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HERMAN BAVINCK AND HIS REFORMED SOURCES  
ON THE CALL TO GRACE:  
A SHIFT IN EMPHASIS TOWARDS THE INTERNAL  
WORK OF THE SPIRIT

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INTRODUCTION

The protestant theological *locus* of the divine call to grace is characterised by the cooperation of the outward proclamation of the Word and the inward work of the Spirit. Over against the radical reformation, the representatives of the magisterial reformation agreed that the work of the Spirit was inseparable from the external proclamation of the word of God. The way in which the relationship between word and Spirit was elaborated on, however, later became a bone of contention. The Lutherans stressed the indissolubility of word and Spirit, of the external and the internal. The Reformed, to the contrary, underlined that the work of the Spirit was not intrinsically connected to the word, but added to it. Given the fact that the relationship between object and subject, between the outward Word and the inward work of the Spirit, is so important for the theology of Herman Bavinck that the prolegomena of his *Reformed Dogmatics* are structured by the distinction, it is interesting to question how this relationship is elaborated on in the doctrine of the divine call to grace.<sup>1</sup> To find out how Bavinck relates to his Reformed sources, we will analyse three aspects of his discussion of the theme from the first and later editions of the *Reformed Dogmatics* and from his series of articles

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1 H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 4th edn, 4 vols (Kampen: Kok, 1928-30) [henceforth: Bavinck, *GD*], 1, pp. 255, 466. Cf. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. by J. Bolt, trans. by J. Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003-8) [henceforth Bavinck, *RD*], 1, pp. 281, 495. In his prolegomena Bavinck leans towards subjectivism, at least when compared with his Reformed sources. H. van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust*, Studies in Reformed Theology, 17 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 291-6.

on 'Immediate Regeneration,' later published in the volume *Roeping en wedergeboorte* (1903), recently translated as *Saved by Grace*.<sup>2</sup>

### THE ORDER OF THE ORDER OF SALVATION

After Bavinck was appointed professor of systematic theology in Kampen at the age of 28 he started publishing his *Reformed Dogmatics* in four volumes from 1895 to 1901. The second and enlarged edition was published from 1908 to 1911, when Bavinck was a professor at the Free University in Amsterdam. The third edition (1918) remained unchanged and in the fourth edition only a few misprints were corrected. In effect, this means that there are only two versions of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, the first edition and the later ones. In the first edition Bavinck treats the *ordo salutis* at the end of the third volume.<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of this volume, issued in 1898, he excuses himself for not having been able to keep his promise to deliver the work in three volumes, but he expresses the hope that this will not disappoint subscribers and readers.<sup>4</sup> Bavinck subdivides the benefits the believers draw from Christ into three parts: calling and regeneration, faith and justification, and sanctification and perseverance.<sup>5</sup> Before, however, turning to the benefits themselves, he discusses the mutual relationship of the benefits or the right order of the *ordo salutis*.

Regeneration was first taken in a very broad sense as spiritual renewal and thus treated after faith. As witnesses Bavinck refers to Jean Calvin, Theodore Beza, Franciscus Junius and the *Belgic Confession of Faith*.<sup>6</sup> Quickly, however, the insight grew that the grace of regeneration must precede faith and thus regeneration was understood as infusion of the principle of life. To illustrate his point he refers to Amandus Polanus von Polansdorf (1561-1610), quoting him in Latin: 'the grace of regeneration is

<sup>2</sup> H. Bavinck, *Roeping en wedergeboorte* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1903) [Henceforth: Bavinck *RW*]. H. Bavinck, *Saved by Grace: The Holy Spirit's Work in Calling and Regeneration*, ed. by J. Beach, trans. by N. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008) [Henceforth: Bavinck, *SG*].

<sup>3</sup> H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 4 vols (Kampen: Bos, 1895-1901) [henceforth Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>], 3, pp. 425-572. In the second and following editions part of the discussion of the order of salvation is transferred to the fourth volume; the third volume closes with the introduction of the *ordo salutis* and the fourth opens with the paragraph on 'Calling and Regeneration'.

<sup>4</sup> Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. [2].

<sup>5</sup> The final edition has four subdivisions: calling and regeneration, faith and conversion, justification, and sanctification and perseverance. Bavinck, *GD*, 4, pp. 1-257.

<sup>6</sup> Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. 479.

prior in us to faith, of which it is the effect'.<sup>7</sup> Polanus' *Syntagma Theologiae christianae* was influential for Bavinck's understanding of Reformed theology. The famous *Deus dixit* formula, for instance, also came from Polanus.<sup>8</sup>

This reference, however, is questionable to prove that regeneration was understood as vivification. Polanus equates regeneration with sanctification.<sup>9</sup> The point he makes in the quote is that faith cannot be the efficient cause of regeneration, because the *grace* of regeneration precedes faith.

Nevertheless, in general Bavinck is correct that in the development of Reformed theology the meaning of regeneration shifted from the renewal of the whole life to the start of new life. The result of this development was that regeneration was not only placed before faith, but also before the divine calling. This order was defended—Bavinck quotes Johannes Maccovius—because no one can savingly hear the word of God unless he is born again.<sup>10</sup> The Franeker theologian went even further than most of the other Reformed teaching eternal justification. Maccovius' idea's would become more and more important in the discussion on infra- and supralapsarianism and on presumptive regeneration in the following years.

In the footnote Bavinck also refers to Abraham Kuyper for this point. His colleague in Amsterdam had divided the work of grace into eight phases, of which the first was the implantation of the new principle of life and only the third the call through Word and Spirit, both outwardly and inwardly.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. 479. 'gratia regenerationis prior in nobis est quam fides, quae illius est effectus.' Cf. A. Polanus of Polansdorf, *Syntagma Theologiae christianae* (Hanover: Daniel & David Aubrios, 1625), p. 467.

<sup>8</sup> In one of his early articles Bavinck refers to Polanus: 'We should always keep the beautiful word of Polanus a Polansdorf in memory: Principium, in quod omnia dogmata theologica resolvuntur, est: Dominus dixit.' H. Bavinck, 'Het dualisme in de Theologie', *De Vrije Kerk: Vereeniging van Christelijke Gereformeerde Stemmen*, 13 (1887), 11-39 (p. 39).

<sup>9</sup> 'Eadem etiam sanctificatio dicitur.' Polanus, *Syntagma*, p. 466.

<sup>10</sup> Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. 480. 'Verbum Dei nemo salutariter audire potest, nisi qui sit regenitus' J. Maccovius, *Loci communes theologici* (Franeker: Johannis Arcerius, 1650), p. 710. Next to Maccovius, Bavinck also refers to Voetius, who denies that the Word of God can be savingly heard prior to conversion. G. Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum*, 5 vols. (Utrecht: Joannes Waesberge, 1648-69) 2, p. 445.

<sup>11</sup> A. Kuyper, *Het werk van den Heiligen Geest*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: J.A. Wormser, 1888-9), 2, p. 129. For Kuyper's view on regeneration cf. A. van Egmond, 'Kuyper's dogmatic theology', in *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of His Life and*

Very important for the understanding of Bavinck's own development is, however, that he regretted this development in Reformed theology. He distanced himself not only from Maccovius's concept of eternal justification, but also from the idea that regeneration preceded the divine call. When he carefully explains his own position, he admits that from the perspective of the eternal mystical union with Christ all the benefits, including justification, precede the divine call. In the first edition of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, however, Bavinck still underlines that all the benefits of Christ only become the possession of believers through the actual calling by Word and Spirit.

As God performed creation in this way, so He also performs recreation. Many have placed this calling after regeneration and, no doubt, this benefit precedes the call in all the children of the covenant who are born again young. But taking these instances as a general rule is as dangerous as the opposite.<sup>12</sup>

Bavinck adds five reasons for this warning: (1) There has always been a difference and liberty among the Reformed about the time of regeneration: before, during or after baptism. Scripture is not clear enough to decide the issue. (2) In many cases it is very difficult to assume that those who have lived in sin for many years were born again as little children; even Voetius found this difficult.<sup>13</sup> (3) Supposing that regeneration precedes the call on the mission field separates Word and Spirit. (4) The order of the persons in the Trinity and of the works in creation and recreation show that the Word precedes the Spirit and that Christmas and Easter precede Pentecost. (5) The calling must be taken in a much broader sense than possible when it is placed after regeneration; there is a universal and general call next to the special call.

In the later editions Bavinck maintains that '[c]alling, the preaching of the gospel, precedes all other benefits, for as a rule the Holy Spirit binds himself to the Word'.<sup>14</sup> This is nuanced by the remark that all benefits are organically interconnected. He no longer says that it is dangerous to hold that regeneration precedes the call as a general rule. In the later editions

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*Work*, ed. by C. van der Kooi and J. de Bruijn (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999), pp. 85-94.

<sup>12</sup> Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. 483. The thought that both creation and recreation are performed through Word and Spirit is also the opening phrase of the chapter on 'Calling and Regeneration.' Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. 485. The thought is and is maintained in the later editions, but no longer as an argument that calling precedes regeneration. Bavinck, *GD*, 4, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> He refers to Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum* 2, p. 410.

<sup>14</sup> Bavinck, *GD*, 3, p. 602; cf. Bavinck *RD* 3, p. 593.

he only admits that calling precedes regeneration in the logical sense and that therefore the divine call in Reformed theology generally took the first place in the order of salvation.<sup>15</sup>

In the first edition Bavinck is critical of the development in which regeneration was placed before the call, although he says that regeneration took place during, after or sometimes even before the call.<sup>16</sup> In the later editions he says that it must be considered that 'the internal calling of regeneration in order undoubtedly always precedes the saving hearing of the Word of God, as Maccovius correctly asserted'.<sup>17</sup> In the later editions Bavinck no longer says that there is no regeneration without calling by the gospel of Christ. Moreover, he deletes the paragraph on calling and regeneration in which he discussed their mutual relationship.

In the context of the *ordo salutis* Bavinck also discusses the moment of regeneration. According to Roman Catholics and Lutherans it occurs in baptism, but the Reformed hold that the grace of regeneration is granted to the children of the covenant either before, or during, or after baptism, or without further specification, before, during or after baptism.<sup>18</sup>

At the synod of 1905 exactly this phrase pacified the views *pro* and *contra* presumptive regeneration in the Reformed Churches.<sup>19</sup> Therefore it is interesting to ask where the phrase comes from. In the first edition of the *Reformed Dogmatics* Bavinck gives three references, to Gijsbert Voetius, Herman Witsius, and Martinus Vitringa. The expression closest to Bavinck is found in Witsius's discussion of the 'Effectiveness of Baptism on Infants'. He states that it is very difficult to tell the exact time of regeneration. There are four opinions. According to the first, regeneration can take place 'either before, or in, or after baptism'.<sup>20</sup> The other three opin-

<sup>15</sup> In a footnote Bavinck refers to the authors mentioned in his *Calling and regeneration*. Bavinck, *GD*, 3, p. 585 n. 3; cf. Bavinck *RD* 3, p. 580 n. 234.

<sup>16</sup> Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. 505. He refers to Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum* 2, p. 461.

<sup>17</sup> Bavinck, *GD*, 4, p. 55; Bavinck, *RD* 4, p. 80.

<sup>18</sup> Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. 479; cf. Bavinck, *GD*, 3, pp. 587-8; Bavinck, *RD* 3, p. 582.

<sup>19</sup> The formula was used to settle the dispute on presumptive regeneration. 'God fulfills his promise sovereignly in His own time, whether before, during, or after baptism.' For the complete text see J. Schaver, *The Polity of the Churches*, 3rd edn (Chicago: Church Polity Press, 1947), pp. 2, 34-7.

<sup>20</sup> 'Nonnulli regenerationem diversis temporum articulis dispensari putant, aliquando ante, aliquando in, aliquando post Baptismum.' H. Witsius, *Miscellaneorum Sacrorum Libri Quator*, 4 vols. (Herbornae Nassoviorum: Andreeae, 1712), 2, p. 627. I could not find a similar expression on the pages Bavinck refers to in Voetsius disputation on 'The State of the Elect before Conversion' Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum* 2, p. 408. I was not able to trace the refer-

ions advocate one of the three possibilities. The formula would become important in later discussions of presumptive regeneration.

### EXTERNAL CALL AND INTERNAL CALL

A second aspect of the doctrine of the divine calling is the distinction between the external and the internal call. After an extensive discussion of the external call through law and gospel, including a defence of the general offer of grace, Bavinck says in the first edition of the *Reformed Dogmatics*: 'Scripture and experience testify, however, that all these workings of external calling do not always and in every case lead people to a sincere faith and salvation.'<sup>21</sup> If the ultimate cause of this difference is the human free will, then the distinction between the external call and the internal call becomes superfluous. 'Augustinians, Thomists, and Reformed theologians, therefore, located the reason why in one person the calling bore fruit and in another it did not in the nature of the calling itself.'<sup>22</sup> The Augustinians said that a 'triumphant delight' was present with the call and made it efficacious. The Thomists spoke of a 'physical predetermination' or a 'physical act of God', but the Reformed distinguished a *vocatio interna* from the external call through law and gospel.

Bavinck refers to Augustine's *Treatise on the Predestination of the Saints*, and to Calvin's *Institutes*, to his *Commentary on Romans*, and to his critical book on the *Acts of the Council of Trent*. The church father says that when the gospel is preached, some do and others do not believe. 'They who do believe at the voice of the preacher from without, hear of the Father from within, and learn; while they who do not believe, hear outwardly, but inwardly do not hear nor learn; that is to say, to the former it is given to believe; to the latter it is not given.'<sup>23</sup> Bavinck may be right that this and other phrases from Augustine are the source of the Reformed

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ence to Martinus Vitringa. His father Campegius Vitringa (1659-1722) issued a systematic theology in aphorisms. C. Vitringa, *Aphorismi quibus fundamenta sanctae theologiae comprehenduntur* (Franeker: J. Gyselaar, 1688). The book was enlarged by his son Martinus who made many remarks on the propositions, resulting in nine volumes. K. Vitringa, M. Vitringa, T. Scheltzinga, *Doctrina christianae religionis, per aphorismos summatim descripta*, 9 vols (Arnhem: Joannes Henricus Möelemannus, 1761-1789). This is the work to which Bavinck refers.

<sup>21</sup> Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. 495; cf. Bavinck *GD*, 4, p. 10; Bavinck, *RD* 4, p. 41.

<sup>22</sup> Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. 497; cf. Bavinck, *GD*, 4, p. 11; Bavinck, *RD* 4, p. 42.

<sup>23</sup> 'Cum igitur Evangelium praedicatur, quidam credunt, quidam non credunt; sed qui credunt, praedicator forinsecus insonante, intus a Patre audiunt atque discunt; qui autem non credunt, foris audiunt, intus non audiunt neque

*vocatio interna*, but the church father does not speak of external and internal calling, but of external and internal hearing.

Calvin does not use the words internal and external vocation either in the *Institutes*. Explaining the saying of Jesus that many are called but few chosen (Matt. 22:14), the reformer distinguishes a *duplex vocatio*. Through the universal calling in external preaching, God invites all equally to himself. 'The other kind of call is special, which he deigns for the most part to give to the believers alone, while by the inward illumination of his Spirit he causes the preached Word to dwell in their hearts.'<sup>24</sup> Thus, in the *Institutes* the Reformer does not speak about an internal call, but about an inward illumination accompanying the external call.

The commentary on Romans 10:16, however, does use the phrase *interior vocation*. When Calvin explains that although the word always precedes faith, as the seed precedes the corn, this does not mean that the seed is always fruitful; 'there is no benefit from the word, except when God shines in us by the light of his Spirit; and thus the inward calling, which alone is efficacious and peculiar to the elect, and is distinguished from the outward voice of men.'<sup>25</sup> The reference to the *Acts of the Council of Trent: With the Antidote* (1547), is less exact; there Calvin explains that there is 'this difference in the calling of God, that he invites all indiscriminately by his word, whereas he inwardly teaches the elect alone.'<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the distinction goes back into the Reformed and even into the catholic Christian tradition. Still, Bavinck seems to give a special interpretation to the distinction. He equates the internal call with the effectual or efficacious call. This was less common in Reformed Orthodoxy than is often supposed. Van Mastricht, for instance did not equate the internal

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discunt: hoc est, illis datur ut credant, illis non datur.' Augustine, *A Treatise on the Predestination of the Saints*, VIII.15.

<sup>24</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.24.8. J. Calvin, *Opera Selecta*, ed. by P. Barth and W. Niesel, 3rd edn, 5 vols (Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1967), 4, p. 8. Cf. J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by J. McNeill, trans. by F. Battles, The Library of the Christian Classics, 20-21 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), p. 974.

<sup>25</sup> 'significat enim non aliter exstare verbi profectum, nisi dum spiritus sui luce Deus affulget, atque ita ab externa hominis voce distinguitur interior vocatio, quae sola efficax est et solis electis propria.' J. Calvin, *Joannis Calvini Opera quae Supersunt Omnia*, ed. by E. Cunitz and E. Reuss, 52 vols. (Brunswick: Schwetschke and Sons, 1863-1900), 49, p. 206.

<sup>26</sup> 'Hoc enim interest in Dei vocatione, quod omnes promiscue invitat verbo suo: electos autem solos intus docet.' Calvin, *Calvini Opera Omnia*, 7, p. 480.



call with the efficacious call, because the Holy Spirit sometimes speaks to the heart, without bringing saving change within it.<sup>27</sup>

One of Bavinck's favourite sources for Reformed Orthodoxy was the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* from four professors who taught in Leiden shortly after the Synod of Dordt. During his pastorate in Franeker, Bavinck had published a new edition. This book had quite an influence on his theological views, as he admitted to a friend.<sup>28</sup> But even in this work the internal call is not necessarily efficacious, because also the universal calling by nature has an internal side, and because the external and the internal call can go together in the hypocrites.<sup>29</sup>

Bavinck admits that the external call also is accompanied by a certain working and witness of the Spirit.<sup>30</sup> He also says that the twofold calling originally was referred to by other terms in the Reformed tradition, such as the material and formal call, the common and the particular call, and the universal and special call. Nevertheless, the distinction external and internal gained the upper hand and gradually replaced the others. Bavinck probably followed Polanus on this point. The *Syntagma* divides the external call into an efficacious and an inefficacious call and equates the efficacious with the internal call, without making further distinctions or reservations.<sup>31</sup>

Bavinck must have been aware of the nuances among the Reformed orthodox authors. However, he systematises and somewhat simplifies the Reformed tradition. Bavinck not only equates the effectual with the internal call, he also tends to equate the effectual internal call with regeneration. Already in the first edition he states that the call—taken in the Pauline sense of the word—stands in the closest relationship to what is elsewhere called regeneration.<sup>32</sup> Regeneration is the internal word, the call of the gospel, planted in the heart as a seed. 'Internal call and regenera-

<sup>27</sup> P. van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, new edn (Utrecht/Amsterdam: Sumptibus Societatis, 1715), p. 650. Cf. E. van Burg, 'Extern en intern: Uitwendige en inwendige roeping bij Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706)' (unpublished master's thesis, Utrecht University, 2010), p. 24. The thesis is available at <<http://igitur-archive.library.uu.nl>>.

<sup>28</sup> H. Bavinck and C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Een Leidse vriendschap: De briefwisseling tussen Herman Bavinck en Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje 1875-1921*, ed. by J. de Bruijn and G. Harinck (Baarn: Ten Have, 1999), p. 100.

<sup>29</sup> J. Polyander, A. Rivet, A. Walaeus and A. Thysius, *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, ed. H. Bavinck (Leiden: Donner, 1881) p. 298-9.

<sup>30</sup> Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. 488; cf. Bavinck *GD*, 4, p. 3; Bavinck, *RD* 4, p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> Polanus, *Syntagma*, p. 448.

<sup>32</sup> Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. 500.

tion relate to each other as seed and plant.<sup>33</sup> In the later editions Bavinck emphasises this point, stating that regeneration is just another word for the efficacious call (*vocatio efficax*).<sup>34</sup> The internal call is understood as an infused *habitus* or inseminated seed of the grace of regeneration.

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATURE AND GRACE

A third aspect of Bavinck's concept of the divine call is the relationship between nature and grace. This aspect is typical for his theology and the way in which he elaborates on the Reformed tradition shows how he was both a faithful student and an independent representative of that tradition. In line with Reformed Orthodoxy, Bavinck distinguishes between the *vocatio realis* and the *vocatio verbalis*. The general call by nature, history and personal experience is insufficient for salvation, but, nevertheless, it is very useful. Bavinck refers to the Leiden *Synopsis* and to the authors Petrus van Mastricht, Herman Witsius, Johannes Marckius and Bernhard de Moor.<sup>35</sup>

Most of the cited authors are very concise on the issue. Bavinck gives the tradition a neo-Calvinistic turn by interpreting the universal call as a feature of common grace and by connecting it with special grace. 'The covenant of grace is sustained by the general covenant of nature.'<sup>36</sup> This general call paves the way for the special call of the gospel. As the Logos, Christ prepares his own work of grace through all kinds of means and ways. Thus God performs both creation and recreation by his Word and Spirit. The special call does not replace the general call but incorporates it into itself, confirms it and transcends it. This is quite similar to the way he dealt with the relationship between general and special revelation in his prolegomena. Later on, in the *Magnalia Dei* (1909) he makes the connection between revelation and the divine call. In the chapter on the divine call in that book he states that special revelation makes the use of words

<sup>33</sup> Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. 505.

<sup>34</sup> Bavinck, *GD*, 4, p. 51, Bavinck, *RD* 4, p. 77.

<sup>35</sup> Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. 487. Polyander, Rivet, Walaeus, and Thysius, *Synopsis*, p. 294. Van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, p. 651. H. Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus*, 4 vols (Leeuwarden: J. Hagenaar, 1685), pp. 241-5. Cf. H. Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity*, trans. by W. Crookshank (Edinburgh: Thomas Turnbull, 1804) pp. 349-54. J. à Marck, *Christianae theologiae medulla didactico-elenctica* (Philadelphia: J. Anderson, 1824), p. 170. De Moor's work was not available to me in the preparation of this paper.

<sup>36</sup> Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. 486. Cf. Bavinck *GD*, 4, p. 2; Bavinck, *RD* 4, p. 33.

necessary, because the historical content of salvation-history can only be communicated verbally, whereas the general or universal call because of its a-historical character does not need words.<sup>37</sup>

The relationship between nature and grace is also at stake when Bavinck discusses the character of grace in regeneration. He rejects the Thomist interpretation of grace as 'a physical act of God' accompanying the external call. Bavinck rejects this Roman Catholic idea, because it makes grace a surplus of nature. According to Bavinck, the Reformed refused to describe the internal calling as something physical. Of course, the divine call is more than a moral advice, but does not bring any new substance into creation, as the Manichees and Anabaptists teach. According to Bavinck, 'grace never creates, it recreates'.<sup>38</sup> The use of the word regeneration for the renewal of the whole creation in Matthew 19:28 helps Bavinck to explain the character of spiritual renewal. In the new birth the continuity of the self is maintained. 'Christ is not a new; a second Creator, but a Re-creator, a Reformer of all things'.<sup>39</sup> Thus regeneration not only brings nothing new into creation, it also does not deprive it of anything essential, because sin does not belong to the essence of creation. Sin is not a substance, but only affects the form of creation; therefore recreation is a renewal of the form, or a reformation of creation. Grace is not a physical force; it does not suppress, but it restores nature. Without giving the reference, Bavinck cites a Latin phrase: '*non tollit sed restituit et perficit voluntatem.*' It is not clear from which source Bavinck copied the phrase, but it was not uncommon in Reformed orthodoxy. Francis Junius, for instance says that grace perfects nature and does not destroy it.<sup>40</sup> Bavinck

<sup>37</sup> H. Bavinck, *Magnalia dei: Onderwijzing in de Christelijke Religie naar Gereformeerde Belijdenis*, (Kampen: Kok, 1909), pp. 464-5 = *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1956), pp. 411-12.

<sup>38</sup> 'De genade schiept nooit, zij herschiept.' Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. 509. The whole concept of recreation is essential to understand Bavinck. J. Bolt, 'Editor's Introduction', in Bavinck, *RD* 2, 11-23. On p. 18 Bolt refers to J. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie: De openbarings- en schriftbeschuwing van Herman Bavinck in vergelijking met die der ethische theologie* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1968), p. 346. Veenhof in turn refers to E. Heideman, *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (Assen: Van Gorcum, Prakke & Prakke, 1959), pp. 191, 195.

<sup>39</sup> Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. 509. The second edition is slightly different: 'Christ, accordingly, is not a second Creator, but the Redeemer and Savior of this fallen creation, the Reformer of all things that have been ruined and corrupted by sin.' Bavinck, *GD*, 4, 69; Bavinck, *RD* 4, 92.

<sup>40</sup> 'Nam gratia naturam perficit, non autem abolet.' F. Junius, *Opuscula Theologica Selecta*, ed. by A. Kuyper, *Bibliotheca reformata*, 1 (Amsterdam: Fred.

also uses this quote to characterise his concept of organic inspiration.<sup>41</sup> He must have known that the phrase originates with Thomas Aquinas, but probably he did not want to mention that, because he was refuting Thomism here.

The claim that the Reformed do not call grace something physical is incorrect. Van Mastricht and Voetius for instance do call the work of grace physical over against a concept in which grace is merely a moral persuasion of the will.<sup>42</sup> For Van Mastricht the essential difference between the efficacious divine calling and regeneration lies in the fact that the second is physical, while the first is moral.<sup>43</sup> Voetius calls God's way of operating in regeneration physical, because it produces and introduces a new creation.<sup>44</sup> Bavinck probably sensed this; at least he seems to have discovered it, because he is much less outspoken on the issue in the later editions of the *Reformed Dogmatics*. Regarding the physical nature of grace, Bavinck maintains his position that grace restores nature, but in these editions he is much more careful about the Reformed sources. He no longer claims that they absolutely deny that grace has a physical character. This might be due to a more careful study of the sources, but it may also be caused by a stronger emphasis of Bavinck on regeneration as an immediate act of the Holy Spirit, over against his former emphasis on the word as an indispensable means of grace.

The three issues show a development in Bavinck's thoughts. The emphasis shifts towards the antecedence of regeneration in the *ordo salutis*, towards the equation of the internal call with regeneration and towards a certain openness for a physical understanding of the grace

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Muller, 1882), p. 343. Cited by T. Sarx, *Franciscus Junius d.Ä. (1545-1602). Ein reformierter Theologe im Spannungsfeld zwischen späthumanistischer Irenik und reformierter Konfessionalisierung*, Reformed Historical Theology, 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), p. 140, n. 386.

<sup>41</sup> Bavinck, *GD*<sup>1</sup>, 3, p. 509. For the use of the phrase for organic inspiration, cf. Bavinck, *GD*, 1, p. 414; Bavinck *RD* 1, p. 443. Thomas Aquinas says that grace does not cancel out nature, but perfects it (*gratia naturam non tollit sed perficit*). T. van Aquino, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q1, a8, ad 2. For a historical survey of the development of this axiom cf. J. Beumer, 'Gratia supponit naturam. Zur Geschichte eines theologischen Prinzips', *Gregorianum*, 29 (1939), 381-406, 535-52.

<sup>42</sup> Van Mastricht calls both saving grace and regeneration physical. Van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, pp. 643, 660. Cf. Van Burg, 'Extern en intern', pp. 22, 27.

<sup>43</sup> Van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, pp. 650. Cf. Van Burg, 'Extern en intern', p. 223.

<sup>44</sup> Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum* 2, p. 449.

of regeneration. It would be wrong to suggest that the changes are very strong. Bavinck does not deny positions that he first held, but still the shift in emphasis is striking. The overall picture shows that Bavinck's interest moves from the outward Word as a means of grace towards the inward work of the Spirit in the heart. This shift may have been caused by a discussion on the character of regeneration in the Reformed Churches. We will turn to Bavinck's contribution to that discussion in order to trace possible influences.

### IMMEDIATE REGENERATION

In 1892 the churches of the Secession and of the Doleantie came together in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The desire to merge the seminary in Kampen and the Free University in Amsterdam remained a bone of contention in the united the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Bavinck was a strong advocate of the merge and when it failed he decided to move to Amsterdam in 1902. The most important doctrinal differences regarded regeneration and baptism.

Within the churches from the Secession many had strong feelings against the Kuyperian idea of supposed regeneration as foundation for infant baptism. At the Synod of Utrecht (1905) a committee stated that it was not necessary to make definitive pronouncements on the issue, because it was merely a divergence of opinion, nonessential to the confession and foundation of the church.

The synod accepted a formula that placed the different approaches beside one another. In short it said that on the one hand the seed of the covenant must be held to be regenerated and sanctified in Christ, by virtue of the promise of God, until, upon their growing up, the opposite should become apparent. On the other hand, however, it maintained that it was less accurate to say that baptism is administered to infants on the ground of their presumed regeneration, since the ground of baptism is the mandate and the promise of God. Bavinck was the main author of this formula.

Bavinck's *Calling and Regeneration* was originally published as a series of forty articles on 'Immediate Regeneration'. The articles and the book must be seen as a preparation for the Synod. Bavinck aimed at doctrinally unifying the two streams in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Therefore it is rather difficult to interpret his book.

At the beginning of the book, Bavinck refers to the discussion in the Reformed churches regarding the order of the benefits of the covenant of

grace and their relationship to each other.<sup>45</sup> The older and more common opinion was that calling preceded regeneration. The newer opinion—inaugurated by Abraham Kuyper and strongly advocated by some of his disciples who developed his concept of presupposed regeneration in a radical way—was that regeneration inseminated as a seed or principle of life preceded all the other benefits.<sup>46</sup> This reversion of the order of salvation formed the theological foundation of the idea that all the elect were born again before baptism and thus that presupposed regeneration could be the ground of baptism.

Abraham Kuyper, Jr (1872-1941) wrote a dissertation on Maccovius in 1899.<sup>47</sup> In his supralapsarian theology, passive justification from all eternity played a key role and was listed as the first of all the benefits in the order of salvation. The young Kuyper used this scheme to undergird his idea that all the elect were born again in infancy.

In the introduction of *Calling and Regeneration*, Bavinck refers to the 'brotherly controversy on Maccovius' whose supralapsarianism, eternal justification and immediate regeneration are rejected by some and defended by others. On a deeper level there are concerns regarding the preaching of the gospel. According to some, not only from the circles of the Secession churches, but also from the Doleantie churches, it seems 'that there are no unregenerate in the church any longer. It seems as though even when a person has continued living for years in an unconverted state, he still must be considered to be regenerated.'<sup>48</sup> In summary, the preaching is no longer searching or discerning, because the doctrine of presupposed regeneration robs the administration of the Word of its power and as a result many spiritually build on sand and deceive themselves for eternity.<sup>49</sup>

Bavinck understood and sympathised with these complaints, which mainly represented the tradition of the Secession, although they might also have been uttered in the churches that originated from the Doleantie. The necessity of heart searching or distinguishing preaching was characteristic for the Further Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*), the Dutch form of Puritanism. This tradition was not only upheld in the churches of the Secession, but also remained present in the Dutch Reformed Church after the Secession (1834) and even after the Doleantie (1886).

<sup>45</sup> Bavinck, *RW*, p. 7, Bavinck, *SG*, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. J. Veenhof, 'Discussie over het zelfonderzoek—sleutel tot verstaan van het schisma van 1944', *Theologia Reformata*, 45 (2002), 219-41, 223-4.

<sup>47</sup> A. Kuyper, Jr, *Johannes Maccovius* (Leiden: Donner, 1899).

<sup>48</sup> Bavinck, *RW*, p. 10, Bavinck, *SG*, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Bavinck, *RW*, p. 10, Bavinck, *SG*, p. 5.

On the one hand Bavinck opposes the radical development of Kuyper's position. The book can be read as supportive of the criticism from the Secession circles. It is mostly seen as an independent voice next to Abraham Kuyper Sr.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, however, Bavinck also nuances the criticism and tries to win the critics for the acceptance of Kuyper's doctrine of presupposed regeneration. He rejects that as the ground for baptism, but he does not deny that it is possible that infants are born again before being baptised and he emphasises that—according to the judgment of love—all children must be regarded as regenerate until the opposite appears. On the one hand he rejects harsh supralapsarianism and the idea of eternal justification, on the other hand he states that the idea of immediate regeneration is truly Reformed and even blames those who reject immediate grace, of Pelagianism.<sup>51</sup> All depends upon the right interpretation of the term *immediate*. Bavinck seemingly criticizes 'immediate regeneration' but in fact he makes the terminology acceptable by stressing the immediacy of grace that does not exclude but presupposes the use of means.

In order to arrive at the 'truly Reformed' position, Bavinck first fences it off from Pelagianism, by stating that the work of the Spirit is immediate in the sense that nothing stands in between the Spirit and the soul. Secondly, he demarcates this position from enthusiasm by claiming that the power of the means of grace must be maintained. Finally, he distinguished the Reformed from the Roman Catholic and Lutheran positions by declaring that grace is not bound to the Word or to the sacraments.<sup>52</sup> These three topics correspond with the chapters of the book.

In the first of the three mentioned chapters, titled 'The Immediate Work of the Holy Spirit', Bavinck argues that in the Reformed tradition starting with Calvin, the mystical union with the person of Christ from all eternity precedes all the benefits of Christ.<sup>53</sup> All the Reformed agreed that the external call came first, but that does not decide the question

<sup>50</sup> Bavinck's *Saved by Grace* is often interpreted as a critical alternative to Kuyper's views on regeneration. J. Mark Beach calls it 'a mildly 'anti-Kuyperian' work. J. Beach, 'Introductory Essay', in Bavinck, *SG*, pp. ix-lvi (p. xiv). According to Jan Veenhof, Bavinck treads a third path next to Kuyperianism and anti-Kuyperianism, though he admits that this path is not easy to trace. Veenhof, 'Discussie over het zelfonderzoek', p. 235.

<sup>51</sup> Bavinck, *RW*, p. 22; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> Bavinck, *RW*, p. 17; Bavinck, *SG*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>53</sup> Bavinck, *RW*, p. 25; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 16. This seems to be a later development in Reformed orthodoxy tied up with the doctrine of the *pactum salutis*. Bavinck gives no references for the claim that Calvin already teaches an eternal mystical union with Christ.

where the internal work of the Spirit starts. Different answers were given to the question when this happened and originally the Reformed used several different names for this first beginning, like internal call, repentance, faith, conversion, regeneration and active grace. Nevertheless, all agreed completely regarding the fact that this beginning was not human, but divine. In the work of salvation human beings are receptive and passive.

With Augustine, the Reformed confessed the internal, hidden and effectual grace. 'Nothing stands in between this work of grace and the person that is born again, no word, no sacrament, no church or priest, no act of the mind or of the will.'<sup>54</sup> The Holy Spirit works directly, immediately and irresistibly. Thus Bavinck equates immediate grace with irresistible grace. No concerned church member fostering the tradition of the 'Nadere Reformatie' would dare to object to irresistible grace. Bavinck reduces the issue at stake between the different parties to the question of whether this work of the Spirit can or cannot be called immediate without misunderstanding. This reveals that he is trying to win the concerned members of his own churches for the acceptance of the Kuyperian position.

In the second chapter Bavinck argues that this immediate work of the Spirit includes the use of means. In this chapter he criticises 'immediate regeneration' if it excludes the Word as a means of grace.<sup>55</sup> To prove that the original meaning of the word 'immediate' did not exclude the use of the means he not only refers to Augustine whose doctrine of grace was combined with a high view of the church, but also to the *Heidelberg Catechism* (Lord's Day 25) and the *Belgic Confession of Faith* (article 24), where true faith and regeneration are said to be wrought through Word and Spirit. He acknowledges that regeneration there refers to the whole life of faith and sanctification, but, according to Bavinck, this whole also includes the beginning.

He also refers extensively to Reformed orthodox sources. He admits that it is true that later on the distinction was made between regeneration in a strict sense and conversion, but nowhere is this distinction explained in a way that suggests that the first was effected without and the second through the Word.<sup>56</sup> Bavinck demonstrates that the Synod of Dordt main-

<sup>54</sup> Bavinck, *RW*, p. 27; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 17.

<sup>55</sup> Bavinck, *RW*, p. 47, Bavinck, *SG*, p. 34. He adds that 'many today hold the view that the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit in regeneration constitutes a contrast with the mediate operation....' Bavinck, *RW*, p. 48; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 34.

<sup>56</sup> Bavinck, *RW*, p. 58; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 41.



tained over against the Remonstrants that the irresistibility (or rather invincibility) of grace did not exclude the use of the word as means of grace. Thus the *Canons of Dordt* explicitly confess that 'the supernatural work of God by which he regenerates us in no way rules out or cancels the use of the gospel, which God in his great wisdom has appointed to be the seed of regeneration and the food of the soul'.<sup>57</sup>

The Reformed defended the immediateness of grace over against the Remonstrants and later over against the school of Saumur. To illustrate the first point Bavinck translates and summarises a part of Franciscus Gomarus comments on Matthew 23:37 where Jesus complains that he wanted to gather the children of Jerusalem as a hen her chickens under her wings, but that they did not want this. The Leiden professor confutes the error of the Remonstrants, who used this text to prove their ideas regarding free will by vindicating the meaning of Jesus words and asserting the orthodox doctrine.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, part of this primarily exegetical source is devoted to the question whether the work of the Spirit can be called immediate, but Bavinck overemphasises this point in his presentation.

Gomarus distinguishes between the *habitus* and the *actus* of faith. 'God both requires the act of believing externally of a person through the Word and must grant him the *habitus* of believing internally through his Spirit, making him able to believe, and by the hearing of the word and his help excites him to the act of believing.'<sup>59</sup> In the treatise the word 'immediate' is brought up from the Arminian side to accuse the Reformed of making the use of the means superfluous. Bavinck gives the impression that Gomarus calls the *habitus* of faith immediate, while in fact Gomarus only refutes an Arminian misunderstanding.

Bavinck adds many other Reformed sources to underline the immediacy of grace or of regeneration both against Arminianism and against the theology of Saumur, where—following John Cameron—regeneration was merely understood as illumination of the mind.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Bavinck, *RW*, p. 61; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 43.

<sup>58</sup> The explanation of this text, titled 'Vindicatio fententiae Christi Matt. 23. V. 37. ubi prolix erroris Remonstrantium, de gratia conversionis & libero arbitrio confutatio, & doctrinae orthodoxae asserio' is part of a collection of exegetical remarks on the gospels. F. Gomarus, *Opera theologica omnia* (Amsterdam: J. Janssonius, 1664), pp. 85-126.

<sup>59</sup> 'Quare hunc credenda actum Deus & mandat homini verbo exterius, & interius per suum Spiritum donando fidei habitum, ad credendum, idoneum reddit; & audito verbo, suoque auxilio ad credendum actu excitat.' Gomarus, *Opera*, p. 104. Cf. Bavinck, *RW*, p. 64; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 45.

<sup>60</sup> In order to analyse Bavinck's relationship with Reformed orthodox theology more carefully, all his sources should be traced and checked, but in general

The ambiguousness of Bavinck's position lies in the fact that he on the one hand defends the systematic and logical order of the *ordo salutis* in which calling precedes regeneration, while at the same time he keeps repeating that it is possible that regeneration precedes calling and even that this is mostly the case with those born within the covenant. Bavinck even states that the idea of regeneration in its narrow sense as vivification is present in seed form in Calvin.<sup>61</sup>

[W]ith respect to many children of believers Calvin accepts a form of regeneration apart from the preaching of the gospel. But when he formulates the general rule and indicates the order of the benefits of salvation, then he always places calling before regeneration, the preaching of the Word before the operation of the Spirit.<sup>62</sup>

After discussing Calvin, Bavinck makes the same point for Maccovius, the hero of radical Kuyperians. In passing, Bavinck states that the real problem with the Polish theologian was that his way of life was everything except Christian, that he was blamed of living like a beast and that it was no wonder that pious men like Sibrandus Lubbertus and William Ames sought a connecting between this wrong life and a wrong doctrine. But even Maccovius does not call regeneration immediate in any sense that excludes the use of the means. Bavinck concludes: 'So Maccovius also subscribed to the doctrine that the call—as a rule even the external, but in any case the internal call—precedes regeneration.'<sup>63</sup> Following Maccovius, Voetius, Van Maastricht, Alexander Comrie and the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1645) are also cited to prove the same points. Calling logically precedes regeneration, but regeneration may temporarily precede calling. The solution towards which Bavinck is arguing is that the internal call coincides with regeneration.

In the second part of the chapter Bavinck mentions three reasons for maintaining the logical order of calling and regeneration: (1) because of the doctrine of the covenant, (2) because of the uncertainty regarding the time of regeneration related to baptism, (3) to avoid Anabaptist dualism. Still, his real point is to create space for the alternative chronological order in which the divine call follows the preceding immediate grace of regeneration.

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the Reformed orthodox quotations that call regeneration immediate are not particularly convincing, because the phrase is often used in a polemical context.

<sup>61</sup> Bavinck, *RW*, p. 77; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 56.

<sup>62</sup> Bavinck, *RW*, p. 79; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 57.

<sup>63</sup> Bavinck, *RW*, p. 86; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 62.

After describing the different views on the chronology of baptism and regeneration and placing the view of Voetius against that of a rather unknown Dutch theologian, Jesajas Hillenius—concludes: ‘People did not accuse one another of heresy, however, and never considered criticizing each other before the church public as being less reformed.’<sup>64</sup> This sounds like a warning of the concerned Secession brethren.

In the final chapter of the book, Bavinck explains the connection between the immediate operation of the Spirit and the use of the means. Bavinck, in short, concludes that regeneration precedes the saving hearing the Word of God. For the act of saving faith, the Word is absolutely necessary. But then the word is the means through which the capacity (*habitus*) of faith progresses into the act of faith.<sup>65</sup> The infusion of the capacity of faith in regeneration precedes any act of faith. ‘So regeneration occurs *under* the Word, *by* the Word, *with* the Word, but it does not occur *through* the Word.’<sup>66</sup>

At first glance the articles are polemical against Kuyper and especially against his radical epigones. Most of the readers of *De Bazuin*, the periodical of the theological school in Kampen, belonged to the camp that criticised Kuyperian theological renewal. Between the critical lines, however, Bavinck tried to ease the consciences of the concerned members of the church by showing that—if interpreted correctly—nothing was essentially wrong with the position they attacked.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps the strongest argument that *Calling and Regeneration* was not intended as an attack of Kuyperianism lies in the silence of Abraham Kuyper himself.<sup>68</sup> He would never have accepted an attack by Bavinck so peacefully. Although Kuyper did not agree with Bavinck on all points, he must have noticed that his colleague was moving in his direction compared to the first edition of the *Reformed Dogmatics*. Kuyper did not feel attacked, because he understood that Bavinck was trying to win the concerned members of the

<sup>64</sup> Bavinck, *RW*, p. 129; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 90.

<sup>65</sup> Bavinck, *RW*, p. 217; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 150.

<sup>66</sup> Bavinck, *RW*, p. 220-21; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 152.

<sup>67</sup> Instead of attacking Kuyper, Bavinck links up his discussion of immediate grace with Kuyper’s view of Calvinism whose essence lies in the ‘high thought that God, superior in majesty above all creatures, still holds immediate communion with the creature through his Holy Spirit.’ Bavinck, *RW*, p. 28; Bavinck, *SG*, p. 18.

<sup>68</sup> This silence is interpreted negatively by those who read Bavinck’s *Saved by Grace* as anti-Kuyperian. ‘We cannot trace Kuyper’s reaction to this beautiful book of Bavinck. *De Heraut* remains dead silent about it.’ R. Dam, B. Holwerda, C. Veenhof, and D. Vollenhoven, *Rondom ‘1905’: een historische schets* (Terneuzen: Littooi, [1944]), p. 28, n. 46.

Secession churches for the acceptance of the theological differences with the Doleantie churches.

## CONCLUSION

The three issues in the *Reformed Dogmatics*—the order of the *ordo salutis*, the relationship between the external and internal call, and the physical character of grace—show that Bavinck's thoughts developed towards a stronger emphasis on the internal work of the Spirit instead of his original emphasis on the external Word. It also shows the growing influence of the later phases of Reformed theology on Bavinck's thought; in his early years he was more critical of that development from the perspective of the reformation. Bavinck tends to interpret his sources from a modern object-subject scheme and sometimes his quotations even seem to lay other nuances than he does in his elaboration on them. The analysis of his thoughts on immediate regeneration in *Roeping en Wedergeboorte* show that this development was strengthened by his desire to mediate between the positions of the Secession and the Doleantie on assumed regeneration and eternal justification. Although he did not consent to the radical Kuyperian position, he pleaded for acceptance of that position by stressing the immediate character of divine grace.

Bavinck wrestled with the subject-object dilemma. He wanted to remain faithful to the Reformed tradition, because for him it was the purest form of true biblical theology. Therefore Scripture and not the Reformed tradition should have the final word. It seems to me that due to his concern for the pastoral questions and for the unity of the church in a later stage of his life he leaned more heavily on the later developments in the Reformed tradition regarding regeneration than at the beginning, where he was more critical of the later development. This shift of emphasis runs parallel to a general tendency in his theology to take his starting point in the human subject.