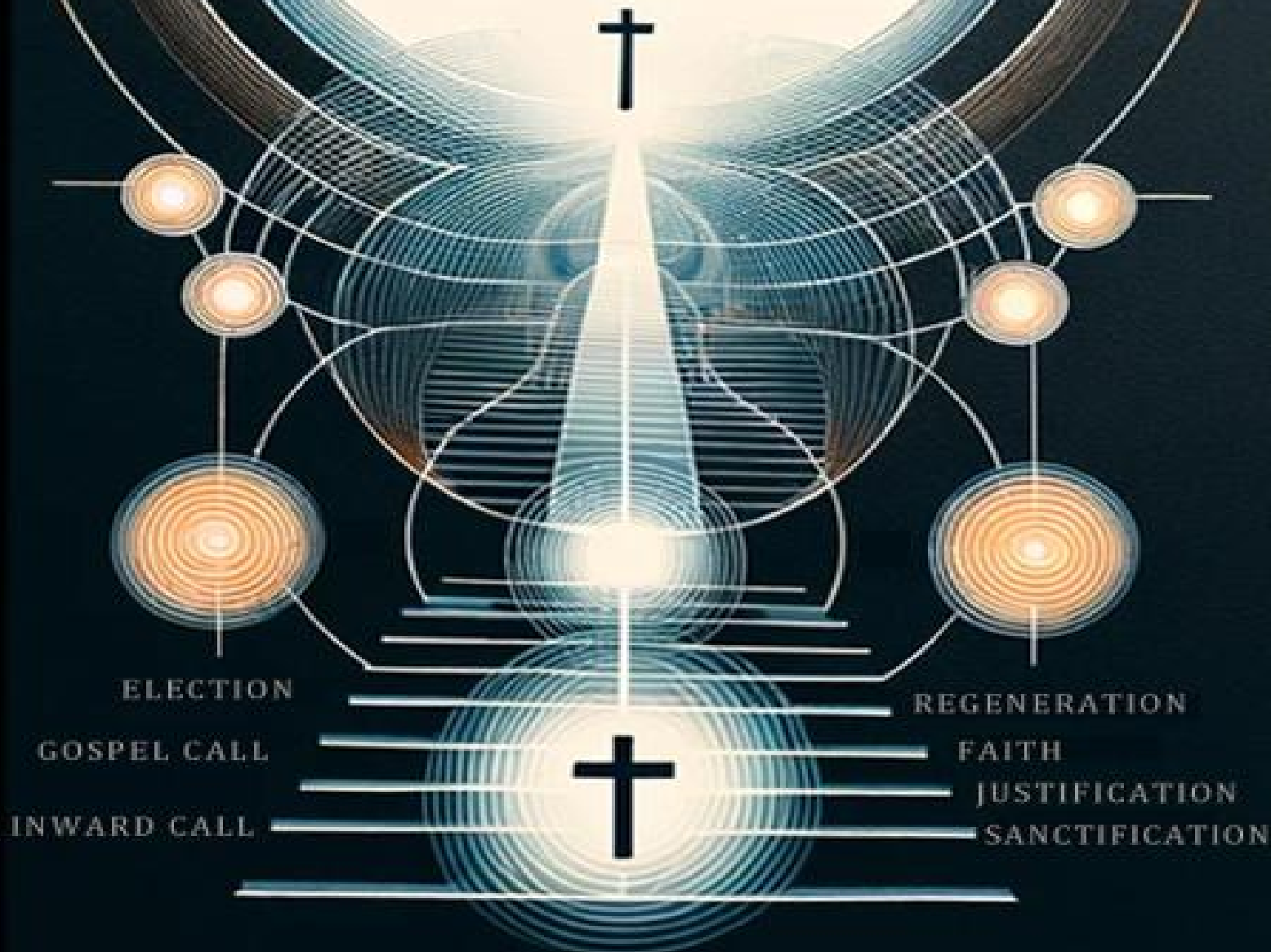


# THE ORDER OF SALVATION

The Ordo Salutis



ELECTION

REGENERATION

GOSPEL CALL

FAITH

INWARD CALL

JUSTIFICATION

SANCTIFICATION

HERMAN BAVINCK

THE APPLICATION OF THE WORK OF REDEMPTION

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# **The Order of Salvation**

**by Herman Bavinck**

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## **Introduction**

In the exploration of salvation within Christian theology, a distinctive emphasis is placed on grace as the fundamental mechanism of salvation, setting Christianity apart from other religions that rely on human efforts for redemption. It begins with the assertion that salvation in Christianity is a divine initiative through Jesus Christ, contrasting with the self-salvific paths seen in other belief systems. It underscores the biblical covenant of grace, where salvation is depicted not as a human achievement but as a gift from God, fostering a relationship based on love, obedience, and faith in God's promises.

Bavinck highlights the early church's engagement with these concepts, including the challenges posed by legalism and the pivotal role of the Holy Spirit in empowering believers and signaling God's kingdom through signs and wonders. The text navigates through theological debates, such as the conflict between Pelagianism—which views grace as enabling human choice towards good—and Augustine's stance, which firmly situates salvation and grace as entirely the work of God, independent of human merit.

Further, it explores the nuances of Roman Catholic and Protestant understandings of grace, the former viewing it as a transformative power that elevates humans to a supernatural existence, and the latter as a liberating force from sin, emphasizing faith and the believer's relationship with God. The Reformation's critique of the Catholic penitential system, especially Luther's concept of faith alone as the means of justification, marks a significant shift towards a more personal and direct engagement with the divine.

Bavinck also examines the broader implications of these theological debates on the Christian understanding of salvation, touching upon various perspectives like mysticism, rationalism, and modern interpretations that either emphasize a direct communion with the divine or advocate for a moral and intellectual path to salvation. He critically assesses the evolution of these ideas, including the impact of modernity's shift towards the human subject and the philosophical attempts to reconcile Christian doctrine with contemporary thought.

While Scripture does not provide a systematic outline for salvation, it offers varied insights into the Holy Spirit's transformative role. The process of salvation unfolds as follows: it begins with the covenant of grace, through which Christ secures salvation's benefits. The Holy Spirit then applies these benefits to believers, initiating with

justification based on Christ's atonement. This leads to the believers' repentance and sanctification, essential for maturing in grace. Regeneration by the Holy Spirit comes before faith, indicating that sanctification is necessary for eternal life. Essentially, salvation involves being called, regenerated, justified, sanctified, and glorified by God's grace, through Christ, and by the Holy Spirit's work.

In conclusion, Bavinck reaffirms the complexity and richness of the Christian doctrine of salvation, rooted in the covenant of grace and the transformative work of the Holy Spirit, while also acknowledging the ongoing dialogue within Christianity and its engagement with modern philosophical and theological reflections.

## **The Universal Quest for Salvation**

If Christ continues his prophetic, priestly, and royal activities in heaven, it logically follows that we must view the theological order of salvation and all its associated benefits. Just as God is the creator and ruler of all things, firmly establishing himself in Christ against sin, and unveiling all his attributes of righteousness, grace, omnipotence, and wisdom through him, it is also through the Holy Spirit that he applies Christ's benefits, accomplishes his own work in them, and advances his own glory. The path to salvation (*via salutis*) holds a distinct character in Scripture, fundamentally divergent from what is advocated in the world's religions or philosophical systems. There is hardly a religion without the concept of redemption and a means of participation in it. While arts and sciences can be formidable tools in the struggle for survival, and culture can enhance and enrich human life, they all prove inadequate in bestowing lasting happiness and eternal goodness upon humanity. Nevertheless, this is

what people consistently seek in religion, arising from much deeper levels of need than those satisfied by the material world. The human heart is inherently designed for God, remaining restless until it finds its ultimate rest in Him. As every person, to varying degrees, strives for lasting happiness and an unchanging good, it can be asserted, in agreement with Augustine, that everyone is inherently in search of God, the highest good and our eternal salvation (Acts 17:27). However, it must be promptly acknowledged that in our limited understanding and tainted thoughts, we do not seek God in the right manner or in the right places. Pagan religions lack an understanding of God's holiness, lack true insight into sin, and are unfamiliar with the concept of grace. Since they do not recognize the person of Christ, they all uphold the path of works as the means of salvation.

The foremost principle of paganism, essentially, consists of a negative aspect—rejecting the one true God and disregarding His gracious gifts—and a positive aspect—believing in human efforts to attain salvation through wisdom and strength. "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves" (Gen. 11:4). The concept of redemption and the path leading to it vary depending on the specific problem from which redemption is sought. Across all religions, distinct from magic, there is a shared pursuit of redemption from a supernatural divine power, one who can offer assistance willingly but cannot be coerced and must be appeased and influenced through sacrifices, prayers, rituals, and moral conduct.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, these religions consistently place significant emphasis on human actions. Humans are responsible for satisfying the deity and complying with its laws. Whether these actions are predominantly ceremonial or ethical, positive or negative, humans are invariably their own saviors; all religions, except for Christianity, promote autosotericism. In the most primitive religions, the concept of sin is nearly nonexistent, and

atonement, peace, and happiness are primarily achieved through magical acts and rituals, although moral conduct still holds significance. In more advanced religions, morality takes precedence, and salvation becomes increasingly reliant on moral fulfillment.

Depending on the valuation of human earthly endeavors within the context of moral law fulfillment, moral religions develop into either practical or ascetic schools of thought. For instance, in Parsiism, the cult constitutes only a relatively small aspect of the overarching battle that each individual must wage against impurity, death, and the devil. This struggle extends to all facets of life and involves not only various purifications, cleansings, and adjurations but also the practice of virtues (honesty, truth, righteousness, mercy, etc.) and the faithful pursuit of one's earthly calling: "He who sows grain, sows holiness." Conversely, Buddhism, where misery is equated with life itself, regards redemption as the suppression of the desire for existence. This desire gradually diminishes and fades through adherence to the eightfold path and, notably, through withdrawal from the external world into the self.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of variations in views regarding moral law and its fulfillment, the common thread remains that individuals are responsible for their own redemption. "Be your own light!" Buddha instructed his disciples. "Be your own refuge. Do not seek refuge in anything else. Hold onto the truth as if it were a lamp. Do not seek refuge in anyone other than yourself." Similarly, Islam, which originated after Christianity, does not offer a deeper understanding of sin and grace. It primarily locates redemption in liberation from hellish punishment for unbelievers, considering redemption from sin itself to be less significant. While Muslims do pray for the forgiveness of sins, it is automatically granted upon repentance—belief in the oneness of God, acknowledgment of Muhammad as His prophet, and performance of



religious duties (prayer, alms, fasting, pilgrimage). Redemption is not a divine gift but an individual's own action.<sup>7</sup>

Philosophical systems essentially concur with these religions: the sole path to salvation lies in virtue and moral self-improvement. This pursuit may manifest in practical endeavors, ascetic self-denial, or mystical contemplation, but in all cases, it is humans who strive with all their faculties to ascend and secure their own salvation. In the words of Seneca, "It is the task of the gods to ensure that we live, but it is ours to live well." According to Cicero, there is no need to express gratitude to God for possessing virtue because our virtue is just cause for others' admiration and a valid source of our own pride. This would not be the case if virtue were a divine gift, and we did not attain it through our own efforts. "Has anyone ever thanked the gods for being a good person?"

## **The Bible's View of Salvation: Grace**

The Scriptural perspective on salvation, which markedly contrasts with others, is evident from ancient times. In the Old Testament, it is God who, immediately following the fall, graciously instills enmity between humanity and the serpent and reconciles humanity to Himself (Gen. 3:15). God selects Abraham and his descendants, the people of Israel, to be His chosen possession (Gen. 12:1; Exod. 15:13, 16; 19:4; 20:2; Deut. 7:6f.). He establishes a covenant with them and imparts His laws (Gen. 15:1; 17:2; Exod. 2:24–25; Deut. 4:5–13). He provides blood on the altar for atonement (Lev. 17:11) and fulfills all the requirements for His vineyard (Isa. 5; Jer. 2:21). This covenantal

relationship isn't contingent upon law observance as a precondition; it isn't a covenant of works but solely grounded in God's elective love. Nevertheless, it must be validated and sealed through adherence to God's law. Given that Israel couldn't accept it with a perfect heart and make it a genuine reality except through faith coupled with love and a desire to follow the covenant's path. If the covenant is genuine and not merely a concept, it necessitates compliance with the covenant's requirements. It is, therefore, self-evident that concerning the covenant and its law, people could adopt differing stances. Among them were ungodly antinomian individuals, akin to the Sadducees, who cared little for God or His commandments and derided the devout (Pss. 14:1; 36:2; 42:3, 10; 94:2; Mal. 2:17; 3:14). There were also Pharisees who emphasized outward compliance with the law and founded their righteousness and salvation upon it (Amos 6:1; Jer. 7:4). Between these groups existed a small faithful minority, the sincerely devout, who regarded the Lord's law with deep reverence, meditated upon it day and night, and held it in high regard. Nevertheless, they didn't predicate their righteousness and salvation on law observance. Although they frequently appealed to their righteousness and called upon God to vindicate them (Pss. 7:8; 17:1ff.; 18:21; 26:1ff.; 35:24; 41:12; 44:18, 21; 71:2; 119:121; 2 Kings 20:3; Job 16:17; Neh. 5:19; 13:14; etc.), they also humbly confessed their sins, entreated God for forgiveness, and pled for His grace (Pss. 31:9–10; 32:1ff.; 38:1ff.; 40:13; 41:4; 130:2, 4; Isa. 6:5; 53:4; 64:6; Jer. 3:25; Mic. 7:9; Neh. 1:6; 9:33; Dan. 9:5, 7, 18; etc.). The righteousness of these devout individuals isn't a personal attribute but a characteristic of the cause they represent. They are righteous because they surrender themselves to God. In the Old Testament, it's this trust in God that fundamentally defines righteousness. They believe in God (יֵאֱמֵן, Gen. 15:6; Exod. 14:31; 2 Chron. 20:20; Isa. 28:16; Hab. 2:4), place their trust in Him (בָּטַח, Pss. 4:5; 9:10), seek refuge in Him (סָתַח, Pss. 7:1; 18:2), fear Him (יָרָא, Pss. 22:23; 25:12),

hope in Him (לְיָחַד, הוֹחִיל, Pss. 31:25; 33:18), expect from Him (קָוָה, Ps. 25:21), wait for Him (חָפָה, Ps. 33:20), lean on Him (סָמוךְ, Ps. 112:8; נִסְמָךְ, Ps. 57:7), and remain loyal to Him (דָּבַק, חָשַׁק, Ps. 91:14; 2 Kings 18:6; etc.). This faith is counted as righteousness (Gen. 15:6), just as elsewhere the observance of God's commandments is referred to as righteousness (Deut. 6:25; 24:13).

## Old Testament Nomism

In the Old Testament, the essence of this subjective righteousness, which fundamentally rests on trust in God, is intrinsically linked to God's grace and the work of His Spirit. This is clearly evident from the Old Testament texts. When it comes to Israel, one cannot speak of a righteousness that originates from their own merit; they were chosen despite their stubbornness (Deut. 9:4–6). God is the ultimate source of all life, light, wisdom, power, and blessedness (Deut. 8:17–18; Pss. 36:9; 68:19–20, 35; 73:25–26; Jer. 2:13, 31). The prayer of Israel's devout is, "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory" (Ps. 115:1). Humility characterizes their souls (Gen. 32:10; Ps. 116:12), and a contrite heart is pleasing to God (Ps. 51:18; Isa. 57:15). Rather than crediting humans, everything is attributed to God as the giver, and above all, thanks are offered to Him. All creation is called upon to praise Him, and in prayer, everything is sought from Him – not only salvation from perils but also knowledge of His law, enlightenment of the eyes, and more. God shows mercy to whomever He chooses (Exod. 33:19) and records in His book those who will live (Exod. 32:33). He unconditionally promises to be their God, and they will be His people (Exod. 19:6; Lev. 26:12). Even in the face of Israel's unfaithfulness and apostasy, God consistently shows

compassion, grants repentance, and offers life (Exod. 32:30–35; Num. 14; 16:45–50; Lev. 26:40–44; Deut. 4:31; 8:5; 30:1–7; 32:36–43; Neh. 9:31). He forgives sins for His name's sake (Exod. 34:7, etc.) and sends His Spirit, who is the source of all spiritual life (Num. 11:25, 29; Neh. 9:20; Pss. 51:12; 143:10; Isa. 63:10). Even when history bears witness to Israel's repeated desecration, abandonment, or nullification of the covenant (Deut. 31:20; 1 Kings 11:11; 19:10, 14; Jer. 22:9; 32:32; etc.), prophecy proclaims that God will never break the covenant or forsake His people. He is bound by His name and reputation among the Gentiles (Num. 14:16; Deut. 32:26–27; 1 Sam. 12:22; Joel 2:17–19; Isa. 43:21, 25; 48:8–11; Jer. 14:7, 20–21; Ezek. 20:43–44; 36:32). This covenant is eternal, unbreakable, anchored in God's grace (2 Kings 13:23; 1 Chron. 16:17; Pss. 89:1–5; 105:10; 106:45; 111:5; Isa. 54:10). God is responsible for both parties, ensuring His people's steadfastness. He establishes a new covenant, retaining His Word and Spirit, forgiving their sins for His name's sake, pouring out His Spirit on all, giving them a heart of flesh, inscribing His law within them, and guiding them to walk in His statutes (Deut. 30:6; Isa. 44:3; 59:21; Jer. 24:7; 31:31f.; Ezek. 11:19; 16:60; 18:31; 36:26; 39:29; Joel 2:28; Mic. 7:19; etc.).

However, following the exile, these prophetic elements gradually diminished within Israel's religious landscape, leading to a one-sided emphasis on nomism. In 445 BC, Ezra and Nehemiah, upon the return of the exiles, administered an oath obligating all to observe the commandments of the Mosaic law (Neh. 8–10). This led to a profound transformation in the hearts and lives of the people of Israel. Prior to the exile, they had been resistant to the law, frequently falling into idolatry and wickedness, and repeatedly straying from faithfulness and allegiance. Yet after the exile, they submitted humbly to the law, utterly rejected idolatry and the

worship of images, and found great joy in obeying God's commandments.

However, over time, this fervor shifted towards the opposite extreme. Although the postexilic prophets raised their voices against this trend, when the prophetic influence waned, the nomistic movement continued to flourish. The true and living God, who had revealed Himself to Israel over the centuries, became overshadowed by His own law, which increasingly became the paramount privilege and focal point of Israel's existence. This perception was reinforced by the recurrent oppression and persecution endured by the Israelites. It was believed that God had distanced Himself from them due to their iniquities, allowing them to fall under the dominion of Gentile nations. It was anticipated that only in the future, through the Messiah, would God once again have compassion on Israel, liberating them from oppression and restoring their dominance over all other nations. Consequently, the primary expectation of the Messiah was not centered on atonement for sin and the establishment of a new covenant but rather on justice for Israel, deliverance from oppression, and the restoration of their authority over all nations.

Hence, Israel had to prepare for the arrival of the Davidic king by rigid adherence to the law. The law was exalted in various ways, equated with heavenly and eternal wisdom that emanated from God as His primary creation, and with which He continuously engaged. Therefore, being the perfect expression of salvation, the law would endure for eternity. While humanity, post-fall, continued to exist by God's mercy and owed its survival solely to God's grace after the grievous sin committed by Israel in the wilderness (Exod. 32), it was now more obligated and empowered to attain righteousness through law observance. God assessed all human deeds, particularly those of

the Israelites, according to the law's standard. These deeds were recorded in God's book, and a daily verdict was issued, determining either reward or punishment for each act. Good deeds performed by humans were considered offerings to God, obligating Him to reciprocate with gifts. In this system, God and humanity became contractual parties, and all aspects of the world operated within the framework of works and rewards. This applied not only to individual lives but also to the history of families, generations, peoples, and humanity as a whole. All of God's actions, from the beginning to the end of the world, were contingent upon human merit. In this context, there was no longer room for the biblical concept of atonement for sins. "Atonement" could only be achieved through acts such as repentance, faith, confession of sin (all considered works among other works), self-discipline, fasting, prayer, almsgiving, acts of mercy, Torah study, martyrdom, and more, all of which could either include a person in or restore a person to the ranks of the righteous. Moreover, any deficiency in one's own righteousness could be compensated by the righteousness of others, such as the patriarchs, Moses, Joshua, David, or even living individuals. The good deeds of the living also benefited the deceased. Thus, there were numerous methods to secure atonement for sin and attain righteousness, but they all ultimately revolved around the observance of the law and its often intricate commandments.

This consistent nomism gave rise to two distinct mindsets among the Jews. Some, whether genuinely or not (as was often the case with many Pharisees), believed that they had successfully fulfilled the entire law. This led to spiritual pride, with such individuals making claims on God for their rightful rewards (Matt. 19:20; Luke 18:11).

On the other hand, this nomistic perspective led others to conclude that righteousness could not be achieved through works alone.

Depending on whether individuals were ultimately content with themselves or not, they found themselves either among the righteous or the ungodly. However, this path did not bring them to the assurance of salvation. They did not experience the joy of a close relationship with God, nor did they find comfort and peace in His fellowship. Throughout their lives, they remained enslaved by the fear of death (Heb. 2:15). As their understanding of the law deepened and their commitment to fulfilling it grew more earnest, the law increasingly became an unbearable burden for the Jews (Acts 15:10).

The book of 4 Ezra captured this sentiment when it stated, "We who have received the law must nevertheless perish on account of our sins."

## **Consolation of God's Reign: The New Testament**

To truly grasp the depth of Jesus' gospel of the kingdom, it's essential to comprehend the state of Judaism during His time. On one hand, this kingdom is depicted as a heavenly treasure bestowed as a reward upon the righteous (Matt. 6:20; 13:43; 19:21; 25:46). To obtain it when fully revealed in the future, a righteousness surpassing that of the Pharisees is required (Matt. 5:20). This pursuit should take precedence above all else (Matt. 6:33) and necessitates unwavering commitment (Matt. 13:44–46; 19:21; Mark 9:43–47; 10:28–29). Nevertheless, this kingdom is markedly different from the Jewish expectations of that era. It is fundamentally spiritual, not political, as Jesus acknowledged from the outset during His temptation (Matt.

4:1–10). Its citizens are identified by spiritual virtues like purity of heart, meekness, mercy, humility, and more (Matt. 5:3ff.; 18:4; 20:26–27). Furthermore, it possesses a universal scope, intended not solely for the Jews but for all nations (Matt. 8:11; 21:43). Additionally, it is not merely a future occurrence but already exists in the present (Matt. 11:12; 12:28; Luke 17:21), continuously growing and spreading like a seed or leaven (Matt. 13:24ff.). Those who receive it in faith, akin to a child, will eventually enter into it (Mark 10:15).

In an eschatological sense, this kingdom is indeed referred to as a reward. However, the work and the reward are entirely disproportionate. The kingdom's incomparable value renders all notions of reward insignificant (Matt. 19:29; 20:13–15; 25:21; Mark 10:30; especially Luke 17:10). The righteousness required for entrance is itself a divine gift from God (Matt. 6:33), as are the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28; Luke 1:77; 24:47; etc.) and eternal life (Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30). God bestows this kingdom and its benefits not upon the righteous but upon publicans and sinners (Matt. 9:13), the lost (Matt. 18:11), the poor, and others (Matt. 5), as well as children (Matt. 18:3; Mark 10:15). This kingdom of heaven is theirs even on earth (Matt. 9:15; 11:11; 13:16–17; 23:13; Mark 10:15; Luke 17:21). To partake in this kingdom, one does not require personal righteousness but rather repentance (μετανοια), a change of heart, and faith (πιστις), the acceptance and trust in the gospel of the kingdom as a divine gift to the lost (Mark 1:15). This involves trust in God (Mark 11:22), in Jesus' word and power (Matt. 8:10; 9:2; Mark 4:40), and in Jesus as the Messiah (Matt. 27:42; Mark 9:42; John 1:12; 2:11; 6:29; 17:8; 20:31; Acts 9:22; 17:3; 18:5; etc.). Yet, even this μετανοια and πιστις are gifts of God's grace (Matt. 11:25, 27; 15:13; 16:17; Luke 10:22; John 6:44, 65; 12:32), allowing only those of the truth to come to faith (John 8:43, 47; 12:39; 18:37), who have been



given to the Son by the Father (6:37ff.; 17:2, 6, 9; 10:26; 12:32), and who have already experienced rebirth (1:12–13; 8:47).

In the preaching of the apostles, all of this is expounded at much greater length. The relation between the objective acquisition and subjective application of salvation becomes much clearer. After Jesus was raised from the dead, it became evident to his disciples that the kingdom he preached—with all its benefits of forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life—was acquired through his suffering and death. He was raised and glorified by the Father specifically to apply these benefits to his own. The application is inseparable from the acquisition, forming one work entrusted to the mediator, and he will not rest until he delivers the entire kingdom to the Father. However, despite the inseparable connection between the acquisition and application of salvation, there is a distinction between them.

Christ accomplished the former on earth, during his state of humiliation, through his suffering and death. He continues to achieve the latter from heaven, in the state of exaltation, through his prophetic, priestly, and royal activities at the right hand of the Father. This application of salvation is actualized by the Holy Spirit. Christ himself was empowered by the Spirit to fulfill his earthly mission. The Spirit played a role in his conception, anointing, guidance, ministry, and the miracles he performed. The Holy Spirit worked through Christ's words, actions, and emotions, being with him throughout his earthly ministry. The Spirit enabled Christ to offer himself in sacrifice and was instrumental in his resurrection. In the forty days between his resurrection and ascension, Christ provided instructions to his disciples through the Holy Spirit. At the ascension, Christ received the Holy Spirit along with all his gifts, ascending on high, taking captivity captive, giving gifts to humans, and filling all things.

Christ's appropriation of the Holy Spirit is so absolute that Paul can state in 2 Corinthians 3:17 that the Lord (referring to the exalted Christ) is the Spirit. This does not erase the distinction between them, as Paul refers to the "Spirit of the Lord" in verse 18 and in other passages. However, at the time of the ascension, the Holy Spirit became so closely associated with Christ that he can be referred to as the Spirit. In his exaltation, Christ became a life-giving Spirit. He now possesses the seven Spirits, representing the Spirit in his fullness, and he sends the Spirit forth as much as the Father does. The Spirit, who had been abundantly poured out on Christ during his earthly ministry, has now become the primary source of his life in his exaltation. Christ has relinquished all merely natural and psychological life and now, as the life-giving Spirit, leads his church to glory.

## **The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit**

The first activity Christ performs after his exaltation is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Having been exalted to the right hand of God and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father (the Holy Spirit promised in the Old Testament), Christ can now bestow this Spirit upon his earthly church (Acts 2:33). The Spirit he imparts proceeds from the Father and is received by Him from the Father; subsequently, Christ Himself pours it out upon His church (Luke 24:49; John 15:26). It is the Father who sends the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name (John 14:26). Before the ascension, there was no Holy Spirit in the sense that Jesus had not yet been glorified (John 7:39).

This does not imply that the Holy Spirit did not exist before Christ's exaltation, as the Old Testament mentions God's Spirit, and the Gospels speak of Elizabeth and John the Baptist being filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15, 41), Simeon being guided by the Holy Spirit (Luke 2:26–27), and Jesus being anointed with the Holy Spirit without measure (John 3:34). Nor does it mean that the disciples were unaware of the Holy Spirit before Pentecost; they were taught differently by the Old Testament and Jesus Himself. Even the disciples of John, who told Paul in Ephesus that they had not received the Holy Spirit at their baptism and had not heard of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:2), were not denying the Holy Spirit's existence but rather the extraordinary working of the Holy Spirit, such as the events on the day of Pentecost. They were aware that John was a prophet sent by God, equipped with the Spirit, but they had not joined Jesus' company and, therefore, lived outside the church, which received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

The event on Pentecost signifies that the Holy Spirit, who existed before that day and bestowed many gifts and performed great works, now began to dwell in the church as in His temple after Christ's ascension. After creation and the incarnation, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the third great work of God. This extraordinary gift of the Holy Spirit had been promised in the Old Testament, with prophecies that the Spirit would rest upon the Servant of the Lord in His fullness and be poured out upon all people in the last days, young and old, male and female (Isa. 11:2; Isa. 44:3; Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28ff.). John the Baptist continued this promise, stating that the Messiah would baptize not with water, as he did, but with the Holy Spirit and purifying fire (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; cf. Acts 2:3; 18:25; Rom. 12:11; 1 Thess. 5:19). Jesus also promised to send the Holy Spirit from the Father after His ascension to lead His disciples into all truth. He made it clear that the Holy Spirit's activity involved

two aspects: comforting the disciples and leading them into the truth, which is granted only to Jesus' disciples, while convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7, 8–11).

Jesus fulfilled this promise regarding his disciples, particularly his apostles, even before His ascension. On the evening of His resurrection, during His first appearance to the apostles, He solemnly introduced them to their apostolic mission. He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:22–23). This special endowment and power of the Holy Spirit for their apostolic office was given by Christ before His ascension, distinct from what they would later receive on the day of Pentecost along with all believers.

On that day of Pentecost, the apostles were not alone but gathered for prayer with certain women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, His brothers, and many others, totaling about 120 persons (Acts 1:14; 2:1). All of them were then filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4). While the same expression is used earlier (Exod. 31:3; Mic. 3:8; Luke 1:41), there is a significant difference in meaning. Previously, the Holy Spirit was temporarily given for specific purposes to isolated individuals, but now He descends upon all members of the church and continues to live and work in them. Just as the Son of God appeared repeatedly in the days of the Old Testament but did not choose human nature as His dwelling place until He was conceived in Mary's womb, various activities and the gift of the Holy Spirit were present earlier. However, on the day of Pentecost, He transformed the church into His temple, a temple He continually sanctifies, builds up, and never abandons.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit grants the church of Christ an independent existence. It is no longer confined within the boundaries of Israel's existence as a people or within the limits of Palestine. Instead, it lives independently by the Spirit dwelling within it and extends across the entire earth, reaching out to all peoples. God, through His Spirit, moves from the temple on Zion to reside in the body of Christ's church. Consequently, the church is born on this very day as a mission and world church. The ascension of Christ is naturally affirmed and authenticated by the descent of the Holy Spirit. Just as the Spirit initially consecrated and perfected Christ through His suffering and raised Him to the highest summit, He must now shape the body of Christ in the same manner and by the same means until it reaches full maturity and becomes the fullness (pleroma) of Him who fills all in all (Eph. 1:23).

In the early period of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, various extraordinary manifestations accompanied the lives of Christ's disciples. On the day of Pentecost, as soon as they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak in different languages as the Spirit enabled them (Acts 2:4). Luke's description makes it clear that this was not a miracle of hearing but a miracle of speaking and language. Luke, who worked closely with Paul, was well acquainted with the phenomenon of glossolalia, as seen in the church of Corinth and referenced by himself in Acts 10:46–47 and 19:6. The phenomenon on the day of Pentecost was undoubtedly related to glossolalia, as Peter could confidently declare that Cornelius and his household had received the Holy Spirit "just as we have" (Acts 10:47; cf. 11:17; 15:8). However, there was a distinction.

In 1 Corinthians 14, as well as in Acts 10:46 and 19:6, reference is made to tongues or languages without the adjective "foreign," which was mistakenly added in the Authorized Version. Yet in Acts 2:4, it

explicitly mentions "other" languages. When the Corinthians spoke in tongues, they were not understood unless someone interpreted (1 Cor. 14:2ff.). However, in Jerusalem, the disciples were already speaking in other languages before the crowd gathered, and the listeners could understand them. This rules out the possibility of a miracle of hearing (Acts 2:4). When the crowd heard them, they comprehended what was being said because each person heard the disciples speaking in their native language (Acts 2:6, 8). The "other languages" mentioned in verse 4 are undoubtedly the same as the "native languages" referred to in verse 6 (cf. also v. 8). Therefore, the disciples were not uttering unintelligible sounds but speaking in different languages, often described as "new" languages, as found in Mark 16:17. These were languages that uneducated Galileans were not expected to speak (Acts 2:7). In these languages, they proclaimed God's mighty works, particularly those accomplished in the last days, including the resurrection and ascension of Christ (Acts 2:4, 14ff.).

Luke's account should not be interpreted to mean that, at that moment, the disciples of Jesus possessed knowledge of and spoke all the languages of the world. Nor does it imply that each disciple individually spoke in foreign languages. The purpose of the miraculous languages was not to suggest that the disciples were conveying the gospel to foreigners in their respective native languages because they could not understand it otherwise. The fifteen names listed in verses 9–11 do not represent distinct languages but rather the countries from which foreigners had come to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. Furthermore, all these foreigners were capable of understanding either Aramaic or Greek, eliminating the necessity for the apostles to possess the gift of foreign languages.

Throughout the New Testament, there is no further mention of this gift of speaking foreign languages. Even Paul, who could have greatly benefited from such a gift as the apostle to the Gentiles, never makes reference to it. In the context of the time, Paul effectively communicated everywhere using Aramaic and Greek. Therefore, the phenomenon of speaking in foreign languages on the day of Pentecost was a unique event. While it had some connection to glossolalia, it represented a distinct and elevated form of expression. Glossolalia is considered a form of weakened and diminished speech, which is why Paul regarded it as inferior to prophecy. However, in Jerusalem, the speaking of languages was a combination of glossolalia and prophecy—a coherent declaration of God's mighty deeds in the native languages of the represented peoples.

The outpouring of the Spirit, in its fullness, was so potent at that moment that it exerted complete control over the disciples' conscious minds and found expression through articulate sounds that were recognized by the listeners as their own native languages. The purpose of this miraculous speech was not to permanently equip the disciples with the ability to speak foreign languages but rather to create an extraordinary and powerful impression of the significant event that had occurred. What better way to achieve this than by allowing the newly established, small world church to proclaim the mighty works of God in numerous languages? At the creation, the morning stars sang, and the sons of God rejoiced with shouts of joy. At the birth of Christ, a multitude of heavenly hosts sang praises to God. On the day of the church's birth, the church itself celebrated the great works of God in a multitude of languages.

While the speaking of languages on the day of Pentecost holds a unique position, the early manifestation of the Spirit included numerous extraordinary displays of power. In the legalistic Judaism

of that era, mentions of the Holy Spirit were rare. God had become a distant deity, no longer dwelling with His Spirit in the hearts of humanity. However, with John the Baptist and, especially, the appearance of Christ, a new era was ushered in. The Spirit descending upon Jesus was characterized by love and power, and this manifestation continued in the church after Pentecost.

Typically, the Spirit was granted after an individual came to faith. Sometimes, it occurred at the time of baptism (Acts 2:38), or through the laying on of hands before baptism (Acts 9:17), or through the laying on of hands after baptism (Acts 8:17; 19:6). Along with the Spirit came special gifts and power. The Spirit bestowed qualities such as boldness in proclaiming the word (Acts 4:8, 31), an exceptional measure of faith (6:5; 11:24), comfort and joy (9:31; 13:52), wisdom (6:3, 10), glossolalia (10:46; 15:8; 19:6), prophecy (11:28; 20:23; 21:11), appearances and revelations (7:55; 8:39; 10:19; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6; 20:22), and miraculous healings (3:6; 5:12, 15–16; 8:7, 13).

Similar to the works of Jesus, these extraordinary displays of power in the church evoked fear and amazement (2:7, 37, 43; 3:10; 4:13; 5:5, 11, 13, 24). On one hand, they infuriated opposition and stirred the hearts of enemies to hatred and persecution. On the other hand, they also prepared the ground for the reception of the gospel message in the world. During this initial period, they were essential in securing acceptance and permanence for the confession of Christ.

## **Salvation, the Spirit's Gift**



Throughout the apostolic period, these extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit persisted. The apostle Paul serves as a prominent witness to this. He himself was richly endowed with special spiritual gifts. His conversion on the road to Damascus, where he received a revelation from Jesus Christ (Acts 9:3ff.), marked the beginning of his call as an apostle. Paul continued to receive revelations (Acts 16:7, 9; 2 Cor. 12:1–7; Gal. 2:2, etc.). He possessed gifts of knowledge, teaching, glossolalia, and prophecy. He proclaimed the gospel with a demonstration of the Spirit's power (1 Cor. 2:4), and Christ worked through him, performing signs, wonders, and miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:18–19; 2 Cor. 12:12).

Similar gifts were granted to other believers as well. In 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 and Romans 12:6–8, Paul explains that these gifts, distributed in varying degrees, all come from the same Spirit, given to each as He wills (1 Cor. 12:11). These gifts fulfilled the Old Testament promise (Gal. 3:14) and acted as the firstfruits, guaranteeing a future heavenly inheritance (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14; 4:30).

While Paul greatly valued these gifts, he emphasized that they should align with the confession of Jesus as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3). He discouraged their misuse for self-elevation and urged that they be employed sincerely and for the benefit of others. Paul emphasized the interconnectedness of all believers, viewing them as members of one body, each needing the other (1 Cor. 12:12–30). He differentiated the gifts by their ability to edify the church (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:12). Love, among all these gifts, stood as the most excellent, as without it, all other gifts held no value (1 Cor. 12:31–13:13). With this, Paul shifted the focus from the temporary manifestations of the Spirit to the ongoing spiritual and moral activities the Holy Spirit continually brought into the church. This shift mirrored the Old Testament's

emphasis that the Spirit of God was the author of true spiritual and moral life (Pss. 51:12; 143:10; Isa. 32:15; Ezek. 36:27).

Jesus shared this perspective when speaking to Nicodemus, asserting that entrance into the kingdom of heaven required a new birth through the Spirit of God (John 3:3, 5). In His farewell discourses, Jesus explained that the Holy Spirit would come to comfort, guide, advocate, and represent the believers (John 14–16).

Hence, although the early period saw many extraordinary signs of the Spirit's power, both appreciated and sometimes overrated, it is vital to recognize that the Spirit's abundant influence also manifested in religious and moral virtues. The disciples of Christ were united into a close-knit, holy community, persisting in the apostles' teachings, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers (Acts 2:42). They held everything in common, being of one heart and soul (Acts 4:32). Through the Spirit, they gained freedom, boldness to speak the word, strengthened faith, comfort, and joy in times of oppression (Acts 4:8, 31; 6:5; 9:31; 11:24; 13:52; etc.). The letters of the apostles further exemplify these virtues in other churches, highlighting the Holy Spirit's role in fostering deep fellowship among believers and between Christ and His church. While distinct from the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit, mentioned alongside them, shares in their essence, fully incorporating believers into communion with them and imparting all their benefits.

His activity is by no means limited, primarily, or exclusively to the bestowal of extraordinary gifts and powers. It is not solely centered on conveying Christ's benefits apart from His person. While Christ's redemptive work secured forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit's role is not merely to affirm the proclamation of this gospel (John 15:26–27; Acts 5:32; 1 Cor. 2:4; 2 Cor. 4:13; 1 Thess. 1:5–6; 1 Pet. 1:12), prove

the world wrong (John 16:8–11), instill faith in people's hearts (1 Cor. 2:5; 12:3; Eph. 1:19–20; 2:8; Col. 2:12; Phil. 1:29; 1 Thess. 2:13), and assure believers of their status as children of God (Rom. 8:15–16).

While forgiveness is a crucial judicial benefit, it is not the only one. Christ's redemptive work also includes sanctification, breaking the power of sin. He died so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Christ (2 Cor. 5:15). In fulfilling the law, forgiveness fundamentally weakened sin's dominion. Where righteousness exists, so does life. Romans 3–5 is succeeded by Romans 6–8. Christ did not just die; He also rose and was glorified. He remains the Lord from heaven and the life-giving Spirit, not only dying for the church but also living and working within it. The Holy Spirit is the agent of this communion between Christ and the church.

The Holy Spirit is not solely responsible for producing faith and confirming believers' status as children of God; He is also the author of new life. Faith goes beyond accepting God's witness; it initiates a new way of life (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10; 4:24; Col. 3:9–10). Through the Spirit, Christ Himself dwells among His own (John 14:18), inhabiting them (Rom. 8:9–11; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17; Col. 3:11). Simultaneously, believers exist, live, think, and act in Christ through the Spirit (John 17:21; Rom. 8:1, 9–10; 12:5; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:28; 5:25; Eph. 1:13; Col. 2:6, 10). Christ encompasses everything and resides in all (Col. 3:11).

Furthermore, God Himself comes to indwell believers through the Holy Spirit, filling them with His fullness, ultimately aiming for God to be all in all (John 14:23; 1 Cor. 3:16–17; 6:19; 15:28; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:22). The Holy Spirit establishes communion with Christ's person, facilitating participation in all His benefits: wisdom (1 Cor. 2:6–10), righteousness (1 Cor. 6:11), holiness (1 Cor. 6:11; Rom.

15:16; 2 Thess. 2:13), and redemption (Rom. 8:2, 23). The Spirit assures believers of their status as children of God (Rom. 8:14–17; Gal. 4:6) and the love of God (Rom. 5:5). He liberates them from the law, allowing them to function as one church in the world, governed by their principles and under their head (Acts 2; 2 Cor. 3; Gal. 4:21–6:10). He unites believers into one body (1 Cor. 12:13), leading them to the one Father (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 2:18), fostering a confession of Christ as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3), harmonizing their hearts and souls (Acts 4:31–32; Gal. 5:22; Phil. 2:1–2), and guiding their growth to maturity in Christ (1 Cor. 3:10–15; Eph. 4:1–16; Gal. 2:19). The Holy Spirit serves as the author of regeneration (John 3:5–6; Titus 3:5), life (John 6:63; 7:38–39; Rom. 8:2; 2 Cor. 3:6), illumination (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:6–16; 2 Cor. 3:12; 4:6; Eph. 1:17; 1 John 2:20; 4:6; 5:6), various gifts (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:4ff.), renewal, and sanctification (Rom. 8; Gal. 5:16, 22; Eph. 3:16). He seals and glorifies believers (Rom. 8:11, 23; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30).

The church has held, from its very inception, an unwavering certainty that faith in Christ is the path to salvation. Believers recognized their unique connection with God, sustained continuously by His grace. They were God's chosen ones, adopted through Jesus Christ to form His own people. Through Christ's agency, they sought refuge in His mercy, becoming the new people with whom God established His covenant. Christ not only revealed God to them but also offered His blood for their sins. He surrendered Himself to cleanse them through forgiveness and to bring them to life through His wounds. He stands as the Lord and high priest of their confession, the focal point of their faith, preserving and strengthening them in their beliefs. Those who do not believe in Christ's blood are condemned. Self-justification holds no ground; it's not based on human wisdom, piety, or righteous deeds but rests

solely on faith. From the very beginning, Almighty God has justified everyone. We are saved by grace, not by works, in accordance with God's will, through Jesus Christ.

Following the Apostolic Fathers, these same ideas resurface in the writings of the Apologists. While they emphasize that true knowledge and wisdom, genuine philosophy, are revealed in Christ against Gnosticism, they do not forget that Christ is also the Savior and Redeemer. This is evident, particularly in the works of Justin. No one is saved except by Christ's merits, who bore the curse and made atonement for all, redeeming those who repent and believe. He frequently mentions a grace that precedes our deeds, enlightening and leading us to faith. Irenaeus closely ties salvation to faith in Christ and highlights that the Holy Spirit has been sent to fulfill the Father's will in humans and to renew them. The Spirit is as indispensable as rain and dew for making the land fruitful. Origen asserts that the human will cannot repent on its own but requires divine assistance. God is the primary cause of this work. Latin fathers like Tertullian, Cyprian, and Ambrose express even stronger views on human moral corruption and the necessity of the Holy Spirit's grace, ideas on which Augustine heavily relies. Tertullian speaks of the overpowering grace of God, more potent than human nature, influencing our will. Cyprian's words, repeatedly cited by Augustine, declare that nothing is to be boasted of since nothing belongs to us. Ambrose recognizes an inner grace that affects the will, stating, "The will of humans is prepared by God." The veneration of God by the saints, Ambrose suggests, is a result of God's grace.

However, during those early centuries, the doctrine of salvation's application was far from developed and often veered in erroneous directions from the start. While occasional "testimonies of

evangelical truth" could be found, the prevailing view quickly transformed the gospel into a new set of laws. Faith and repentance were generally considered necessary for salvation, but they were ultimately seen as products of human free will. Although salvation had been objectively achieved by Christ, becoming beneficiaries of it required the free cooperation of individuals. Faith was typically reduced to a mere conviction of Christianity's truth, while repentance took on the character of penance aimed at atoning for sins.

Sins committed before baptism were forgiven through baptism, but those committed afterward had to be addressed through penance. Penitence was often still seen as genuine sorrow for one's sins, but the emphasis increasingly shifted toward external actions as the means of manifestation, such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and similar deeds, with these good works seen as a form of "work satisfaction." The focus of soteriology became entirely externalized. The application of salvation by the Holy Spirit to the sinner's heart was overshadowed by the pursuit of so-called good works, often chosen arbitrarily, as the path to salvation. Christian discipleship revolved around emulating the life and suffering of Christ, which was vividly depicted before people's eyes. Martyrs, ascetics, and monks were held up as the model Christians.

## **Pelagius and Augustine**

Pelagius deviated significantly further from the doctrine of grace than his predecessors, completely abandoning the Christian foundation upon which they still relied. Instead, he resurrected the self-sufficient principle of pagan philosophy, particularly that of the Stoics. In his theology, Pelagius severed all ties between Adam's sin

and our own, denying that guilt, pollution, or even death resulted from the initial transgression. This departure from Christian doctrine had profound implications, as salvation was no longer exclusively tied to Christ; instead, it could be achieved by adhering to natural law (*lex naturae*) and positive law (*lex positiva*).

In Pelagius's theological framework, there was no room for internal grace or the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, which not only enlightened the mind but also inclined the will. While he did mention grace, he narrowly defined it as: (a) natural ability, the gift of having the capacity to choose, granted by God to every individual—this was creating grace; (b) the objective grace found in the proclamation of the law or the gospel and in Christ's example, which aimed at enlightening the human intellect and guiding people toward salvation—this was illuminating grace; and (c) the forgiveness of sins and future salvation, available to those who believed and performed good works. Grace of the first kind applied to all human beings, while grace of the second kind was considered non-essential, serving only to facilitate salvation. It did not possess the power of efficacious grace (*gratia operans*) but merely provided assistance. Moreover, it was not granted universally but only to those who had proven themselves worthy through the proper use of their inherent abilities. This grace was neither preparatory nor irresistible, and it could not be equated with fate, masquerading under the guise of grace. Furthermore, it was not obligatory, conferred by God, or tied to the performance of every good deed; rather, it was selective and bestowed only in specific circumstances. Many good deeds, according to Pelagius, could be accomplished by individuals without any reliance on grace.

Semi-Pelagianism, in its moderation of this theological system, introduced the idea that humanity, while not spiritually dead due to

Adam's sin, was indeed ill. It asserted that the freedom of the will had not been entirely lost but had been weakened. According to this perspective, humans required the assistance of divine grace to perform good deeds and attain salvation. However, the grace that enlightened the mind and supported the will could never be separated from or viewed independently of the remaining human freedom of will. Grace and will, in Semi-Pelagianism, worked in conjunction, with God's intent for grace to be universal but, in reality, benefiting only those who made proper use of their free will. The adage "It is ours to will, God's to carry it to its conclusion" encapsulated this idea. While grace could occasionally precede human will, it was generally seen as secondary. The commencement of faith and its perseverance depended on the human will, with grace being required solely to enhance faith. The concept of efficacious or irresistible grace was not accepted, and even prevenient grace was frequently denied.

Augustine, on the other hand, started from the premise of humanity's complete moral corruption due to Adam's sin and its utter incapacity to perform any spiritual good. Consequently, he developed a vastly different doctrine of grace. Although he frequently used the term "grace" to describe objective benefits such as the gospel, baptism, and the forgiveness of sins, Augustine believed that an additional, internal, and spiritual grace was essential. This grace illuminated the intellect and bent the will towards faith and obedience. Augustine initially held the view that believing was an action individuals had to undertake despite God's call. However, around AD 396, influenced by reflections on 1 Corinthians 4:7, he underwent a transformation in his understanding of grace. He now described grace as not only external preaching but also as a hidden inspiration of God—a source of faith, fear of God, virtuousness, love, and empowerment through the Holy Spirit. This grace was a product



of divine election and predestination, distributed according to God's mercy rather than human merit.

Consequently, Augustine emphasized the gratuitous nature of grace, stressing that it was entirely free. The Holy Spirit operated as He wished, not contingent on human merit but capable of producing it. Grace was prevenient, preparatory, antecedent, and efficacious. It acted before the unwilling were made willing, illumined the intellect, generated faith, created good will, fostered love for goodness, and endowed individuals with the capacity to perform good deeds while removing weakness. This irresistible grace worked inexorably and insuperably upon the human will, being accepted by even the hardest of hearts. God's grace transformed the stony heart into a heart of flesh. Those elected to receive this grace not only gained the ability to come to Christ but also inevitably came to Him.

However, it is essential to clarify that God's grace does not suppress or annihilate human free will; instead, it liberates the will from the bondage of sin. Augustine emphatically declared, "Do we then by grace make void free will? God forbid! No, rather we establish free will. For even as the law is established by faith, so free will is not made void by grace but established, for grace restores the health of the will." Augustine further asserted, "To yield our consent to God's summons or to withhold it is the proper function of our own will," emphasizing that both believers and non-believers voluntarily exercise their will in this manner. Augustine's intention in making this statement was not to place the decision back into human hands; rather, he continued by saying, "This word does not invalidate but rather confirms the word of the apostle: 'What have you that you did not receive?' For the soul cannot receive and possess these gifts, which are here referred to, except by yielding its consent. And thus whatever it possesses, and whatever it receives, is from God; and yet

the act of receiving and having belongs, of course, to the receiver and possessor." Augustine highlighted the profound mystery surrounding human choices and the role of God's grace in them.

Both the inception and the progression of faith and love are entirely attributed to God's grace. What begins as operative grace transforms into cooperating, consequent, and subsequent grace. This divine grace not only initiates willingness but also empowers action and fulfillment. Without Christ, human efforts are futile. Augustine emphasized, "As we begin, it is said: 'His mercy shall go before me'; as we finish, it is said: 'His mercy shall follow me.'" It is God who "prepares the will and perfects in us by his cooperation what he initiates by his operation." Augustine elaborated, "He therefore operates without us in order that we may will, but when we will, and so will that we may act, he cooperates with us. We can, however, do nothing ourselves to effect good works of piety without him either working that we may will or co-working when we will." God's mercy "follows the willing that he may not will in vain." The necessity of grace extends beyond specific good deeds; it is indispensable for all actions. Augustine asserted, "The human will must be assisted by the grace of God to every good movement of action, speech, or thought." In both its objective and subjective aspects, from inception to culmination, the work of salvation remains solely a manifestation of God's grace.

Pelagianism faced condemnation at the Synod of Carthage in 418, with its canons receiving approval from Pope Zosimus and later from Celestine I. Further condemnations followed at the Council of Ephesus in 431 and the Synod of Orange in 529. The latter synod also explicitly rejected semi-Pelagianism, and its canons found confirmation from Boniface II. Consequently, it solidified as official church doctrine that the entirety of human nature had been

corrupted due to Adam's sin. Moreover, it was established that both the initial spark of faith and its subsequent growth were not products of human effort or natural abilities but rather were entirely dependent on the grace of God.

This divine grace, as affirmed by the church, not only instructs individuals on what is right and wrong but also empowers them to understand, love, and act in accordance with God's will. It manifests through the infusion, operation, inspiration, and illumination of the Holy Spirit within us. This divine influence precedes and prepares our will, transforming it from unbelief to faith, and enables us to both desire and perform good deeds. The necessity of internal grace and prevenient grace has been a consistent teaching within the church.

The Synod of Quiercy in 853, while condemning Gottschalk, declared, "We have free will for good, preceded and aided by grace... freed by grace and by grace healed from corruption." Similarly, Rabanus emphasized that God, through His Holy Spirit, rules within and provides spiritual zeal for comfort. This theological perspective was also upheld by scholastic theologians. Lombard, for instance, asserted that sin led to the loss of the freedom of the will, and now individuals lacked the capability to genuinely desire or accomplish goodness unless liberated and assisted by grace. Operative grace, in this context, precedes the emergence of a good will, freeing and preparing it to desire and carry out virtuous acts, while cooperative grace follows, providing assistance to the now-rectified will.

Thomas Aquinas concurred, acknowledging that individuals could perform naturally good actions without grace, but supernatural virtue, the love of God, adherence to His law, acquisition of eternal life, preparation for justification, recovery from sin, avoidance of sin,

and the continual pursuit of goodness all required the assistance of grace. Similarly, the Council of Trent stipulated that adults needed prevenient grace to prepare for justification. This grace served as a catalyst for those who had turned away from God due to sin, enabling them to redirect themselves toward their own justification. Therefore, the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church firmly upholds the necessity of prevenient grace and rejects the Pelagian and semi-Pelagian notions that ascribed the initiation and growth of faith to the inherent capacities of unregenerate human nature.

Is there a shade of Semi-Pelagianism in Rome's doctrine of prevenient grace? One may raise this question since there seems to be ambiguity in Rome's understanding of prevenient grace. At times, it appears to equate prevenient grace merely with the external call of the gospel, exerting moral influence on the intellect and will, a notion recognized even by Pelagius and his followers. Trent, for instance, identifies it as the calling "whereby they are called without any existing merits on their part." However, Rome also encompasses within prevenient grace an inward influence of the Holy Spirit on the intellect and will.

The Synod of Orange explicitly spoke of this grace involving an infusion and operation of the Holy Spirit within us. Trent described it as "arousing" or "stimulating" (*excitans*), emphasizing that "God touches the heart of man through the illumination of the Holy Spirit." Aquinas, too, emphasized that the grace through which an adult prepares for justification is not a mere "habitual grace" but rather an operation of God that turns the soul toward Himself, an assistance of God that moves the soul from within and inspires virtuous intent.

Theologians have held differing views on the nature of this preparatory grace. Some Thomists considered it a "physical quality supernaturally infused" or a "certain physical entity." In contrast, Molina, Lessius, and Ripalda saw it as an "illumination of the mind and an inspiration of the will," while Suárez, Tanner, and others believed it was not a created entity, but rather the Holy Spirit Himself moving the will immediately. However, it is generally accepted as "gratuitous assistance," an internal and supernatural gift of God, an illumination of the mind, and an immediate movement of the will. This grace bestows not only "moral strengths" but also "physical powers," enabling individuals to prepare for justification.

However, Rome's rejection of semi-Pelagianism was not entirely clear-cut; it subtly reemerged in certain aspects. Firstly, Rome maintained that the freedom of the will, though weakened by sin, was not completely lost. Even without grace, humans could perform many naturally and civilly good deeds that were not sinful. They could still know and love God as their creator and lead morally upright lives. Although consistently observing the entire law and resisting all temptations might be challenging in the long run, it was not deemed impossible. In essence, the "natural man" remained a complete human being.

Secondly, Rome departed from Augustine's perspective by regarding "prevenient grace" as bestowing the capacity to believe but not the act of believing itself. Prevenient (actual) grace was seen as granted to all adults who heard the gospel, yet the decision to accept or reject it lay within their power. The Council of Orange II stated, "According to the Catholic faith, we believe this also, that after grace has been received through baptism, all the baptized with the help and cooperation of Christ can and ought to fulfill what pertains to the salvation of the soul, if they will labor faithfully." Trent similarly

declared that individuals could consent to prevenient grace and cooperate with it or reject it. However, theologians held varying opinions on this matter.

Augustinians, notably Berti, argued that prevenient (actual, sufficient) grace provided the capacity (*posse*) but not the will (*velle*) to believe. To transform mere capability into willingness and to make sufficient grace efficacious, a "victorious delight" (*delectatio victrix*) was required. This victorious delight needed to overcome "carnal delight" (*delectatio carnalis*), which stood in opposition, thereby turning "able" into "willing." Consequently, the will had to be transformed by this victorious delight, which held greater strength than mere desire (*concupiscentia*).

Thomists, including Báñez, Gonet, Lemos, Billuart, and others, similarly asserted that sufficient grace endowed the capacity but not the will to believe. To instill the will to believe, a "physical action of God," often termed "physical advancement" or "predetermination," had to augment it. Both Augustinians and Thomists concurred that efficacious grace depended not on human will but on grace itself, with the act of belief infallibly following "victorious delight." However, they diverged in their understanding of the essential, objective distinction between "sufficient" and "efficacious" grace.

While Augustinians believed that these two forms of grace did not fundamentally differ but varied in degrees, such that grace merely "sufficient" for one person might become efficacious in another due to a lesser hardening, this perspective did not fully align with the Tridentine concept of the "capacity to assent or to reject." Consequently, Molinists asserted that the efficacy of grace was contingent on the human will, while Congruists, like Bellarmine, contended that it depended on a "foreseen congruence or

incongruence of grace" with the conditions and circumstances of those to whom grace was offered at any given time.

Catholic doctrine can be summarized as follows: in the sacrament of baptism, infants born within the Church receive regeneration (justification or infused grace). However, those who hear the gospel at a later age receive what is termed "sufficient grace." This grace entails an illumination of the intellect and strengthening of the will by the Holy Spirit. Individuals have the choice to accept or reject this grace. If they choose to accept it, this initial "arousing" grace (*gratia excitans*) transforms into aiding or cooperative grace. With this grace, individuals collaborate to prepare themselves for justification (*gratia infusa* or *habitualis*). This preparation comprises seven components: aided by God's grace, individuals begin to believe in God's Word, recognize their own sinfulness, cultivate hope in God's mercy, develop love for God, grow in their aversion to sin, resolve to receive baptism, and commit to leading a new life. Faith, in this context, does not occupy a central position but stands alongside the other six preparations for the grace of justification. It is essentially an assent to the truth of Christianity, representing unformed faith, and only attains its justifying power through love (faith formed by love), which is imparted by infused grace. Faith alone cannot justify; it is called justifying faith because it marks the commencement of human salvation, serving as the foundation and root of all justification, and representing the first of the aforementioned preparations.

Once an individual has adequately prepared themselves and has done what is within their capacity, whether through the proper utilization of grace-sustained or natural abilities, God cannot deny them infused grace. It is true that this grace has not been merited, as it far surpasses any human merit; nonetheless, it is just that God, by

the standard of a merit of congruity, should reward those who have genuinely striven with the grace they received. This infused grace is conferred in baptism and encompasses the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the infusion of supernatural virtues, participation in the divine nature, and culminates in the forgiveness of sins. These two elements, forgiveness of sins and infused grace, constitute the dual facets of justification. In the theology of Rome, the forgiveness of sins corresponds to the negative aspect, which is the elimination of sin to the extent it has been eradicated.

If, through baptism, an individual has become the recipient of this infused grace, it is possible for them to lose it through mortal sins. They are also required to do penance for venial sins, not just with contrition of the heart but also through oral confession and acts of penance. Nevertheless, with infused grace, individuals have received the supernatural capacity to perform virtuous deeds and, consequently, to receive all subsequent grace, even to the extent of meriting eternal life according to a merit of condignity. The good deeds one performs emanate from a supernatural source, making them deserving of a supernatural reward. From this perspective, the ultimate goal of this Catholic doctrine of grace becomes evident: grace serves as a means for humans to merit heavenly beatitude once more. This was essentially true even in Augustine's teachings. In his view, grace, although granted without merit, primarily consisted not in the forgiveness of sins but in regeneration and the infusion of love, enabling individuals to perform good works and thereby attain eternal life. "Humans receive righteousness so that, by virtue of it, they may deserve blessedness." While merits do not precede grace and faith, they certainly follow them. "Merit is prepared by believing." "Grace precedes merit: grace does not arise from merit, but merit arises from grace. Grace precedes all merits so that the gifts of God may follow my merits." Similarly, Ambrose wrote:



"Grace itself deserves to be increased so that, having been increased, it may also deserve to be perfected, with one's will accompanying it, not leading it, following it, not preceding it."

Later, as the doctrine of the "superadded gift" in the image of God emerged, this trend worsened. There was a significant transformation in the concept of grace. Grace was now seen as necessary not only for fallen humanity but also for elevating Adam from an ordinary "natural" human to the status of the image of God.

After the fall, grace began to serve a dual purpose: firstly, to redeem humans from sin (healing grace or medicinal grace), and secondly, to elevate them to the supernatural realm (elevating grace). While the former required grace only incidentally, in a moral sense, the latter demanded it absolutely and "physically." Consequently, the latter aspect increasingly overshadowed the former. The ethical contrast between sin and grace gave way to the "physical" differentiation between the natural and the supernatural.

By grace, the Catholic Church no longer primarily meant God's free favor in forgiving sins, or at least not exclusively. Instead, grace was understood as an infused quality that transformed human beings, making them participants in the divine nature. It was considered a supernatural, created, and hyperphysical power—a mystical infusion into natural humans, facilitated by priests and sacraments. This infusion raised individuals to the supernatural order, enabling them to merit subsequent graces through the performance of good works and, ultimately, heavenly blessedness through condign merit.

# Luther and the Reformation

Luther's reformational efforts were instigated by the Roman Catholic penitential system. However, recent studies have demonstrated that the groundwork for the new gospel understanding driving his opposition to indulgence sales had been laid years before. Luther's marginal notes on Lombard's *Sentences*, dating from 1509-10, already articulated the notion that God's "righteousness" in Romans 1:17 referred not to the divine attribute but to the righteousness of faith granted by God. Some historians even speculate that the Reformation's inception might have occurred as early as 1508-9 when Luther stayed at the Wittenberg monastery. Nevertheless, Denifle has shown that Luther's interpretation of God's righteousness in Romans 1:17 was not a new revelation but had already appeared in the writings of many church fathers and scholastics.

Luther's conversion was rooted in a fresh understanding of a sinner's justification before God through grace and faith alone. This perspective is clearly expressed in his commentary on the Psalms (1513-15), where grace is primarily linked to the forgiveness of sins, and faith is defined as trust in God's mercy. Although this insight was initially mingled with medieval and Roman Catholic elements, it was deepened and clarified through Staupitz's teachings, Luther's exploration of mystical writings like the *Deutsche Theologie* (*Theologia germanica*), and his continued study of Paul and Augustine. In his lectures on the Letter to the Romans (1515), Luther's newfound understanding took clearer shape.

Luther's own religious-moral experiences led him to a profound reevaluation of key gospel concepts such as righteousness, justification, grace, faith, conversion, and good works. He

interpreted these ideas differently from the prevailing Catholic teachings and piety of his time. At the time, Luther did not fully comprehend that this fresh perspective on the gospel would lead to conflict with the Roman church and the pope. However, he began to take note of various abuses, and as early as 1512, particularly in his September 1517 disputation against scholastic theology, he advocated for the reform of theological studies, the rejection of scholasticism, and a return to the study of Holy Scripture.

The conflict didn't erupt until Tetzel, acting on behalf of the Archbishop of Mainz, introduced his indulgence trade to the dioceses of Halberstadt and Magdeburg, drawing large crowds. His message, in accordance with Catholic Church teaching, proclaimed that penitents could obtain relief from ecclesiastical penalties and acquire certain graces by performing various good works. These works included making a pilgrimage, contributing to a church construction project, participating in a crusade, equipping a crusader, or more simply, confessing sins and providing a monetary offering. Furthermore, purchasing an indulgence not only meant relief from ecclesiastical penalties but also offered aid to relatives and friends in purgatory, potentially shortening or easing their punishment. While Tetzel didn't explicitly utter the phrase, he was effectively endorsing the notion that "as soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs." His preaching made it evident that indulgences had been turned into commodities by the popes, marketed through entities like the Fuggers, taking advantage of a credulous public.

This trade also revealed a harmful aspect of the Roman Catholic system, as the sale of indulgences was not an isolated excess or abuse but a direct outcome of the legalistic distortion of the gospel. Luther's protest against this indulgence trade marked the commencement of the Reformation and attested to its religious

origin and evangelical nature. The dispute centered on the essential character of the gospel, the heart of Christianity, and the true nature of piety. Guided by his own spiritual experiences, Luther illuminated the original and authentic meaning of Christ's gospel. Much like the term "righteousness of God," the word "penitence" had been a bitter concept for him. However, as he grasped the concept of "righteousness by faith" from Romans 1:17, he gained insight into the genuine nature of penitence. He realized that the repentance called for in Matthew 4:17 (μετανοειν) had nothing to do with the works of satisfaction required in the Roman institution of confession. Instead, it involved "a change of mind with genuine internal contrition" and was a product of grace along with all its benefits. In his initial seven of the ninety-five theses, as well as in his sermons on "Indulgences and Grace" (February 1518), "Penitence" (March 1518), and the "Sacrament of Penance" (1519), Luther expounded this understanding of repentance or conversion. He articulated the idea that true penitence primarily consisted of genuine sorrow for sin, a firm commitment to bear Christ's cross, a new life, and the word of absolution, which was the word of God's grace in Christ. Forgiveness of sins, that is, justification, didn't hinge on penance or satisfaction but rested on God's promise and was obtained solely through faith. It was faith, not sacraments, that justified. Luther thus reinstated sin and grace at the core of Christian salvation doctrine. Justification, or the forgiveness of sins, wasn't contingent on repentance, which remained inherently incomplete, but was grounded in God's promise and acquired through faith alone.

Regarding the relationship Luther established between repentance and faith, there exists some disagreement. Ritschl argued that Luther initially believed true repentance to be the outcome of faith in the gospel and love for God. However, later, especially after the publication of Melancthon's Instruction to the Church Visitors

(1528), he is said to have placed law-induced penitence ahead of faith to avoid promoting a false sense of security. This is believed to be the opposite of Calvin's approach. Initially, in the first edition of the Institutes, Calvin was thought to have prioritized repentance before faith. Still, in later works like the Genevan Catechism of 1538 and subsequent editions of the Institutes, he was believed to have established faith as preceding true penitence. Nonetheless, historical research by Lipsius has demonstrated that claims of such a reversal in Luther's doctrine of penitence are unfounded. In Luther's thinking, penitence consistently comprises two aspects: (1) contrition, which involves understanding and sorrow over sins brought about by the law, and (2) faith in God's grace revealed in the gospel of Christ. Through the preaching of the law, God initially softens the hardened hearts of sinners and then leads them, through faith, to the comfort of the gospel. When sinners come to know the grace of God, they develop a genuine love for goodness, from which true penitence arises, persisting throughout life and involving the mortification of the old self and the emergence of the new "self." In the early period, when Luther particularly opposed Catholic "works righteousness," he emphasized that true penitence stems from faith and encompasses all of life. Later, as a countermeasure to antinomianism, he emphasized that genuine faith is preceded by contrition of the heart. Nevertheless, Luther's teaching remained materially consistent: contrition (penitence in the narrower sense), faith, and good works were always central to the path of salvation. This perspective aligns with the views of Lutheran confessions and early dogmaticians, such as Brenz, Strigel, Chytraeus, and others up to Gerhard. They organized the path of salvation under these three headings (loci).

In connection with this order of salvation, Luther consistently operated from the premise of "absolute predestination" during his

initial period. He never formally retracted this position, although he increasingly stressed the revelation of God in Christ and the universal offer of salvation through the gospel to counter any potential misuse of absolute predestination. However, Melanchthon began to dissent from the doctrine of absolute predestination around 1527 and gradually adopted a synergistic stance with growing conviction. In his commentary on the Letter to the Romans, he already rejected the investigation of election, asserting that God's promise is universal, and God expressly desires the salvation of all humans. In the second revised edition of the *Loci Communes*, published in 1535, Melanchthon stated that conversion resulted from the collaboration of three causes: the Word of God, the Spirit, and the human will, which assented to the Word of God without resistance. In the 1543 edition, he cited with approval the idea that human free will consisted of the "ability to incline oneself toward grace." Even the Formula of Concord, while no longer boldly confessing free and unconditional election, firmly rejected the notion that the human will, by its inherent abilities, could respond to grace. It affirmed its belief in predestination and the spiritual impotence of unregenerate humans, rendering them "less than a stone or a stick" and passively experiencing conversion. However, it equally asserted the universality and resistibility of grace. The Formula of Concord aimed to reconcile these positions by asserting that unregenerate humans retained a passive capacity, not an active one. They could still attend church and experience God's work in them. Subsequently, Lutheran theology typically elaborated on this by claiming that in baptism and the preaching of the Word, God grants all who live under the gospel "sufficient grace (indispensable, irresistible good impulses)," liberating and renewing their will. Moreover, they can choose not to resist and allow God's grace to work passively toward regeneration and conversion or actively cooperate with it.

Under the influence of this overt or covert synergism, the Lutheran conception of the order of salvation, when elaborated upon later (and as in Hollaz, addressing topics such as "calling, illuminating, converting, regenerating, justifying, renewing, and glorifying grace" with reference to Acts 26:17–18), took the following form: Christian children, who cannot yet resist, experience rebirth through baptism and receive the gift of faith. Others, at a later stage in life, receive a "sufficient call," which remains consistent for everyone and imparts the enlightenment of the intellect and empowerment of the will. This enables them not to resist the workings of God's grace. If they do not resist, they progress to contrition (penitence, conversion in a limited sense), regeneration, and the endowment of faith, which is a product of regeneration. Through faith, they attain justification, receive forgiveness of sins, and subsequently acquire adoption, mystical union, renewal, and glorification. However, in practice, the Christian journey does not unfold in such a systematic manner. Just as grace initially relies on the will strengthened by God's supernatural power, it remains contingent both in its development and until the end. Grace is always resistible and, therefore, losable and regainable, even up to one's final moments. In the order of salvation, the focus is on the human being. Despite emphasizing that God alone regenerates and converts, whether God does so depends on human resistance or lack thereof. Humans possess the power of decision; through resistance, they can nullify the entire work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. They retain this power until their death. More precisely, the center of gravity within the order of salvation lies in faith and justification. Calling, contrition, and regeneration merely serve a preparatory role. They are not yet the blessings of the covenant of grace; they function as intermediaries, leading the sinner to Christ. Only when individuals believe and, through faith, embrace the righteousness of Christ, does God accept them in Christ, forgive their sins, free them from the law, adopt them as His children,

incorporate them into fellowship with Christ, and so forth. Everything hinges on faith, specifically, the act of believing. If a person exercises the power of faith, they possess everything simultaneously: peace, comfort, life, and blessedness. However, if they neglect to exercise it, everything becomes uncertain and subject to loss. Consequently, the entire focus is on maintaining that faith.

Yet, Lutheran believers often fail to connect the work of grace to God's eternal election and covenant, and they also struggle to relate it to the natural world, society, and humanity. While they find blessing in their faith, they do not extend its influence to family, education, society, or the state. For them, living in communion with Christ is sufficient, and they do not feel compelled to engage in the battle under Christ as their king.

## **The Ordo Salutis in Reformed Theology**

In Reformed theology, the order of salvation, despite its similarities with the Lutheran perspective, holds a distinct character from the outset. Calvin, while addressing justification and election after faith, regeneration, conversion, and the Christian life, does not intend to suggest that this is when they objectively originate. Calvin's underlying concept differs significantly: election is an eternal decree, even if humans only become aware of it through faith. Similarly, the forgiveness of sins is rooted solely in Christ, even though it is bestowed upon us exclusively through faith. Calvin repeatedly emphasizes the idea that participation in Christ's benefits is only possible through communion with His person. Implicit in this idea is the fundamental difference in the order of salvation between Lutherans and Reformed theologians.



In fact, if it holds true that the very first grace benefit already assumes communion with Christ's person, then the imputation and bestowal of Christ to the church precedes everything else. This is precisely the Reformed doctrine. A connection was established between the mediator and those chosen by the Father in eternity, through election, particularly in the covenant of salvation (*pactum salutis*). Subsequently, within the divine decree, a mystical union was formed between them, accompanied by substitution. Christ assumed human form and secured salvation for His people based on this covenant.

He could accomplish this precisely because he was already in communion with them, serving as their guarantor and mediator. The entire church, united in Him as its head, has objectively experienced crucifixion, death, resurrection, and glorification alongside Him. In the person of Christ, all the benefits of grace are prepared and readily available for the church. Everything is complete: God has been reconciled, and there is nothing left to be contributed by humans. Atonement, forgiveness, justification, mystical union, sanctification, glorification, and more—they do not come into existence after or as a consequence of faith but are objectively and actively present in Christ. They are the direct results of His suffering and dying, and they are received by faith on our part. God grants and imputes these benefits to the church in the decree of election, through the resurrection of Christ, and by His call through the gospel. In due time, they will also become the subjective possession of believers. While it is true that we need not add anything to the work of Christ, Christ Himself, having accomplished salvation, has not completed His task. He undertook the mission of truly and fully saving His people. He will not step down as mediator until He has presented His church—spotless and without blemish—to the Father. The application of salvation is just as essential a component of

redemption as its acquisition. "Remove its application, and redemption is not redemption." In heaven, Christ continues His prophetic, priestly, and royal activities. The application of salvation is His work, and He is the active agent in it. Through an irresistible and indelible grace, He imparts Himself and His benefits to His own. Soteriology, too, must be seen theologically, as the work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. In this domain as well, the honor of God is at stake—the assertion and manifestation of all the perfections of God, which have been violated by sin. It is God's will, within the church of Christ, to redeem the world and humanity from the power of Satan and to present them eternally as a testament to His wisdom and power, His holiness and grace. Just as surely as the objective re-creation took place in Christ, so it must also be realized subjectively by the Holy Spirit within the church.

However, just as the acquisition of salvation occurred through a covenant, with Christ as the mediator and head of the covenant, its application must also follow the same pattern. First and foremost, the gathering of the elect should not be seen in an individualistic and atomistic manner. The elect, after all, have been eternally given to Christ, included in the covenant, born in due time from Christ just as the body and its members are all born from the head, and made partakers of all His benefits. The church is an organism, not a mere collection of individuals; in its case, the whole precedes the parts. Some Reformed theologians, therefore, discuss the doctrine of the church before that of salvation. However, this is unnecessary because Reformed theology, within its doctrine of the covenant of grace—which was often addressed at the outset of its soteriology, or even earlier, before the doctrine of the person and work of Christ—already considers these theologians' concerns when prioritizing the doctrine of the church. Furthermore, this order of treatment can easily lead to a conflation of the church as the body of Christ with the church as an

institution, resulting in the attribution of a value to the latter in the origin and development of the religious life, which, according to Scripture and the confession, it is not entitled to. Nevertheless, within this practice, the true and genuinely Reformed idea is still preserved, namely, that the covenant of grace does not originate as a consequence of the order of salvation but precedes it, serving as its foundation and starting point. While it is true that the believer becomes aware, through faith, that they belong to the covenant of grace and to the number of the elect, the epistemological foundation is distinct from the ontological foundation.

Secondly, regeneration, faith, and conversion should not be viewed as preparations occurring apart from Christ and the covenant of grace, nor as conditions that individuals must fulfill entirely or partially in their own strength to be incorporated into that covenant. Instead, they are benefits that flow from the covenant of grace, the mystical union, and the gift of Christ's person. The Holy Spirit, who is the author of these benefits, was acquired by Christ for His own. Therefore, the imputation of Christ precedes the gift of the Spirit, and regeneration, faith, and conversion do not lead us to Christ initially; rather, they are drawn from Christ by the Holy Spirit and imparted to His own.

Consequently, in the third place, penitence in the Reformed order of salvation had to take on a different character compared to the Lutheran order. Personal experience also played a role in this distinction. Calvin's journey to Christ differed from Luther's. Luther lived for an extended period under a heavy burden of guilt and a troubled conscience. For years, he felt the weight of the law's curse and God's wrath upon him, ultimately finding peace in the gracious forgiveness of sins through faith alone. On the other hand, Calvin was gradually convinced of the truth of the Reformation but, due to

his respect for the church, hesitated to join the movement for a significant period. Then, suddenly, a "conversion" occurred when all doubts and hesitations were overcome, and he wholeheartedly surrendered himself to God's will. His transformation primarily involved learning obedience to what he had long recognized as God's will. For Calvin, the novelty was not so much in a sudden experience of grace and salvation but in a resolute decision and a decisive act of obedience to God's will.

This is why Calvin did not focus on constructing a theory of conversion but rather on addressing the question, "On what basis must the regenerate person, aware of being a sinner, ground their validity and acceptance before God?" Like Luther, Calvin acknowledged the existence of a penitence that precedes faith, characterized by contrition of heart and self-mortification before God. Many individuals experience a "crisis of conscience" or are compelled to obedience before they fully grasp or taste the knowledge of grace. However, Calvin considered this initial fear to be a legalistic form of penitence that does not infallibly lead to faith. He also rejected the doctrine held by some Anabaptists, which required new converts to practice penitence for a few days before being admitted into the community of grace. For Calvin, the emphasis was on a different kind of penitence, one that stems from faith, is possible only in communion with Christ, persists throughout life, and involves both mortification and vivification. These aspects occur through participation in Christ.

Now Luther also knew this kind of penitence. He, too, recognized that true contrition presupposed a love for righteousness and had its origin in the benefits of Christ. Nevertheless, alongside this perspective, he consistently upheld the necessity of prior preaching of the law and what he called "passive contrition." He referred to the

"fear of threatening" as the initial element of conversion. Melancthon took an even further step in this direction. In the revised visitation articles of 1528, he explicitly named this "passive contrition," which precedes faith, as "repentance" (although Luther had rarely used this term). He justified this by referring to Luke 24:47. He provided the following noteworthy explanation: "Although some people indeed believe that one should not teach anything before faith but teach repentance in terms of faith and flowing from faith, yet, so that the adversary may not be able to say I'm recanting my earlier teaching, one has to assume that, since repentance and law also belong to the common beliefs (for one must certainly have believed beforehand that it is God who threatens, commands, and frightens), it is for ordinary uneducated persons that one should leave such doctrines under the name of 'repentance,' 'command,' 'law,' 'fear,' and so on in order that they may understand the Christian faith all the more discerningly." Hence, practical and pedagogical considerations led Luther to retain "passive contrition" as the initial component of conversion.

Conversion, for that reason, was consistently divided—both in the Lutheran confession and Lutheran theology—into two parts: contrition and faith, corresponding to the contrast between law and gospel. Loosely connected to these two parts, there was a third part concerning "good works" or the "new obedience," with the comment: "Then must follow the good works that are the fruits of repentance." On the other hand, Calvin increasingly downplayed the penitence that sometimes precedes faith and shifted the focus toward conversion that follows and proceeds from faith. This shift also resulted from the fact that he began to consider not only adults but also the children of the church in the context of the covenant of grace and their incorporation into Christ. Conversion, accordingly, became an integral part of the Christian life. It presupposed regeneration and

faith. Its components were not contrition and faith but mortification and vivification. It extended throughout life and found its place in the doctrine of gratitude.

Fourthly, this brought about another shift in the doctrine of conversion. Among the Lutherans, "contrition" and "faith" constituted its two components. However, Calvin disagreed with this division. While he acknowledged the close connection between repentance and faith, recognizing that, strictly speaking, the former is not possible without the latter and rather flows from it, he noted that Scripture consistently distinguishes between the two, mentioning them side by side (e.g., Acts 20:21). Therefore, Calvin asserted that "repentance and faith, although held together by a permanent bond, require to be joined rather than confused." Faith and repentance, consequently, acquired more or less independent significance in the order of salvation. Calvin gained a twofold advantage from this.

Firstly, faith could now be more closely linked to justification, and justification could be understood purely in a juridical sense as an act of acquittal by God. Lutheran theology, as we will see later in the section on justification, is not entirely clear on this point. However, Reformed theology, owing to Calvin, gained clear insight into the religious nature of justification and simultaneously developed a clear conception of faith as a "firm and certain knowledge." This ensured that justification was now "fully secured in advance."

A second advantage was the ability to attribute an ethical dimension to repentance without hesitation. Among the Lutherans, the first part of repentance, namely, contrition, primarily consisted of "terrors of conscience." While Calvin also included them in the definition of repentance, it primarily entailed mortification, which involved

heartfelt sorrow over sin, hatred of it, and a desire to flee from it. Additionally, it included vivification, a heartfelt joy in God, love for Him, and delight in doing His will. Faith and justification, therefore, were not the sum and substance of the order of salvation after contrition. Luther tended to emphasize stopping there, viewing Christian liberty primarily as liberation from the law, and expecting good works to naturally result from faith, much like fruit from a tree and sunrays from the sun. Calvin, on the other hand, made a clear distinction between the religious and ethical aspects of life and allocated a separate realm for the latter.

Finally, in the fifth place, Calvin could do justice to the active side of repentance since it was included in the Christian life. This posed challenges for the Lutherans, as they saw contrition as the starting point of the new life. Given their confession of human impotence, repentance had to be understood strictly in passive terms, and if this passive view weakened, it could lead to synergism. Calvin, on the other hand, addressed the regenerate person in repentance, someone grafted into Christ who, by the power of God, had to repent, combat sin, and fulfill God's will. This divine will is contained in the law. Luther, having mainly encountered the law in its condemning force, believed that believers were completely liberated from it, leaving no room for the third use of the law. Calvin, however, attributed a normative significance to the law in the moral life and derived from God's will a stimulus for encouraging people to perform good works.

Sanctification, just like justification, is a benefit of Christ. As good works, in which believers must walk, are prepared by God in Christ (Ephesians 2:10), faith extends beyond the forgiveness of sins. It reaches for the perfection found in Christ, seeks to confirm itself through works as its own fruits, and equips itself with courage and strength to not only live in communion with Christ but also to engage

in battle under His kingship against sin, the world, and the flesh, and to make all things serve the glory of God's name.

Repentance, or conversion, consists of two parts: mortification and vivification. Depending on individuals, circumstances, and times, either the negative or positive aspect of the Christian life can come to the forefront. The moral life of Christians has faith as its root, the law as its rule, and the honor of God as its ultimate goal. While the idea that the honor of God is the ultimate goal of all things is found in Luther, Melanchthon, and later Lutherans, it gained a deeper and broader meaning in the thought of Bucer, Calvin, and later Reformed theologians. Obedience to God's will in the interest of advancing His glory became the central task of the Christian life in Reformed circles.

## **The Ordo Salutis in Mysticism and Rationalism**

In ecclesiastical theology, various conceptions of the order of salvation emerged, but they can be grouped into two main categories: mysticism and rationalism. Mysticism is a phenomenon found in higher religions and aims to deepen the religious experience, often as a reaction against external religious authority. Regardless of where it appears, whether in India, Arabia, among Jews, Greeks, Catholics, or Protestants, mysticism shares common traits. It typically seeks higher knowledge and a closer communion with the divine through unconventional means and the assistance of extraordinary forces. These forces can range from magic, manticism,



theurgy, hypnotism, spiritism, and theosophy (occultism), to the use of forces implied in revelation and religion. Mysticism is often accompanied by ecstasies, visions, and unusual phenomena, sometimes leading to a pantheistic fusion of the divine and the human. Even within Christianity, figures like John Scotus Erigena, the Brothers of the Free Spirit, Böhme, Weigel, and others have explored mystical experiences that blur the boundaries between the divine and the human.

When we isolate these elements under the label of general mysticism, true mysticism remains focused on seeking a deeper knowledge and closer communion with God through extraordinary divine grace. Practical, empirical mysticism employs various exercises to attain this knowledge and communion, while theoretical and speculative mysticism, often associated with the former but distinct, examines and systematizes the insights and experiences obtained through these exercises. Following in the footsteps of Plato, Philo, Plotinus, and Pseudo-Dionysius, mystics generally identify three stages in the mystical journey: καθαρισμός (the *via purgativa*, involving asceticism), φωτισμός (the *via illuminativa*, through meditation), and έποπτεία (the *via unitiva* or *contemplativa*, leading to ecstasy). In the purgation stage, the soul cleanses itself from sin through prayer, penitence, sacraments, deprivation, and self-chastisement, withdrawing from all earthly attachments. In the second stage, the soul focuses its thoughts and will on a specific object, such as Christ's suffering, his wounds, heavenly bliss, or the love and holiness of God. In the third stage, the soul becomes intimately united with and identified with the object of meditation, leading to a practically indescribable state known by various terms, such as seraphic contemplation, mystical union, betrothal, mystical kiss, passive transformation, mystical sleep, death or annihilation, the tomb of the soul, and others.

In stark contrast to this mystical inclination, rationalism emerged in modern times, partly influenced by Socinianism and Remonstrantism, and eventually gained dominance over human thought in the eighteenth century. In this rationalistic perspective, Christ is regarded merely as a prophet and teacher who proclaimed God's truth and affirmed it through his life and death. By following Christ, humans, though weakened by sin, are not devoid of power and can attain salvation. The gospel's call exerts a moral influence on their intellect and will. If individuals, through their own free will, heed this call, assent to the truth, place trust in God's grace, and obey Christ's commandments (for faith encompasses assent, trust, and obedience), they are justified. This faith, which essentially includes full Christian obedience, is graciously counted by God, through Christ, as perfect obedience, and those who persevere will attain eternal salvation.

In connection with mysticism and rationalism, there are also one-sided interpretations of the order of salvation known as antinomianism and neonomianism. Antinomianism generally reduces salvation's application to its acquisition, nearly equating the two. According to this view, Christ has accomplished everything, assuming not only the guilt of sin but also its defilement. Christ has obtained not just righteousness but also regeneration and sanctification for believers. Consequently, there is nothing left for humans to do. Contrition, conversion, repentance, prayers for forgiveness, and good works become unnecessary, carrying a legalistic nature that fails to acknowledge the perfection of Christ's sacrifice. Believers need only have faith, which means recognizing that they are justified, born again, and sanctified, finding perfection in Christ. Their remaining sins are no longer sins but rather the deeds of the old Adam, which do not concern believers, as they are perfected in Christ, liberated from the law, and now live in grace.

Often, antinomianism doesn't stop there but goes further by reducing the application of salvation to God's decree itself. It suggests that even Christ did not genuinely secure salvation; instead, it was eternally prepared in God's decree. Christ's role was merely to reveal God's love. Thus, faith is merely the act of dispelling the illusion that God is angry with us, and sin consists solely of that illusion. Historically, such notions were promoted by Gnostics and Manicheans in ancient times and by numerous libertine sects in the Middle Ages. During and after the Reformation, antinomianism resurfaced among Anabaptists, Libertines against whom Calvin opposed, in English independent disturbances around the mid-17th century, and in the Netherlands among the Hattemists and the Hebrews sect. Antinomianism extends beyond religion and affects morality and politics, finding expression in figures like Friedrich Nietzsche and proponents of anarchism in modern times.

All the Reformers adamantly rejected antinomianism. While Luther, due to his one-sided perspective on the law, occasionally spoke as though the law held no significance for Christians—except in recognizing their ongoing sinfulness—he strongly opposed Agricola, who completely dismissed the preaching of the law and sought to derive repentance solely from faith in the gospel. A fundamental distinction exists between the Reformation and antinomianism. Not only did the Reformation emphasize the law's role in bringing about the knowledge of sin and misery in humans, but, more importantly, according to the unanimous consensus of all the Reformers, the entirety of salvation was and could only be achieved through a framework of justice established in accordance with the law. Undoubtedly, Christ's work centered on his perfect obedience to God's law, and justification occurred solely based on the flawless righteousness accomplished by Christ.

Just as antinomianism on the right distorted the principles of the Reformation, even more harm was done on the left by nomism, which infiltrated Protestant churches under the influence of Socinianism and Remonstrantism. This nomism can be categorized into a rationalistic and a Pietistic school. The rationalistic school primarily traced its origins to Piscator's teachings, asserting that the required righteousness was achieved solely through the passive obedience of Christ. Although this perspective was rejected by the Reformed churches in France during their synods in Gap (1603) and Rochelle (1607), it gained substantial acceptance, especially within the Saumur school. John Cameron, for instance, taught that since the will always follows the intellect, enlightenment of the intellect sufficed for conversion. Amyraut, on the other hand, grounded the doctrine of election in hypothetical universalism. Pajon considered internal grace unnecessary and linked the efficacy of the gospel call, similar to Bellarmine's theology, to its congruity with the recipient's circumstances.

Consequently, Reformed doctrines such as the covenant of works, human incapacity for good, immediate imputation of Adam's sin and Christ's righteousness, among others, were denied. Faith became combined with works and was seen as both the means and the basis of justification. This Saumurian theology spread beyond France and infiltrated other Reformed churches, including those in England and the Netherlands. Initially, the Episcopal Church in England professed Reformed beliefs and doctrine, but starting in the sixteenth century, it also accommodated Roman Catholic and Arminian positions. The antinomian errors embraced by many zealots during Cromwell's era led some individuals back in the direction of Saumur's teachings. However, it is a common characteristic of those who adopt the "middle way" to show a greater

preference for the extreme they are moving halfway toward than for the one from which they are departing halfway.

Amyraldism and Arminianism in England quickly formed an alliance and gave rise to a particular understanding of the order of salvation known as "neonomianism." This term generally describes the belief that the basis for a believer's justification lies not in the imputed righteousness of Christ but in the believer's own sincere, though imperfect, righteousness. According to this perspective, Christ, through his suffering and death, provided satisfaction for the sins of all humanity and made salvation attainable for all people, bringing them into a "salvable state." In this salvable state, the old law of the covenant of works, which demanded perfect righteousness from everyone, has been replaced by "a new law," a law of grace that accepts faith, repentance, and sincere, albeit imperfect, obedience from contrite sinners. Christ's work can still be referred to as our "legal righteousness" because it satisfied the old law, and believers may even invoke his work when the old law makes demands on them. However, the evangelical righteousness that serves as the foundation for our justification is different—it consists of our obedience to the new law, which encompasses faith and repentance.

Neonomianism gained acceptance but also faced strong criticism from those later labeled "antinomians" by their opponents, though this label was arguably unfair. These individuals could be more accurately described as "antineonomians" and did not deserve the "antinomians" label (opponents of the law). On the contrary, they took the moral law much more seriously than the neonomians they opposed. While neonomians portrayed the law of the covenant of works as a temporary order that Christ had not fully satisfied in a substitutionary sense and that was now replaced by a "new law," the antineonomians emphasized that the moral law was essentially

eternal, rooted in God's nature, completely fulfilled by Christ on our behalf, and still applied as the rule of our lives.

A similar dispute emerged in Scotland with the publication of the new edition of Edward Fischer's "Marrow of Modern Divinity" in 1718. This disagreement had both formal and deeper doctrinal aspects. It revolved around questions about whether certain antinomian errors were taught in the book but also delved into the broader issue of neonomianism, which had arisen in England a century earlier and had now made its way to Scotland. The critics of the "Marrow," such as Principal Hadow of St. Andrews, generally remained faithful to sound doctrine but sometimes leaned toward neonomianism in their criticism, ultimately laying the groundwork for the rise of the Arminian or semi-Socinian school, which gained prominence in Scottish theology during the eighteenth century. Similarly, Jonathan Edwards' denial of immediate imputation in the cases of Adam and Christ gradually steered New England theology toward the influence of Placaeus.

In the Netherlands, from the middle of the seventeenth century onwards, a similar weakening of the principles of the Reformation became evident. The first individual who clearly embraced the sentiments of Piscator and the Saumurian school concerning justification was Johannes Vlax, who served as pastor in Zutphen from 1674 to 1690. According to him, it was necessary to distinguish between two types of justification. The first type consisted solely of the forgiveness of sins, was grounded in the death of Christ, and could be termed a justification of sinners. However, the second type was a justification of the godly, based on the personal evangelical righteousness that believers themselves achieved through the power of the Holy Spirit when they began to live according to the

commandments of Christ. This second justification entailed the bestowal of eternal life and the reward linked to good works.

Anthony van den Os, who became a pastor in Zwolle in 1748, took these ideas even further. He understood the righteousness of God mentioned by Paul as nothing more than God's gracious disposition to save sinners through Christ. He described faith as trust in Christ and obedience to his commandments. As the eighteenth century progressed, all of Reformed theology in the Netherlands began to shift in this direction. A small group led by Holtius, Comrie, Brahe, and others remained faithful to the confession of the fathers. They attempted to exclude all human works and righteousness from justification, viewing it as an eternal decree. However, the tide could not be reversed. Even professors J. van den Honert and J. J. Schultens at Leiden raised objections against this restoration of the Reformed confession. They denied the immediate imputation of the righteousness of Christ and asserted that in the order of salvation, faith should precede justification. The minister of Voorburg, David Kleman, echoed this new perspective when he posited a connection—established by the wisdom and goodness of God—between the moral actions of humans and the supernatural gift of faith. According to Kleman, those who properly utilized their natural abilities (enhanced by the moral teaching of the gospel) and earnestly followed a path of duty could confidently expect to receive God's supernatural grace.

## **Pietism and Methodism**

In addition, neonomianism also took on a pietistic form, making faith and [pietistic] experience, rather than faith and obedience, the condition for justification. From the beginning, a practical school of thought existed in the Reformed church and Reformed theology, which was averse to all scholasticism and placed great emphasis on life. This movement found support and promotion, especially from the strongly anti-Aristotelian philosopher Peter Ramus, who advocated greater simplicity in philosophy and described theology as the "doctrine of living well," with its purpose being not the "knowledge of things but practice and consistent application." Many Reformed theologians embraced this view, including Sturm in Strasbourg, Tremellius in Heidelberg, Piscator in Herborn, and Snellius, Scaliger, and Jacob Alting in the Netherlands. At Cambridge, Perkins and his pupil Ames in Franeker described theology as "the doctrine of living for God, the pursuit of piety," rooted in the will. This practical form of Pietism emerged, represented in England by R. Baxter (mentioned above), Daniel Williams, B. Woodbridge, and many practical authors, and promoted in the Netherlands by numerous theologians and ministers such as Witsius, Vitringa, Lampe, Mel, d'Outrein, Brakel, Hellenbroek, Smytegelt, Francken, Groenewegen, Borstius, Van der Groe, Eswijler, Schortinghuis, and others.

As the conditions in the church deteriorated, and dead orthodoxy gained prominence, all these authors emphasized the necessity of genuine conversion. Being born to believing parents, church membership, baptism, communion, and orthodox faith were all deemed insufficient. A true, saving faith, distinct from temporary, miraculous, and historical faith, was required. True faith did not emerge without prior experiences of terror before the law, fear of judgment, and anguish over sin. The essence of faith did not reside solely in the assent or conviction of the intellect but rather in trust,



surpassing knowledge. Its seat was more in the heart and the will than in the head. Faith was not immediately certain; rather, it involved a distinction between refuge-taking trust, characterizing the essence of faith, and assured trust, added later. This refuge-taking trust, hungry and thirsting after Christ and His righteousness, was a condition preceding justification. It entrusted itself to Christ for justification and, once having accepted Christ's righteousness, presented it to God the Father, pointing Him to His promises, and obtaining justification. However, things were not as straightforward as many believed. The gospel was not for everyone; the offer of salvation was not universal. The law applied to all, but the gospel was only for certain "qualified" sinners, those who had received an initial endowment of grace. Belief was only possible for those who had first received the Holy Spirit's boldness to take that step, guarding against illusory or stolen faith. Permanent self-examination was necessary, as self-deception was a constant danger. The line between the worst of the regenerate and the best of the unregenerate was exceedingly fine, and there was much similarity between false and true grace. Believers were required to continually reexamine and test themselves using the marks of a truly spiritual life. The path of salvation was narrow, and even the righteous could scarcely traverse it. It was also a lengthy journey, with a great distance between refuge-taking and assured trust. Along this path, various classes and groups of people existed: the "discovered," the "persuaded," the "concerned," the "hungry for salvation," individuals with little or weak faith, and others. Typically, the experience of being "sealed" and "assured" only followed after a prolonged period of inner doubt and conflict, often in an extraordinary manner, through a voice, vision, sudden word of comfort from Scripture, and so on.

Akin to this Pietism in the Reformed churches is the Lutheran variety, which had its foundation laid by figures like Musaeus, Arndt,

and others, as well as Reformed authors such as Baxter, Dyke, Bayle, and others. This movement gained significant momentum and saw substantial expansion thanks to the efforts of Philipp J. Spener (1635–1705). Through sermons, discipline, lectures on piety, and numerous writings, Spener took a stand against dead orthodoxy, advocating for a return to the grace of regeneration received in baptism but subsequently lost. He emphasized that historical faith was insufficient for salvation, asserting the necessity of a vital, active faith. According to Spener, one could not attain this faith unless they came to recognize their sins through the preaching of the law and engaged in a long and agonizing struggle against the devil, the world, and the flesh, sometimes reaching the point of despair (*Busskampf*). It was from this intense struggle that true faith emerged. This faith, therefore, went beyond mere assent; it was primarily characterized by trust, constituting a heartfelt experience and a vitality of the soul. Initially, this faith served as a means of justification and subsequently manifested itself in a holy life that stood apart from the world, even abstaining from the *adiaphora*.

This was the Pietism in which Zinzendorf (1700–1760) was raised. While he continued to share its aversion to dead orthodoxy, he found it to be overly legalistic. Zinzendorf believed that fear of the law and anguish over sin, while not necessarily wrong and sometimes having a preparatory role, were not the essence of true penitence. True penitence, though the term might not be precisely accurate since it evokes notions of punishment, arose from the gospel, from the message of the suffering Christ. It was not primarily about fear, struggle, lamentation, or weeping but rather about placing trust in God's grace. It was a matter of the heart, specifically of deep emotional experience. For this reason, the heart needed to be sensitized, which was best achieved through vivid depictions of Christ as a suffering figure, with a focus on His blood and wounds.

Through such vivid communication and immediate observation, faith was born in the human heart without necessarily requiring a penitential struggle (Busskampf) or pinpointing the exact moment of rebirth. This faith brought about union, symbolizing a betrothal and marriage between Christ and the soul. It immersed the heart in grace, akin to swimming in the blood of Jesus as if it were its natural element, enabling the believer to dwell constantly in the "precious closeness of the Savior." This faith simultaneously justified and regenerated, with faith and love converging. The dynamic communication of the Spirit, often described as being "born from Jesus' side," was deemed of greater value than objective justification. As those born of Him, believers lived in His presence without excessive pietistic scruples, placing everything, including their home life and social interactions, under His rule and leading a virtuous Christian life.

What Pietism was for the Lutheran churches, Methodism, as led by John Wesley (1703–91) and George Whitefield (1714–71), became for the Reformed churches. Originally, its aim was to awaken a dormant church and infuse orthodox Christianity with renewed vitality. To achieve this, it employed a compelling proclamation centered on righteousness, sin, judgment, and damnation. Its primary goal was to swiftly awaken people to a profound awareness of their state of lostness. Then, without delay and in the same moment, they were to be led to Christ through faith and assured of their salvation. Finally, they were encouraged to live a new and sinless life characterized by active service in the kingdom of God, dedication to mission and philanthropy, and abstaining from a wide range of indifferent things.

In contrast to Pietism, Methodism clearly reveals its English origins and Reformed heritage. While it similarly reacted against dead orthodoxy, it rejected the idea of preparation and gradual conversion

progression. It did not subscribe to a protracted "penitential struggle," a final "breakthrough," or a subsequent "sealing." Methodism concentrated everything into a single point, emphasizing conversion in full consciousness and meticulously keeping records of saved souls. Once individuals were converted, it did not gather them into quiet introspective circles, societies, or conventicles for piety cultivation. Instead, it immediately thrust them into active service, demanded sudden total sanctification, and organized them into an army that adopted an aggressive approach with the motto "blood and fire" (redemption and sanctification). It marched into the world and stormed it for Christ.

The influence exerted by Methodism on Protestant Christianity cannot be overstated. It not only established numerous large and thriving churches or societies but also infiltrated all churches, leaving an indelible mark on the entire religious landscape of modern times. England and America, in particular, experienced a kind of second reformation thanks to Methodism, characterizing itself through practical, active, and aggressive Christianity that set it apart from the Reformation of the sixteenth century. While the original Reformation primarily aimed at purifying confession and the church in accordance with Scripture, Methodism placed little emphasis on doctrine, distanced itself from traditional organized churches, and directed its focus outward toward the world. It breathed new life into mission work among Jews, pagans, and Muslims, a momentum that continues to this day. In recent years, it has even adopted the ambitious goal of "evangelizing the whole world in this generation." The concept of inner mission work gained serious traction through Methodism, giving rise to various activities that demonstrate Christian religion as a faith of love and mercy. These activities include evangelism among nominal Christians, Sunday-school education, Bible and tract distribution, street

preaching, outreach to the marginalized and imprisoned, and care for the hearing- and speech-impaired, the blind, the mentally ill, and more.

Religious life has undergone a transformation as well. In the past, within devout circles, it was preoccupied almost exclusively with introspection, examining one's own spiritual states and experiences. It often took many years and involved numerous fear-filled struggles to reach certainty and decisiveness. However, in the present, it carries this certainty and demonstrates its authenticity through dedicated service in God's kingdom.

John Wesley emphasized repeatedly and emphatically that conversion and sanctification are not distant promises; they are available here and now to anyone who believes. "Christ stands ready, he is waiting for you; believe in him, and all will be granted to you in this very hour."

Therefore, you should anticipate it every moment; your situation cannot worsen, and if it does not improve, you lose nothing. However, you will not be disappointed; your hope will be fulfilled, and it will not delay. So, seek it at any time, every day, every hour, even this very moment. Why not now? Surely, you can expect it now, if you believe it is possible by faith. Your approach will reveal whether you seek it through faith or works. If by works, you believe that something must be accomplished before sanctification. You think, "I must first be or do this or that." In that case, you are pursuing sanctification through works. But if you seek it by faith, you can anticipate it just as you are, here and now. It is essential to note that there is an inseparable connection between these three aspects: expect it by faith, expect it as you are, and expect it now. To deny one is to deny them all; to affirm one is to affirm them all.

This is the consistent message of Methodism, emphasizing the gospel and underscoring conversion and sanctification. The belief in the immediate availability of salvation, not at some future date, but in the present moment, is the distinctive and potent feature of Methodism. It serves as the foundation for the revivals that have periodically resurged in the English-speaking world since Wesley's ministry. Despite occasional excesses, these revivals have revitalized and strengthened religious life in broad circles, often bearing abundant fruit in terms of morality.

## **Subjectivism**

In all these diverse religious movements, a common feature emerges: they shift the focus from objective factors of salvation, such as Christ, the church, the word, and sacraments, to place the religious subject at the center. This shift is evident in both philosophy and theology of modern times, whether they emphasize the intellect, the will, or the emotions in the order of salvation, as seen in rationalism, Methodism, and Pietism.

Descartes, for instance, grounded all knowledge in the certainty of existence encapsulated in thought. He regarded the clarity and distinctness of knowledge as the standard for truth. This led humans to liberate themselves from sensory, fleeting, and unreliable impressions, striving instead for clear and distinct concepts that the thinking mind, with its innate ideas, could generate from within itself.

Similarly, Spinoza believed that "what is clearly and distinctly perceived is true." He rejected sense perception as the source of knowledge, asserting that true ideas emanate from a pure mind, not from incidental physical motions. Natural humans, however, are enslaved by their emotions, shaping their notions of good and evil based on whether something promotes or hinders their life. Objectively, there is no good or evil in the grand scheme of things; everything is necessary and stems from God. But as long as we view things as part of nature and possess inadequate knowledge, we remain in bondage, experiencing suffering and limitations.

To attain true freedom, individuals must seek a higher knowledge, one that cannot be obtained through rational understanding, Descartes' view notwithstanding. This knowledge is termed "intuitive knowledge" and originates "from a fully adequate idea of certain attributes of God to a fully adequate knowledge of the essence of things." It provides us with a clear and distinct understanding of emotions, granting us mastery over them. This knowledge reveals that sadness, hope, fear, and other emotions oppress life and cannot be considered good. It teaches us to contemplate all things from the perspective of eternity, offering us peace and undisturbed serenity. It aligns with intellectual love for God and anticipates no reward for virtue, finding blessedness within virtue itself.

In the Enlightenment, the rule that clarity serves as the standard of truth became dominant. Even though the rationalism of the era retained a semblance of supernatural revelation, it considered such revelation as a doctrine meant to enhance and complement reason's knowledge. These doctrines' credentials had to undergo scrutiny by reason. Grace was also subjected to judgment in a similar manner. If grace was deemed necessary, it was granted only to those who made

their best efforts, or it was given in sufficient measure to each individual to determine their own use of it.

However, consistent rationalism eventually rejected all notions of special revelation and grace. It championed the idea of individual autonomy in both intellect and will. People were expected to follow their own insights and assert themselves against external authority. Enlightenment of the intellect and moral improvement were seen as the paths to blessedness.

Immanuel Kant, however, challenged and dethroned this rationalism to make way for faith. He subjected reason's knowledge to a rigorous critique and confined it to the realm of sensory perception. Kant posited the existence of a practical reason alongside theoretical reason. This practical reason bound individuals to a moral world order, imposing an unconditional obligation to do good. Inherent in the moral law was the concept of freedom, although there was no room for it in the world of sensory perception. Instead, freedom existed in the noumenal or intelligible world that transcended the sensory world.

Thus, every human action, on one hand, played a necessary role in the natural mechanism, while, on the other hand, it was freely executed by an intelligible cause. Kant placed the highest value on human freedom, considering it not a mere hypothesis or postulate but an automatic and necessary fact, inseparable from the moral law. This freedom, according to Kant, served as the cornerstone of morality and religion, the foundation for faith in God and immortality, and the path to redemption. It allowed humans to remain governed not by "the instincts of sensuality" but by the moral law and a sense of duty. Nonetheless, this journey was one of continuous struggle against evil, slow progress in doing good, and a



pursuit of moral improvement that never reached absolute perfection. Moral progress was an ongoing process, and redemption was attainable for those who steadfastly worked towards self-improvement.

In these words of Goethe, we can encapsulate the core ideas that Kant elaborates on concerning sin and salvation in his Critique of Practical Reason. However, in his work "Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone," influenced by historical Christianity, Kant introduced several modifications to his earlier stance. He came to recognize that humans cannot exist in a state of indifference, oscillating between good and evil actions. If humans share a common essence, if they are organic beings, their inner disposition must fundamentally align with either goodness or evil. It's not merely a Christian doctrine but a universal truth that humans are not inherently good; this is evident in the experiences of all people throughout history. "All individuals have a price for which they would sell their integrity." As the biblical Psalm 14:3 states, "There is no one who does good, no, not one." Every human being, due to an extratemporal and inexplicable act of freedom, possesses a natural inclination towards evil. Evil is not an external aspect of their being but an intrinsic part of them. They are inherently and profoundly tainted by evil.

Kant's conviction about the inherent evil in human nature is so strong that he unequivocally declares that salvation requires a "new creation" or a form of rebirth. However, when it comes to the question of whether and how such a rebirth is possible, Kant does not derive the answer from Christianity, as one might expect given his acknowledgment of humanity's radical evil. If humans are inherently wicked, how can they possibly save themselves? Yet, since Kant is not satisfied with the doctrine of grace, he reverts to his doctrine of freedom. The moral law inherently implies freedom.

When it unconditionally demands that we must do good and be good, it presupposes our ability to do so. Just as Pelagius argued from the "ought" to the "can," Kant infers from the moral law's "you shall" the "you can" in terms of performance.

Kant defends the notion that humans have the ability to do good by asserting that within them, there exists a capacity for goodness. While there is a predisposition toward evil, there also lies a predisposition toward good behind this inclination. This disposition encompasses not only a susceptibility to goodness and the possibility of redemption but also a positive germ of goodness—the power to redeem oneself. It is this disposition that empowers humans to transform and renew themselves. Just as through an intelligible act of freedom they made themselves sinners, they can similarly use their freedom to regenerate themselves. This rebirth is not a slow and gradual process but rather a sudden transformation, occurring as a revolution within the intelligible substratum of the human psyche. It represents a new creation, a fundamental change of heart, an instantaneous abandonment of the old Adam, and an adoption of the new. While Kant places the principle of salvation in the realm of free will, his intention is not to negate the role of grace. On the contrary, he encourages all individuals to do what is within their capacity and to anticipate "cooperation from above." However, in Kant's view, humans can never definitively discern whether something is a product of grace since the cause-and-effect relationship does not operate outside the natural world. Moreover, accepting it practically would imply that the good deeds are not their own but the work of another being acting within them.

Therefore, what remains is the belief that human beings have the capability and responsibility to redeem themselves through their own free will. In this endeavor, the concept of a perfect humanity,

symbolically embodied in the person of Christ, serves as both a guarantee and a source of inspiration for our faith. Christ's ideal teaches us how to achieve perfection and establish goodness as the ruling force through the trials and tribulations of combat and temptation. Once we have experienced a rebirth through a deliberate exercise of our free will, the gradual process of sanctification commences in our practical lives. Those who have been born again remain in this state and never revert to their previous condition. While this may seem at odds with Kant's doctrine of freedom, he assumes the endurance of the regenerated individuals.

It is true that one cannot immediately and directly be certain of this outcome. However, those who continually improve morally can reasonably infer that they will eventually attain perfection, whether in this life or the hereafter. Feelings of guilt and fear of punishment no longer need to torment them. During and after their conversion, individuals continue to make amends for past sins. They voluntarily undertake the consequences of sin, although it is no longer a punishment but a form of discipline that guides them towards virtuous actions and, consequently, renders them worthy of forgiveness. Moreover, as new beings, they stand free from condemnation and appear pure in the presence of God. Achieving perfection may take a considerable amount of time, but God considers one's disposition for virtuous actions and justifies them through grace.

Schopenhauer, much like Kant, vehemently emphasizes the corruption of human nature. Consequently, he, too, comes to acknowledge that mere development or enlightenment is utterly insufficient for the radical improvement of individuals. What one does is a product of what one is, and genuine transformation must occur at the core of one's being. In this regard, Kant and

Schopenhauer firmly oppose the optimism and rationalism of the eighteenth century. However, they also share the rejection of the Christian doctrine of salvation as the solution. While Kant maintains a belief in a form of salvation achievable through the freedom of the will, thus returning to the Enlightenment's optimism, Schopenhauer remains steadfast in his pessimism and accepts no other deliverance from suffering except the annihilation of consciousness, as found in Buddhism.

Art and philosophy may offer some solace, but Schopenhauer steadfastly maintains his pessimism to the end. He contends that ultimate salvation can only be achieved, guided by one's own knowledge, by allowing life, with all its misery, to serve as a quiescence for the will, leading to its negation and eventual entry into nirvana. In this state, consciousness is entirely numbed, and the will to live is completely extinguished.

Eduard von Hartmann's soteriology, starting from humanity's wretchedness, incorporates elements reminiscent of Kant and Schopenhauer, alongside ideas stemming from pantheistic and evolutionistic philosophy. Radically evil due to their eudaemonistic egoism, a product of their animal ancestry and historical development, humans are seen as inherently flawed. Their "essential and most characteristic nature" is profoundly tainted by evil. They manipulate "sensuality," which isn't inherently wrong, for their egoistic pursuits. This ethical and physical evil, however, is not merely tolerated by God as a final purpose but rather viewed as a means to an end. It serves the purpose of transforming humans into religious-ethical beings, igniting their desire for salvation and sanctification, ensuring the enduring and indispensable existence of religion and morality. Deep within every individual, there lies a latent fundamental tendency of a different nature—an ethical

disposition that aligns with the objective moral order of the world. This disposition provides them with the strategic foundation from which they can combat evil. They are not solely natural beings but also moral beings, possessing a sense of responsibility, duty, guilt, and a longing for salvation. This ethical disposition cannot be solely attributed to humans as products of nature, shaped by their egoism. Instead, it originates from an immanent objective reason that operates within them and manifests itself through the evil present in themselves and the world. In religious terms, it can be referred to as "grace," encompassing not only the inherited moral disposition from previous generations (original grace) but also the moral strength to develop and nurture this disposition (actual grace). In its entirety, it should be seen as the immanent governing principle of the moral world order, as the Holy Spirit through which God realizes goodness within humanity. Therefore, no person is entirely devoid of it, and there are no absolute reprobates or elect individuals. Every individual belongs to some extent within the community of the blessed, receiving a portion of grace based on their familial background, upbringing, and other factors, which they can appropriate, enhance, and earn.

Salvation, in God's view, is bestowed upon humans through grace, yet it necessitates their acquisition through moral endeavor when viewed from the human perspective. Consequently, grace, when seen from the human standpoint, can be termed as faith. These two are fundamentally intertwined, much like the inherent oneness of God and humanity. "Grace" and "faith" are essentially identical, albeit observed from different angles. As a result, redemption and sanctification constitute a gradual process that unfolds slowly. Salvation isn't realized abruptly and in one fell swoop but rather progressively, in the manner of faith.

This redemptive journey commences with enlightenment, subsequently evoking feelings of guilt and aversion to evil. However, these elements bear primarily negative and preparatory significance. Following this, faith emerges—a faith that, albeit unconsciously, precedes the aforementioned components but now operates consciously, giving birth to a renewed individual. Through this faith, individuals yield themselves to grace, conquer the burden of guilt, attain reconciliation, inner peace, "sonship," and union with God. They also engage in the lifelong process of sanctification.

Nonetheless, this subjective redemptive process doesn't represent the ultimate objective. Instead, it serves as a subordinate means of the objective redemptive process within humanity. This objective process entails the triumph of the moral world order, a more precise term than "the kingdom of God." Importantly, as no alternative exists for genuine redemption, it culminates in "the redemption of the world from itself as the triumph of the idea in the collapse of the universe."

Universal redemption coincides with the world's dissolution, involving "the recall of its spatial-temporal appearance into the eternal Being" and the return of the absolute will from actuality to potentiality. Consequently, the world's redemption ultimately serves as a means for God's redemption.

## **After Kant**

In the wake of Kant, modern philosophy took a different path, leading to the idealistic systems of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Like Kant, Fichte shifted the focus from theoretical to practical reason, from intellect to will, and from knowledge to moral conduct. However, he pursued this direction so relentlessly that he entirely discarded "the thing in itself" and made knowledge subservient to action. In his view, action preceded words – the primacy of deed over speech. The "I" (or self-consciousness) is not only self-aware but also generates the "non-I" (the world as an idea). According to Fichte, nothing exists beyond the "I," and he boldly stated, "The I is everything." Human essence lies in self-determination, and their destiny is freedom. Those who allow the world to determine them are slaves, while those who define themselves become masters, kings, sovereigns. Consequently, human redemption is their own achievement, attained through consistent efforts toward self-improvement. The fundamental lesson to practice is simply this: "assert yourself, become self-aware, strive for independence, and liberate yourself."

However, this wasn't the end of Fichte's philosophical journey. Accused of atheism in 1799, he was forced to leave Jena, leading him to join a different intellectual circle in Berlin. It was during this period that he delved deeper into religion than ever before. Consequently, his philosophy took a different trajectory and adopted a new form. Until then, Fichte had consistently opposed what he called "obscurantism," but now he turned away from the Enlightenment's rigid rationalism. He distanced himself from thinkers like Nicolai and moved closer to Romanticism, Schleiermacher, and Spinoza. While his philosophy had previously transitioned from the practical to the theoretical and then to the moral and religious "I," it now found its foundation in religion. From this vantage point, it aimed to construct an entire worldview. Fichte

first ascended to the divine, only to proceed outward from God. Beginning with volition, he ventured into the realm of being and then, from that being, examined the entire world. Thus, the theory of science transformed into the doctrine of religion.

As a result, the calling and destiny of humanity underwent a transformation. Fichte had previously situated it in moral action and freedom. Now, he proclaimed that our certainty regarding moral conduct, both as humanity's task and goal and as the world's task and goal, is fundamentally and exclusively rooted in religious faith. Conviction of the reality of the moral and sensible worlds does not arise from the intellect but from the heart; it is a matter of faith. All truth originates from faith, conscience, and the alignment of the mind. "We are all born in faith." Once individuals grasp this insight, they come to recognize that God, whom they discovered last, is, in fact, the first. The world's goal is the world's foundation. God and humanity are eternally united. However, this unity, the underlying essence, is temporarily disrupted by self-consciousness (knowledge), which always creates a division between subject and object, allowing humans to seek reunion through this existing disunity. Ultimately, what was eternally one in essence must, through separation, return to union. The destiny of humanity is not centered on activity, action, independence, or freedom; instead, it revolves around life in God, finding rest and delight in His fellowship, a concept akin to intellectual love, as termed by Spinoza. This is the supreme, blissful, and eternal life.

Fichte believed he could find this idea within Christianity, specifically in the Gospel of John. In his view, the eternal unity of the divine and the human represented the innermost essence of religion. Christ's person visually presented this truth. Before him, no one had recognized and expressed this truth as he had. Subsequently,



everyone could only attain this truth, this union with God, this state of blessedness, through him. While historical faith doesn't save us – "only the metaphysical, by no means the historical, saves" – properly understood Christian doctrine is undeniably true and profoundly novel. It reveals the kingdom of God as the true world, eternally willed by God and realized in history. When individuals make this divine will their own, they discover eternal life. Incorporating God's will into their own requires internal rebirth and the relinquishment of self-will. There is but one path to salvation: self-annihilation and self-denial. There is but one means of salvation: the death of selfhood, dying alongside Jesus, and rebirth. Jesus, by nature, embodies what we, following His example, must become in freedom – the born children of God. Consequently, His historical appearance represents an eternally valid historical truth. Dogma may clothe this truth in a series of metaphysical propositions, but the Holy Spirit, promised by Christ, guides us toward all truth and labors to complete the kingdom, which simultaneously embodies God's kingdom and the realm of reason.

Schelling's development followed a similar trajectory. In his early period, he displayed a certain indifference toward religion. However, through a more profound study of nature, he arrived at what is referred to as identity philosophy. In this philosophy, the key concept shifted from doing to being, and it expressed the unity of subject and object, spirit and nature, God and the All. This Absolute, however, eludes thought and formal proofs; it can only be apprehended through intellectual vision. Religion, morality, and art all draw their roots from this mysticism of the heart. Consequently, religion and philosophy, though they may seem distinct, share the same essence—the unity of the eternal and the finite. While paganism tends to draw the eternal into the finite, Christianity elevates the finite into the eternal. Hence, while nature forms the

core of mythology, history, especially as embodied in the person of Christ, serves as the focal point of Christianity. These ideas, already present during Schelling's identity philosophy phase, receive further elaboration in his positive philosophy, particularly in his philosophy of revelation.

Positive philosophy complements the negative, commencing where the latter concludes. It reveals that the entire history of humanity revolves around the finite returning to the infinite. In reality, the fall commences with creation, with the moment the finite becomes independent. This estrangement from the divine continues as humanity misuses finite reality for their egoistic purposes. God countered this estrangement through a historical process, embodied in the person of Christ. Christ, who already possessed an independent existence, set aside His glory to become the Son of Man. This transformation didn't solely occur during His incarnation but traces back to the time of the human fall. While not explicitly named Christ, His influence was already at work in paganism and mythology. The entire period from His activity in paganism to His death was marked by humiliation and suffering. However, with His resurrection, a reversal transpired. The entire old world came to an end – paganism, mythology, and the dominion of demons were all stripped of their power, and humanity received fundamental justification. This justification, found in the resurrection of Christ (Rom. 4:25), precedes the new life and good works. True good works require prior justification, as without it, there may be a fear of evil but no courage to perform the good.

Individual good works can only emerge once the entirety of our present condition has been justified. Given that it's not our specific actions but our entire existence that stands reprehensible before God, our deeds alone cannot justify us in His eyes. Only Christ has

the power to justify us before God by making our entire existence righteous and pleasing to Him. Through the resurrection of Christ, we receive justification as a free gift of righteousness (Rom. 5:17). Consequently, our current state of separation from God becomes an accepted condition in which we can peacefully and even joyfully navigate. This stands in stark contrast to the melancholic and self-tormenting Christianity that denies the significance of Christ's actions for us.

This highlights that the essence of Christianity lies in the person of Christ, making it an inherently historical religion. Moreover, after His resurrection and ascension, Christ continues His work until all His adversaries are ultimately defeated. His immediate action in the resurrection was to restore human nature to be pleasing and right in God's eyes, granting humans the freedom, power, and potential to become God's children once again. Subsequently, He sent the Holy Spirit, who "realizes the entire deity in us." With this, the religion of the Spirit and freedom emerged, offering humans life and blessedness in communion with Christ. This religious evolution progresses through the Petrine church of Rome, the Pauline church of the Reformation, and culminates in the future Johannine church. Through this progression, the cosmic process grounded in the three divine potencies—nature, spirit, and personality (or love)—reaches its conclusion. Christ will have restored all things to unity with God, marking the reconciliation between God and His creation as the central theme of history.

In contrast to the Enlightenment, Hegel shared the desire of his predecessors to incorporate Christianity and its core concept of redemption into his philosophical system. He laid the groundwork for reconciliation within the framework of the Absolute itself. This Absolute, remember, is not an unchanging entity but an eternal

process of continuous development—a self-evolving spirit and idea. Initially, it exists as pure potentiality, propelling itself towards actuality through the unfolding of world history.

This process entails a journey from self-emptying to self-reconciliation. The self-emptying commences with the emergence of the finite world and culminates in humanity. Humanity's journey begins with a state of naive innocence, evolves into self-consciousness, asserts its individuality, subordinates finite things to egoism, and introduces sin into the world. As a consequence of this sin, humanity finds itself in opposition to God, just as it faces adversities and misfortunes in the world. However, it is humanity's privilege to recognize this condition and to sense the need for redemption.

In general, redemption entails reconciling the existing opposition and acknowledging the essential unity of God and humanity. However, it is a misconception to believe that any single individual or all of humanity collectively can effect this reconciliation. It can only be embraced if it already exists as a fundamental truth. Indeed, it does exist, primarily within the concept of God and historically within the person of Christ.

Within the concept of God, the infinite and the finite, God and humanity, are eternally intertwined. However, this conceptual existence alone was insufficient. For reconciliation to truly take hold in humanity, even among the uneducated and common people, it needed to be visibly and historically embodied in a person. This was achieved by God through Christ, who was not merely a teacher or martyr but, in a sense, the incarnation of this concept—the Son of God. Christ remained faithful to his unity with God even unto death

and elevated human nature to the point of sitting at the right hand of God.

Christ, therefore, is the "God-man," and his death marks the epicenter of reconciliation. His death symbolizes the death of death itself, the negation of negations, leading to resurrection and ascension. In Christ, God embraced finiteness, along with its extreme manifestation in evil, to ultimately defeat it through His own death. "It is infinite love for God to identify himself with what is foreign to him in order to destroy it." Thus, his death initiates a shift in consciousness—the beginning of "a new world, a new religion, a new reality, another cosmic condition."

The church stands firmly upon this foundation. Through faith, it is certain that God and humanity are inseparable, and the limitations, weaknesses, and imperfections of human nature do not contradict this unity. "The fundamental qualification in the kingdom of God is the presence of God, so that its members are not only commanded to love people but also to be aware that God is love." Individuals arrive at this certainty not through reasoning, miraculous evidence, morality, or decency, but through faith, through "the testimony of the Spirit, the indwelling idea of the Spirit itself." This testimony does not pertain to transient external history, which must fade away, but to the idea that God and humanity are one, a truth realized and revealed historically in Christ. Thus, although faith may originate in the sensory realm, it must ultimately transcend to the spiritual realm. "The true essence of Christian faith must be justified by philosophy, not by history."

The institutional church, distinct from the Christian community, bears the responsibility of nurturing its members and leading them to the truth. This responsibility is evident in infant baptism, where it

is declared that children are born not in misery but within the fellowship of the church. While initially receiving truth on authority, they gradually appropriate it for themselves. They are born into and for freedom. Unlike those who come to the church from the outside and undergo regeneration and conversion, these children may proceed with the understanding that God has been reconciled, evil has been overcome, and the Spirit of God, their Spirit by faith, combats sin within them. In the Lord's Supper, which holds a central place in Christian doctrine and is subject to various interpretations, believers witness the tangible exhibition of reconciliation with God and the indwelling of the Spirit in their hearts.

What is most remarkable in the post-Enlightenment philosophy that began with Kant is its renewed attempt to connect with Christianity and incorporate its religious truths into its philosophical system. Flat rationalism had dismissed Christianity as obsolete, asserting that enlightened minds and free will were sufficient for salvation, leaving no room for the grace of revelation. However, philosophy, through its notable interpreters, revisited this superficial judgment. It embarked on a deeper and more prolonged exploration of nature, history, humanity, and the world, ultimately articulating the idea that redemption from sin and suffering could only be accomplished through an act of God. According to this philosophy, evil was not a random occurrence or a capricious human action but an essential element within the cosmic process. Therefore, redemption from evil was only possible if, within that same cosmic process, it was gradually defeated and expelled by a divine power. In Schelling and Hegel, as well as in Schopenhauer and Hartmann, later philosophy took on the character of a "philosophy of redemption."

Post-Kantian philosophy made a sincere effort to re-embrace the profound concepts of Christianity, yet it only achieved partial success

in this endeavor. This can be attributed, to a large extent, to the fact that it only partially overcame rationalism, more in its outward appearance than in its essence. For instance, Hegel, while looking down upon the Enlightenment and ridiculing its intellectual arrogance, championed the right to seek reason within Christian religion. However, he simultaneously subjected Christian religion to his "thinking consciousness" and found the standard for its truth within his own reason. He did acknowledge that philosophy did not position itself above Christian religion and its content but merely above the form through which it expressed its truth. Yet, this statement did not fully compensate for his earlier assertion that "thought is the absolute judge before which the content must prove and authenticate itself." Consequently, Christianity may have contained a doctrine of reconciliation with profound significance, but this profundity was only fully revealed through philosophy. It was not religion but philosophy that achieved genuine reconciliation. "Philosophy is theology in the sense that it represents the reconciliation of God with Himself and with nature; it asserts that nature, as otherness in itself, is divine; it affirms that finite Spirit naturally aspires to reconciliation and partially attains it in the course of world history." The effort to reconcile reason and religion, therefore, ultimately resulted in a division between idea and reality, leading to a point where the idea itself could no longer be sustained. Post-Hegelian history clearly demonstrated that in the process, valuable content had been discarded along with the speculative language. When stripped of its speculative terminology and expressed plainly, idealistic philosophy was left with the idea that human beings, initially existing within the polarity of sensuality and reason, nature and spirit, idea and reality, gradually transcended this polarity through a process that they themselves had to support and promote, either through intellect or will.

## **Schleiermacher and Ritschl**

Modern theology, as it emerged with Strauss, delivered a significant shake to Hegel's philosophy, revealing its distinctive intellectual character. Although it often employed Christian terminology, it infused these terms with altered meanings. In the process of conversion, for instance, God and humanity, or the grace of God and the human will, are not in opposition; conversion is entirely and simultaneously the result of both. Grace aligns with divine providence, functioning ethically and pedagogically, nurturing and strengthening the religious community's capacity for salvation ("the ability to embrace grace"). Over time, it will guide all individuals toward salvation and conquer all resistance. In reality, humans do not fundamentally require regeneration; the term conversion is used from God's perspective. Conversion itself involves repentance (reflecting on past sins, willingly accepting their consequences, and committing to amend one's life) and faith (trusting in God's grace through Christ). Once converted, a person is instantly justified. Justification is not a transcendent divine act but rather the removal of guilt consciousness, a shift in the awareness of one's relationship with God, and the resolution of the division between the natural "I" and its destiny. According to this theology, conversion marks the initial renewal of individuals, carrying within them the assurance of perfection, akin to the mature plant hidden within the seed or the grown man concealed within the boy. Consequently, the most significant aspect is the heart, the inner disposition. While actions may initially lag behind this disposition, this imperfection is a transient phase that no longer holds significance in reconciliation and justification.



Just as idealistic philosophy returned to Christianity, so did Schleiermacher, with even greater emphasis, place the historical person of Christ at the center of his doctrine of faith. According to Schleiermacher, after Christ entered our world of sin and misery, he possessed the power and calling to incorporate us into his realm of holiness and blessedness. This incorporation happens through regeneration and sanctification. Regeneration includes conversion and justification, which are one and the same, viewed from both human and divine perspectives. In conversion, comprising penitence and faith, a person is neither merely cooperative nor entirely passive but receptive, allowing humanity as a whole to become ripe for grace and salvation. Justification is the divine act placing a person in communion with Christ. Negatively, it involves forgiveness, condemning the past, and positively, adoption, encouraging a new life. Justification lets forgiveness occur as a person obtains a new life in communion with Christ. Mediating theologians incorporated the person of Christ and the Holy Spirit more broadly into dogmatics but generally maintained the ideas of Schleiermacher in the order of salvation. They attributed to humans the power to accept or reject grace, whether derived from God's creation, providence, enabling grace in baptism, or the gospel call. They corrected Schleiermacher by holding justification as an objective act of God, based on infused righteousness of Christ, making it not only judicial but also communicative, sanctifying, and a glimpse of the future.

In contrast to this subject-based justification, Ritschl turned again to the person of Christ to find the basis for forgiveness in his work. It was not acquired by Christ and did not entail a change in God's disposition, for God is eternal love without punitive righteousness. However, Christ, through his unwavering commitment to his calling, unbroken communion with God, and surrender to God's will, demonstrated that God is love and forgives. Christ proclaimed God's

love even in his death and founded a kingdom of God, a church, where he instilled the consciousness that God is love and forgives sin, allowing communion with God despite sin. In Ritschl, justification is a synthetic judgment, pronounced before good works, replacing fear of God as judge with the consciousness of communion. It is not an individual believer's verdict or experience but the church's possession, knowing it exists in communion with God despite sin. Particular individuals access this through faith and joining the church. Faith is free, typically arising from upbringing, rooted in truth, independent of historical investigation, and based on Jesus' moral greatness impressing the unbiased mind. Through this faith, humans gain a new view of God, themselves, and the world, knowing God as love and sin no longer hindering communion with God. Disasters and misfortunes are not punishments, and they spiritually reign over all things. Their consciousness of sin is removed, constituting their justification. This justification leads to reconciliation, casting aside hostility toward God based on that justification, essentially identical to regeneration, a change in mood and disposition rather than a hyperphysical transformation.

To Ritschl's credit, in a time when the Reformation doctrine of justification was misunderstood and conflated with sanctification, he refocused attention on its significance for religious life, placing the doctrine at the center of the redemptive order once more. However, his approach invited criticism, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Ritschl emphasized God's love in his doctrine of God while neglecting his holiness and righteousness, attempting to deduce reconciliation solely from his love.
2. Reconciliation was seen as Christ proclaiming God's love and the absence of wrath through his teachings and life.

3. Guilt and punishment were considered human notions without correspondence to objective reality, especially since sin was viewed as essentially ignorance.
4. Justification, found in Jesus' proclamation of God's love, was a possession of the entire church, with individuals receiving it by joining the church.
5. It was independent of the subject, excluded mysticism, and had no direct connection with sanctification.
6. Its aim was not to provide personal assurance of salvation but to enable Christians, through their trust in God, to assert themselves against the world.

This summary, while not exhaustive, highlights some significant objections to Ritschl's theology and philosophy. Over time, the intellectual climate changed, and people's optimism in science and culture giving them peace of heart faded. They recognized the limitations of material progress and the need for religion and mysticism. There was a resurgence of interest in philosophy, metaphysics, and idealism, with a shift from Kant back to Hegel. Ritschl's approach, which relied on historic Christianity and the personality of Jesus without proof, appeared increasingly inadequate as studies suggested syncretism in Christianity's origins. Metaphysics became a source of sure footing amid the loss of a historical foundation. Additionally, Ritschl's limited emphasis on the religious life within the individual contributed to the rise of new mysticism and philosophy. His method paved the way for the history of religion and the psychology of religion.

# Psychology

The latter, especially at this point, holds particular significance for us. The field of psychology of religion remains relatively youthful, yet its emergence was driven by the trajectories taken by religious life in preceding centuries. Influential movements, akin to those sparked by Pietism in Germany and Methodism in England and America, all shared a common thread: a shift in focus from the object of religion to the subject. Theological developments followed suit, as evidenced in the systems formulated by Kant, Schleiermacher, and their respective schools of thought. Subsequently, this subjective inclination gained momentum through the influences of agnosticism, biblical criticism, experimental psychology, as well as the study of religions and revivals.

Particularly noteworthy is the role played by the reports provided by revivalists concerning their gatherings and conversion experiences, as they played a pivotal role in catalyzing the emergence of the psychology of religion. G. Stanley Hall, the current president of Clark University, was deeply moved by these reports and conceived the idea of conducting a meticulous examination of the data contained within them. He swiftly assembled a school of thought that, guided by experimental methodologies, including the use of questionnaires, scrutinized various religious phenomena. This school of thought branched out and extended its reach to numerous countries.

It is essential to note that the psychology of religion does not encompass the entirety of religious phenomena but rather relegates the objective aspects of religion, such as dogma and worship, to the domains of history and philosophy. Instead, it confines its focus to the exploration of subjective religion, delving into the religious experiences of individuals. More precisely, it emphasizes not only

religious concepts but also the emotions, sensations, and fervor accompanying them or evoked by them. Initially, it diligently collects these phenomena from biographies, correspondence, conversations, and questionnaire responses. Subsequently, it employs methods such as analysis, comparison, and classification to process this data. Ultimately, it seeks to deduce the underlying principles governing religious development from this empirical material.

Now, based on such investigations, some psychologists who delve into the religious development of individuals provide us with the following portrayal:

In the child, an independent and distinct religious life is yet to emerge. Much like the human embryo, as it progresses in development, retraces the evolutionary stages of organisms that precede the human species, childhood represents the primal, most ancient state of humanity. Ontogeny mirrors and summarizes phylogeny. Just as the earliest humans, during their evolution from lower animals, remained quasi-animalistic for a considerable duration, childhood similarly exhibits characteristics of an animalistic nature. The child commences life equipped with instincts akin to those found in animals. The doctrine of original sin holds true in the sense that the child, by virtue of its origin, retains vestiges of an animalistic existence. By nature, the child is self-centered, assertive, and prone to conflict. It carries within it the rudimentary instinct of self-preservation, which manifests in emotions like anger, sensitivity, jealousy, and the like. In religious and moral matters, the child displays the same self-centered inclinations. To the child, the value of religion is predominantly measured by what it can receive. Lacking independent discernment, the child is susceptible and readily accepts everything it hears as truth. For the child, religion primarily consists of rules and dogmas imposed by parental,

ecclesiastical, or biblical authority. It places faith in and adheres to authority. To the child, religion remains entirely external and objective. "Religion is something external to them; God is a being above and beyond."

However, at the onset of puberty, typically around the age of fourteen for girls and sixteen for boys, a significant transformation takes place. The shift in how young individuals perceive the nature of the church and the scope and significance of its influence in their lives during adolescence has been the subject of extensive and meticulous research in recent years. Stanley Hall published a work on this topic spanning over thirteen hundred pages. He diligently and comprehensively examined all the changes that transpire during human development in the years of puberty. These changes encompass the entirety of life and existence and are simultaneously physiological and psychological, biological and sociological in nature. Just as childhood harkens back to an earlier phase of human history, the period of adolescence represents a neotenic phase. The advancements achieved by the human race in a later epoch are reborn and reiterated during adolescence. The development in this phase is notably marked by its less gradual and more abrupt nature. It echoes the earlier era of upheaval and turmoil when humanity severed previous bonds and ascended to a higher level of civilization. There is a rapid increase in body length, weight, and stamina compared to earlier years, and hitherto nonexistent functions emerge and gain significance. The voice undergoes alterations, hair growth intensifies, limb dimensions and proportions change, and the cerebral nervous system, the foundation for the mature psychic life, attains its full maturity. It is as though nature arms individuals with all available powers to prepare them for the challenges that lie ahead. It instills aggression in young men and readies young women for motherhood.

Psychologically, the change that takes place at this stage is equally remarkable. As boys and girls begin to establish different relationships with the world and develop new interests, their senses also undergo changes in structure and function. Touch, smell, taste, as well as hearing and vision, experience significant transformations. Overall, sense perception takes a backseat; in contrast, there is notable progress in the evolution of the capacity for deliberation and reflection. Thinking, rationality, and self-awareness of one's personality flourish, adopting an entirely new, more universal, abstract, and spiritual form. While children are influenced by heredity and imitation, at this juncture, individuality begins to take form. The universally human aspect starts to differentiate and manifest itself in distinct, divergent character traits and facial features. Alongside all these fresh impressions and ideas, another realm of sensations also emerges within an individual. New sensations of joy and displeasure, empathy and aversion, novel impulses and desires, wishes and ideals, often unconscious and not fully comprehended, enter the human psyche. The person, the individual and personal person, with their unique insight and selfhood, emerges in young men and women: they aspire to be themselves and lead their own lives.

Biologically and sociologically, puberty ushers in significant transformations as well. Puberty marks the awakening of one's sexual life, their reproductive life. Boys become capable of reproduction, while girls become sexually mature. This sexual development doesn't merely coincide with physiological and psychological development; it is, in fact, at the very heart of it. While it may not be the cause or sole explanation for all the other developments, it certainly infuses them with color and tone; it serves as a powerful impetus and catalyst for them. Alongside this awakening to the reproductive aspect of life, individuals also grow

into a larger context, the society that envelops them. They begin to realize that, in addition to living their own lives, they are also destined to coexist with and contribute to the lives of others. The new personality, enriched with a much broader world of thoughts and sensations, wishes and desires, transitions from the narrow circle of self-centered, childlike existence to an adult society with its intricate web of relationships. The focus of one's activities shifts from self-interest to an interest in the broader collective. In summary, puberty signifies a second birth, a rebirth, the emergence of a new personality—distinct and individual, yet simultaneously social.

However, akin to the first birth, this second birth is accompanied by travail. Puberty ushers in its own set of maladies and perils, its own deviations and transgressions. Much like the corresponding epoch in the history of humanity, it is a phase marked by tumultuousness and tension. The rapid and uneven growth of the body and its components engenders a sensation of inadequacy. The immense potential energy amassed within the nervous system, yet unable to find release, begets profound restlessness and strain. The advent of a multitude of new perceptions and ideas into one's consciousness keeps the psyche in perpetual motion and turmoil. It resembles a sea, tossed to and fro, up and down by the winds. The budding personality, striving for independence and eager to assert itself, feels hemmed in from all sides, restrained, impeded by society's efforts to instill an altruistic way of life. The individual and their environment collide. Often, it is as though two selves within one person confront and contend for supremacy. This age is characterized, on one hand, by a sense of dissatisfaction and discontent that manifests itself through various forms of skepticism, restlessness, remorse, despondency, melancholy, daydreaming, self-absorption, obsessive rumination, and, on the other hand, by an impulse toward freedom and autonomy, a thirst for inquiry, fervent enthusiasm for grand



ideas and eminent figures, exuberant generosity, faith in the future, lofty idealism, a yearning to reform everything. Like every other phase in life, and particularly this one, it possesses its distinct virtues and shortcomings. During this period, life oscillates between wisdom and folly, adoration and contempt, fascination and indifference, excessive exertion and deep despondency, selflessness and self-interest, credulousness and skepticism, noble aspirations and sinful desires. The young person stands at a crossroads. Their entire future hinges on the path they choose now. The child is the parent of the adult.

Nonetheless, all these states and experiences constitute the labor pains of the emerging personality. Expelled from the idyllic realm of childhood, the young person ventures into the vast world to carve out a place for themselves. As they progress toward personal freedom and self-reliance, they simultaneously adapt to their surroundings and conform to their social milieu. The trials and tribulations they must endure are beneficial and constructive. They fortify their character, enrich their insights, and deepen their existence. Leaving behind the innocence of childhood, individuals traverse the critical phase of puberty to reach the threshold of mature masculinity and femininity.

Within this psychophysical progression of the adolescent years, religious development assumes a distinct role. The revelation of the correlation between these two processes has astonished some psychologists to the extent that they attempted to elucidate all of religion through the lens of the sexual drive, regarding religion as nothing more than a manifestation of "perverted sexuality." Nevertheless, most psychologists of religion vehemently oppose this "medical materialism." It is undeniable that sexual and religious development may share an interconnected and occasionally

overlapping trajectory, but those who seek to entirely expound religion in terms of sexuality could just as easily attribute it to the functions of respiration and metabolism, given their associations, and could similarly categorize science and art—interests that also take root during adolescence—as manifestations of deviant sexuality. Starbuck, for instance, acknowledges that sexual development may indeed serve as the occasion and backdrop for religious awakening, yet he underscores the significant distinction between a condition and a cause. In the realm of religious development, not only the physical aspect but also the psychological state exerts its influence. Various concepts and ideas, particularly of an ethical nature, exert their sway. The religious process is far too intricate to be reduced to a single causal factor or distilled into a simple formula. Additionally, one must recognize that the content of religious consciousness often diverges entirely from that of sexual consciousness, and as such, it preserves its distinct position and value in the long run. There is an interdependence between the soul and the body, and vice versa; nevertheless, one must acknowledge the autonomous worth of the life of the soul and its religious content, as it is ultimately the rational content and moral outcome that determine its value. "By their fruits, you shall know them (the mental states), not by their roots."

Nonetheless, the rejection of this materialistic theory does not negate the acknowledgment shared by all psychologists of religion—a recognition of the existence of a close (though frequently unspecified) association between religion and love, and an understanding of adolescent religious development as a natural and essential developmental process during that phase of life. It is important to note that this religious development does not manifest uniformly or follow a standardized form for everyone. Disparities emerge, influenced by upbringing and environment, disposition and temperament, gender and age. Indeed, there exists a distinction in

religious development, particularly between the "healthy-minded" and "the sick soul." There are individuals who do not require a conversion experience, while others do. There are the "once-born" and the "twice-born." Some have been raised in a religious milieu during their formative years and continue to find solace in the religion of their youth throughout their lives. They remain untouched by crises, unfamiliar with heartbreak or a struggle with sin. They are strangers to the fear of punishment and the dread of judgment. They navigate life as carefree, jovial souls, reveling in the goodness that envelops them from all sides, placing their faith in the advancement of humanity, and filled with unwavering hope for the future. These are the fortunate individuals who, with their good-natured demeanor and pleasant outlook, triumph over the world's suffering. They are held up as exemplars by the Mind-Cure Movement, which endeavors, through suggestion, to dispel fear from the human heart and, through the power of the mind, to obliterate sin and sickness.

Yet even amidst these privileged individuals, there frequently arises not necessarily a definitive conversion, but rather a more or less robust religious resurgence. In children, religion remains external and objective. To transform this religion from a mere memorized lesson into a matter of free, personal conviction, a matter of the heart, an awakening, revival, and the internalization of religious life must occur. Typically, such a progression of religious life coincides with the emergence of independent personality in individuals. However, various forms of religious experience exist, and a one-size-fits-all standard does not apply. The universe is far more abundant than we imagine, defying alignment with a singular system. There are also afflicted souls, individuals who perceive life differently, who grasp the world's suffering and the futility of all things, and who, within their own souls, grapple with sin, its culpability, and its dominion. These are profound beings who require a religion of

redemption, individuals with a low "pain, fear, and misery threshold," who attain serenity and peace only through a crisis.

Typically, such a crisis is termed a "conversion," and Christianity regards it as the result of a supernatural intervention. Nevertheless, from a scientific standpoint, the psychology of religion finds no imperative need to invoke any supernatural element to explain this religious crisis. Conversion, however peculiar and atypical it may appear, is a wholly natural process that psychology can sufficiently elucidate.

First and foremost, the psychological examination of religious experiences has unveiled the intimate connection between the psychosomatic development during the adolescent years and the concurrent religious awakening and deepening. Comprehensive surveys of this phenomenon, along with the statistical analysis of outcomes, reveal that this religious awakening primarily unfolds between the ages of ten and twenty-five. One might broadly assert that it occasionally commences as early as the seventh or eighth year, then steeply ascends through the sixteenth year, subsequently declines markedly until the twentieth year, and gradually diminishes thereafter until around the thirtieth year, becoming exceedingly rare beyond that point. In this context, it is noteworthy that, while puberty and conversion do not precisely synchronize temporally, the religious crisis generally transpires somewhat earlier in girls than in boys. Among girls, it is most likely to manifest around the thirteenth, sixteenth, and still—to a considerably lesser extent—in the eighteenth year. Conversely, in boys, it is infrequent at the age of twelve but most commonly occurs around sixteen, and still quite frequently at eighteen and nineteen.

Even this level of concurrence is noteworthy and raises the suspicion of a profound link between puberty and conversion, love and religion, sexual emotions and religious awakenings. This suspicion gains credibility when, secondly, one observes a profound connection and striking similarity between the experiences characteristic of young individuals during these years and the religious experiences that transpire within the same period. During puberty, the inner life of the soul undergoes incessant turmoil, doubt, and twists. Correspondingly, religious experiences share this character: emotions of sin, guilt, fear of retribution, despondency, melancholy, penitence, apprehension, and more are emblematic. During the moment of conversion, which may vary in duration, it seems as if two forces—depicted as the old and the new self, darkness and light, sin and virtue, Satan and Christ—engage in a struggle, wherein the individual involved does not so much represent one of the contending sides but rather perceives themselves as the prize over which these two forces vie. In the course of this conflict, the experiences of sin, woe, and adversity gradually, sometimes suddenly, yield to sensations of tranquility and joy, forgiveness and reconciliation, divine favor and communion with the Divine. These religious experiences, therefore, share qualitative similarities with those characteristic of adolescence in general, differing mainly in their religious context and interpretation.

Thirdly, within the realm of the psychology of religion, it is essential to acknowledge that the religious experiences described as "conversion," "awakening," "realization," and the like are not unique to a single religion but manifest across all religions and among various peoples. Notable figures like Paul, Augustine, and Luther, as well as Buddha, Muhammad, and others, underwent religious crises. Revivals are not exclusive to Christianity but appear in every religion, both in individual lives and among masses of adherents. All

religious phenomena, whether objective (dogma, ritual, church organization, etc.) or subjective (mysticism, asceticism, ecstasy, revelation, inspiration, etc.), are characteristic across all religions. Moreover, there is a shared recognition among all religions, consciously or unconsciously, of the link between religious development and puberty. In all religious traditions, this stage is marked by certain rites of separation, trials, circumcisions, tattooing, and more, all designed to initiate young men and women into full religious communion. Among us, Catholics celebrate First Communion, Lutherans have Confirmation, and the Reformed have public professions. Puberty represents the age of rebirth, the emergence of an independently religious and religiously-social personality.

Lastly, in the fourth instance, the emerging psychology confidently offers a compelling explanation for the religious transformation that takes place within individuals during conversion or awakening. In recent times, numerous psychologists have come to recognize the immense significance of the "unconscious," or more aptly termed "subconscious" or "subliminal cerebration," in human existence. The thoughts and ideas present in a person's conscious awareness at any given moment represent merely a fraction of what the mind truly holds. Sensations, impressions, urges, desires, and other elements introduced or aroused in individuals earlier do not simply vanish; instead, they submerge beneath the threshold of conscious awareness into the subconscious realm. There, they leave imprints on the pathways of the cerebral nervous system and, in a sense, continue their existence and activity.

Due to the ever-changing nature of our consciousness brought about by the influx of new perceptions, the unconscious reservoir of impressions remains in a constant state of flux. On some occasion or

another, a specific cluster of impressions can readily resurface, altering or even displacing the impressions currently occupying the consciousness.

Such shifts in consciousness, these "changes in personality," manifest in human life continually. One day, individuals may be brimming with enthusiasm for a particular cause, only to find their ardor extinguished the next. In the lives of individuals or crowds, jubilations can swiftly give way to cries of "Crucify him." A number, a name, or an incident might elude our memory at a particular moment but unexpectedly resurface shortly thereafter. A mathematical problem, a puzzle, or a logical argument may appear insolvable in the evening, only to have the solution awaiting us in our thoughts the following morning. When President Teddy Roosevelt indulges in a hunting excursion, his realm of ideas differs vastly from his mental landscape when he focuses on state affairs within the White House. At that moment, both externally and internally, he assumes a distinct persona, a different facet of his humanity.

Conversion, or a religious awakening, is essentially a transformation of one's consciousness. It signifies that "religious ideas, once on the periphery of one's awareness, now take center stage, with religious goals becoming the habitual focal point of one's energy." While conversions may appear sudden, immediate, and unanticipated, similar to the sudden emergence of an idea or the inspiration of a genius, this is not truly the case. Those who undergo conversions often later speak of earlier religious impressions that laid the groundwork. These impressions, perceptions, and ideas, sometimes acquired in one's early youth, were never obliterated but merely submerged into the unconscious.

When an external stimulus aligns with the individual's inner state—a compelling word in a sermon, a scripture passage springing to mind or leaping off the biblical page, an emotionally charged revival gathering, or something else—it awakens what had been dormant in the unconscious. Suddenly, that which had remained hidden bursts forth into consciousness, displacing prevailing ideas and assuming a central position. This results in a profound shift in consciousness, introducing an entirely new content. This transformation of consciousness marks the second birth, the emergence of a fresh religious persona. "Spontaneous awakenings are the fruition of what has been ripening within the subliminal consciousness."

Consequently, the abrupt nature of a particular religious awakening does not serve as proof of its miraculous, supernatural origin, nor does it fundamentally differentiate it from the gradual, consistent growth characterizing the religious development of others. Moreover, the value of a religious "revival" hinges not on its origin but on its essence and outcomes. The pivotal question is not "How does it occur?" but rather "What is achieved?" Whether a given religious development necessitates a crisis depends on an individual's unique character and is shaped by their past and current state. Therefore, conversion is not an exclusive experience but a shared one, representing the awakening of one's religious personality during the adolescent years—a natural, essential, and normal psychological process in adolescence.

This psychological interpretation of conversion finds backing in the religious development that surfaces at a later stage, generally termed "sanctification." During this phase, it becomes increasingly challenging to distinguish individuals who have undergone a religious crisis from those who are unaware of such an experience. "Converted men are indistinguishable from natural men." On



occasion, the latter may even exhibit higher moral standards. A state of order and tranquility, characterized by harmony and effective adaptation to one's surroundings, is not exclusive to converts or Christians alone. Feelings of certainty and joy can be found equally in Leo Tolstoy and John Bunyan. Conversely, neither "twice-born men" nor "once-born" or "healthy-minded men" remain immune to doubt, inner conflict, temptation, or unrest in their later years. While complete apostasies are rare, it is quite common for individuals to experience a slump or a period of dullness following a phase of enthusiasm and activity. Here, too, the saying holds that "a bow long bent grows weak." "Every flow has its ebb."

A noteworthy phenomenon is that, as a rule, individuals tend to outgrow their doubts and embark on reconstructing their faith and lives once they reach maturity. The number of adults who maintain a purely negative stance toward religion is relatively small. Despite various deviations, religious development in almost all cases ultimately culminates in "a positive and active religious attitude." Reconstruction appears to be a law governing the later stages of religious life. As people become established members of society, assume roles such as husband, father, wife, and mother, and forge their own connections within society, they begin to engage with voices from the realms of science, philosophy, religion, art, duty, and responsibility in a more composed and serious manner. Personal familiarity with life's disappointments and adversities often leads to a change in perspective, a kinder judgment, and the reconstruction of their religious faith. Some individuals return to the religion of their youth, while others, through amalgamation and separation, construct a new faith for themselves. Furthermore, there remains a wide range of religious diversity among people. As life unfolds, it becomes increasingly diverse and intricate, with religious life in many cases even exhibiting pathological variations.

However, according to Starbuck, amid this diversity, unity also emerges, manifesting in three specific ways. First, there is a growing consensus among individuals in their belief in a personal God, the existence and immortality of the soul, and an appreciation of the person of Christ, whether as a Redeemer or an example. Second, while many religious ideas are retained, dogmas begin to carry less weight in everyone's eyes. Greater value is placed on religious feeling than on religious faith, and more emphasis is given to the inner aspects of the religious life than its external forms. Third, there is a growing conviction that motives and intentions in religion hold greater importance than faith and feeling, as people increasingly orient their conduct toward altruism. Egocentric tendencies are giving way to other inclinations, with society, the world, and God becoming the central focus.

To sum it up, there is both idea and law, dynamics and design, involved in religious development, both in humanity as a whole and in individual persons. The former is a recapitulation of the latter. It can be broken down into three components: firstly, the evolution of the human being into an independent and distinct personality, mirroring the centuries-long emergence of humans from the animal world; secondly, the evolution of the individual person into a social entity, reflecting the gradual formation of society with its myriad forms and complex relationships; and finally, the evolution of the social person into a part of humanity, the entire world, and the divine, often referred to as "the Power that promotes righteousness." According to Stanley Hall, we are currently in the midst of this period. Human evolution spans countless centuries behind and ahead. Contrary to the belief of some Christians that we are in the world's old age, we are, in fact, in its adolescence. The twilight we perceive is not that of evening but of dawn. The soul is not yet fully formed; it is still in the process of becoming. Forces within it,

currently dormant like sleepers in a forest, will awaken one day. They will play a more substantial role in ushering in the impending reign of "the kingdom of man" than is currently conceivable.

## **Basic Options and Errors**

The history of the order of salvation emphasizes its significance, not only for expanding our knowledge but, more importantly, for guiding our lives in a practical sense. Because God has implanted the longing for eternity in the hearts of humans, they are forever bound to ask, in one way or another: How can I discover the ultimate good and enduring happiness? What brings reconciliation with God and invites me into His fellowship? Which path leads to eternal blessedness? Or, as Luther once phrased it: How can I find a gracious God? It is the order of salvation, the sequence, or the way of salvation (*ordo* or *via salutis*) that endeavors to address this question. By this, we mean the manner and order in which, or the route through which, a sinner receives the benefits of grace secured by Christ. This topic was given an independent place in dogmatics and received systematic treatment relatively late in history. In the scholastic period, relevant material was scattered. The most crucial content discussed under this heading can be located in the commentaries on the Sentences II, dist. 26–29; III, dist. 25–27; and in the Summa II, 1 qu. 109–114. The Decree of Trent encompasses all aspects related to grace under the title of Justification during session VI. Catholic theologians typically compile this material in a section

on grace, discussing consecutively: actual grace (its nature, necessity, gratuity, universality, sufficiency, and efficacy); habitual or sanctifying grace (its nature, dispositions, effects, stability, and increase); and the fruits of grace or merit (their nature, condition, and objects).

Initially, Reformed theology typically approached the order of salvation with a tripartite structure: repentance, faith, and good works. However, it soon found it necessary to expand this framework, incorporating various topics such as the call, illumination, regeneration, conversion, faith, justification, sanctification, and more. Over time, theologians recognized the need to consolidate this wealth of material under a single category and organize it along specific lines. Calvin, as a pioneering figure, titled the third book of his Institutes as "The way in which we receive the grace of Christ: what benefits come to us from it and what effects follow." Others referred to it as the "applied grace of the Holy Spirit" (Quenstedt), "the effecting of salvation or the mode of pursuing it" (Calovius), "the application of redemption" (Mastricht), "the order or way of seeking and obtaining salvation" (Reinhard), and so forth. There was even more diversity in the order of treatment among theologians.

In addressing this order of salvation, theologians are not free to invent their own path to salvation or draw inspiration from science, art, or culture. They must adhere to their foundational principle that Holy Scripture is the sole and sufficient source of theological knowledge. Just as in any other theological locus, the treatment of the way of salvation must guard against the imposition of human-made religion. To the question, "What is the way to heaven?" theologians can provide no other answer than what Scripture contains. God Himself, not humans, has established and revealed

this way through Christ. It is a fresh and living path that Christ Himself has paved and traversed, leading truly to eternal life (Heb. 10:20), and God's children are guided by the Spirit of Christ from start to finish (Ps. 73:24; Rom. 8:14). However, when theology diligently adheres to the guidance of Holy Scripture in the subject of the way of salvation, it faces a unique challenge.

On one hand, everything has been accomplished by Christ: sin has been atoned for, the law has been fulfilled, death has been conquered, Satan has been subdued, forgiveness has been obtained, and eternal life has been revealed. One might expect that those for whom Christ died would immediately experience complete deliverance from sin, suffering, and death, obtaining holiness and blessedness. However, this is not the case. On the contrary, believers are called to exercise faith and repentance in time, undergo regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification, and continue to contend with sin, suffering, and death in this life, ultimately entering the kingdom of heaven through much tribulation. How can these seemingly contradictory aspects be reconciled? On one hand, everything has been accomplished, leaving nothing for humans to do; on the other hand, significant events must still take place in the lives of individuals for them to obtain the salvation secured by Christ. The Christian religion appears to maintain two irreconcilable positions: one of salvation through Christ and another that exhorts believers to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. Consequently, the ship of the Christian order of salvation always faces the peril of shipwreck on two submerged rocks: antinomianism on one hand, and nomism on the other.

Nomism, in its various forms and degrees, not only contradicts God's decrees but also fails to give due regard to the person and work of Christ. When it expands human activity in the acquisition of

salvation, it diminishes the role of Christ. It becomes evident that if faith, repentance, and perseverance are within the realm of human capability and effort, and if the ultimate decision regarding one's salvation lies in human hands, then Christ's role is, at best, limited to providing the possibility of salvation. He has merely created an opportunity for us to be saved, but whether any individual or group will seize and continue to seize that opportunity ultimately depends on human beings themselves. God has granted them freedom and vested the decision in their hands. Consequently, Christ falls short of accomplishing everything, and the most critical aspect, determining actual salvation, remains a human responsibility. Christ is thus demoted from His unique position in the work of salvation and relegated to the status of all the prophets and teachers who have instructed humanity on God's behalf. His work is likened to the preparatory and pedagogical activities that God has employed in human history. The gospel of grace becomes only a matter of degree higher than the natural law. Humans, with God's guidance and support, are called to self-activity, and their salvation depends on whether they seize the opportunity offered by God.

The Pelagian order of salvation erases the specific distinction between Christianity and pagan religions, subsuming them all into a single process. It can, at best, acknowledge Christianity as the foremost among equals. This approach regresses into paganism by asserting that people can attain salvation through their own wisdom and strength. In doing so, it undermines the certainty of faith. Paul testifies that the Gentiles are without Christ and consequently without God and hope in the world (Eph. 2:12). Justification is not achieved through the works of the law, and there is no certainty of salvation. As individuals scrutinize themselves and their deeds more closely, they sadly realize that even their best actions are flawed and tainted by sin. They must, therefore, rely on God's grace, which

overlooks imperfections and accepts intentions, or submit to the authority of their church and priest, settling for a false sense of security. Certainty remains elusive. Since grace, to the extent it is granted and necessary, is not only resistible but also perpetually imperiled, they constantly face the risk of losing what they have and their hope of salvation. Such a position offers no stable course or development of the Christian life. It is even uncertain what the outcome of world history will be, whether there will be a church or a kingdom of God. Human hands hold the reins regarding the most critical matter—the world's eternal destiny.

The errors of this rationalistic nomism are glaringly evident, but they are equally present when it disguises itself in the attire of Pietism or Methodism. Just like numerous other attempts to reform Protestant churches, Pietism and Methodism were correct in their resistance against lifeless orthodoxy. Originally, their aim was merely to awaken a dormant Christianity; they did not seek to alter the Reformation's confession but only to apply it in practical life. However, driven by an understandable reaction, they often veered too far in their efforts and swung to another extreme. They, too, gradually shifted the focus from the objective work of salvation to the subjective. It essentially makes no difference whether salvation is made contingent on faith and obedience or faith and experience; in both cases, humanity takes center stage. While Pietism and Methodism did not outright deny the acquisition of salvation by Christ, they failed to employ this doctrine or connect it organically to the application of salvation. It became, in a sense, dormant capital. The active role of the exalted Christ, the Lord from heaven, was overshadowed by the subject's experiences. In Pietism, rather than being directed toward Christ, individuals were turned inward toward themselves. They had to traverse a lengthy path, meet various demands and conditions, and subject themselves to numerous tests

of authenticity before they could believe, appropriate Christ, and have confidence in their salvation. Methodism indeed attempted to consolidate all these elements—conversion, faith, assurance—into a single indivisible moment, but it systematized this approach, in a highly condensed manner, much like Pietism. In both, there was a lack of appreciation for the activity of the Holy Spirit, the preparation of grace, and the connection between creation and re-creation. This is why neither of them resulted in a fully developed Christian life as a consequence of the conversion experience. Whether in a Pietistic manner, it withdrew from the world, or in the style of Methodism, it acted aggressively in the world, it was always something distinct, something existing dualistically alongside natural life. Consequently, it did not organically impact family, society, state, science, or art. Whether in or out of a Salvation Army uniform, Christians were perceived as a distinct class of people who lived not within but outside the world. The Reformation's contrast between sin and grace had, to a greater or lesser extent, given way to the Catholic contrast between the natural and the supernatural. Puritanism had been replaced by asceticism. The essence of sanctification now revolved around abstaining from ordinary activities.

On the opposite end of the spectrum lies antinomianism, standing as a counterforce to nomism. It champions an essential truth, one that we must fully acknowledge to overcome antinomianism itself. It is undeniable that Christ has accomplished everything, and no human effort can add to his sacrifice for our salvation. However, antinomianism, distinct from the antineonomianism of England and the Netherlands, employs this truth to advocate an entirely different doctrine. Yes, Christ has accomplished everything, but does this imply that after suffering and dying, he has nothing more to do? No, because Christ has also risen and been glorified. His resurrection



appointed him as Ruler and Savior, the Lord from heaven, the life-giving Spirit. In his state of exaltation, there is still much for Christ to accomplish. He must apply and dispense the salvation he obtained to his church. To achieve this, he sent his Spirit to regenerate the entire church and guide it into all truth. Antinomianism, however, neglects this aspect of applying the work of salvation and, in principle, denies the personality and activity of the Holy Spirit. In the end, it aligns with nomism due to the law of opposites attracting each other. Yet, driven by a motive other than the perfect sacrifice of Christ, it goes even further, arriving at the denial and criticism of the objective atonement (satisfaction).

Antinomianism contends that Christ did not secure eternal salvation through his suffering and death but only revealed the love of God. Atonement and justification are eternal concepts. Similar to nomism, in this perspective, Christ is reduced to the status of a prophet and teacher. However, nomism stems from its Deistic principle, while antinomianism fundamentally arises from pantheism. It closely resembles the philosophies of Gnosticism, Spinoza, and Hegel. According to antinomianism, God and humanity are essentially one. From eternity, they have been reconciled, and ideas of wrath and righteousness are human constructs. Due to their finite nature and limitations, humans feel distant from God and imagine Him to be far from them, filled with anger against sin and demanding satisfaction. This is an erroneous human conception of God. God is eternal life, eternally reconciled, and eternally one with humanity. The entirety of redemption, in this view, consists of enlightening humans through the teachings of the prophets, helping them shed the illusion of God's wrath and punitive righteousness, and recognizing God as their Father and themselves as His children. This redemption requires nothing more than enlightenment; it is enlightenment, encapsulating faith alone. There is no room for repentance, contrition, remorse for

sin, fear of hell, dread of judgment, prayer for forgiveness, or sanctification—these are all Pelagian errors that fail to align with the objective realities of God's grace and atonement. On a lower, legalistic plane, people may still feel the need for them, just as they continue to interpret atonement as arising from Christ's sacrifice and speak of God's wrath and righteousness. However, these are religious concepts and symbolic expressions valued by the common people. On the spiritual plane of the philosophers, they give way to the pure idea and the fully adequate concept. Much like nomism, antinomianism ultimately rejects the essence of Christianity, regresses to paganism, and places salvation from sin in the rationalistic enlightenment or moralistic improvement of humanity. Both, whether in an Arian or Sabellian sense, reject the confession of the Trinity.

## **Trinitarian Salvation**

Only on the foundation of the trinitarian confession can we find room for an order of salvation that is scriptural, Christian, and Reformed. Firstly, this confession establishes that the application of salvation is distinct from its acquisition. While the Holy Spirit shares one essence with the Father and the Son, He is a distinct person. He possesses His own unique way of existence and operates in a manner unique to Him. While all the external works of God [*opera Dei ad extra*] are undivided and inseparable, we can still discern an economy in creation and re-creation that allows us to speak of the Father in relation to our creation, the Son in relation to our redemption, and the Spirit in relation to our sanctification. Why did

Christ assert that the Holy Spirit had not yet been given because He had not yet been glorified (John 7:39), and why was the Holy Spirit poured out on the day of Pentecost? This underscores that sanctification is indeed a work distinct from creation and redemption, just as the Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son.

Hence, the mediator's work did not conclude with His suffering and death. Christ is not merely a historical figure who, after living and working on earth for a time, influences people through His teachings and exerts an impact through His words and example. Although He completed the earthly work the Father assigned Him, in heaven, He continues His prophetic, priestly, and royal activities. His justification and glorification at God's right hand serve precisely this purpose. He is the living Lord from heaven. This heavenly activity differs from what He accomplished on earth, yet it is intimately connected to it. His earthly sacrifice fulfilled all requirements of justice: He satisfied God's demands, upheld the law, and secured all the benefits of grace. This work is final and cannot be increased or diminished. It is perfect and complete, resting in the Father's approval, sealed with His Son's resurrection. All the benefits God bestows through the covenant of grace are granted "through and on account of Christ."

However, there exists a distinction between ownership and possession. Similar to how a child has a claim on their father's possessions even before birth but only takes possession of them much later in life, all those who will eventually believe have ownership rights in Christ to all the benefits He has secured, even before they believe. Yet, they only come into possession of these benefits through faith. The acquisition of salvation, therefore, necessitates its application. The former inherently leads to and results in the latter. Just as Christ's exaltation is intricately

connected to His humiliation, and His heavenly work is intertwined with His earthly ministry, the application of salvation is inseparable from its acquisition.

And this application is twofold. We understand that Christ's redemption involves deliverance from sin and its consequences. He not only took upon Himself our guilt and punishment but also fulfilled the law on our behalf. Therefore, the application of Christ's benefits must encompass both justification (assurance of forgiveness of sins and the right to eternal life) and sanctification (renewal of the image of Christ within us). It is not merely the removal of guilt but also the cleansing and overcoming of sin's pollution and power. It is a complete redemption, a total re-creation. To bring about this redemption based on His completed sacrifice, Christ was exalted to the right hand of the Father. He sent the Holy Spirit for this purpose, who not only "bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16) but also regenerates us and transforms us into the image of God. Therefore, this work of application is as divine as the Father's act of creation and the Son's work of redemption. The Holy Spirit, who accomplishes this work, is, along with the Father and the Son, the one and only God, deserving of eternal praise and blessing.

Secondly, implicit in the confession of the Trinity is the idea that the work of sanctification, in an "economic" sense, the task of the Holy Spirit, though distinct, is never separated from the work of redemption and creation accomplished by the Father and the Son. This is evident from the fact that in the divine being, the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son and shares the same essence with them. Just as He exists, He works, both in creation and re-creation. Therefore, it follows that the work of the Spirit is in harmony with the work of the Father; there is no opposition or contradiction between them. It is not a matter of the Father desiring

the salvation of all while the Holy Spirit applies it only to a few, or vice versa. They work in unity because they share the same essence. It also follows that nature and grace, while distinct, are not mutually exclusive. The Roman Catholic system often emphasizes the contrast between nature and supernatural grace, a view that some Protestant groups and sects have adopted. Pietism and Methodism sometimes misunderstand the role and value of nature both before and after conversion. However, the Reformation, in principle, recognized no antithesis other than that of sin and grace. Nature was also a creation of God and under His providence. Thus, it held no less value than grace. For this reason, the Reformation attributed a pedagogical role and significance to nature, meaning God's guidance in the natural lives of individuals and societies. It is God Himself who prepares the way for the gracious work of the Holy Spirit through generations, and the Holy Spirit aligns His activities with God's guidance in the natural realm. Through His grace, the Holy Spirit seeks to restore and consecrate the natural life to God, freeing it from the power of sin.

From the essential unity of Father, Son, and Spirit, it is evident that the Holy Spirit is intimately connected with the work of the Son. These two divine persons do not oppose each other in their actions. Such a contradiction would arise if, for instance, the Spirit were to apply salvation only to a few while the Son acquired it for all humanity, or vice versa. The three persons, sharing one essence, work harmoniously in their diverse activities. Through His own humiliation, the Son became a life-giving Spirit. He lives entirely by the Spirit. "The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God" (Rom. 6:10). He has attained complete immortality, the eternal life of the Spirit. In Him, nothing "natural" or "soulish" remains that can suffer and die. Equipped by the Spirit for His earthly mission and anointed without measure, He has fully

received the Spirit's gifts and now lives, reigns, and governs through the Spirit. The Spirit of the Father and the Son has become His Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. Before His glorification, Christ was not yet this Spirit, but now He possesses the Spirit of Christ as His rightful property.

On the day of Pentecost, Christ sends the Spirit to apply all His benefits to His church through the Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not acquire or add to these benefits, for Christ has accomplished everything. The Spirit is in no way the meritorious cause of our salvation; that role belongs solely to Christ, in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily, and whose work requires no augmentation or improvement. Instead, the Holy Spirit receives everything from Christ. Just as the Son came to glorify the Father, the Holy Spirit descended to glorify the Son. He bears witness to the Son, drawing from His fullness to bestow grace upon grace, leading people to the Son, and through the Son to the Father. He applies all of Christ's benefits, each according to their measure, in their time, and according to their order. The Holy Spirit's activity does not cease until the fullness of Christ dwells in His church, and the church attains maturity, "the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Thus, the work of the Holy Spirit is exclusively applicatory. The order of redemption is the application of salvation (*applicatio salutis*). The essential question, therefore, is not, "What must a person do to be saved?" but rather, "What is God accomplishing in His grace to enable the church to partake fully in the complete salvation secured by Christ?" The "application of salvation" is a divine work that must be understood theologically, not anthropologically. Throughout this entire process, "economically" speaking, the Holy Spirit serves as its author, and it may be characterized as His unique work. The entire "way of salvation" constitutes the "applicatory grace of the Holy Spirit."

Against this view of the order of salvation, Pelagianism raises the objection that it denies humanity's rights, suppresses human self-activity, and fosters ungodly living. When this objection aims to undermine the scriptural testimony that no one will be justified by the works of the law (Rom. 3:20), it cannot be admitted from a Christian perspective. Partial agreement with this objection would mean departing from the scriptural foundation. However, when this objection is genuinely considered, it is false and based on misunderstanding. The perspective that sees the "application of salvation" as God's work does not exclude but rather includes the full recognition of all moral factors that, under God's providence, influence the intellect and heart of the unconverted person. While these factors may not be sufficient for salvation, they still hold value, even for the work of grace. It is God Himself who leads His human children in this way, bearing witness to them and bestowing blessings from heaven, encouraging them to seek Him in hope of finding Him. We do not see any reason why the Holy Spirit, who calls people to faith and repentance through His Word, would negate the moral impact of the Word on the human heart and conscience that Pelagianism attributes to it.

Reformed doctrine encompasses more than what is acknowledged by Pelagius and his followers. They believe they can suffice with that moral effect, but Augustine and his allies, while deeming it inadequate, still fully incorporated it into the Holy Spirit's work of grace. Furthermore, the application of salvation remains the work of the Spirit, a work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. It is never coercive or violent but always spiritual, beautiful, and gentle, treating humans as rational beings, illuminating, persuading, drawing, and bending them. The Spirit dispels their darkness with light and replaces their spiritual weakness with spiritual strength. Grace and sin are opposing forces; sin is overcome solely by the power of grace.

As soon as and to the same extent that the power of sin is broken, the opposition between God and humans ceases. It is God's Spirit who "bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16). "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me; the life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20). "It is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure" and who wants us to work out our salvation "with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12–13). This theological view is far from promoting ungodly living; instead, it guarantees the reality of a new Christian life, assures believers of the certainty of their salvation, securely establishes the triumph of the kingdom of God, and completes the work of the Father and the Son through the Spirit. In contrast, Pelagianism introduces uncertainty, even regarding the victory of good and the triumph of the kingdom of God, as it hinges everything on the unpredictable arbitrariness of humans. While defending human rights, it disregards the rights of God and leaves humans with nothing more than the right to be fickle. Conversely, the Reformation, by advocating for the rights of God, simultaneously reclaims the rights of humanity. Here, the Scripture's words apply: "those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be treated with contempt" (1 Sam. 2:30). The theological perspective on the order of salvation embraces all the good inherent in the anthropological view, but the reverse is not true. Those who begin with God can also do justice to humans as rational and moral beings. However, those who start with humans and primarily seek to secure their rights and liberties invariably limit the power and grace of God.

## **Grace**



The word “grace” encompasses all the benefits of the covenant acquired by Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit. However, the meaning of grace varies among individuals. Firstly, it signifies the undeserved favor bestowed by God upon His creatures, particularly upon sinners. This aspect of grace was already present in the doctrine of God's attributes. Secondly, it serves as a term for a wide range of physical and spiritual benefits granted by God's grace to His creatures, collectively referred to as "gifts of grace" and "grace" itself (Rom. 5:20; Eph. 1:7; 2:5, 8; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; Titus 2:11; 3:7; etc.). Additionally, the term denotes the charm or elegance that a person exhibits through the gifts they have received in soul and body. Lastly, the Greek word *χάρις* and the Latin *gratia* often connote the gratitude a person expresses for favors received (*gratias agere*). Our focus here is exclusively on grace in the second sense. Nonetheless, this concept remains too broad for our current discussion. In this context, we are not considering the objective benefits of grace granted by God through His law, the gospel, the person and work of Christ, the church, and the means of grace, as these are separately addressed in dogmatics. Instead, we are only examining those gifts of grace that the Holy Spirit imparts subjectively—internally—to individuals, which are most closely connected to their salvation. Excluded from this discussion are, on one hand, the gifts of God's common grace, granted to varying degrees to all people and all kinds of people (Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:17; James 1:17), and on the other hand, the extraordinary gifts (*charismata*; often referred to in Catholic theology as *gratia gratis data* [grace freely bestowed] due to the recipient's obligation to freely employ these *charismata*—for no compensation—in the service of others). These extraordinary gifts are allocated individually by the Holy Spirit "just as the Spirit chooses" (1 Cor. 12:4, 11). This chapter solely addresses the gifts of God's special grace, which are presented to all listeners in the preaching of the gospel and are effectively given to the elect.

When it comes to this grace, there exists a significant distinction between Roman Catholicism and the Reformation, particularly in its Reformed development. In Catholic theology, the grace referred to here is known as *gratia gratum faciens*, the grace that renders humans pleasing to God. It is further categorized into actual and habitual grace. Actual grace is bestowed upon humans to enable them to engage in saving activities. The natural human, lacking the superadded gift, although capable of performing numerous naturally and morally good deeds, cannot perform the works associated with a higher order connected to supernatural, heavenly blessedness. The performance of saving works absolutely requires actual grace (sometimes also referred to as prevenient, antecedent, arousing, or even working grace). In this context, Rome decisively rejects Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism. Catholic theology defines actual grace as more than just the external call of the gospel with its moral impact on the human intellect and will. It involves an illumination of the intellect and an inspiration of the will, providing humans with not only moral but even natural (physical) abilities.

At this juncture, it is essential to observe that Rome places the absolute necessity of habitual grace not solely on humanity's sinful state but also on the notion that humans, having lost the superadded gift, are now purely natural beings who, by nature, cannot perform supernatural good works or saving acts because "it is fitting that acts leading to an end should be proportioned to that end." Furthermore, Catholic theologians assert that this actual grace is universal. Universal not only in the sense that it may be offered to all but specifically in the sense that it is indeed given to all humans indiscriminately. This includes unbaptized children who die in infancy, unbelievers, hardened sinners, and non-Christians. However, if this is the case, and on the other hand, salvation does not ultimately become the portion of all, the only way to reconcile this

discrepancy is to posit that actual grace remains resistible and can be lost from start to finish. Objectively, this grace is sufficient in itself, but its efficacy, according to Molinists and Congruists, hinges on the human will. Despite Catholic theologians' attempts to interpret Augustine in this manner and their vehement criticism and condemnation of proponents of predestination such as Gottschalk, Calvin, Jansen, and others, they ultimately admit that we are confronted with an inscrutable mystery. Indeed, many Catholic theologians, following Augustine and Aquinas, attribute the efficacy of grace to a special operation of God and teach a "predestination to grace and glory before any foreseen merits."

Equally significant is the contrast between Rome's perspective and that of the Reformation regarding the nature of grace. Catholic theologians explicitly maintain that "actual" as well as "habitual" grace is not a substance but a quality. They reject Lombard's view that love is synonymous with the Holy Spirit, acknowledging that while the Spirit is the efficient cause, he is not the formal cause or essence of grace. They reject both a Deistic separation between God and humanity and a pantheistic blending of the two. However, even concerning actual grace, it is asserted that it not only morally but also "physically" elevates our faculties, enabling them to act supernaturally. Consequently, it is essentially supernatural, transcending the entire natural order. It stands in stark contrast to merely natural grace, creating a distinction as sharp as that between nature and supernature. Habitual (infused) grace, on the other hand, is characterized even more explicitly as a gift from God, elevating humanity to the supernatural order and somehow making them participants in the divine nature. It is described as a divine quality dwelling within the soul, akin to a brightness and light that removes all stains from the soul, rendering it more beautiful and radiant. To be more precise, it is termed a "substantial disposition" that, unlike

knowledge, for example, renews and perfects not only a particular faculty but the very essence of the soul itself.

This renewal and perfection, wrought by infused grace, encompass the regeneration, justification, and sanctification of an individual. Through this grace, a person attains the status of a child of God, enters into a relationship of friendship with Him, and is exalted to become a temple of the Holy Spirit. Its most concise manifestation lies in the fact that by this grace, a person becomes a sharer in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Grace engenders within humans a unique mode of existence, through which they are, in a profoundly distinctive manner, united with the divine. It elevates them "to the divine realm." While it does not transform them into God, it establishes a particularly profound connection with the Deity. Grace does not simply elevate individuals, along with all their capacities, to the highest point attainable by their nature, for that would merely align with their natural perfection. Rather, given that grace is intrinsically supernatural, it raises them above their nature, transcending even the nature of angels, surpassing all aspects of the natural order, transcending all existing creation, and ascending beyond all conceivable natures. "It lifts us not merely above human nature but above every nature, above the highest choirs of heavenly spirits ... not merely above the whole existing creation but also above all possible beings, the most perfect beings conceivable not excepted." As only God stands supreme over all conceivable beings, "this grace-filled elevation must transport us to a divine realm." This elucidates the true purpose of grace in Catholicism. Grace has a dual mission: to exalt and to heal. However, the former largely eclipses the latter. "The primary task is elevation and befits grace in the entire supernatural order. The task of healing, on the other hand, is subordinate and supplements grace in the fallen natural order." In the former sense, it is absolute; in the latter, it is only incidentally

necessary. In Roman thinking, grace is, above all, a supernatural quality bestowed upon human beings, by which they are fundamentally incorporated into a supernatural order. They become participants in the divine nature, gain access to the vision of God, and are empowered to perform supernatural deeds, such as meriting eternal life by condign worthiness. Forgiveness of sins assumes a secondary role, while faith holds preparatory significance. The paramount objective is the elevation of human beings beyond their natural state: divinization, encompassing both likeness to God and union with Him.

The Reformation, in its rejection of this Neoplatonic mysticism, returned to the simplicity of Holy Scripture and consequently developed a profoundly different conception of grace. Grace's purpose is not to elevate humans into a supernatural order but to emancipate them from the grip of sin. Grace stands in opposition not to nature itself but solely to sin. In its true essence, grace was unnecessary in the case of Adam before the fall and has only become imperative due to the advent of sin. Thus, it is not an absolute necessity but rather an incidental one. The "physical" contrast between the natural and the supernatural gives way to an ethical opposition between sin and grace. When grace completely eradicates sin, along with its burden of guilt, defilement, and punishment, its mission is fulfilled. At that point, humans automatically regain the image of God, as this image is not an added gift but an integral aspect of human essence. Therefore, alongside the grace that delivers us from sin, another grace is needed to elevate humans beyond their nature.

Certainly, according to the Reformed perspective, grace has bestowed upon us more than what we lost through Adam's transgression. For Christ did not merely secure the "ability not to sin

and die," as the Lutherans depict it, but immediately conferred upon believers the "inability to sin and die" (*non posse peccari et mori*). He did not return us to the point on the path where Adam stood; rather, He completed the entire journey on our behalf. He accomplished not only passive obedience but also active obedience. He obtained an imperishable salvation, eternal life, which was still a future prospect for Adam. Precisely because Adam's destiny was eternal blessedness, Christ was able to attain it for us in his stead. However, grace does not bestow upon us more than what Adam would have acquired through obedience if he had not fallen. The covenant of grace differs from the covenant of works in its method, not in its ultimate objective. It is the same treasure that was promised in the covenant of works and is fulfilled in the covenant of grace. Grace restores nature and elevates it to its highest pinnacle, yet it does not introduce any novel or disparate elements.

From this perspective, it is clear that grace, in Reformational theology, cannot possess the character of a substance in any way. The Reformation acknowledged that grace is not solely external but also internal, bestowing not only moral but also "hyperphysical" (supernatural) capacities, constituting a quality or disposition. While occasionally employing similar terminology as Rome, the Reformation ascribed different meanings to these terms. In the Roman Catholic context, grace is a physical power, given its role in elevating nature to the supernatural realm. Given the Catholic doctrine of sin, if grace's function were solely to liberate humanity from sin, its moral potency would likely suffice. However, the Reformation held a distinct view of sin, conceiving it as both guilt and a comprehensive corruption of human nature. Human beings are inherently dead in sins and trespasses. Their inherent incapacity can be characterized as "natural" in a sense, but it is, by its essence, a spiritual and moral form of incapacity—a failure to perform good

solely due to sin. It is only termed "natural" because it is a characteristic of humanity "by nature" (that is, by virtue of their fallen sinful nature) and is not engendered in humans through habit, upbringing, or external influences. Such moral faculties cannot erase this incapacity from them either. Grace operates "supernaturally" because it eliminates the incapacity stemming from fallen nature and restores the capacity for good inherent in the original nature. In Protestant doctrine, spiritual and moral incapacity does not possess the same character; hence, grace is not a "physical" quality in the Catholic sense, even though it reinstates the original capability for good lost due to sin.

Furthermore, grace can never be perceived as a substance since sin itself is not a substance and does not strip humanity of any substantial essence. Rather, grace constitutes a restoration of the original form (*forma*) that was initially imprinted upon all creation, including humanity. This re-creation does not entail a second, entirely new act of creation. It does not introduce new creatures or substances into existence; instead, it is genuinely a process of "re-formation." Throughout this transformative journey, the influence of grace extends as far as the power of sin reaches. Sin has permeated every aspect, corrupting the very nature of creatures and the fabric of creation itself. Therefore, grace represents the divine power that liberates humanity from the grip of sin, purifying its innermost core and presenting it before God as pure and unblemished.

Merely a morally operative grace would be insufficient. While Rome appears to exalt grace by deeming it absolutely necessary and attributing to it "physical" powers that surpass nature significantly, it ultimately renders grace powerless by making its effectiveness contingent upon the human will. Grace achieves nothing if the will opposes it, and if the will consents, it merely provides humans with

the means to earn subsequent grace and eternal life. It becomes a mere aid for human efforts in the pursuit of deification. In contrast, within the Reformation perspective, grace encompasses the entire spectrum of salvation—it is the beginning, the middle, and the end. It is devoid of any reliance on human merit. Similar to creation and redemption, sanctification is a divine work, stemming from God, proceeding through Him, and consequently leading humanity back to Him, all while serving the purpose of His glory.

Under the overarching category of grace, there exist numerous distinct blessings. Scripture provides an inexhaustible list of these blessings, which Christ obtained and the Holy Spirit imparts to the church. Consequently, theology has perpetually grappled with the challenge of addressing them comprehensively and systematically. Within Catholic dogmatics, it gradually became customary to encompass all these blessings under the umbrella term "grace" and to distribute them across three sections (actual, habitual, and the fruits of grace). This hierarchical ecclesiastical order emphasized the role of the priest in infusing, restoring, and increasing grace in the hearts of believers through the administration of sacraments. Grace closely followed the path of the sacraments in this framework.

In contrast, the Reformation, originating from experiences of regeneration and repentance, placed greater emphasis on believers and the path leading to their salvation rather than on the institutional church and its sacraments. Consequently, it shifted away from describing grace as something administered by the church and instead focused on the work of the Holy Spirit in applying Christ's benefits to the members of the body. While a few theologians still prioritized the church and the means of grace when discussing the order of salvation, the majority reversed this order. Logically, the organism took precedence over the institution. The covenant of grace



encompassed believers and their offspring, and based on the inclusion of the church's offspring in the covenant of grace, they were incorporated into the institutional church through baptism.

In this restructured order of salvation, the Reformation initially addressed the work of the Holy Spirit under three headings: repentance, faith, and good works. However, as the understanding of these concepts evolved, there were significant modifications in the number and content of loci, particularly in Reformed theology.

Previously, we mentioned that in the earlier period, doctrines of election and the covenant of grace were sometimes included in the order of salvation but were later typically placed in the loci on God and Christ. Similar shifts occurred in the treatment of other loci within the order of salvation due to changes in concepts. Regardless of whether predestination, covenant, church, and means of grace were discussed before or after the order of salvation, "calling" consistently occupied the primary position. Just as in creation and providence, God brought all things into existence through His Word, and this divine calling retained its prominent status. Even when calling was differentiated into an external and an internal call, and when regeneration was narrowly defined and positioned before faith, calling remained the first locus in the order of salvation. This order was maintained in response to challenges from the Anabaptists, who severed the Spirit from the Word, and the Remonstrants, who accused the Reformed of neglecting the Word as a means of grace due to their doctrine of the direct and efficacious work of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, there was unanimous agreement within the order of salvation that the origin and commencement of new life in a person were solely attributable to the internal, direct, efficacious, and invincible operation of the Holy Spirit. Occasionally, this operation was referred to as "immediate," not to exclude the Word as

a means of grace from the Holy Spirit's work, but for two key reasons: first, to affirm against the Remonstrants that the Holy Spirit, while using the Word, independently entered the hearts of individuals and brought about regeneration without dependence on their will and consent; and second, to assert against the theology of Saumur that in regeneration, the Holy Spirit did not merely illuminate the intellect through the Word but also directly and immediately infused new affections into the will.

On the contrary, there existed disagreements concerning the terminology used to describe the initial work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a sinner. Following Luther's experience, many theologians initially emphasized repentance before addressing faith and good works. However, they soon recognized that not everyone underwent such an experience, especially not the children of the covenant, and that it could not be demanded of all. Furthermore, Luther and Calvin had previously highlighted the substantial difference between worldly grief, which arises from the law, can also be experienced by the unconverted, and does not necessarily lead to saving faith, and godly sorrow, which presupposes faith and arises from the new life. Following Calvin, the Reformed tradition incorporated penitence into the Christian life and eventually replaced it with a different term. The word "penitence," along with "penance," had acquired a distinctly Roman Catholic connotation, evoking thoughts of priest-imposed punishments and penitent payments. While it might still be suitable to describe the regret or remorse that a sinner sometimes feels due to the consequences of sin, it was deemed highly inappropriate for the sincere sorrow over sin as sin, a sentiment found exclusively in believers. Consequently, another term, the elegant "resipiscentia" (literally, "becoming sane again" or "coming to one's senses again"), gained popularity. This shift had two significant consequences: (1) the need to identify the very first work

of grace with a name other than "penitence," and (2) a reevaluation of the meaning and position of "resipiscentia."

Regarding the first consequence, Calvin initially considered faith as the first benefit of grace, viewing regeneration in a broad sense as the renewal of humanity after God's image. Others introduced distinctions such as "inefficacious" and "efficacious" or "external" and "internal" calling as the commencement of the new life. Some employed terms like "conversion," "regeneration," "drawing," or "resuscitation," typically ascribing narrower meanings to these words than before. Various circumstances led Reformed theology to consider the application of the benefits of salvation even before faith. Anabaptists asserted that children of believers, unable to believe in Christ until they reached the age of discretion, were deprived of the covenant of grace's benefits and, consequently, baptism. In response, Reformers defended the position that the children of believers, although incapable of actual belief, shared in the principle and "disposition" of faith, making them eligible for baptism. Therefore, they believed that children who died, like adult believers, were saved, not lost. Furthermore, all Reformers confessed that humans, by their nature, were incapable of believing or repenting, and thus, faith and repentance must be the outcomes of the omnipotent work of the Holy Spirit, resulting from a seed planted in the heart by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, theologians found themselves compelled to differentiate between the Holy Spirit's operation and the fruit of that operation, between the capacity and the act of faith, between passive and active conversion, or between limited and full regeneration. "Regeneration" was now the term for the benefit that entailed the infusion of the very first principle of the new life, preceding faith. "The grace of regeneration occurs in us prior to faith, which is the effect of it." Disagreement persisted regarding the timing of regeneration. While Catholics, Lutherans, and many British

theologians placed it in baptism for all children (baptismal regeneration), the Reformed asserted that the grace of regeneration was granted to the elect children of the covenant either before, during, or after baptism (specifying one of these), or simply before, during, or after baptism (asserting it was one of these but declining to specify which).

Regarding the second consequence mentioned earlier, it is important to note the following. If "resipiscentia" (conversion) fundamentally differed from "poenitentia" (repentance), it should naturally find a place distinct from its initial assignment, particularly by Lutheran theologians. The Reformed tradition did not dispute that many who are saved experience regeneration and conversion at a later stage in life. They acknowledged that, in such cases, various experiences and activities often preceded regeneration, including attending church, hearing the gospel preached, understanding God's will, sensing sin and misery, fearing punishment, recognizing the need for redemption, and more, sometimes referred to as "preparatory grace." However, they generally believed that regeneration (in the restricted sense) took place in covenant children during their early years, before reaching the age of discretion. Consequently, it typically occurred prior to faith and conversion in the active sense. In these cases, it did not necessarily involve a dramatic impact or strong attraction, as later demanded by Pietism and Methodism. Instead, it could unfold gradually over time, in stages, and with grace. It was also not obligatory for individuals to provide a detailed account of the manner and timing of their conversions, unlike John Wesley, who famously pinpointed his conversion to a specific date and time. Rather than being concentrated at a single point in time, regeneration extended throughout the entirety of the Christian life. As a result, it could no longer be addressed, as penitence once was, at the beginning of the order of salvation, nor could it encompass

contrition and faith as its components. Instead, it needed to find its place later, within the doctrine of gratitude, where it could be described as an ongoing mortification of the old self and a continuous resurrection of the new person.

Additionally, in the realm of the doctrine of justification, some Reformed theologians developed views that differed somewhat from the prevailing consensus. When neonomianism introduced faith as a condition that must be met before one's sins could be forgiven, antineonomians objected, asserting that this approach undermined the doctrine of free justification. They argued that faith and conversion could not be legalistic prerequisites that individuals needed to fulfill in order to be justified. Instead, they considered them gifts of the Holy Spirit, benefits of the covenant of grace, and outcomes of Christ's work. Consequently, participation in these benefits was only possible through communion with Christ. This perspective placed the imputation of Christ's person and all His benefits ahead of the bestowal of these benefits themselves. In other words, justification did not result from or by faith but was oriented towards faith. Before the elect received faith, they had already been justified. In fact, they received this faith precisely because they had been justified beforehand. This objective and active justification was proclaimed in the gospel from Genesis 3:15 onwards and was evident in the resurrection of Christ (Romans 4:25). It had actually taken place in the decree of election, when they were given to Christ and Christ was given to them. Their sins were imputed to Christ, and His righteousness was imputed to them. While some began to speak in terms of this concept of eternal justification, it had little or no influence on the treatment of the order of salvation. Concerns about antinomianism, which opposed the satisfaction of Christ based on eternal justification, altered the nature of faith, and rejected the normative use of the law, prevented Reformed theology from shifting

the doctrine of justification back to the realm of decrees. Despite recognizing elements of truth in it, the doctrine of justification from eternity was not embraced. Even Maccovius explicitly rejected and opposed it. He acknowledged that justification, in an active sense, occurred for all the elect in what was referred to as the "maternal promise," Genesis 3:15. He supported this view with the phrase "before the ages" (Titus 1:2), which did not pertain to eternity but to ancient times. Consequently, he structured the benefits in the following order: active justification, regeneration, faith, passive justification, and good works. Nevertheless, he continued to distinguish justification from its decree in eternity. Moreover, the changing conditions in the church increasingly posed challenges to maintaining the Reformed model of the order of salvation. In a relatively healthy church environment, it is plausible to assume that covenant children will generally experience regeneration during their youth and subsequently come to faith and conversion "gradually and gracefully." However, when secular influences infiltrate the church and many individuals grow up and live for extended periods without displaying fruits indicative of faith and repentance, those with a serious faith disposition feel compelled to caution against relying solely on childhood regeneration and historical faith in Christian doctrine. They emphasize the need for genuine heart conversion, an experiential understanding of the truths of salvation, and protection against stagnant orthodoxy. Pietism and Methodism, with their gatherings and revivals, consistently find legitimacy and relevance in response to these concerns.

## **Truth and Religious Experience**

The emergence of revivals, as previously mentioned, gave rise to the burgeoning field of the psychology of religion, which at times seeks to supplant traditional philosophy of religion and dogmatics. It is generally assumed that there should be no contention regarding the possibility and appropriateness of examining religious phenomena from a psychological standpoint, provided that such exploration is conducted with due sensitivity and reverence.

While existence (*esse*) and perception (*percipi*) are not entirely congruent, the world is apprehended by humans exclusively through their consciousness. Therefore, the content of this consciousness can be objectively considered and studied in its own right, as well as subjectively, from a psychological perspective. This psychological inquiry remarkably complements the former approach and provides illuminating insights into the phenomena it examines, almost as if viewing them from a different vantage point. This phenomenon is not unique to religion but extends to various domains such as art, science, philosophy, the study of society, and now, notably, the study of religion.

Exploring distinctive characteristics in the religious experiences of children, young adults, adults, and the elderly, establishing connections between religious development and physical, psychological, and moral maturation, understanding the correlation between religious awakenings and the onset of puberty, elucidating the process of conversion through recurring alterations in one's consciousness, and delving into the influence of subliminal forces within the religious journey—all of these aspects broaden one's perspective and deepen one's understanding of religious life. Furthermore, they yield valuable insights for theologians, pastors, preachers, missionaries, educators, and caregivers.

The psychology of religion, being a relatively young science, occasionally rushes to harvest fruits prematurely. While one may expand the scope of their investigation, it inevitably remains confined to a limited group of individuals, numbering only in the dozens or hundreds. And what these individuals convey pales in comparison to the millions who exist beyond the purview of the study. Examining those who remain outside such research could fundamentally challenge the assertion that conversion or awakening is an inherent and necessary process during the years of puberty.

Even with meticulous selection of subjects and skillful formulation of questions, the responses obtained—much like all autobiographies, diaries, confessions, conversion narratives, and accounts of personal states and soul experiences—must be handled with great caution. Intentional insincerity may not be the issue, but the realm of religious experiences suffers from a profound lack of self-awareness, an inherent risk of self-deception, and a significant disparity between one's essence and conscious understanding. When these diverse religious experiences, often attributing vastly different meanings to the same terminology, undergo statistical analysis, reduction into a singular formula, classification, and generalization into laws, the challenges become so formidable that many shy away from drawing comprehensive conclusions. The quest for fixed laws in the history of religions, as in sociology and history at large, has thus far yielded limited success. Consequently, there is a well-founded apprehension that the psychology of religion may not see its efforts bear fruit as swiftly as some anticipate.

For instance, there likely exists a connection between religion and love, as well as between religious awakening and puberty, yet the precise nature of these relationships remains enigmatic. A similar opaqueness shrouds the relationship between the soul and the body.



Moreover, while it is indisputable that numerous religious awakenings transpire during the adolescent years, a considerable number occur before and after this phase. Exceptions abound in this regard. While sudden conversions are relatively common in Methodist circles—though not universally accepted—certain significant Christian denominations have never promoted them and adhere to a different perspective regarding their occurrence. Additionally, it is difficult to deny that many individuals, when recounting their religious upbringing, tend to emphasize losses rather than gains. Beyond these considerations, figures like Starbuck and Hall acknowledge that the period of adolescence shapes not only religious and ethical personalities but also criminals, individuals with sexual addictions, and alcoholics. In light of these facts, if one still contends that conversion constitutes an obligatory developmental element during puberty, this argument can only be maintained by divorcing conversion from its entire substance and equating it with any transformation of consciousness.

For instance, there exists a form of conversion devoid of any concept of God, as noted by James. Likewise, there are conversions from virtue to sin, as well as from sin to virtue. Detached from its substantive content and viewed purely from a psychological standpoint as a transformation of consciousness, these experiences appear entirely similar. While the psychology of religion can provide insights into what conversion frequently entails in practical life, the circumstances under which it may transpire, and the instances where it might be misconstrued or mistaken, it is inherently incapable of elucidating the difference between authentic conversion and pseudoconversion, or between worldly sorrow and godly remorse. It cannot explain why conversion occurs in one person's life but not in another's, even when the latter may be in more favorable circumstances, such as growing up in a devout family, or why it

manifests at one stage in one person's life and at a different time in another person's life. The reason for this is that the psychology of religion lacks its own criteria and, on its own, cannot define or comprehend what conversion truly is and must be. Only through God's revelation do we gain insight into this matter, and without such revelation, it remains a mystery. The boundary where the finite intersects with the infinite and finds its rest in the infinite is inherently unverifiable in all respects. What occurs in the depths of a human soul, hidden behind one's consciousness and will, remains a mystery even for the individual experiencing it, and even more so for those who are external observers reliant solely on observable phenomena. The psychology of religion itself underscores this when it connects seemingly sudden conversions with impressions and experiences that occurred much earlier, thereby affirming the distinction recognized in Christian traditions between regeneration and conversion.

Should the psychology of religion persist in upholding its predetermined dogma and strive to explain all religious phenomena solely through psychological means, it will inevitably reach a juncture where it ends up diminishing the essence of its subject, robbing it of its authentic character. Consider, for instance, its examination of the religious phenomenon of prayer. It will promptly discern that prayer universally and consistently presupposes the belief in the existence of God as a personal Being who not only hears but also responds to prayers. Now, if the psychology of religion, instead of merely observing this fact, chooses to proceed further and attempts to elucidate it through psychological terms, it immediately contradicts the very nature of prayer. In a manner akin to how idealism, rooted in theoretical knowledge, undermines human cognition by eliminating the implicit belief in the reality of the external world from observation, the psychology of religion, by

negating metaphysics' entitlement to exist, dissolves religious phenomena into mere illusions.

Moreover, it becomes evident that through the path it has chosen to follow, the psychology of religion can never establish the legitimacy, truth, and worth of religion. Just as we cannot unconditionally regard everything in domains like religion, law, morality, aesthetics, etc., as true, good, and beautiful, but also have to acknowledge the existence of abnormal and pathological occurrences—something James and others do recognize—our judgments must either introduce a norm from another sphere or attempt to derive such a norm from the religious phenomena themselves. The latter approach is adopted by pragmatism, a philosophical school that also counts James among its adherents. The criterion for evaluating the truth and validity of religious phenomena, according to pragmatism, lies not in the "roots" but in the "fruits." James contends that religion belongs to the "sthenic affections"; it constitutes a vital force, one of "the most important biological functions of mankind." In religion, the focus shifts from understanding God's essence to examining how God is employed by us. James asserts, "Not God, but life, more life ... is the end of religion. God is not known, he is used." Through its existence and the exercise of such a vital force, religion establishes its authenticity and validity.

This perspective is noteworthy because James here takes a stance directly opposed to Kant, with whom he otherwise closely aligns himself. Kant sought to liberate virtue entirely from all eudaemonism. However, here, religion and virtue are commended precisely for their contribution to the general well-being and their social utility. Nevertheless, even with this utilitarian standard, James does not fully overcome the challenge. If "life force" serves as the sole criterion for determining the truth and validity of religion, the

question remains, one that historical research can never definitively answer, whether Islam or Buddhism might be in a stronger position than Christianity and whether superstition, persisting in all religions among a significant portion of their adherents, might prevail over a purified form of religion. Apart from this issue, even in evaluating what "life force" and "the promotion of general well-being" constitute, one cannot forgo a firm criterion. The matter at hand involves not merely strength, power, or sheer force but also substance. If "value" serves as evidence of "truth," there must be an initial consensus regarding that "value." To be consistent, pragmatism would now need to argue that this "value" can only be justified by its "value," and so forth ad infinitum. Since such a proposition is inherently unfeasible, pragmatism reaches an impasse unless it alters its course and justifies the truth and validity of religion through a different avenue than "value."

James himself also experienced this dilemma when, towards the conclusion of his work, he raises the question of whether and to what extent the psychology of religion can demonstrate the existence of a corresponding objective reality and, by extension, the truth and validity of religion. In response, he contends that mysticism, with its reliance on immediate revelation, and theology and metaphysics, with their speculative nature, are incapable of proving it. Humans, however, possess not only intellect but also heart, emotions, and willpower. While our intellect can only apprehend phenomena, the "symbols of reality," our heart allows us to connect with the true objective reality, the noumenal world, "with realities in the completest sense of the term." Therefore, the heart must be accorded its rightful place of significance. This emotional and volitional aspect of humanity asserts itself more forcefully than the intellect, especially in the practical aspects of life. It guides us to a different perspective on the world and life than science alone can offer. All

assessments, particularly those of a religious and ethical nature, are contingent on personal will and have their origins in the heart. "The heart has reasons that reason does not know."

Interestingly, James's assertion leads him back to the mysticism he had initially rejected. Building on the foundation of positivistic science, he endeavors to construct an idealistic worldview. To achieve this, he divides humanity into entities of intellect and will, and the world into the phenomenal and noumenal realms, suggesting that these two are akin to symbols and reality, a menu and a dinner. Concerning the unconscious, James, like Myers in his work "Human Personality" and numerous members of the Society for Psychical Research, adopts the mystical theory, despite facing opposition from Pierce, Jastrow, Hall, and others. While James doesn't go so far as to affirm the presence and interior influence of various supernatural agents within the unconscious, the heart, or emotions, he does assert that reality manifests itself and is sensed there. He posits that concealed ideas and forces are at work, and that God's grace permeates through "the subliminal door." Consequently, he labels himself a "supernaturalist," albeit in a significantly modified sense.

However, the knowledge that James acquires of the supersensual through this path, the path of Schleiermacher and Schopenhauer, is quite limited. It essentially boils down to the idea that the truth of religion is demonstrated by psychological study only to the extent that it reveals "something more" than what science, which examines the phenomena, unveils. Objectively, this "something more" represents the essence of all religions, just as the corresponding feeling within humans forms the core of subjective religion. Nonetheless, no one is content with this vague "something more" in religion; everyone embellishes it differently and interprets it

according to their own perspective. These descriptions and explanations constitute the realm of "overbeliefs," which, while "absolutely indispensable," cannot lay claim to objective validity. Thus, each person has and must have their own religion, their own concept of God. "All ideals are matters of relation." There's even a question of whether religious experience truly demonstrates or necessitates the unity of God, for it doesn't require an absolute power or a being with absolute metaphysical attributes like independence, simplicity, personality, and the like. Such attributes are but hollow titles, mere stones in place of nourishment; they offer "a metaphysical monster for our worship." Religion simply requires a higher power. There may be a significant truth hidden within polytheism, as it allows the infinite diversity of the world to come to the forefront in a polytheistic worldview.

With these research findings, James himself provides evidence that the psychology of religion, while capable of making valuable contributions to a deeper comprehension of the religious life, can never replace or substitute for dogmatics, philosophy, or metaphysics—just as the history of religions cannot. It does, to some extent, instruct us on what religion is, how it is rooted in and connected to human nature as a whole, but it remains silent on its content, truth, and validity. Hence, it is essential to recognize that ultimately, James returns to metaphysical terrain and takes refuge in the mystical backdrop of religious phenomena. We are left with a choice: either religious phenomena are purely psychological and hence illusory (in the vein of Feuerbach), or they are founded in a reality that lies beyond them. Even modern theologians and philosophers like Biedermann, Pfleiderer, Hartmann, Drews, and others maintain the existence of an ontological foundation. The infinite dwells within humanity, working through and within it. However, due to the absence of a true revelation of God in word and

deed, we technically know nothing about Him. We only sense His presence in our hearts and interpret our feelings through religious concepts, which hold merely symbolic value. While the idea of revelation is an essential construct of religion, there exists no factual revelation that underlies it. Therefore, from this perspective, all religious phenomena (ideas, sensations) only possess psychological value, and the reality of religion is sought in an elusive and indefinable "essence" of religion. Religion, along with all its ideas, sensations, and actions, can only be upheld as reality when it rests in revelation. In such a case, revelation instantly provides the criterion by which religious phenomena (such as conversion, faith, prayer, and so on) can be evaluated.

The task of dogmatics, in contrast to the psychology of religion, which can only provide an insufficient account of subjective piety, is to elucidate the order of salvation in accordance with God's word and thought. Understanding the Christian life, both in its inception and progression, can undeniably aid dogmaticians in grasping the meaning of Holy Scripture more deeply. It is a prerequisite for them to be spiritually discerning individuals capable of comprehending the things of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:15). However, this does not absolve dogmaticians from their duty, but rather equips them for the task of presenting not their personal ideas or composing the conversion history of a sinner. Instead, they are tasked with showcasing the treasures of salvation that God, through Christ, has procured for His Church and bestows upon it through the Holy Spirit.

Scripture abounds in its summary and description of these divine benefits. It often refers to these blessings by various names or portrays them using different imagery. In Matthew 4:17, Jesus enters the scene with the proclamation, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Yet in Mark 1:15, He declares, "Repent, and believe

in the good news," and in John 3:3, 5, He exclusively speaks of being "born again" as the means to enter the kingdom of God.

In other passages, we are instructed that the path to life is narrow and difficult (Matt. 7:13), or that discipleship requires one to forsake and hate all else (Matt. 10:37ff.). What the Old Testament terms "circumcision of the heart" essentially aligns with what the New Testament refers to as "regeneration." The term "regeneration," frequently found on the lips of Jesus in John's Gospel, is only mentioned once in Paul's writings (Titus 3:5). Therefore, the objective here, as in other areas of dogmatics, is not merely to juxtapose the concepts found in Holy Scripture, nor is it to assume that the terms used in dogmatics carry precisely the same meaning as they do in Holy Scripture. "Regeneration," "faith," "conversion," "renewal," and similar terms frequently encompass not sequential stages, levels, degrees, or phases of development on the path of salvation but instead encapsulate the entire transformative process within a single word. These expressions function as collective concepts, summarizing the completed reality itself rather than individual components or phases of development.

For this reason, various attempts at simplifying the order of salvation have been made. Pietism initiated this process by placing the "penitential struggle" (Busskampf) and "breakthrough" (Durchbruch) at the center, and Methodism followed suit by emphasizing conversion and sanctification almost exclusively. Schleiermacher brought rebirth to the forefront, categorizing it into conversion and justification, while Ritschl underscored justification and reconciliation. The emphasis on justification (reconciliation, forgiveness, "sonship") or regeneration (conversion, redemption) depends on whether sin is perceived more in the intellect or the heart (the will), experienced as guilt or pollution (power).



The one-sidedness of these two tendencies often drives others to combine these blessings, addressing both justification and regeneration in the order of salvation. However, when people seek to avoid one-sidedness, their attempts at simplification often boil down to a mere change in terminology rather than a substantive shift. In reality, they group under a smaller number of categories the same subjects that older dogmatics had divided into multiple chapters.

Simplification has also been achieved by transferring various topics, such as regeneration and conversion, into the realm of ethics or by incorporating justification, regeneration, reconciliation, and election into the doctrine of the work of Christ. In such cases, only faith remains within the scope of soteriology.

Contrary to these efforts at genuine or apparent simplification, it is the duty of the dogmatician to proclaim the entire counsel of God and reveal all the benefits encompassed in the magnificent work of salvation. While dogmaticians may occasionally use words not found verbatim in Scripture or ascribe to them broader or narrower meanings than they have in certain contexts, their responsibility lies in extracting the ideas concealed within the words of Scripture and elucidating the relationships between them. The diverse words and metaphors employed by the authors of the Old and New Testaments serve to unveil the central issue from various angles, portraying its richness and fullness.

Keeping this in mind, let us first note that all the benefits acquired and distributed by Christ to His church are part of the covenant of grace. This covenant, though first revealed in the gospel during a specific time, finds its foundation in eternity. It is rooted in God's good pleasure, His divine counsel. Christ was designated as the mediator of this covenant from eternity, enabling Him to vicariously

atone for His people in time. Thus, from eternity, an imputation of Christ to His own and of the church to Christ occurred. An exchange took place between them, forming a mystical union that underlies their realization throughout history.

In response to neonomianism, some Reformed theologians began speaking of "eternal justification" or "justification from eternity." While they aimed to express the idea that Christ, from eternity, offered Himself as a surety for His people, taking their guilt upon Himself and imputing His righteousness to them in the counsel of peace, the chosen terminology drew criticism. Theological discussions arose because these terms differed significantly from traditional definitions, and they blurred the distinction between the decree and its execution, the "immanent" and the "objectivizing" act.

Moreover, even when considering the decree, Christ's satisfaction for His people logically precedes the forgiveness of their sins and the imputation of the right to eternal life. To reverse this order would render Christ's satisfaction unnecessary and lead down the path of antinomianism. The Reformed tradition always guarded against both this error and the error of nomism. Even those who embraced a form of eternal justification never claimed that the exchange between Christ and His church in the pact of redemption constituted full justification. Instead, they regarded it as the initial component of justification, emphasizing that this justification needed to be repeated, continued, and completed in various stages, including the resurrection of Christ, the proclamation of the gospel, the calling, the testimony of the Holy Spirit through faith and works, and ultimately, the final judgment. As a result, none of them treated or completed the doctrine of justification within the locus of the counsel of God or the covenant of redemption. Instead, they addressed it within the

context of the order of salvation, sometimes as active justification before and as passive justification after faith or entirely post-faith.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to maintain the Reformed concept that all the benefits of the covenant of grace are firmly established in eternity. Specifically, it is God's electing love, particularly the Father's good pleasure, from which all these benefits flow to the church.

Secondly, from a Christian perspective, there is no doubt that all the benefits of grace have been completely and solely acquired by Christ. Thus, they are inherent in His person and prepared for His church within Him. Nothing needs to be added from humanity's side because everything is already accomplished. Since these benefits are all covenantal, acquired within the framework of the covenant, and distributed accordingly, participation in them only occurs through communion with Christ, who is the mediator of the covenant. The covenant of grace, the mystical union, the imputation of Christ to His church, and the imputation of the church to Christ, all rooted in eternity, are first objectively realized in time through the person of Christ. He was crucified, buried, raised, and glorified for and with His church. Thus, the bestowal of Christ upon the church, even in this sense, precedes the church's acceptance of Christ through faith. Otherwise, how could we receive the Holy Spirit, the grace of regeneration, and the gift of faith, all of which were acquired by Christ and belong to Him? Consequently, it is not the case that we first repent or are reborn by the Holy Spirit and receive faith independently of Christ. We do not acquire these benefits beforehand, only to bring them to Christ and accept His righteousness, thereby achieving justification through Him. Instead, just as all the benefits of grace originate from the Father's good pleasure, they now flow from the fullness of Christ.

However, we must differentiate between the acquisition and the application of salvation. While it is correct to acknowledge an intimate connection between Christ's work and the benefits of salvation and not to separate them, there remains a distinction between what Christ did with God for us and what He continues to do with God for us. This distinction encompasses His work in the state of humiliation and His work in the state of exaltation, as well as the acquisition and the application of salvation.

Thirdly, this approach allows us to truly appreciate the work of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of individuals. It is noteworthy and, at the same time, quite understandable that in Kaftan's work, the person and work of the Holy Spirit have almost been entirely omitted from the discussion of the order of salvation. It is simply mentioned that the Spirit of God or Christ inwardly impacts us through His vital presence in history and the Word. The role of the Spirit of Christ is even less emphasized in the works of Herrmann and those who, like Ritschl, are averse to mysticism in religion. According to Herrmann, it is the image of Jesus that should directly affect individuals inwardly and awaken faith within them. Others tend to focus more on historical "mediations" such as upbringing, preaching, the church, sacraments, and so on, viewing faith as a product of the Holy Spirit's activity within the church rather than an effect arising from the image of the historical Jesus in Scripture.

In this context, we encounter the question of whether the Holy Spirit works solely historically and mediately through the Word, sacraments, and other means, or whether He also works immediately and directly within the human heart. Connected to all of this is the fundamental question of whether the Holy Spirit is a force, a mindset, a principle of the new life proceeding from God, manifested in the person of Jesus, and presently continuing His work in the

church. Is He identical with the communal spirit of the church (as Schleiermacher suggests), with love (as Lombard suggests), with the new and holy life present in believers, or is He, along with the Father and the Son, the one true God to be praised for all eternity, as the Christian church confesses based on Scripture?

If the latter is true, as the Christian church affirms against all Pneumatomachians, we are still left with the question of whether the Holy Spirit always works directly and immediately in the human heart without the need for the Word (as some Anabaptists believe), or only through the Word (as Lutherans assert), or exclusively through the sacrament (as in Roman Catholicism), or as a rule in connection with the Word. Depending on the answers to these questions and points of contention, the character of the order of salvation takes on a different form, which becomes more or less evident in all aspects such as calling, regeneration, and more.

Reformed theology distinguishes itself in the following manner: It shares with the entire Christian church the affirmation of the Holy Spirit's consubstantiality with and personal distinction from the Father and the Son. However, in accordance with scriptural evidence, it derives the understanding that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. This Spirit, on one hand, receives everything from Christ and willingly binds Himself to His Word. On the other hand, since the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit personally resides within the church and in each of its members, filling them with the fullness of God. All the benefits of salvation, granted by the Father to the church from eternity and acquired by the Son in time, are simultaneously gifts of the Holy Spirit. Thus, through the Spirit, Christ and the Father incorporate all of their children into the most intimate fellowship with themselves.

Furthermore, since all these benefits of Christ are not a random collection but are organically interconnected, the Holy Spirit dispenses them in a specific order. Those who believe will be saved. Regeneration is a necessary prerequisite for entering the kingdom of God. Pleasing God is impossible without faith, and seeing God requires holiness. Perseverance until the end results in salvation. One cannot attain the subsequent benefits without having received the preceding ones. Therefore, calling and the preaching of the gospel precede all other benefits, as the Holy Spirit typically binds Himself to the Word. This calling not only serves to invite nonbelievers to faith and repentance at the outset but also continues to admonish, teach, and lead believers permanently. The proclamation of the Word persists without interruption and, throughout one's life, emphasizes the mortification of the old self and the transformation into the new "man." The content of the message varies depending on the audience and circumstances. Peter spoke differently to his listeners on the day of Pentecost, and Paul addressed the Athenians differently than he did in his letters to the churches. There is a distinction between mission preaching and preaching aimed at the church. Even within the congregation, the administration of the Word highlights different truths at different times. Sometimes, words of comfort are necessary, while at other times, words of admonishment are required. There are moments for building up and moments for tearing down. The comfort of the promises of the covenant of grace sometimes alternates with serious exhortation and calls for self-examination. Nevertheless, it is always the same abundant Word employed by the Spirit to nurture the growth of the church in the grace and knowledge of Christ. The Spirit uses this Word not only in its public administration within the church but also in the family, school, public discourse, and reading, as well as in upbringing and education. This calling, both external and internal, along with the corresponding acts of faith and

repentance (resulting from regeneration in the narrow sense), can be seen as the initiatory benefits that lead to the subsequent ones.

In the fifth place, these benefits can be categorized into three groups. Sin encompasses guilt, pollution, and misery: a breach of the covenant of works, a loss of the image of God, and submission to the domination of corruption. Christ redeemed us from all three aspects through his suffering, fulfillment of the law, and conquest of death. Therefore, Christ's benefits can be summarized as follows: (1) He restores our right relationship with God and all creation, which includes forgiveness of sins, justification, purification of our conscience, acceptance as children, peace with God, Christian liberty, and more; (2) He renews us according to God's image, involving regeneration in the broad sense, renewal, re-creation, and sanctification; (3) He preserves us for our heavenly inheritance and will eventually free us from suffering and death, granting us eternal blessedness.

The first group of benefits is received through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, accepted by faith, and leads to a change in our consciousness, freeing our conscience. The second group of benefits is conferred upon us through the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, renewing our very being and delivering us from the power of sin. The third group of benefits is communicated to us by the preserving, guiding, and sealing work of the Holy Spirit, serving as a guarantee of our complete redemption and delivering us from the domination of misery and death in soul and body.

The first group of benefits anoints us as prophets, the second as priests, and the third as kings. In the first group, our focus is primarily on the past, directing our gaze to the historical Christ and the cross of Golgotha, where our sins were atoned. In the second

group, our attention turns upward to the living Lord in heaven, where He serves as the high priest at the right hand of God's majesty. In the third group, we anticipate Christ's future, a future in which He will subdue all His enemies and present the kingdom to God the Father. These benefits, though distinct, are inseparable. Like faith, hope, and love, they form a threefold cord that cannot be broken. It is Christ Himself, the crucified and glorified Lord, who, through His Word, directs our faith to His sacrifice, incorporates us into His fellowship through His Spirit, and, through both Word and Spirit, prepares and preserves us for heavenly blessedness.

In the sixth place, let us consider four groups of benefits in the order of salvation: calling (including regeneration in a restricted sense, faith, and repentance), justification, sanctification, and glorification. While glorification is often reserved for the conclusion of dogmatics in the doctrine of the last things, it is an integral part of the way of salvation (*via salutis*) and closely connected to the preceding benefits. These four groups align with what Paul states about Christ in 1 Corinthians 1:30, where He is described as "wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." In Romans 8:30, the apostle enumerates three benefits in which God's foreknowledge is realized: calling, justification, and glorification. All these benefits have a temporal dimension.

The term "he glorified" (ἐδόξασεν) in this context does not solely pertain to the glorification that awaits believers after death or on the day of judgment. Instead, it encompasses the glorification that believers already experience on earth through the renewal of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:2, 10; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 3:16) and that will be fully realized at their resurrection on the last day (1 Cor. 15:53; Phil. 3:21). Therefore, ἐδόξασεν includes both sanctification and glorification. Consequently, we encounter these four primary



benefits that Christ secured for His own. Corresponding to these benefits are the activities of the Holy Spirit and the operations of grace.

In calling, the Holy Spirit primarily fulfills His role of conviction and teaching, granting us preparatory, prevenient, and effecting grace. In justification, the Spirit's comforting role and illuminating grace are prominent. In sanctification, the Holy Spirit carries out His sanctifying role, renewing us day by day through His cooperative grace. As for the glorification that commences in this life (2 Cor. 3:18), the Spirit performs His sealing role, completely restoring us through His conserving and perfecting grace to conform to the image of Christ, so that Christ may be the firstborn among many brothers (Rom. 8:29).

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