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True or false Regeneration

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Preface

Let us begin by relating a true event. It was in a time of religious tensions, difficulties, and divisions. Ministers traveled country wide in order to get as many supporters behind them as they could, to convince them that they were right, and also to justify the separations. That is what happens in times of crisis. One evening, one of the preachers intensely endeavoured to do so. He was ardent in his sermon, fiery in his movements on the pulpit, fervent in everything. He had, so to speak, met all the requirements for proclaiming a sound sermon. It all was very passionate, and everything was preached as his church demanded to be learned and taught and preached. The text was: "*Thy Word is truth.*" People were deeply impressed. Such a word, such a sermon, such a testimony, and that all, so biblical and experiential! This was the pinnacle of authenticity! Continually, it resounded through the church: "On the basis of God's Word, on the basis of God's Word, on the basis of God's Word!" What could a man, a church, need more than that true pure truth? After the service, groups of churchgoers remained standing in awe outside the church to wait for the notable preacher. Apparently, there was also need for some discussions in the consistory room, as it took quite some time before the door was opened. An old man, who had not said anything since the service, stood some distance from all the people, waiting for his enthusiastic children. Someone stepped up to him and asked him, "And what about you; what do you think? Did not the minister preached exceptionally well?"

The man replied, "Yes, he has spoken exceptionally, extraordinarily, truly very impressively. He was, he only had . . . the wrong text!"

Puzzled, they asked, "Wrong text? He has explained it all so preciously and according to the Scriptures!"

The man said, "Yet, he did have the wrong text! In fact, he had no text at all, because he has spoken about the words, 'My church has the truth.' That text is not in the Bible, so all his preaching does not tell me so much. Actually, it doesn't tell me anything."

"My church has the truth." I think this assertion is persistent. Even if there is no separation or schism. You regularly read in some church bulletins, "We know it; we have it; we can do it." And even if it is not said with so many words, there still resounds a "*woe unto you*" if you hold a different opinion. This is one of the big problems of our days: "My minister has the truth! My elder can't be wrong, and God's people also think that way!" But chances are that it is *not* the truth. One question often instantly silences them, "Where do you find your teachings in the Bible, in the marginal notes, in the Forms of Unity, with the church fathers or the Reformers?" They cannot answer that question.

In the past years, I have often noticed with dismay that the knowledge of the most fundamental parts of the doctrine has almost disappeared in the Netherlands. In my sermons, I try to be as clear as possible, but many people really no longer know what I'm talking about when I preach about our reconciliation through Christ's satisfaction. It is so sad to say, but members, also consistory members, and even ministers in our denominations, generally no longer know what true regeneration is. Self-criticism is not the strongest character trait of the experiential reformed. All too easily, we act as if we have the truth. We have great pretensions, beautiful names, glorious aid

organizations, but a chill may well go through the marrow of our bones, because we remain far below par. I think we need to learn to change our tune.

Regularly, I get questions why I warn against the embryo theology. I cannot keep explaining in every sermon why I am so strongly opposed to this. Church bulletins also do not provide enough space to pay due attention to this matter. Therefore, I have decided to do this in the form of a book. At the same time, I raised this issue in a sermon at Geldermalsen. As a result of that, the publisher J.M. Vermeulen of Meteren asked me to further elaborate on the differences between the Blood and the embryo theology and to publish it in the form of a book. His request caused me to immediately go ahead with my plan. To be clear, I do not write this book on behalf of the Old Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, but in personal capacity. It is a private initiative, “*for necessity is laid upon me.*” (1 Corinthians 9:16)

I can look back on the good collaboration with this publisher. He has not only given me the opportunity of publishing this book, but he also gave me a lot of good advice before and during writing. He was often ahead of me during my work, and provided new material as I was still writing. He did most of the work of compiling and correcting. We like to give him a very warm thank you here. I also thank Ds. W.J. van den Brink of Ede for providing his thesis, *About the Justification*, and also for verifying my conclusions from his writing which are included in this book. He has richly informed us, and hence did us a great service.

The main point of this book is the issue of regeneration explained as much as possible from the Scriptures, the marginal notes, the Forms of Unity, and the Reformers. The approach to the Scriptures in our days is often dominated by own theological fronts, by leaders in and of church denominations, so that we are no longer capable of listening to Scripture with an open mind. Unbiblical theological expressions therefore start to lead a life of their own, overgrow the Bible and the life of faith, and destroy the churches.

Once there is a schism, it is rarely ever restored. Leaders in churches do not want to give up their theologies, philosophies, and ideas because it has become a part of their identity. They proclaim their own views as the most pure, the most reformed, but often they do not even know the Reformed theology; they just imitate others and also, do not do their own research. The Bible and the old fathers are made subservient to the different opinions of people: everyone only takes what suits him, not considering the context. They want to prove that they are right! Correction of opinions would mean loss of face, and that is not what the church leaders are interested in. Is this not something we should be ashamed of, ministers? Are we not just like the Roman Catholics, who hold on to certain doctrines which are not scriptural at all? Yes, indeed, we are just like them!

Effortlessly, I could enumerate dozens of articles, especially from church bulletins, which deal with the issue of regeneration. These are mainly from the last century, but what they say on this subject is not scriptural; for me, they are actually worthless in regards to this issue.

My basis is the Holy Scriptures. It is upon this reliable Word of God, that I want to lean. For the exegesis, I prefer to consult the original languages. In this book, I restrict myself to the commentary of Calvin, when needed. There is no better exegete. You can read and examine it for yourself.

If you can, also read from the church fathers. Why read from the church fathers? After the Scriptures, they are the earliest sources of the Christian faith, subsequent to the apostles, the direct witnesses of Jesus Christ. Because man in our days often uses Scripture to confirm their own quibbles, it is good that we carefully read from the church fathers. We will mention some of them, for example, the well-known Augustine, the most famous baptismal student of Ambrose. Ambrose was bishop of Milan from the year 374 until his death in 397. Along with Jerome of Bethlehem (347-420)¹, Augustine of Hippo Regius (354-430) and Gregory the Great of Rome (540-604), he was one of the four major church fathers of the west. Read the sermons of Ambrose and Augustine, because they are of rich and valuable content.² Please, do so! Apparently, for many, the words of Scripture do not carry enough weight anymore. No longer do they want to search God's Word, and the marginal notes, even less so. Scripture is no longer compared with Scripture, but with all kinds of writers, of whom, most frequently, the latter church leaders are decisive. That is one of the biggest problems of our days. Many have introduced what was totally rejected in the days of the Reformation, that is, the way of reading the Scriptures through their own darkened minds, from their own perspectives. Upon this shaky foundation, man considers his own church the only true church. They have a disregard for other churches. And so everyone strives for his own church, which has strayed far from the truth. They don't verbalize it, but with their acts they say, "This is what we are, and this is how we do it." But Kohlbrugge said, "This is God, and this is how He does it."

Thus, this book is written according to the language of the Scriptures, the marginal notes, the Forms of Unity, and the great lights of the Reformation. I will refer to those in order to examine if we, the so-called experiential reformed people, make a straight path. Occasionally, I will give citations of later ministers, mainly for the sake of illustration. In that way, we may discern what is according to tradition and what is according to Scripture. That way, we also avoid all kinds of unbiblical distinctions that have more to do with thinking and with philosophy than with faith. However, some Puritan writers are mentioned, especially to confirm that they also stood for this doctrine, but we must not place their views above those of the Reformers. We also like to mention something about the Further Reformation, because the influence of scholasticism, which led to fallacies in the doctrines, was then already noticeable. Amongst the old fathers of the Further Reformation, Comrie takes a special place. Discussion of his doctrine is the content of several chapters. This amount was necessary, because there are now several churches that have embraced the so-called embryo theology, which has its roots in the teachings of Comrie. These churches have fundamentally deviated from the doctrine of the Reformation.

The outline of this book is very simple. In part 1, I explain to you the Blood theology; in part 2, the scholastic theology; and in part 3, the two are compared and parallel lines drawn to the present. It is obviously not an exhaustive exposition on this subject. It only gives some guidelines to help regain an understanding of the doctrine of the Reformers and thereby to help recognize the heresies of today.

It is my duty and calling to refute the embryo theology as clearly as possible. With the help of God's Spirit and the truth of God's Word, this will not be a burden to me. I will definitely not hide the facts. I would not be able and willing to do so. Besides that, in concealing facts, how would I justify myself before my God and King? It grieves me to see with how much emphasis the embryo

theology has been introduced into so many congregations. We hear from young people how this teaching is imposed upon them in catechism classes, marriage counsels, and baptism instructions. Sometimes young people say to me, “This cannot be so, minister! It's not the truth!” Ministers are not afraid to say that Calvin teaches us such things. In addition, even terms like “the old truth”, “the pure confession”, etc are used. I have noticed that this doctrine has been indiscriminately listened to and has been accepted for decades already. Thus, there is an urgent need to prove that it is *not* “the old truth”. I will therefore, in this my writing and my preaching, be just as clear as those who have introduced and preached the embryo theology. With emphasis, I state that my writing is not directed against individual ministers, but only against their teachings.

We therefore need to completely separate matters and persons from each other. Without a doubt, they have said and written good things in their works, but on this issue of the regeneration, they clearly and fundamentally differ from our fathers. That does not mean peace at all costs, because we must stand up and testify of God's truth and strive against the fallacies. But in the vessel, love must not be missing. Love builds up. We need to show a concern for each other's salvation. May God bless this book to the salvation of our immortal souls.

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PART 1

**THEOLOGY AND FAITH ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE
AND THE FORMS OF UNITY**

Chapter 1

Turmoil about True Regeneration

In our denominations, there is a type of doctrine discernible which speaks about presumed regeneration and presumed faith: the embryo theology. This theology is contrary to the truth, which is to be preached and confessed by the servants, who are truly called by God. It is the calling of the ministers of God to strongly reject and refute such teachings.

Recently I read a piece written by Thomas Watson in his book, *The Beatitudes*, which greatly appealed to me. He wrote: "The ministers of the Gospel must not only be pastors but also warriors; in the one hand, they must hold the bread of life to feed God's flock, and in the other hand, the sword of the Spirit to fight heresies."³ Therefore, it would not be sincere, if we would pass by the heresies within the circle of our own denominations. It concerns the fallacy of the embryo theology, also called the presumed regeneration. In the course of time, it has become the conventional teaching. Slowly, it has crept in, and is therefore noticed by yet only a few.

Here and there, I hear a bit of opposition against it, whereas formerly, there was still fierce resistance among the adherents of the true reformed doctrine. Alas, it was to no avail. In the non-conformist circles, all sorts of distinctions began to be made in the life of faith, and a doctrinal system was developed that was fundamentally different from the biblical doctrine of the Reformers. The boundaries faded, and the deviation was eventually widely accepted. Unintentionally, truth was made falsehood, and falsehood made truth. This is very serious, and therefore, that doctrine must be objected and must be refuted and rejected.

Questions of the Soul

A young man sent me a letter asking, "How and when can I know or say that I'm born again?" In response, I took up the pen to give a more detailed explanation on this subject. I noticed a great turmoil which had arisen in the life of this young man. In fact, this is the case with other young people as well. From all sides and from different denominations, I meet young people who are distressed about the destiny of their immortal souls. They are no longer satisfied with the Remonstrant doctrine or with the doctrine of presumed regeneration in their churches. They can no longer accept that; they are searching for a different type of preaching - a preaching that uncovers the need of their souls, and that shows them their misery. They perceive the deceit of their heart. The doctrine, which is contrary to Scripture, no longer satisfies them. They are troubled by their life before the presence of God, and feel that in and of themselves, they are lost. They no longer want to hear religious flattery, where man is allowed to rest on false grounds and is set on a pedestal.

They have come to loathe themselves and to deeply lament their sins. They know themselves damnable before God. In their broken lives, they have no use for a doctrine that is estranged from the

true work of God. They seek faithful preaching, the doctrine of the Reformers and of other theologians, who preach the law and the gospel in a pure way. They are in great spiritual need. The real questions of the soul remain unanswered.

You may ask which questions? I mean, “My soul, do you see the state you are in; how can you appear righteous before God?” or, “How shall I ever become converted to God?” or, “How must I become reconciled to God?” or, “Is there yet a way to escape the (well) deserved punishment?” The preachers of free grace seem to be missing. It is still mentioned here and there, but the matters are hardly explained anymore. Almost everywhere, it seems that man is led to build their lives upon sand. They cause you to rest on presumed faith and to lean upon a presumed regeneration. People become totally confused by this.

Confusion is also created by the reviewers of books, who more or less uncritically recommend the books of God-fearing writers like Erskine, Boston, Meade and others, but who themselves advocate a completely different type of preaching, namely, an “embryo preaching”. The readers no longer know what to believe. They want to know what the only foundation is.

We have a great desire to point out to you the only Foundation. That alone is - the Lord Jesus Christ and Him crucified! In the remainder of this book, we hope to clarify this for you (namely, the redemption in His blood).

The Problem

You may ask what the big difference in the preaching then is. What exactly is the “embryo theology”, as mentioned before? Below, I will briefly describe it by presenting two outlines to help you understand the following chapters. It would be good to memorize the first outline - that of the Blood theology - and to never forget it. The second outline - that of the embryo theology - is needed to recognize all kinds of fallacies.

a. The Biblical (Puritan) Doctrine of the Blood

With this, we will follow the order as Thomas Watson shows us in his doctrine of faith.⁴ The facts mentioned therein are logically distinct. The one goes in order before the next, but chronologically, they are inseparable.⁵ Watson discusses the following issues as the fruits of the work of redemption through the blood of Christ:

- A - FAITH (by which one is born again)
- B - EFFECTUAL CALLING
- C - JUSTIFICATION (conscious incorporation into Christ)
- D - ADOPTION OF CHILDREN
- E - SANCTIFICATION
- F - ASSURANCE
- G - PEACE
- H - JOY

I - GROWTH IN GRACE

J- PRESERVERANCE

The Puritans call the effectual calling the first step of saving grace in the heart.⁶ Most people within the boundaries of the church are called externally (outwardly), while the elect are called effectually (inwardly).⁷ John Owen calls regeneration the foundation of all actual experience of grace.⁸ The internal calling is the result of eternal election,⁹ and regeneration is the consequence of the decree of election.¹⁰ The regeneration, which occurs in the conscious uniting with Christ by faith (not as Comrie states), is also the fountain of sanctification.¹¹ Faith is a fruit of the effectual calling¹² and the instrumental cause of justification.^{13, 14}

b. The Doctrine of the Embryo Theology (Comrie, Kuyper, Kersten, Steenblok, and others)

By studying the writings of Comrie and his followers, we can draw conclusions which lead to the following outline:

A – REGENERATION OR QUICKENING (quicken and regeneration, which is the same thing, is placed as happening first. The person involved does not know this yet. It is an unconscious incorporation and regeneration before and through faith in Christ, as well as an unconscious justification. Anyone who has it is already saved.)

B - KNOWLEDGE OF MISERY

C - ILLUSIVE REDEMPTION (seeing is not possessing)

D - UNCERTAINTY

E - REDEMPTION (only with a few, but this grace is not necessary)

F - DOUBTS, UNCERTAINTY, STRUGGLES, AND WRESTLINGS

G - GLORIFICATION (probably)¹⁵

You see by the facts that there is a big difference with the previous outline. This is reality. While in the first outline (the biblical Reformed theology), the sins are revived by God's holy law; in the embryo outline, the sinner is already quickened, regenerated, and unconsciously justified; he has already been saved, and he cannot miss out on his salvation. Comrie calls the embryo "the first stem cell of faith". In his point of view, he unconsciously and unintentionally abandons the biblical teaching principles. In his embryo philosophy, he unintentionally taught a delusive faith under the name of regeneration. According to his method, this presumed regeneration and presumptuous faith is the foundation of spiritual life. Where our Reformed fathers deemed the refurbished life out of the broken Covenant of Works to be insufficient, the embryo teaching already talks there about an (unconscious) faith, an unconscious regeneration, and a presumptive sanctification. There (on the grounds of fallacies) the convicted sinner has already been quickened by a false spiritual incorporation into the second Adam as an embryo, without being consciously cut off from his old roots in the first Adam (Rom. 7:1-3). You can see that here is a big, very big difference with the teachings of the Scriptures and with the exegesis of our orthodox fathers. Some or perhaps many will object and deny this, but that lies for their own account. From now on, we will simply refer to the churches which have adopted the embryo philosophy as "embryo churches".

Another Foundation

The basic idea of the embryo theology differs fundamentally from the pure Word of God. In my thirty-seven years of ecclesiastical life, I have thoroughly experienced what damage the embryo doctrine has done in our reformed circles. This has become a leaven that leavens the whole lump. A foundation has been laid that cannot stand in the face of eternity. They do not deny that Christ is the only Foundation, but at the same time, another foundation is laid beside it whereby people with certain marks are supposedly born again, while in reality, they are not. Besides the only two ways taught by Christ, a third way is preached. This one is constructed with the aid of philosophy. This happens so subtly, it still looks like the doctrine of the two ways.

It concerns an illusionary incorporation into Christ, which God's Word does not teach. According to this doctrine, it takes place in the sinners unconsciously. Then that occurs outside of the true unity in faith and love, which is not how Christ teaches us in John 15:4 and 10. This is exactly what the Lord and King of His Church warns us about. It is a fruitless branch that is cut off and thrown into the fire (John 15:6). This false notion of incorporation has nothing to do with the teachings of Calvin in his *Institutes*, when he speaks of the transplantation into Christ. This true incorporation into Christ takes place through faith alone with the conscious knowledge of the sinner, who is united into Him, while being cut off from everything else. In this way, he comes to partake of Christ and all His benefits (note: not the other way around). The embryo churches teach: first the benefits of Christ, then Christ. This cannot be found in any of our "Doctrinal Standards". According to these confessionals, it is through saving faith that we are made to partake of Christ and His communion (union mystica). And this communion is also with the Father. Through Christ we go to God the Father.

Good Counsel

Dear readers, take this to heart. If you do not want to listen to me, then hear the church father Augustine:

"I beseech you by our Lord, by His cross, by His blood, by His love, by His humility, and by His majesty - I pray and beseech you to actually do something with my words. Do not think of this as pretentiousness! The mercy of Him, in whose face I tremble, knows that I am led by the duty of love to tell you all this. I am moved by fear, knowing that I am accountable to none less than to the Lord."¹⁶

Good and Bad Philosophy

We must not continue in the embryo theology. That is erroneous philosophy, which comes from the pagan Aristotle. Paul condemns such teachings in Colossians 2:8, where he writes: "*Take heed that no man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.*" Just read here what the marginal notes say about the word "philosophy": "Here is not meant the correct philosophy, which is a gift of God and even an instrument or means to better understand and explain God's Word, but the sophistry or deceptive wisdom of some pagan philosophers, as is explained from the following words "vain deceit", and as Paul speaks of this in Rom. 1:21, 22, where philosophers in their imaginary wisdom have proposed some things of God and of the way to the supreme good, which these teachers have wanted to mix with the gospel, even as the scholastic teachers do in the papacy, whereby the simplicity and sincerity of the saving doctrine of the Gospel has been darkened and falsified."¹⁷

So we see that our godly fathers are not totally against the practice of philosophy. The study of this

subject belongs to the training of the theology student. Philosophy falls under systematic theology.

The knowledge that the students gain hereby causes them to be resilient against the false opinions and fallacies of men. In particular, the philosophy of religion is part of the study program of the Faculty of Theology. They use the method of this philosophical thinking to their aid, for example, to further explain the content of faith or the phenomenon of faith. This is not without risk, as is apparent in the examples of theologians who became entangled in this philosophical thinking. Quite a number of students have even lost their minds by this. Others have become atheists (e.g. Nietzsche). Many have gone astray and only a few have been able to make good use of it. The reason of this is that man is a fallen man. One is not able to do this study without the help of God's Spirit.

The example of the use of philosophy in the matters of faith that we are now discussing, is the embryo theology. This way of practicing theology emerged from scholasticism. It finds her way of doing things from the reasoning of pagan intellectuals with their philosophical method. It is an erroneous viewpoint that carries dire consequences in our church life. It has everything to do with a doctrine of justification, which is not declared in the Bible. One is under the delusion that one is justified *before*, rather than, *by* faith, and that he is therefore justified from eternity. This is not true. Our justification was ordained in eternity, and through the way of faith and repentance, it is granted to the elect. Not a righteous man, but a ungodly man is justified, and that takes place through the blood of Christ. The Blood theology is God's truth.

One Fallacy Leads to Another

Here again is proof that errors never stand alone. One fallacy leads to another. Without realizing it, they have strayed further and further from God and His Word. The one matter depends on the other. The doctrine of the unborn child was interpreted in their own way in the embryo churches. Rarely, if ever, does it come to a real birth. Often this seed dies in the womb or ends up as a miscarriage. The people, however, who are borne by the Holy Spirit, are the "*newborn babes*" of 1 Peter 2. These children of grace are truly God's children and no bastards. I must sadly tell you that the doctrine of the embryo has become prevalent in the dissenting churches. There they teach a false and a presumed regeneration instead of reconciliation with God. This concerns something one is not aware of, something that is not actually present. Their vision is based on the probability. One presumes, in this case, that one is born again. One considers himself born again, even though there is no evidence for this. That is why we call this a presumed regeneration. The Bible does not teach us about such regenerations. It is an imaginary rebirth. Hence all the illusionary conversions! The tables of the Lord's Supper are full of people who are not truly born again. Appalling! They are people without the wedding garment. People hardly know any more what reconciliation with God is. Everywhere confusion is created with false notions about God's Word. Even worse, for many people, this is fatal. Even there, where God has worked, the souls are put on the wrong track, and they come into darkness and in bonds. Therefore, I continually repeat: return to God's Word, which was often still preached in its pure form by our old fathers. The Lord had endowed them with a lot of light. He blessed their preaching. For that reason alone, one should read the old fathers more often. Sadly enough, that is not the case.

Preachers like the Erskines and Boston are held as suspicious. Man has replaced the pure doctrine by an unbiblical embryo theology. The teachers of this theology devised their own doctrinal system. We know that Dr. C. Steenblok even claimed that there is "an Arminian thread" running through the

theology of the Erskines! That is far from the truth! Their preaching and interpretation of Scripture is so closely tied to the Word of God, that no one is able to refute them. You must really read their works. Everything they say and teach is supported with quotations from Scripture. It is just like Moses and the prophets, who said in their message to the people, “*Thus saith the Lord.*” The Lord Jesus also spoke in like manner when He said, “*It is written.*” The people did not accept this, and preachers were considered heralds of a new teaching (Mark 1:27, see also Acts 17:19). This talk of those people indicates a fallacy and displays their own deviation. Therefore it is very disappointing that people today think they know it better than our godly theologians. Note that many so-called experiential Reformed people, in fact, simply only fight for Kuypers' principles. I am not exaggerating; you will read more about it yet in this book. How deeply have we sunken away in our circles!

Remain With the Old Truth

Therefore, remain with the old tried truth. That truth alone is dear to me! When I received my first Bible, I did not understand a thing of it. To me it was a Book that was sealed with seven seals. When I heard my first sermon, I did not understand it at all. My heart was closed to this; it was full of iniquity. Shortly afterwards, my eyes were opened and my heart was trodden. God spoke to my soul, and although a lot was still hidden, nothing was unclear in the things which God taught me. I read nothing but my own condemnation. The Bible was not put away because of that. God taught me as a totally lost sinner, what grace actually means. He saved my soul, delivered me from all evil, and engaged me into unspeakable communion of love. Therefore, everything else that differs from the latter, I cannot acknowledge it, dear friends. That is why I am particularly opposed to the embryo theology. That is why I desire to arouse you to remain with the old truth. “*Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.*” (Prov. 22:28). I have never regretted reading the old fathers. They are dear to me, and therefore, I constantly study them.

John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* was the first book after the Bible that I got in my hands. It gave me inner joy to read it, and it was full of sound teachings. My father gave me, *The Rose of Sharon* and *The Captain of Faith* from the works of Andrew Gray. I was overwhelmed by what I read there of the love and truth of God. I bought all his writings and was taught and refreshed thereby. The fourth book was the fundamental work of Hugo Binning, *Several Grounds of the Christian Religion*. That is the truth which God teaches us. If you want to read them, read them completely, and lay those books of modern Christianity aside. Remain with the Lord, His Son, His Word, His service, His servants.

As a servant of God, I feel obliged and called to warn you for all deviations. My heart's concern is also especially with the youth. They are the new generation for the future. They are exposed to the temptations of Satan, who not only goes about like a roaring lion but also appears as an angel of light. The message that world-wide, the youth are again asking for the old paths, has caused me to greatly rejoice. The doctrine of the Reformation has fully regained their interest again. May God bless it! It is God alone who can protect us from all deceit. Thankfully, I see that here and there the eyes are being opened to those deceptions. Examine it, because it is in the interest of your soul. It concerns the rapidly approaching eternity. May God therefore enlighten your mind and be gracious unto your soul.

Chapter 2

True Regeneration According to Scripture

We will further examine the regeneration according to God's Word. This is our most important source. Only God's Word is infallible. We will also listen to Augustine and read some marginal notes. Furthermore, we hope to discover a continuous line throughout various Bible texts. And finally, we will consult the original text.

We have already heard so much about it - regeneration. Being born again. We cannot miss this benefit in order to live comfortably and die happily. Perhaps you immediately think of the history of Nicodemus, but that nightly conversation will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter of this book, in the form of a meditation. Let us first see where else this word “regeneration” occurs in the Holy Scriptures.

The term regeneration occurs only a few times in the Bible, for example, in Matthew 19:28 and Titus 3:5. It is the basic concept of a doctrine which pervades the whole Bible.

Other Terms

In the Bible, different terms are used for the same matter. If we would separate these things from each other and make them into distinct entities, this would certainly create confusion and error. Then the matter is made absolute and separated from the real meaning. All of God's servants must be on their guard for this.

True regeneration can also be called quickening, faith, and conversion. Furthermore, we may hear the Word of God speak about a circumcised heart (Deut. 30:6), a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26), a new creature (2 Cor 5:17), a new man (Eph. 4:24), a new life (Rom. 6:4), etc. These words refer to the reconciliation and the restitution of the sinful man. Therefore, when thinking about regeneration, one can think of the whole conversion. Another time, we will speak about justification. Therefore Calvin may confidently speak about the renewal or sanctification, when he speaks about the regeneration.

a. A Following of Jesus

We read of this in Matthew 19:28, where the Lord Jesus speaks to Peter and His other disciples, “*Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed Me in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*” To Philip He said, “*Follow me.*” The calling in this powerful word of Jesus cannot be resisted, and so all His chosen people follow Him in regeneration. God calls the sinner out of darkness into His marvelous light and to the new birth. The sinful man awakens from his state of death and comes to Jesus. He takes up his cross and follows Him. The hidden operation of God the Holy Spirit causes the sinner to hear the voice of Jesus and grants him faith by which He regenerates the sinner. This is the regeneration in the true sense of the word. It is a new creation. The following indicates a following in His humiliation and also in His exaltation. It is a partaking of the complete Christ and of all His work. In contrast to the rich young man, he (Philip) left everything for Him, and obtained all in Him. The

Lord spoke earnestly to the rich young man, but he did not hear Him and did not follow Him. With everything he had, he was still unspeakably poor and not born again. Nowadays, they would have considered him a regenerated person, and would have made him a minister. They would have said, "What a good man! See how earnestly and obediently he follows God's Word!" But he was no better than the Pharisees; he followed Moses and not Christ (John 9:28, 29). They would have considered him to be a child of God, but he was not.

It is valuable to listen to Augustine, who here says:

"What was true for him is also true for us. The Gospel is the mouth of Christ. Christ may well reside in heaven, but that does not stop Him from speaking on earth. Do not act as if you are deaf; He is calling! Do not feign yourself to be dead; He thunders! If you do not want to maintain the most difficult commandments, then at least, maintain the less difficult ones. Is the burden of the most difficult too heavy for you? Then at least, take the burden of the less difficult. Why is it that you are so lazy and do not want to take up either? Why do you resist it so much? The most difficult instructions are, of course, sell everything you own, give it to the poor, and follow Me (Matt. 19:17). And the less difficult commandments are: thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not encourage one to testify falsely, thou shalt not steal, but thou shalt honor thy father and mother, and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. That is what you must do!"¹⁸

Therefore pay attention. There is no such thing as regeneration outside of Christ. Regeneration does not therefore consist in some convictions, sadness and anxieties, or other feelings. Also, the general operations of the Holy Spirit cannot be considered to be the regeneration, but it is the partaking of Jesus by faith, in the name of the Son of God.

b. Receiving God's Grace

Secondly, we see what the apostle Paul writes in Titus 3:5: "*... not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.*"

If we take a look at the marginal notes here, we read: "That is, by regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, Who is like a waterbath, by which the filth of our sins is washed and cleansed, Ezek. 36:25, 26, 27, whereof baptism is a sign and seal. See such a manner of speaking in Rom. 4:11."

From this passage, it is clear that we can do nothing outside of God's mercy. Through the Father, we are born again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3). As long as we are not born again, we remain under the wrath of God, because of our sins and our transgressions against God. Only God brings us back again out of mere grace and goodness. He calls us to the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ. Take note that if we stand before God without faith, He deals with us justly. Even if we do all we can to adorn our impiety, we cannot deceive God. We will never be righteous before God with all that hypocrisy. We then are only saved when we become incorporated into Christ by faith. This occurs immediately when we believe. Not by degrees, but at the same time. Not unconsciously, but truly and genuinely are we saved by faith. The Object upon which faith looks is Christ. We know in Whom we believe, or else, there is no true and saving faith. And by faith in the Son of God, we pass from death into life. It is a spiritual resurrection from the death of sins and trespasses. In this way, we have come to the Life (Christ), and we live out of God in Christ. In this way, we have just been made alive. Before this, we were still under the law and not under grace.

c. Incorporation into Christ by Baptism

Since it has pleased God to reveal His Son in us, He desires this salvation to be sealed as well. He also does this in part in *Baptism*, for this is ordained for the confirmation of faith. Baptism is an entry into the Church of Christ. It is a sign that we have been incorporated into the Body of Christ. In this way, the Lord has desired to reveal His grace in us. Baptism is therefore a sign and pledge of God's mercy towards us. Herein God does not give redundant figures in the sacraments, but He fills us inwardly by His power, what He then confirms with outward signs.

This is why Baptism, in the true sense, is called the washing of regeneration (Eph. 5:26). To understand the power of the sacraments, we must not separate the truth from the symbol. The sign of Baptism is of great service to us through the workings of the Holy Spirit. It is profitable for teaching us, and is a symbol that strengthens our souls. The Lord even goes so far, in that He offers salvation to unbelievers, by means of Baptism. But because they have no faith, they are not born again, and therefore, the receiving of Baptism does not profit them either. They are not washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son. For God, Baptism retains its power and meaning, but they reject it by their unbelief. They do not receive mercy from God. For the believer, however, this Baptism is at all times beneficial and powerful. They not only receive the symbol, but also the truth and the fruit of this washing unto eternal life. We may therefore in no way diminish and despise Baptism. It is a terrible misunderstanding to place the regeneration outside of the true incorporation into Christ. It gives false hope for the coming eternity, if we are not baptized by the blood and Spirit of Christ. There is no ground to have people think that they are God's children, if they are not washed in the blood of Christ crucified.

d. Newness of Life

In the way of sanctification, regeneration comes to manifestation and perfection. At death, when the old man has died completely, our soul comes to perfection. That is what the Lord promises the believers in His precious Word. Their faith rests the promises of the Lord and they lean upon the merits of Christ, Who has shed His precious blood for them. When they are finished living their life upon earth, they will receive the crown of life and will eternally walk in long white garments that have been washed, before the throne of God and of the Lamb.

By the power of God the Holy Spirit, renewal takes place in our lives, so that we may know that we have been washed and cleansed by Him. About this, look again at Titus 3:5, where we read: “... *not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.*” These words run parallel with Ezekiel 36:25, where it is written: “*Then I will sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean.*” That clean water is a figure of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God.

Augustine tells us that it is not unfamiliar that the Bible teaches us in figurative ways. In that way, you can also use the so-called metaphor (that is the transfer of the actual meaning to a figurative meaning) without distorting it.¹⁹

Paul's words are entirely consistent with those of the prophet Ezekiel and are, in fact, saying the same thing. In this text, the apostle also makes reference to Holy Baptism. It must be clear to us that it is

God the Holy Spirit Who regenerates us and makes us new creatures. But because the gifts of grace are invisible and hidden, a visible symbol thereof is shown unto us in Baptism. From this explanation, we see that regeneration contains the *renewal* by the Holy Spirit, and that makes the embryo doctrine a delusion.

Misconceptions

One must not think that the Holy Spirit works regeneration and renewal in the external bath of baptism. "If you are baptized, then it's okay with you. We consider ourselves (presumably) born again." You hear it - truly Kuyper with his reformed churches. "The believers are saved through the means of baptism." It is their doctrine, which teaches them that they are now initially saved. Baptism is then the cause (*causa medians*) of their salvation, which cannot be lost. This is a terrible doctrine. These people make a distinction in being baptized (for them this is the regeneration) and the forgiveness of sins (which is also presumed). Comrie does the same in his philosophical notion of the regeneration. He has made a separation between regeneration and forgiveness of sins and has disconnected it from the death and resurrection (Baptism) of Jesus. He did sense that this was impossible, and therefore he devised the concept of an unconscious incorporation. Alas, many have followed him in this. With such a separation, they devalue the Scriptural meaning of being baptized in the washing of regeneration.

Baptism with the Spirit

In 1 Peter 3:21, the correct understanding of this matter is brought to light. It reads: "*The like figure whereunto even Baptism does also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*" The marginal note here says of "*good conscience*": "That is, which is cleansed by the Blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ. With this is understood bold access and address of believers in their assurance and in their prayers to God as to their Father, which is an inseparable fruit of the forgiveness of our sins and of our renewal or *regeneration*." God has saved the believers; He saves them by Baptism, which seen in a spiritual way as a spiritual blessing, brings salvation. Not the baptism with water, which is a visible symbol of it, but the Baptism signified thereby and sealed by the Spirit saves (John 3:5).

ORIGINAL TEXT

Explanation

Of great importance is ultimately, what the original text says of it. In Scripture, the concept of regeneration occurs in a few places and under different names.

- a. The word "regeneration" is found twice in the Greek original text as a noun: in Matthew 19:28 and Titus 3:5. There both are the translation of the Greek term *palingenesia*.
- b. "*Hath begotten us again unto a lively hope*" and "*being born again*" occur as translations of the Greek verb *anagennaō*. It is used in 1 Peter 1:3 and 1 Peter 1:23.
- c. "*Be born again*" is used in John 3 in the nightly conversation with Nicodemus (for the Greek words *gennaō anoōthen*).

Palingenesia (Beginning of a New Life)

Here it concerns a birth, which creates a new beginning in our lives. It is, as it were, starting the way from the beginning all over again. This beginning refers to being saved by Christ, Who delivers the sinner from his sins by His blood. Through faith, we have been incorporated into Him. That is the beginning. Then we pass out of death into life. There is no such thing as a kind of embryo life. The beginning of our new life is our justification by faith in Christ. Therefore, our justification by faith is also our regeneration.

This word actually means the beginning of the regeneration; it has the whole new life in it. Here the figure of the bud and the flower can be used. The flower was already hidden in the bud.²⁰ New life sprouts, where man is born again. The regenerated one has received new life from God and lives the new life through the Holy Spirit, the Renewer of life. Not him, the sinner, but Christ, the sinless One, lives in the believer, and the life that the believer now lives, he lives by faith in the Son of God, according to the testimony of Paul (Gal. 2:20). Perhaps the linguists wanted to teach us a presumed regeneration out of certain verbs. There is no reason at all to defend their teachings (those of the embryo theory). People forget that the apostle and our orthodox exegetes have directly linked the doctrine of regeneration to the doctrine of Holy Baptism. The meaning of this doctrine, we have already pointed out in the exegesis of Titus 3:5. Around this text in the periscope and context, we see that the regeneration is about the deliverance from sin, and closely related to inner sanctification.²¹

Anakainosis (Ongoing Renewal of Life)

From another perspective, this regeneration is a renewal of life (anakainosis, (Rom. 12:2)). It is a renewal as it ever was before (think of our state in Paradise), overladen with radiance, of new freshness and beauty, so that this man has become a new creation (kaino ktisis) (2 Cor 5:17; Rev. 21:5). The renewal of life (palingenesia) reveals itself in its operations and fruits, in its glory. That sanctification proves that the regeneration is true. It reminds us of the words of the Lord Jesus, who tells us that the tree is known by its fruit. This tree is rooted in the grace of God. The believer does not have life out of himself but receives it out of Christ, the Fountain of life. The sap of the Vine, Christ, permeates the branch of the believer. He receives life, strength and love, and is thereby fruitful in Him through the love of God and by faith in Christ, whereby he is regenerated and justified.

Gennao anothen

Let us briefly again look at John 3:3 and 7, where we find the Greek words *gennao anothen*. The root word of the verb is *gennao*, which can mean *generate*, *beget* or *be born*, depending on the context in which it occurs. In Greek, the basic concept of our new birth is closely related to *ginomai* which means *to become*.²² Nicodemus took it as a literal *being born again*, but the Lord meant, *to be born of water and Spirit*, in fact, God's Spirit. It is a figure of speech; it is a spiritual matter, and the Lord used a well-known concept out of everyday life. He referred to the new covenant that He will make with the house of Judah and the house of Israel (Jer. 31:31-34, Ezekiel 11:16-20). That covenant is characterized by the giving of His Spirit within them; they are then *born again*.²³ That Spirit will then come from above (Greek - *anoothen*: *from above, from the highest*) It indicates the place from where the Holy Spirit comes, namely, from God. Hence the words that the Lord used in speaking to Nicodemus about being born again. It is obvious that God's Word makes the connection between

Christ and our justification and reconciliation, and between the Holy Spirit and our regeneration and renewal.²⁴

Other Meanings

With the prophets, this term had to do with the coming of the Messiah. In the first century, the term *regeneration* was used in the most diverse meanings. With the pythagoreans, it was a migration of the soul, with the Stoics, it stood for the seasonal cycle or the destruction of this world by fire, through which a new and harmonious ordered world arises, with Flavius Josephus for national restoration of his nation.²⁵ Also in mysterious religions, the concept of regeneration has its particular religious hues, for example, the reincarnation of the Buddhists. Let us take heed, that we do not become like the heathens; let us hold fast to the biblical understanding of regeneration.

Conclusion: In the Bible, regeneration is always inseparably linked to the forgiveness of sins. We read nothing of an embryo, nothing of an unconscious regeneration, nothing of regeneration in a narrow or wider sense. It is an immediate and conscious transition or incorporation into Christ by faith. Therefore, continue to speak according to the Bible.

Chapter 3

Regeneration According to the Marginal Notes

The marginal notes also speak about regeneration. They are written by enlightened Bible translators and appropriated (approved of) by the church. Alas, they are hardly read any more. Consequently, we lack sound interpretation. In this short chapter, I will focus especially on the marginal notes on Ephesians 2, Romans 6, and 1 Peter 1. Therein is spoken about the three stages of regeneration. You must really take note of this.

In our reading and studying of God's Word, let us also read the marginal notes. With that I mean the Statenvertaling (equivalent to the King James Version), the old tried and tested truth that has been an eternal blessing for so many already.²⁶ Whatever people think, suppose, believe, or consider to be true, does not matter at all.²⁷ No, we adhere to God's Word and to the marginal notes. We must be very careful - experience is not the standard, but the Word of God is. In fact, who can guarantee that what we experience or sense would be the genuine matters?

Ephesians 2

The letter from the apostle Paul to Ephesus is very important in our study of the regeneration. Ephesians 2 is often - almost always - incorrectly applied. We heard once that someone was trying to explain something in a sermon out of spiritual life. He then said, "But it does not start with that, no, of course, it starts with Ephesians 2:1: *“And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.”* They place “quickening” where God only begins to convince the sinner. We will see what God's Word and the marginal notes say about that.

The first verse states:

“And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.”

The marginal note on the word *quickened* explains:

That is, delivered from the death of sin by our justification and regeneration, as is immediately explained hereafter.

And following that is Ephesians 2:5:

“Even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace ye are saved).”

The marginal notes on the name *Christ* say:

For if Christ, Who had died for our sins is raised from the dead, thereby has He actually manifested that He has nullified the guilt of our sin and put away the body of our sins, which He, first for us and then also in us, had accomplished by the power of His death and His resurrection, Rom. 4:25; 6:6, 7, 8, as He has given us faith, has justified us by faith, and by His Spirit has renewed and sanctified us. See 1 Cor. 1:30.

So what happens when new life is granted unto us? What does God's Word and our Reformed fathers say about that? This: “By our justification and regeneration, we are delivered from the death of sin.” Also note the order. We are not implanted into Christ without knowing Him. We are incorporated into

Christ and immediately receive all His benefits.

To explain those benefits, the marginal notes refer to 1 Corinthians 1:30. There we read that Christ Jesus “*is made unto us, wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*” All of these matters are fruits of faith. Anyone who truly believes possesses these things. No separation is made here between the possession of life and the conscious knowledge of Christ.

Romans 6

We will now take a look at what Paul says in Romans 6:3 and 4 about regeneration. In verse 2, he declares that believers have died to sin, and it is impossible that they will still live in it. In verses 3 and 4, he gives the foundation of the truth by reminding us of Baptism and its significance. He had not previously spoken about this in Rome, because he had assumed that the believers there already knew about this. He focuses on Baptism as such. It is not just about the baptism of water but especially on the full spiritual Baptism. It was about the spiritual reality of Baptism with the baptism of water as a sign and seal (Rom. 4:11). This again had everything to do with the receiving of Baptism. That was done by immersing the person to be baptized into the water, where he remained submerged momentarily, until he then again arose from out of the water. Those are three stages or steps. Have you ever heard of stages of regeneration? Let us have a look.

a. The first stage

In Romans 6:3, Paul writes:

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?”

The marginal notes about *being baptized into His death* state:

That is, to be assured by Baptism that we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, so that not only have our sins been atoned before God, but also the Holy Spirit has been acquired, by Whose operation, the corruption that is in us, is deprived of its life or its dominion, which is the **first stage** of our regeneration, Tit. 3:5, 6.

What you read is correct: our sins are atoned before God, and the Holy Spirit is acquired for us. To be clear, we also see that Baptism is related to the death of the Savior. Baptism in Jesus Christ is a baptism into His death. The immersion in water represents being buried with Him into His death. Christ went into death in order to pay the guilt of the sins of His people. He wanted to destroy the power of sin. Through Baptism, they are united with Him; therefore, they are also delivered from sin. This is true, not only of the guilt of sin, but also of the power of sin. Thinking about this serves to the comfort of the believers and to the strengthening of their faith.

The conclusion of this, the apostle puts forth in verse 4, namely in the second stage of our new birth.

b. The second stage

We now read the first part of the following verse:

“Therefore we are buried with Him by Baptism into death (. . .)”

The marginal notes to be *buried with Him* state:

This is the **second stage** of our regeneration which is sealed unto us by Baptism, namely, the increase and the perseverance in the mortification of sin in us, as the burial was a completion of the death of Christ, (verse 6). What occurred to Christ also happens to the believers. The apostle wants to strongly express the thoughts of truly having died. It means that sin with its guilt has gone forever. It is a liberation from corruption.²⁸ In baptism, the water closes over the baptized one. He was buried in the water, so that his being buried with Christ became reality. It is about a total deliverance from sin forever through the unity and state of communion with the Lord Christ. This is achieved by true spiritual Baptism, signified by and sealed with the baptism of water.

If this immersion then refers to the union with Christ in His death and burial, then it also refers to His life. We will also see that in the next stage of regeneration. The writers of the marginal notes call this the third stage.

c. The third stage,

The third stage, we find in the second part of this verse:

“. . . that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so, we also should walk in newness of life.”

The marginal notes state about *to walk in newness of life*:

This is the **third stage** of our regeneration, which we receive through the power of the resurrection of Christ, which is signified and sealed by Baptism unto us, namely, that we have received power to live in newness of life, in holiness and purity. Eph. 5:26, 27.

Again, we see here also that regeneration is connected to Christ. We die with Him and arise with Him. Meanwhile, our sins are buried and left behind in His grave. The Father is also involved in this. He manifested Himself to be His Father by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. As the Father Himself then has shown favor toward Him, so He also does unto believers for whom Christ has gone into death. They are now given to walk in newness of life. That is, enjoying life out of new principles. It is a completely different life than it was before. They follow the Christian principles of life from out of God's Word. The old life of sin was destroyed that they might excel in a new life through Christ's power. It is a life of devotion to the Lord, being cleansed and redeemed from sin. This truth is preached in all the letters of the apostles.

1 Peter 1

We will close this chapter with a word of Apostle Peter about regeneration. Please look carefully at the marginal notes on this. When Peter names the addressees, he had already pointed out the riches that the Lord had bestowed upon them. They were given to partake of the salvation in Christ by grace. After the benediction, Peter describes more purposefully and in yet more detail what mercies and what great privileges they have received from the Lord. He wants them to properly realize this. He desires that they know to be indebted unto Him all gratitude and affection. He also makes it clear how wicked the deeds and sayings of false teachers are, and he warns them that they should definitely not follow them.

1 Peter 1:3 reads:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the

dead.”

The marginal notes about the word, *has begotten us* are:

“That is renewed by His Spirit, or delivered from the corruption of our first birth and freed from the dominion of the indwelling sin.”

Notice that this statement is fully consistent with what we have clarified out of Ephesians 2 and Romans 6.

Chapter 4

Regeneration According to the Three Forms of Unity

The confessional documents - also called the Three Forms of Unity - originated in difficult times when the church was called to make a profession. The church has accepted them as doctrinal standards of the Gospel. The church has marked her identity with these writings in order to remain faithful to the pure interpretation of the Gospel. Especially in our time of so much confusion and temptation, it is necessary to clearly see what is of importance.

The confessional documents referred to are:

- The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)
- The Confession of Faith (1561)
- The Canons of Dordt (1619).

a. The Heidelberg Catechism

Every Sunday is preached out of this precious document, which we would now like to discuss first. Let us not use just any commentary, but that, from one of the authors, namely, Zacharias Ursinus. His co-author was Caspar Olevianus. Who could know about the meaning of the word “regeneration” any better than Ursinus, the author of this confessional jewel? There is something else yet. In the edition of 1657, there are two approbations, namely, from the Theological Faculty of Leiden and of Utrecht. Both approbations are signed by the best theologians of that time.

What does the Catechism say about regeneration? The word occurs only once, namely, in the answer to question 8 of Lord’s Day 3.

“Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness?”

Answer: “Yes, indeed we are (a) except we are *regenerated* by the Spirit of God.” (b)

Ursinus gives a clear explanation of this in his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism. In this Lord’s Day, he distinguishes four states in which man should be considered: before the fall, after the fall, when born again, and in his glorified state after this life. Here, of course, it concerns the third state: when born again. Ursinus explains:

“Because the Holy Spirit, by His special grace, has renovated the nature of man through the Word of God—has kindled new light and knowledge in the understanding, and has awakened in the heart and will such new desires and inclinations, as are in harmony with the divine law; and because the Holy Spirit effectually inclines the will to do those things which are in accordance with this knowledge, and with these desires and inclinations, it is in this way that the will recovers both the power of willing that which is acceptable to God, and the use of this power, so that it commences to obey God according to these declarations of His word: “*And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart.*” “*A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.*” “*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*” “*Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.*” (Deut. 30:6; Ex. 36:26; 2 Cor. 3:17; 1 John 3:9) The reasons, on account of

which the will in this third degree chooses and does in part both the good and the evil, are the following:

1. Because the mind and will of those who are regenerated are not fully and perfectly renewed in this life. There are many remainings of depravity which cleave to the best of men as long as they continue in the flesh, so that the works which they perform are imperfect and defiled with sin. *“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.”* (compare with Canons, V, Article 1 and 2) (Rom. 7:18)

2. Because those who are regenerated are not always governed by the Holy Spirit, but are sometimes forsaken of God for a season, that He may thus either try or humble them. Yet although they are thus left to themselves for a time, they do not finally perish, for God, in His own time and way, calls them to repentance. Ps. 51:13: *“Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.”* Isa. 63:17: *“O Lord, why hast Thou made us to err from Thy ways?”* (compare with Canons, V, Article 5-7) In short, after regeneration is begun, man is in a state to be able to choose the good. He then chooses partly the good, and partly the evil. There is a proneness to the good, because the mind and will being illuminated and changed begin, in some measure, to be turned to the good, and to commence new obedience. There is a proneness to the evil because the saints are only imperfectly renewed in this life and retain many infirmities and evil desires on account of original sin, which still cleaves to them. Hence the good works which they perform are not perfectly good.”²⁹

You notice here that the new birth is not disconnected from the rest of spiritual life. It is a unity, a life with Christ, which extends unto our death. That is regeneration. That is what the Confession states!

b. The Confession of Faith

Guido de Brès (1522-1567) gave a clear and living testimony of the truth. It cost him his life. However, with our so-called orthodoxy, we have largely abandoned this truth again. We have exchanged the precious matters of this confession for a bit of glitter and favor of men. After the dark period of the Middle Ages (500-1500), we have again wrapped the light in a new, almost pitch-black darkness.

The people of the Reformation had left scholasticism (medieval philosophy) completely behind them, but it has re-entered through our back door again. This is the darkness of our days, and our Reformed people agree with it, and feel at ease with it. The ministers also feel content, because they strive for their good position and allow themselves to be honored like gods. Not Christ, but they sit on the throne. It is heartbreaking because only God's Name should receive glory into all eternity.³⁰

No, the men of the Reformation were of different caliber. Their possessions and their own blood they gave for the glory of the great King. They sought the welfare of the souls of sinners. Let us now see what Guido de Brès says.

In Article 22, he speaks of *“our justification through faith in Jesus Christ.”* It begins as follows:

“We believe that, to obtain the true knowledge of this great mystery (the deliverance from their sins, AK), the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ, with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him. (. . .)”

Article 23 is about the words “*in which our justification exists*”. This article begins as follows:

“We believe that our salvation consists in the remission of our sins for Jesus Christ's sake, and that therein our righteousness before God is implied (. . .).”

In Article 24, he then follows with “*the sanctification and the good works*”:

“We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth *regenerate* and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin. (. . .)”

You can notice here that the article, in which regeneration is mentioned for the first time, appears after the articles about justification. Also note the order in which the confession discusses the matters of faith: the deep fall of man, God's electing love, redemption through Christ, justification through faith in Christ, sanctification.

If you want a good explanation on these issues, read *Zion's Glory and Strength* by Arnoldus Rotterdam. There we read that Christ merited our salvation and also applies it to His Own people. This salvation becomes our own through the operation of the Holy Spirit, because He works the faith in our hearts. As a result, we are made partakers of Christ, and we are justified. This is the core of Christianity and the fountain of all true consolation. Whosoever errs herein, errs to his own destruction. The devil continually focuses on denying the truth of this doctrine, to distort and obscure it. If this fails, he then attempts to achieve that we lay it aside unpracticed.³¹

What does this minister say about being born again? This: “Faith is the fountain of our regeneration.” Faith, through which man is regenerated, enables us to live to God in all kinds of good works. It exercises communion with God. It would suffocate in the womb wherein Comrie and his followers lay the living child. No, the new birth is the goal and the purpose of Christ's suffering and death (Titus 2:14).

Thus, this article teaches us that regeneration and good works are the fruits of our justification. It concerns the elect who are purchased with the blood of Christ. The new birth is a benefit of the Covenant of Grace.³²

There is no middle state between being regenerated or unregenerated. There is also no way in between. It is either inside or outside of the strait gate (Christ). It is either a good or a bad tree. They are wise or foolish virgins, etc., etc. That is what this confession states; that is the pure doctrine.

c. The Canons of Dort

Now our third form. The Canons were compiled at the Synod of Dordrecht. They are a refutation of the Five Articles *of* the Remonstrants. Therefore, the Canons are also called the Five Articles *against* the Remonstrants.

We read in the third and fourth chapters of the Canons of Dort, Article 12:

“And this is the regeneration so highly celebrated in Scripture, and denominated a new creation: a resurrection from the dead, a making alive, which God works in us without

our aid. But this is in no wise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel, by moral suasion, or such a mode of operation, that after God has performed His part, it still remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not, to be converted, or to continue unconverted; but it is evidently a supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation, or the resurrection from the dead, as the Scripture inspired by the Author of this work declares; so that all in whose heart God works in this marvelous manner, are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and *do* actually believe. - Whereupon the will thus renewed, is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence, becomes itself active. Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent, by virtue of that grace received.”

We read that all those in whose hearts God works in this miraculous way are surely, infallibly, and powerfully regenerated, and they truly come to believe. Can it be any clearer? Powerfully born again, they truly come to believe. We do not read that the preached Word acts upon the power to believe so that the sinner begins to feel his sins and step by step begins to believe in Christ. We also do not read anywhere that our fathers of Dordt speak of going from an implanted faith to an actual faith.

Immediately following that, we read in Article 13:

“The manner of this operation (the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, A.K.) cannot be fully comprehended by believers in this life. Notwithstanding which, they rest satisfied with knowing and experiencing, that by this grace of God they are enabled to believe with the heart, and love their Savior.”

Dordt clearly turns away from the doctrine of the Remonstrants and proves that the root of the new life is out of God and is not of man. It is by the power of God that the sinner is raised from the dead and comes to a new life in Christ. This is just as it was in creation, a new creation. It follows the line of Scripture, as we have already pointed out. It is about the whole conversion. Conversion is a work of God and not of man. They do not add unto it or take anything from it here. In our hearts God manifests a powerful work, which influences all the capacities of the soul. Under God's guidance and governing, man comes to the grace that is in Christ Jesus. In this manner, God works conversion. The new birth is something new which God works *in us, without us*. Yet this work of God does not act against our will. The will is inclined toward God by the power of God's renewing Spirit. God's Spirit does not dehumanize man.³³ He grants him faith through which he is born again. He works in him and makes the preparations for this in the person. Man is the object of His regenerating power. Once he has received saving faith, then for him the light goes up into the darkness. That new life out of God cannot be understood or explained. It is just as one cannot explain the light from out of the darkness, and life from out of death.

With peace of mind, you may leave the dogmatic books from the preachers of the last century closed. These books do contain some good things, but on crucial points, they are fundamentally wrong. Take other better books to educate yourself and others. The books of good old writers like Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Ursinus, Kohlbrugge, Thomas Watson, Stephen Charnock and others are full of spirit and life.

Conclusion: Our confessions speak just as Paul did, that the new man, created in the image of God in righteousness and holiness, is the fruit of faith. The conversion, the regeneration is according to them a renewal, a renewal according to how it used to be in the state of innocence. The renewed man is a new man who is placed against the old man. This man was regenerated by God, from a state of enmity, curse, and impenitence. This, the Bible calls regeneration. The putting on of the new man is a coming back to its original state again. This explanation has nothing to do with the embryo doctrine.³⁴

34. T. Bos, *ibid.*, pg. 18.

Chapter 5

Fundamental Concepts of Scripture

In our exegesis, we can now ask whether we should restrict ourselves to only the text and the meaning of it. No, for there are also connections between the texts themselves. With that, other passages are sought that are associated with the content of the text which is to be explained. Let us see what else God's Word says about our topic.

a. Reconciliation with God

We would like to point out that the following texts concern a principle truth. These are the words of 2 Corinthians 5:19: *“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation.”* It concerns the core and essence of the Gospel. Man is by nature in enmity with God. God is against us, and we are against God. Hence we need to be reconciled to God.

On the other hand, we see that God shows all willingness to be reconciled with us. This is only possible through a sacrifice. And this Sacrifice is Christ. God requires of Him His blood, which is necessary for reconciliation. He carries their punishment, and they go free. You may wonder, why? Well, there was a demand of justice of God for the debt that man has made. Has this been satisfied? Has God reconciled us to Himself? That can only be through Christ.

Do you know what is so wonderful herein? God is in Christ, and Christ is in God. That means, he who has the Son, also has the Father. He that partakes of the Son by faith also partakes of the Father. He that partakes of the Father also partakes of Christ as Surety and Redeemer. Christ reconciles the Father with the sinner by His blood, and Christ reconciles the sinner with the Father, also through His sacrifice of blood, and also in the way of conversion.

Here again - not an embryo, but a Blood theology. The first is an invention by which man seeks access to the tree of life in by-passing the cherubim. That man, however, will fall into the deadly sword of God's justice. But in the blood of Jesus, God is no longer angry. He is pleased with them.

In this reconciliation, (take note) man is born again - never before that. For why else would the atonement still be necessary? This new regeneration has been granted to the sinner by grace. Only then are we a new creature. *“Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). Then we bear the image of the precious Jesus, Whom we truly learn to know as our Savior. He is to us the Immanuel, God with us. God came so close to us in Christ. Now God is for us. God is also in us through the Holy Spirit. And what a wonder! He abides in us, and we in Him. Love has overcome. What should we preach now? - The embryo doctrine? - No, the reconciliation with God! He has placed the word of reconciliation in us.

b. The Gospel of the Cross

We read in 1 Corinthians 2:2: *“For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ,*

and Him crucified.” The apostle has been taught and instructed by God. He is averse to all knowledge that is inconsistent with the doctrine of godliness. Whatever is not of God should not be accepted by us.

In his former life, he was filled with the teachings and traditions of men. He faithfully kept the customs of the fathers. Everything he had learned earlier was but vain notions about the truth. Later everything completely changed. He then proclaims the testimony of God. There is nothing more precious than God's grace in Christ Jesus. He glories in the cross of Christ. He does not adorn his message of the Gospel with words of eloquence. He wants nothing to do with human philosophy, which uses human wisdom and knowledge to seek a way to heaven. The testimony of God is of greater value for him than that of men. He proclaims the Gospel of free grace. Christ and Him crucified is everything to him. It would be a shame for him not to preach the crucified Son of God of Whom our salvation must come.

That does not mean that he bypasses the other concepts and teachings of God's Word. No, on the contrary, he preaches the whole counsel of God. Everything focuses on the cross of Christ. There is nothing more fruitful to preach about than the message of the cross of Jesus. Woe to that minister that does not preach this Gospel of the cross. Woe to us, if we are offended with this cross. We cannot and must not pass by the cross of Jesus Christ. Only then do we have something of the divine wisdom, if we have knowledge of and partake of Christ and His merits of the cross. Paul does not want to stand upon any other Foundation. He praises such wisdom. The preaching of this cross is dear to him. Hence we should have nothing to do with the doctrine of unconscious regeneration. The blood of Jesus, shed on the cross, must be preached. That alone can cleanse us from all sin. This is the way God has ordained in His infinite wisdom.

c. No Other Name

We read in Acts 4:12: *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other Name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.”* Here the apostle Peter makes it clear that salvation is only to be found in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We must perish, if we rest on people, no matter of what state or position. God shall never adopt us, if we seek Him outside of His beloved Son. Many are fanatical about names, as they also are with Comrie's, but it will not benefit them. It is Christ Alone who can bring us back to God. Of Him, we must learn about God, and of God, we must learn about Christ. His Name stands for Christ, and Christ is God. Which creature could offer us help in the day of trouble? Pray to Christ alone for your salvation; there is no other Name. The Lord bids us to come to Him through Christ. He offers us His Son for our salvation. In Him, He has descended unto us from heaven, so that we may be taken up unto Him from beneath the heavens. His incarnation is a sure pledge thereof, and His Name stands as a sure warrant for it. By His death, He has reconciled us to Him forever. Because of this reconciliation, we have been adopted to be His children.

In these verses, the apostle discusses the revelation of this salvation. This is in Christ. We do not need to climb up into heaven, it is under the heavens. It is in Jesus, through Whom God came near. In this way, God is not only among us but also *in us*. The latter is by faith, which comes from the Holy Spirit. Be no longer troubled by people who say, *“Here is the Christ, or there is the Christ.”* Pay no attention to people who come with their well-sounding names, but who draw you away from this dear Surety and Mediator. That is not Jesus. Many do not deny Jesus as a Name, but they do not know Him. Many talk about the road, but they walk on byways. They do not know Him, and they hardly trust Him with the least part of their salvation. They lean on their own wisdom and love themselves the most. Their

concern is about their name and their honor. Talking about Jesus is no more than mere contemplations. No, for the true believer there is no embryo, but a full Christ unto salvation.

d. The Only Foundation

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:11: *“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”* Paul was called to be the servant of Christ. He went to work as a wise builder. In his teachings, he laid down a good foundation for the Church of God. They must not do anything which is contrary to God's Word. God's Building rests upon a good Foundation. That Foundation is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. This Foundation lays sunken in the blood of the Lamb of the Son of God. The true saving faith finds its support and salvation in Him. One cannot deviate from these teachings of Paul without departing from Christ. The Church must be built on Him alone. This was the main thing for Paul. Paul, who has served the congregations faithfully, could not require more of them than to hold on to this doctrine. The ministers of God's Word are not awaiting any other task. If they do it differently, they cannot be servants of Christ. Those who deviate from this pure doctrine are the destroyers of the congregation and are the persecutors of God's Church. Paul desires the newly inaugurated ministers to bring a truthful preaching because only in that way do they build the Church in the most holy faith. What is more pernicious to believers, than to disturb them with a new way of teaching? These ministers cause their feet to slide from the only Rock, Jesus Christ. The congregation must be on her guard because many use the Name of Christ, but are not of His servants. Next to God's truth, they have another truth, and have laid another foundation besides this Foundation. They do acknowledge Him as Savior, but in the mean time, they seek their own righteousness, sanctification, and salvation elsewhere. Thus the preaching is stripped from the Foundation of Christ, and they put another foundation in His place. Christ is no longer the only Foundation and the only Name for us. They came up with something in addition. They place the hearers of their preaching on a different ground. It is hardly noticeable at first. Oh, it comes so close by! Paul warns us earnestly about this, because if Christ is not the only Foundation for us, we cannot be saved. He is the Fountain of all good. Our justification, redemption, regeneration, sanctification, atonement, cleansing, our life and our comeliness are found only in Him. It must be preached like this; they must not add to it or take from it. Outside of Him, the believer knows neither rest nor perfection. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. He, who knows Christ, also knows the heavenly doctrine and is perfect in Him. God's servants must preach the Word as purely as Paul had preached. Compare your preaching with that of Paul, ministers! If it is similar to that of Paul, then Christ shines as foundational Stone, Cornerstone, Keystone and ornamental Stone.

e. Christ is the Life

The apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 1:21: *“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* Reader, it cannot be that we have life outside of Christ. All this arguing about life before Christ, and outside of Christ and His righteousness, is in the best sense, a delay on the road to Zion which is above, and in the worst sense, self-deception on our life journey to eternity. Let someone tell me that he has found it outside of Him, Who finds us. Shall we be found of Him and not know Him? That is impossible! We know in Whom we have believed. Faith without the conscious knowledge is no faith. It is an artificial thing and a theory that people learn to believe with a faith that does not know that it believes. Abandon that misleading faith that allows people to believe that they are believers, without knowing that they believe in Christ. What must we do with a doctrine that says that people are saved, while they do not know that experientially? Why do they want us to believe that we may once come to believe that we

do believe? How can one solve that monstrosity of philosophy? I ask you to solve the puzzle of these premises (assumptions). Readers, remain with the teachings of Paul, who out of his simple faith, says that for him, life is Christ and to die is gain. With this you will not be deceived.

Actually, Paul is saying that it does not matter whether he lives or dies; he is happy because he has Christ, and Christ has him. His words are as follows: it does not matter to me if I live or die, I am of Christ. Am I of Christ, then it is bliss for me to die. He declares, as it were, it is easier for me to say that my dying is living, than to believe that I could live happily without Christ. Where do you hear this language? Not from the supporters of the presumed regeneration, but from God's truly regenerated children. They are those, who are truly incorporated into Christ. Christ lives and remains in them, and they live and remain in Christ.

Conclusion: Also in these connections, we do not come across the embryo in the Scriptures. We must not promote another Gospel than that of the cross of Jesus Christ. Let that misleading faith go, that causes people to believe that they are believers, without knowing that they believe in Christ. What must we do with a doctrine that says that people are saved, while they do not know that experientially? Reject it!

Chapter 6

The Blood Theology

The true Church has a Blood theology. The atoning sacrifice of Christ is sufficient for the salvation of His people, and God Himself is satisfied with it. He requires nothing more and nothing less. We must look upon this Blood and nothing else, shall we ever be saved. This is an unchangeable and set truth of God.

a. Christ's Blood is Necessary

This blood is *necessary* to remove our trespasses and sins from us. The blood of the first covenant points us to Christ, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world. That also became clear in the Old Testament with the people of Israel. In their exodus from Egypt, they slaughtered a lamb according to the command of the Lord. With its blood, they marked their doors as a guarantee for the preservation of their lives. From the day that the Jews have held the Passover, in figurative sense for the first time, they have killed and eaten the lamb. Fifty days after that day, they received the law, written by the Finger of God (a name for the Holy Spirit). Also in that manner, after the passion and resurrection of the Lord – which is the actual Passover - precisely fifty days later, the Holy Spirit was sent to the disciples. But then, no longer did that take place on stone tables, which was a symbol of their hard hearts.³⁵

Of this blood, the Savior had spoken at the institution of the Lord's Supper: “*And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day, when I drink it new with you in My Father’s Kingdom.’*” (Matt. 26:26-29).

b. Christ's Blood is Special

There is a peculiar power in the word “blood”. We cringe when we see blood. Just talking about blood appalls us. We imagine things about it, which causes us to shudder. Sometimes those images repeatedly come to mind. We cannot get rid of them. The sight of blood is touching. A sensitive heart cannot see an animal bleeding. Probably there are people who faint. The sight of blood is atrocious. We turn our eyes away when an animal is slaughtered. The smell of the warm blood causes many to gag. However, in the Old Testament worship, the shedding of the blood of animals pointed to Christ. In this sense, that blood had a special power and drawing to the future blood that Christ has poured out on the cross. The believer finds his life therein. One and the same is here - the Offer and the Priest. Priest, because He is our Reconciler, for we possess Him as Intercessor before the Father; Offer, because He has redeemed us by His blood (Heb. 9:12-14).

How is this with people? When one sees human blood, the feelings of disgust are even more than with the blood of animals. We may not shed the blood of people. Murder is a horrible crime, which shall be punished by God. *“Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed.”*

There is peculiar power in blood. Blood is our life. The soul is in the blood. The shedding of this blood is a sign of death. One makes himself guilty if he sheds it. But the blood of Jesus draws us and sets us free from guilt. The Blood and the Cross are as a magnet for sinners; Adamites are saved thereby. The Father draws them to the crucified Son of God. The dying Son draws them to Himself. Every true Christian comes to the cross and the blood of the Son by faith. When His blood flows out and He dies, then the blood flows into us, and we begin to live. His wounds became as fountains of life for our soul.

c. Christ's Blood is Quickening

We go from one issue into the other, concerning the truth of these matters. I will not say much more about it, for there is no end. The Infinite has infinity in Himself. Augustine follows this so eloquently, as he deals about the brazen serpent. He explains:

“What are the biting serpents? - Sins, from the mortality of the flesh. What is the uplifted serpent? - The death of the Lord on the cross. By reason that death originated through a serpent, it therefore was represented by the image of the serpent. The bite of the serpent caused death; the death of the Lord brings life. They set their gaze upon the Serpent that the serpents may have no power. What does this mean? They set their gaze upon the Serpent, that death may have no power. - But whose death? The death of Life, if can be spoken of the death of Life. Rather, because it can be said, it is all the more wondrously spoken. But may it not be said, since it had to be done? Am I to hesitate to put into words what the Lord has done for me? Is not Christ the Life? And yet, He was hung on the cross. Is not Christ the Life? And yet Christ died. But in the death of Christ, death died; for Life, by having died, killed death; the fullness of Life consumed death; death was swallowed up in the body of Christ. So we also shall say in the resurrection, when in triumph, we shall sing, *‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’*” (1 Cor. 15:55).³⁶

Here you can again clearly see how the sinner is brought over from death into life. Any other thoughts about this are fabrications. Man looks for many inventions, but not the truth. It is a false hope that man holds fast to.

d. Christ's Blood is Redemptive

In the epistle to the Ephesians, Paul testifies: *“In Whom we have redemption through His blood,*

the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” (Eph. 1:7). He clearly shows here that we are only reconciled to God through Christ. Christ reconciled the Father by His death. If we seek God by grace, we must turn our hearts to the Blood. The Blood and the forgiveness go together when it pertains to our salvation. Salvation is the not-imputing of our sins for reason of the merits of Christ, and the imputing of His righteousness, which is accepted and appropriated by faith. Thus we are redeemed, not only from sin but also from the bonds of the devil and death, merely by grace. The embryo thoughts are shrewd thoughts of the human mind and are subject to frivolity of religion. We maintain the Blood theology. Redemption and forgiveness through His blood are inseparable. If God forgives us our sins, He redeems us from guilt and eternal death. This is our liberty and glory against death and our accusers, for Christ's sake, who shed His blood for us. In the offering of death, all possible sins are atoned. This reconciliation concerns all believers of any time or place in the world (1 John 2:1, 2). This Blood is the only price of reconciliation.

The viewing of this blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, also causes us to see the dreadfulness of our sins. When we think of the guilt of our sins, we must see the way of redemption here. Such a price He had to pay, for this shame which we have caused! Such a Sacrifice for our sins is laid down here! When Christ ascended the altar, then Isaac, the Church, was set free. Christ was condemned, so that offenders were acquitted. Christ was bound, that they may be released. Christ was deserted, that they shall never be abandoned. Christ was imprisoned, that they may be delivered. Incredible, that such a Sacrifice of love was placed before God for our hatred. We sink away in deep adoration, because He poured out His blood for debtors. We must heartily weep at the sight of this.

Conclusion: This is Blood theology; only this is Gospel. The embryo theology is nothing. Embryo theology comes from pagan philosophy. And that philosophy is human science, not the knowledge of God. Ministers, let go of those wrong philosophies and practice the biblical theology. Do you not think of the souls who come Sunday to Sunday under a sermon in which the trumpet gives an uncertain sound? Does not that responsibility weigh down upon you, if you deviate from Scripture and confession - if you stray from the Blood theology?

Chapter 7

Three Jewels of Regeneration

Three jewels: faith, hope, and charity. What do the marginal notes of 1 Corinthians 13:13 say about these jewels? Read there how clearly and powerfully it is explained how necessary those precious gifts are for us. And that in two captivating sentences: “We have need of all three of these virtues to be present and to remain in us. For without faith, we cannot be justified, and without faith, it is impossible to please God; without hope, faith cannot endure, and through love, faith must be active.”

Faith

Let us now observe how the apostle John speaks concerning true faith. He writes in 1 John 5:1: *“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him.”* The apostle has come to the end of his epistle. He emphasises the main point of his writing once again by saying that only those, who are born of God, are true believers. They believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Christ is the Center of our salvation. The love for Him, and faith in Him, are inseparable and indispensable in our new birth. By faith, we become partakers of Him, and in Him, we have eternal life. Faith in Christ is the fruit and the mark of our new birth. Here it is about faith that endures. Anything else can be no true faith, and is also therefore no new birth. This is about faith that surrenders itself to Him and rests in Him. There is by faith an acknowledgement and receiving of what God has revealed. It is by this faith, that the new birth is recognizable. In this faith of the regenerated a power is revealed that overcometh the world. (v. 5). According to this Scripture verse, regeneration is in direct relation to faith, to love (1 John 4:16), and in working righteousness. (1 John 2:29). The Father is the One Who regenerates. The apostle expresses himself here in general terms, but he especially refers to God as the cause of new life. One who is born again, also loves his regenerated brother, and who loves God, also loves His only begotten Son.

Hope

The apostle Peter is called the apostle of hope. He wrote in 1 Peter 1:3: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten to a living hope through the resurrection of our Jesus Christ from the dead.”* With great emphasis, the apostle wishes to make known that it is God Who has mercy on the sinner. Our regeneration must only be attributed to Him. God desires us to clearly understand that His dealings with the believers are purely grace. He points out in this text, that by nature, we lie in our state of death and deep misery. He had wanted to raise us up again, have us reborn (Greek: enangennan). The Lord gives us the word “reborn” and it means, that the one who is raised up or brought to life again, did not exist in that condition before. God has brought the regenerated to a new state and a new life by His recreating omnipotence. All prior workings from the side of man are totally excluded. It is now again apparent that regeneration is inextricably connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Peter hints that he and the other disciples were overwhelmingly perplexed by the Lord's crucifixion. But when they

received the strongest assurance of His resurrection, then they were, according to their perception, transferred from death into life. From a state of desolation and desperation, they were brought to a living, powerful hope. So it happens with all believers. The root and the principle of their life is in the Lord's resurrection. His death on the cross is the ransom and removal of sin, guilt, and the death of their death. His resurrection is the source of life. The resurrection of Christ from death into life is the principle of their new life and hope. The original text tells us that this hope is a result of that regeneration. Previously there was no hope, but now there is, and that because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Who thereby granted them new life. It was about this hope that the apostle was talking. The hope lives and brings forth powerful deeds. Because of their new birth, the lives of believers have become one living hope. It occupies all of their thoughts and actions, or at least, this ought to be so. These actions are determined by what God did for them. He had quickened them, and made them alive from out of death, through the resurrection of Jesus. By examining the original text, it should be clear that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation and the means of our new birth. Our rebirth, wherein we have received the new life, is inseparably connected to the resurrection of Christ from the dead. So it was for the apostles and the Christian Church, and so it should also be for us.

Love

Let us now see how love appears in regeneration. The apostle writes in 1 John 4:7: *“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.”* When we look at the sequence by which a man is born again, we see that the believers have received the Spirit of God. This Spirit brings them to the acknowledgement and confession of Jesus Christ as the Son of God manifested in the flesh. This passage also proclaims God's love in the redemption that is accomplished through the atonement. It cannot be that a person is regenerated and is not delivered of his or her sins. It also cannot be that someone has been redeemed by Jesus Christ but does not know it. Also, the sinner cannot love his Savior without knowing Him in His love and grace. True love is grounded in the redemptive work of Christ. It is by God's love that we are born again, and that we are among those who love Him. No wonder that the Lord, by means of His servants, comes to admonish us to love Him. Love flows from Him, the Source of love, and therefore, He admonishes us to love Him in return. In this way alone, the believers come to a life of love and fellowship with God. Calvin notes two things about the end of this text, where the apostle speaks of regeneration. In the first place, he shows that this is the true knowledge which regenerates and re-creates us, so that we are new creatures. In the second place, he writes that it is impossible that this knowledge of His love would not transform us to the image of God.

Calvin says, “Then let that silly ornament of the non-Reformed faith now go, because he who separates faith from love, does as if he wanted to take away the heat from the sun!”³⁷ It cannot be any clearer. It is therefore impossible to speak about any regeneration without the knowledge of faith and love.

Conclusion: From all this, you can see that faith takes the central place in God's Word. In our days, it has become regeneration instead. Now it is widely taught that regeneration takes place as the first grace, totally unconsciously as well, and of all things, without actual faith and without the sinner realizing it. It used to be: believe, believe, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. Now man thinks to be able to be saved by an unconscious regeneration. It is therefore extremely important to further closely investigate that false regeneration, that embryo philosophy. That is what we hope to do next, in the second part of this book.

Part 2

SCHOLASTICAL DOCTRINE SYSTEMS

Chapter 8

Fallacies From the Early Church to the Further Reformation

We shall now give an outline of the early church and the church of the Middle Ages, by which we will show that the embryo theology is based on old errors. Its roots lie in Plato and Aristotle (pagan philosophers). Their ideas were incorporated into scholasticism, which began after Augustine. We will also show the shifts that arose immediately after the Reformation. They began to systematize. The mind began to interfere with faith and took rule over faith. It may be a difficult chapter, but you should really read it. Read it completely to better understand the doctrine of the embryo.

Pelagius and Augustine

Pelagius was a monk of Irish descent. He worked in Rome since the year 384, and was greatly annoyed with the preaching of Augustine about sin and grace. Pelagius travelled through Alaric and his Visigoths to Carthage with his radical friend Caelestius during the conquest of Rome in the year 410, and then they travelled to Palestine. Caelestius remained in Africa to spread the views of Pelagius.³⁸

Augustine regarded faith as a gift of God, but Pelagius held faith for the work of humans. He put full emphasis on the free will of man, who with the aid of the Law and the example of Jesus would be able to contribute to his salvation. He hated the confession of impotence, as Augustine had written in his Confessions: "Give what thou commandeth, and then command what Thou wilt." (da quod iubes et iube quod vis).³⁹

Pelagius denied original sin (originale peccatum), and also according to him, there was no inner working grace (gratia international). He claimed: by the word of forgiveness, a man is declared righteous by God; that God does not impute sin is part of baptism; faith is then only the agreeing with the acquittal. Man can do good works by his own free will (liberum arbitrium), which was not lost through the fall.⁴⁰ Against this background, Augustine developed his doctrine of justification.

THE DOCTRINE OF AUGUSTINE

Augustine's Doctrine of Justification

Thus, Augustine was caught up in the ecclesiastical struggles of his days. The main issue was the doctrine of free grace. Against Pelagius' optimistic vision of man, Augustine argued in *De Natura et Gratia* (412) that the righteousness (to be righteous before God) is not out of the works of the Law (ex lege), but by faith (ex fide). For Augustine, that meant to be juristically saved from God's righteous wrath. That is to say, pardon and acquittal and truly becoming righteous (iustificari et redimi ab ira Dei

justissima). God's acquittal makes love possible. That love is poured out in the heart by the Holy Spirit, and that is righteousness. Love stems out of faith, which does not go outside of the will. These are gifts of God Himself, which are necessary for the union with God, the supreme Good (unio mystica). Through the Holy Spirit, man turns his back to pride, and he gives himself over to God by faith to be saved by Him. In that faith, there is beseeching for mercy, a confidence (fiducia) in the victory of God's love over and above the love of self. By sheer, irresistible (irresistibilis) grace, the merciful God calls the sinner whom He converts and grants faith. Through Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and man, He awakens the dead, that is, He brings them to perfect life and righteousness. Augustine sees the salvation of man as regeneration, a re-creation on behalf of God.⁴¹

Augustine's Doctrine of Grace

Augustine proclaimed the merciful intervention of God. He understood thereby an external grace - the sacraments of the Church - and an inner grace. Without the latter, the first is fruitless. He distinguished different times in the operation of divine grace. Initially, there is the conviction of sin and guilt in the heart of man. To this end, God gave His law that no one can fulfill. One must believe in God to acknowledge that the law is the expression of His holy will, and is therefore our duty. In that manner, we become familiar with God. We now believe what we would not believe. However, that which precedes faith is not sufficient to obtain God's salvation. It is necessary, that the desperate, with the law confronted man, comes to believe in the promises of the Gospel and begins praying for God's help. God is always the first, and calls (vocatio) man by grace. That calling begets faith and the new will. Faith learns to hope for what is still missing. God grants that man a taste of righteousness and a confidence upon His help, which is grounded in the incarnation, suffering, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God inclines the heart without compulsion (coactio) to believe. The Holy Spirit enlightens the human spirit, heals and strengthens the will; on the other hand, man believes by an act of his own will. God takes the initiative and makes faith possible. Man believes.⁴²

Augustine's Process of Salvation

Augustine developed his doctrine from Romans 5:5, of inspiratio novi amoris, that is, the doctrine of the inspiration of the new or highest love. We will come across that again in the next chapter, when we write about Aristotle. Inspiratio was a key word for him. The outpoured love of God enters into the hearts of the elect through the Holy Spirit. This new life is working through love, and provides substance for His glory. God is glorified in His Own work. He grants them grace through Jesus Christ. According to Augustine, love was the central force in the process of justification. The stages in the process of salvation, we can (in the line of Paul in Romans 8) summarize as follows:

1. predestination;
2. calling;
3. faith (despising of ourselves, fleeing to grace);
4. justification:
 - b. change, transformation, regeneration, healing of the will, renewal of life, outpouring of the love of God in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, the gift of God's righteousness as an inclination to new life;
 - c. doing the works of righteousness, sanctification, and justification; increasing from day to day in holiness, but incidentally realizing how far we still are from perfection, accompanied by faith and hope in the perfect righteousness because of the simply inevitable imperfections in this life,

therefore complemented by the remission of sins;

5. completion (fulfillment of faith and hope, fullness of love).⁴³

The Core of God's Grace

The core of the discussion with the Pelagians lies in whether or not one confesses to possess justifying grace. Justifying grace is a medicinal grace. It has its foundation in the blood of Christ, in His cross and resurrection. The believer receives the forgiveness of sins in true Baptism (what the outward baptism signifies) grounded upon Christ's work. He is not a slave to sin anymore but is a new man, who belongs to Christ, righteous and holy. Nevertheless, the old man has not suddenly disappeared. The believer must battle against the old corrupt nature his whole life long. Therefore, in the life of sanctification, the ongoing battle against sin remains.

According to Augustine, justification is a completed action that takes place once, but is nevertheless an ongoing process. The believer must continue his whole life through in combat with the remains of sins. By the gift of perseverance (*donum perseverantiae*), he continually draws nearer to the situation where he cannot sin (*non posse peccare*) any longer. At the end of the world, with the second coming of Christ, this becomes full reality for the believer.⁴⁴

Augustine versus Comrie

Grace that transforms the will and restores the nature, is not an indwelling or habitus grace (note what Comrie did with his philosophical habitus construction), whereof the will operates at its own discretion, but it is an effective and efficacious grace (*gratia actualis et efficax*). This grace governs the will and brings it to its deeds. The spiritual power of Christ as a conquering grace (*gratia victrix*), defeats all resistance in man and leads him to his purpose. Augustine meant with efficacious grace (*gratia efficax*) that there is no limitation in the nature of man (*praedeterminatio physica*). A strong sense of ineffable sweetness and spiritual enjoyment bends and determines the will. The lust for earthly things is overcome (*victrix delectatio*).⁴⁵

Inseparably Connected

Augustine does not declare that justification is absorbed into sanctification. He continues to see the forgiveness of sin as the pardoning judgment of God and the not imputing of sin. When he speaks of justification (*iustificatio*) as regeneration (*renovatio*) and sanctification (*sanctificatio*), he implies the entire process as the gifts of the grace of God. In this context, the saving (*salus*) and justifying of the sinner are closely linked. These two benefits are intricate together in Christ. The man justified through faith, (*ex fide*) is going to act justly, as a direct result of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Beside holding the Scripture for truth, and beside the childlike trust in God, faith means to have faith in the finished work of the Mediator, according to the church father. To have faith in Him means to have the new life by God's grace. The juridical aspect is certainly not lacking, although it remains somewhat in the background, because there was no controversy on this point with the Pelagians. The same applies to what man, in the time of the Reformation, would have called the imputing (*imputatio*) character. The imputation is effective, real. The imputation and holiness (*imputatio* and *sanctitas*) are inextricably linked to each other. They are worked by the Spirit and are understood in faith. There is a close relationship between Paul and Augustine, when it pertains to the

justification of the sinner (*iustificatio impii*). Augustine continually cites fundamental texts from the epistles of Paul.⁴⁶

THE DOCTRINE OF SCHOLASTICISM

Gospel as a New Law

Clemens, Ignatius, Tertullian, Ambrose, Augustine, and others have remarkably testified in their writings and liturgical prayers of God's grace and of the undeserved forgiveness of sins. Yet there was a movement at that time that the Gospel was as a new law. This new form of legalism invaded the church more and more. Man began to see Christian life as a fulfilling of God's commandments; faith and works were paving the way to heaven.⁴⁷

Penitence and good works obtained a fulfilling and meriting character through the influence of Tertullian. Following a long period of developments, this led to the sacrament of penitence, which became a second means to salvation in addition to baptism. Through baptism, man then received the remission of past sins; in penitence, man received forgiveness of debt and also the eradication from the blemish of sin through the imparted grace (*infusio gratiae*). Both of these benefits are inextricably linked to each other, though they are not the same: the first benefit is justification; the latter is sanctification and renewal.

The imparted grace does not occur through its own nature, according to the Franciscan theologian and philosopher, Johannes Duns Scotus (1266-1308), but by virtue of divine order.

Note: this is wherein Comrie errs later on.

Thomas van Aquino (1225-1274)

We now follow an Italian philosopher and theologian, Thomas van Aquino, who is also counted among the scholastics, an influential systematic thinker in the theological and philosophical field. According to him, the habitual grace (*gratia habitualis*) heals (sonat) or justifies the soul, and no remission of debt (*remissio culpae*) can exist there without the presence of the already imparted grace. It is regrettable that the philosopher, Comrie, followed this serious error. Thomas van Aquino places the blessing of the forgiveness of sins subordinate to that of sanctification. One consequence of that is the diminishing of sin and guilt.⁴⁸

Rome ended up in semi-Pelagianism, with the practice of indulgences, which the Synod of Aarausio (Orange) had rejected in the year 529. With the indulgences being the forgiveness of sins, the concept of justification had little to do with forgiveness of sins anymore.⁴⁹ That synod emphasized the vision of Augustine on free will and grace. Man is incapable of doing any good, and cannot prepare himself for the grace of God.

LUTHER AND AUGUSTINE

The Doctrine of Luther (1483-1546)

Luther thought justification (*iustificatio*) to be a spiritual transformation and then afterwards to be led orderly on the way of justification. This concerns the mercy of God; not a new habitus of man (had Comrie but remained on this track). The declaration of being righteous is both a recreating act, a making righteous, begetting of life, and the renewing of life. By grace God grants Himself to a sinner who is full of repentance and who is seeking for Him. Grace is then the righteousness that God grants by faith. Christ makes place for that in the heart of the sinner who has fallen away from God. Faith is not a free act of man, but is the result of the entry of Christ. Faith is, as Augustine states, no merit (*merita*) but a gift from God.

God very undeniably desires the sinner to also become holy, to become continually more righteous. In this process (of healing), the Reformer held the imputation, the imputation of righteousness, as an act (*actus*) of God. This righteousness granted to a penitent sinner, is the righteousness which Christ works in the believer by the Holy Spirit, and therefore is not the righteousness, which He had acquired and which He possesses in Himself.

According to Luther, “to justify” means thus on the one hand, a wrought righteousness (*iustum efficere*), and on the other hand, a declaration of being righteous (*iustum reputare*). To be righteous and to become righteous are joined with each other. For Luther, hope is an integral part of faith. Christ, Who makes the believer righteous, also at the same time, grants him hope and assurance of salvation by faith, which only comes from God. True faith is inconceivable without the love that God, the Holy Spirit, works in the heart.

Luther saw the good works as a fruit of faith. After 1517, following his proclamation of his ninety-five theses in his struggle against the sales of indulgences, he preached an even firmer basis for the forgiveness of sin. Now the objective righteousness of Christ, His atonement, was introduced as the only ground of forgiveness of sins.⁵⁰

To summarize: the declaring righteous and the making righteous are both an ongoing process in justification. It is about a sentence out of free grace because of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ and the healing, renewing, and recreating of man. Justification (*iustificatio*) includes both the declaration of being righteous and the sanctification. The forgiveness of sins and renewing (forensic and effective part of justification) cannot be separated from each other no more than the Person and the work of Christ.⁵¹ According to Luther, Christians in this life remain both righteous, and at the same time, sinner (*simul iustus simul peccator*).

Luther and Augustine

Augustine and Luther have the same view of the law. They believe that the law offers no merit of good works as a means of salvation. Both theologians think the same about the bondage of the human will: the will is incapable of good. According to them, it applies that God acquits the sinner in His judgment for Christ's sake. This is founded in the imputation of Christ's righteousness (*imputatio aliena iustitiae*). According to them, justification and regeneration (*iustificatio* and *regeneratio*) are equivalent. (Note: this is again opposite to the feelings of the embryo theology).

With both theologians, there is little difference between the righteousness in Christ and by Christ (propter Christum or per Christum), and between Christ in us and Christ for us (Christ in nobis and Christ pro nobis). Justification is inseparably bound to sanctification and is a process of healing.

Also the religious - moral life of man and the inner necessity of good works form a unity according to them. Both theologians speak of the desire for communion with Christ through the Holy Spirit (unio mystica).

According to both, perfection on earth will never be found, and continually, the forgiveness of sins and daily conversion are needed.

An important point for both theologians is the dualism of life in two worlds (the aeon of the flesh and the aeon of the Spirit). This is entirely consistent with the epistles of the apostle Paul. Till so far, the parallels of Luther and Augustine. You will note that Luther had thoroughly studied the works of Augustine since 1509.

THE SYSTEMIZING OF THE DOCTRINE

Melanchthon (1497-1560)

Melanchthon was the right hand of Martin Luther and hence an important ecclesiastical man. He held fast to the judicial (forensic) form in his doctrine of justification. According to him, justification meant the remission of sin and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ (remissio peccatorum and imputatio Christi). The second part of the redemption was, according to him, sanctification and renewal.

Melanchthon saw the Gospel as the promise (to sinners) of the Benefactor, Christ (promissio beneficii Christi). He viewed the reconciliation in the same manner as Anselm.⁵² According to Anselm, intelligence and piety, which leans toward mystical experience, go together. His philosophical-theological views are consistent with the train of thought of Augustine, Plato, and Aristotle.⁵³ His main work, *Cur deus homo*, is the fruit of years of thinking. This document is a masterpiece and embraces the doctrine of satisfaction (satisfactio). He proceeds from faith (fides), but attempts to use reason (ratio) to convince others with different opinions of the scriptural truths of faith.⁵⁴

Melanchthon's doctrine of atonement was according to the scholastic schedule. He made a separation between the declaration to be righteous and the righteousness itself. That what was connected with each other, according to Luther's theological thoughts, he proceeded to formulate more and more into a system.⁵⁵ So Melanchthon separated justification from sanctification and renewal. "What you're missing with all your rhetorical and philosophical abilities is faith!" the straightforward Luther wrote him in a notorious letter from Coburg. Therein, the biggest difference between the two was expressed. Luther gave the cause of the Reformation confidently over to God's mercy, and Melanchthon, sensitive and practical, attempted to exert influence upon it with his own wisdom. In a philosophical manner, he wanted to create a solution that came to meet the different views in the debate on justification in

relation to sanctification. His opinion eventually found its expression in the *Formula Concordiae* of 1580.⁵⁶

Osiander (1498-1552)

Andreas Osiander, the Reformer of Nuremberg, disputed his big conflict in Koningsbergen about the doctrine of justification.⁵⁷ He denied that God acquits the sinner by grace. He thought it too despicable that God would impute unto us righteousness for Christ's sake. According to him, justification exists in an actual change in man. This is then worked in him by the indwelling Christ.⁵⁸ Thus he set himself up against the judicial aspect of the doctrine of justification of the other Reformers (Luther and Melanchthon) and taught a kind of spiritual unity with Christ as a sign of true piety. According to him, this unity was a mystical union with the divine nature of Christ. He also placed full emphasis on the divinity of Christ; His human nature would only have an instrumental significance.⁵⁹ According to his opponents, he leaned over to Catholicism and was viewed as a despiser of Christ's atoning death.

Please note: this theologian laid the foundation of justification in sanctification.⁶⁰ With this, he taught a double imputation. He divided the matters into different stages and then joined the one with the other again.

In that manner, Comrie also labored in his habitus notion. He separated regeneration from justification, and later on, added it to regeneration again. But since it was incomplete, therefore justification had to be repeated. In his regeneration, one was already justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ, but that was unconsciously and had happened in a concealed (mystical) way. According to Comrie, this again takes place afterwards in a conscious way. Thus there is talk of a double justification. That would then not be a sinner, a wicked one, but a justified one being justified again. This corresponds with Rome and its scholasticism from the early Middle Ages; the Roman theologians also have a double justification.

Oh, how far have we sunken away! We seem to be struck with blindness. Yet, there are still a few people who point this heresy out to us, but almost no one seems to listen anymore. Let us, nevertheless, turn from those foolish imaginations and return to the old tried and true truth. Research the issues in their proper content. Consult Calvin! What did Calvin do with this doctrine?

Calvin had boldly contested against all the strange and scholastic notions. He did not want to be compared with Osiander in his teachings about the implantation by faith in Christ, the true Vine. He did not teach a double justification. In his commentary on John 15, he explains that the implantation has nothing to do with a share in the divine nature, nor a habitus (inhabitatio) of divine grace in man. Thus Comrie with his "habitus" does not agree with Calvin. Calvin rejects such formations, but does have an eye for the incomprehensible, mysterious, spiritual unity, the unity of faith with Christ. This unity includes the whole man, whereby he has part in a life with the Lord just as the branch receives life from the vine. The way in which man is united with Christ is by the hidden power of the Spirit.⁶¹ Calvin shows us that he, over against Osiander, accepts the view of the unity with Christ, but he denies that we are mingled with Him.⁶²

Flacius (1520-1575)

Mattias Flacius (Vlacić) was a devoted follower of Luther. He came from Istria, today called Croatia. He came to Wittenberg as a humanist student and there, he went through a heavy spiritual crisis, from

which he was released through Luther's doctrine of justification. He founded his own German protestant movement, which was strongly opposed by the Catholic authorities. He worked in Antwerp, participating in the composing of an Antwerp-Lutheran confession. He placed full emphasis on the declaration of righteousness and congregated himself together with the doctrine of the judicial justification of Melancton, over against Osiander. Justification was now the recognition of a purely forensic (legal) justification before the heavenly Judge, whereby sanctification no longer was morally and organically connected.⁶³ Flacius distinguished justification (iustificatio) from the renewal (renovatio)⁶⁴ even as Melancton did. Soon man progressed from this distinction to making a separation, as we will still frequently demonstrate in this book.

SHIFT IN THE DOCTRINE

Formula Concordiae

In 1580, in Dresden, the Formula Concordiae (Form of Unity) was compiled to try to bridge the internal conflicts among the Lutherans. This compilation, which was to bring the followers of Philipp Melancton and Gnesio-Lutherans together, did not refer back to Luther's doctrine of justification, but in general, took over Melancton's theory of salvation. Melancton had tried to construct faith into a doctrinal system, but his followers went so far to consider justification to be an acquittal and righteous-declaration of the sinner without the existence of sanctification.

According to Luther, first there is the pronounced acquittal before God's judgment seat, wherein one is actually justified, and at the same time, there is the sanctification; the element of renewal is in justification.⁶⁵ Thus, there is a difference between Luther and Melancton. Luther has fully maintained the classical atonement motive, in addition to the Latin-Anselminian. According to him, forgiveness of sin is the beginning of redemption. Christ has conquered the great tyrants: law, sin, the devil and death, he says. He has us share in His victory. Note: justification, reconciliation, and redemption are inextricably seen by Luther as the work of Christ. He has brought the battle against the devil to a victorious end. Thus Luther did not primarily proceed from out of the imputed (imputative) righteousness in the life of the believer in the first place, but from a continual conversion and justification and sanctification. Melancton, however, separated forgiveness, as a pure judicial act, from the acquittal by Christ (propter Christum). - And Comrie? He also did that, and he turns these things around yet as well. - And the followers of Comrie? Alas, alas, the truth is far gone in our days!

Rationalization of the Doctrine

Despite the attacks of the Roman Catholics or Pelagian side, the orthodoxy wanted to thus maintain that justification was a gracious act of God, an imputation of the "foreign righteousness" (aliena iustitia) and the remission of sins, sola fide (faith alone), for Christ's sake. But also the orthodoxy began to rationalize more, and united themselves more and more with the medieval doctrine of atonement. They separated justification from sanctification, which is contrary to Paul's theology.⁶⁶

THE DOCTRINE OF CALVIN

Union with Christ

Calvin's theology is primarily focused on the uniting of the sinner to Christ. By true faith, we become implanted into Him. Therein is the most fundamental assumption of the communion (unio) with Christ. Without implantation (insertio), there is no justification or sanctification (iustificatio and sanctificatio) possible. According to him, implantation (insertio) does not mean to take part in the divine nature (participatio divinae naturae), also not the indwelling (inhabitatio) of divine grace (contra the doctrine of Comrie), but the bond of faith with Christ. The initiative for the implanting goes forth from Christ, Who effectually (efficaciter) binds the elect to Himself by faith. Faith is then a gift of God and an instrument of salvation. Calvin names two benefits as fruit of faith: justification and sanctification.⁶⁷

Whosoever accepts the imputed (imputatieve) righteousness by faith is righteous (iusti) before God. The sinner receives redemption, the forgiveness of sins (absolutio peccatorum) through the union of faith with Christ, and is clothed with His righteousness, which is the same as the reconciliation (reconclatio) and the adoption (adoptio). The judgment (damnatio) because of God's wrath upon man with his totally corrupt nature is taken away through justification. At the same time, sanctification is necessary, which Calvin prefers to call regeneratio (note = regeneration), for the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of sanctification. Faith is faith in Christ, Who is become unto us righteousness and sanctification. Sanctification is a matter of faith. Faith and sanctification always go together. According to Calvin, sanctification is a requirement. To be holy is to the glory of God's Name and is the purpose of the election and calling. In the standard of the law, the believer remains sinful, and there is no claim of accomplishments on the path of holiness. On the other hand, true holiness is possible by the unity of faith with Christ. Man is reborn into a new man. The old man is undone. Where Christ pours out His power, there is no place for sin anymore. He lives by faith in the believer and purifies him by His Spirit from sin.⁶⁸

Not Chronologically

To clarify: Calvin clearly distinguishes justification and sanctification (iustificatio and sanctificatio). About a chronological order, mention is barely made. Both benefits are linked by an eternal and indivisible bond. These benefits (bona Christi) are only possible by implantation (insertio) in Christ. Through that, the believer receives partaking of the grace and salvation in Christ. Without faith, there is no implanting into Christ and no communion with Christ for the elect. Through the union (unio) with Christ, man receives the twofold grace of Christ: the reconciliation with God through the righteousness of Another (iustia aliena), namely, that of Christ, and the sanctification of the Spirit. Justification (iustificatio) is from the first moment on perfect, but sanctification (sanctificatio) imperfect. Sanctification is a process that consists of mortification (mortificatio) and quickening (vivificatio) with Christ. By faith, man is justified, regenerated and sanctified. Sanctification is the bond between God and man.⁶⁹ We are duty bound to bear the signs of holiness. We must be holy for God's glory. Sanctification is the purpose of the election and calling (Eph. 1:4). Believing in predestination drives to action.⁷⁰ The calling also has a goal: Christ has come to call sinners to repentance (1 Thess. 4:7). The regeneration has effect on the lives of the acquitted. The primary (first) factor in that process of regeneration is the immediate repentance (poenitentia; Greek – metanoia),

which points to the continuity of it.⁷¹

SCOTLAND AND ENGLAND

The Doctrine of the Puritans

We will present the doctrine of the puritans with what Dr. John Owen taught who was also known as the Calvin of England. Even as Calvin, Owen taught sanctification as a requirement. To be holy is to the glory of God's Name and is the purpose of the election and calling. According to the standard of the law, the believer remains sinful, and there is no possibility of any attainment on the path of holiness. On the other hand, true holiness is possible through the unity with Christ by faith. Man is born again into a new man. The old man is undone. Where Christ pours out His power, there is no place for sin any longer. He lives in the believer by faith, whom He cleanses from all sins by His Spirit. Also according to Owen, justification and sanctification are thus benefits linked together by an eternal and indivisible bond. Both benefits are only possible through the implanting in Christ.

By this, the believer receives a portion of the grace and salvation in Christ. Without faith, no one can please God. The implanting and communion with Christ occur together. Only the elect are truly in Christ by faith, and in Him, they also receive the other benefits of God. Through the union with Christ, there is reconciliation with God for them (through the righteousness of Another) and the sanctification by the Spirit. Justification is perfect from the first moment, but sanctification is incomplete and is an ongoing process. They remain sinners, even when they are justified.

The implanting in Christ means to be regenerated and at the same time, to be sanctified. Sanctification is a process in the subject that consists of the mortification and quickening with Christ. Man becomes justified by faith, regenerated, and sanctified. Not a righteous one, but a sinner becomes saved by Christ. Not a regenerated one, but an ungodly one becomes justified. The election does not take a dominant place, but has been written for the comfort and assurance of the believer. God calls His people out of darkness into His marvelous light. They are saved in the Son of His eternal love. True faith takes part in the communion with Him. So they are a new creature.

Regeneration is genuine and therefore has an effect on the lives of God's Church. The believers stand in the freedom with which the Lord has set them free. This does not lead to carelessness, but to a following of Christ. In the process of regeneration is a continuing repentance, which points to continual experience of their sinfulness. The most advanced are those who have learned to be displeased of themselves the most. These hasten to God and long for Him.

Scholasticism with the Puritans

We know that some Puritans had uncritically joined with certain traditions. They would at times make particular scholastic expressions their own during their theological training. Thus there were those among them, who spoke more rationally than classically about faith (experiences). While one preacher practiced absolutely no medieval scholasticism, the other did. Therefore, also among the Puritans the influence of scholasticism appeared which was then still spoken against by several godly preachers. It would not fit into the scope of this book to trace these trends in detail. But this is what I do want to

say: the Puritans knew and practiced a deep spiritual and godly life. If we find something with them which leans towards the things we refute in this book, then especially with them, it was not dogma (doctrine), and for this reason, they are very dear to us. In all the thirty-seven years that I have read their writings, I have never encountered the embryo theology (according to the system of Comrie).

THE DOCTRINE FROM THE REFORMATION TO THE FURTHER REFORMATION (Comrie)

Augustine, Calvin, and Luther

Augustine, Calvin, and Luther are entirely consistent in the doctrine of justification. According to Augustine, the process of regeneration comes in the vicinity of healing (sanatio). To be righteous and to be a sinner at the same time is entirely consistent with Luther.

Calvin has made the necessary demarcations from Rome in his doctrine of the justification of the sinner (iustificatio impii). Also Osiander's substantial justice, he powerfully rejects. When Calvin refutes Osiander's doctrine, he says, "But one must remember what I have already said that the grace of justification cannot be and is not, separated from regeneration, although they are benefits that are distinguished."⁷²

Augustine, Luther, and Calvin see sanctification as the work of the Holy Spirit Alone. They make no distinction between justification and sanctification as being two different moments or stages. In the Roman Catholic doctrine of grace, the tendency became increasingly evident, to view the Holy Spirit as a gift that is poured out into man (gratia infusa). Gradually they had begun to understand the Holy Spirit more as a gift of out-flowing power from God that granted man certain characteristics and inherent qualities. Calvin had opposed them in that, and he taught with emphasis that the Holy Spirit is a divine Person, the One Who makes holy (Sanctificator). According to him, grace is not a quality that is poured within but a merciful disposition of God toward man. Nevertheless, Calvin and Luther did fearlessly proclaim the Spirit as a gift of grace that is imparted. (Note: Comrie did not understand this, and that is why he incorrectly refers to Calvin and also John Owen, as he exploits his embryo teaching.

(I have explained this in the next chapter on pg. 98-100.) The Holy Spirit is therefore always the Subject and He also pours out the love (charitas). In the love, which is the main part of the law, is the assurance of justification. Justification is the means to the goal, namely, sanctification which is worked by the Holy Spirit. Aside from differences in emphasis, there is a great similarity between the two Reformers and Augustine. It is therefore obvious that Calvin powerfully defended the standpoint of Augustine in opposition to the Council of Trent.⁷³

The Doctrine of Arminius (1560-1609)

Arminius taught a justification which was fundamentally different from the Reformers. He was a professor at Leiden since 1603 and came into conflict with his colleague at Leiden, Franciscus Gomarus. His aberrant views became public, when both had to appear before the Supreme Council of the States of Holland. In 1610, Gomarus gave a statement of Arminius' unorthodoxy summarized in

three points.

a. Arminius argued that faith is a gracious esteem of God, by which we are justified. Gomarus said, “No, not faith itself justifies us, but it is only an instrument by which we embrace Christ as our righteousness.”

b. Arminius claimed that the righteousness of Christ cannot be imputed unto us as righteousness. He attempted to make this clear in the third point.

c. He (Arminius) taught that Christ's obedience was the acquiring and the meritorious cause of our justification and that therefore God in mercy reckons our faith for righteousness. If there would be an indication of an actual allocation, our faith would no longer be necessary. According to him, our faith becomes the justifying act involved in justification. Faith, as an act of obedience, has a big influence on God. Even though faith is largely deficit and the deed is extremely flawed, God still views it as perfect righteousness. Whatever is lacking in the righteousness of man, Christ has obtained. Thereby, God is reconciled, and so He receives an opportunity to justify the sinner. In this way, Arminius turned back to the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification.⁷⁴

The Doctrine of Dordt

Gomarus remained with the “strict” or “orthodox”, firmly tied to the confession that faith is a gift of God's free grace to the elect; that Jesus Christ is our Righteousness; that faith is an instrument that keeps us with Him in the communion of all His goods.⁷⁵ Over against him stood the “moderates” or “politicals”, the followers of Arminius, the Remonstrants. Our fathers of Dordt rejected their fallacies.⁷⁶

Maccovius (1588-1644)

Let us now return from our trip through Europe back to the Netherlands. Also there major shifts had occurred. Here, the leader was Johannes Maccovius (derived from Makowsky), a distinguished professor in Franeker. This Maccovius, a brother-in-law of Rembrandt, was a flamboyant (stylish) Polish nobleman. From the description of his life, we know that this Jan Makowsky was very popular among the students because of his manner of lecturing. He was a celebrated debater, but not a practitioner of the fear of God and also no friend of the practice of godliness. He blemished his life by walking in drunkenness, licentiousness, and immorality. He practised a lifestyle of jovial Christianity. He preoccupied himself in scholastic sophistry and was continually in conflict with his colleagues Lubbertus and Amesius.

Furthermore, the improper walk of his life was also discussed. It was precisely this worldly Maccovius whose habit it was to simply dispute the most hidden matters of God's Kingdom and the ultimate consequences of the supralapsarism. He found a broad scholastic study to be a requirement for a theologian and considered Luther and Calvin too simple and too biblical in their statements. With the weapons of philosophy and scholastics, one is better able to stop the mouth of opponents, he reasoned. He searched for arguments which were derived from logical thinking (*consequentia remota*). According to him, God's Word is not only that which is all written in the Holy Scriptures, but also everything that flows from the Scriptures through proper presumptions (*per bonam consequentiam*), which could also be allocated to be claimed as God's Word. Whatever would follow as a logical conclusion out of the Scriptures must be honored as part of Scripture. He was the founder of the doctrine of presumed or dormant regeneration (*regeneratio supposita*). Along with that, he also made a

distinction between active and passive justification. Furthermore, he taught that someone who is convinced of sin would already have been regenerated. His teachings have brought great overshadowing over the distinction of law and gospel.

Subsequent Developments in the Netherlands

Even the theologians, Gomarus and Voetius, followed in the footsteps of Maccovius, albeit with their own accents.⁷⁷ Also Trigland, a prominent preacher in the church of his day, co-author of the Canons of Dort, was influenced by him. Therefore, there may also be some (embryo) theologians that observe a touch of the doctrine of the “habitus” in these Canons, for example, when it says that God “pours new qualities into the will.” (III / IV, Article 11).⁷⁸

I am of a completely different opinion myself. The in or out-pouring of the grace of God is a simple statement that both our fathers (listed above under the heading Augustine, Calvin, and Luther), and the Holy Scriptures have used; for example, of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17, 18), or of the love of God. (Rom. 5:5). Here the issue is that the Holy Spirit works faith in us and strengthens it. Man has nothing to do with that. We do nothing to participate in the work of salvation, because that is a one-sided work of God. In this, the men of the Synod of Dordt stand firm for the truth in their combat against the Remonstrants. Faith does not come *because of us* or *by us* in the heart, but faith comes *in our hearts without our doings*, worked by the Holy Spirit. All what we do is resist.

This is also true of the views and teachings of Maccovius. He comes close to the Catholic doctrine of infused grace (*gratia infusa*) with his view of regeneration. For years Maccovius' *Collegia theologica* remained one of the most common theological handbooks. A. Kuiper jr. considered him the pioneer of Reformed scholasticism in the Netherlands. Those who approach the scholastic thinking positively, find this no problem. A good use of scholasticism can be enlightening for the life of faith, is what they think. They therefore advocate rehabilitation (restoration of honor) for Maccovius. After investigation, they have shown to (that they) perceive more upright orthodoxy in Maccovius than previously had been thought. He towers head and shoulders above even Comrie with his conceptions of the doctrine in the subject we are now discussing. That tells us a lot.

This is then the reason, that we have now come to something which particularly grieves me: that the doctrine of Comrie is, at any rate, in connection with the teaching method of Maccovius and his followers. Comrie is even marked by new researchers as less orthodox than Maccovius. Alas, alas, alas, in this respect, Comrie followed the false teachers (scholastici). In addition to this, Comrie apparently had absolutely no idea of the wicked life of this man, as he wrote in his *Letter on the Justification of the Sinner* that Maccovius of Franeker had been appointed “because of his unusual giftedness, piety, and ability to silence the opposition, which was not lacking at that time either.” At the Synod of Dordt, Maccovius had been acquitted of fifty points of objection, but he had also been given a stern warning to remain simpler in his doctrine and to cut back on his way of scholastic teachings. However, Comrie concluded from this Synod ruling that Maccovius' doctrine of justification had been declared to be orthodox. By this statement, he means to declare that the fathers of Dordt would have also approved of his doctrine, which was closely tied to Maccovius' doctrine. But that conclusion was unfounded because Comrie could not know what the content was of those fifty points. They were published later in 1831, and only then, it appeared that none of them related to justification. As you can see, we have arrived at Comrie; we will dwell on him in the next chapter.⁷⁹

Conclusion: The Reformed theologians took up the same weapons as their opponents had, and so had gone continually further on the path of philosophy. Away from the simplicity of God's Word! The whole arsenal of logic with all the philosophical and metaphysical concepts was thrown into the battle. The best disputant was the best theologian. Alas, alas! Would it not have been better to follow the other preachers like Shepard, Owen, Erskine, Van der Groe and others who had preached according to Scripture and Confession, whose doctrine and lives harmonized? Their statements are indeed much more preferable than the scholasticism and the reasoning skills of the philosophers. Therefore, do not agree with their irresponsible philosophy!

Chapter 9

Comrie and the Embryo Philosophy

Ministers who preach the so-called embryo theology, hide behind Comrie. A competent and godly theologian, certainly. Comrie was also a doctor of philosophy, but he took a completely wrong direction with that philosophy, in order to come out of the impasse of a discussion about justification. His doctrine very much resembles pure truth, but, nevertheless, strongly deviates from it.

The old fallacies of Rome (Thomas Aquinas and his scholastic statements based on Aristotle) are wrapped around the truth like a silk robe. It is noteworthy that in some churches, they always and almost exclusively refer back to Comrie, even though in his time, in the time of the Further Reformation, he was an odd man, someone with different ideas and teachings. It is in those churches however, that he has become the house theologian and his doctrine their own style, while it would be much better and safer to take the Reformers and other old divines as starting points. Look it up in church bulletins, “Comrie says . . . Comrie teaches . . . Comrie thinks . . .” It appears as if there is no other name given under heaven but Comrie, by whom we must be taught. Only *his* sermons are beneficial. By emphasizing the teachings of Comrie, they have deliberately maneuvered themselves into an isolated position. Comrie was a star of God's work of love in the firmament of God's Church, but as servants of God, we are obliged to refute some of his views (2 Tim. 4:2). This will be done concisely of course, because otherwise it would be a study on its own.

Aristotle

First we want to say something about Aristotle, because naturally the question arises, “Who and what kind of man was Aristotle?” He was a Greek philosopher who lived from 384 to 322 before Christ.⁸⁰

He emphasized the scientifically verifiable reality, while a man like Plato saw the portrayal of supernatural ideas⁸¹ throughout the tangible world. The opinions of Aristotle had great influence on the church of the Middle Ages, also until this day as demonstrated in this book. The universities began to take over the method of Aristotle in their theological ways of thinking. This method is called scholasticism. That name means that one operates in a scholastic manner. They tried to describe, define, and analyze the truth in an orderly manner, which was retained by the church. Take note of what Comrie had been doing.

Scholasticism had its principles in tradition, which acknowledged both the Bible (the Vulgate at that time) as well as the works of the church fathers and the former Greek and Roman philosophers. With that they had wanted to solve those increasing and major problems concerning the relationship between *knowing* and *believing*, *reason* and *revelation*: must there be spoken of a contradiction (antithesis) here or could a connection (synthesis) be achieved?

Thomas Aquinas, the great master of scholasticism, was the man of synthesis.⁸² Everything had to be investigated in depth. Out of that, they built the analyzing system. In that way, the doctrine of presumed regeneration occupies almost every thought.⁸³ Man went further and further into this philosophical thinking. They also addressed the relationship between *nature* and *grace*, *human*

ingenuity and the *wisdom of God*. Aristotle excelled in that. This famous Greek philosopher appeared to be surpassed by none in the purity of perception, in clarity of logic, in transparency of systematic thinking. The highly educated did not understand how it was possible that a heathen could be so well enlightened. As one having those qualities, he was also praised in the churches.⁸⁴

Aristotle's thoughts about the soul can be summed up as follows. Every person has a thinking soul, above that is the “thinking spirit.” The soul of man is awakened to think by the “thinking spirit”; this is an ongoing process. The knowledge of the supernatural thinking spirit is acquired by experiential knowledge. Well then, see what Comrie says: “The soul may already have operations but still needs to come to further discoveries.”⁸⁵

In university, Luther saw through all the fallacies of Aristotle. He wrote to a friend, “My theology - it is that of St. Augustine - continues and has prevailed at the university. God has done it. Aristotle is going down and perhaps he will continue to descend till hell. It amazes me that so few desire lectures about the *Sententiën* of Petrus Lombardus. No one desires to attend a seminary, unless the teacher teaches my theology – which is the theology of the Bible, of Augustine, and of all true theologians of the Church.”⁸⁶

Luther detested those analyzing schemes and has directed Aristotle to hell.⁸⁷ As an anti-intellectual, he went against Aristotle.⁸⁸ There exists a kind of cartoon from the time of the Reformation (woodcut), in which we see Aristotle presented as leader of the Roman Catholic Church. It portrays Christ leading to the light of the truth, and Aristotle leading the Roman Church to perdition, wherein Plato already had fallen.⁸⁹

Readers, I cannot eliminate from my thoughts how dangerously Comrie was at work in his theology of presumed regeneration. Alas, this is the bitter fruit of man operating according to his intellect. Contrary to that, we know that Calvin, also a theologian with great intellect and aversion to scholasticism, is called the theologian of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁰

The Implanted Grace

You should know that during the period between Augustine and the Middle Ages, they had struggled about the relationship between grace and free will. The concept of merit (*meritum*) became more and more emphasized at the expense of the sovereignty of grace. In the 13th century, the great theologians replaced Augustine's doctrine of justification with the falsely formed theory of salvation of Aristotle. The scholars went to work with Aristotle. His written legacy was made more and more accessible, and thus, they influenced the doctrine of justification. Two Aristotelian core issues deserve attention.

- a. The first is the teaching of the *habitus*. Herein Aristotle deals with the moral capacities that humans could consider as a second nature. When we compare this to the doctrine of justification, we could conclude that the believer has a *twofold* *habitus*. First he has the natural *habitus* and besides that, he is granted a supernatural *habitus* by the imparting of Godly grace, resulting in a completely different situation. The believer is then put on a kind of supernatural basis whereby he is enabled to do good works of meriting character. Without that supernatural *habitus*, it would be impossible. Therefore this can only be possible if God has placed the believer on a supernatural foundation by infusing habitual grace (*infusio gratiae habitualis*).
- b. The second key issue is that all this operates according to a method that Aristotle calls *informatio*. This system would make it clear how the supernatural (*supranaturele*) *habitus* is infused into man. The

point is that God (the actual forma) then claims the soul for Himself. In this way, He wants to prepare room for Himself in the life of the believer. In the soul, however, all sorts of things are present that hinder the entry of grace. Thus these need to be removed first. If that has taken place, then divine grace can be brought in, and only then can God come and live in the soul and cause that man to become pleasing to God.

I'm not going to explain it any further, but if you understand the philosophical embryo teachings of Comrie, and read this piece once more, you will find with Comrie a blueprint of the medieval scholastic doctrine, despite the difference in words used. I seriously warn you: do not accept this. This is the *habitus-doctrine* of the scholastic theologians! They have replaced Augustine's doctrine of *inspiratio* with Aristotle's theory of *habitus*. We see Aristotle's doctrine explicitly stand out with Thomas Aquinas. This man wore the academic nickname of *Doctor Angelicus*, which means as much as *angelic teacher*.

According to Augustine, God's grace, the inspired love of God (*charitas*), is directed to the will. According to the scholastics in the *habitus* teaching, the *informatio* of grace is not directed to the will, but to something hidden behind the will and powers of the soul. Ultimately, it is about the *transformation* of man. In this process, he is brought into a good relationship with God.⁹¹

Comrie and Scholasticism

Alexander Comrie (1706-1774) is called the most scholastic Reformed theologian of the Further Reformation. He was sensitive to the speculative way of thinking of the Reformed scholasticism. That is understandable, since he had completed his studies with a doctorate in philosophy. His dissertation had the title *The Moralitatis Fundamento et Natura Virtutis* - about the basis of morality and the nature of virtue. The title gives us the impression that Comrie has mainly gone into philosophical-anthropological questions, and has therefore moved a considerable distance from the center of theology.

He absolutely did emphasise free grace for lost sinners and the everlasting nature of the Covenant of Grace. This made him to be one with the Reformed theology. On the other hand, we see that Comrie was also philosophically engaged. He endeavoured to describe what takes place in the most hidden parts of the human heart.

Habitus and Actus

Now we will compare the aforementioned *habitus* philosophy of Aristotle with the teachings of Comrie. We shall now quote something from the *habitus/actus* from Comrie's "*Verzameling van Leerredenen*". Comrie says that the ratio of the essence of faith (the ratio formalism fidei) lies in this:

“ . . . that it is an infused *habitus* which we receive by the power of and through our true incorporation into Christ, and is consequently in its first *conceptus formalis* of a passive nature, with respect to the gift of divine grace that God grants His chosen in His own time . . .
However, this belief, which in its *ratio formalis* is a passive *habitus* with respect to the gift of divine grace, and which only receives, must be understood in its *actus formalis*, consisting herein that it, having received the gift of divine grace, embraces, accepts, appropriates and especially applies it to himself, in such a way that it immediately takes possession of everything

that God grants in the promise of the Gospel for himself in particular, so that he immediately receives for himself, which Scripture calls “accepting”, and that, in the *actus formalis* of faith about the gift of divine grace, who had passively received it.”⁹²

Naturally, *habitus* and *actus* are also mentioned in Comrie’s exposition on Lord’s Day 7:

“The *habitus* flowing from Christ into the elect, and being implanted into their hearts in and through the communication of spiritual life and of the new nature, is the only means by which Christ makes entry into the hearts of the elect, to hereby enter into their souls, and come to dwell therein; and also the means by which He grants all spiritual and heavenly blessings, yes, even the means by which He, granting these blessings, has the soul to be born again, that is, it is made God’s creation created in Christ Jesus unto good works. For because of this, it is Christ having made an entry into the heart by infusing this habit or grace of faith, He also enters into the heart, and there He lives in such a way that we are grounded and rooted in love, and are thus more and more conformed to the image of God.”

And then the *actus*:

“The workings (= *actus*, AK) flowing from this principle, are in accordance with those parts of the divine Word with which and by which it is pleasing to God the Holy Spirit to work on this capacity.

When the Spirit of God works on this implanted faith by the *law*, then the man who exercises this faith, is so convinced of his sins and misery in a saving way, that he truly knowing himself, bemoans his misery, confesses his sins, and feels ashamed before God.

When God’s Spirit works on this implanted faith through the *Gospel*, revealing Jesus in the Gospel to the soul, then that faith works with an eye on the Mediator in such a way as He is discovered, far or near, in desiring, longing, hungering, thirsting, fleeing, etc., as He is seen from afar; but if He is revealed thus nearer to the soul in the Word of the Gospel, then in accepting, embracing, trusting, and totally giving oneself over to Him in full trust and assurance.”⁹³

Functioning Habitus and Actus

It is now clear to us that this systematic thinking of Comrie is about *habitus* and *actus*. This is his basic foundation. *Habitus* stands for “faith” and *actus* stands for “believing”. Here Comrie teaches, according to his scholastic interpretation, that the soul must first be (unconsciously) united with Christ, before there can be (presumed) spiritual life. First there is the ability to believe, and only then are there the acts of faith. So regeneration and the implanting of the ability to believe coincide. Oh, how terrible this is! You would not think this was possible. The soul is quickened, born again, the habitual grace is bestowed, without any real union with Christ by faith. What a deception for the soul! How was it possible that Comrie got caught in this snare of Satan! Furthermore, according to Comrie, one can know that the *habitus* (the habit of faith) is there through the *actus* (the act of faith). The *actus* is of essential importance to him, by which he means the embracing of the offered Christ. Alas, his followers did not remain with this, but pulled it apart. Compare Comrie’s philosophizing about *habitus* and *actus* once more, with the teachings of Aristotle, referred to under the heading “The Implanted Grace”. What a similarities there are with that pagan philosopher!⁹⁴

Philosophy

The language of Comrie, the language of the scholastics, the language of the sophists (philosophers in

the line of ancient philosophy), and the language of Aristotle do not agree with the language of the Holy Scriptures. The philosophers and sophists are not filled with the Spirit of God but with the spirit of the world. (1 Cor. 1 and 2). According to Calvin, they are preachers of the doctrines of the devils.⁹⁵ As they have taught about the doubting of believers, this doctrine was likewise also accepted in the Church of Rome. If you read the outline at the beginning of this book once more, you will recognize it immediately. That is also what the embryo theologians teach. According to them, you must be constantly in doubt about the matter of God's grace. Is it there or is it not . . . ? Doubt is the characteristic of your (probably) regenerated life. You find no ground in God's unchanging and steadfast truth, but you seek it in your own feelings, your mind, understanding, and judgment. From out of the experiential knowledge, you obtain knowledge of the supernatural things. Of God's promises, you may make use of them in a restricted or selective way, but also, faith in that is full of all possible uncertainty. Pleading upon God's promises is totally unfit. What they do accept is that you lean upon a pious and probable opinion, which is often instilled by the minister whom you idolize. Oh, what similarities are there between the godly and pious Comrie and that pagan philosopher! Totally deviating from the doctrine of the Reformation! Together they attempt to destroy the faith of the saints and the doctrine of perseverance in faith, by their distrust of the grace of God. With Comrie, this teaching style is present in a limited way, but with his followers, it has sunken deeply into their way of thinking and preaching. On account of the issues, it will not be easy for them to get back on the right track. Sadly enough, Comrie attempted with the aid of philosophy, to search out what God through His Spirit causes to take place in the supernatural events of regeneration. It is remarkable that he was the very Comrie, who in the line of Zanchius and Voetius emphatically taught the implanting of the capability of faith, and with that, he even believed to have paved a way out of an ever increasing pressing religious issue, which had arisen in the later period of the Further Reformation.

Embryo

Comrie was educated philosophically enough to be aware of the value that philosophy yields to articulate or clarify certain theological concepts. He made a fairly bold use of them. That is also reflected in the already mentioned regeneration, which he emphatically stresses. He describes it as an act of the triune God. This is what he says:

“. . . but most specially of the Holy Ghost wherein the elected vessel - the elected person - receives the first stem cells of new creation so that he lives as an embryo in mothers body, and has all parts of a human in essence, although it has not come to that perfection to which he will be brought later on.”

Here Comrie believed to be able to enjoin in the biblical way of speaking about the renewal of the human being as a “*new creation*” and about a “*new man of heart*.” Besides, also Peter talks about new-born babes, doesn't he? But out of Comrie's elaboration on this, he shows to be more oriented upon Aristotle, at least, he sought a synthesis (combination) between him and Paul.

Thus, Comrie has made full use of the scholastic way of thinking. Especially his fear of the doctrine of the Remonstrants has led him to place the scholastic thinking of cause and effect more central. In this context, he unfurled a transcendental (metaphysical) shaded image of God, in which the eternity of God receives an overriding consideration bound together with the oneness of God, whereby it was all the more emphasized that all what God is and does is just as eternal as God Himself.

Comrie discussed his ideas at length in his devotional works. He found it necessary that the

congregation would take note of it, and that they would accept it as a form of the orthodox truth. He

has undoubtedly been working from out of serious motivation. Without a doubt, he had intended to equip the congregation apologetically against the rising unbelief. Yet it is questionable if we ask ourselves whether he had done the church a good service with this. The benefits of it must not be forgotten, but the negative effects still clearly dominate.⁹⁶

Which Comrie?

Automatically the question hereby arises: which Comrie are we talking about? You may find that an odd question, but it is not. I ask this because he did not sail a steady course, but went through a certain development. He never denied his ancestry from Scotland and constantly showed his connection with persons (Erskine, Boston, etc.) and writings (Westminster Confession). So he was therefore well aware of the Puritan vision of the preparatory work. But he has left that biblical viewpoint and has accounted the preparatory work to be a work of grace. At one time, he cites with approval from Boston's *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*, wherein is described that the sinner is not cut off from his wretched state until after the twelfth blow of the axe, where he then receives new life in Christ.⁹⁷ Also in his *ABC of Faith*, he teaches that there are convictions which precede regeneration and faith in Christ.⁹⁸ But in his book, *De Eigenschappen*, he then writes that convictions are the *result* of faith and fruit of the incorporation into Christ.⁹⁹ In his *Catechism*, he declares that there are no *preparations* preceding regeneration.¹⁰⁰ Later he states that instead of speaking about *preparations*, he would rather call them *preceding matters*.¹⁰¹ Some convictions he views as fruit of the quickening, and at other times, he describes these same fruits as belonging to general convictions.¹⁰² Also in the use of the words *habitus, actus, and embryo*, he is not consequent.¹⁰³

Impressions from Comrie's teachings

First we shall give a few additional comments in order to get a clear picture of his theology. I must say that it is no easy task to follow him. To keep his doctrine pure, he, as intellectual in his way of thinking, goes from one thing to the other.

Ultimately, with the aid of philosophy, he apparently seems to piece it all together nicely, but alas, it cannot stand up to the test of God's Word anymore. In his considerations of faith, Comrie comes to his construction of *habitus – actus*, using the following assumptions (premises). He teaches:

- a. Man is dead in trespasses and sins. (Eph. 2:1). The unregenerate man is carnal, and the carnal mind (the deepest inner life of man) is enmity against God. (Rom. 8:7).
- b. Only then, when man is in Christ, is he a new man, receiving life, becoming quickened. This quickening is the regeneration.
- c. When he becomes quickened, he is dead, and therefore he himself cannot be active in that quickening. (according to *Catechism*, p 25).
- d. Yet this incorporation into Christ is *through* faith.

Conclusion: The faith, by which we are incorporated into Christ, cannot be working as a deed, but it is passive as an instrument. This incorporation is a permanent grace, so must also the principle of faith be

permanent - this is the habitus of faith. This construction he also needed for his doctrine of justification.¹⁰⁴

In his doctrine of justification, he makes distinction between active and passive justification:

a. The *actual and real* justification takes place in eternity. He grounds this justification in the Counsel of Peace, which is the covenant that God made in the Person of Father to His Son, as Surety. He calls this the justification from eternity. This takes place *before* all inward changes in man, thus even *before* faith.

b. Then follows the *passive* justification. This takes place in the time and is revealed in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. The righteousness of the Saviour, which He has acquired as Surety, is then granted to every elect in His own time. This is done by the Holy Spirit and it follows faith. This is not a second justification for Comrie, but an *actual* gift of what God from eternity had imputed to the sinner.¹⁰⁵

From this doctrine of justification, it is clear to us how Comrie deems the union of the elect with Christ to be. This is not entirely correct, because on the one hand, Comrie declares this union to take place with Christ without faith, having faith as a result; while on the other hand, he mentions faith as a medium between Christ and the soul.

Out of Comrie's doctrine of justification, it is now apparent that the same matters are meant. The union with Christ *by* faith is a revelation in the time of what was already present from eternity, *before* faith, in the covenant between the Father and the Son. Now that this becomes clear to us, it is also instantly apparent where we must seek for the origin of this construction.

Comrie speaks of a union with Christ and consequently, of the elect being righteous in the judgment of God which is from eternity. This eternal judgment of God becomes reality in the time. Here we have the *Platonic* origins of this line of thought. It fared with the doctor Philosophiae (Comrie) just like many others who studied philosophy - it went to his head. This train of thought of Plato, this *Platonism*, is also evident from his Christology, in which he has the eternal *Man Christ* united with the Person of the Son in the time. This is also apparent from his doctrine of predestination, which is closely linked with his Christology. Besides, we can realize by now that also Comrie's reflections on the *habitus* and *actus fidei* are constructed from his philosophical thinking.¹⁰⁶

Comrie continually referred to Calvin, the Dutch Confession of Faith, the Canons of Dordt, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Westminster Catechism, and other writings, but his goal of returning to the Reformation by this, we can consider as having failed. The fundamental structure of his understanding prevented him from comprehending these sources in their actual meaning. His concept has contributed to an increased effect of a substantial (an individually autonomous) understanding of grace, which has later developed into a much more serious elaboration in Kuyper's theology. Moreover, his emphasis on the *habitus* over against the *actus fidei* works out grave passivity. The exhortation to grow in faith and to grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ loses its power, for the slightest deed which proceeds from the *implanted* faith does not differ in character or nature from the greatest.¹⁰⁷

Characteristics (First Sermon)

Comrie's book, *Verhandelingen van eenige Eigenschappen des Zaligmakenden Geloofs* is well known.

We will highlight just a few things. Especially the first two sermons are regarded in the Reformed Congregations. It concerns *the incorporation into Christ*, when that takes place.

You can see that the main issue is entirely different from what the Holy Scriptures teaches us. Comrie begins with unconscious incorporation, regeneration, and justification. He had his reasons for this, as we have explained. So pay attention to the foundations as you read the following.

Secondly, what you must be aware of is his philosophical style of reasoning. He does this in the manner as more scholastic teachers have done, for example, how Aristotle writes his *Continuum*. That is to say, he divides the experiences of the soul into *parts of parts*.¹⁰⁸ Yes, even into the smallest detail, he attempts to analyze and systematize the experiences of the soul, in an almost psychological manner.

I would also like to point out to you that it is very precarious to use part of a sermon for a book like this one, because the issues are then often taken out of context. Man has the author say something that he has never intended. This is what we definitely do not want. With emphasis, we now want to show two things. The one side is that the experiences he describes can encourage our souls and even provide some consolation. The other side is that man can make the greatest possible mistakes, because someone is taken for what he is not: a born-again child of God.

Comrie explains the following about the incorporation into Christ, which we will summarize in short:

“The soul, when the Spirit comes to unite her with Christ, lies as dry bones which were shown to Ezekiel, or as a helpless child on the plains of the field, lying in his blood (. . .)

Someone may possibly ask the question, what are the acts of faith which unites the soul with Christ?

a. The soul now begins to break her agreement and harmony with all lusts and desires of whatever kind, nature, name, or position they may be and commences to depart from the service of them (. . .)

b. The soul begins to see with impressions its separated state and with the bitterest sorrow she laments to God in secret (. . .)

c. From day to day, the soul learns to feel her necessity of this union with the Mediator all the more, for she sees that nothing can please God that is done outside of this union (. . .)

d. The Lord allows some rays of His divine light to shine into the soul by His Holy Spirit, whereby the way of salvation through a Mediator is discovered, and the Mediator Himself is revealed in the glory and adorableness of His Person, and is seen in the perfection and all-sufficiency of His merits (. . .)

e. The soul, nevertheless, burning in love to the Mediator because of the sight of His adorableness and necessity, is often beset with great fear, if she, being so unworthy of herself, may dare to take the freedom to accept Him, but yet, the offer of grace is greatly impressed upon her heart, by which she senses that the offer is done to her, and that it is God's commandment that she, however miserable she is, not only may but also must believe in the Mediator (. . .)

f. Is to be noted, that the soul, in all mentioned acts and deeds, unites herself with the Person of the Mediator Himself; for nothing, neither heaven nor earth, neither promise nor joy would help her heart. Oh, she must actually and substantially pass over into the Mediator Himself, for He must be hers and she must be His (. . .)”

What is now wrong with these characteristics here? There is nothing wrong with them! Here is Comrie, the godly theologian; the philosopher is partly inoperative. But now we have it, for what does

the philosopher Comrie assert? - That the soul described by him is under grace, while God's Word states, for example with Paul in the epistle to the Galatians, that the sinner is still under the *law*.

This is a fundamental difference with the teachings of Scripture, the church fathers, and the Reformers. What do they do now in our days? They say, "Here the soul is quickened out of the state of death, made hearing from deaf, and seeing from being blind." Contrary to what Comrie teaches, they never come to Christ, but yet, they are quickened, regenerated, and justified. Comrie has never meant this, but as a philosopher, he has facilitated this.¹⁰⁹

The question is: what kind of regeneration did Comrie teach? Is it according to Scripture? He teaches a *quicken*ing where the Bible speaks of *awaken*ing. (Eph. 5:14) The Bible teaches conviction of sins by the Holy Spirit when man is still under the law, and the Bible employs the quickening through the same Spirit in Christ, Whom God hath raised from the dead. Is therefore Comrie's description of regeneration similar to what other ministers teach?

The sad consequences of this doctrine are evident in our spirit-less days. Man preaches spiritual life without the true life that is in Christ Jesus. What must I then know? That God teaches me what I do not know. What does God then teach me? He teaches me that everything that is in the Bible is true and good.

Faith in Him saves us. Christ must be the central Point. Read also John 15:1-17. If you know Him, you are born again. Therefore, search for Him to be born again. Nothing else! You ask, "How?" I'll explain it to you, but this I tell you in advance: if you possess Him, then you are alive; if you lack Him, then you are dead. That is not theory, but theology. That is not philosophy, but biblical theology. Not the embryo doctrine, but the experiential knowledge of the Blood is what God's Word teaches us. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission. This knowledge is experiential, and this is it what makes your whole religion of value. The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanses from all sin.

Now pay attention again. I tell you: please note! You are born again if you know of the rescue as a totally lost sinner, through Christ. How can you know that? Well, if you grow and flourish in Christ.

Have some patience yet; I still have much more to say. But this I will already tell you. You should know this: you are only born again if you are in Christ - have consciously gone over into Christ. This you must know, because many teach differently. And another teaching is not the teaching of God's Word. And whatever is not according to God's Word, you should not accept. And what if an angel would say it? Even then, you should not accept it. If it be an angel, be doubly careful, for the devil very often reveals himself as an angel of light.

How can you know that then? Well, I tell you, it must be according to God's Word. Not according to the Spirit? Yes, also according to the Spirit, but the Spirit of God teaches us the Word of God. Therefore I tell you: it must be according to God's Word, for if you have God's Word, then it is according to the Spirit. If you are born again, then you are implanted into Christ by true saving faith. Then you begin to blossom and spread the fragrance of the love of Christ. If you flourish and give the scent of Christ, then you know: I am born again.

True believers are rooted in Christ, the Prince of Life, and they are implanted in Him. They are not the seed, bulb, or whatever else, but the Word that is sown in their hearts, is the seed. If it bears fruit, then there is faith and conversion, and otherwise there is no faith and also no conversion. If not, then you

are still confined in the womb of death, as in a deep abyss. Of this is stated: “*The earth was without form and void.*” Those who are born again, stand in the courtyard of the Church. Christ is the Wheat that bears fruit after it dies, and so it is with His people also, who die with Him and live. Then you are born again. If you have not died with Him, then you also do not live with Him. If you live with Him, then you have also died with Him. Is this true? Then you are a new creature.

No, we must not explain God’s Word with the pagan philosophy of Aristotle. Again, that was condemned by Paul. (Col. 2:8). This is also true of the embryo theology, because it is not according to God’s Word. The embryo theology is nonsense. Not the embryo theology, but the Blood theology is the truth of God. Without realizing it, they have strayed more and more from God and His Word. O Lord, bring them back, those who stray; bring them back to Thee and to Thy truth.

Characteristics (second sermon)

Now we would like to mention something about the second sermon in this book with the theme, “*Faith, a Grace by which the Soul is Justified*”.

Comrie gives a detailed description of this part of the doctrine, and writes in the application:

“If everyone would consider these things, and would submit his soul to the divine truths, then he shall be able to discern whether he has taken part of this benefit or not. Now, what does your conscience say on these matters? Does she assert that you have never experienced these things? Oh, how deplorable is your state, if you live and die like that!
a. You shall be brought before the Judge of the whole world and then cry to the mountains and hills, if they would cover you, but that will not help you (. . .)”

In the four following points, Comrie still goes on further to show the terrible state of one who is not justified.

We see here that Comrie still realizes very well that one cannot exist before God with all that work of the conscience and emotions (the so-called regeneration, quickening and justification under the law). In fact, here the godly theologian, Comrie, contradicts himself as a philosopher. As he often did, he throws his own theories and assertions upside down. He then still knew what they no longer seem to know today. Nowadays, they are satisfied with a presumed regeneration in the embryo churches. One soon belongs to Gods people. One is serious, sheds a tear or one has some stirrings of the conscience. Where Comrie cannot hold it for true life, they already believe to have possession of it. In this writing of Comrie, they are now themselves very seriously warned of the false grounds on which they stand.

Characteristics (sixth sermon)

In the sixth sermon, Comrie teaches that faith is *a grace that overcomes the world*. He takes these words from 1 John 5:4: “*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*” Here we have regeneration in the *narrower* sense and later on, also in a broader sense. He writes:

“Attentive readers, you must know that the word “birth from God” or “regeneration” is taken in

a twofold sense: in a narrower and in a broader sense. In the narrower sense it refers to that mighty, powerful, and irresistible work of God, whereby the elect sinner is quickened from the state of death. In this narrower sense all our godly theologians teach that all preparatory work is to be excluded as a cause, and that, in this respect, regeneration should be placed before faith, as the root and principle from which true faith sprouts. So if faith is a vital act and activity of the soul, then in the order of its nature, it implies that there is life in order to be able to exercise it.”

Alas, here Comrie introduces something which God's Word never spoke of. He speaks of regeneration in the narrower sense. With quickening, he means something completely different than what God's Word teaches us. The quickening is no longer the justification of the ungodly by faith in Christ, but a (false) regeneration that precedes this. Comrie does realize this, and therefore he appropriates a fix by saying that being unconsciously in Christ takes place through faith (as a medium). Man does not yet know this, because it is a hidden work of God the Holy Spirit. Comrie thus distorts the Holy Scriptures and alas, he comes onto the path of presumed regeneration. These ideas come to dominate his entire exposition. It has acquired a wrong foundation. His explanation is no longer based on God's Word, but rules over God's Word. His followers make it even worse than it was before, for they know not what Comrie still did know. It is sad, but Comrie fell into the fallacy of regeneration taking place *before* faith rather than *by* or *through* faith as the Word of God teaches us in Rom. 1:17: “*For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’*”

So now, regeneration in the *broader* sense:

“But in a broader sense, the word does not only mean the quickening of the sinner, but also the restoration of the image of God in him and the perfection of the work of God in the soul; in which respect it includes faith, repentance and all other graces of the Holy Spirit, arising from this source. Your attention can be confirmed in this by reading the godly expositions of the great Calvin on John 1:13, the godly Voetius in his theological disputes, Tom. 2, pg. 457 and Witsius in his Irenic, chap. 5, 6. It is not our intention to repeat their words, because their works are known to those who love true godliness. But we will take the word in this broad sense, and show your Christian attention why this change is called regeneration or new birth from God. We will then more extensively explain this matter, because this, as Calvin says in the cited

place, is the source from which follows faith; and that everyone may examine himself and also learn to treat others cautiously, because, although the soul has been quickened in a point of time, yet the perfections take place in steps, one thing revealing itself after the other.”

Comrie, with his deep contemplations, mixes up everything. He has Calvin say and teach something which he has never said or taught. What Calvin actually taught, he does not understand. I hope to expose that misinterpretation right after this.

Comrie refers to the godly theologians, but they were more or less scholastic teachers, and not those who have treated this subject purely scriptural as the Reformers did. Comrie strayed from them, even though he wanted to fight for them with all the weapons he had. But he cast his philosophical wisdom into the battle. And . . . he fell. Do take note - he did not fall away from God, but he did fall, and this has serious consequences for those who now call themselves pure reformed, although they no longer are.

The matters, which the Reformers largely declared to be the *preparatory* work of God, come to stand in

a different light with Comrie, in the light of philosophy. Through this philosophical thinking, faith is called conviction and conviction is called faith. When the Lord draws and invites the sinner by the Gospel, Comrie there calls it a time of “finding” where the sinner is unconsciously born again. Those who are found by God are, according to Comrie, still to be drawn to the conscious union with Christ, because they do not know Him yet. Happily it is only a theory of his philosophical mind; otherwise it would not stand so well with true believers. Moreover, it is no wonder that true believers come into the dark by his teachings, because in that way, all what God has already given them is taken away from them, while those who come near, the so-called concerned, are very sweetly flattered and built up with nothing.¹¹⁰

Comrie's Appeal to Calvin

Thus Comrie believed that the idea of *habitus fidei* and *actus fidei* could be applied to Calvin. There were more who thought so. They claim that Calvin does not have faith commence in the *actus*, but yet also recognizes a certain *habitus fidei*, even though he does not mention this word.¹¹¹

What has Calvin then meant? Should the *habitus fidei* then be found in his teaching about the complicated faith,¹¹² where in his view the nobleman and the Samaritans had such a faith? Their faith however, had Christ as an Object of salvation. That was faith which did not lack trust in Him.¹¹³ Calvin speaks of the sudden conversion of Zacchaeus as a not yet born faith, but a preparation to it.¹¹⁴ We do not act justly toward Calvin to make this assumption of him, and it can therefore also not be enlightening to use the term *habitus fidei* referring to this statement.

What is it then? Calvin spoke of the seed and the root of faith, the *semen, radix fidei*. He affirms thereby, that the root of faith can never be eradicated from a godly heart; it rather remains attached to it, however shaken he is and however he tends to go hither and thither.¹¹⁵ The light of faith can never be extinguished so far, but nevertheless, it still remains hidden under the ashes. For insomuch the Word of God is an incorruptible seed, the fruit must be incorruptible too, because it is like it. The shoot of this incorruptible seed can never wither or completely perish. It is a pity that Comrie, blinded by his philosophical endeavor, did not understand this and thereby, he took a perilous course.

From what has been said, it is clear that Calvin does not use the scholastic distinction between *habitus* and *actus fidei*. Here he speaks about the attacks that faith has to endure. And faith is indeed resistant against these attacks. Not because of its own quality or *habitus*, but because it arms and strengthens itself with the Word of God; because it never allows itself to be deprived of trust in His mercy; because this thought prevails, that believers have God near, and that He ensures their salvation. In other words, the continuity of faith is due to the continuity of its Object, the unshakable firmness of the Word, the steadfast mercy and faithfulness of God.¹¹⁶ In that sense, the root of faith cannot be eradicated because faith is rooted in God Himself. Therefore, the seed of faith does not perish, because the seed of the Word is incorruptible.¹¹⁷ Calvin thus offers such true comfort to God's Church on earth. He upholds a very different doctrine than the followers of Comrie. In their scholastic teaching, everything is uncertain as well as just presumed. Their views are similar to the foolish builder (Matt. 7:26,27). Calvin did not practice philosophy, but biblical theology. His theological method is a precise arrangement of the statements of Scripture. The *Apostolicum* has become the framework of his latest *Institution*. He proved the Bible in a Christological way. For him, theology is an explanation of the relation of God to man. From the viewpoint of the union of the believer with Christ, it is clear that Calvin puts the emphasis on being *in* Christ. This union with Christ is not the beginning of a process that automatically continues and comes to perfection, but it is the work of the Holy Spirit, Who creates

faith in the elect and maintains it from moment to moment from the beginning to the end.¹¹⁸

The scholars who have studied the teachings of Calvin and knew them well, have pointed to the fact that Calvin, nevertheless, also considers faith in children possible. Precisely here he speaks of a seed of future conversion and future faith that is already concealed in those children by the hidden workings of the Spirit. One could therefore extract the impression of the *habitus fidei* from this, even though Calvin does not use this term. This is actually not true. Calvin here speaks about a seed that will grow into mature fruit, so that nothing remains of the seed itself. But in the scholastic distinction between *habitus* and *actus fidei*, the *habitus fidei* is not meant as an early stage in faith, but as a continuing basis from which the *actus fidei* arises. The *habitus fidei* is like a residual substance in the soul. That does not apply to the *semen*, as Calvin means here.

We thus conclude that Calvin certainly had known the continuity of faith, but thereby did not consider a distinction between *habitus* and *actus fidei*, but considered the firmness of the Object upon which faith is directed.¹¹⁹

Comments on “De Eigenschappen”

On March 27, 2012, a clear testimony was expressed by the rector of the Theological School of Reformed Congregations, Rev. A. Moerkerken, with the presentation of a reprint of Comrie's book, *Eigenschappen des geloofs*: “Whoever has never read Comrie's explanation of Lord's Day 7, cannot properly understand the preaching of the Reformed Congregations.” The rector also quoted a statement of Rev. A. Vergunst: “If you would like to preach a good sermon, you should read the *Eigenschappen*. There you can learn how to preach.”^{120, 121}

The *Reformatorsch Dagblad* reported on the event: “The rector of the Theological School said that according to Comrie it is “crystal clear” that the beginning of spiritual life lies in the incorporation into Christ. This is evident from the first two sermons of the *Characteristics*, which deal with “Faith is a Grace Which Unites the Soul With Christ as Intimately as Possible”, and “Faith is a Grace Whereby the Soul is Justified”. That is not the same as accepting and knowing the Person of the Mediator. What we call the preparatory way, Comrie gives it a place *in* spiritual life, not *before* spiritual life.”¹²² So far the report.

Initially I was struck by the assertion of the rector who says we can only understand the doctrine of his congregations, if we have read Comrie's explanation of Lord's Day 7. Now, if that one single book of a scholastic minister must form the basis of our knowledge; that is very sad! They may as well anxiously ask themselves how many church goers have read this difficult sermon of more than 100 pages well enough and have understood it and have remembered it. That is not a small task. I would say, stay with the *Schatboek* of Ursinus, also with more of those good writings, and then you will immediately see that their basis is but very thin. At the same time, you can then also read how wrong Comrie is with his philosophical explanation of the order in the way of salvation.

The next thing that made my heart tremble with indignation is the claim that one can hold almost no good sermon, or one must have read the *Characteristics* of Comrie. That is a dishonor against Christ, the Teacher of God's Church and the Holy Spirit, the Teacher of God's people, Who with His anointing teaches what Comrie does not teach on this point.

Finally, you also see here an explanation of the doctrine of Comrie. He confirms the doctrine of the

Reformation by saying that the soul is united to Christ by faith as intimately as possible and is justified. But then, he continues to say that this is not the same as accepting and knowing the Person of Christ. You see it here; this statement is - we have shown you ample evidence – unscriptural. The Word of God and the sound theologians and Reformers have spoken about “awakening” and “convictions” and place them before (and therefore outside of) saving faith. Outside of saving faith, there is no spiritual life. That life is in Christ alone. By faith, we become partakers of Him and of the whole salvation. With the embryo doctrine, they place the preparatory way inside of spiritual life, while the sinner is still under the law. What a terrible mistake! They have separated the incorporation from the knowledge of the Person of Christ. They mix law and gospel. That is so confusing! Let us remain with the old and proven Truth of God. The Christian church should continually be reforming while sojourning on this earth.¹²³

Conclusion: It makes us sad that the congregations of the Reformed Denominations are indoctrinated by ministers who promote the embryo doctrine. We therefore hope that God brings about a new reformation, and that He thereby causes many to be delivered and saved through Christ. The facts are discouraging, but He can raise up men like Luther and Calvin. Study their writings. Let the theologies of embryo theologians be for what they are. For instruction of the soul, you must use the writings of our fathers. They were so richly endowed with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. This gave the godly church fathers, Reformers, and many of the Puritan ministers fruit on their work. Go back to the sources and you will again find the marrow of the Gospel. May it be of profit for your immortal soul for the coming eternity.

Chapter 10

Embryo Doctrine Affects Later Churches

The embryo doctrine of Comrie did not go unnoticed. There is a certain line noticable from Comrie to Dr. A. Kuyper, Dr. H. Bavinck, Rev. G.H. Kersten and Dr. C. Steenblok. Their churches left the pure reformed doctrine of the Bible and of the Reformation behind and embraced the aberrant teachings of Comrie. Introducing an error does not take a lot of effort, but the echo of it is endless. Just read how the embryo philosophy, the habitus, and the actus got a place. While the inventor of that doctrine, Aristotle, has died more than two thousand years ago, his pagan philosophy is still alive and thriving.

Calvin, Comrie, and Kersten: for some people they form a pure reformed triarchy. Then Calvin is the great man of the Reformation, Comrie a star of the Further Reformation, and Kersten a prominent preacher of the “experiential reformation”. Comrie is said to have been guided by Calvin, and Kersten, by Comrie. The reality is different. That Comrie stands far from Calvin, has already clearly been shown. Then on the horizon appears another triarchy: Comrie, Kuyper, and Kersten: men of the presumed or unconscious regeneration. Kersten opposed Kuyper, but both Kersten and Kuyper embraced Comrie.

In this chapter, we will restrict ourselves to a few prominent ministers and preachers who have written dogmas. These ministers were leaders in their own denominations.

Dr. A. Kuyper (1837-1920)

Dr. Abraham Kuyper was a student of Professor J.H. Scholten, the founder of modern theology in the Netherlands. After his conversion, he radically turned away from this modernism. However, a longing remained in him to a connection between Calvinism and the modern culture. He wanted to be a modern cultural man. Central point in this line of thought is the concept of regeneration or *palingenesia*. This meant for Kuyper that the momentum is not primarily from a doctrine, but comes from the life, a distinction also made by the “Groningers” (a certain group in the Reformed churches) in their theology. This, however, connected Kuyper with the Further Reformation, and it finally went back to certain tendencies in the Canons of Dordrecht.

It is said that regeneration is the way whereby predestination becomes reality in man; the seed of regeneration is placed in man on the ground of God's election. It is not so that new life is generated by faith, but rather, faith is generated from the new life. The regeneration is a *change of being*, as a new quality implanted, a *flow of divine life into the heart*. Also in the kingdom of God, life comes first and then the consciousness follows. Now it is our calling to allow divine life, if it has been implanted, to further enter our human consciousness. God has implanted into us the ability to believe, as the seed of regeneration. In due time, the stem of faith sprouts from this seed which breaks out in regeneration and bears fruit in acts of faith.

All of Kuyper's endeavors are built upon this doctrine of regeneration, to place another Christian calvinistic culture over against modern culture. Opposite the humanism of the unregenerate is placed

the humanism of the regenerate that meet in noble rivalry.¹²⁴ Kuyper states in his teaching style in Lord's Day 7:

“If the Lord God implants the ability of faith in regeneration, then God does not give him raw formless force, which he can use to make what pleases him; no, but then that faith at once has its fixed form, so that as soon as it buds, it comes out according to its character. Graft a cutting of a cultured vine onto a wild vine, then there is no branch yet and no bud yet and no leaf yet and no bunch yet. Yet, all of that is already present in the seemingly formless cutting and shall, if you will only have patience, come out in fixed form according to its nature. And so it is now in the ability of faith that God the Lord implants with the incorporation into Christ; all of that is contained and understood and present in the bud. There is nothing more to be added by man's works. God does everything, as He grants everything.”¹²⁵

Heresies never immediately come with large deviations, but when the first step is set, the remainder follows.

Dr. H. Bavinck (1854-1921)

Kuyper's successor, Dr. H. Bavinck, was the only one in the Reformed Churches who could theologically match up with Kuyper. Yes, he could even be held as his superior. A thinker, who struggled for the truth his whole life.¹²⁶ He was Kuyper's fellow thinker and broadly followed him. Yet there were also differences in emphasis, which grew stronger over the years. He criticized Kuyper's views on some doctrines. This in a certain sense also applied to the regeneration. However, he shared his preference for the doctrine of the Further Reformation with Kuyper, according to which the regeneration consists of the implantation of a new principle of life, which precedes faith as such. According to them, it is the operation of the Spirit, Who gives the ability to believe, then faith comes about under the hearing of the Word.¹²⁷

So he also separated regeneration of the actual deed of faith and of the conscious transition into Christ. Thus we read in his dogma:

“There is a distinction between ownership and possession. As a child, even before he is born, is already entitled to all the goods of his father but obtains possession of it at a much later age, so also all those who shall later come to faith, do already have a right to all the benefits which Christ has acquired, long before their faith in Him, but they acquire possession of it only when they come to faith.”¹²⁸

However, there is a significant difference with Kuyper. Kuyper places more emphasis on an ontological representation of regeneration, thus, outside of the hearing of the Word. Using statistics, he held regeneration to generally take place in early childhood in connection with predestination. Bavinck, partly through his contact with Kromsigt and Oorthuys, held more closely to the relationship between Word and regeneration. Unlike Kuyper, he did not establish infant baptism in the regeneration, but in the objective spirit of the promise of the Covenant. So he also retained justification in the time, through and by faith, over against Kuyper's doctrine of justification from eternity.¹²⁹

Reformed Church

The embryo doctrine was also present in the former Reformed Church. This was strongly expressed by the person Rev. Severijn. The Reformed Church no longer exists, but the viewpoint of this minister can still be found in the new Protestant Church of the Netherlands. Severijn understood regeneration in the same manner as Kuyper. This would involve a renewal of the psychological man by an implanted pneumatic principle of life. In this, Dr. J.G. Woelderink comes against him, and emphasises that in regeneration it concerns a life out of the promise of God. Not a new principle of life in man, but the Word of the Gospel is the seed of regeneration according to 1 Peter 1:23.¹³⁰

So also in the Reformed Church, there were discussions on the subject that we are now considering. At present, this issue is hardly relevant there any more. With the fusion in 2004 of the Reformed Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Dutch Reformed Church, those errors are also accepted. That of the embryo theology is apparent in the view of the Covenant. This covenant automatism teaches more or less that almost everyone is born again in baptism; obviously, it pertains to a presumed regeneration. This development has rightly been considered evil in the eyes of the separated churches, but who realizes that they themselves err so much? I will mention one who has noticed it and has warned against it, Dr. Hermann Friedrich Kohlbrugge. We shall read more about him later on. May the Lord open our eyes.

Leave the teachings of Kuyper be, dear reader. With his appeal on Comrie, Kuyper has created immense confusion in the churches. Such doctrine is easily accepted, being agreeable to the flesh and pleasing to people. It does not cut into the pious flesh. One believes to rest on firm ground and is under the delusion that one is a true child of God. Oh, oh, what a deception for the soul! The one is ultra-orthodox, the other is hypercalvinist, and another a thoroughly orthodox church person. But as long as one possesses presupposed faith and a presumed regeneration, one is still outside of the true knowledge of God. Without Christ, we are strangers of the Covenants of the promise (Eph. 2:12). What a disillusion that will cause! Hopefully, it may take place on this side of the grave; then miracles are still possible.

Rev. G.H. Kersten (1882-1948)

For many years, Rev. Kersten was the most prominent preacher of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations (Gereformeerde Gemeenten). We can regard him as a religious leader of that denomination. The amount of work he did is hardly imaginable. The number of achievements is impressive. In addition to the extensive labor that was attached to the pastorate of a large church, he took care of the editorship of two church bulletins: *The Saambinder* and *De Banier* (The Banner). His work as member in the House of Representatives was also done with great devotion in the years of the twenties and thirties. He was also chairman of the boards of the Political Reformed Party and of the Association for Reformed School Education. For years he was principle lecturer at the Theological School. So for church and state, he has fully given himself. He was regarded as a very active person, who did serve in any way possible. Kersten also did a lot of organizing. To a large extent, he set the tone of the theological climate in the Reformed Congregations (in the Netherlands).

He also wrote a dogma, perhaps in between all his other duties and without proper theological training. Again, with his own accents. A limited investigation into them already turned up a lot of negatives. It is clear that he has not only made use of the dogma of Kuyper but especially also that of Bavinck. Many things that Kersten mentions have also been written by Bavinck. Several times he was not able

to present much more than a selective summary of Bavinck. Therefore in the mildest sense, he was called a plagiarist. Sometimes he did not understand things very well.

Regarding the regeneration, a researcher writes: “It is striking that Kersten does not have much objection against the presumed regeneration as such.” He says that many times Kersten gave the impression that he had wanted to push his own views through. He generally did not openly acknowledge that the reformed of old had different opinions. The choices he made were sometimes presented as *the* views of the Reformed theologians.¹³¹

Introduction of Embryo Theology

In this manner, Rev. Kersten also acted in his choice for the embryo theology. He imposed it upon the congregations by focusing almost exclusively on Comrie. It remained Comrie, Comrie, and Comrie again. He even referred to Comrie along with Brahé and Holtius, as a “champion for the reformed doctrine”. I will briefly relate how Comrie became the house theologian of the Reformed Congregations (in the Netherlands) on this subject.¹³²

We read in *The Saambinder* of October 27, 1927, the question, “Is there a preparation before regeneration? The answer is ‘No’”. From the response, we quote the following:

“You hear all kinds of views about regeneration, amongst others, that someone is only born again when he, in confirmation of his state, is justified by faith. Let everyone remember that regeneration is a birth, and just as no one is born fully grown, so no one is born again in a confirmed state. Our fathers have taught plainly and clearly that one is born again when God causes him to pass from death into life. What preparations would now exist before someone's quickening? We are dead, I say, ay, what can make us stand or what can prepare us for that spiritual resurrection? No, nothing indeed; there is no preparation before regeneration. Comrie also spoke thus, “In this narrow sense, our pious divines taught us that all preparatory work is to be shut out as a cause, and that regeneration in this respect, should be placed before faith as the root and the principle out of which true faith arises.” Read his “. . . *Eigenschappen van het zaligmakende geloof*”, pg. 110 and 111, and his Catechism pg. 401.” (. . .)¹³³

In response to this article, comments immediately poured in. No wonder, because at that time, the sermons of old fathers were still frequently read in those churches. On the 10th of November, thus two weeks later, *The Saambinder* appeared with a follow-up on this topic. Rev. Kersten was obviously irritated but did not change his opinion. He began his article by classifying the writers of those letters as incompetent and actually, also somewhat as if they were unconverted.¹³⁴ And again he came with Comrie:

“It must be distinguished what God works in His elect regarding the consciousness and the assurance of faith. A newborn infant is heir as well as the eldest son of the house; but even if the newborn inherits millions, he is unaware of it; he is also placed under fosters and caretakers. As such, each regenerated person is an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ; but in that aspect, so many of God's children remain in great darkness and doubt.¹³⁵ Well then, it pleases the Lord to lead them in a way in which their faith is strengthened, the knowledge increases, and assurance is strengthened. He wants to confirm them Himself; persuade them that they have part in Christ and in the atonement by His blood, that their names are written in the book of life, and that they are born of Him. Now, not referring to the absolute

work of God, but in regard to the life of faith of the people, our divines speak of a hidden life that only later becomes visible.

Thus Comrie speaks about regeneration in a wider sense, meaning not only the quickening of the sinner but also the restoration of the image of God in him, and the perfection of the work of God in the soul which includes faith, conversion, and all other graces of the Holy Spirit that flow from this fountain. But yet again, that does not change the fact that regeneration - the transition out of darkness into God's marvelous light - knows of no preparation. We are dead or alive, darkness or light, born again or not born again - one of the two. And to that quickening, to that regeneration, we can do nothing. It is the absolute work of God in His people. I conclude with Comrie's words, 'Keep in mind that regeneration is an immediate work of the Holy Spirit. . . .'

A similar description is also included in Rev. Kersten's dogma.¹³⁶

Reprint of "Eigenschappen"

In 1930, Rev. Kersten arranged for a reprint of Comrie's work, "*Verhandeling van enige eigenschappen van het zaligmakende geloof*". Obviously, with *De Banier* (The Banner). He also added a foreword to it and called it "a special privilege to introduce a new edition of the works of Dr. Alexander Comrie." Rev. Kersten also gave a brief explanation of the purpose and content, placing emphasis on certain points:

"It is of great importance to know that Comrie has issued "*Eigenschappen des geloofs*" for the instruction of the congregation about an important subject what also for some, in these times, does not seem clear. 'For (writes Comrie in the exposition of the Catechism, page 411) finding that some among you are of the understanding that we *have no life* before we actively accept Christ, and that we are implanted in Him only then, when we actively accept Him, therefore we issued the *Eigenschappen des geloofs*. Where this matter is so clearly explained in the first sermon that most of you now understand that the incorporation takes place before the act of faith of accepting Him.'

Comrie distinguishes the *habitus* from the *act* of faith. In regeneration, the habitus of faith is implanted in the soul, and through this indwelling faith, they are the elect in Christ. This habitus of faith exerts itself in *acts of faith*, by which God's people are more and more, as it were, *consolidated* with Christ, or are more and more closely united with Him. This distinction provides a special comfort to the sincere, nevertheless, contested and afflicted souls, while on the other hand, it strongly encourages the making of his calling and election sure (. . .)" G.H. Kersten.

When we read this, we might think that Kersten has issued this book especially to give the embryo theology a firm place in the congregations. It was even offered in 1932 as a bonus book with the Banner Calendar.

Continuation of the Embryo Doctrine

On June 23, 1938, *The Saambinder* reported that a classis meeting had reproved an elder who taught that the new birth was connected with justification and the conscious union with Christ. "The classis rightly judged that this statement was contradicting Scripture; that it assaulted the work of the Holy

Spirit; and the ground of salvation was put into the exercises of faith, and therefore in the works instead of in Christ.”¹³⁷

On May 30, 1940, “the old Reformed Confession” was even brought forth:

“Regeneration takes place in the quickening. Before regeneration, there is no spiritual life; we are dead. Regeneration takes place in a moment, in the actual moment of God's pleasure. It is the renewal, new creation, resurrection from the dead and the quickening. Whosoever teaches otherwise, opposes the old Reformed Confession.”

Further astray

We have already written earlier, one error leads to the next. Without realizing it, man has strayed further and further from God and His Word. We might almost say, had it only remained with the errors of Comrie. But Rev. Kersten himself went even much further astray. Rev. W. J. van den Brink at Ede performed a thorough research into this, and his conclusions do not lie about it. For the sake of illustration, we want to quote a few.

“It remains remarkable that Kersten, on the one hand, defends with great certainty, that in regeneration, God has acquitted the sinner and reconciled him to God, while on the other hand, he argues that in the experience, God's justice is not yet satisfied, and the quickened sinner must yet be reconciled to God. For Kersten, the acquittal received in regeneration has therefore no meaning in the life of faith. It is therefore possible that the sins are forgiven in regeneration, but that God, by means of His law, comes back ‘again’ on the committed sins when the sinner becomes justified.”¹³⁸

“As far as we could ascertain, Kersten has given no account of his choice to opt for the definition which Wilhelmus à Brakel gives of actual justification and by which he would forsake the line of Comrie in this aspect.”¹³⁹

“We conclude that Kersten wants to hold on to the definition that the assurance of the sins having been forgiven belongs to the essence of faith but on the other hand, he assumes that in the experience, this is hidden from the consciousness. Regeneration appears to be so unconscious, that it is not possible to derive consolation from it; especially, since Kersten describes the fruits of regeneration to reveal itself in unrest, sorrow over sin, and awareness of guilt; regeneration is never associated with a looking upon Christ in faith, neither the experience of peace in the heart.”¹⁴⁰

“Only after experiencing ‘being cut-off’ is there true union or incorporation into Christ. Only for God's children, in whom faith has been implanted in regeneration and wherein they were united with Christ, is it given to be *re*-united with Christ.”¹⁴¹

“The histories of God's Word are being spiritualized in such a particular way, that thereby, all the spiritual experiences concerning justification in the tribunal of the conscience, apparently need to be verified. The allegorical method has become indispensable for Kersten to be able to maintain his standpoint. With Comrie, we did not come across such passages; biblical histories are never so spiritualized that they must prove the experience of the pious. Here we see with Kersten how the influences of fellowship gatherings greatly come forward, and God's Word

appears to be no more than a Book that comes in handy to confirm the required experiences of the saints. It cannot be otherwise but Kersten would run into problems. Because often we see another explanation in the marginal notes or in the writings of Comrie.”¹⁴²

“Such distorted interpretations we especially find where it concerns the assurance of faith. In following Calvin, Kersten wants to state that there is assurance in the essence of faith. All God's children have this essence of faith, namely, an assured knowledge and a firm confidence that all sins are forgiven. Kersten connects the essence of faith to the gift of the ability to believe. However, it now appears that not all of God's children are aware of this assurance. So according to Kersten there is such a thing as a ‘subconscious’ assurance of faith. For indeed, that assurance must be obtained by the exercise of faith (. . .). Here is a clear contradiction in terminology. He states that in regeneration, man receives the habitus of faith which includes the essence of faith, namely, that all sins are forgiven and yet, the regenerated one does not know it.”¹⁴³

“After having now compared Comrie with Kersten, the final conclusion to be drawn is that in some areas, there are certainly similarities, but on other key issues of the Reformed faith, Kersten has deviated from the view of Comrie and sometimes even from the teachings of the Scriptures. Thus, the three sola's (sola gratia, sola fide, and sola scriptura) of the Reformation, which were still practiced in the Further Reformation, were to a large extent obscured and lost in the experiential reformation.”¹⁴⁴

We are closing the topic, because the sad list of fallacies can be expanded effortlessly. The theology of the fellowship gatherings increasingly prevailed. That what was present with Comrie in the bud, has become dogma, a doctrine, with Rev. Kersten. Rev. Kersten embarked on his own path with the theological principles which Comrie has expressed, especially in his later life. He tried to combine the theology of the fellowship gatherings with the views of Comrie. In this way, the dynamics and unprejudiced proclamation of the Gospel, which we still see with Comrie, has been lost. Through his many writings and sermons (and especially his *The Reformed Dogma for the Congregations Explained*), Rev. Kersten ensured that the description given by him of spiritual life, has become normative for a big part of the Reformed denominations. The harm he caused by this in the church circles is very extensive. Yet, it must still be possible to return to the teachings of the Reformation. May God awaken us to that.

The Arrival of Dr. Steenblok

As he grew older, Rev. Kersten delegated important tasks to Dr. C. Steenblok, who in 1943 had come from the Reformed Churches to the Reformed Congregations. In the Reformed Congregations there was a power struggle taking place, amongst other things, about the succession of Rev. Kersten. Dr. Steenblok became lecturer in 1944 at the theological school, and chief editor of *The Saambinder* in 1945. One may think that he had received a large place in the denomination in a short time, but it is notable that always the name of Rev. Kersten had to be mentioned when it was about an influential position for Steenblok. That obviously upset other ministers, especially, since part of the congregations did not accept him. Moreover, he knew only one opinion: his own. A researcher wrote: “Actually, he put an equal sign between his opinions and (the teachings of) the Scriptures.”¹⁴⁵ With him, we see a further narrowing of the doctrine.

a. Shortly after his arrival, Steenblok already caused great unrest. On April 12, 1944, he held a lecture

on the subject, *Christ and Common Grace*. That teaching error was still quite recent; via Kuyper, it had just been brought into the Reformed Churches. “The lecture of Dr. Steenblok is characterised by typical scholastic distinctions.”¹⁴⁶ This lecture provoked a storm of protest. Rev. J. Fraanje even spoke openly against him. Apparently, Steenblok did not know that this subject was not a live issue in the Reformed Congregations, or that he deviated from the prevailing view of this denomination. Typically, it was preached there that common grace is merited by Christ.

b. The conflict over common grace continued into a conflict about the *general offer of grace*. Steenblok wrote a series of articles about the teachings of 1931 and dealt therein with the Covenant in his own way: theoretical, polemical, full of quotations from the old fathers, and using a method reminiscent of scholasticism. But action always calls for reaction and therefore, Rev. R. Kok started to emphasize the responsibility of man and the general offer of grace.¹⁴⁷

The Doctrine of Dr. Steenblok

Theologians observed fundamental deviations from the teachings of the fathers. We will mention a few (Dr. K. van der Zwaag made an overview). Rev. J. van der Haar accused Steenblok that he hardly ever made mention of Calvin and when he did, the quotes were incomplete and biased. He also pointed out the contradictions between Calvin and Steenblok and he lamented, “We are becoming more and more hypercalvinistic.” In his exegesis, Steenblok wanted nothing to do with “the offer of grace”; he changed it to “presented grace”. Prof. W. van 't Spijker concluded that there was a magnification of the election. Rev. I. Kieviet pointed out the dual offer of the promise according to Calvin, “but with Steenblok it became: all or nothing.” Dr. K. Exalto found that Steenblok disconnected the offer of grace from the command to believe. He spoke of “rock hard rationalism.” Dr. P. de Vries concluded about Steenblok, “He makes no clear relationship between the preaching as dispensation of reconciliation and the sacrifice of Christ. That actually makes him even more extreme than the English hypercalvinists.” And, “according to him, man must know to possess true knowledge of misery before he may go to Christ. This means that a person needs to know that he is saved before he may go to Christ. Steenblok apparently considers it possible to separate regeneration from faith.”

Rev. van der Haar noticed still more differences from Calvin. With Calvin, the doctrine of predestination was not the content but the background of the preaching. With Steenblok, the key issue was not justification but predestination with regeneration as an auxiliary pole in a theological ellipse. Also Graafland observed radical shifts away from the Reformation. According to him, Steenblok made nuances in a wide variety of concepts, and he interpreted them from out of eternity. Where Zanchius speaks of “proclaim” Steenblok made it “make known”. Where Brakel writes about unconverted and ungodly, Steenblok speaks about “reprobates.” We see it again: quoting requires honesty and prudence. Quotations are often used only for discussion and in a context for which they are not intended: “My church has the truth.”¹⁴⁸

Besides the frequent criticism, which is used for this denomination, there are also those who have a more positive approach. Mr. P.L. Rouwendal would still place Steenblok within the limits of the Reformed tradition. He thinks K. Exalto and C. Veenhof did not want to understand him. However, he does conclude that Steenblok, as a theologian, clearly stood in the shadow of Kuyper and Bavinck; that he was insignificant compared to Calvin and Voetius and that even in the Reformed Churches, where many ministers had enjoyed such training in that aspect, he was not outstanding at all.¹⁴⁹

Besides the philosophical embryo doctrine with all of this, they went even further astray from the teachings of the Reformers (and also of Comrie, who actually emphasized the offer of God's grace in

Christ Jesus). Due to the crisis in the Reformed Congregations, Steenblok had to resign his position of chief editor at the Synod of January 11 and 12, 1950. There was a splitting in 1953, which led to the creation of a new denomination, the Reformed Congregations in the Netherlands. Also in later times, Comrie's thoughts on the "embryo" were still quoted.¹⁵⁰ But alas, it was not a serious explanation. In fact, it was only about the confirmation of a certain view and tradition. The thoughts about the embryo theology, the view on the offer of grace and common grace, seemed to be increasingly perceived as *the* distinguishing point of that denomination. It was a matter of faithful preservation of the legacy of Steenblok and the embryo theology. That also became evident in 1979, when it was obvious that one of the ministers, Rev. A. van den Berg, taught "that regeneration takes place when Christ is revealed into the soul." We notice that repeatedly the name of Rev. C. De Jonge is mentioned, a minister of the Old Reformed Congregation of Kampen, where Rev. van den Berg had gone to church in earlier years. This preacher in Kampen brought forth pure reformed preaching, which had nothing to do with the embryo teachings. Unfortunately, the result of all the discussions was that the embryo doctrine was maintained and that Rev. van den Berg left the denomination, followed by two other ministers, Rev. A. Wink and Rev. J. De Groot.¹⁵¹

Ds. L. Rijksen

Rev. L. Rijksen was appointed chief editor in place of Steenblok. He also upheld the embryo theology. On December 11, 1952, *The Saambinder* published a piece on the image of an acorn to clarify his view, in the question and answer section.

"H. in B. is asking what we should understand with "habitus of faith". Answer: Throughout all ages there has been much controversy about faith, and what it actually is. It is therefore very necessary to distinguish between the nature and the exercise of faith, as well as between faith and the believer. Saving faith (because this is what it is about) is implanted into the soul by the Holy Spirit in a supernatural way in regeneration, whereby the union with Christ is realized. And as the acorn contains the whole tree in itself, so faith also has everything in itself, in its initial implantation, which serves to an increase in knowledge and growth in Christ, in the further exercises of faith by the continual operation of the Holy Spirit (. . .)"

Rev. A. Moerkerken

This embryo theology is still very much alive. Where Rev. Rijksen used the image of an acorn, the present rector of the Theological School, Rev. A. Moerkerken, uses the image of a *bulb* and a *small child* and works everything out in more detail:

"What is true faith? When we look at the answer, we must observe that the forefathers have said that there is a difference between the habitus and the exercise of faith. There is a difference between the implanting of faith and the exercise of it. Do you understand that, boys and girls? I will say it more clear for you. In November, you can plant a bulb in the garden. You all have once seen a bulb. There is no color, no stem, no leaves, no smell. There is nothing to be seen on it. And yet, the whole flower is already in it. The colors, the stem, the leaves, the pollen, the sepals and even the smell. Everything is included in that bulb, but you cannot see it. That bulb is planted into the earth and disappears for a long time. It is as if there is nothing in the ground. You forget about it. But then in the spring, you suddenly see a green sprout appear. That is not added to it, that comes out of that bulb. There comes a stem and slowly, you are going to see

the color of the flower. And a bit later, when it has been raining and the sun has been shining, then there is a tulip or whatever flower it is. So it is also with faith . . .”

“- Another illustration - A small child of a few hours old has eyes, if it is healthy. It can even open its eyes, but the child does not see you. It has eyes, but the actual seeing comes later. A man may have ears but may not be able to hear. There is a difference between the ears and the hearing. There is a difference between the touching and the feeling. There is a difference between the smell and the smelling of it, between the taste and the actual tasting. And so there is a difference between faith and believing. That faith is like that bulb, speaking with reverence, which God the Holy Spirit comes to plant in the heart of the sinner in regeneration. Then there may be times that we only see dark earth in the life of such a man. But the planting of faith is there. What is now needed? That by the operation of the Holy Spirit, that plant of faith is going to become a flower with fragrance, beauty, and color. In other words, faith must become actual believing. The habitus of faith must come to the actual deed of faith, to the exercise of faith.”

“In Lord’s Day 7, speaking with reverence, it is said what is in that bulb. In Lord’s Day 7, it is also described what happens when that bulb starts to germinate and when the exercise of faith is there. That is what is described here for us. These exercises of faith - we may also say “acts of faith” - these are three. We close with the illustration. With a flower, you have a root, a stem, sepals, aroma, and color. But with faith, there are only three exercises, three acts of faith: knowledge, consent, and confidence.”¹⁵²

Theory of the Bulbs

I want to give everyone the sound advice not to accept the theory of the mentioned bulbs. No, that is not the doctrine of godliness, and therefore I ask you: embrace the theology of the Cross as Scripture teaches us. (1 Corinthians 2:2). This speaks of the Flower and Plant of God's delight, namely, the Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the valleys. (Song of Solomon 2:1). Christ and His atoning death on the cross stands in the center. (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Not the theory of the bulb, but the reality of the Blood is what God's Word teaches. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. The bulb of the heresy of the embryo churches dies in the earth of a self-sufficient religion, while God's elect and beloved ones, through their deliverance, as plants, start to flower and scent in the love of Christ. They are rooted in Christ, the Prince of life, and are planted in the soil of God's grace. The Word, that was sown in their hearts, bears rich fruit of faith and repentance. They are planted in the courts of the Lord, in the house of our God. They stand in the courtyard of the Church. This blessing flows out of Christ. He is the Grain that bears fruits out of the power of His resurrection after His dying and death. Likewise it is with His people, who die and live with Him. We must remain with this doctrine.

Preach the Word

It all sounds so wonderful: a subconscious faith, faith as a seed, faith as a cutting, faith as an acorn, faith as a bulb. You almost believe that you are already born again, because who has never been moved, been anxious or worried about his eternal destiny? You go overboard but without drowning, so therefore, there is no fish and also no miracle. You remain floating with the head above water. This is good for the gardener, but this is not good for the sower. The sower sows the good seed, the seed of God's Word. I know nothing of bulbs, but I do know about sowing; God has taught me that. That

sowing is the full proclamation of the Gospel of Christ. The field of this present evil world must be entered, plowed, purified, sown, watered, and harvested. It is to this work that God has called me. He did not tell me, "Go and philosophize," No, but, "*Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season.*" (2 Tim. 4:2) "*The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few.*" (Luke 10:2) "*Another it is that sows and another that reaps.*" (John 4:37) The Lord Jesus thanked the Father that He had hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them to babes. (Luke 10:21) Alas, also Comrie fell into the trap of philosophy. But I tell you emphatically that Comrie had not wanted these previously mentioned fantasies. If he had actually known that his followers would go on the broad way with this, I 'm sure he would have bitten his tongue and cut off his hand which he used to write these things that gave rise to this doctrine.

We could refute all those errors separately, but if you have read the first chapters of this book, this will not be a lot of effort for you to do yourself. As for me in this case, it is my intention that you get an idea of how the embryo theology has invaded the Reformed churches. It has become part of their identity, and the exegesis of God's Word must then be adjusted to it accordingly.

Rev. E. du Marchie van Voorthuysen

We will now present quotes to you from a minister who understood and condemned the embryo doctrine into its root. He was a minister who had no sympathy for this doctrine at all. It is Rev. E. du Marchie van Voorthuysen, who said:

"In the state of righteousness, man was clothed with the image of God. We have lost that; it has been destroyed. Do you think this image becomes restored by a text or a verse?"

"In this present time, everyone possesses grace . . . quickened outside of justice, grace at the expense of righteousness; everyone seems to possess grace. A little sense of the lack of God, a little weeping over guilt, a little affection for the people of God, a little visiting fellowship gatherings, occasionally suggesting a psalm verse, and then they say, 'Well, you do not have that of yourself. That is a woman with grace or a quickened boy. And 'quickened' is the same as being born again, and those no longer can go lost. God sustains His work. A Surety for the debt is no longer necessary. It's okay if you learn that later on and you must await it, but if you do not learn it, that is also alright. God is free . . .'"

"That is what happens in our days. Oh, if that was all true, what a crowd of living souls we would have! Then it would not be such a dark time. O, Van der Groe, you have been such a pessimist, and Justus Vermeer, what a melancholic man you have been! But it is not true! Don't believe any of it! If there is a sincerely concerned soul, he becomes distressed and does not believe a thing of it. Churches full of people find that magnificent but without the imputed perfect righteousness of Christ, no one can stand before God because He demands His image to be returned."¹⁵³

Testimony of a Priest

Would you like another comment? From a very different circle? From Brazil, for example? Then only for the purpose of illustration, I will give you a testimony of a former priest. It is from Rev. H.J. Hegger, who was director of the organization, *In de Rechte Straat*, at that time. What does he say about this subject?

“We, priests, knew that we would lose from the Protestant theologians if we would discuss the Scriptures with them. Because we were well aware that they know the Bible much better than we do. Therefore, we always tried to bring forth arguments from reason, because in reasoning we were much stronger.”

“The training of a priest consists in two years of philosophy and four years of theology. We were trained in the logic of Aristotle and later, I had to teach the philosophy of Aristotle in Brazil. We learned how to pick out the reasoning errors of someone. . . We even memorized entire lines of rhyme in Latin in which the possibilities of reasoning errors were imitated. I believe the Reformation loses its power when it surrenders to scholasticism. Of course, we may and must use our intellect in order to penetrate deeper into the meaning of the Scripture. But we go off track if we draw conclusions from Scripture and string them together into a theological system. Especially if we impose such a more or less experiential system on each other. . .” *Scholasticism is the actual cause of the terrible division among Protestants. God's Word unites, words of humans bring division.* (italics added, AK)

“Thus, it is such a pity that both Comrie and Abraham Kuyper mention a distinction between ‘habitus’ (literally - indwelling principle) and ‘actus’ (act) as elaborated on by Aristotle in his ethics. Both have applied that distinction to faith as habitus and faith as actus. By that, Kuyper came to his doctrine of the assumed regeneration (. . .)”¹⁵⁴

Thoroughly Kuyperistic

Of the above quoted authors, it can be said that their doctrine, in this aspect, is thoroughly Kuyperistic. According to them, one can therefore be born again without faith! Or in as far as they speak of faith, this is not the faith that is meant in the Bible. Please note that someone can know a lot about Christ and yet fall back into the world. (2 Peter 2:20). Then it was purely intellectual, not a saving knowledge. You can indeed accept Him by a faith, but some of those with temporal faith do so also. But God's children do it through a sincere and saving faith and thereby, unto justification and sanctification. That, and that only is biblical. No, that does not fit into the embryo doctrine! According to them, you can unknowingly be born again without faith! - Be born again without a conscious incorporation into Christ! God's Word and our forefathers speak very differently about regeneration and faith. True faith implies a knowledge of Jesus Christ. The transition out of the death of sin into the life in Christ, includes an accepting of Jesus. We read in John 6:47: “*Verily, verily, I say unto you. He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life.*” These believers are the new-born babes. (1 Peter 2:2). They are born again out of faith because another regeneration does not exist. Or can you be converted without faith? Regenerated without faith? We read in John 1:12 and 13 so clearly: “*But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that **believe on His name**; which is not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*” Therefore, whosoever is not implanted into Christ by faith, is not born again. Simply said, one is still in the flesh and not in the Spirit, if he is not implanted into Christ.

Those who teach differently are teaching a presumed regeneration, as Kuyper does. They teach a way outside of the conscious union with Christ by faith. Also in that manner, almost no people go lost anymore. They are built up with nothing, and they are converted, where God makes His own feel unconverted; they live where the believers experience death. Thus, every man has his own religion, and the one just speaks like the other. Only those who are in Christ Jesus, they are “*a new creature; the old has passed away, behold all things are become new.*” (2 Corinthians 5:17) These people have

received forgiveness; without this forgiveness, we are still under the judgment. Dear friends, please realize that. Don't let anyone deceive you because, "*without the shedding of blood, there is no remission.*" If God takes you from under this judgment, your life becomes completely different. Then God is your Life; everything has become new. You are born again, regenerated, and truly converted unto God. And this birth is inextricably linked to Christ, at which time you are then, through faith, baptized in His death and are risen with Him. You can read this in Romans 6, which we have considered in Chapter 3. Be sure to also read the marginal notes about verses 3 and 4. There it speaks about true regeneration. Let all other teachings go, for they destroy your soul, because they are not of God and not according to Scripture. With those you will perish forever.

False Mindset

In the embryo theology, the central issues of God's Word are not considered and neither are the marginal notes. It is all Comrie, that we can think of. But ministers should not preach and write to the liking and opinion of Comrie, but to the will and mind of the Spirit, which is presented in the Word of God and the confessionals of the churches.

The embryo philosophy is very different from what our fathers wrote. It has a very different frame of mind compared to the Holy Scriptures. The foundation is not good. Embryo scholars have faith begin where it has not yet been worked by the Holy Spirit. These scholars are probing into the secret work of the Spirit. With their intellect, they want to explain the unexplainable. They want to give the preparatory work of the Spirit a place where God does not want it to be. They build up where God breaks down. They allow the branch to grow on a tree where God cuts it off. They place man inside, where God places him outside. They call someone saved where God lets him go lost. (Ecclesiastes 3:6) Those who are still under the law are placed under grace. They call them righteous, where God teaches them that they are wicked. In opposition to God's Word and the true experience, they teach a system in which a righteous man is justified. Behind the back of Comrie, they teach sanctification before justification. They do everything to secretly place a man within the boundaries of God's salvation, under the guise of love to the "little ones in grace". Of what help is such delusion to us? Such a regeneration does not exist.

Therefore, reader, remain with God's Word and the teachings of our righteous and godly fathers. Hopefully, my warnings may be a blessing to many. People in whom it is a true work do not want to be placed inside; they walk away from such teachings, because they feel that they stand outside. In the beginning of this book, I have written about such young people. Please do not ignore my warnings. The embryo theory is a destructive path.

I conclude this chapter with a few sentences from professor W. van 't Spijker, written in the introduction to the new edition of the Institution (Wood, 2009).

"Thus the source of Calvin's vehement opposition to the scholastic theology becomes understandable. In that, he continued the line of Luther; one can only be a true theologian and remain so, when he becomes one without Aristotle. In later times, especially in the seventeenth century, when (the teachings of) Aristotle returned to the Reformed theology, then this was also a sign that they had lost the simplicity and clarity of scriptural theology as Calvin had practiced it."

Apparently the devil quickly managed to largely extinguish the light for the later church. They lit a

different light (of reason or intellect) and they went the path of their own views and insights. It is getting worse in our time, for the peculiar teachings one hears of these days, are perplexing. Man hardly knows the teachings of the Paulinic writings. This is also one of the fruits of misunderstanding and of leaving our pure confessional forms. One possesses faith out of books, and faith in his church, inflexible traditions, false theologies and creeds, in short, its own kind of experiences.

Conclusion: If all of these things are wrong then, of course, there are many more things wrong. Only think of the view about the offer of grace. And what is perceived about the promises? Has the Gospel been made conditional? Is the view of the Covenant consistent with the doctrine of the Reformation? Is theology dominated by the election? Does man narrow and reduce the message of the Gospel to sinners? The one depends upon the other.

Therefore, read and re-read the writings of godly forefathers. Remain with the teachings of Scripture; study the teachings of the apostles, church fathers, and Reformers. You will discover why such gloom and deep darkness has come over the churches of the Netherlands. I beg this of you, for I earnestly hope that your soul may be saved.

Chapter 11

Thoughts about the Embryo

In the previous chapter, you saw how that a number of ministers formulate and employ the embryo theology each in their own way. - Unconscious regeneration with all its consequences. - Regeneration without faith, justified from eternity, you belong to it. We do not read of this in the Bible. Where do they get it from then? - From Comrie, of course. Yes, but we should not preach Comrie's word but the Word of God. If we pay attention to their arguments, we see that they hardly, and then also even incorrectly, refer to the Word. It is purely intellectual reasoning and philosophy.

Before we proceed, we want to determine what the word “embryo” refers to. Yes, an embryo, what does one actually mean by that? To answer this, let us consult the scientists. We know that embryology is the branch of science that studies the development of the unborn fetus. The old name, evolution history, dates back to the time when it was thought that a new organism slowly freed itself from several coverings and developed itself.

Phases of Development

Today, we know that in the period before birth, the gradual formation of tissues and organs takes place progressively. We see that the egg attaches to the uterine wall after fertilization. A little more than two weeks after conception, all embryonic tissues are already present. After three weeks, a primitive heart is formed and after five weeks the length has increased to 8 mm. In the head, the eyes are visible; the heart shares the space in the torso with the rapidly growing liver, and the shapes of the arms and legs are clearly visible. After seven weeks, the embryo is already clearly recognizable as a human creature; eyes, ears, and nose are present, as well as arms and legs. After eight weeks almost all organs and tissues are formed. From that moment on, it is called a fetus. So the embryonic phase is the first phase of development of the unborn child.¹⁵⁵

Human Reasoning

Comrie and his followers compared this natural process to the process of regeneration. It is all based on human reasoning. That reasoning has no foundation in the Word of God, for by no means had the Holy Scripture explained itself in this manner. When God with His Spirit came to dwell in the Reformers, He did not teach these highly gifted and talented people anything like that. The understandings of darkened minds enter the field of false mysticism. Besides, in my opinion, you also will not find this, to that extent, with the theologian Comrie. He preached the gospel richly and purely. His sermons are permeated with God's love and grace. Christ is highly exalted and glorified in them. But here, we see what the legacy of his philosophical views have left behind in the Reformed denominations.

The Fantasy

A cutting, a seed, an acorn, and a bulb - the examples in the embryo theology are associated with life in the plant world, but people forget that with plants, it concerns simple cell life. They live by growing and flowering. It does not hurt when you step on them. They have no feelings but they are still alive. With the animals, there is a twofold life. They have a body and a spirit of life, but no reasoning or soul. They do have feelings and a wonderful instinct. But man has a body and a soul and is endowed with reason. So a human has a threefold life. How careful we must be with such examples. It is just as wrong as comparing the Trinity of God with water in the form of liquid (1), ice (2) and vapor (3).

So again the question: can we find the image of the embryo theology in the Bible? No, and that's why I feel such resistance in my heart against this way of teaching. The Lord warns me against their views on regeneration. God's Spirit is striving with me. He does not allow me to accept this doctrine. This gives distress within me.

An Imperfect Substance

Let us then read from Psalm 139. This is about the unborn child, the embryo. These text words refer to the great miracle of the creation of man. Our being is in God's ordination and foreknowledge. There is no form or shape attributed directly to the embryo. David calls it an imperfect substance, which is being formed by the Lord. This unformed mass is called *Cijêma* in Greek, because from the time of conception to the moment of birth they call the embryo a *fetus*.

This wondrous formation does not so much refer to our regeneration, but to God's omnipotence, wisdom, and power. Here it concerns the glory of God, which reveals itself in all His doings and works. We climb up to the higher things as He descends to our low beings. God's knowledge is infinite and extends itself to all things, yes, even the smallest things. This was of the greatest importance to David. God sees us in the smallest detail of the beginning of our lives. Even from the commencement of our lives, from this dark chamber until the end of our lives, He knows our path. Nothing can escape Him. This was David's consolation in all his trouble, strife, and sorrow.

If we still want to be as spiritual as Comrie, then we must think of man being dead before his new birth. What do I mean by this? Well, still residing in the womb is the image of our *state of death*. Our life in the old nature is, in the spiritual sense of the word, a state of death. The womb is a dungeon in which we are trapped in our spiritual state of death and sin. We are lying there unsightly and guilty before God. Only when we are born again, then we see light. Then the sun enlightens and warms us. There is joy because the child has been born, saith the Lord Jesus. (John 16:21) This verse opens a wide field against the teachings of the embryo theology.

Firstfruits

In Acts 2, we read of the outpouring of God the Holy Spirit under the preaching of Peter, but we do not read about a particular impression on a presumed regenerated man. And how was it with those young men, young girls, and older ones? Here also we see the perfect harmony of the Old Testament with the New Testament. In both cases, there is nothing of an embryo life amongst the children of God. Those who feared the Lord were for Him as a flock with whom He dwelt. He also wanted to bestow such

excellent gifts upon His people. These believers experienced these things very consciously. God was glorified in them by Christ. They knew in Whom they believed, and they glorified God for His unspeakable gifts. This also applies to the other children of God in the Scriptures where the Lord speaks about them in that manner. This is also reflected in their personal lives.

As a Child

Paul speaks of growth and knowledge of the Lord Jesus. He himself had experience of this. We read about it in 1 Corinthians 13:11: “*When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*” Here it is very different than it is today. There are preachers who want us to believe that we can go endlessly through this world as a regenerated embryo; that we will probably never come to the conscious knowledge of Christ; or perhaps it may happen at a later stage, but that is seldom.

However, here the apostle speaks in a sound way about the matters of faith. These things belong to deep experiential life, because it is a parable of our growth in the knowledge and grace of God. Our childhood disappears as we grow older. We hereby come to spiritual maturity. In old age we still bear fruit. (Psalm 92:15) Similarly, we can say that there are mothers in Israel and fathers in Christ.

Too Great Curiosity

What is the use of all that philosophical reasoning for us? It has corrupted a large proportion of the Reformed denominations. It has put her on the wrong track, and it has placed her followers upon false foundations. The foundation is not good. We see the impact of it in our days. The preaching of those who boast so much about Comrie, lacks a sound base. We sometimes hear comments about a beginning of life which do not make any sense. Neither Christ nor His Spirit are authors of these so-called truths. They often do not even come close to the truth. And strangely enough, they hold them for being true and from God.

We do not doubt the good intentions of Comrie but in this, he went too far. Nowhere do we encounter this philosophical expression *embryo* where it concerns a true knowledge of faith in Christ. If this would be as important as his advocates would have us believe, God the Holy Spirit would have laid great emphasis upon it. No, it appears to us to be an overly abundant curiosity into the mysteries of God. The Lord has openly declared the point of the matter in His Word. And that is: “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*” (Acts 16:31)

Chapter 12

Relationship between Law and Gospel

It can happen sometimes that as we sit under a so-called experiential sermon, we still must say, “Hey, what the minister says is wrong.” We can suddenly be confronted with the teachings of presumed regeneration. We can instantly hear that the text is improperly spiritualized. We go home. And then, what do we do?

At home, we open the Bible. We read the text again. We look up the marginal notes and refer to Matthew Henry. What do we read and what do we see? It is different from what was preached to us. Then we refer to Calvin, or read Luther, and search Augustine, or John Owen. Hey, it totally does not agree! You already understand it. Especially the book of Ruth and the history of Jacob, Zacchaeus, and the man born blind, are dealt with in such a way. The sojourn of Jesus with the disciples is also not properly understood. And so much more. Sometimes a sermon turns out to be a way of conversion with some texts added. Sadly, we go home. The good things of the sermon are also gone.

What did the minister say about regeneration? He referred you to Comrie (*actus and habitus*). Then you read something written by Comrie, a godly minister. Comrie has applied distinctions, but did not disconnect the matters from each other. That is what the later ministers do. His so-called followers radicalized Comrie. Oh, if only they were like Comrie yet, then the preaching would be different.

The Third Way

By now it is clear that they no longer understand the proper ratio between *law and gospel*. The correct order that God has revealed in His Word of the three parts of our misery, deliverance, and gratitude is not well understood. They clearly have been confused by the philosopher Comrie. Besides the two ways that Christ has taught us, they have constructed a third way: the *via media* (middle way). Next to the only Foundation, another ground has been laid upon which one assumes to be able to go and stand upon. One thinks to be able to stand before a holy and righteous God with an unconscious faith.

The Doctrine of Scholasticism Refuted

In scholasticism, the authority of the church goes above that of the Holy Scripture. According to the way the church teaches, it must be. This doctrine is normative for Christian life and walk. What others think does not matter: we think and teach it this way, and so it is. So it is with Rome and accordingly, we also hear this tone where the embryo theology is the foundation of the church.

The scholasticism is of the opinion that regeneration precedes conversion. It could be considered as the root of it. Calvin teaches exactly the opposite. According to Calvin, regeneration is the fruit of faith.¹⁵⁶ This is apparent in Chapter 3 of the third book of the *Institutes*, where the heading states: “That we are born again by faith.”

It is because of the incorrect view of regeneration that so little assurance of faith is found in our circles. One employs various arguments to set the work of God upon the soul in suspicion. They are one of God's people who consider themselves born again but who are not or barely assured of faith. One is taught that faith as such is always assured, but that the believer is not always conscious of it. But the thought that one can be a believer without the personal assurance of faith - a religious opinion that is prevalent in the churches of our days - is altogether rejected by Calvin.

Calvin was strongly convinced that man must not establish any new doctrines after the work of the apostles. However, in 1905, the Reformed Churches have established some new doctrines, amongst others, that supralapsarism is regarded to be just as reformed as infralapsarism, even though the Synod of Dort had declared that only infralapsarism to be the doctrine of the Reformed Churches. Other new doctrines were the doctrine of justification from eternity, of the instantaneous regeneration, and of the presumed regeneration in baptism.¹⁵⁷ Calvin intended this mostly for the Roman clergy, but what he says is a warning for all times, even for us. Calvin teaches us that God takes away people's ability to introduce new doctrines, so that He only would be our Teacher in spiritual lessons, as He alone is truthful, One Who cannot lie and deceive.

However, the neo-Calvinists find the archimedean point in the new birth, from which then the whole Christian life organically sprouts (think of Kuyper's biological terminology and unfortunately also the doctrine of the embryo churches), without theologically taking God's Word sufficiently into account.¹⁵⁸ God teaches us that if this life is to continue, we must from moment to moment, seek to look to the center point above ourselves, in the revelation of God's grace Who justifies the sinner, even the pious sinner. That life comes only from God. By virtue of an indwelling principle, no one would ever be able to live. This applies to both the natural and the spiritual life. God is the source of all life and of all good. Ministers, stop with the doctrine of the embryo theology! You do not understand wherein you have become entangled. Proclaim the blood theology, and you receive fruit on your labor!

Learning from Olevianus

Now we will turn our attention to Caspar Olevianus, one of those who drafted our confessional jewel, the *Heidelberg Catechism*. In his book, *Writings*, this minister and author gives a precious exposition of the doctrine of faith based entirely on God's Word. He writes so differently than the embryo churches. You can breathe again, as you read it. It is as if you hear the voice of the Master again.

In a precious way, he renders the Word of Christ, Who speaks in 1 John 5:9-12: *"If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which He hath testified of His Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son. And this is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."*

Olevianus wrote in the 15th article on pg. 298:

"The heavenly Father not only offers Christ to His elect Church through the Gospel (for if He did not do anything else, they would not receive Him, John 1:11), but He also creates faith in their hearts through the preaching of the Gospel." (John 1:13 and 5:25)

"As the Lord did not only offer the sun to the man born blind, but He also by His power,

granted him his sight, whereby he could rejoice in seeing it. (John 9:26) In that manner, the Son of God as the Sun of righteousness is offered to the world in which He finds none others, than those who are dead in sin and iniquity, deaf and blind. Therefore He quickens the elect by His power, causes them to hear and see by creating faith in them to the result that they accept Him willingly, embrace Him, and enjoy Him to their everlasting joy. (Ephesians 2:5; Isaiah 60:1-3; 61:1-3; Luke 4:18; 2 Cor. 4)”

“For, the Holy Spirit works powerfully in us through the Gospel. He incorporates us into Christ by creating faith in us, whereby we accept the offered Christ with His everlasting righteousness, which He imputes to us. (Dan. 9:24; Philipp. 3:9) And through the Spirit of sanctification, Who can never be separated from Christ, He renews us to conversion. This consists in the mortification of the old man and the quickening of the new man, which is always saving grace. (Rom. 6:5, 6)”

“But since sanctification or the renewal to conformity to the image of God is imperfect in this life so that it cannot stand in God's justice or under the stringency of the Law, even though it also comes from Christ being apprehended by faith, it therefore, nevertheless, is not deemed as righteousness before God but only the imputed righteousness of Christ, which is perfect. Yes, that exceeds all the righteousness of the Law, and only with that can we exist before God. (Rom. 5:1,2; 2 Corinthians 5:21)”

Herein it is apparent that this great Reformer not only had the correct understanding in the doctrine of the new birth, but also that he teaches us the common and unconditional offer of grace in the correct biblical manner.

Learning from Luther

Now a brief but striking word by Luther:

“To put on Christ in the sense of the Gospel is not a matter of imitation but of a new birth and a new creation; then I must put on Christ Himself, that is, His innocence, His righteousness, His wisdom, His power, His salvation, His life, His Spirit, etc.”

“We wear the animal skins of Adam, which is a physical covering and the garment of sin; we are all subjected to and sold under sin. There is terrible blindness, ignorance, contempt, and hatred to God within us. Furthermore, we are full of evil lust, impurity, covetness, etc. This garment, this corrupt and sinful nature we have inherited from Adam by inheritance. Paul then speaks about the old man “*that ye have put off the old man with his deeds*”. (Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9 KJV) From sons of Adam, we need to become children of God. That does not happen by changing the garment a bit, or by any kind of laws or works, but by the new regeneration and renewal, which takes place in Baptism. That is why Paul speaks in this letter to the Galatians, chapter 3:27: “*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*” And Titus 3:5 states: “*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.*” There is, namely, in the baptized one a new light and a new flame ignited. There are new and pious feelings created, fear of God, trust in God, hope, etc. A new will arises. And only that is the true putting on of Christ according to the Gospel.”¹⁵⁹

The End of the Law

Finally, read how the apostle Paul clearly describes what it is to be *in* Christ or to be *outside* of Christ. He says in Romans 10:4: “*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.*” With “law” is meant the Law of Moses. It is far from it that God gave the law to sinners to obtain a righteousness that can stand before God. God gave the law to Israel to convince His people that it is absolutely impossible to be justified by it. This law accuses us and is a condemning and slaying power. We must think of the law as a mirror in which we see our sins. To that law the expression of God's holy will is connected. It demands perfect obedience if we want to be righteous before God. By meeting its requirements, we can achieve eternal life by works. However, this applies only on the condition that there is not the slightest blemish or stain of any sin that clings to that self-righteousness. Often the name of law is taken for the whole of Scripture (see chapter 3:20, 28, 31; 7:7-12). Christ is the end of the law by fulfilling it with the purpose and the result that there is righteousness for everyone that believes. The law hands us over to Christ. It drives us out to grace that is in Christ Jesus. So when the law has accomplished its work in us, Christ stands ready to accept us by grace without any merit on our part. This is its purpose. In Christ the law is silenced in its condemning power. Here grace of righteousness begins for the believing soul. Whosoever believes in God's grace, which is granted to us through Christ, is saved.

Conclusion: With this sharp distinction of being under the law or being under grace, we can, with the fullest conviction, refer the embryo theology to the realm of fiction. We reject it in view of the Holy Scriptures. This is God's Truth, and it is entirely different from the above mentioned serious fallacies out of philosophy. We must not mix law and gospel in that manner.

Part 3

ORDER OF SALVATION

Chapter 13

The Order of Salvation in the Embryo Theology

In this chapter, I will give a summary of the order of salvation as taught in the embryo churches. I would rather not do this, but it is absolutely necessary in order to show you that there is a problem with the doctrine of those churches. The scholastic bias of the doctrine of Comrie took the separated churches far from the church of the Reformation. That is why I want to explain the difference between the embryo theology and the blood theology once more.

First I want to say something about the theology which characterizes the Old Reformed Congregations in the Netherlands. Then I will quote something from the book *Louter genade* (Pure grace), which is published by request of the General Synod of 2001/2002 of the Reformed Congregations. Regarding the Reformed Congregations in the Netherlands, I will present something from *De Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (The Reformed Doctrine) by Dr. C. Steenblok. We can therefore take this data as an official representation of their views. We will take the liberty to place biblical evidence over against it all.

Old Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

The Old Reformed Congregations in the Netherlands have never had their own doctrinal standards. Thankfully, we don't find dogma or doctrinal statements, because they do not want to be wiser than the church fathers and old fathers. So hereafter I will not be able to discuss any official dogmas as we will do with the other churches.

The Old Reformed Congregations form a group born out of need. They acknowledged the desire of Ledebouer to return to the national church as soon as the Lord would work restoration in the Reformed Church. This desire has now come to nothing with the formation of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands.

Especially in earlier years, the Old Reformed Congregations have continually been more focused on the Further Reformation. In recent decades, the Puritans have been more included. There they have not been bound so much to a particular modality. The ministers, of course, are constrained by the Holy Scripture and the authentic confessional documents. It is the duty of their calling to fully stay with the Word of God. Some of them had accepted the embryo theology, possibly by reading erroneous sermons and church bulletins. Others have not done so but have warned against it.

It has been stated that there are just as many trends as there are ministers. There is something pitiful about that but it is still acceptable, for even with the old fathers there are differences in emphasis and sometimes not even such small ones. Thankfully there have been (and still are) several ministers, who have never accepted the embryo doctrine. We only will mention the names of Rev. C. Smits and Rev. E. du Marchie van Voorthuysen to you. These ministers had not only received grace from God, but

have also received a good education. Furthermore, they were not influenced by the general trend of the heritage of Comrie in the other churches. They had a broader view of church life and the prevailing theology. They still let a warning voice be heard in these congregations. They wanted us to distance ourselves from the embryo doctrine, because it is a perilous doctrine that has crept in everywhere. Guard yourself against it! Once a church has adopted the embryo doctrine, the harm is immeasurable. It places us on a wrong foundation where its theology rests and everything has to be squeezed into that style, so that the doctrine of that church can be explained accordingly (as Rome did).

Alas, we must ascertain that the influence of the embryo theology has also manifested itself in the Old Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. We can see that especially in congregations where the old fathers are no longer read. The neglect to read the sermons of the good old writers is not only forbidden by the synod, but it is also detrimental to the churches. But in recent years, we can see a shift in the right direction taking place, so that thankfully, the embryo doctrine is losing ground.

Reformed Congregations

Following publications of Dr. J. Blaauwendraad, the General Synod of the Reformed Congregations responded to the request to “once again clarify what has always been taught in the congregations regarding the Covenant, the promises, and the preaching. In this way it could be shown to older and younger people how we must understand these issues according to Scripture and confessional documents.” Rev. J.J. van Ekeveld concluded his introduction with the wish: “It is of great importance that our youth is well informed scripturally and according to the confessional documents in these essential issues.”¹⁶⁰ We totally agree with this desire. It must always be sound scripturally, and according to the confessional documents.

Let us see what the authors of that book, *Louter genade*, (Pure grace) confess about regeneration and the preaching of the order of salvation.

“a. In the preaching, it must be clear that the discovering, uncovering, crushing and humiliating work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the sinner is not a condition which man must fulfill but is the fruit of that regeneration (Synod report 1977).”¹⁶¹

“b. With emphasis it is stated by the committee that these discovering, uncovering, crushing and humiliating works are ‘not experiences prior to the quickening of the sinner which would make him suitable for receiving the grace of God.’ They are not ‘conditions to be fulfilled by man prior to the coming to Christ’. On the contrary, these are fruits of the Spirit of regeneration.”¹⁶²

“c. With regards to the preaching of the order of salvation, the report finally states: ‘The Lord has a holy order in which He converts His people, although the leadings and ways that He takes with His children can be different. Alas, it must be noted that this order and the preaching of the necessity of an inner experience of this order of salvation is regarded by some people as the preaching of a ‘system of conversion’.’”¹⁶³

These theses were written in connection with the frequent criticism on the doctrine of the Reformed Congregations, even from their own people. Regeneration is described only so very briefly in that mentioned booklet. Alas! Yet there we see again: first regeneration and then after that the discovering works of the Holy Spirit. This again is exactly the embryo theology. You immediately notice that this is not in line with God's Word. It goes much deeper than just some minor differences, because it

touches the foundation of true Christian principles, confession, and experience. That is why we have decided to write this book.

Reformed Congregations of the Netherlands

Regarding the Reformed Congregations of the Netherlands, we quote some questions and answers from Dr. Steenblok's dogma about regeneration.

“Question 1649:

How does one distinguish in regeneration?

1. In a narrower sense as the quickening act of God prior to faith which is bestowed as a gift therein and which has the yet dead, although elected sinner, as the object. Eph. 2:1.
2. In a broader sense that more so includes the conversion which necessarily flows from the regeneration in a narrower sense and sprouts from out of faith.
3. In the broadest sense, as in a very special sense, the recreation of heaven and earth. Matt. 19:28.”

“Question 1651:

What is the difference between active and passive regeneration, the regeneratio activa and passiva?

A. The first is the regenerating work of grace of God equal to the external effectual calling; and the second, the passive regeneration, is the fruit of it, the new man which is created after God, the whole of the implanted habitus of the new life.”

“Question 1662:

What is the relationship of regeneration to justification, sanctification, faith, and conversion?

- A. 1. Regarding the point in time, they occur together and are thus simultaneously together with the active justification, but logically follows it, as the personal imparting of Christ and His righteousness, logically or orderly precedes the spiritual incorporation into Him, although they simultaneously occur with the gift of saving faith.
2. It is the beginning of the active and passive sanctification.
3. Where it concerns true faith and conversion: In regeneration the elect sinner is entirely passive, the gifts are bestowed and in conversion and the acts of faith, he becomes cooperative under and with grace.”

“Question 1667:

What is the difference between the so-called dormant or subconscious regeneration and the view of the embryo? (. . .)

A. The embryo (Comrie) implies that the consciousness of faith of the reborn can be filled with a lot of darkness. One should distinguish the gracious work of God itself in and through regeneration from the awareness and the assurance of that work in the heart. They are often enclosed and cannot come out. However, this absence of strongly breaking through yet in the frame of heart experiences, does not abolish the quickening work of the Spirit.”

“Question 1674:

How is the preparation (to regeneration, according to question 1671 of Steenblok, AK) specified by Comrie?

A. Comrie speaks about it, Catech. Publisher The Banner, pg. 409: (. . .)”¹⁶⁴

As you can see, these confessions and these teachings deviate from the teachings of Scripture. Dr. Steenblok has the same dogmatical view of the regeneration as Rev. Kersten.¹⁶⁵ The regeneration in the narrower sense which Dr. Steenblok suggests does not exist at all. The Bible does not speak a single word about it. Then, what is it? I will tell you. His view of regeneration largely corresponds with the pagan philosophy which we have discussed earlier. It is the teaching of scholasticism, as you know, which comes from Aristotle. Alas, this doctrine took a place in the Christian train of thought of the embryo churches. As we have already explained, Steenblok stands more or less in the same line of thought in this as the denomination where he comes from. With his presumed regeneration, he deviates even further from the Reformers and the Confession. The worst is that he clearly moves away from God's Word. This is also evident from his erroneous reference to Ephesians 2:1. This text means something very different than Dr. Steenblok wants us to believe under: "Regeneration in Narrower Sense". In the marginal notes our fathers of Dordrecht teach us deliverance from the death of sin by our justification and regeneration (see Chapter 3 of this book). That deliverance occurs *consciously* and not *subconsciously*; by a *conscious* justification and a *conscious* regeneration (also note the order). It will be clear to you that he stands on a wrong foundation. His doctrine differs in this aspect from our Reformed Confession. The system is totally according to Comrie. With his teachings, Dr Steenblok hits the same anvil as the Netherlands Reformed Congregations. In some aspects, he goes even further. Only think of his view on *the offer of grace*, and also on *general grace*. (One can write a whole separate book about this). More and more, I see that every individualistic theology takes churches another step further away from the old Confession. Therefore read and reread the writings of the god-fearing forefathers. Then you will discover why there has come such gloom and deep darkness over the churches of the Netherlands. I beg this of you, because I fervently hope that you may carry your soul out as a ransom, and that you will not go lost forever.

"The Conversion System"

The Reformed forefathers considered conviction of sin a preparation to faith, but this embryo coalition describes it as fruit of regeneration. Has Van der Groe then written his *Toetssteen* in vain, in which he exposes numerous convictions as the work of Satan? The old people of God said very clearly: the second matter (the justification) must have taken place in order to know what the first matter (the conviction) is; the end must clear up the beginning and not vice versa.

I will discuss the embryo doctrine a little more in general terms in respect to the above mentioned "*conversion system*".

a. Regenerated outside of Christ

In their order of salvation, there is first the regeneration, then the conviction of sin, and only then, the coming to Christ. Faith in Christ is no longer first. In this so-called regeneration, there is already life of grace according to the embryo scholars. This is the beginning of the road on which the stages in the life of grace are experienced. So in those churches, it is possible that one has life without knowing Christ. One may not know Him and yet be spiritually alive. That is because one has been, from a spiritual view, incorporated into Christ (subconsciously) but he still has a long way to go before he actually knows Him. God's Spirit has planted faith in his heart, but there is not yet the conscious experiential knowledge; that will come later. What a fallacy! A simple person who knows nothing, but who simply reads his Bible well, can tell you that this teaching is not the truth. Why do I say this?

Alas, with many “experiential” preachers the “experiential” teaching has merely become the embryo doctrine of Abraham Kuyper plus some legalistic knowledge of misery. A legalistic subjection is considered to be regeneration, which is presumed by Kuyper. Under the motto “old pure truth”, they are completely on the wrong track. Embryo habitus (the bulb) would even without the actus (active faith) include knowledge, consent, and confidence! Why then not also embryo knowledge of misery? How in need of God's Spirit we are, for He alone can lead us into all truths! May He take away the spiritual blindness that prevails in the various denominations.

b. Narrow and Broader Sense

In the embryo churches, one distinguishes regeneration in a *narrow* and *broader* sense. What is meant by this? The Reformers did not know this distinction; at least, we cannot read about it. The simplest answer to this question is: by regeneration *in the narrow sense* one means the quickening of a dead sinner by grace and *in the broader sense*, that regeneration is the sanctification. It extends throughout the entire life. The Bible also does not talk about such regeneration, but in a way, this remains to be seen. In the Bible can be spoken of a beginning, a persevering, and an end of faith. Christ is the Author of this saving faith (Heb. 12:2). We need to emphasize that in the embryo theology “quickenings” means something entirely different than in the doctrine of the Reformation. One does not directly connect the quickening with the true union by faith with Christ. To them it concerns a presumed regeneration with a subconscious faith in Christ.

This view is based on the notion of the habitus of Comrie. Comrie considered this explanation necessary because he did not want his teaching to be associated with the Remonstrants; he wanted to stay with God's Word. He considered it a good thing to place regeneration before faith as a root or principle from which faith sprouts. In between that there is a whole way of convictions and anxiety for the already born again and righteous believer. Alas, it is all delusion because it is presumed, incorrectly named and taught. If not mixed or confused with the law, sanctification disappears far out of view. On the other hand according to Calvin, who does not think scholastically at all, regeneration and sanctification coincide. This is how we read article 24 of our Dutch Confession of Faith. The Canons of Dort also place all emphasis on the beginning of the new life that God works *in us, without us*. They phrase it like this in view of their struggle against the Remonstrants. With “the beginning of faith”, they wanted to emphasize the character of grace. However, you should not think that this faith, as the starting point of spiritual life, has anything to do with the *habitus* thought of Comrie. Dordt never wanted this understanding of faith to be individualized, because their doctrine of regeneration is embedded in the large framework of the justification of the ungodly. This is entirely different than with Comrie, who in his doctrine has the righteous one become justified. As a matter of fact, Comrie himself was very much afraid that his doctrine of the habitus would be confused with the doctrine of *gratia infusa* of Rome. Alas, he did not escape the snare of scholasticism. Thus, regeneration begins where God works faith and ends when one is in heaven. The Reformers have always placed faith in Christ in the centre. Where embryo theologians mention “regeneration” as the beginning of spiritual life, the Reformers call these convictions *preparatory work*. Only by true faith in Christ is one regenerated; for them that is the starting point of true life for the soul. They follow the Bible, and the Word of God is the standard of their lives and confession. The opinions of the other professors lean on the human mind or on human experience. If we do not want to deceive ourselves in our opinion and experience, then we must verify it with God's Word. If it does not agree, then we must reject it. We must therefore reject the just mentioned views. With our god-fearing forefathers, it concerns the whole of the conversion. That is a conversion which God begins and which God completes. Then we need not fear an embryo conversion and all those other apparent rebirths, which reveal nothing but wind.

Man becomes converted, god-fearing, and quickened outside of Christ. Their feigned repentance and regeneration is like the life of the rich young man. Their pretentious humility is the worst form of spiritual pride. Perhaps here we have the worst example of self-deception. Oh, I hope so much that their eyes may be opened in time.

c. Order of Salvation and the “Doctrine of Stages”

Regarding the order of salvation which they also call doctrine of stages, they teach things that are totally foreign to the Bible. It is too dreadful to mention. They teach that the newly reborn sinner does not know Christ. This is the situation in the first stage. Prior to that, it was the state of death. According to those who favor the embryo theology, there is no preparatory way *to* Christ but a preparatory way *in* Christ, Whom one does not know yet. They have probably never read that no one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him. Yes, they say, at that time they were already incorporated into Christ, but they did not know it. They probably also do not know that Christ has said that He would draw all men to Himself when He would once be exalted. This does not fit in with their doctrine. The regenerated, who had been incorporated into Christ but does not know Him yet, will be drawn to Christ by the Father and by Christ to Himself. What fallacies! According to them, there are children, young men, and fathers. The newly born-again are children, the young men know the revelation of Christ to the heart, and the fathers would then be the justified people. Oh, oh, where do they get these fantasies from?!

d. Seeing is not Possessing

Subsequently they teach that in the life of grace of God's newborn child, there is the revelation of Christ. This happens after the long troublesome road to Christ. But alas, the disappointment is great. *Seeing is not the same as possessing!* It is not relevant that Christ has said, “*That every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life.*” (John 6:40) They have their own view there. And to understand their doctrine well enough, we first have to read the *Catechism* by Comrie and especially also the first two sermons from the *Eigenschaften* (Characteristics). Oh, with that legacy of the philosopher Aristotle, they exclusively take up their own place in church life. We had better listen to God's Word. John 6:40 states: “*This is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.*” *Then seeing is possessing!* The old Simeon saw Christ, where others saw nothing in Him. It was a blessed seeing, being, and becoming. So it was with Jacob in the Old Testament; with Thomas, after Christ's resurrection. I believe that those who deny this, think that they see a ghost as the disciples (at sea), or a spirit (after His resurrection), or a stranger (travelers to Emmaüs). If this is so, He shall soon manifest Himself to them; otherwise, I fear that they are erroneously taught by themselves or by the ministers of later times. In any circumstance, we are not deceived by the Lord here.

It can be that in our distress, we have seen our salvation as lying outside of ourselves. Then we still experience our lack. This is not the actual seeing of faith that those had who had been bitten, when they looked up at the bronze serpent. This is not the seeing and beholding of Him, Whom they have pierced. This seeing is an expectation of those who hope in God that He may have mercy upon them. In our circles, there is much talk of a revealed Christ and a granted Christ. But I do not believe that the Lord reveals Himself to the soul unto salvation and redemption of the soul and then later would say, “I have not yet really given Myself nor the salvation in Me.” Spoken with all reverence, the work of the Lord is not delusive, and He does not come with false redemption. The Lord called them saved who

have not seen and yet (shall) have believed. Therefore, we walk by faith and not by sight. The latter is still to come when we shall see God face to face. Now we still see Him as through a dark glass. Thus Isaac Ambrose was given to write a book of little less than a thousand pages called, *Looking unto Jesus*. Let us just remain with this old and pure doctrine.

e. Covered Guilt

What about the guilt? Oh, that is covered. In this plan, this is a step further. This happens when the conscience is acquitted of guilt and punishment. Knowledge of Christ is not enough for that. Most of God's children don't get that far but don't worry, they will still go to heaven, albeit with fear, because they were already a born-again child of God. No, this is yet another step. Do you know what God's Word refers to as the highest degree in the life of grace? The patriarch Abraham, who we deem so great and experienced, mentions it when he calls himself *dust and ashes*. There was no one born of a woman greater than John the Baptist. He says that Christ must increase and he must decrease. Let us keep that in mind. But, alas, this does not happen while systematizing; it implies always moving forward and never backward. Where are the sins then forgiven according to the embryo doctrine? There is no need for it on earth as is expressly stated and in heaven, there is no sin. Where will that forgiveness happen then? What do the philosophers say? Does that perhaps then also happen subconsciously? Or is it not necessary? One should know that the atonement by the blood of Christ is the main theme of God's Word. They can know that there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood, no reconciliation but through satisfaction. They should know that Scripture teaches grace *by* justification and not *before* justification. They should know that the covering of guilt as mentioned in Psalm 32, means *cover* according to the Hebrew root word, meaning: as with a garment; that God never remembers the sins of His elect people; that He buries them as in a grave. - Covered as in the Red Sea of Christ's pure, holy, sweet, blissful, sacrificial blood of His heart of love. (Micah 7:18 and 19) The sins are all covered under the robe of the righteousness of Christ. And God writes under that account: it is fulfilled; I will never remember it. And the Holy Spirit signs and seals it.

Oh, oh, how far away are they in those denominations! It is appalling! It affects the honor of God; it offends Him in the deepest way. And then to think of all those deluded souls who travel with beautiful words to their eternal misery! Whoever keeps quiet is guilty also. Oh, turn again to God!

f. Separation between Implanting and Revelation

What do we mean by the phrase *implanting* and *revelation*? It concerns the incorporation into Christ and the revelation of Christ. In the embryo theology, a separation is made between these two. That is totally against God's Word. The incorporation into Christ and the revelation of Christ coincide, according to the Holy Scripture. That is why the doctrine of Comrie has been contradicted in so many places, so that it is impossible to quote all these Scripture verses.¹⁶⁶ For example, take the image where Christ speaks about the Vine and the branches (John 15), or where Paul speaks about the mystical union of Christ with His Church in Ephesians 5. Paul, for whom it has pleased God to reveal His Son in him, writes in Romans 6:11: "*Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" The marginal notes state that the believers receive the power of the Spirit of Christ to live for God to the glory of God and to more and more mortify sin. This should be enough; it requires no further explanation. We should well remember that these matters and the fruits that result from them, can only be there if God is reconciled unto us. Now we need to be aware

that both the mortification of the old man and the resurrection of the new man come from out of faith. No one can hate sin and come to God unless he loves God. And no one loves God, or he must be endowed with faith. The believer strongly believes that God is merciful and that He accepts all who turn to God by grace, and who take refuge in Him with true faith. This shows that faith cannot be separated from the regeneration. Faith is always present in the doctrine of conversion and in the part of gratitude.¹⁶⁷ Of course, we do not forget that God is the supreme and primary Cause of true conversion.

It should be clear to you that we can only speak of quickening in the second part of conversion (when there is true saving faith). Paul says about this in Galatians 2:19 and 20: *“For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.”* Ursinus says in his *Schatboek* (Book of Treasures) that the mortifying of the old man is the preparation to this quickening. Briefly, this consists of an acknowledgment of sin and the wrath of God and in sorrow about it. Nevertheless, these things can also be with the reprobate, think of Ahab, etc. Also then there is a sorrow about it, not about the punishment as with Cain, Pharaoh, Saul, Judas, etc., but as with the prodigal son, etc. Such do not come to despair by this sorrow but are lifted up by faith. Those who have godly sorrow take their refuge to God for Christ's sake and are saved. With the ungodly, the sorrow and remorse about their sins was not a part in conversion. It also was no preparation to conversion but a fleeing from God and a gate of despair. - Thus far Ursinus. This is a very different language from what we often hear in our right-winged circles.

We all seem very orthodox in our churches, but we are not. It all started with a misunderstanding of this truth. Subsequently, man wanders off further and further. The result speaks for itself. That impure doctrine is woven through everything. It appears to be that the people of our denominations can no longer think soundly and scripturally on account of this doctrine which is ingrained into our brains. Oh, I hope so much that the Lord may deliver us from this. Therefore, read the Word of God and the good writings of our forefathers. Let go of the embryo doctrine and return to God's Word!

g. Preparatory Way

From the above it appears that in the embryo churches there is no preparatory way *to* Christ, because the sinner is said to have already been incorporated into Christ (in regeneration). According to them, we need to know a way of preparation *in* Christ. Without this there can be no revelation of Christ, according to them. Disappointing also is the fact again that we are not actually justified, but that again will hopefully happen later. But you cannot even be completely sure of this. Oh, we are almost back to Rome, at least in part. Let us listen to God's Word again. To name just one text: we read in John 6:37: *“All that the Father giveth Me, shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out.”* Let's now listen to Bishop J.C Ryle in his exposition on the Gospel of John. This star in God's firmament writes:

“What does it mean: to come? It means that movement of the soul, which takes place when a man, feeling his sins, and realizing that he cannot save himself, hears about Christ, turns to Christ, trusts in Christ, holds on to Christ, and with his whole person relies on Christ for salvation. In the language of Scripture, when this takes place, it is called a coming to Christ.”

What does the Lord mean by saying: *“I will not cast them out?”* He meant that He will not refuse to

save anyone who comes unto Him, whoever he may have been. His past sins may have been great, his present weakness and sinfulness so manifold but does he come to Christ by faith? Then Christ will accept him by grace, freely grant him pardon, place him among the number of His dear children, and grant him eternal life.¹⁶⁸

Let us leave that comfortless embryo doctrine and follow this truth of God. How well did our old writers understand this truth! How clearly God came to us with His testimony. Also how essential is the Spirit of God!

h. Preparatory Work of the Law

The next misconception is that they no longer preach that only by the law the preparatory work begins. They call this the saving convictions by the Holy Spirit, thus, after regeneration, as they presume. With this the fallacy is concealed for the hearers. One hears familiar sounds of the truth but the ministers mean something completely different than God's Word teaches us. And what is worse, why we feel so pressed to warn and strive against this doctrine, is that with this so-called regeneration and ingrafting, a wrong foundation is laid. That foundation will not hold for eternity. They bring your soul into great danger. Let us listen again to Ursinus. He describes so purely what God teaches us in His Word. He writes:

“There are two parts in conversion, namely, a mortification or death of the old man or of the flesh, and a quickening or resurrection of the new man or of the spirit. This is what the apostle teaches in Rom. 6:4-6, Eph. 4:22-24 and Col. 3:9 etc. So we can better speak with the apostle, than with those who make convictions and faith parts of the conversion. With the humiliating work, they understand the mortification and with faith, they understand that joy which follows the exercise of righteousness and a new obedience. These are the fruits of faith, but in no wise faith itself. And the humiliating work precedes the conversion and is not conversion itself nor a part of it but only a preparation to conversion, and that only in the elect, and not with others. The old man is the corrupt nature of man. The new man is the nature of man which is again erected after the image of God.”¹⁶⁹

Facts of Salvation

Now I also want to say something about the facts of salvation. You quite often hear that it must become Christmas, it must become Easter in the soul, etc. Many preachers give this a spiritual meaning which is not taught by God's Word. They explain the walk of the disciples during the sojourn of the Lord Jesus on earth too subjectively. It is based on a kind of “conversion model” which is shaped according to stages in spiritual life. That is not a sound interpretation of God's Word. Thus one loses contact with the real meaning of the text and the simplicity of the Gospel. God's Word is “spiritualized” in such a way, so that no true spirituality remains. The history itself and the people in it become hobbyhorses for false explanations of Scripture. The doctrine of Scripture is altered to basic principles of the embryo theology. There are many examples of these: think of Jacob, Ruth, Nicodemus, etc. Also the conduct and walk of the disciples in their relationship with their great Master and Savior are adapted to the views and opinions of the embryo ministers. Those embryo-theologians rule over the text and history of God's Word rather than that Scripture is their interpreter. The result is that the facts of salvation are torn from their context, individualized, and are wrongly applied and

twisted. One becomes increasingly further removed from God's Word. Doctrine and life come to rest on unsound grounds.

Of course, there is growth and increase in grace and knowledge, a deepening of spiritual life in the soul. Believers receive more light in the ways of their Prince and King. This is due to the power of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. This happens *after* the true transition into Christ. Thus, it is not: first this and then that. People often linger with the prophetic or the kingly office of Christ, but they remain foreign to His high-priestly work. And especially the last one is important because our reconciliation through the blood of Jesus lays in that. Outside of that, everything is lost. No, God's Church is found in God. For them it is Christ and Him crucified. Therein it is that their faith rests.

You may say of the disciples that at first, they did not yet sufficiently understand what would happen in and after the death of Christ. Over and again they showed their lack of understanding. Only after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit did they receive much more light therein. In that way, you can say about the life of grace of the Church that some things can be unclear, because they are not so exercised yet. But in what they in essence possess, everything is included what is necessary to know for salvation. They must only yet receive better understanding of it. The way in which this takes place is not a system but a good order. In the order of salvation, it is not a matter of climbing up the stairs, but indeed, of decreasing while Christ increases. Those who are truly justified before God are the most humble people. The more I receive from God, the more humble I become. With what the Lord works in your life and what He explains, the point is not that you will become something, but it becomes a wonder for you, all that you receive from God.

First and Second Passing By

I just want to add a bit to the previous points and mention an important example of this. We find that in Ezekiel 16:6, which says: "*And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, 'Live'; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, 'Live'.*" What do many embryo theologians do? They also explain this text according to their liking. They ascribe those words to the quickening of a man, who after some time (as the quickened sinner) is justified (vs. 9, 10) in the second passing by (vs. 8). These text verses seem to be useful for their interpretation, so that man has embraced this doctrine with both hands. But I repeat: what does God's Word say and the old sound commentators?

Scripture shows here that it concerns the preservation of God's church, which is presented as being unsightly when she came to Egypt, in the time of Joseph, with the number of 75 souls. God's eye was and remained upon His people, even though they were unworthy. Against the will of Pharaoh, the Lord wanted to preserve this remnant according to the election of grace. By His hidden power, He kept them alive; otherwise they would have perished (Calvin). He turned to this people and sent Moses, His servant. He wanted them to live and not die nor be eradicated. Hence the Lord speaking to the ears of the people with an inaudible voice (Calvin), "Live." The people are destined to live and not doomed to perish. Thus it was in God's decree (Henry), in which He destined their salvation (Calvin). Therefore, He had compassion on His people for the sake of His eternal love (Polus and others). The word "live", which is repeated, is to emphasize the *truth* of His saying. He would have His people live through the redemption by His strong hand. He did that in Christ, the right Hand of His righteousness.

The marginal notes with this text read: "Thou shalt live (this means you will live in the future and not die in Egypt. It is strongly assured that thou shalt live, AK), notwithstanding, that you are very wicked

and miserable. It is a command (take note, AK) containing a promise of life; in which way of speaking you can see in Ps. 37:3; Prov. 3:25. The Lord wants to say, although you are very unclean and deformed and lie in the midst of death, yet will I make (note again: it must still happen, AK) that ye shall live. This has always been fulfilled according to the Covenant of Grace that God had made with Abraham.”

The latter includes that the Lord renewed His covenant (vs. 8) at Horeb. He had already included the people in the covenant with Abraham (Calvin). When the people were still in Egypt, it became large and became very beautiful (vs. 7). In the time of love, when the nation was still in the house of service and slavery, the Lord extended His wings protectively over them and delivered Israel (verse 8) from all the trouble (Ps. 107). He took the shame and disgrace away which they were subjected to in Egypt (vs. 9). He made them to be a glorious kingdom in Canaan. It attained true freedom and was under virtuous rulers like David. Eventually the promised Messiah would be born. This is the brief explanation of these verses. You can see that this is a very different explanation than that of the so-called clergy from later times in the style of Kuyper. Calvin very seriously warned against those quibbles of people and the allegorizing of this symbolic passage of Scripture. The embryo contemplation is in contradiction to what the prophet says. One cannot be thus occupied with it, or he must twist Scripture.¹⁷⁰

Appropriating Grace

We see that the mentioned denominations have a doctrine of regeneration, an order of salvation, which the Bible does not recognize and which was not preached by orthodox ministers. They lay another foundation than that of the crucified Jesus Christ and the redemption by His blood. I will give one simple example of this.

Someone related to me about the funeral of an old woman. She was a decent woman, who was occupied with eternal things. Therefore some believed that the woman knew another life; she was serious and respectful, had convictions, and she was deeply impressed by death and eternity. She herself had never talked much about spiritual life. After the funeral, an old man, who had been unable to attend the funeral, asked, “Did the minister say something about her at the grave?”

“Oh yes,” was the reply, “he had buried her with ease and liberty, although the woman had never dare to lay hold on anything. The minister said she had always remained a yearning person, but he could still very well take over her state and could bury her with ease.”

“Well,” said the old man, “about that woman, I would not say anything because it is not fitting for me to do so, but that minister should check his matters. For faith is an appropriating grace, and if you do not know anything about this and have no knowledge of that, you can safely say it did not happen.”

See, that is how far we have gone astray! Preachers - in this case, a prominent minister of a very large congregation – called someone blessed on the grounds of some convictions! That is then called regeneration and everyone believes it because the minister had said so.

Justifications

We would first like to show the fact that the Bible only speaks of *two* justifications, while the embryo churches have *five*. God's Word teaches there are two:

- a. One is by the law: “*For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.*” (Romans 2:13).
- b. The other is the righteousness by faith, because one cannot be justified by the law (Rom 3:22; Rom. 4:5). Thus there remains only one righteousness, namely, that of faith (Romans 5:1). This one man receives from Christ (Romans 4:25; Rom 5:16, 18). This is not the justification of a believer nor of a righteous person and also not of one who is born-again but of the *ungodly*. And that by grace!

God's Word does recognize the fore-ordination of our righteousness from eternity (Luke 22:29).

-This righteousness is fore-ordained from eternity, to be granted to the sinner undeserved (Eph. 1:5).

-This righteousness was purchased by Christ on the cross (Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20).

-This righteousness is given by God, communicated through Christ, applied by the Holy Spirit and appropriated by faith. This happens in the time as we read in Psalm 116:5: “Thou, o Jehovah, in Thy sovereign grace, hast saved my soul from death and woe appalling.”

The Reformed Congregations of the Netherlands acknowledge five justifications:

1. of eternity;
2. of Christ in the resurrection;
3. of regeneration (passive);
4. of the conscience (the tribunal);
5. of Christ's return (public).¹⁷¹

The last one may be justified but the others are unbiblical. - The *first*, because it is about the *fore-ordination* of our righteousness. - The *second*, because this grace has not been applied personally. - The *third*, because one is not actually but only presumably born again. The *fourth* is true, but it is not in the proper context: not a wicked man but a righteous man is justified here; so, that is not true. This results in the *fifth* one also not being true, because that man is deceived by the four previous standpoints. Therefore if God does not prevent it, he, however, only comes to notice that at the gate of heaven.

Let us just be honest and not allow ourselves to be put on an erroneous track. These notions which are foreign to God's Word, show that God's elect are already righteous before they are justified. With the first three justifications they have no knowledge of it yet; that only occurs with the fourth. Alas, that is only for a few. Whatever you want to say about this doctrine, I leave it up to you, but I consider it terrible. It is my fervent wish that the ministers will hastily discard these fallacies. Do it publicly and escape the blemish which is on your name. Ask and obtain forgiveness from God through the blood of Christ.

Devalued

The blood theology has been devalued to *embryo philosophy*. In that embryo-doctrine, the unborn child is called regenerated. Subsequently, they chop this child into pieces (by convictions of the Holy Spirit), thereafter it receives a further benefit. Miraculously enough, the child suddenly has eyes to look upon Christ, but alas, this falls too short.

Here is yet another image of this doctrine. Just think of a farmer who sows his field with good seed.

Some (unspecified) time later, he comes back and plows (the Law) the whole field under again, to then subsequently take in the harvest. What do the people do who promote the embryo doctrine? They sow a wasteland. They neglect the plowing. They do that only after the seed of regeneration has been thrown into the field and has been fertilized by the dew from heaven. Then after that they come with the plough and they turn the whole thing over again. Then they come to look every day if the seed is coming up. With great desire they look forward to the summer for the harvest. Meanwhile, they enlarge the barns because they expect a good and rich harvest. Have you ever seen a farmer work in such a manner? You immediately understand: nowhere does the Bible teach us this way. God does not work like that. Now then, abandon that doctrine! You will say: why do you write this? This offends good people (Matthew 15:12). No, I do not do that. It is not about people; it concerns you, your never-ending, eternal salvation, and the saving of your immortal soul! Read this verse from father Ledeboer, and you will understand. (free translation)

We fight for the doctrine of Dordt,
Because it is from God the Lord!
All that is outside falls away,
For it is all of man's portray!
Devised by corrupt imagination,
Far from Jesus' fount of salvation!
Blessed is he, who may receive,
A light, he never had perceived,
For it, by nature, is not taught.
To Jesus' beauty, God's child is brought.
His doctrine, death, His blood and cross,
Defeats our own honor as a loss.

Chapter 14

The Order of Salvation According to the Blood Theology

Now you may ask, does Scripture acknowledge an order of salvation? Yes, God's Word also has an order. That list is not as long as that of the embryo theology. Nevertheless, it is clear, entirely biblical of course, and preached fully by sound theologians.

What does the Bible say about the order of salvation through the apostle Paul (salutations)? Paul tells us that our salvation is anchored in eternity, and that it is applied and fulfilled in the time. Regarding the golden chain of our salvation, he says in Romans 8:29-30:

“For whom He did foreknow (1), He also did predestinate (2) to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called (3); and whom He called, them He also justified (4); and whom He justified, them He also glorified (5).”

Let us see what the *marginal notes* say here.

- (1) That is, for His own, as in John 10:14, 27. That is, whom He from eternity has chosen in Christ to eternal life, verse 33. Rom. 11:2; Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:2.
- (2) That is, not only in the suffering, but also particularly in the sanctification and glorification that will follow afterwards, 1 Cor. 13:12; 15:48; 2 Cor. 3:18.
- (3) That is, unto faith and obedience of faith by an effectual calling, verse 28.
- (4) That is, for Himself, by faith, as this word in this epistle is taken in this whole matter, and includes the intention of the apostle. For this justification is the closest step to glorification.
- (5) That is, here in beginning by sanctification and adoption to children, and hereafter, by the full possession of this glory, v. 17, 21; 2 Cor. 3:18.

Serious, very serious question: do you read one word here about the embryo theology? Do you read about the subconscious regeneration? - Of the strait and narrower sense? - Of justification from eternity? Do you read here that justification is not truly necessary?

Short Explanation

What do we read here then? If we interpret these words by explaining Scripture from Scripture, then we see them as follows: the call is heard from the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), the call comes to all externally through the preaching of the Gospel (Isaiah 53:1). Till so far there is no change in the soul of a man. That occurs when the Holy Spirit joins Himself to the Word.

Then the sinner has not yet been made alive, but he is aroused and awakened. (See the outline on p.176). He is still under the law and not under grace. That changes when he is called internally, is justified and regenerated. These matters occur together. The calling comes internally in the elect by the Holy Spirit, Who first convinces the sinner of sin (John 16:8). Then the Father draws him out of

darkness into His marvelous light, which is Christ (Col. 1:13). The Holy Spirit arouses the sinner to believe in order to be able to give heed (1 Cor. 2:13-16) to that calling. By this faith, he (consciously) accepts Christ and is regenerated. You can clearly read it in God's Word: *"But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."* (John 1:12, 13)

By faith, we are justified: *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Rom. 5:1). By faith, we are made alive and do we live. *"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."* (John 3:36). Furthermore, we see that we are righteous, for by faith we are in Christ, washed and cleansed by His blood (Rom. 5:9) and thus reconciled to God (Ps. 65:4). God sanctifies His Church through His Spirit (1 Pet. 1:2). The glorification points to the life hereafter, where we will partake in full glorification of body and soul (1 Cor. 2:9). How different God's Word is from the embryo theology!

Knowledge of Misery

God's Word teaches us three parts: misery, redemption, and gratitude. The epistle of Paul to the Romans gives clear proof of that in its outline. He first illustrates the state of all mankind; then he teaches redemption in Christ Jesus and in chapter 12, the third part follows: about gratitude and sanctification. The Heidelberg Catechism follows this line precisely and meticulously. This is the teaching of the Holy Scripture and the experience of the saints. This is strongly reflected in the conversion of sinners and in the life of God's children. We only mention to you the well-known example of the publican in the back of the temple. Even after receiving grace, the Lord exercises His Church continually in these three parts. They cannot go without the knowledge of misery, otherwise they would not need forgiveness of sins; and without redemption there can be no gratitude. Ledeboer says our greatest misery is that we do not know our misery.¹⁷² Knowledge of misery does not stand on its own, of course. It is only genuine if it leads us to Christ.

Convictions

From this we can conclude that there are convictions that do not lead to Christ. They are called general convictions. They can be very profound and cause a lot of distress in the soul. Once these are gone, they can make a man even harder than he was before. They can also bring a person to despair. Then they take man away from God rather than lead him to Christ. *"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of."* (2 Cor. 7:10) *"All that the Father giveth Me, shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out."* (John 6:37)

In our days as a result of that embryo theology, we often see people lingering too much in affections and emotions. They build their conversions on that and by doing so, they believe to have obtained life. They love to be pampered and nurtured with the name of "concerned Church". But the Word clearly tells us that a man is only saved when he comes to Christ. He cannot be saved outside of Christ.

Christ's cross and blood is most necessary for us to be able to meet God. Faith makes us partakers of Christ and all His benefits. Nothing can save but faith in Christ. All that we may think to have outside of that cannot exist before God as ground for salvation.

Convictions are not Conversions (Mead)

If convictions do not lead to Christ, then you must examine yourself. We will illustrate this with some fragments from the puritan, Matthew Mead. You must not think that he leaves any of the embryo theology intact in his writings. Amongst other things, Mead says in his book, *The Almost Christian Discovered*, the following:

“Strive for a continuing work of conviction. The almost Christian has his convictions just as well as the true Christian. Otherwise he would never have come this far. But they are not sincere convictions; otherwise, he would not have remained there. God desires the soul to be truly sensitive about the bitterness of sin, before it will taste the sweetness of grace (. . .).”

“There are certain characteristics that go between the soul that is dead in sin and the work of conversion and union with Christ, by which the soul is made capable to receive the Lord Jesus Christ. Nobody is immediately transferred from his state of death and at once enabled to believe in Jesus Christ. There are some characteristics that come in between.”

“Now, true convictions are the appropriate frame of mind for the sinner to receive Christ. He has not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. - That is, such as see that they are sinners and therefore are in a lost condition. He was sent and anointed to bind up the brokenhearted and to comfort all that mourn.”

“Never rest in convictions before they end in conversion. Herein many people go lost. They rest in their convictions and take them as their conversion: as if the sins were forgiven just because they had them in view. Or as if a sight of the lack of grace was the upright work of grace itself.”

“It is a remarkable text in Hosea 13:13: *“He is an unwise son; for he should not stay long in the place of the breaking forth of children.”* The place for the birth of a child is from the womb. As the child comes from the womb, so the conversion is born from the womb of conviction. If the child remains between the womb and the world, that is dangerous, and then the lives of mother and child are in danger. So it is when a sinner rests in convictions and does not go further, but remains stuck in childbirth. (...)”

“If you live under convictions, be careful not to rest in it. Do not remain long in the place of the 'breaking forth of children'. It is true, convictions are the first step to conversion, but it is *not the conversion itself*. Man can take his convictions along with him into hell! How terrible if one must say on his deathbed, “I was convinced of my lack of Christ, and of Christ's willingness to forgive and to save, but alas, I did not heed those convictions.”

“So then: has the Spirit of God started to work in you? Have you ever been convicted of the evil of sin, of the impotence of all things under the firmament to help you? - Of the fullness and righteousness of Jesus Christ? - Of the necessity to rest in Him to obtain mercy and peace, sanctification and salvation? Have you ever been truly convinced of these matters? Oh, for as much as you love your souls, if ever you hope to be saved, make use of these convictions, and be sure to not rest in them, until you have come to the full union with the Lord Jesus Christ, and in that way, end with a true and complete conversion. Then you will not be only *almost*, but *wholly* a Christian.”¹⁷³

Measure of the Knowledge of Misery and the Submission

There is a moment in time, sooner or later, when all the elect will come to agree with God, so that they

take pleasure in the punishment of their iniquity (Lev. 26:41,43). The saying of Luther: “How shall I ever be converted to God?” is then exchanged with the words of Calvin: “How will God receive the honor?” If we want to express ourselves with words of Scripture, then we speak as in Psalm 51:4: “*That Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest.*” There man is then made upright before God. There he is a man who is worthy of damnation and hell. When we come to this point that we may lose it before God, then the Lord cannot do us any harm. He does nothing amiss, if He would do as we deserve. With legalistic repentance it goes quite differently.¹⁷⁴ They find it so terrible to have to go to hell, but if you see that the Son of God has died for your guilt, then you melt away, and you weep yourself empty.

Godly Sorrow

Thus “*godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of,*” we have already said. It must be clear that there cannot be true conversion without this sorrow. There are many false notions about this blessed sorrow. Many people attach great value to their sorrow and tears. Others find solace in their miseries and hold that to be their conversion, in a morbid way. They never nor ever come to Christ. There are also those who think that mere sorrow is conversion itself. It is not. It is a presumed conversion. Others think that there is a conversion without sorrow. They are wrong also. Many church people to their detriment think: once converted, always converted. They are strangers of a true and ongoing daily repentance. For others, the authenticity of the conversion is to be measured according to the degree of horrors and torments. Not the degree but the uprightness of it is in the interest of our soul, in its returning to God. One must come into a reconciled relationship with God through the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son. Whosoever lacks this, goes lost forever.

You may ask if the Reformers placed penitence and repentance before or after faith. Calvin spoke of penitence before faith. That penitence consists in brokenness of heart and an abasing before God's face. One fears God's judgment and bewails sin. Only when we learn to be displeased with ourselves, hate our lives, and mourn about our sins, shall we turn to God. Although there is something bitter in the first taste of this sorrow, it becomes beneficial and desirable for us. This sorrow leads us to salvation in the way of true conversion. Here Calvin clearly speaks about the preparatory work of God and the way leading to salvation in God. However, he emphasizes even more the repentance that flows forth from faith. That faith is possible only in communion with Christ. That continues the whole life through and consists in the daily mortification of the old man and the resurrection of the new man. The first (mortificatio) consists of a heartfelt sorrow about sin with an abhorring and fleeing from sin, and the second (vivificatio) consists in a heartfelt joy in God.

Thus Calvin does not place the subconscious incorporation into Christ as the beginning. He does not acknowledge a presumed regeneration. Calvin's biblical theology stands totally opposite to the embryo theology of Comrie, and even more against that of Kuyper, Kersten, and Steenblok. You must study the theology of Calvin, and reject those of the other mentioned ministers.¹⁷⁵

The Necessity of our Redemption by Christ

You can see that we should not linger in affections and emotions. Supported by the embryo theologians, many believe to be able to build their conversion upon it. Thereby they think to possess life. That is a great danger, for the Word teaches us that man is saved only when he comes to Christ, when he can no longer do without the cross and blood of Christ. I do not want to determine how deep

that knowledge of misery should go, but do not take this too lightly. The Lord Himself has said: "*If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*" (John 8:36) Would you also like to know how the Son of God can make you free? Do you already feel the burning desire in the soul to know Him as Mediator? Is your soul yearning for the Savior of sinners? Alas, with most of us, this is not the case. Yet there are those who in secret hunger and thirst after Jesus. This is the work of the Spirit that drives the soul to desire Jesus with all its might. In the heart of the elect, He creates the hope of deliverance from the sins which so deeply burdens them. The guilt of such ones has become unbearable. The bonds of sin afflict their souls with great terror. This discovery causes them to hang on to the lips of ministers who teach them in God's name. They love the ministers who proclaim them the goodness of God. They desire to be instructed in the way they should go. Their petition is upwards to God asking if they may tread that way of salvation, led by His good hand and guided by His Spirit. They will cling to God's ministers and ask for their good advice. They beg the ministers to reveal the way by which they can again receive grace. It is about life and death: tell me in Whom salvation lays, of Whom do you declare this salvation?

Thus, an uncovered soul sits under the Word of God. Thus, he listens to one or more of the children of God. Thus he sighs as he reads the Word of God. And thus, he prays unto the Lord. Who is He, Who can save me from sin and free me from this burden? With Whom is counsel, with Whom is salvation? O, answer me if you know it. Oh, if you do not know it and this really is your great need and desire, then I will tell you: *our Lord Jesus Christ*. He is the Mediator Who can bring you back to God. He is the Reconciler, able to save you. He is the Savior, mighty to deliver you. He is the Redeemer, Whose love for the lost is infinitely great. Only He Who has come, the Son of God can be your Savior. There is no other Name given under heaven by Whom we must be saved. Jesus is His name by which He shall be called. - Savior from before the foundations of the world. He brings His redeemed from the greatest evil to the highest good. To this end, He was anointed by the Father with the Holy Spirit. Christ is the Messiah Who would come. He bears the office of Mediator. He is the great Prophet, Who will always teach us, the great Apostle of our confession. He is the great High Priest of the house of God, Who reconciles us to God with His own blood. He now sits at the right hand of God as our heavenly Advocate. He will reign as King into all eternity. It is He Who must deliver you.

Calling

We must therefore be drawn from the darkness of our lost state to receive a part in salvation through Christ. This takes place by a powerful calling by God. Do not forget that regeneration goes together with that divine calling. You cannot say that the one is separated from the other; just as my words cannot be separated from my breath. If you separate calling and regeneration, you can no longer speak of conversion. The external call comes to all who sit under the preaching but with some, something happens by the power of the Spirit, which is called the internal calling. For faith is by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Many do not follow Christ while they have been called. From this we see that the preaching has a twofold effect. One will only respond to the calling when the power of the Spirit is connected to it, so that one can follow Christ. Thus the calling comes to the hearer and he receives faith, because faith comes by hearing through the Word of God.

Knowledge of Christ

Man cannot be saved without the knowledge of Christ; there is no salvation outside of Christ. Where there is true faith there is a sure knowledge of Him. There is no doubt or uncertainty possible. I know

in Whom I have believed. Shall I then meet an unknown God? We do need to make a distinction herein. There is a refuge-taking faith, by which one flees to Christ (Matt. 15:28), Who *can* forgive my sins (Luke 5:28). There is also an assured faith in Christ, Who *has* forgiven my sins. What matters is that there is faith in Christ. That alone is saving, no matter how little, weak or small it is. Each member, to the least of them, knows a union with Jesus in faith. Christ is, of course, a hidden Person. However, He is not so hidden that one cannot draw near to Him. He stands on Sharon's plain like a rose. One need not take a difficult journey or enter endless depths or climb high altitudes to see and to admire Him. It is through the drawing love of the Father and by saving faith, that I see Him. Once I have seen Him, I always desire to behold Him.

Drawing Love and Justification by Faith

“How does the lost sinner come to Jesus?” you may ask me. Wherever Jesus Christ and Him crucified is preached, there are souls converted to God and sinners drawn to Christ. While dying, Christ draws them to Himself. With weeping and supplications they come to Him. Overcome with the burden of guilt, He meets them in His blood and becomes their Savior. Irresistibly they are pulled to Him. Then they shall see Him on the cross. There they behold Him Whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and shall in bitterness cry for Him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. Overcome with the burden of guilt, they bow at the foot of the cross before the crucified Mediator. Their soul is filled with sorrow. With mourning they confess and weep over their sins. They abhor themselves in dust and ashes and are filled with shame. So God draws them from the power of darkness into His marvelous light. He breaks the dominion of sin and makes them His subjects. The Father has the hand in this. Christ gave report of this when He said: *“All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me, and he who comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out.”*

No, they do not come of themselves; they do not commence to come of themselves or by the advice of others. He leads their convicted and sentenced souls by His hand to Christ. He enlightens their minds and opens the eyes for His crucified Son. They see Him white and ruddy on the cross. His sweet face and amiable eye rests upon them. His head crowned with thorns nods to them as He says, “This I did

for you, or otherwise you would have had to suffer eternal death.” They are embraced by Christ with the hands pierced by the nails. They are kissed with the kisses of His reconciliation, love, and peace. They die with Him in His death to live with Him through His resurrection. Washed in the blood of this blessed Mediator, they are white as a lily. They have their unclean souls washed and bathed in the five fountains of His crucified body. They have tasted this blessed blood and have eaten of this crucified body. They have drunk from the cup of salvation granted by the hand of the Triune God. Now it is peace. The debt has been paid and the sins are atoned for. He shares the eternal inheritance with them. Oh, sweet cross; oh, blessed Mediator! Oh, sweet blood; oh, my Lord Jesus Christ! Thou art my Goel; my Lord and my God! Nothing can save us but Jesus. Never will this fountain of divine love in Jesus dry up. This is the Blood theology. Blessed is he who may know this by experience.

Lord's Day 7 and 23

We see again and again that ministers pull Lord's Day 7 and 23 apart. They follow the wrong teachings of the embryo theology. God's Word and the Catechism teach us differently. It is incorrect to say that the Son redeems His Church in regeneration (Lord's Day 7) and that the Father acquits them in justification (Lord's Day 23). These are again the new notions of a religious generation. They do not

understand the connection between these two Lord's Days. They also do not understand that the Father acquits them in Christ. This acquittal occurs together with faith. The Father acquits them on account of the merits of Christ. His sacrifice is therefore the valid reason and ground (Rom. 5:9). True faith relies wholly on Christ. God imputes this to them as their righteousness (Rom. 3:24-26). The believer embraces Christ to his salvation, and God justifies him out of grace for the sake of Christ (Rom. 8:1). This justification is an act of acquittal by God (Rom. 8:31-33). The believer knows this through the Holy Spirit and by the declaration of the Gospel (Isa. 40:1). Thus, they are righteous before God *through* or *by* faith in Christ (Rom. 1:17). God imputes to them Christ's righteousness and at once declares them free in Christ, the risen Prince of Life (Rom. 8:34). This is not something that happens later.

Therefore in our circles, it has become an incorrect habit to speak about a revealed Christ in Lord's Day 7 and a granted Christ in Lord's Day 23. It is not a further benefit that is bestowed to only a few. Also the distinction between the "essence" (Lord's Day 7) and the "wellbeing" (Lord's Day 23) received good acceptance in the Reformed circles. God's Word does not acknowledge these teachings with its wide range of distinctions. Lord's Day 7 and Lord's Day 23 are inseparably one. Please read the questions of the Heidelberg Catechism of those Lord's Days and search the confessional documents; you will not find it in those teachings. Besides, even Rev. C. Smits, minister of the Old Reformed Congregation at Hardinxveld-Giessendam, was of this opinion. He said in his exposition on the Catechism: "Actually, Lord's Day 23 teaches exactly the same thing as Lord's Day 7. It is not as sometimes is stated, 'Now you have come to Lord's Day 7 but not yet to Lord's Day 23.' This has totally not been the intention of the authors. In Lord's Day 7, it is proclaimed as the doctrine, but Lord's Day 23 makes it personal: how does it benefit you?"¹⁷⁶ You see: he spoke in the line of the Reformers.

The devil has apparently greatly succeeded to extinguish the light that the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism had for the greater part in the church of the later ages. Man has ignited another light (of reasoning or the intellect) and has travelled the path of own opinions and understandings. In our days, it becomes even darker, as we cannot phantom the strange teachings anymore that we hear in our times. One hardly knows of the teachings of Paul anymore. This is also one of the fruits of error and of the deserting of the pure doctrinal confessions. Man now has a book-faith, a church-faith, stubborn traditions, incorrect dogmas and teachings, briefly said: one's own kind of experiences.

Do you know which line Ursinus followed as he spoke about faith?

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|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. The <i>preparation</i> of faith | Lord's Day 2-6 |
| 2. The <i>necessity</i> of faith | Lord's Day 7 Q. /A. 20 |
| 3. The <i>essence</i> of faith | Lord's Day 7 Q. /A. 21 |
| 4. The <i>ground</i> of faith | Lord's Day 8 Q. /A. 25 |
| 5. The <i>subject</i> of faith | Lord's Day 9-22 (the 12 articles) |
| 6. The <i>fruits</i> of faith | Lord's Day 23 |
| 7. The <i>origin</i> of faith | Lord's Day 25 Q. /A. 65 |
| 8. The <i>leadings</i> of faith | Lord's Day 25 Q. /A. 67 |

Regeneration

With the mind, it is impossible to describe regeneration. The matters that occur there are hidden from natural man. We need the Holy Spirit to receive knowledge in this issue. The Lord Jesus shows that the work of the Holy Spirit is like unto the wind, of which we hear the sound of but do not know where

it comes from and where it goes. Alas, the intellect desires to explain the unexplainable. Comrie also joined in that, and it ended in a Babylonian confusion in deep darkness. You must know that where reason ends, faith begins. It is now not my intention to write much more about regeneration under this heading, because I have covered this at the beginning (regeneration in Scripture, etc.) and at the end (Nicodemus) of this book. But in regards to the order of salvation, we tell you that you need not err if you stay with the Holy Scriptures and our sound confessional documents. These teach us that we are regenerated and justified by faith. In the Heidelberg Catechism, we see, for example, in Lord's Day 3 (question and answer 8) that we, in the part of the discovering of our sins, where the instructor speaks about the knowledge of our misery, that we have not yet been regenerated. He only speaks of salvation then, when we have been regenerated. Thus, once we are delivered from all sin, guilt, and punishment, then we are regenerated. This is clear enough. You notice again that that embryo theory is only foolishness.

When is then the sinner regenerated? We can read that in Lord's Day 7. There the instructor deals with faith. Faith is the key word in the Bible and with our sound old fathers when they speak about our regeneration and justification. Regeneration does not stand alone, as they would have us believe. In Lord's Day 7, the sinner is truly regenerated and justified. God the Holy Spirit works faith in the heart, whereby forgiveness of sins and everlasting righteousness and salvation is granted to the sinner by God. It is not that forgiveness of sin, etc., is not granted until Lord's Day 23, because there the instructor describes what takes place in Lord's Day 7. Immediately, as soon as we believe, our sins are forgiven. For example, think of the cripple at the feet of Jesus. In Lord's Day 7, the instructor does not write about a revealed Christ, Who comes to acquit the sinner at a later stage (in the tribunal of the conscience). But already here, God grants us forgiveness for the sake of the sacrifice of Christ by which He was reconciled. Here (in Lord's Day 7) God declares us free in Christ, the crucified Son of God. Here our guilt is not covered as under a cloud, but it is covered by the blood of Jesus. God will never come back on them. Who teaches otherwise makes the Bible and its doctrine of faith a lie and establishes a self-willed, unbiblical doctrine (including the embryo theology) and arouses God's anger.

Do we think to know it better than God? Now when this regenerated and justified sinner speaks of his faith, he declares to believe in the *forgiveness of sins* with the Twelve Articles. In Lord's Day 21, the believer explains and confesses what he means by having faith in the forgiveness of his sins. Thus he confesses what he believes before the instructor speaks of "justification" in Lord's Day 23. He has already been justified and that, by faith alone. Here the instructor does not begin to speak about a second justification, but he explains the first one. This he does on the basis of Scripture, and because he is not a Roman Catholic. If you want to teach it differently, then you do so contrary to Scripture, and you thereby have a Roman Catholic doctrine. If this explanation about regeneration is still not enough for you, I quote a beautiful expression of Paul in which he mentions regeneration in one sentence, namely: "*To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me.*" (Acts 26:18) Here he explains the whole order of salvation. Pay particular attention to the turning point. It lies in the transition from one to another realm: it is a transition by faith.

Further Benefit?

You can see that God's Word does not describe the experience of the tribunal as a further benefit. Believe me, the Bible and the life of faith do not know of a second justification. The Roman Catholic Church *does* have the doctrine of double justification. This opinion and doctrine, as we have amply

described in this book, is the result of the teachings of scholasticism. That is what Calvin and Luther have forsaken after they had left the Roman Catholic religion, but later scholasticism was brought back again through the backdoor into the house.

We must be careful with all the statements and experiences of people concerning justification. Many have a wrong idea of it. One thinks of a physical working and the other of a transfusion (outpouring) or transmutation (a mutation of one thing into the other). Often people talk about a vision or a mystical experience. We do not want to elaborate on this because it is too difficult and cumbersome to explain this in a few words, but it is certain that it concerns a juridical happening. It has a forensic, a juridical meaning. That is also in line with Scripture: "*Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?*" (Rom. 8:33, 34).

When man is convicted as a guilty one then, by His Spirit, God places his sins in order before his eyes. God becomes his Judge. Man is summoned in his conscience to appear before the holy Judge and comes to realize that he is a child of wrath. He is condemned in his conscience, accused by Satan, and convicted by the Law. All elements of the acquittal of the sinner are there: the sinner in his conviction, the Law in its condemning power, the conscience accused before God, his holy Judge, and Satan as the oppressor of his soul and the accuser before God. There is a burning hell beneath him and a closed heaven above him. God is angry in righteousness and pronounces the verdict. The soul expects its end in eternal misery and accuses and condemns himself before God. He bows himself before the Lord, acknowledges His Name, justifies His righteous judgment, and worships God. Christ intervenes as Surety and requires this soul, for He has purchased him with His blood. God beholds Christ, acquits the sinner, and accepts him to be His child. The soul is born again. Overflowing with the grace and love of God, he sings to the honor and glory of God. That is thus the concept of the tribunal. Christ intervenes as Surety, Who reconciles the sinner with God since the guilt was laid upon Him. He is his heavenly Advocate.

Separate Experience?

If the justification is taken as a separate matter, one divides the issues which go together. We must not forget that the reconciliation with God is also our justification. Justification, in turn, is the same as the obtaining of forgiveness. Justification occurs only once. It happens through Christ and the sacrifice of His blood. Our acquittal is only and always in Christ. The judgment has already been accomplished on the cross. The sword that initially was awakened against man, has struck Him. In His sacrifice, God is satisfied. The righteousness that Christ hereby has thus acquired, He imputes to the sinner in the deadliest moment of time. The sinner receives and embraces Christ with God-given faith. He accepts Him to his salvation. Christ, the Son of God, makes the sinner free, the Father of Christ pronounces him free, and the Holy Spirit declares him to be free. What about sin? - Reconciled. What about the guilt? - Paid. Where is the wrath of God? - Appeased. What follows here? - Peace. What came first? - God's justice. What did the sinner obtain? - Free grace. What are we now? - Truly free, redeemed! "*The LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee.*" (Psalm 116:7). Now what? Pay God your vows and offer Him thanksgiving.

Adoption to Children

From the preceding, we could have already perceived that the adoption to children becomes reality along with our justification. We *were* not His children as the supporters of the embryo theology

suggest, but *become* so by this true new birth. Thus we find it also with Paul when he says: “. . . *that we might receive the adoption of sons.*” (Galatians 4:5b). How am I then a child of God? - First, by election. By that, an enemy becomes a child, and a servant becomes a son. - Secondly, by the good pleasure of God. Out of free grace, God calls the sinner, justifies him through faith in Christ's blood, and sanctifies him and others to a people for Himself, that they may be called God's children. - Thirdly, by the mercy of God. Thereby they are regenerated to a living hope by God's grace. - Fourthly, by ransom through the blood and sacrifice of the Surety on the cross of Golgotha. - Fifthly, by liberation from the chains of the devil. He takes them out of the prison house of this hellish prison guard and delivers them from the bondage of hell. Through His curse, the law no longer rules the ransomed of the Lord. “*If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*” - Sixthly, by justification. He relieves us of guilt and clothes us with Christ's righteousness. In that way, we obtain the forgiveness of sins through His blood. The Father pronounces us free on the grounds of the merits of Christ, His Son. - Finally, we receive the declaration of our adoption to children by the third Person of the divine Being. He is the Spirit of adoption to children whereby we cry, “*Abba, Father.*” In that manner, we become legal heirs of the Kingdom of heaven. He bestows upon us the right of children and grants us free access to the Throne of grace. That right is granted unto us in Christ Jesus, Who has become our Savior in God. We lay declared in His eternal love and have become His child in the time by being acquired through adoption. He is God's only begotten Son, the beloved Son of the Father. There are no others besides Him. We are children through the birth of the Spirit. We are and remain His creatures also in the wonderful state of this blessed childhood. We are children for His sake because of His love, grace, sacrifice, and blood. We are children only by grace. In Christ we are saved through faith which is God's gift. We are children, thanks be only to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

True Peace and Rest

We want to yet briefly consider what the grace of our justification entails. Here on earth we meet with many tribulations and troubles of heart. The wicked often assault us or deliberate our downfall. Then again, we are startled by the temptations of Satan. The corruptions of our hearts give rise to many troubles in our souls. It brings us much unrest and anxiety. Especially the sins are a heavy burden; of this evil, we encounter a great deal of hindrance and a continual strife. In ourselves, we have no defense against this great multitude. Therefore a God-fearing person takes refuge in God. He is ever at the throne of grace to find mercy and help in every time of need. He does so by appealing to God's promise. With an eye upon Christ, he pours out his soul before God. He does not lack boldness as the Lord Himself kindly invites believers to the wells of salvation and to the water of Life. There he obtains true peace for his soul. He rests in God in Whom the Word be praised. He finds rest in His Son in Whose work he may find peace. He obtains rest in the Holy Spirit given to him as Comforter. More than a mother comforts, the Lord comforts His Own. With inner compassion and fatherly mercy, God takes care of their souls. By the staff of His Word and in the power of His Spirit, He leads them to the waters of rest. Thus they are quieted in God for there, He reveals Himself *to* and *in* the soul. “There,” says the soul, “I rely on God, my Refuge and my Fortress; my God in Whom I trust; I am like a weaned child fed from the breasts of consolation.” There the saved sinner is embraced by the loving-kindness of God. Here he is nurtured in the love of God and of His beloved Son. He is caressed by the right hand of God's justice. He is eased by the melody of the holy Word of the Lord. He finds himself embraced in the bosom of God's pleasure and to the breast of the Gospel of Christ. A blissful feeling penetrates into the depths of his soul. It is that of security, safety, and protection. It is the sense of rest, peace and tranquility. It is the blissful feeling of the grace, love, and favor of God. The heart feels itself enlarged and obtains power and strength thereby and becomes as a young hero who runs in battle. The affections are aroused with very great joy in God. It causes him to sing of His mercy. He then

sings rejoicing in God, and he is exuberant in the Savior, Who cannot be thanked according to worthiness. With his whole heart, he shall declare His glory, for the Lord is his Light, his Glory, his Salvation, his Peace, and his Strength in life. Do you, by grace, also know of this, reader? Oh, of course, you notice that all of this is completely different from the teachings of the embryo theology.

Songs of Thanksgiving

We may not forget to express gratitude to God in this writing. We indeed know from what distress and death, God has redeemed us by Christ. In the deadliest moment of time, He has saved our soul and wiped our tears. So we come to say that there is a moment in His anger and a life in His favor. Of one accord, His people must praise His Name, work, and glory. Their iniquity is pardoned, their guilt is blotted out, and they are mercifully relieved of their punishment. This gives them a comforting sense of peace, salvation, and love. God's favor radiates upon their souls, and His grace delights their hearts. God wipes their tears away. Their sorrow heals and their suffering ceases. So the Lord has them to sing of His goodness and truth. Their soul rejoices in God and His salvation. Furthermore, He comforts them with His Son, His Beloved in Whom He is well pleased. He suffered meditorially and died in their stead. Glorious and wonderful was His resurrection to our righteousness. Beyond compare was His triumph over grave, death, and hell. Full of compassion, He spoke to His disciples before His ascension about the coming of God's Spirit. He will never leave nor forsake His own. He will always be with them until the end of the world. His ascension is gladdening and His intercession at the Father's right hand is comforting. How wonderful is His Name and how adorable His majesty and glory. Where shall we stop? Where do we not see Him for our comfort? There is no end because everything of Him is altogether lovely.

Thus it is also with the Holy Spirit. We must not remain a stranger of our regeneration through Him. Through Him, we receive a new heart, spirit, and life. After He has convinced us of sin, righteousness and judgment, He makes us partakers of Christ and all His benefits. He unites us to Him through the gift of saving and justifying faith, by which we are incorporated into Christ. With that, He immediately pours out the love of God into the heart. For our comfort, He teaches us to pray, and He clarifies the Holy Scriptures to us. He breathes life into the soul, so that we learn to sigh and call upon God. He leads us in the path of righteousness and sanctifies our souls for Jesus, our blessed Head, whereof the Church is the body and the believers the members. He enlightens our eyes to see the spiritual things of God's heavenly Kingdom. He gives strength in adversity and solace in temptations and guile of Satan. He assures us that we are children of God and heirs of the Kingdom of God. He abides in us forever. He gives His pledge to us, confirming that the work of God in us is the truth and that this will not be taken away from us but that it shall be perfected and finished.

The Holy Walk

The communion with God in love expresses itself in a holy walk. After reconciliation with God, the Lord invites to a new life seen in a humble walk with God. This should be observed by the fallen sinner as the most valuable of all that he knows as pleasure. What do we need to keep in mind? Well, that God is holy. He instructs us, "*Be holy, for I am holy.*" Therefore seek Him for your sanctification, which is brought about by His Spirit. Furthermore, we must also keep in mind that God is just and deals righteously. This He also requires of His people. They ought to purge their hearts of evil and do justice to their neighbors. This is only possible through faith in Christ, through Whom God justifies the ungodly. Out of Him, you must be justified in Christ in order to be righteous before God. And then

they will act and walk uprightly as God is just and does righteously. And he that is righteous, let him be righteous still, in regards to the life of sanctification. The children of God must experience this in their spiritual poverty as their new obedience to God is but weak and imperfect. They must continually be cleansed by the blood and Spirit of Christ. This will cause them to be cautious in all in their doings before God and man. They cannot take things lightly, knowing themselves placed before the face of the holy Covenant Jehovah. They take care in their duty when approaching God. They thoughtfully walk before Him in their words and deeds. They must ensure that no separation is caused by their sinful wrongdoings. Therefore pride must be kept afar off. Indifference does not fit in the life and walk with God. The heart is tender and caring towards this solemn duty. If they desire to find themselves by grace in the bosom of God, then they must be humble and lowly. Therefore they ought to prepare themselves for such a walk with God. They must always be inclined to think of Him for the meditation of Him is sweet. They should constantly need and invite Him for it is His coming that perfects their salvation. If He tarries to come, they must wait for Him patiently, awaiting Him with all prayer and supplication. In that way, they give evidence of His companionship to be of highest value for them. It expresses the strong desire for God and His communion.

Therefore, plead the Holy Spirit if He will blow upon your garden that thy Beloved may come to your garden. God always comes in Christ and never otherwise than *in* Christ, or it must be in His fierce wrath and vindictive justice. Oh, there are so many misconceptions in our days! They think to be able to meet God outside of Christ. One thinks himself born again without having acquired a reconciled God in Christ. What a serious mistake occurs here and what great disappointments shall one meet with if God does not intervene from His side! Think again of the embryo theology. It stems from gross ignorance and the guile of Satan to obscure the truth for the soul and to hold him in this fallacy. Now it goes this way: "Yes, but the one says this, and the other teaches it that way," but God will say: "*Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched, for I never knew you!*"

True Liberty

Now we want to see what the liberty of the children of God comprises, and how it must be preserved. Paul comments on this in Galatians 5:1: "*Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*" By now, reader, you can know that God has delivered His own from all slavish bonds by a strong Hand. What does the apostle now say to believers who stand in the liberty of the children of God? He admonishes them to not lose that freedom. They must remain standing in the liberty by which Christ has made them free. They must not allow themselves to be brought back into bondage by other people, ministers, or themselves. They must not fall back into the law. They must take care to not forget the great and glorious grace and works of their Savior. He is their dear Friend. Delight yourself in His atoning work. Rejoice in His salvation. Marvel about your liberty. Never give it up. Glorify your King. Live in this liberty. Take a deep breath and look freely around you. Take no cause in your liberty to sin. Do not be lawless, but walk in the love to God and to your neighbor. You may not abuse your liberty. Do not be harsh or moody, but be meek and humble. We are called to glory in Christ Jesus and to not place our trust in flesh. We want to encourage others to fear the Lord and to believe in the Name of the Son of God. We take pleasure in walking with God, in observing His service, and in following Christ, the Lamb, wherever it pleases Him.

What does this mean to stand in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free? It means that you may freely use the heavenly Book of the law. It is that precious Word of God that we call the Bible. You

receive from God the entitlement to make unlimited use of all of God's promises; they are for you, in Christ, yea and amen. They give you a lot of encouragement in your soul struggles and sorrows. This liberty renders you a welcome guest at the Lord's Table. The Master is there and He is calling you to the communion of His love. He grants you all the freedom to come to the throne of grace at any hour or at any other time. Cast all your cares there upon the Lord, for He cares for you. None of your requests will He turn down and no prayer shall He reject. Seek to see your daily sins forgiven by Him, for Christ's sake. Plead upon His promises. Ask of Him for His blessings. Receive vigor in temptations and obtain strength in tribulation. You may draw near in the darkest night of your misery. You find solace in the midst of the worst troubles. You become quenched in your most intense thirst. You find shade in the blazing heat of the desert of this world. Take advantage of this liberty, for you have obtained the right of children. You are an heir of God through Jesus Christ. Wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption have become yours in Christ. God has set you free in Himself and out of mere grace. He gave you the liberty to be free in Him. He granted you His Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Therefore stand in this your liberty.

Baptism and the Covenant

We have already shown that our regeneration has everything to do with Baptism. Baptism is the bathwater of our regeneration. In this way, God establishes a covenant of grace with us. Reader, it is necessary for us that we actually enter into the covenant of grace. Ursinus teaches us that this covenant is the communion between God and true believers which is grounded in the reconciliation through Christ. Guido de Brès points out to us that all who are in the covenant of grace share in the goods of salvation. With Ralph Erskine we can say here that it concerns the members of the invisible Church who, out of mere grace, receive great and many privileges of the Lord. These goods are only appropriated to the citizens of the city of God, for no one has a right to it than he or she who is a fellow citizen with the saints and of the household of God (Eph. 2:19). Erskine clarifies that the Prince of Peace is the Lord of the city of God, of which His subjects are the believers and His people the inhabitants. They are all like their King Who lives in the midst of that city, for they have been transformed according to His image. He has made His Church glorious because He has bestowed unmerited honor upon them. So here on earth, they already have peace in their conscience.

Erskine says so beautifully that they have access to the King's Table, and that they receive a hearing with their Prince without the troublesome waiting in the court, as it takes place in the world. Paul says that we in Christ, if we have been incorporated into Him, have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him (Ephesians 3:12). We obtain the liberty to speak from Him, and may lay our hearts open before Him in the duty of prayer and thanksgiving. We thus have the liberty to approach God as our Father with childlike boldness and without slavish fear. We practice a well-grounded assurance that our persons and our doings are accepted by God. To say it briefly with Erskine, we have the privilege of an indisputable entitlement to the city of the New Jerusalem above. Every true citizen receives letters of leadership from his Prince. Neither death nor hell can hinder their way. They have their King's passport and therefore, they will press forward. They are "*blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ*". (Ephesians 1:3). So not only with temporary blessings or outward privileges but also with spiritual blessings.¹⁷⁷

Good Works

We will continue this order of salvation with a few words about good works. Paul says so clearly: "*For*

we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10). The saved sinner is thus a true believer; he is the workmanship of God. Here we speak of the new birth from God, of the renewed man who is recreated in the image of God. This is called a second or new creation in God's Word. Good works are then necessarily the fruit of regeneration. God has not called us unto uncleanness but unto sanctification. The liberty, in which God places His Church, may not be misused for occasions for the flesh. All the more, we must serve one another in love. We know with the apostle Paul, that in ourselves we are imperfect. He followed after, if that he may apprehend that for which also he is apprehended of Christ Jesus. But he also knew that God is able to make all grace abound in His people, so that they may be abundant in everything to every good work.

In that way, God will reward every one according to his work. They obtain eternal life, who seek it with perseverance in well doing, glory and honor, and immortality. By faith, their works are pleasing to God in Christ Jesus. In Him, they bear fruit and increase in the knowledge of God, in Whom is life eternal. God has prepared His Church hereto. They are the vessels of His mercy. He wrote His laws into their mind. He imprinted the indelible letters of His commandment of love in their hearts, written by the pencil of the Holy Spirit. God makes His will known by His Word. He teaches their hearts by His Spirit. By faith they follow after Him. Only in that way do they walk in the light of the divine Countenance. God is the Author but also the Finisher of their faith. They receive what is granted by Him. This applies not only to justification, which takes place by faith, but also to sanctification without which no one can see God. Thus the righteous shall live by faith. This faith draws from the fullness of Christ. Out of Him, they receive what they do not find in themselves. So they learn to not walk after the flesh but in the Spirit. They hate sin. In Christ, they are reconciled with God. Through His blood, they are justified. Through His death is their life. From His life, they obtain their strength. In this way, they shall walk in newness of life. This cannot be but to the honor and glory of God.

Sanctification

Although I have already written about the good works and the walk with God, I still want to point out sanctification separately once more. This topic usually gets (too) little attention. This also needs to take a place in the lives of God's people. We must not be conformed to the world. (Romans 12:1). We must live godly lives and devote our hearts to the Lord in love. We must not hesitate to sacrifice ourselves as a well-pleasing sacrifice to Him. Especially in the embryo circles, it is mainly about the so-called beginning of life. If you would ask how one comes to Christ, then that is strange to them. They remain caught up in emotions and convictions. These are so broadly conversed, that they no longer seem to know about the practical godly life as proclaimed by Paul and described above. I also notice that during the sermons.

If I speak of tears and repentance, they still recognize that; but if I speak about life with Christ in sanctification, the exercises of the Spirit and of faith, then they do not know it anymore. And on top of that, the embryo doctrine places sanctification before justification, therefore they believe they can already live before God outside of being justified. I call that only self-improvement. They live in convictions outside of Christ; they feel born again but not yet justified. Thus that would mean that not a *sinner* but a "regenerated" one must be justified. Such a concept is contrary to Scripture. Only through justification does a soul become righteous before God. He teaches him to live in holiness, for otherwise, they attempt to be justified by the works of the law. The man who does these things is still under the law and not under grace. The Lord must first cut him off from his works and life and only then, is he incorporated into Christ and he, as a sinner, becomes righteous before God through faith in

Jesus. He is therefore not justified as a born-again or half converted one but as an ungodly man.

Oh, the great confusion is all caused by us not knowing anymore what our fathers have taught. The experiential life has come to stand on its own and has been exalted to be truth. One imitates the other and holds it for the truth while sometimes it is not, which is why God's people end up in confusion and darkness. It is essential to hold fast to the true doctrine. God's Word is the truth and from that comes our experiences.

Key Issues in the Bible

After mentioning and reading all these things, it is good to make a short summary. You must be aware that in this line certain things coincide, but it seems helpful to mention them separately. The error has often been that man started to distinguish these matters on their own. Opinions were divided on this, which even led them to quarrel about it. Alas, those uncircumcised hearts have often been contentious with each other about it. But God's Word is the end of all contradiction; that Word is the guidance of our life; that Word never fails. In that Word, we see written:

The external calling by means of God's Word (Isaiah 53:1; Matthew 23:37; Romans 10:17; 2 Cor. 5:11; Gal. 3:2, 5; Heb 2:3)

What does God work in the heart of the sinner when he is *still under the law*? (Ps 33:9; Jer. 23:29; Rom. 6:15-23)

In this work of conviction, we pay attention to the three Persons in the Godhead, namely, the work of the Son - the Word (see 1 and 2), the work of the Holy Spirit (see 3 and 4), and the work of the Father (see 5).

1. The divine halting of the sinner on the broad way to eternity (Acts 9:4)
2. The awakening from his deep sleep of death (Luke 15:17-19; John 11:43; Eph. 5:14)
3. The opening of the eyes (Gen. 3:7; Acts 26:18).
4. The conviction of sin before a holy and righteous God (Acts 2:37; John 16:8)
 - * Knowledge of God (Isaiah 6:5)
 - * Knowledge of misery (Lam. 3:1; Heb 12:6);
 - * Knowledge of self (Jer. 17:9)
5. The way leading to Christ. (Isaiah 55:6, 7; Luke 15:17-20; John 6:35, 38, 65) By the means of the above mentioned matters, the Lord has the sinner come to Christ. It can also be called:
 - *The drawing love of the Father (Hos. 2:13; 11:4; John 6:37, 44; Col. 1:13);
 - * The sorrowing after God, (Matt. 11:28; 21:32; Jer. 31:9; 2 Cor. 7:10);
 - * The cutting off of everything which is not God and Christ (Luke 9:24; Rom 9:28; John 15).

The sinner now comes *under grace*. (Rom. 6:15; Gal 5:18)

1. The internal calling by God's Word and Spirit. (Matt. 11:28; Romans 10:17; Rom 11:29) This calling is hidden (John 3:8) in the external calling and is expressed as:
2. The gift of faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8; John 3:14-16); Phil. 1:29) by which we:
 - * are consciously incorporated into Him (Ps. 110:3; Rom. 11:24; John 15);
 - * are consciously born again (John 1:12, 13);

- * are saved (Mark 16:16; Eph 2:8);
 - * are justified (Rom. 5:1);
 - * are quickened (John 5:25; Col. 2:13; Eph. 2:1, 5etc.), because “*this life is in His Son.*” (1 John 5:11) and “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” (vs.12);
 - * know God in a saving way because “*He that loveth is born of God and knows God.*” (1 John 4:7; also see 2 Cor. 4:6);
 - * are a new creation because, “*If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.*” (2 Cor. 5:17);
3. The adoption to children (Rom. 8:15, 16)
 4. The sanctification (2 Cor. 7:10; Hebr. 12:14)
 5. The glorification (Rom. 8:17-23; Rev. 21:9-11, etc.).

Here God's Church may lawfully say with Paul: “*But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*” (1 Cor. 1:30, 31)

We are aware that in a summary like this, some comments could be made. We have already indicated that several issues of faith coincide. They should not be strictly separated from each other. Yet, this summary fulfills my purpose. We want to give the people an impression of the order in which God grants faith and salvation. Also the expression of “way leading to Christ” may be a bit erroneous. But the essence is clear. We see that the Lord leads us to Christ by His beloved Spirit and to the way of true conversion through faith in Him. “*For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry: ‘Abba, Father.’*” (Rom. 8:15). He is also called “*the Spirit of faith.*” (2 Cor. 4:13)

So, where should we place godly sorrow? The authors of the marginal notes consider this sorrow a fruit of justifying faith and not a work of the law. Yet they mention the parable of the lost son in a text proving their point. This was reason enough for me to put this theme also under the heading: “Under the law”. It is actually on the border of both.

For further study, we can take the exposition of Calvin on 2 Cor. 7:10. From him, you can see expressed what we have written on pg. 159 and 160 under the heading “*Godly sorrow*”. Calvin says that this sorrow is caused by fear of Gods judgment (see also James 4:9, 10). He says that Paul calls this sorrow the cause of conversion. From knowledge of sin, we become very sorrowful. According to Calvin, the conversion begins with sorrow which improves the heart of man and which finally renews his mind. He praises this sorrow because of the fruit which it brings forth: salvation. The Lord works it, that we being renewed by conversion shall also be delivered from the bondage of sin. Being justified by faith, we will also be delivered from our curse.

Finally, we have given you a short overview of the ways of the Lord with His people. If you compare this with the so-called order of salvation of the embryo theology, then you will see very big differences. Do not get entangled in that. O youth, young people, you are forming the new generation for the future. You stand exposed to all kinds of temptations. Hold on to the order of salvation of the blood theology. Let us speak and preach in a biblical way.

Chapter 15

Preaching of Salvation

Thankfully, there have been a number of preachers in the past centuries who let us hear the pure sounds of the Gospel of truth: the pure preaching of salvation. - Preachers who were not infected with the embryo philosophy. It is impossible to give them all a voice in this book, but we want to mention a few. - Ministers with a special message for the church of the Netherlands and abroad. - A testimony that we should not forget.

Rev. L.G.C. Ledebøer (1808-1863)

The doctrine of Rev. Ledebøer was adhered to by ministers of the Old Reformed Congregations amongst others. Although he has not compiled a dogma, he did make some statements about the doctrine of regeneration. In line with the old fathers, he taught on the basis of God's Word that regeneration is not separated from the reconciliation with God.¹⁷⁸ According to him it is not only the doctrine but also a lively experience. Therefore, we would now like to give an example of how God changes a dead, sinful, hostile man into a quickened man. In that disputable doctrine of the churches mentioned previously, a human being is according to their misconception first quickened (Lord's Day 3), then Christ is revealed to him (Lord's Day 7) and finally he is also justified (Lord's Day 23). The latter, they no longer consider necessary. He has already been somewhat saved, because Christ has previously revealed Himself to him. But he does, however, still need to seek for justification. Ledebøer had great difficulty with this doctrine (or rather, he abhorred it). He gave evidence of this in his introduction to the letter about *The Justification of Sinners before God*. Therein it becomes apparent that he felt great resistance to the view of Rev. C. van den Oever (in line with Rev. E. Fransen and Dr. C. Steenblok, etc.) on this subject.¹⁷⁹ He had not spoken openly about it out of fear, yet he could not unite himself with Rev. van den Oever. Van den Oever wrote him, if he would want to write a bit more about this topic, but Rev. Ledebøer did not want to go into that. Ledebøer did not have much to do with those *opinions and thoughts* of people. He remained faithful to God's Word. What concerns this matter, he expressed the ground pillar of that with which the church stands or falls, namely, the justification by faith. The following is his answer to a question on this subject:

“You have *asked me* in a letter about the justification of the sinner before God, *whether it occurs by faith alone*. Here the question may be threefold: first, what the Word says about it; secondly, what I have preached about it; and thirdly, what my personal experience is. If all these three things do not agree together, then the last two are rubble from hell and the work of Satan, however beautifully imitated, as the wolves mimic the voice of the shepherds so as to lure the sheep.”

This tells us enough. Take heed - take lessons from this. The differences amongst the separatists were radical and profound. Alas, we do not see these differences any more. The influence of the embryo theology is so strong, that even the Old Reformed Congregations are threatened to be immersed in it. Oh, if they go along with the doctrine of the embryo coalition, then they are finished. Then they will be unworthy of the name of the church of the Reformation.

Hear now how Ledebouer experienced the matter of the justification of the ungodly before God. We pay particular attention to the turning point and think of Lord's Day 33, which deals with true conversion. He writes:

“Now we do not speak of the length of the period one can remain in one or the other - God is free therein, as He is in everything - even not specifically in the distress and anguish of the sinner, which can be a longer time for the one or the other, or even one can delude himself with false imaginations, although always driven out of it again in the Lord's own time. There shall once come a time when he is brought to the end of everything; he becomes enclosed and all the more burdened and anguished (I speak from experience) as a city besieged and starved, no deliverance, help or counsel from anywhere. Nothing gives satisfaction for him; everything falls away in which he has sought life in. There a way of deliverance is pointed out to him, that door of hope in the valley of Achor (which means: fear and distress), a Way outside of himself. Another must intercede for him and fill the eternal breach. There come promises, openings, and hope of salvation at times in the soul as lightning in the night, but he lies down powerless. Discoveries, comfort in those openings, thoughts of salvation, this must be further granted to him. The Spirit bloweth (oh yes!) where it listeth. It becomes wholly night for him. The law goes through bone and marrow and through the thoughts and intents of the heart; he is stands guilty in everything. He must perish if no deliverance comes.”

“Now, that must be experienced and cannot be described. It lasts as long as it pleases the Lord until, with the publican, his heart is broken. His frame of soul is detained, obstructed and then falls from him where he believes to be perishing, literally dying to everything in that moment.”

“There life comes into death; Christ reveals Himself to his soul. Incomprehensible, indescribable, a new heaven, a new earth, a new heart, a new life, new eyes, everything around him, in him, above him, in a new affection, completely new! They rejoice in heaven, *"a child is born"*, or rather as that is experienced by the soul, there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents. He has become partaker of a new divine nature. He can and must say Father in Christ; his sins are forgiven him. For the first time, he praises, shouts, extols and thanks; he receives the new white stone with the new name written on it as a pledge and evidence. The whole Bible is an open book for him; God's people are his people, all is granted to him. His heart, ear and mouth, soul and innards, intellect, desires and wishes, passions and affections all go directly out to the blood-Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. That Name, he learns to understand. Yes, I declare, he has been raised up with Christ and has become heir of eternal life and has become partaker of the inheritance of the saints in the light. His life and death are above. As timid as he was, so bold he now is. It is now all praise and thanksgiving and singing of psalms; faith reveals itself in love and hope. Oh yes! Faith is already flowing, hope possesses, and love sometimes causes him to succumb. Sorrow has been changed into joy, and the garment of praise he has been granted instead of a distressed spirit. Instead of a thorn, a fir tree has gone up. The Spirit witnesses with his own spirit that he has become a child of God.”

Rev. Th. van der Groe (1705-1784)

In comparison with the teachings of Comrie and his embryo thoughts, we can confidently say that now

we can breathe again. We have now arrived at Van der Groe - a unique individual in the last days of the Further Reformation who has maintained the principal theme of the Reformers, namely, that the essence of faith is inseparably connected with assurance. Here we again hear the language of the Bible. When reading his books, you immediately sense that you are on the right track. Scripture and its simplicity are distinctively apparent again. In as much as we are familiar with the doctrine of the Reformation, we immediately notice that this minister is in line with our old theologians. Vigilant as he was, he even noticed the smaller differences and for that reason, he raised his warning voice against all deviations in the doctrine of truth which had then already sprouted up everywhere. How clearly he teaches us that we need to know ourselves as lost in order to be saved. This knowledge of our lost state is a fruit of the preaching of the law.¹⁸⁰ According to him, Christ must become necessary for us.

It does not stop there for we must let go of everything and we must lose everything for His sake. Thus it comes to a complete submission to Him. There can never be rest for the soul before we consciously believe in Him.¹⁸¹ We read from him that the knowledge of Christ precedes the union with Christ. For how can we have faith in Him, if we do not first know Him? By nature, however, we are blind for Him. The root of the matter is that we do not know that He is there. Therefore, Christ must be revealed to the soul so we can behold Him with the enlightened eyes of our understanding. This knowledge then ignites the assurance of faith in Christ. Thereby it is evident that it is the true saving knowledge.

There is thus an essential difference between the saving knowledge and the dead, false, contemplating knowledge. In true knowledge, man dies to himself. If there is no living knowledge, one indeed never shall come to accept Christ or it must be a hypocritical accepting which is not preceded by knowledge of the lost state. Precisely there where man comes to nothing, Christ becomes everything. That "Christ is all and Christ is it alone" has a deep reforming effect according to Van der Groe. This is evident when he speaks about the exercises of faith concerning the offices of Christ and the natures and states of Christ. In Christ, the soul finds rest. Therefore, faith will abide the longest in Christ. And they are the best preachers who have no other subject but Christ.¹⁸²

Just as the Reformers, Van der Groe strongly emphasizes the assurance of faith. According to God's Word and the experience of saints, he calls the first substantial grace that God grants in the calling, the union with Christ by faith. The nature of this union with Christ is assurance. There is no faith outside of the union with Christ and there is no union with Christ without assurance.¹⁸³

This is totally opposite to what Comrie and especially his followers teach. I tell you that it is not without reason that those, who truly read God's Word, along with Augustine and the ministers of the Reformation, can no longer bear the food they are offered containing the leaven of presumed regeneration. But for those who so gladly prefer to stand on this deceptive ground, it is as sweet cake for them.

Thus we clearly see in this respect, that Van der Groe went a different direction than Comrie. Comrie has also emphasized the union with Christ but connected it to his construction of *habitus and actus fidei*. Van der Groe who did not think philosophically at all was much more concerned about the act of faith. He did speak about a habitual ground principle of faith which is the reason that the believer never comes to despair. A few times, he has also mentioned the seed of faith¹⁸⁴ which precedes conversion, but these aspects hardly ever appear in the whole of his perception of faith. The main point is the conscious union of faith with Christ.

That is why regeneration also arises out of this uniting by faith with Christ and therefore follows faith.

The regenerated man is the new creature in Christ. Hereby regeneration stands close to justification. Both are out of Christ, the one actual, the other by imputation but both are through faith.¹⁸⁵ Regeneration and sanctification are also closely connected, as conversion is an all-inclusive term used by Van der Groe in which everything is summarized - conviction of sin, union with Christ, and peace with God.¹⁸⁶

Besides, Van der Groe stated in his edition, *Het oprecht en zielzaligend geloove (The Upright and Soul-saving Faith)* that he respected theologians like Schortinghuis, Brakel, Koelman, Van der Kemp, Hellenbroek and Verschuur, "But the old theologians as Luther and Calvin, Teellinck, and Van Lodenstein, weighed a few pounds more for him."¹⁸⁷

Rev. J.P. Paauwe (1872-1956)

Among those who preached God's truth purely was also Rev. J.P. Paauwe. He was someone who raised his voice against everything that was erroneously taught in the churches. He was a man who said with Luther, "I was taught that justification is at the end. But God teaches us that it is found at the beginning." So much came up against this. He once mentioned something about it, "Someone once wrote me a letter in which he supported the so-called, as it is expressed, the concerned Church. I have answered this letter in the following manner: 'You want to speak to me about these things? I am willing to do this but on one condition that you must bring along one book. One book is sufficient (of a minister with high regard) in which you find your views defended.' He came at the appointed time. I asked, 'Where is the book?' 'I do not have any.' 'Have not found any? And then you still dare to come to me?' The interview was soon finished."¹⁸⁸

Rev. Paauwe has spoken clearly about regeneration. We would gladly have you read it. What did Rev. Paauwe say? Compare it with the quotes out of Scripture along with the marginal notes which we have cited for you in the first chapters. He calls regeneration the distinguishing mark of justification.

"God grants in Christ to the elected called sinner three benefits. He does grant him more but before everything else, He grants him three benefits. The first is forgiveness of sins, the blotting out of the guilt. The second benefit that God in Christ grants the sinner, who is called, is the right to eternal life. - The right to temporal, spiritual, and eternal life. With these two benefits, it does not remain. God grants yet a third benefit, and that is regeneration. And because regeneration (not concerning time but concerning the order) is the third blessing, therefore it is the mark of justification, the sign of the forgiveness of sins and the right to eternal life. Therefore, it is impossible that regeneration would precede justification. But even equally impossible it is that someone would be justified without being a partaker of regeneration. Regeneration is the mark of justification. That is why the apostle Paul says (if you would like to you can look up the marginal notes yourself): *'There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.'* From this we conclude that justification, along with regeneration or the renewal, follows the uniting with Christ."¹⁸⁹

Rev. E. du Marchie van Voorthuysen (1901-1986)

The doctrine of the Reformation is, of course, also the doctrine of the re-reforming. We find this also expressed so earnestly by Rev. E. du Marchie van Voorthuysen. After he had been in the Christian

Reformed Churches, he joined the Old Reformed Congregations in the Netherlands. We see him with his doctrine in line with the Reformation. Therefore we also would like to hear what he has to say about regeneration. Some of you might still know him as a man who was viewed by many to be too radical. However, if you encounter the placid religion of the churches then such a demeanor becomes very well explainable and understandable. The background plays a major role in this. If you stood in the former Reformed Church, then you had to stand against the Remonstrant doctrines. Are you among the Papists, then you must strive with Pelagianism. If you belong to the separated churches, then you will need to take the sword of the truth against those who advocate the embryo doctrine. Also for this reason we want to hear a portion by Rev. Du Marchie van Voorthuysen. You will notice that it directly contradicts the embryo theology and that it is rejected in all parts by him. Well educated as he was, he states:

“Kuyper taught presumed regeneration. In our times, the doctrine of presumed justification is pushed. And that not only in the Reformed Churches; no, you find it in the right wing of the so called stricter congregations. There you can be cut off from Adam without realizing it; there you can be incorporated into Christ without even being aware of it. Without your knowledge, you are quickened in Christ. I cannot believe it; I do not *want* to believe it! If it would be possible that a woman would give birth to a child without pain and without her knowledge; if she would give birth to a child without feeling anything, then you can come again to talk about it. But then I *still* will not believe it!”

“Where do you read about an unconscious transition into Christ? Where have the Reformers taught that? I do not ask where it *is* taught, but I only ask where the Reformers have taught it. Where can you find it in the confessional documents? Where is it in the Catechism? Do you know what is in the Catechism? That there are three things necessary to know to live and die comforted. - Three things, not three conditions. *That* is the only comfort.”¹⁹⁰

Concerning these three things, I would like to point out to you that the embryo theologians also herein do not follow the *Heidelberg Catechism*. They state that instead of three, there are actually five things needed to know in order to be saved. One starts with regeneration in the narrow sense, then follows knowledge of misery, then the revelation of Jesus, then justification, and finally gratitude. In their theology, they usually do not get further than the first three things; the last two are hardly ever mentioned. Oh, the ditch, the ditch, the ditch! Readers, watch out for the ditch! (Matt.15: 14; Luke 6:39)

Dr. H.F. Kohlbrugge (1803-1875)

We will conclude this list with something from the book, *Leer des heils* (Doctrine of Salvation), in which Dr. H.F. Kohlbrugge talks about regeneration in question and answer form. Kohlbrugge was dismissed as Reformed-Lutheran proponent because he had accused a minister of remonstrantism. Despite repeated requests, he was not admitted to the Reformed Church even though he was a graduate. In 1848, he became a minister of the Niederländisch-Reformierte Gemeinde at Elberfeld. This sorely tried preacher has exerted considerable influence from Germany and especially also in the Netherlands. His sermons are still gladly read in the worship services. In the mentioned booklet, we read:

- Question 315: *With respect to this truth, how is it with him who believes in Christ?*
Answer: He takes it in that manner that the old man has been laid down and that he has put on the new man.
- Question 316: *When has this actually happened?*

- Answer: In the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ in which He brought everything back to God and restored all that was spoiled through our fault, after we had fallen away from God.
- Question 317: *When does man partake of the fruit of this work?*
- Answer: Although the salvation of Christ is present for us, yet, a certain point of time will come in our lives, when we are translated into this salvation by the Spirit of faith and pass from death into life. That is the whole conversion of a man which makes him to be satisfied with the righteousness of God, a conversion, which is also called *regeneration*.¹⁹¹
- Question 318: *Who works this regeneration?*
- Answer: God, through the imparting of the Spirit of Christ.¹⁹²
- Question 319: *What is the means which God uses for that purpose?*
- Answer: The word of His grace which I may believe just then, when I no longer find ground under my feet, also, no life in my own hands, and heaven above me is closed, as it is written: *“Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money.”* (Isaiah 52:3)
- Question 320: *What is the mark of your regeneration?*
- Answer: That I fear my God, honor and love my neighbor, comfort myself not with my regeneration but with the eternal faithfulness and mercy of God.

It will be clear that this doctrine is the doctrine of the Reformation. No, Kohlbrugge did not teach embryo philosophy. Let us return to this doctrine of the Reformation. Oh, please, do not remain in the deception of that embryo theology and all that goes along with it. In that theology, they hold the dead for living out of love for the so-called concerned souls and at the same time, they murder those who are truly alive. Ministers, stop proclaiming such things! You have always heard it that way and have been taught it, but let it go and teach the congregation the old tried and tested truth according to the fear of the Lord. No longer imitate the ministers but be nourished and strengthened by the Word which speaks to us of free grace. Through the Holy Spirit, you will find the truth and walk in the truth.

A Lesson from Kohlbrugge

I want to continue this chapter with a testimony of Kohlbrugge. Let us listen to an excerpt from his biography. This preacher, who was banned out of the Reformed Church, received an invitation from Brummelkamp to join the separatists. Now pay due attention to the answer: Kohlbrugge pointed out to Brummelkamp that he had had personal association with them before the separation but that the separatists had ended this contact. “I always stayed home to serve every one with the Word of the Lord and with the consolations with which the Lord comforted me. They have all left me, the one after the other, offended by that Word.” Kohlbrugge’s preaching was obviously different from that of the separatists. His well-known series of sermons from Romans 7 and especially his so called “comma sermon” on verse 14 had not gone over well with the separatists: *“For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.”* (It concerned the comma after the word “carnal”). Da Costa had even called him an antinomian. But the Lord had shown Kohlbrugge that “precisely those, who spoke the most of the righteousness of Christ, were those who came so little to the righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel of the Anointed.” He accused them that “they believed to build a temple for the Lord but instead, put them aside who testified of the righteousness according to the will of God and according to His holy charge.” What did Kohlbrugge therefore write about the separated, who had departed from God’s Word on this point? I ask you again: pay due attention!

“Speak to those men, Brummelkamp! Speak to these men, the Word of the Lord:

1. The field on which, and the sower by whom the separation was first sown, and the way it was sown, are accursed by the Lord of Hosts, the strong and mighty God, Who will not be mocked in His testimony, Who lives with him of a broken and a contrite heart and who trembles before His word (. . .).

2. The doctrine of your church is not the doctrine of Christ, is not a walking in the Spirit, but after the flesh; and the spirit, which has gone out among you, is a spirit of falsehood in the mouth of all thy prophets, and your work has not been found full before God, but ye people have left the law of the Lord and run after gods that are no gods, but Baäl (Peors). (. . .)

Disband the whole separated church as such; subject yourselves to the doctrine of Christ in truth. Put away that gospel, that Jesus, that spirit from among you, which ye have because it is not the gospel of the all-blessed God.

And in as far as ye are ministers of these congregations, go and resign yourselves and study the Word of the Lord and submit yourself to His testimonies. But as surely as the Lord lives, the way you are now teaching and working and being occupied, ye are not His apostles but you deceive yourself and others and are deceived by doctrines which have an appearance of truth, but it will not give you confidence before the Lord when He shall be revealed to the true witnesses.”

Besides, even Rev. Kersten has accused Kohlbrugge of false opinions of the sanctification. In his dogma, he had allocated more than one page for this. “Kohlbrugge (. . .) paid too little attention to it, that the regenerated is converted to God by the power of the Holy Spirit and practices His commandments.” It is just the question of what is meant by “the regenerated”. Kohlbrugge had understood it well but he was still condemned. So it still happens now. Those who bring a pure doctrine are placed on the spiritual scaffold and beheaded. You have, in fact, been able to read in the conclusions of Rev. Van den Brink (see p.111-113) how far Rev. Kersten himself had gone astray from the doctrine of the Reformation and also even from the teachings of Comrie.¹⁹³

(Decayed) Churches

Kohlbrugge considered the Elberfeld church as an emergency measure, and also Rev. Ledeboer had thus seen it. But the separatists had not listened to Kohlbrugge. They have continued to build their own churches and sum up their teachings in their own doctrinal standards. With Kohlbrugge it referred to Romans 7, but nowadays, what do the separatists say about Romans 6, for example, of the steps in regeneration? Who still preaches like the authors of the marginal notes? (See chapter 3 of this book). You can make up the application; it is really not that difficult. And what has become of the separatists after more than 150 years?

a. The *Reformed Churches* (the churches of Kuyper, a great monopoly at the time) have completely left the truth. A pen cannot describe what eventually took place in those churches. They have merged with the Protestant Church of the Netherlands, a church without a sound confession. Embryo doctrine: everyone is a presumed believer on the one hand, or everyone is presumed regenerated on the other hand.

b. We also see that the *Free Reformed Churches* established in 1944, have left the truth. They have their own denominations, their own organizations, their own political party, private schools; they called themselves the true church, patted themselves on the back, but what is left of it? Officially, nothing!

c. In the sixties, a conflict erupted in this denomination amongst other things, about the binding

of the confessional documents established in the form which was required by office bearers who signed it. This led to the establishment of the Independent Free Reformed Churches in 1970, at present called the *Netherlands Reformed Churches*. What is left of the truth there? Of the old, tried and tested doctrine of the fathers? Do you know? Church after church has fallen away. That process does not stop!

d. Compare also the *Christian Reformed Churches* of nowadays to sixty years ago. What is left of them? - Also almost nothing. The one part works together with the *Netherlands Reformed Churches*, another part with the *Restored Reformed Church*, yet another group with the *Free Reformed Churches* and the rest is hopelessly divided. Where does one still read Van der Groe? - And Shepard? Almost everyone is a child of the Covenant. Whole groups of confession catechism students come to the Covenant Table, presuming to be converted by virtue of only making a public confession.

e. Now the final churches yet of the (*Old*) *Reformed Congregations (in the Netherlands)*. The embryo theology is not much better than the doctrine of the covenant children: converted with some convictions, regenerated without faith, justified from eternity. We do believe that God preserves His Church. There will always be a remnant according to the election of grace. Witnesses among the ministers will also not be lacking. There will always be one who raises his voice to warn the people about their transgressions. In general, however, the churches have come to a state like the church of the Old Testament. Before and after the exile until the coming of Christ, this church was idolatrous, full of sectarianism, whore-like, and fallen from grace.

In our days, the true life out of God seems to have almost vanished. God's faithful servants are few and God's children have become liken to earthen vessels. In as far as there is still some orthodoxy, we lack the knowledge, love, and fear of God. This is reflected in the desecration of the Lord's Day and of both sacraments. Even the ministers of the Reformed denominations use the Lord's Day to hurry from one place to another. They travel over land and sea to make one proselyte. Their sermons (embryo) are adapted to the taste of the public, either "heavy" or "light". They do their best not to please God but to please the people. (1 Thess. 2:4, 15) There is hardly need to preach about true conversion, because they assume that one with some convictions is already born again. All this takes place under the slogan: "We have the truth", while the sermons are contemporary and superficial. Thus, the pure doctrine of the fathers has almost disappeared from the Netherlands. The old fathers are barely read anywhere. The ministers preach to the heart of dead confessors. It is all embryo, embryo, habitus, actus what goes around. The pure doctrine of regeneration - where is that still heard? It is, in general, gone. Grace is no longer free grace. The pious person is what it is all about. The good minister must be the subject of the conversations. "Yes, but my minister is converted," you will say. Don't you think they also said that of Kuyper? "Yes, but my minister preaches so sound." Don't you think they also said that of Bavinck? People, stop it. Follow after Christ. Everything will come to an end. Your church, your minister, your religion, it comes to an end. - And then? - Then comes eternity. Shall it be well with your embryo opinion? It will not stand. That embryo doctrine contributes nothing to your salvation. Instead, it keeps you away from it. Stay with the old pure reformed truth and evade, by the grace of God, your ruin. Let yourself be warned.

Stand or Fall

Oh, oh, it is all so utterly deplorable. The latter churches are also much further away than they think. If they no longer know what true regeneration is, what do they still know then? Luther had said it

already five hundred years ago: “With justification of the ungodly by faith alone,” the church stands or falls. If this is not taught then *she falls*, and if this is indeed the case then *she stands*. You go ahead and make your own conclusion.

Oh, sure, they do not deny Christ, but they also do not know Him and yet, they say to be incorporated into Him. These things you will not find in the whole Scripture, and you will not hear them from any sound minister. Read Shepard, Hooker, etc. and you will find none of this. That which was first present in the bud and was not taught so explicitly, has now, alas, become an established fact in those churches. A book by Comrie, like recently the re-translation of *De Eigenschappen* (The Characteristics), causes much ado in those circles, but if the *Schatboek* (Treasured Book) reappears, then all is silent. They would rather not even talk about *The Toetssteen* or *The Almost Christian Discovered*. Let me say it this way: today, they no longer profess the faith of our fathers which is based on the pure grounds of Scripture, but they prefer to believe in professions of their own church denominations.

Critics

Some critics have noticed this course of events in their church denominations and have analyzed the variances so that everyone can notice the great difference with the Reformation. But the churches do not want to accept that; they think everything is fine and they do not want further investigation. Instead of clearing this misconception out of the way and treating the souls entrusted to them with honesty, they continue on in this evil way. The majority follows these leaders blindly. Even those who have been taught of the Lord, accept these expressions. They accept what should be rejected and let go of what should be accepted.

This doctrine has brought great darkness into the church. Where there is yet the true preparatory work to spiritual life, it no longer comes to a breakthrough and further spiritual growth. They have totally no eye for the correct transition from the realm of the prince of darkness into the Kingdom of His love. They no longer know or read *The Human Nature in its Fourfold State* by Boston, who with his ax blows cuts off all that which is now being blessed. The common work of God's Spirit is no longer distinguished from the saving work. They give ground under the feet where there is no ground. They daub it with untempered mortar. Grace is made conditional and sanctification precedes justification. Therefore, sanctification is mixed with the works of the law. Holiness has become a legalistic bondage. A life of good works is taught under the guise of love.

In All Directions

What a fool man is when he lacks the light of the Spirit. Without Him, he is utter darkness. He is so fixed on his own system that he is blind to other things in God's Word. In that way, he makes the Bible into such a very small entirety. Because of that, they do not preach the full Gospel anymore and the Gospel is mixed with the law. Of the freedom of a Christian, you no longer hear about that.

The bright light of the Gospel seems to gradually have been extinguished on most pulpits (without generalizing). And do you know what is so deceptive? Those ministers say but half truths. Yes, so that is also possible! Rev. Du Marchie van Voorthuysen spoke of that: “The judgment of these days is that ministers say many things that are true, a lot of truths, but that which you can still take into any direction. For what *is* regeneration? Where do you place the quickening? Some think this of it and

another something else. In that way, you get churches full of converted people with beginnings of life and little marks of grace. People who do not dare to deny this or that, those little ones who are pronounced to be blessed as people of God: ‘Keep up your courage. Just see to it that you obtain a little more.’ But man! Come to acknowledge that you will be condemned with all of that; so that then, you may be reconciled in such a way. . .”

That is why the Tables are so full of communicants; more than a hundred is already quite common nowadays. Sometimes they are people of whom it is to be feared that they do not even have an *outward* understanding of the truth; people who live in the midst of the world. But ministers and consistory members are not doing anything about it anymore. The key concepts of the truth are no longer understood, and in the profession of the truth in the churches of today, we hear accents that slowly on come to totally contradict what God teaches.

The sound confessional documents are displayed as museum pieces in the show cases of the churches; their contents are no longer understood. They have devised house rules; and that in a temporary church, in pitch black darkness. One considers alive what is not, and one thinks himself regenerated without having been delivered by Christ. The one is presumed born again, the other is presumed converted or justified and still others have presumed faith. What a miscalculation this is for an endless eternity! May the Lord still open many eyes for this.

Reading Sermons

We also want to say something about the publication of the sermons of today. There comes a bit of everything on the market. When publishing books and sermons, quotes are sometimes distorted. One works on a selective basis. What they do not like is omitted. Sometimes there is no one who reviews, corrects, or edits it. That market has become a flea market. A lot of the literature is empty of content, based on human insights, lacks depth, or uses language of the modern world. There is a multitude of enthusiastic, emotional, and superficial feelings expressed. They give the people a little comfort with a “regeneration” outside of Jesus and without faith. Churches and consistories, ministers, do not join them but discover the treasures that our fathers have left behind. Abide with the scriptural-experiential truths, with the blood theology! Only blood, blood, blood - that alone cleanses from all sin!

Conclusion

We have come to the end of this earnest instruction. To whom precisely, have I addressed this writing? Shall I tell you? No, I will have the church father Cyprian tell you:

“I address *you!* Though it would be the last moment, in the last instant of this temporary life that you would pray for what you have done wrong and beg of God, Who is the One and True God, by acknowledging that you know Him and to also believe in that - you receive grace by that acknowledgment and saving forgiveness through that faith! That is granted unto you by divine goodness. Then on the brink of death, you will enter into immortality.

That is the grace of Christ; that is the gift of His mercy. He has conquered death by the blessing of the cross. He ransomed the believer with the price of His blood. He reconciled man with God the Father. He had the mortal being relive through the heavenly rebirth. Let us all follow Him wherever possible and give ourselves to partake of His sacrament and seal. He is it, Who paves us the way of life. He is it, Who takes us back to Paradise. He is it, Who guides us to the

Kingdom of heaven!

With Him we shall live forever. Only because of Him, have we become children of God. With Him, we will forever rejoice, restored through His blood. We, Christians, will be forever glorious together with Christ in the bliss of God the Father, in the joy of everlasting delight, forever in God's countenance and forever giving thanks to God. Forever joyful, yes, and grateful, how could it be otherwise? We were doomed to die but we can now rest assured: we have become immortal."¹⁹⁴

Chapter 16

The Nightly Conversation with Nicodemus

We will meditate in closing, on a passage from John 3, where the Lord Jesus has a conversation with Nicodemus. This nightly conversation gives a clear explanation of regeneration. Often the texts of this chapter are indiscriminately associated with the embryo doctrine, but let us close this book with a biblical explanation.

God accomplishes His purpose also in the person of Nicodemus. He is the Beginning and the End of everything. He comes to the sinner and takes him to Christ. The Son leaves the house of the Father to save the sinner and the sinner by the power of God, leaves the house of Adam in order to be saved in the Savior. The Savior unites Himself with the sinner by His grace and love, and the sinner becomes united with Christ through faith and love.

So simple is the conversion of a sinner to God, and so simple is here the reconciliation of the sinner with God through the cross and the blood of Christ. Basically with this, everything has been said, but for the sake of some persistent fallacies, we want to explain it a little further.

The Pharisee

Nicodemus represents the God and Christ-hating religion of that time. Note the depiction: “*a man of the Pharisees*”.¹⁹⁵ He gives credit to his name (conqueror of the people) for he is just as proud and arrogant as all the other Pharisees are. He must have been in a position of authority in the Sanhedrin¹⁹⁶ and also above all that, he enjoyed some wealth.¹⁹⁷ His nightly journey expresses his anxiety for his prestige. He does not want to be recognized, for it would be at the expense of his name if his acquaintance with the Lord were disclosed to the Sanhedrin. He hides in the dark, not only for the people but also for himself. He escapes into the impersonal. In his, “*we know*”, he lets the group speak, namely, the group which covers itself with the lie of the community. No wonder Calvin remarks here that the Lord Christ saw the heart of Nicodemus full of thorns and choked by weeds.

In this “*we know*”, Nicodemus commits two mistakes. He begins his individual conversation as a delegate and representative of a large community. He hides behind the mask of his case, his association, his party. He camouflages himself. Secondly, in the words “*we know*”, he hides his inner insecurity behind the appearance of confidence.¹⁹⁸ The Lord Jesus exposes him. He uncovers his apparent seriousness and has him to stand naked before His all-seeing eye. As with a sharp knife with precision, He removes the disease of which His patient is suffering.

The Night

The night, the time that Nicodemus comes to Jesus, has a vertical effect. There is depth and height in it. In the night a lot of things become invisible and the horizon diminishes itself. The field of vision is lesser than during the day. The night is not only for sleeping but also for reflection and thinking. In the

Bible many decisive nights are recorded, just think of Pniel and Gethsemane. The night shows knowledge (Ps. 19) as also in this nightly conversation. There are many inner tensions and anxieties. Nicodemus begins his conversation cautiously, “*We know that Thou art a Teacher come from God.*” He begins as it were from afar, from shore to shore. Note that he (of the guild of the Pharisees) regards Jesus as his equal. After all, he also is a teacher.

The Flattering Tongue

If someone gives applause in this way to the Lord, then we must be careful. There is nothing more precarious in this life than applause. It is full of ulterior motives and causes a lot of misunderstanding. With many, applause has led to their downfall. One is so controlled by it, that one is no longer aware of the facts and the truth. Man is blinded by it. The Lord sees through Nicodemus; He is not receptive at all for the praise he receives from Nicodemus. Not only does He ignore it, He also rejects it. What does the Lord have to do with the profession of a Pharisee? Should He be grateful for this recognition? No, He cuts it off and presents it to be of no use and of no value. Alas, the embryo theologians would like to place a beginning of spiritual life in here; they do not properly see through the issues of God's truth.

Of Vital Importance

Christ now transcends the thoughts of Nicodemus. “*Jesus answered and said unto him, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’*” The marginal notes explain: “That is, by the Holy Spirit redeemed of the innate depravity and renewed to a new spiritual life.”

Here the word “*verily*” means “*amen*”! The Lord wants to call us to our attention with the word “*amen*”. While one usually knows that it is placed at the end of a prayer, here it is the beginning of an address. One usually only comes to see the nature of the sentence which is read afterwards. Now it is an audible exclamation at the beginning of the sentence. Think about it. The word “*amen*” is full of significance. As with a trumpet, the Lord desires to call our attention to all earnestness with this word. “*Amen*” means: now pay attention for God is going to speak. He now comes to speak of matters that are of vital importance.

Regeneration and the Kingdom of God

What do we now see, Nicodemus? God now speaks of other things than the things in which you live. They are of a much higher order than you can see or think. They concern the Kingdom of God. There is no in-between moment, no middle position, and no middle ground. Whosoever is not born again, stands outside of this Kingdom. He cannot see it ¹⁹⁹ nor enter into it.²⁰⁰ Man lacks the ability to correctly appropriate this truth. The horizontal birth is of man, who is flesh and blood.²⁰¹ The vertical birth is out of God and comes from above. Christ embodies the Kingdom of God. And all that Christ says about Himself is a statement about the Kingdom of God. If one has a part in Christ, then one has a part in the Kingdom of God and in eternal life of salvation.

Misunderstanding of Regeneration

It is characteristic of God's Word that the Lord continually points out our ignorance. We see that clearly with Nicodemus. Here he is in his unregenerate state. Nicodemus is the theologian of intellect; he does not understand the things of the Spirit of God; he cannot understand them. He does not know how a person, having grown old, *can be born again*. His understanding is inadequate and out of the earth, earthy. By this the evangelist John shows the contrast between Christ and the world. Christ does not then start to reason about the view of Nicodemus of the new birth, but speaks to him with divine authority. He appears to almost deliberately conceal this matter of regeneration for him. He wraps the incident in a mystery and comes with the doctrine of incomprehensibility. One can only enter into the Kingdom of God if he is born of water and Spirit. The water refers to the baptism of John which serves as a symbol of immersion and death, and the Spirit refers to the resurrection and quickening. Here Calvin teaches straightforwardly that Christ means the same thing with the Spirit and the water.

The Sphere of Regeneration

There are two spheres. One sphere is that, which is born *of the Spirit* being spiritual. The other sphere is that, which is born *of the flesh* being fleshly. *Flesh* stands for the natural human existence and *spirit* stands for the work of God in man which He recreates through grace. Renewal can only take place out of regeneration by the Spirit. Here it concerns a miracle of God. No lineage according to blood or race, no biological origin, and no tradition or historical continuity, however valuable in itself, works regeneration. No input of human thought and knowledge, no utmost effort of the will can bring about the renewal. It is only the workings of the Spirit Himself, Who brings forth regeneration as a miracle of God. Regeneration is a human impossibility and a divine possibility. It is not easy for this Jewish teacher to hear himself and his whole spiritual family to be called "*flesh*". Thus here is no indication of an embryo case and a subconscious incorporation into Christ. Such faith *cannot* be true faith: such faith is delusional faith.

The Silence and the Wind

The conversation falters here. There is silence. By that you can hear the quietness of the night. It sounds strange to us. It is as if you hear the wind blowing. The Lord takes that opportunity. Suddenly, the words of Christ resound: "*The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*"

This not only refers to the work of God's Spirit but also to the lives of the born-again. The life of the regenerated one is also as unpredictable and incomprehensible as the uprising wind. The emergence of the wind and the emergence of the new life are seen as mysteries of God's creating power. The double meaning of the Greek *pneuma* and the Hebrew *ruach*, wind and spirit, makes this symbolic train of thought obvious. "*Being born of the Spirit*" is a further clarification of what we read in John 1:13 of "*being born of God*".

Struggle and Humiliation

Nicodemus' heart is full of defiance; he is obstinate like most Pharisees. The wind blows but Nicodemus tries to avoid it. He wants to stay out of the hands of God. He does not desire to surrender

his soul to Jesus. He does not know where the wind comes from; it is a mystery for him. Powerful is its operation, but he fiercely opposes. - Faith? - Not in the least. - An unconscious incorporation into Christ? How can you imagine that?!

Christ makes it clear to Nicodemus that he and the entire corps of the Pharisees does *not* know it. Opposite of his “*we know*” (v. 2), the Lord states “*thou knowest not.*”(v.8). This is shocking to Nicodemus. It does not convince him, but he is pressed back; he gives way. His self-assurance where with he came to the Lord makes way for hesitation which comes up in his soul. He does not know it anymore. He loses his self confidence. Nicodemus wants to climb higher, but the Lord thrusts him down from that height into the depth of “*not knowing*”. Nicodemus says, “*How can these things be?*” He does not give up yet. Using his human imagination, he still tries to understand the miracle of regeneration. It is inappropriate questioning. In this manner, this question cannot be answered. Here the man must become baffled with it. - Even Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel.

Distinction between Knowing and Not Knowing

The Lord has placed a breach in the pride of Nicodemus. He makes the breach wider and hollows it out even more. Are you a preacher, Nicodemus? - And that even in Israel, and do you not know these things? You are supposed to be familiar in the books of the Old Testament? Have you never read in Jeremiah 31:33 how there is spoken about regeneration? Have you never read Ezekiel 18:31 about the new heart and the new spirit? Had not David asked for this, when he in his sorrow over the committed sins with Bathsheba, prayed to the Lord for restoration and renewal? (Ps. 51:12). Continually there is spoken in God's Word about the renewal and the birth from above but yet, this phrase was unknown to the rabbis in that period. Over against this, the Word of the Lord states: “*We speak that We do know, and testify that We have seen.*” (verse 11). The Lord hereby shows us that there is a great process taking place in which He asserts Himself with His testimony.²⁰² Throughout all centuries, the Gospel shall proclaim something different than that which is taught in the synagogues. Synagogues and the Church are opposite each other. In the “*We*” of Christ, the prophetic Israel is opposite of the Judaism of the Pharisees.²⁰³

End of Conversation

It is not clear when the conversation ends. It appears that the conversation is over even though the Lord continues His address. The moment comes that Nicodemus silently leaves. He was baffled. There is so much for him to think about. Now the critical moment comes. He is confronted with the question: is there faith or is there no faith? That is the all-decisive question. Without faith, no one can please God. If he has faith, then he is justified by God and he has eternal life. If he believes not, he disobeys Him and the wrath of God abides on him. (John 3:36). We need not contemplate what the inner thoughts of Nicodemus were; we have enough to do with ourselves. How shall it go with us? Yet two more times the Bible speaks of Nicodemus. It becomes clear in those passages that this teaching has been blessed for him, even though he does not give an actual confession.

The Explanation

Nicodemus did not understand the explanation of the new birth when the Lord spoke to him about the Kingdom of God. If he knew nothing of the Kingdom of God upon earth, how could he understand the

heavenly part of this Kingdom? The heavenly matters were still hidden, namely, those of His coming and of the forthcoming Kingdom. Nicodemus was bound to the earth and could not ascend up to heaven, but there was also no need for that because Jesus came to him. It is as if the Lord Jesus said: Nicodemus, heaven is not opened by human intellect (philosophy), mysticism, moral fidelity, but by the appearance and the revelation of Jesus Christ, God's Son, the incarnate Word. What is required in regeneration is faith in the Son of God. Again, the appearance of Jesus Christ as the Son Who became Man and faith in Him are the conditions for the new birth. With true saving faith, the wonder takes place. God Himself is the Fulfiller of it for He grants what He requires.

The Figure of Regeneration

The Lord now teaches us even more about true regeneration. This is directly attached to Christ Himself. The Lord takes the representation from the Old Testament. Looking upon *the brazen serpent* is an excellent figure of regeneration. Whosoever would look up to the brazen serpent when bitten is healed. This looking upon the serpent of brass gives life. So it is also with Christ. He had to be raised upon the wood. Whosoever looks up by faith shall live. If not, then he dies the eternal death. Before that time, he lies in death even though he lives. He only lives if he lives Christ. If he lives Christ, then he lives God. If he lives God, then he lives Christ. We have never lived, if we have not lived Christ. The Lord Himself emphasizes this once more in verse 15: "*That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" Here in the original text, the Lord does not actually mention the object but it concerns the position of the soul.

The Span of Grace

The span of grace has increased. All restrictions fall away. Now follows the essence of the Gospel. Christ formulates this essence in these words: "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" (v. 16) Words fail here. We do not have the ability to describe the greatness thereof and to measure its content. There is only room for deep admiration.

We shall not continue with our explanation of the texts following. We only want to say that outside of the Son, we have no life and therefore, outside of Him we *are not* born again. The formation of the incorporation outside of the knowledge of Him does not stand. There is no other way to salvation than through a true, saving, and living faith in Christ. He that believeth not is under judgment. The world is under judgment. Judgment shall not *come* but the judgment *is* here. The only way out lays in the Name of the only begotten Son of God: "*He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the Name of the only begotten Son of God.*" (verse 18) The outcome is determined here. Is there darkness, then one walks in darkness; is there light, then one walks in the light as a child of light. The wrong-doer hates the light; he does not want to render himself, because he does not want to be exposed, but for a child of God everything is upright and sincere. They do the truth and the truth makes them free. They have come uprightly to the knowledge that God is their Redeemer, Christ their Savior, and the Holy Spirit their Sanctifier. Thus God has done something great in them. In regeneration, He has restored His image in them; through the blood of Christ, He has reconciled them, and by the Holy Spirit, He has perfected them.

Conclusion: Dear readers, may the Lord grant you to understand what we have explained in this book: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Not the philosophy of Aristotle, of Plato, of Maccovius, of Comrie and his followers - you must reject those. Beg for true regeneration: not presumed, not subconscious, but biblical and consciously. Only the infallible Word of the Lord (Sola scriptura) must you believe with saving faith (Sola fide). Embrace and follow only after the Confession which is based on that Word. Confess the doctrine of free grace only (Sola gratia). Embrace Christ alone for your salvation (Solus Christus). Then only can you truly say with 1 Peter 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ." (Soli Deo gloria)!