

Did Herman Bavinck Teach an “Ordo Salutis” in His Theology?

The Question of “Applicatio Salutis”

Is There an “Ordo” Salutis taught in the Bible?

Was Bavinck within the bounds of Scripture by teaching a specific, fixed “order” regarding salvation? Another way of phrasing the question is this: did Bavinck teach a fixed *order* of salvation, or did he teach a *way* of salvation? Was Bavinck’s doctrine of the *ordo salutis* scholastic in nature, or did he break the “codification” of salvation that has come down to us from the past?

If Bavinck did teach such an order, how, if at all, did that order tie in with what is being argued as the central motif of his theology: the mystical union of the believer with Christ? It would appear that if Bavinck tied the mystical union with some version of the order of salvation that certain changes would be necessary in the way that one looked at the *ordo salutis*.

As was described in the previous chapter, Dr. John Bolt’s dissertation on the idea of the imitation of Christ theme in Bavinck’s theology added key ingredients into the equation such as suffering, self-denial, and sacrificial love. Therefore, in this chapter we shall examine what other Reformers and Reformed theologians have taught about the order of salvation and then make a comparison between their views and Bavinck’s.

In Reformed circles there has been a controversy regarding the *ordo salutis* and, as might be expected, various positions have been taken on this matter. Since Bavinck was a theologian of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is of interest to inquire to what degree he differed from those around him.

Moreover, is there a distinction among the triad that Bavinck taught: *ordo*, the “way” of salvation, and the *applicatio salutis*? In his chapter on the order of salvation and its application, Bavinck uses these three terms as descriptions of the contents of the subject matter. In this sense, Bavinck anticipated the discussions that would take place in later Reformed theology surrounding the *ordo*.

In fact, Bavinck included many different facets of salvation in his discussion of the *ordo*. He not only speaks of regeneration, righteousness, and holiness, but also includes an array of spiritual blessings such as life, illumination, spiritual sealing, and a bevy of other related (spiritual) gifts.¹

In light of the totality of Bavinck’s theology and his theological methodology it is clear that his discussion of the above-mentioned triad is not accidental. Rather, it is an integral part of the manner in which he viewed salvation in general and the *unio mystica* in particular.

Therefore, it needs to be asked to what extent his particular emphasis on the mystical union of the believer with Christ played a role in his doctrine of the order of salvation. As subsequent chapters will manifest, it is also necessary to observe how the mystical union theme is carried over into other facets of Bavinck’s theological system. Of particular interest will also be the relationship between the *unio* and the sacraments. To narrow the point further, we shall investigate the relationship between the *unio mystica* and the “continual” meal instituted by Christ for the spiritual strengthening of his people: the Lord’s Supper. Does Bavinck offer any improvement to the sacramental discussions in

¹ GD3:501, “Hij (the Holy Spirit) is de auteur van wedergeboorte, Joh. 3:5, 6, Tit. 3:5, leven, Joh. 6:63, 7:38, 39, Rom. 8:2, 2 Cor. 3:6, verlichting, Joh. 14:17, 15:26, 16:13, 1 Cor. 2:6-16, 2 Cor. 3:12, 4:6, Ef. 1:17, 1 Joh. 2:20, 4:6, 5:6, van allerlei gaven, Rom. 12:3-8, 1 Cor. 12:4v., van vernieuwing en heiligmaking, Rom 8, Gal. 5:16, 22, Ef. 3:16, van verzegeling en verheerlijking, Rom. 8:11, 23, 2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5, Ef. 1:13, 14, 4:30.”

Reformed theology? If so, what are the particular elements that play roles in that improvement? Can it be said that Bavinck rises above the controversy and offered something that has been overlooked? We shall need to examine these questions in subsequent sections.

As representatives of the Reformed view concerning the *ordo salutis*, I have chosen the following theologians: John Calvin, John Murray, Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., Louis Berkhof, G.C. Berkouwer, and A.A. Hoekema. All of them, with the exceptions of John Calvin and John Murray, were intimately familiar with Bavinck's work in his native Dutch language.

In addition to examining what each of these Reformed theologians taught with a view to the *ordo salutis*, we shall also ask what they taught about the *unio mystica* as it relates to the *ordo*.

An outline of the discussion

A.A. Hoekema recounts three varying, yet related stances on the matter of the order of salvation.² Each of the positions he delineates, including his own, is typified by men of the Reformed persuasion who would have been familiar with Bavinck's works.³ The question each respective position asks is this: Is there a precise "order" taught in the Bible with regard to man's salvation?

Hoekema reminds us that this is not a new question, but one that has been the focal point of a great deal of discussion in the history of theology. The Lutheran theologian,

² A.A. Hoekema, *Saved By Grace*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 11ff. Hereafter *SBG*.

³ Of the three mentioned, John Murray would have been the least likely to have an intimate acquaintance with Bavinck's works due to the fact—to the best of my knowledge—that he did not read Dutch as fluently as the others. I have not found extensive quotations from Bavinck's works in Murray's writings, although it seems feasible that he would have had many conversations with Dr. Cornelius Van Til, who knew Bavinck well.

Jacob Carpov, coined the phrase *ordo salutis* in 1737 to describe salvation.⁴ Especially in the case of G.C. Berkouwer—as we shall see—Carpov represented a kind of scholasticism in theology that was to be rejected.

According to Berkouwer, Carpov’s devised system was the codification—in the bad sense of the word—of the truths of Scripture. When Berkouwer was appointed as professor at the Free University of Amsterdam his fellow professor in his department was Valentine Hepp.⁵ Hepp favored the scholastic approach to theology. Berkouwer took a very different tack and preferred the method of correlation between faith and the Bible.⁶

Since the question is crucial to and for Reformed theology and for Bavinck’s theological methodology, we shall examine the various points of view of the above-mentioned theologians.

John Calvin.

It is fitting that we begin with John Calvin for several reasons. In the first place, he is one of the “fathers” of Reformed theology. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* continues to be a source of doctoral work. The four-volume work, along with Calvin’s letters and commentaries, provide a wealth of material for academicians. In addition, Calvin’s works continue to be a rich source of devotional material for practical Christian living. There are spiritual gems contained in Calvin’s works that defy a purely academic interest. Calvin was thoroughly conversant with the various issues confronting both the

⁴ Hoekema, *SBG*, 11.

⁵ Cf. G.C. Berkouwer, *Zoeken en Vinden*, (Kampen: Kok, 1989), pp. 75-77. In successive sections, Berkouwer describes Hepp and Scholasticism, Biblicism, and Dogmatic exegesis. On page 74 Berkouwer remarks concerning Hepp, “Hepp was via Kuyper door het Calvinisme gefascineerd.”

⁶ For various descriptions of Berkouwer’s methodology, see H. Berkhof, “De methode van Berkouwers theologie,” in J.T. Bakker *et al.*, *Ex Auditu Verbi*, (Kampen: Kok, 1965), pp. 37-55; W.D. Jonker, “Dogmatiek en Heilige Skrif,” in J.T. Bakker *et al.*, *Septuagesimo Anno*, (Kampen: Kok, 1973), pp. 86-111; J.C. de Moor, *Towards a Biblically Theological Method*, A Structural Analysis and a Further Elaboration of Dr. G.C. Berkouwer’s Hermeneutic-Dogmatic Method, (Doctoral Dissertation at the Free University of Amsterdam), (Kampen: Kok, 1980).

scholarly world and the “man in the pew.” Finally, all of the theologians that will be examined are deeply indebted to Calvin’s theology. These men—past and present—are all included in the Reformed tradition and, as such, unashamedly champion, espouse, and teach the Reformed faith. Bavinck is included among their number. Bavinck’s dependence upon Calvin is noticeable throughout the *GD* and other writings. It is, then, with particular interest that we begin our investigation with John Calvin and his influence upon Reformed theology.

The complete title of Book Three of the *Institutes* is this: “The Way in which We Receive the Grace of Christ: What Benefits Come to Us from It, and What Effects Follow.” For obvious reasons, it will not be possible to provide an overview of the entire book. Nevertheless, certain salient points need to be emphasized since it is here that Calvin gives us the kernel of what we are to understand regarding the mystical union and its work, working, and worker in the life of the Christian.

The first chapter of Book Three is entitled “The Things Spoken concerning Christ Profit Us by the Secret Working of the Spirit.” Section one reminds us that it is the Holy Spirit who is the “bond” that unites us to Christ.” Calvin engages the reader from the outset by asking a question. “How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed on his only-begotten son—not for Christ’s own private use, but that he might enrich poor and needy men?”⁷ As an aside, one can only hope that academicians would take an important lesson from Calvin’s balance between the scholarly and the highly practical.

⁷ *Inst.*3.1.1, 537.

How does Calvin answer his own question? Not only is his answer genial in nature, but is especially germane to the matter of the mystical union as the central motif in the *ordo salutis*. Calvin replies, “First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us.”⁸ Calvin is leading up to an exposition of the engrafting of the believer into Christ. This was not only an essential theme in Calvin’s theology but can be found reflected in other Reformed theologians. In passing, it should be noted that this theme can be found in the Heidelberg Catechism in questions and answers 20, 64, and 80.

Calvin speaks of a “sharing” that occurs between Christ and the believer as well as a “dwelling with us.”⁹ Calvin envisions a threefold benefit for the believer in this union. First, Christ shares what he has received from the Father. In the second place, he becomes ours. Third, he dwells within us. All that he received from the Father is not merely passed along to the believer, but becomes theirs because Christ dwells within him.

At this point, a question that plagued the Reformed is raised by what Calvin says. The question regards how Christ can dwell within the Christian if his body has ascended to heaven. This question occupied a great deal of Calvin’s attention as he attempted to forge an answer that was both scriptural and reasonable. In terms of the believer “possessing Christ” and being indwelt by him, Calvin turns to Romans 11:17 and Galatians 3:27 to provide partial answers. “We also, in turn, are said to be ‘engrafted into him’ [Rom.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. “Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us.”

11:17]¹⁰, and to ‘put on Christ’ [Gal. 3:27]¹¹; for, as I have said, *all that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him*. It is true that we obtain this by faith.”¹² As Calvin begins to set forth his case, he points the reader one of his essential concepts, namely that the believer is (mystically) to grow into one body with Christ.

Necessarily, Calvin referenced faith because “. . .we see that not all indiscriminately embrace that communion with Christ which is offered through the gospel.”¹³ According to Calvin, reason dictates that man climbs higher and examines the “secret energy of the Spirit (*arcana Spiritus efficacia*), by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits.”¹⁴ Calvin has introduced two essential ingredients into his discussion: faith and the Holy Spirit. “There is good reason for the repeated mention of the ‘testimony of the spirit’ (*Spiritus testimonium*), a testimony we feel engraved like a seal upon our hearts, with the result that it seals the cleansing and sacrifice of Christ.”¹⁵ The sum of Calvin’s argument is that “the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself.”¹⁶

The Scripture describes an intimate relationship between Christ and the Spirit. The Holy Spirit “is called the ‘Spirit of sanctification’ [cf. II Thess. 2:13; I Peter 1:2; Rom. 1:4] because he not only quickens and nourishes us by a general power that is visible both in the human race and in the rest of the living creatures, but he is also the root (*radix*) and

¹⁰ Eiv de, tinej tw/n kla,dwn evxekla,sqhsan(su. de. avgrie,laioj w’n evneken tri,sqhj evn auvtoid/j kai. sugkoinwno.j th/j r`i,zhj th/j pio,tthoj th/j evlai,aj evge,nou. . .

¹¹ o[soi ga.r eivj Cristo.n evbapti,sqhte(Cristo.n evnedu,sasqeÅ

¹² *Inst.*3.1.1, 537. Italics—RG.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Inst.*3.1.1, 538.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Compare *Inst.*2.15.2.

seed (*semen*) of heavenly life in us.”¹⁷ Calvin acknowledges a general work and working of the Holy Spirit in all mankind as well as in the remainder of all living creatures. When he speaks of the believers, however, he reserves language such as the “root” and “seed” of heavenly life to describe his activity.

Therefore, “we ought to know that he is called the ‘Spirit of Christ’ not only because, as eternal Word of God, is joined in the same Spirit with the Father, but also from his character as the Mediator. . . . This unique life which the Son of God inspires in his own *so that they become one with him*, Paul here contrasts with that natural life which is common also to the wicked.”¹⁸

The various activities of the Spirit point us to his work in uniting us to Christ. One of those actions is that he persistently boils away and burns up our vicious and inordinate desires, while, at the same time, he enflames our hearts with the love of God and with zealous devotion.¹⁹ “For by the inspiration of his power he so breathes divine life into us that we are no longer actuated by ourselves, but are ruled by his action and prompting.”²⁰ It is solely by the relationship between Christ and the Spirit that we come to possess the Savior. “But he unites himself to us by the Spirit alone. By the grace and power of the same Spirit we are made his members, to keep us under himself and in turn to possess him.”²¹

¹⁷ *Inst.* 3.1.2, 538.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 539.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 540.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 541.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Faith, therefore, is the principal work of the Holy Spirit.²² According to 2 Thessalonians 2:13²³, faith has no other source than the Spirit.²⁴ In addition, the Spirit is “the inner teacher by who effort the promise of salvation penetrates into our minds, a promise that would otherwise only strike the air or beat upon our ears.”²⁵ The Spirit grants heavenly wisdom to the believer. He may rightly be called “the key that unlocks for us the treasures of the Kingdom of Heaven [cf. Rev. 3:7]; and his illumination, the keenness of our insight.”²⁶

Summarizing his thoughts, Calvin writes, “We have said that perfect salvation is found in the person of Christ. Accordingly, that we may become partakers of it ‘he baptizes us in the Holy Spirit and fire’ [Luke 3:16], bringing us into the light of faith in his gospel and so regenerating us that we become new creatures [cf. II Cor. 5:17]; and he consecrates us, purged of worldly uncleanness, as temples holy to God [cf. I Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; II Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21].”²⁷

How did Calvin understand faith and its nature? Succinctly, it could be stated that Calvin viewed true faith as having two components: knowledge and trust. True faith is a matter of both the head and the heart. He gives us his own definition with the following words. “Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given

²² Ibid., 541.

²³ ~Hmei/j de. ovfei,lomen euvaristei/n tw/| qew/| pa,ntote peri. u`mw/n(avdelfoi. hvgraphme,noi u`po. kuri,ou(o[ti ei[lato u`ma/j o` qeo.j avparch.n eivj swthri,an evn a`giasmw/| pneu,matoj kai. pi,stei avlhqei,aj.

²⁴ *Inst.* 3.1.4, 541.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 542.

²⁷ Ibid.

promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”²⁸

This faith has Christ as its object and all its stability rests in Christ.²⁹ As is evident from Calvin’s definition of faith, an inextricable relationship exists between the Spirit and Christ. Referring to Christ, Calvin says, “no one can duly know him without at the same time apprehending the sanctification of the Spirit.”³⁰ Put another way, “faith rests upon the knowledge of Christ. And Christ cannot be known apart from the sanctification of his Spirit.”³¹ This explains Calvin’s emphasis on faith’s certainty being of an inward, spiritual nature. Faith consists in assurance rather than in comprehension.³² Faith’s “chief hinge,” upon which it turns is this: “that we do not regard the promises of mercy that God offers as true only outside ourselves, but not at all in us; rather that we make them ours by inwardly embracing them.”³³

The relationship between faith and the *unio* is delineated by Calvin in *Inst.*3.2.24. That section of material deals with the “indestructible certainty of faith” resting upon Christ’s unity with the believer. Describing this relationship Calvin writes, “As if we ought to think of Christ, standing afar off and not rather dwelling in us! For we await salvation from him not because he appears to us afar off, but because he makes us, ingrafted into his body, participants not only in all his benefits but also in himself.”³⁴ Herein lies the essence of Calvin’s thoughts surrounding faith. It is located in the notion

²⁸ Ibid., 551.

²⁹ Ibid., 543-544.

³⁰ *Inst.*3.2.8, 552.

³¹ Ibid., 552-553.

³² *Inst.*3.2.14, 560.

³³ *Inst.*3.2.16, 561.

³⁴ *Inst.*3.2.24, 570.

of “engrafting,” which includes both participation in Christ as well as in all his benefits. This, too, is the essence of the mystical union of the believer with Christ. Calvin continues his description in this manner. “But since Christ has been so imparted to you with all his benefits that all his things are made yours, that you are made a member of him, indeed one with him, his righteousness overwhelms you sins; his salvation wipes out your condemnation; with his worthiness he intercedes that your unworthiness may not come before God’s sight.”³⁵

This union includes both human responsibility and growth. The believer has the moral responsibility to live as a covenant child. Calvin explains the aspect of responsibility in this fashion. “We ought not to separate Christ from ourselves or ourselves from him. Rather we ought to hold fast bravely with both hands to that fellowship by which he has bound himself to us.”³⁶ The element of growth in this intimate relationship is explicated in these words. “. . . Christ is not outside us but dwells within us. Not only does he cleave to us by an indivisible bond of fellowship, but with a wonderful communion, day by day, he grows *more and more* into one body with us, until he becomes completely one with us.”³⁷ This relationship is capable of increase—as well as diminution—but remains “an indivisible bond of fellowship.” It is not such because of man’s efforts, however, but because of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Faith stands firm on the promises of God, whereby it is certain that God is true in all things.³⁸ At the same time, “faith does not stand firm until a man attains to the freely

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ *Inst.* 3.2.24, 570-571. Italics—RG.

³⁸ *Inst.* 3.2.29, 575.

given promise; second, that it does not reconcile us to God at all unless it joins us to Christ.”³⁹

The outworking of faith consists in the mortification of the old man of sin and the coming to life of the new man *in Christ*.⁴⁰ Both of these happen to the believer “by participation in Christ.”⁴¹ In addition, Calvin manifests the crucial place the mystical union of the believer with Christ occupies in his theology when he writes of it in his section dealing with justification by faith. This is a thought that will recur in Bavinck’s theology and involves one of the central doctrines of the Christian faith. Calvin writes,

We are deprived of this utterly incomparable good until Christ is made ours. Therefore, that joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts—in short, that mystical union—are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are grafted into his body—in short, because he deigns to make us with him.⁴²

Much more could be said about Calvin’s doctrine of the mystical union and its central place in his theology. Suffice it to say at this point that what has become manifestly clear is how it forms an integral part in his discussion of the faith life of the believer. It will become increasingly clear how Calvin profoundly influenced Bavinck in his theological methodology.

For the moment, however, we shall continue our investigation of how various Reformed theologians after Calvin explained the concept of an *ordo salutis*.

³⁹ *Inst.* 3.2.30, 576.

⁴⁰ *Inst.* 3.3.3, 595.

⁴¹ *Inst.* 3.3.9, 600.

⁴² *Inst.* 3.11.10, 737.

John Murray.

In his now widely used work on redemption John Murray lays out his case in favor of an “order” of salvation. “There are good and conclusive reasons for thinking that the various actions of the application of redemption. . .take place in a certain order, and that order has been established by divine appointment, wisdom, and grace.”⁴³

There is agreement among all that a certain order must be maintained in salvation, but the manner in which that outworking takes place is what is at issue. Murray takes Romans 8:30 as the classic text that deals with salvation.⁴⁴ From other texts of Scripture Murray deduces grounds “for putting faith and repentance prior to justification, and regeneration prior to faith.”⁴⁵ Moving out further from the central text in Romans 8, Murray finds “logical considerations” that lead him to include adoption, sanctification, and perseverance after justification.⁴⁶ When he describes the application of the accomplished redemption in Christ, Murray gives the following outline: effectual calling, regeneration, faith and repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, union with Christ, and glorification.⁴⁷

For the purposes of this work, we are only going to focus on Murray’s comments regarding the believer’s union with Christ, which is chapter nine of *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. It should be noted, however, that Murray does teach a “strict” form of the *ordo salutis*.

⁴³ John Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), p. 98. Hereafter *RAA*. Quoted in Hoekema, *SBG*, 11.

⁴⁴ Murray, *RAA*, 82ff.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 95-105. On page 103 Murray writes, “Regeneration is the beginning of all saving grace *in us*, and all saving grace in exercise on our part proceeds from the fountain of regeneration.”

⁴⁶ Hoekema, *SBG*, 12.

⁴⁷ Murray, (Table of Contents), *RAA*, 7.

At the outset of this chapter, Murray alerts the reader that he is aware that questions might have arisen about the union of Christ in the application of salvation.⁴⁸ Murray concedes that the doctrine of the *unio mystica* is not merely important, it is “central” and “basic” to salvation.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, Murray believes he offers a good reason why the subject of union with Christ should not be coordinated with the other phases of the application of redemption. “That reason is that union with Christ is in itself a very *broad* and *embracive* subject.”⁵⁰

By this statement, Murray means to say that the *unio* is not merely a “step” or “phase” in the application of redemption, but rather that element of salvation that “underlies every step of the application of redemption.”⁵¹ “Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ.”⁵² Murray looks at the process of salvation and believes every “phase” is related to and dependent upon union with Christ.⁵³ The New Testament summary phrase for union with Christ is “in Christ.” This New Testament terminology is applied to much more than the application of redemption.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 161, “In these studies we are dealing with the application of redemption. Intelligent readers may have wondered why there has not been up to this point some treatment of union with Christ.”

⁴⁹ Ibid. “Obviously it is an important aspect of the application of redemption and, if we did not take account of it, not only would our presentation of the application of redemption be defective but our view of the Christian life would be gravely distorted. *Nothing is more central or basic than union and communion with Christ.*” Italics—RG.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Italics—RG.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid. “Indeed the whole process of salvation has its origin in one phase of union with Christ and salvation has in view the realization of others phases of union with Christ.”

The “broader meaning” of the *unio* is found, Murray believes, in Ephesians 1:3-4 and other texts. The “fountain” of salvation is located in God’s eternal election “in Christ.”⁵⁴

Murray explains his position in this manner.

The Father elected from eternity, but he elected in Christ. We are not able to understand all that is involved, but the fact is plain enough that there was no election of the Father in eternity apart from Christ. And that means that those who will be saved were not even contemplated by the Father in the ultimate counsel of his predestinating love apart from union with Christ—they were *chosen* in Christ. As far back as we can go in tracing salvation to its fountain we find “union with Christ”; it is not something tacked on’ it is there from the outset.⁵⁵

This constitutes what Murray considers to be the “all-embracing” aspect of union with Christ. God’s plan of redemption comes to sinner in space and time. Therefore, God’s people were also in Christ when he died for them on the cross and secured their salvation.⁵⁶

What are the implications for the union of Christ with believers? In its most fundamental aspect, redemption may not be conceived of as an abstraction.

Hence we may never think of the work of redemption wrought once for all by Christ apart from the union with his people which was effected in the election of the Father before the foundation of the world. In other words, we may never think of redemption in abstraction from the mysterious arrangements of God’s love and wisdom and grace by which Christ was united to his people and his people were united to him when he died upon the accursed tree and rose again from the dead.⁵⁷

The believer’s union with Christ, then, is an integral part of redemption. The new life of the saved sinner has its *inception* in Christ. That same new life is *continued* by virtue of being in Christ.⁵⁸ In addition, it is “in Christ that Christian life and behaviour are conducted.”⁵⁹ The biblical truth of being in Christ permeates all of the Christian’s life,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 162.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 162-163.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 163.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

including his ethical behavior. Moreover, it is in Christ that believers die. “They have fallen asleep in Christ or through Christ and they are dead in Christ (1 Thess. 4:14, 16).”⁶⁰ Finally, it is in Christ that God’s people will be resurrected from the dead and glorified.⁶¹

Murray views the union with Christ as both the source and the fruition of salvation. The “orbit” of the union has two *foci*. The first is the electing love of God the Father in his eternal counsel. The other focal point is glorification with Christ in the manifestation of his glory. “The former has no beginning, the latter has no end.”⁶²

For Murray, this notion of the union with Christ and his description of it is more than a mere theological construction. It has practical applications for the life of the believer. He may take joy in God’s determinate counsel. He may have patience in the difficulties and perplexities of this life. He may have confident assurance with regard to the future. Why is this? “It is because he cannot think of past, present, or future apart from union with Christ.”⁶³

Murray also ties in the union of the believer with Christ to a strong pneumatological emphasis. He rightly sees this as in keeping with the “eternity-time-eternity” flow found in Ephesians 1:4-5, 13-14. The believer “has the seal of an eternal inheritance because it is in Christ that he is sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise as the earnest of his inheritance unto the redemption of the purchased possession (*cf.* Eph. 1:13, 14).”⁶⁴ It is

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 163-164.

⁶² Ibid., 164.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 164-165.

precisely the union of Christ with the believer that changes the whole complexion of time and eternity.⁶⁵

By stating the matter in this fashion, Murray makes the *unio* a very inclusive reality. Murray designates it a very inclusive “subject,” but I believe this detracts from what he’s truly attempting to say. His treatment of the union of Christ with the believer is couched in the warmth and vitality of redemption. The union is substantially more than a mere subject for discussion. It is life itself. We need not quibble about words with Murray, for his own exposition points in the direction of a personal relationship and all that it entails. Discussing the inclusive nature of the *unio*, Murray states,

It embraces the wide span of salvation from its ultimate source in the eternal election of God to its final fruition in the glorification of the elect. It is not simply a phase of the application of redemption; it underlies every aspect of redemption both in its accomplishment and in its application. Union with Christ binds all together and insures that to all for whom Christ has purchased redemption he effectively applies and communicates the same.⁶⁶

Murray connects the union with both the accomplishment and application of redemption. In terms of the outworking of the eternal counsel, “We do not become *actual* partakers of Christ until redemption is effectually applied.”⁶⁷

What, then, is the nature of the union according to Murray? He lists two crucial components. First, the union is spiritual. Second, it is mystical. Since Murray is one of the few that have written on the union as early as he did, we shall spend some time describing his position.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 165. “Apart from union with Christ we cannot view past, present, or future with anything but dismay and Christless dread. By union with Christ the whole complexion of time and eternity is changed and the people of God may rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

When Murray asserts that the union is spiritual, he desires to protect this union from the vagaries that often attend the word, “spiritual.”⁶⁸ Therefore, when Murray speaks of the union of Christ with the believer being spiritual in nature he means “that the bond of this union is the Holy Spirit himself.”⁶⁹ This is certainly in keeping with the Reformed tradition. Murray rightly brings Christology and Pneumatology into the closest proximity. When he attempts to explain the precise nature of this spiritual aspect of the union, Murray is willing to admit that the mystery surpasses our abilities to exhaustively describe it. “...[I]t is union of an intensely spiritual character consonant with the nature and work of the Holy Spirit so that in a real way, surpassing our power of analysis Christ dwells in his people and his people dwell in him.”⁷⁰

In the second place, the union of Christ with the believer is mystical. The mystical union of Christ with the believer takes its starting-point from the word, “mystery” used in the Bible.⁷¹ How is the word “mystery” used in the Bible? According to Murray, there is a fourfold observation to be made when describing biblical mystery. He says,

(1) It was kept secret from times eternal—it was something hid in the mind and counsel of God. (2) It did not continue to be kept hid—it was manifested and made known in accordance with the will and commandment of God. (3) This revelation on God’s part was mediated through and deposited in the Scripture—it was revealed to all nations and is no longer a secret. (4) This revelation is directed to the end that all nations may come to the obedience of faith. A mystery is, therefore, something which eye hath not seen nor ear heard neither hath entered into the heart of man but which God has revealed unto us by his Spirit and which by revelation and faith comes to be known and appropriated by men.⁷²

The *unio mystica* is such a mystery. (Cf. Ephesians 5:32 and Colossians 1:26-27.) In addition, there is a wide range of similitude used in Scripture to describe the union with

⁶⁸ Ibid., 165-166. “Few words in the New Testament have been subjected to more distortion than the word ‘Spiritual.’ Frequently it is used to denote what is little more than vague sentimentality.”

⁶⁹ Ibid., 166.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 167.

Christ. “On the highest level of being it is compared to the union which exists between the persons of the trinity in the Godhead.”⁷³ At another level, it is compared to inanimate objects.⁷⁴ At a kind of “intermediate” level between the Trinity and the inanimate objects is a variety of similitude.

It is compared to the union that existed between Adam and all of posterity (Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:19-49). It is compared to the union that exists between man and wife (Eph. 5:22-33; *cf.* John 3:29). It is compared to the union that exists between the head and the other members in the human body (Eph. 4:15, 16). It is compared to the relation of the vine to the branches (John 15). Hence we have analogy drawn from the various strata of being, ascending from the inanimate realm to the very life of the persons of the Godhead.⁷⁵

Murray guards against “identity” between Christ and the believer in this union. “Union with Christ does not mean that we are incorporated into the life of the Godhead.”⁷⁶ The union of the believer with Christ is the greatest mystery of creaturely relations. “And the mystery of it is attested by nothing more than this that it is compared to the union that exists between the Father and the Son in the unity of the Godhead.”⁷⁷

Murray points to the practical application of the union of Christ and faith when he says this. “The life of faith is the life of love, and the life of love is the life of fellowship, or mystic communion with him who ever lives to make intercession for his people and who can be touched with the felling of our infirmities. It is fellowship with him who has

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 168.

⁷⁴ Ibid. “On the lowest level it is compared to the relation that exists between the stones of a building and the chief corner stone (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2: 4, 5).”

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 169.

an inexhaustible reservoir of sympathy with his people's temptation, afflictions, and infirmities because he was tempted in all points like as they are, yet without sin."⁷⁸

This reality leads Murray to conclude, "Union with Christ is *the central* truth of the whole doctrine of salvation."⁷⁹ Christ's election before the foundation of the world is "election unto the adoption of sons."⁸⁰ Murray is convinced that the *unio* is "the central truth" of the doctrine of salvation because it meets all the believer's needs in this life and gives him hope of the life to come.⁸¹

In addition, recognition of the *unio* promotes the believer's sanctification. This is due not only to the sanctifying grace that is derived from Christ, "but also because the recognition of fellowship with Christ and of the high privilege it entails incites to gratitude, obedience, and devotion. Union means also communion and communion constrains a humble, reverent, loving walk with him who died and rose again that he might be our Lord."⁸²

Murray expounds yet another benefit of the believer's union with Christ. Not only does the believer have fellowship with Christ, he is also brought into a similar

⁷⁸ Ibid., 169-170. On page 169, Murray elucidates further. "Believers are called into the fellowship of Christ and fellowship means communion. The life of faith is one of living union and communion with the exalted and ever-present Redeemer. Faith is directed not only to a Redeemer who has come and completed once for all a work of redemption. It is directed to him not merely as the one who died but as the one who rose again and who ever lives as our great high priest and advocate.. and because faith is directed to him as living Saviour and Lord, fellowship reaches the zenith of its exercise."

⁷⁹ Ibid., 170. Italics—RG.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 171. "It is out of the measureless fullness of grace and truth, of wisdom and power, of goodness and love, of righteousness and faithfulness which resides in him that God's people draw for all their needs in this life and for the hope of the life to come. There is no truth, therefore, more suited to impart confidence and strength, comfort and joy in the Lord than this one of union with Christ."

⁸² Ibid., 171.

relationship with the Father.⁸³ Since he has already discussed the union and the Holy Spirit, Murray completes his exposition by ending in a thoroughly trinitarian fashion. Union with Christ brings union with the Father and Holy Spirit with it.⁸⁴ Murray calls this “mysticism on the highest plane.”⁸⁵ This trinitarian fellowship is described this way.

Believers know the Father and have fellowship with him in his own distinguishing character and operation as the Father. They know the Son and have fellowship with him in his own distinguishing character and operation as the Son, the Saviour, the Redeemer, the exalted Lord. They know and have fellowship with the Holy Spirit in his own distinguishing character and operation as the Spirit, the Advocate, the Comforter, the Sanctifier.⁸⁶

Murray concludes his chapter on the centrality of the union of Christ with the believer with a type of doxology. He is not merely concerned to give an objective description of this communion, but to highlight its subjective importance. In keeping with the Reformed tradition, Murray refers to the stirring of the “deepest springs of emotion in the raptures of holy love and joy.”⁸⁷ Murray’s description is biblically sound and also oriented towards true experiential religion.

Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

In 1969, Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. wrote a doctoral dissertation for Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia entitled *Resurrection and Redemption (A Study in*

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 172. “It is union, therefore, with the Father and with the Son and with the Holy Spirit that union with Christ draws along with it.”

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 172-173.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 173.

Pauline Soteriology.)⁸⁸ Gaffin presents a very interesting approach to the entire *ordo salutis* controversy even though his dissertation is not strictly devoted to the mystical union. He does, however, offer some interesting insights into the issue. For the purposes of this dissertation, emphasis will be placed on Part III, A, 4, a-d; B and the Conclusion, where Gaffin interacts with Murray in particular regarding the “all-embracive” status Murray ascribes to the *unio*.

Section III.A.4 of Gaffin’s dissertation is entitled “The Resurrection as the Redemption of Christ.” The title, itself, lends credence to the fact that Gaffin’s approach is going to be somewhat unique. According to Gaffin, his study, to this point, has made it sufficiently clear that “the significance of the resurrection is more than noetic, that it involves more than an unveiling of the efficacy cross.”⁸⁹ Because of its close association with Adam’s race, Christ’s resurrection is unique. Gaffin writes, “But despite all that is unique about Christ’s death (cf. esp. Phil. 2:6-8), the fundamental consideration for Paul is that it is the death of the second Adam (cf. esp. Rom. 5:18f.); or better, its uniqueness is bound up with its adamic significance.”⁹⁰ To put it another way, “In other works [*sic*], everything which Paul teaches about the death of others must be applied *mutatis mutandis* in the light of Romans 8:3,⁹¹ to the death of Christ.”⁹² This leads Gaffin to conclude that “it is not only meaningful but necessary to speak of the resurrection as the redemption of Christ.”⁹³ This further means that,

⁸⁸ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption (A Study in Pauline Soteriology)*, (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA, 1969.) Hereafter *RR*.

⁸⁹ Gaffin, *RR*, 124.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 124-125.

⁹¹ to. ga.r avdu,naton tou/ no,mou evn w-| hvsqe,nei dia. th/j sarko,j(o` qeo.j to.n e` autou/ ui`o.n pe,myaj evn o` moiw,mati sarko.j a` marti,aj kai. peri. a` marti,aj kate,krinen th.n a` marti,an evn th/| sarki,.

⁹² Gaffin, *RR*, 125.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

Strictly speaking, it is at his resurrection that the accomplishment of redemption finds its consummate realization. Hence in a verse like Romans 6:10 it is essential to distinguish carefully between his death (as an act) which was a dying to sin and the resultant condition of being dead to sin. The latter, as the preceding verse makes especially clear, is exponential of his *resurrected* state in which death is no longer master over him, [*sic*] In fact, it is proper to say that only by virtue of his resurrection can his death be called a dying to sin. To employ a distinction which perhaps has some value at this point: with respect to its center of gravity the theology of Paul is not a *theologia crucis*; rather it is a *theologia gloriae resurrectionis*. From these considerations it is apparent already that a soteriology which in its basic structure moves directly from the death of Christ to the application to others of the benefits purchased by that death, substantially short circuits the apostle's own point of view. In fact, one may say that according to him the accomplishment of redemption is only first definitively realized in the application to Christ himself (by the Father through the Spirit) at the resurrection of the benefits purchased by his own obedience unto death.⁹⁴

Gaffin then proceeds to discuss this scheme as it applies to adoption,⁹⁵ justification,⁹⁶ sanctification,⁹⁷ and glorification.⁹⁸ Gaffin has performed the service of providing the exegetical basis for formulating the intimacy of the mystical union of the believer with

⁹⁴ Ibid., 125-126.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 127. "In other words, o`risqe,ntoj seems calculated to underscore what is already indicated when it is recognized on the basis of other considerations that ui`ou/ qeou/ is a messianic designation: the resurrection of Jesus is his *adoption* (as the second Adam).

⁹⁶ Ibid., 131. "In other words, the resurrection of Christ is regarded here as his justification or, perhaps better, as his entering upon a state of being justified." On page 134 Gaffin continues to write in the same vein when he says, "For if it is the case that Jesus' being delivered up (his death) on account of our transgressions involved nothing less than his being identified w us in the condemnation attendant upon and inseparable from our transgressions, indeed, if it is the case that his death is the pointed manifestation of this solidarity in condemnation, then it follows that his beings raised on account of our justification involves nothing less than his identity with us in the justifying verdict attendant upon and inseparable from the righteousness which he established for us (or better, which he established for himself as he was one with us) by his obedience unto death; indeed, it follows that his resurrection is the pointed manifestation of this solidarity in justification. *Plainly the unexpressed assumption is that Jesus' resurrection is his justification.*" Italics mine.

⁹⁷ Gaffin admits that the notion of Christ's resurrection as his sanctification might seem improper. In *RR*, 135 he writes, "At a first glance it might appear improper [*sic*] to speak of Christ's resurrection as his sanctification." Nevertheless, in light of the theme of "solidarity" between Christ and his people that Gaffin is demonstrating, he concludes that "believers' having been raised with Christ is their (definitive) sanctification because Christ's resurrection is *his* sanctification." (p. 136.)

⁹⁸ Gaffin, *RR*, 137 reminds the reader that "glorification which stands at the end is obviously the realization of the predestined goal, namely, conformity to the image of Christ. Now the image of Christ is none other than the image of specifically the *resurrected* Christ (cf. esp. I Cor. 15:49). Hence the patent implication is that what Christ is by virtue of his resurrection believers will become by virtue of their resurrection; as his resurrection is his glorification, so their resurrection is their glorification."

Christ. His theme of Christ's solidarity with Adam's fallen race is in keeping with an increased intimacy in the *ordo salutis*.⁹⁹

Gaffin continues to emphasize the solidarity between Christ and his people in section III.B (Raised with Christ). At the outset, Gaffin situates his argument in the fact that "the notion of having been raised with Christ existentially is exponential, that is, it describes that aspect of the experience of being joined to the resurrected Christ so that in experience his resurrection is mine."¹⁰⁰ This means that,

in view of the solidarity involved, being raised with Christ has the same significance for believers that his resurrection has for Christ. To be more exact, the notion that the believer has been raised with Christ bring into view all that characterizes him as a result of having been joined to Christ *as resurrected*. It means nothing less than that he has been justified, adopted, sanctified and glorified with Christ or, again better, that *he has been united with the Christ* who is justified, adopted, sanctified and glorified, and so by virtue of this (existential) identity shares these benefits.¹⁰¹

Gaffin provides a double benefit with the above citation. In the first place, he provides grounds for a fruitful discussion about the nature of the mystical union of the believer with Christ. Second, is his notion of "(existential) identity." That is, Gaffin gives ample grounds for a true, existential explanation of the *unio*. Gaffin's work aids in taking the *ordo* out of the realm of the abstract and placing it firmly within the context. By his own admission Gaffin states that being united with Christ and the existential identity in the shared benefits "points to the true magnitude of our findings."¹⁰² "For if the central line of argument up to this point is correct, then, it follows as a corollary that everywhere Paul speaks of the believer's justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification or any of

⁹⁹ Ibid., 137. "The resurrection of Christ is the resurrection of the last Adam; its significance is completely exhausted in terms of his solidarity with those for whom he purchased redemption."

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 138.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 140. Emphasis RG.

¹⁰² Ibid.

the other benefits connected with these, there the more basic, underlying consideration is resurrection with Christ, that is, (existential) union with Christ as resurrected.”¹⁰³

For the purposes of this dissertation Gaffin makes certain important statements regarding the doctrine of justification by faith. He says, “Not justification by faith but union with the resurrected Christ by faith (of which union, to be sure, the justifying aspect stands out perhaps most prominently) is the central motif of Pauline soteriology.”¹⁰⁴ Moreover it is understood as a consequence “That the subjectively transforming elements of soteric experience are aspects of having been raised with Christ and flow from union with him is clear from passages like Ephesians 2:5f. and Romans 6:3ff. and needs no further argument.”¹⁰⁵ This means that “According to Romans 8:34, justification depends not simply on an action in the past experience of the believer but on his present relation to the person of the resurrected Christ (cf. I Cor. 15:17).”¹⁰⁶

Having examined these two key sections of Gaffin’s dissertation, we shall now turn our attention to his conclusions, for it is there that he raises his most trenchant questions regarding the *ordo salutis*.¹⁰⁷ Gaffin’s exegesis has led him to conclude “that the resurrection of Christ is *the* pivotal factor in the whole of the apostle’s soteriological teaching.”¹⁰⁸ The practical implications and applications for the location of this “pivotal factor” is that “Justification, adoption, sanctification and glorification all have a common

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 143.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 143-144.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 146. “In the Introduction the question was also raised concerning the possible dogmatic consequences of a recognition of the way in which Paul’s thinking is controlled by his redemptive-historical outlook. In the light of the present study it would appear that there are indeed important doctrinal implications. These can be indicated most conveniently by employing a comparison suggested, among other consideration, by the discussion toward the end of Part III (A,4 and B), namely, a comparison between the structure of Paul’s resurrection soteriology and the traditional dogmatic conception of the *ordo salutis*.”

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

redemptive-historical, resurrection-qualified origin and complexion. From this it has appeared further as with Christ so with believers, that these are not distinct acts but different facets of a *single act*, in the case of the latter, the act of being raised with Christ, that is, being joined to Christ *qua* resurrected.”¹⁰⁹

Gaffin’s concern is to make the mystical union of the believer with Christ a true unity within the context of God’s redemptive-historical, covenantal purposes for his people. At the same time, as was seen above, Gaffin is equally concerned about the existential element within the “order of salvation.” It is not surprising, therefore, that Gaffin cites Bavinck as one that was concerned about the inherent dangers of an all-too-rigid *ordo*. He writes, “And it is the opinion of Herman Bavinck that especially where the *ordo salutis* is concerned, dogmatics is neither interested in simply stringing together biblical concepts nor required to employ biblical terms in precisely the same sense which they have in Scripture.”¹¹⁰

It would seem, therefore, that both Gaffin and Bavinck approximate each other. Even though there are some differences between the two, it is undeniable that they stand in very close proximity on many points. Bavinck, for example, was strongly in favor of a redemptive-historical approach to Scripture. In addition, he was opposed to a purely scholastic approach to theology and that opposition carried over to the doctrine of the *ordo salutis* as the citation from *GD3:597* manifests. Moreover, both Bavinck and Gaffin share the notion of the existential element in soteriology. Both of these scholars have offered an important improvement in the doctrine of the order of salvation by emphasizing the key role biblical existentiality plays in faith. S.J. Meijers devoted an

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

entire doctoral dissertation to the topic. Bolt, too, has rightly focused on this important element.

As Gaffin continues in his conclusions, there are other points of contact with Bavinck's thinking. For example, Gaffin writes, "First and foremost the traditional *ordo salutis* lacks the exclusively eschatological air which pervades the entire Pauline soteriology. . . .For the apostle soteriology *is* eschatology."¹¹¹ The link between Bavinck and Gaffin is also close here for the former holds that eschatology is rooted in Christology and is, indeed, Christology.¹¹² Syd Hielema has noted this statement by Bavinck and has written a doctoral thesis on it.

Both Gaffin and Bavinck have very similar perspectives on this matter. As Gaffin says, "All soteric experience derives from solidarity in Christ' resurrection and its existence in the new aeon. As the most plausible understanding of Romans 8:30 reflects, the present as well as the future of the believer is conceived of eschatologically. This understanding [*sic*] of present Christian existence as an (exchatological) [*sic*] tension between resurrection realized and yet to be realized is totally foreign to the traditional *ordo salutis*."¹¹³

Gaffin has made an important discovery here and is correct in his assessment. In the "traditional" view "justification, adoption, sanctification (and regeneration) are deprived of any eschatological significance and any really integral connection with the future."¹¹⁴

What this means for the traditional view is that "Eschatology enters the *ordo salutis* only

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 147, quoting *GD3:597*.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 149.

¹¹² *GD4:667*. "De eschatologie wortelt daarom in the Christologie en is zelve Christologie, leer van den eindelijk, volkomen triumf van Christus en van zijn rijk over al zijne vijanden."

¹¹³ Gaffin, *RR*, 149.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

as that which stands at a more or less isolated distance in the future, namely, glorification, is taken up for discussion within the *locus de novissimis*.”¹¹⁵

Gaffin is correct in this since it is inconsequential for Reformed theologians who speak about the “already” and “not yet” aspects of the eschaton really to discuss eschatology as a more or less isolated *locus* of theology. Both Bavinck and Gaffin are concerned to maintain eschatology within the total framework of soteriology and not merely in one phase—glorification—of it.

This is not to say that Gaffin has no criticisms of Bavinck. Bavinck, like all of us, was a child of his time. One of Gaffin’s criticisms of the traditional view of the order of salvation has to do with treating the various facets of that order as separate acts. As he puts it, “Nothing distinguishes the traditional *ordo salutis* more than the insistence that the justification, adoption and sanctification which occur at the inception of the application of redemption are separate acts.”¹¹⁶ In a footnote, Gaffin especially singles out Murray, Berkhof, and Bavinck, even though he acknowledges that there are others that share the same sentiment.¹¹⁷

Gaffin’s point is that “Paul views them not as *distinct acts* but as *distinct aspects* of a single act.”¹¹⁸ At this point it is clear that Bavinck and Gaffin share much in common. In Gaffin’s previous citation of Bavinck (*GD3:597*), he pointed out that Bavinck did not

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 149-150, footnote 9. There Gaffin says the following. “That his is the plain assumption of the other leading Reformed dogmaticians (Kuyper, Hodge, Shedd) can hardly be disputed. The question whether these acts and others (regeneration, faith) in their mutual relations are always only logically (causally) distinct or in some instances may be also temporally distinct need not be entered into here except to note that the apparently popular tendency in orthodox Reformed circles to view regeneration as temporally prior to faith (and justification) is an index of how thinking is regulated by the notion of the plurality of acts. In this connection it is also worth pointing out that so finished and versatile a dogmatician as Bavinck maintained the temporal priority of regeneration to faith: ‘Maar de wedergeboorte in enger zin, als instorting van het beginsel des nieuwen levens, kan ook temporeel aan het geloof voorafgaan’ (*Dogmatiek*, IV, 100: ‘However, regeneration in the narrower sense, as the infusion of the principle of new life, can also precede faith temporally.’)”

hold to precisely the same view as those Gaffin is now criticizing.¹¹⁹ Yet, in the very next sentence in *GD3:597*, Bavinck elucidates what he means. He says, “Regeneration, faith, conversion, renewal *etc.* repeatedly do not designate successive moments along the way of salvation, but summarize, in a single word, the total change that grips man.”¹²⁰ This means, most certainly, that even though Bavinck had not thoroughly extricated himself from certain forms of thinking, he was different from Shedd, Hodge, and Kuyper, even though he shared their Reformed life and worldview.

To return to Gaffin, his critique of the traditional view of the *ordo* focuses on something more in-depth. It is not merely that the traditional structure is fraught with unbiblical patterns or priorities (*i.e.*, temporal, logical, causal), but rather goes much deeper. “Rather, more basic and crucial is the fact that the former is confronted with the insoluble difficulty of trying to explain how these acts are related to the act of being joined *existentially* to Christ.”¹²¹

In this regard, Gaffin asks two pertinent questions. “If at the point of inception this union is prior (and therefore involves the possession in the inner man of all that Christ is as resurrected), what need is there for the other acts? Conversely, if the other acts are in some sense prior, is not union improperly subordinated and its biblical significance severely attenuated, to say the least?”¹²² It is within this context that Gaffin suggests that John Murray has offered one of the best summaries of the mystical union. In a footnote

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 149-150. Italics—RG.

¹¹⁹ The translation of *GD3:597* is this. “Thus there is here even less concern than elsewhere in dogmatics simply to place the concepts occurring in Holy Scripture next to each other or to think that the terms which dogmatics employs contain precisely the same content which they have in Holy Scripture.”

¹²⁰ *GD3:597*. Bavinck also approvingly cites W. Schmidt’s *Dogmatics* where he states, “Ihre Ausdrücke sind sozusagen Kollektivbegriffe, die nicht sowohl einzelne Stadien oder Stufe, Grade oder entwicklungsphasen bezeichnen, sondern die vollendete Thatsache selbst.” Emphasis mine.

¹²¹ Gaffin, *RR*, 150.

Gaffin says, “Professor Murray (*Redemption – Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 201-213) has given what is perhaps the best summary treatment of the doctrine of the union with Christ. His insistence, however, that (in its existential aspect) union is not to be coordinated with the others acts in the application of redemption but underlies them and binds them together (p. 205) is not and cannot be made intelligible in terms of the *ordo* of separate acts with which he is working.”¹²³

Herein lies Gaffin’s complaint: Murray speaks of an “all-embracive” aspect of the mystical union but only in the sense that it *underlies* the others facets of the application of redemption, not in the sense that it cannot be *coordinated* along with them as an element in the *ordo salutis*. Murray, therefore, can speak of the *unio* as “all-embracive,” but in Gaffin’s estimation, falls short of the Pauline understanding of it.

Gaffin offers an example of how the mystical union ought to be coordinated with, say, regeneration. “All this is simply to say that the use of *paliggenesi*,^a in Titus 3:5 will have to find its explanation as a subordinate element in the apostle’s resurrection theology. More particularly, as it has reference to the present (or past) experience of being raised with Christ, that is, the experience of *being joined to the resurrected Christ*.”¹²⁴ The following quotation is somewhat lengthy, but germane and pertinent to Gaffin’s argument so it will be fully cited.

This last observation points to a real difference, a basic incongruity. Even though it has thought improperly in terms of separate acts, Reformed soteriology has taken over with exemplary faithfulness those Pauline doctrines which bear upon the inception of the application of redemption. Precisely because of this fidelity, however, the inclusion of

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., 150, footnote 11. Gaffin goes on to criticize past Reformed theologians when he says, “In the past Reformed dogmatics has not recognized or acknowledged the dilemma posed above simply because, against the background of its covenant concept, it has equivocated on the notion of union with Christ, using union (being contemplated [*sic*] one) with Christ in the design and accomplishment or redemption (Bavinck: ‘de objectieve unio mystica’) as working capital in the area of application.”

¹²⁴ Ibid., 153. Emphasis mine.

that factor which more than any other has come to distinguish it, namely, its doctrine of regeneration works as something foreign and extraneous in comparison with the apostle's *ordo*. This is not at all to say that Paul jeopardizes what the Reformed doctrine of regeneration has sought to safeguard. Nothing could be more alien to his teaching than the notion that the sinner in and of himself possesses some spark of life or the capacity for faith.¹²⁵

Paul's repeated emphasis upon the Holy Spirit as the sole source and communicator of life (in the saving sense) all prohibit us from attributing such a notion about regeneration to him.¹²⁶ God is sovereign and saves man by the "irrevocable efficacy and power" of his calling. "Yet this calling realizes its enlivening function only in the establishing of fellowship with Christ (I Cor. 1:9), the life-giving Spirit, apart from whom there is neither life nor justification nor adoption nor sanctification nor any other soteric reality; and for the effecting of this union faith is the necessary instrument."¹²⁷

This statement is in complete agreement with Gaffin's findings. Notice how he weaves the various strands of thought together. God is completely sovereign is issuing and efficaciously administering the call. It comes to man by God's irrevocable efficacy and power. Next, Gaffin emphasizes the life-giving work and working of the Holy Spirit with a view to the call and the other aspects of redemption. Finally, he points to the place of faith. It is the "instrument" by which all of the benefits and treasures of Christ are apprehended and appropriated.

Quite rightly, this may be called Gaffin's "correlation" approach to the matter. In his own words he says, "It would appear, then, that in the apostle's soteriology there is a

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 153-154. "Paul's sustained emphasis upon the Spirit as the sole source and communicator of *zwh*, in the soteric sense, his constant stress upon faith as an expression of this life (e.g., I Cor. 2:4f.; I Thess. 1:5; II Cor. 3:3 in connection with I Cor. 3:5; II Cor. 4:13) as well as his insistence upon the absolute, all-embracing, unqualified antithesis between the natural man and the Spiritual man (I Cor. 2:14f.), between the 'flesh' and the Spirit (Romans 8:5ff.; Gal. 5:16ff.), all prohibit attributing to him such a conception. The origin of the believer's faith lies not in himself but in the calling of God, a calling activity which in its irrevocable efficacy and power is life-giving and creative (Rom. 4:17; 11:29; Eph. 1:18-20; II Tim. 1:9)."

correlation between Christ as life-giving and the believer as life-receiving (i.e., Christ-receiving) which carries back to the very inception point of salvation, a correlation which characterizes the *single act* of being joined to Christ.”¹²⁸ Gaffin is not positing a kind of “50-50” salvation where God does his part and then leaves it up to man to do his. Quite the contrary is the case. Gaffin’s exegesis has led him to the conclusion that the existential aspect of the mystical union must not be viewed either as an appendage or as something that somehow underlies the order of salvation without actually being coordinate to each of the facets. This “existential” character is a far cry from a man-centered soteriology. Gaffin’s correlation idea is akin to B.B. Warfield’s notion of “synergism.” Since this last term is susceptible to being misunderstood and since Gaffin quotes Warfield approvingly in this regard we shall allow the Princeton theologian to explain what he means. “There is certainly synergism here; but it is a synergism of such character that not only is the initiative taken by God, but the Divine action is in the exceeding greatness of God’s power, according to the working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead (Eph. 1:19).”¹²⁹

Without a doubt, Gaffin has produced an important study for the Reformed world. He has provided depth of insight into the controversy in Reformed circles surrounding the *ordo salutis* and how it ought to be conceived along New Testament lines. He has couched his study within the framework of God’s redemptive-historical actions in the covenant of grace and has also included the much-needed element of *existential* union with Christ without falling into the trap of subjectivism.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 154.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid. Gaffin is quoting from Warfield’s article entitled “On the Biblical Notion of ‘Renewal’” (p. 451).

Even though Gaffin is critical of Bavinck at certain points, there is a clear affinity between them and often they seem to be speaking of the same or similar matters from slightly diverging perspectives. As will become increasingly evident in the course of this work, Gaffin and Bavinck are very close in their assessment of the *ordo salutis*.

Louis Berkhof.

Berkhof's stance in the present discussion on the order of salvation is what may be called a "mediating" one. Berkhof admits that the Word of God "does not *explicitly* furnish the believer with a complete order of salvation."¹³⁰ It does, however, offer us "a sufficient basis for such an order."¹³¹ Berkhof is cognizant of the fact that the application of God's grace to the individual sinner is a "unitary" process, but further admits that there are various "movements" that can be distinguished in that process.¹³²

Berkhof concedes "that the work of the application of redemption proceeds in a definite and reasonable order, and that God does not impart the fullness of his salvation to the sinner in a single act."¹³³

He therefore ends up with an order of salvation that looks like this: Calling (external calling preceding internal calling), regeneration, conversion (including repentance and faith), justification, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification.¹³⁴

It is obvious that Berkhof, like Gaffin, was well acquainted with Bavinck. His *Systematic Theology* contains many references to Bavinck's works. The question that faces us at this juncture, however, is to what extent Berkhof was able to grasp and

¹³⁰ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969¹¹), p. 416. Hereafter *ST*. Italics—RG.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 416-418.

incorporate Bavinck's thinking into his own methodology. Did Berkhof take all of the essentials that Bavinck taught regarding the *ordo salutis* and teach them in his *Systematic Theology*? It is my belief that he did not. Berkhof's approach is more rationalistic than Bavinck's and did not make use of the various insights Bavinck gave theology in his theological methodology as well as in the relationship between the objective and subjective.

G.C. Berkouwer.

A cursory reading of Berkouwer's *Dogmatische Studiën*, reveals a deep appreciation for the theology of Herman Bavinck even though he is not above criticizing him. In all his writings, Berkouwer is constantly engaged in a "dialogue" with Bavinck.

The first volume of Berkouwer's series is entitled *Geloof en Rechtvaardiging* (Faith and Justification). In the second chapter of that work, Berkouwer discusses what he calls "the way of salvation." (Dutch: *De Weg des Heils*.) Rather than speak of an "order" of salvation, he substitutes "the way" of redemption. This is not accidental. Berkouwer chose his wording carefully and consciously. In the first paragraph of that second chapter Berkouwer refers to the structure of Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* with appreciation.¹³⁵ Bavinck handles Christ's humiliation followed by Christ's exaltation and from there moves on to discuss the order of salvation. From his exposition of the threefold office of Christ Bavinck handles the application of the salvation Christ obtained for his people.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ G.C. Berkouwer, *Geloof en Rechtvaardiging*, (Kampen: Kok, 1949), p. 23. He writes, "Als Bavinck het werk van Christus in Zijn vernedering en verhoging heeft behandeld, gaat hij direct over tot de heilsorde. Het is duidelijk, dat er z.i. een zeer nauwe samenhang bestaat tussen het werk van de verhoogde Heiland en deze heilsorde. Dat werk bestaat nl. daarin, dat Christus in de hemel Zijn profetische, priesterlijke en koninklijke werkzaamheid vóórtzet en de orde des heils hangt hiermee onverbreekelijk samen, omdat zij handelt over de 'toepassing' van het door Christus verworven heil." Hereafter *GR*.

¹³⁶ Berkouwer, *GR*, 23.

What motivated Berkouwer to raise this matter of the *ordo salutis* in his first book in his series of studies in Dogmatics? He describes his concern in terms of the objective and subjective sides of salvation being placed next to each other in a “mechanical” fashion.¹³⁷ Berkouwer’s concern arose from what he refers to as a “serious decadence process” that began in the eighteenth century.¹³⁸ Berkouwer’s concern, then, had to do with the mechanical, scholastic manner in which the order of salvation was being treated in theology. Eighteenth century theology brought with it strong speculative and rationalistic elements. What this process produced was not an appreciation for the richness of the salvation of the Lord as much as it did for the regenerate or believing man “in the various stages of his life and in all the psychological variation of his existence.”¹³⁹

In contrast with eighteenth century theology, the Reformation produced a “simpler” and “purer” way of dealing with the order of salvation by placing it in the correlation between grace and faith.¹⁴⁰ Men such as Heinrich Bullinger spoke of the *dispensatio salutis* whereby he thought first of God and the “Outpourer” and “Dispenser” of redemption. The later “disintegration” of theology focused more on the believing subject and the order of salvation than on the salvation itself.¹⁴¹ In other words, later theology

¹³⁷ Ibid. “Over deze ‘applicatie’ is in de dogmatiek heel veel te doen geweest en met name heeft men op deze applicatie kritiek uitgeoefend, omdat men meende, dat zo het heil verdeeld werd over een objectieve en een subjectieve zijde, die dan mechanisch naast elkaar werden geplaatst.”

¹³⁸ Ibid. “Men zeg bovendien in de heilsorde een ernstig decadentie-proces een wees er op, dat ze—in de dogmatische betekenis van het woord—eerst in de 18e eeuw tot ontwikkeling was gekomen.”

¹³⁹ Ibid. “In die ontwikkeling bespeurt men dan in de voortgaande systematisering een sterk speculatief, rationalistisch element òf men ziet in dit proces een groeiende belangstelling, niet zozeer voor de rijkdom van het heil des Heren als wel voor de wedergeboren of gelovige mens in de verschillende stadiën van z’n leven en in al de psychologische variatie van z’n bestaan.”

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. “In dit verband wijst men er op, dat de Reformatie simpeler en daardoor zuiverder handelde, toen zij de weg des heils spande in het éne raam der correlatie” genade—geloof.”

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 24. “en zo meende men vooral in later tijd die verschuiving te kunnen waarnemen, die als vanzelf leidde tot een schematisering van het heil, een ‘Symptom der Zersetzung.’ Men ziet heir vooral de fout, dat men in the Reformatie-tijd, toen Bullinger sprak van de ‘dispensatio salutis’ nog allereerst dacht aan God als Schenker en Uitdeler van het heil, terwijl men later in de heilsorde meer op de gelovige *mens* was gericht en op de *orde* van het heil meer nadruk legde dan op *het heil zelf*.”

tended towards the codification of the *ordo* and lost sight of the God of the *ordo* in the process.

Berkouwer mentions in this regard the criticism that the Dutch theologian K.H. Miskotte leveled against the structure of Bavinck's theology. The criticism is predicated upon what Miskotte believes to be missing in the structure of Bavinck's theology. Miskotte conjectures that there is actually no *locus* in Bavinck's theology on the Holy Spirit. He draws this conclusion because Bavinck's chapters on the Person and Work of Christ are immediately followed by the way of salvation (*heilsorde*) and the benefits of the covenant of grace (*weldaden des verbonds*).¹⁴²

To Berkouwer it is clear that the current controversies he was facing regarding the order or way of salvation had to do with the *order* receiving its own existence, separate from the God of the order of salvation.¹⁴³ Theologians began increasingly to speak of "phases" of redemption.¹⁴⁴ This is incorrect according to Berkouwer because the lines along which God leads men to his salvation are so varied that it is impossible to establish the process in immovable boundaries.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, no "moment" in the order should be given an independent status from the other "moments."¹⁴⁶

What should be the case? In spite of Miskotte's criticisms of the structure of Bavinck's theology, Berkouwer quotes from Bavinck in an approving fashion as he seeks

¹⁴² Ibid. "In dezelfde richting ligt wel het bezwaar, dat Miskotte inbrengt tegen Bavinck's dogmatiek, waarin hij het bedenkelijk acht 'dat er eigenlijk geen locus over de Heilige Geest is, omdat de leer van het werk Jesu Christi onmiddellijk voortschrijdt naar de 'heilsorde' en de 'weldaden des verbonds.'"

¹⁴³ Ibid., 24-25.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 25. "Men ziet er een miskennis in van de objectiviteit van het heil Gods en meent deze ook daarin te bespeuren, dat de rechtvaardiging van haar allesbeheersende plaats verdrongen wordt en geworden is tot een 'phase' in het heilsproces."

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 26. "De lijnen, waarlangs God de mensen leidt tot Zijn heil, zijn zo gevarieerd, dat het onmogelijk is dit proces in vaste stadia te fixeren."

the solution to the disintegration brought about by the eighteenth century. “It has to do much more with ‘the displaying of the treasures of redemption and salvation, which God let Christ obtain for his Church and who dispenses them by the Holy Spirit’ and therefore ‘to make all the benefits known, that are contained in the one great work of salvation.’”¹⁴⁷

Berkouwer cites Calvin as one who correctly divided the Word of God on the matter of the order of salvation. There are several matters that Berkouwer draws to the reader’s attention in defense of his position. In the first place, faith has a solid foundation, which is the gracious promise of God.¹⁴⁸ The promises of God remain unfruitful for the sinner, however, unless they are paired with the work and the working of the Holy Spirit. He is the “key” that opens the door to the riches or treasures of the Kingdom of Heaven.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, Berkouwer concludes that Calvin’s vision faith worked by the Holy Spirit is so strong that it dominates all of his explanations of the way of salvation.¹⁵⁰ Berkouwer interprets Calvin’s explanations as a continual circling around the one middle-point: salvation in Christ.¹⁵¹ Calvin cannot and should not be criticized for not having a systematic approach to the order of salvation. Although he did not teach an “order of salvation” in the later sense of that phrase, there is certainly an order in Calvin’s thinking.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. “Dat het orde-moment geen zelfstandige betekenis heeft, maar alleen vanuit de volheid van het heil wordt bepaald, wordt vooral hierin duidelijk, dat de dogmatiek niet samenvalt met de psychologie der bekering en niet beschrijft alle stadia, waarin de mens op de weg des heils verkeert.”

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. “Het gaat er veelmeer om ‘de schatten van heil en zaligheid ten toon te stellen, welke God door Christ voor Zijn gemeente heeft laten verwerven en door de Heilige Geest aan haar uitdeelt’ en zo ‘al de weldaden te doen kennen, die in het éne grote werk der verlossing begrepen zijn.’” Berkouwer is quoting from *GD3*²:596-597.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 27, citing *Inst.*3.2.29.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. “. . .met grote nadruk onderstreept Calvijn, dat alleen door de Heilige Geest de belofte der zaligheid in onze harten doordringt. De Heilige Geest kan de sleutel genoemd worden, waardoor de schatten van het hemelse koninkrijk ons ontsloten worden.”

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. “Zo centraal is voor Calvijn deze visie op het door de Heilige Geest gewerkte geloof, dat het al z’n uiteenzettingen over de weg des heils blijft beheersen.”

¹⁵¹ Ibid. “Men kan Calvijns uiteenzettingen beschrijven als een voortdurend cirkelen om het ene middelpunt: het heil in Christus.”

That “order” is derived from redemption drawn from the middle-point: Christ.¹⁵² Every other line that is drawn from that middle-point touches the relationship between faith and the salvation that is from God.¹⁵³

It should not be concluded that there was no place for man in his correlation method. Theology focuses on God, but includes what God has done and is doing for man. It is really a question of priority. Theology must be God-centered and, at the same time, speak of what God graciously does for man in his redemptive-historical dealing with man. Berkouwer himself admits that salvation is concerned with human life to the very depths of the believing subject.¹⁵⁴

What this means for theology according to Berkouwer is that the task of the theologian is to focus exclusively on *sola fide* and *sola gratia*. It is only in and through this manner that Christ as *the way* can be confessed.¹⁵⁵

It is my belief that Miskotte misunderstood Bavinck and his theology. As will be amply demonstrated Bavinck followed Scripture and Calvin very closely in ascribing a central place to the Holy Spirit in the application of the obtained salvation. Moreover, we shall also see that Bavinck describes an unbreakable relationship between the Holy Spirit and Christ. It will become patently clear that Miskotte did not capture the essence of Bavinck’s theology with his criticism.

¹⁵² Ibid., 28. “Ook als is er bij Calvijn niet een ‘heilsorde’ in de latere zin des woords, er is wèl een orde, die vanuit het heil in Christus bepaald is.”

¹⁵³ Ibid. “En alle lijnen, die vanuit dit middelpunt getrokken worden, raken de verhouding tussen het geloof en het heil des Heren.”

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 31. “Het gaat immers in het heil om het menselijk leven, tot in alle diepten der subjectiviteit.”

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. “Daarom is het nodig zich voortdurend rekenschap te geven van het feit, dat het uiteindelijk op de ganse weg des heils ‘slechts’ gaat om de exclusiviteit van het ‘sola fide’ en het ‘sola gratia’. Want alleen zo kan beleden worden, dat deze weg Christus is.”

Before Bavinck's position on the way of salvation is described, however, it would be helpful to understand how Berkouwer arrived at his theological methodology and his disdain for eighteenth century theology. Many have chronicled his theological pilgrimage, but few have done a more admirable job than Hendrikus Berkhof and W.D. Jonker, even though G.W. de Jong and J.C. de Moor have both written doctoral dissertations on his methodology.¹⁵⁶ What typified Berkouwer's methodology?

Berkouwer's theological method.

Few have captured the essence of Berkouwer's methodology better than Hendrikus Berkhof¹⁵⁷ and W.D. Jonker.¹⁵⁸ I shall describe what they find as quintessential to Berkouwer's methodology in brief form.

Berkhof describes three phases in the development of Berkouwer's methodology. The first phase is that of the absolute authority of Scripture.¹⁵⁹

The second phase occurred in what Berkhof describes as an "apologetic-polemic" situation.¹⁶⁰ In this phase, Berkouwer engaged in polemics against his own Reformed tradition, especially, the figures of Kuyper, Hoeksema, and Van Til.¹⁶¹ Also in this phase Berkouwer concentrated on the *content* of salvation found in the Bible.

¹⁵⁶ See G.W. de Jong, *De Theologie van Dr. G.C. Berkouwer*, Een Strukturele Analyse (Doctoral dissertation, Free University of Amsterdam), (Kampen: Kok, 1971.) and J.C. de Moor, *Towards a Biblically Theo-Logical Method, A Structural Analysis and a Further Elaboration of Dr. G.C. Berkouwer's Hermeneutic-Dogmatic Method*, (Doctoral dissertation, Free University of Amsterdam), (Kampen: Kok, 1980.)

¹⁵⁷ H. Berkhof, "De Methode van Berkouwers Theologie, in *Ex Auditu Verbi*, (Kampen: Kok, 1965), pp. 37-55. Hereafter *Methode*.

¹⁵⁸ W.D. Jonker, "Dogmatiek en Heilige Skrif," in *Septuagesimo Anno*, (Kampen: Kok, 1973), pp. 86-111. Hereafter *DHS*.

¹⁵⁹ Berkhof, *Methode*, 40, "Eerste fase: het volstreckte gezag der Schrift. Berkouwers dissertatie van 1932 was tegelijk een methodologisch program. Zij richt zich tegen de 'subjectief-objectieve polariteit' zoals deze in de nieuwere duitse theologie wordt voorgedragen."

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 44-45, "In deze periode valt ook een duidelijke polemiek tegen intellectualistische element in de eigen calvinistische traditie (Kuyper, Hoeksema [*sic*], Van Til e.a.)."

His third phase led him to emphasize the truly existential nature of the Scripture.¹⁶² In this case, his criticism was directed more towards his own Reformed tradition as it was found in the Heidelberg Catechism and Canons of Dort.¹⁶³ Berkouwer was reacting to what he perceived to be elements of objectivism in his tradition. It should be noted in passing that this criticism should have come as no surprise since his volume on election (*De Verkiezing Gods*) had already been published where many of these complaints could be found. What was Berkouwer attempting to accomplish in this “phase” of his theological development? Berkhof summarizes Berkouwer’s efforts as an attempt to free the Reformed church and the Dutch Christians from their dogmatism.¹⁶⁴

Jonker’s comments are somewhat similar. What moved Berkouwer the most was what he perceived as the threat of scholasticism among the Reformed.¹⁶⁵ The answer to that threat was to develop a biblical theology where he moved away from the notion of Holy Scripture as the *unicum principium cognoscendi* as far as the content of dogmatic statements is concerned. The problem here is what Berkouwer perceived to be an (mechanical) notion situated in the word *principium*.

¹⁶² Ibid., 48.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 49.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 55, “Elke ware dogmaticus heeft kritisch en thetisch er voor te waken dat de Schrift verstaan wordt zo als ze hier en nu gehoord moet worden. Berkouwer gebruikt daarvoor de correlatie-methode om ons, Gereformeerden en Nederlanders, van ons dogmatisme te bevrijden [*sic*].”

¹⁶⁵ Jonker, *DHS*, 86, Waarin bestaan presies die kenmerkende van die teologie van Berkouwer? In haas alles wat gedurende die afgelope aantal jare oor Berkouwer geskryf is, word hierdie vraag beantwoord deur te wys op Berkouwer se oortuiging dat die korrelasie tussen geloof en openbaring ‘n fundamentele rol in ons teologiese denke behoort te speel. Vanuit hierdie uitgangspunt, word dan gesê, kom Berkouwer tot sy tipies eksistensiële en nie-spekulatiewe dogmatiek wat daarin geslaag het om *die dreigende skolastiek binne die kerklike kringe waarin hy beweeg, af te weer en die dogmatiese besinning tot ‘n nuwe, bybelse oriëntasie te lei.*” Emphasis mine—R.G.

In addition, Berkouwer desired to introduce the existential element by using *sola scriptura* as a “reflection” of a theological method.¹⁶⁶ The result of this “negative” and “positive” was a biblical theology that typified Berkouwer.¹⁶⁷

Jonker applauds Berkouwer’s refusal to use the Bible with a “proof-text” mentality.¹⁶⁸ Berkouwer’s emphasis on the Bible has direct consequences for his dogmatic method. Jonker outlines two.

The first is the “freedom of the Scripture to dominate and correct our thinking.”¹⁶⁹ This can only take place when the dogmatician is never satisfied with a *formal* acknowledgment of Scripture. He must continually submit himself in a prayerful and listening posture to Scripture.¹⁷⁰ This is key for Berkouwer’s position for he believes that the living Word of God is a living instrument that God uses in the proclamation of the message of salvation.¹⁷¹ Therefore, it cannot be forced or coerced into a manmade construct.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 87.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. “Dit is hierdie oorweging wat ons die vrymoedigheid laat neem om—na alles wat daar al oor Berkouwer geskrywe is—not ‘n keer die aandag te vra vir die kenmerkende van sy teologie. Na ons mening moet die daarin gesoek word dat Berkouwer in alle erns probeer het om te doen wat volgens Ebeling nog nie met sukses in die reformatoriese teologie gedoen is nie, nl. om nie net die Heilige Skrif te beskou as die unicum principium cognoscendi wat die *in houd* van die dogmatiese uitsprake betref nie, maar óók om ‘die Bedeutung des sola scriptura für das Verfahren der Theologie *methodologisch* durchzureflectieren.’ Die resultaat hiervan was die ‘bybelse teologie’ wat so tipies van Berkouwer is.”

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 89-90, “As hy in één ding geslaag het, dan was dit daarin dat hy ons bewus gemaak het van die verband tussen dogmatiek en *eksegese*. Die woord *eksegese* moet daarby onderstreep word, omdat dit vir Berkouwer nie slegs gegaan het om die aanhaling van bepaalde Skrifplekke as bewyse vir leerstellige uitsprake (*dicta probantia*) nie, maar om ‘n luister na die Skrif self in sy vreemdheid.”

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 92.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Comp. G.C. Berkouwer, *De Heilige Schrift*, Vol. II, (Kampen: Kok, 1967), pp. 395, 404.

¹⁷² Jonker, *DHS*, 92, “Dit is duidelik dat Berkouwer hom alleen op hierdie standpunt kan stel, omdat hy die Heilige Skrif nie benader as ‘een metafysisch document’, of as ‘n opslagplek van ‘n aantal geopenbaarde waarhede wat maklik in skema gebring kan word nie, maar ‘als een levend instrument, dat God dient in de verkondiging van de boodschap des heils’, as die Woord van God ‘waarin de levende God sprekend met de mens wil omgaan.’”

This leads Jonker to the second point of Berkouwer's methodology. The boundary of the Scripture's speaking is simultaneously the boundary of theological reflection.¹⁷³ This manifests Berkouwer's disdain for speculation and rationalism. His correlation between faith and revelation would have prevented him from positing a strict "order" of salvation.

All the reasons mentioned above play a role in why Berkouwer typifies the eighteenth century as the intrusion of strong speculative and rationalistic elements into theology. He is convinced that the eighteenth century manifested a movement away from the riches of redemption in Christ and focused more on the regenerated or believing subject.¹⁷⁴

The period of the Reformation, on the other hand, was simpler and purer in the manner in which it treated the way of salvation. How did the Reformers accomplish this? According to Berkouwer, it was completed in the "window" of the correlation between grace and faith.¹⁷⁵

Berkouwer agrees that the shift that took place from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century was a "Symptom der Zersetzung," that is, it was symptomatic of "disintegration."¹⁷⁶ The loss of focus led to a concentration upon man and the order of salvation rather than upon God and the salvation itself.¹⁷⁷ This is another reason why Berkouwer was suspect of methodologies that were not born out of the correlation between faith and revelation.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 93, "Dit is die kondlusie dat *die grens van die spreke van die Skrif ook die grens is vir die teologiese besinning.*"

¹⁷⁴ Berkouwer, *GR*, 23.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 24.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. "Men ziet hier vooral de fout, dat men in de Reformatie-tijd, toen Bullinger sprak van de 'dispensatio salutis' nog allereerst dacht aan God als Schenker en Uitdeler van het heil, terwijl men later in de heilsorde meer op de gelovige *mens* was gericht en op de *orde* van het heil meer nadruk legde dan op *het heil zelf.*" Italics Berkouwer.

He is convinced that the “lines” along which God leads man to His salvation are so varied that it is impossible to establish the process in fixed categories.¹⁷⁸ Berkouwer cites Calvin as one who properly understood the foundation of faith: God’s gracious promise.¹⁷⁹ This entails a strong pneumatological emphasis that dominates the explanation of the way of salvation.¹⁸⁰

Calvin’s explanation can be described as a “constant circling” around the midpoint: Salvation in Christ.¹⁸¹ Since Berkouwer admits that justification by faith is the “dominant pillar” in Calvin’s concentric thinking about salvation, he tacitly has to concede some sort of “order” or precedence of justification over other facets of salvation.¹⁸²

Berkouwer’s solution is that even though one cannot find in Calvin’s works a kind of *ordo salutis*, in the later sense of those words, there is an “order” that is established proceeding from salvation in Christ.¹⁸³

Berkouwer is convinced, however, that it is impossible to take the various words used in the Bible for redemption and position them in an unchangeable order.¹⁸⁴ He argues that Romans 8 is not intended by Paul to give a precise order of salvation since in 1 Corinthians 6:11 he places sanctification before justification.¹⁸⁵ He believes, moreover,

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 26, “De lijnen waarlangs God de mensen leidt tot Zijn heil, zijn zo gevarieerd, dat het onmogelijk is dit proces in vaste stadia te fixeren.”

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. “Zo centraal is voor Calvijn deze visie op het door de Heilige Geest gewerkte geloof, dat het al z’n uiteenzettingen over de weg des heils blijft beheersen.”

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid. “Calvijn is zich van z’n concentrisch denken goed bewust, want hij noemt de rechtvaardiging de voornaamste pijler, waarop de godsdienst rust. Ook hier gaat het enkel en alleen om de correlatie tussen geloof en rechtvaardiging. En na deze relatie opnieuw in ‘t licht gesteld te hebben van de boodschap der Schrift, gaat hij spreken over de Christelijke vrijheid, over het gebed en over de verkiezing.”

¹⁸³ Ibid., 28.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 29.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 30.

that dogmatic reflection upon the way of salvation must always find its “center” in the correlation between faith and justification.¹⁸⁶

Berkouwer’s critique of the *ordo salutis* is this. “Logical systemization is not the highest praise for the reflection of the Church, but the clear and decisive elimination of every way where *Christ* is not exclusively confessed as *the Way of salvation*.¹⁸⁷ He believes that his theological method—following the path of the Reformers—is consistent in understanding and confessing Christ as *the Way*.¹⁸⁸

According to Berkouwer, it is only through the above-mentioned correlation that the sovereignty of grace can be maintained. Christ must be the focus and all of life must be lived *in* Him and *through* Him, so that every attempt at man’s cooperation in the origination of salvation is cut off at the root.¹⁸⁹

A summary of Berkouwer’s method.

Some time has been spent on the theology of G.C. Berkouwer for the reason that his early theology expressed many of the concerns that Bavinck faced. Up to a point, there is a strong agreement between these two. Bavinck wrote a truly Reformed Dogmatics dealing with the various *loci* of theology and Berkouwer did. The *Dogmatische Studiën*, for all their erudition and exegetical insights, lack certain key volumes. For example, Berkouwer never wrote a volume either on creation or the covenant.

In addition, in later volumes Berkouwer’s method took him away from Reformed orthodoxy and into a deeper appreciation for the theology of Karl Barth. Nevertheless, his

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 31.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 35, “Niet de logische systematiek is de hoogste lof voor de bezinning der kerk, maar de duidelijke uitschakeling van alle wegen, waarop Christus niet meer exclusief als *de Weg* wordt beleden.”

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 32, “Men zag dan niet meer, dat het in de heilsorde gaat om de fundamentele vraag of in elke analyse der heilsorde nog consequent Christus alleen als ‘Weg des heils’ wordt verstaan en beleden.”

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

importance is still felt in his insistence on a biblical theology as well as in his emphasis on preaching.

Berkouwer was involved in a controversy in Holland regarding the redemptive-historical method of preaching which also had a powerful impact on his theology.¹⁹⁰ These aspects will be examined in the summary of this chapter. The question will be asked how Bavinck's doctrine of the *ordo* was superior to someone like Berkouwer.

For the present, however, we turn our attention to the concepts regarding the *ordo salutis* as taught by the late Dr. A.A. Hoekema, another man well acquainted with Bavinck.¹⁹¹

A.A. Hoekema's resolution.

Dr. A.A. Hoekema was a Reformed theologian who taught at Calvin Seminary for many years. Though not as prolific a writer as some, he has, nonetheless, left us with some very helpful and instructive works. In *Saved by Grace*,¹⁹² he points out some of the difficulties in theology's decision to speak about an *ordo salutis*.

In the first place, the "terms employed in constructing an *ordo salutis* are not used by Bible writers in the same way in which they are used in systematic theology."¹⁹³

In the second place, the "order in which the various steps in the process of salvation are said to occur is not always the same in the Bible."¹⁹⁴ Here Hoekema cites 1 Corinthians 6:11 as an example, which we saw Berkouwer doing as well.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Berkouwer, *ZV*, 235-366. Also see Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*. Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts, (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1970), for a

¹⁹¹ It should be remembered that Dr. Hoekema wrote his doctoral dissertation on the doctrine of the covenant in Bavinck's theology.

¹⁹² A.A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

¹⁹³ Hoekema, *SBG*, 13. In support of this point, Hoekema interestingly quotes from Bavinck, *GD3*²:682 approvingly. His translation of Bavinck reads as follows: "Regeneration, faith, conversion, renewal, and the like, often [in the Bible]

Thirdly, “. . . Romans 8:30, often used as a basis for constructing a segment of the *ordo salutis*, does not have as its primary purpose that of providing steps in the order of salvation.”¹⁹⁵

In the fourth place, faith “should not be thought of as only one of the steps in the order of salvation; it must continue to be exercised throughout the believer’s life.”¹⁹⁶

Fifth, justification “and sanctification are not successive stages in the Christian life but are simultaneous. It is impossible to receive Christ for justification and not at the same time to receive him for sanctification. . . .”¹⁹⁷

Finally, the “orders suggested by Murray and Berkhof are not complete. Love is not mentioned in either of them, and neither is hope. Yet surely love and hope are just as essential in the process of our salvation as is faith.”¹⁹⁸

Hoekema concludes,

We should think, then, not of an *order of salvation* with successive steps or stages, but rather of a marvelous work of God’s grace—a *way of salvation*—within which we may distinguish various aspects. These aspects, however, are not all of the same sort; they should not therefore all be placed into the same category. For example, some aspects of this way of salvation concern what *man does*, though only in God’s strength (faith and repentance), whereas other aspects concern what *God does* (regeneration and justification). Some aspects are *judicial* acts (justification), whereas other aspects concern the *moral and spiritual renewal* of man (regeneration and sanctification). Some aspects are *instantaneous* actions (regeneration, conversion of the crisis type, definitive sanctification), while other phases are *continuing* actions (progressive sanctification, perseverance).¹⁹⁹

The conclusion of the matter for Hoekema is this. “[T]he various phases of the way of salvation are not to be thought of as a series of successive steps, each of which replaces

do not point to successive steps in the way of salvation but rather summarize in a single word the entire change which takes place in man.”

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 13.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

the preceding, but rather as various simultaneous aspects of the process of salvation which, after they have begun, continue side by side.”²⁰⁰

Hoekema points out that Bavinck was thinking along these lines even in the first edition of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* when he stated that all the benefits involved in salvation are given to the elect at the same time.²⁰¹ In the third edition of his Dogmatics, Bavinck expressed himself in this fashion: “These benefits [involved in salvation] can be distinguished but cannot be separated; like faith, hope, and love they form a triple cord which cannot be broken.”²⁰²

Comparing the first and third (and following) editions of the *GD*, it is evident that Bavinck did not change his thoughts on this key matter. His purpose is to *distinguish* and not to *separate*. Hoekema has captured the essence of Bavinck’s methodology. He maintains the centrality of Christ in all his theology as well as the importance of revelation, the covenant, and the Holy Spirit.

What is also important for the purposes of this section is Hoekema’s understanding of the *unio* within the context of man’s salvation. In his work, *Saved by Grace*, the fourth

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 15-16. Italics his.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 16.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 15, quoting *GD*¹3:485, “Dienovereenkomstig is de heilsorde in drie loci te behandelen: roeping en wedergeboorte (in enger zin), geloof en rechtvaardigmaking, heiligmaking en volharding, cf. Voetius, Disp. II 432 sq. In den eersten locus treedt Christus voornamelijk op als profeet, die door zijn woord ons onderwijst te zaligheid; de H. Geest is daarbij de getuige van Christus, die zijn officium elenticum uitoefent, en door de gratia praeparans, praeveniens en operans ons het beginsel des nieuwen levens schenkt. In den tweeden is Christus voornamelijk de priester, die door het geloof ons zijne gerechtigheid schenkt en van de schuld der zonden ons bevrijdt; de H. Geest oefent daarbij zijn munus paracleticum uit en maakt ons door de gratia illuminans van onze zaligheid zeker. In den derden treedt Christus voornamelijk op als onze koning, die ons door het geloof regeert en beschermt; de H. Geest volbrengt daarbij zijn munus sanctificans en herschept ons door de gratia cooperans, conservans, perficiens naar het evenbeeld van Christus. In Rom. 8:30 noemt Paulus evenzoo drie weldaden op, waarin de prognwsij zich realiseert, n.l. roeping, rechtvaardigmaking en verheerlijking. Al deze weldaden vallen in den tijd; ook het evdoxasen slaat niet op de verheerlijking na den dood of den dag des oordeels, maar blijkens den aoristus op de verheerlijking, die de geloovigen in Paulus’ dagen reeds op aarde ontvingen door de inwoning des Geestes, cf. 2 Cor. 3:18, en die in de glorificatie bij de opstanding ten jongsten dage zich voltooit, 1 Cor. 15:53, Phil. 3:21. *Zij worden in het geloof alle tegelijk aan de uitverkorenen geschonken*, cf. Ook 1 Cor. 6:11, maar daarom bestaat er onder haar nog wel eene logische orde; en deze wordt in den ordo salutis voorgesteld, cf. Gennrich, Studien zur Paulin. Heilsordnung, Stud. U. Krit. 1898 S. 377-431.” Italics mine.

chapter is entitled, “Union with Christ.” Hoekema begins by quoting from John Murray’s work, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, which we have already examined. Hoekema also approvingly cites Calvin that the union with Christ “underlies all of soteriology.”²⁰³ Hoekema ties in the union of Christ with the believer with the work of the Holy Spirit. The importance and exclusivity of the union is emphasized when Hoekema says this. “Only through the Spirit can we become one with Christ and can Christ live in our hearts.”²⁰⁴ The New Testament describes this union in a twofold manner. “Sometimes New Testament authors teach that as believers *we are in Christ*.”²⁰⁵ There are other times when “the writers of the New Testament tell us that Christ is in us.”²⁰⁶

In addition to these descriptions of the union Hoekema points out three passages in John where the two concepts are combined.²⁰⁷ This leads Hoekema to conclude, “It would seem, therefore, that these two types of expression are interchangeable. When we are in Christ, Christ is also in us. Our living in him and his living in us are as inseparable as finger and thumb.”²⁰⁸

Essential to Hoekema’s exposition of the *unio mystica* is the scope of that union. He describes it as extending from eternity to eternity. By that he means this.

²⁰² Ibid., 15, quoting *GD*³3:689.

²⁰³ Ibid., 54.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. Hoekema cites 2 Corinthians 5:17;12:2; John 15:4-5, 7; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 1:4; 2:10; Philippians 3:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; & 1 John 4:13.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 55. In this regard, Hoekema cites the following texts: Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27; Romans 8:10; 2 Corinthians 13:5; & Ephesians 3:17.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. Hoekema points to John 6:56; 15:4; & 1 John 4:13.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

Union with Christ begins with God's pretemporal decision to save his people in and through Jesus Christ. This union, further, is based on the redemptive work for his people which Christ did in history. Finally, this union is actually established with God's people after they have been born, continues throughout their lives, and has as its goal their eternal glorification in the life to come. We go on, then, to see union with Christ as having its roots in divine election, its basis in the redemptive work of Christ, and its actual establishment with God's people in time.²⁰⁹

Hoekema locates the root of the believer's union with Christ in Ephesians 1:3-4. This text is compatible with others such as John 17:24 and 1 Peter 1:20. What is of particular importance is the phrase "in him." It "underscores the gracious mode of our salvation: God the Father chose us to be saved not because of any merit he foresaw in us but only on the basis of our predetermined oneness with Christ."²¹⁰ This approach has the added advantage that man's election "should never be thought of apart from Christ."²¹¹ Hoekema draw the further implications of what this must mean when he says, "Union between Christ and his people was planned already in eternity, in the sovereign pretemporal decision whereby God the Father selected us as his own. Christ himself was chosen to be our Savior before the creation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20); Ephesians 1:4 teaches us that *when the Father chose Christ, he also chose us.*"²¹²

The intimacy of the union in Hoekema's mind is clearly delineated by the italicized words in the last quotation. The implication of rooting the union in divine election is that God "decreed that Christ would have a people who belonged to him from eternity to eternity."²¹³ An addition implication is that election in Christ from eternity "is basic to the whole of soteriology."²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 56.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., 56-57. Italics—RG.

²¹³ Ibid., 57.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

If Ephesians 1:3-4 provides the roots of union with Christ, Christ's redemptive work forms the basis of that union. John's gospel, in particular, speaks to this issue although other texts of Scripture also describe this basis.²¹⁵

When describing the actual union of Christ with the believer, Hoekema emphasizes that this eternal plan is worked out in the course of history.²¹⁶ This is a crucial component of the plan. It is not merely an eternal plan that has no contact with the history of God's dealings with his people, but is thoroughly ensconced in history itself. Hoekema expounds eight facets of the actual union between Christ and his people in time.

First, "We are initially united with Christ in regeneration."²¹⁷ Second, "We appropriate and continue to live out of this union through faith."²¹⁸ Third, "We are justified in union with Christ."²¹⁹ Fourth, "We are sanctified through union with Christ."²²⁰ Hoekema quotes from Lewis Smedes who says, "Christ communicates Himself in a way that changes us without diminishing us, transforms us without deifying us, Christianizes us without making us Christs."²²¹ Fifth, "We persevere in the life of

²¹⁵ Hoekema cites John 10:26-28; 6:39; 17:2, 6, 24; Matthew 1:21; Ephesians 5:25; & Titus 2:14.

²¹⁶ Hoekema, *SBG*, 59. "Having looked at the roots of and the basis for union with Christ, we now go on to see what the Bible has to say about the actual union established between Christ and his people in the course of history."

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 60.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 61. Hoekema is aware that this aspect of the union can be taken in an impersonal manner so he adds the following correction. "Sometimes we are tempted to understand Christ's work for us as 'having paid for our sins' on the cross in a *totally impersonal way*; we then think of ourselves as accepting this payment also in an *impersonal way*, apart from fellowship with Christ. . . . The Bible teaches that we can appropriate the saving work of Christ for us, and thus be justified, only in a *personal way*, through living union with him." Italics mine.

²²⁰ Ibid., 62.

²²¹ Ibid., 63.

faith in union with Christ.”²²² Sixth, “We are even said to die in Christ.”²²³ Seventh, we shall be raised with Christ.”²²⁴ Finally, “We shall be eternally glorified with Christ.”²²⁵

All of this is merely another manifestation of the “all-embrasive” nature of the union of Christ with the believer. Hoekema concludes his treatise on the centrality of the union in salvation with an explanation of its significance.

He begins his section on the significance of the union by reminding us that “Once you have had your eyes opened to this concept of union with Christ, you will find it almost everywhere in the New Testament.”²²⁶ Certainly, Bavinck understood this very early in his career and it became the backbone of his theology. Hoekema, quoting James Stewart, agrees that “the doctrine of union with Christ, [is] not only. . .the mainstay of Paul’s religion, but also [is] the sheet anchor of his ethics.”²²⁷

One of the concepts that repeatedly presents itself in the dissertations of Bolt, Heideman, Hielema, and Veenhof is the tension between redemption and the larger question of the restoration of the fallen creation. The questions raised in those dissertations are valid questions and the authors have sought for answers to the various tensions in Bavinck’s theology.

Hoekema offers a tentative solution when he says, “Union with Christ, however, should not be understood only in an individualistic sense. Though it does bring about the renewal of individuals, it does much more than this. Ultimately it involves the renewal

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid. Hoekema cites Romans 14:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 14:13 and Q/A 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism to support his position.

²²⁴ Ibid., 64.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid., 65.

and recreation of the entire universe.”²²⁸ Again, Hoekema cites Lewis Smedes. The quotation is somewhat lengthy but is especially germane to the topic of salvation and restoration.

The familiar text about being “new creatures in Christ” should not be waved too easily as a slogan for what happens “in me” when I am convinced. The design of Christ’s new creation is far too grand, too inclusive to be restricted to what happens inside my soul. No nook or cranny of history is too small for its purpose, no cultural potential too large for its embrace. Being in Christ, we are part of a new movement by His grace, a movement rolling on toward the new heaven and new earth where all things are made right and where He is all in all.²²⁹

Smedes does not go into *how* the restoration of creation is affected by union with Christ. The quotation does, however, relate to the “all-embracing” nature of the union without explaining all the particulars. Hoekema agrees with this assessment of the union and seems to be on a similar track with Bavinck on this matter. It will be shown that Bavinck’s theology accommodates the restorative aspect of Christ’s work, but is focused on salvation. In what follows in this dissertation the emphasis will be on the significance of union with Christ for the Christian covenant community rather than on the wider, broader context of restoration.

It is possible, however, to move from the narrower perspective of Christ’s person and work to an explanation of the broader context of restoration. This is in keeping with the emphases in Bavinck’s theology. Even though he is significantly concerned about the world and the issue in the world—as is made manifest by Bolt, Bremmer, Heideman, Hielema, and Veenhof.

Hoekema ends his section on the significance of union with Christ by designating two other facets of it. He calls them the *legal* and the *vital* aspects of the work of Christ. Each

²²⁸ Ibid., 66.

²²⁹ Ibid. Quoting from Smedes’ book *Union with Christ*, pg. 92.

one is derived from a separate faction of the church. The Western branch of the Christian church “tended to emphasize the ‘legal’ side of Christ’s work.”²³⁰ Conversely, the Eastern wing of the church was more inclined to emphasize “the ‘vital’ or ‘life-sharing’ side of Christ’s work.”²³¹ The Western church tended to emphasize the guilt of sin and the outstanding soteriological blessing was seen to be justification. The Eastern Church emphasized the pollution of sin and the outstanding soteriological blessing was deemed to be sanctification.

Both of these “wings” or “branches” of the early church taught vital truth. The Western Church located the greatest benefit of the Christian in forgiveness, while the Eastern Church taught that it was everlasting life.²³² “The Western church tended to accent the Christ who is *for us*; the Eastern church, on the other hand, was more inclined to celebrate the Christ which is *in us*.”²³³

Bavinck would have agreed with Hoekema’s conclusion regarding the Eastern and Western Church: “We must always keep these two aspects of Christ’s work together: the legal and the vital, Christ for us and Christ in us.”²³⁴ As will be demonstrated, Bavinck saw justification and sanctification as inseparable and taught the union of Christ as an “all-embracing” theological truth for the entirety of his theology. Combining the “legal” and “vital” leads Hoekema to conclude, “Through union with Christ we receive every

²³⁰ Ibid., 66.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid., 66-67.

²³³ Ibid., 67.

²³⁴ Ibid.

spiritual blessing. Christ not only died for us on Calvary's cross many years ago; he also lives in our hearts, now and forever."²³⁵

Hoekema has captured the greater part of Bavinck's doctrine of the *unio mystica*. This dissertation shall delve substantially more deeply into Bavinck's notion of the union and how that applies to the Christian life. It is outside of the pale of this work to concentrate on the social aspects of the union, but "social ethics" for the Christian will be examined. With this background we shall now turn our attention to Bavinck's explanation of the application of salvation.

Gratia Irresistibilis and Inamissibilis

Even though Bavinck's theology is characterized by his christological concentration, all the strands of his thinking that appeared in the first five chapters of this work must be paired with an equally strong pneumatological concentration.

Structurally, Bavinck's chapter on the *ordo* is preceded by chapters dealing with the covenant of grace (§ 44), the Person of Christ (§ 45), the Work of Christ in his humiliation (§ 46), and the Work of Christ in his exaltation (§ 47).

When Bavinck expounds his views on the *ordo salutis*, he covers much of the same ground that the first five chapters of this work have covered, yet with this distinction. The chapter on the *ordo* ties in the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit and Christ much more intricately than he has previously done.

What became evident in the preceding chapters was the central place Bavinck assigns the *unio mystica* in his theology and how it applies to intimate fellowship with Christ. In his chapter on the *ordo salutis* Bavinck works out more of the details of the *unio*. In addition, this eighth chapter serves as a kind of "hinge."

²³⁵ Ibid.

It refers back to all that Bavinck has discussed in the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* up to this point. At the same time, it points forward to what is coming. As we shall see, the *unio* and the Holy Spirit both play an important role in Bavinck's sacramentology in general and his views on the Lord's Supper in particular. The emphasis Bavinck places on the ethical life of the believer finds particular expression in God's saving grace in redemption. Yet, redemption is a broad category. It is also multifaceted.

Bavinck's theology describes the salvation of the entire man and all of life. He is not content to leave man with generalities and vagaries regarding ethical life, but is eager to point out how God's salvation affects man's life at every step along the continuum of faith.

God's "third" great work

According to Bavinck, after creation and the incarnation the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is God's third great work.²³⁶ This is merely a summary statement for a key concept in Bavinck's theology. It is part of the work of the Holy Spirit to take everything from the risen and ascended Lord and apply it to the believer.

Objective and subjective.

The apostolic preaching clearly described the relationship between the objective accomplishment of salvation and its subjective application.²³⁷ They are inseparable.²³⁸ In the previous chapter it was pointed out that Bavinck took certain notions from the Ethical Theologians and that he appreciated their views on the centrality of preaching and "relational" truth.

²³⁶ GD3:494, "De uitstorting des Heiligen Geestes is na schepping en vleeschwording het derde groote werk Gods."

²³⁷ GD3:492, "In de apostolische verkondiging wordt dit alles veel breeder uitgewerkt. De verhouding van de objectieve verwerving en de subjectieve toepassing des heils treedt dan helderder in het licht."

²³⁸ Ibid.

Here he manifests how the apostolic preaching brought the objective and subjective together and balanced redemption accomplished and applied. It is important to note that Bavinck places a great deal of emphasis on the importance of *preaching* for the way of salvation. Yet, preaching is but one of the key means God uses to apply the accomplished redemption. Bavinck's focus on preaching does not lose sight of Trinitarian work in salvation.

Christ exercises the application of the salvation he obtained through the Holy Spirit.²³⁹ The relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit is so intimate and comprehensive that Paul can say, "that the Lord, and that is Christ as the exalted Lord, is the Spirit."²⁴⁰

In terms of redemptive history, the Ascension is a key moment. "At the Ascension the Holy Spirit is made the possession of Christ in such a measure that he can be called the Spirit. In his exaltation, Christ became a life-giving Spirit."²⁴¹

The importance of this is grounded in the notions of intimate fellowship and the believer's conformity to the image of Christ. The Spirit, who was given to Christ without measure during his time upon earth, is now, during Christ's exaltation, the principle of

²³⁹ Ibid. "De toepassing is van de verwerving onafscheidelijk. Het is één werk, dat aan den middelaar is opgedragen; en Hij zal niet rusten, voordat Hij het gansche koninkrijk voltooid den Vader overgeven kan. Maar toch, hoe onverbrekelijk verwerving en toepassing der zaligheid ook samenhangen, er is onderscheid. Gene bracht Christus tot stand op aarde, in den staat der vernedering, door zijn lijden en sterven, deze volbrengt Hij van uit den hemel, in den staat der verhooging, door zijne profetische, priesterlijke en koninklijke werkzaamheid aan de rechterhand des Vaders. *Daarom oefent Hij deze toepassing der zaligheid ook uit door den Heiligen Geest.*" Italics—RG.

²⁴⁰ GD3:492-493.

²⁴¹ GD3:493, "Maar bij de hemelvaart is de Heilige Geest in zulk eene mate het eigendom van Christus geworden, dat deze zelf als de Geest kan worden aangeduid. In zijne verhooging is Hij geworden tot levendmakenden Geest, 1 Cor. 15:45."

life in the fullest sense of the word.²⁴² Christ is now the life-giving Spirit who leads his congregation along the same way to glorification.²⁴³

Christ's Ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The first work Christ performed after his exaltation was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.²⁴⁴ The Spirit was promised in the Old Testament and Jesus also promised him to his disciples after his Ascension.²⁴⁵ There was a twofold aspect to this promise: Christ would send the Spirit, and the Spirit would lead his disciples in all truth.²⁴⁶ The promised Spirit would be poured out in the hearts of Jesus' disciples, he would comfort them, lead them in the truth, and remain with them eternally.²⁴⁷

The Holy Spirit exercises one type of work in the world in general, but a completely different sort of work in the congregation of Jesus Christ. Starting in the Church and working from there into the world, the Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment.²⁴⁸

In the congregation, the Holy Spirit also dispensed spiritual gifts. Therefore, all actions and conduct in the New Testament Church must be in accordance with the confession, "Jesus is Lord."²⁴⁹ In the apostolic period these gifts included "extraordinary" workings that have ceased for the New Testament Church.²⁵⁰

²⁴² GD3:493.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. "De eerste werkzaamheid, welke Christus na zijn verhooging verricht, bestaat daarom in de uitstorting van den Heiligen Geest."

²⁴⁵ GD3:494

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. "De eene werkzaamheid bestaat daarin, dat de Heilige Geest, in de harten der discipelen uitgestort, hen troosten, in de waarheid leiden en eeuwig bij hen blijven zal, Joh. 14:16, 15:26, 16:7."

²⁴⁸ Ibid. "Daarentegen oefent de Heilige Geest in de wereld eene gansch andere werkzaamheid uit, n.l. deze, dat Hij, in de gemeente wonende en van daaruit op de wereld inwerkende, haar overtuigt van zonde, gerechtigheid en oordeel, en op al deze drie punten haar in het ongelijk stelt, Joh. 16:8-11."

²⁴⁹ GD3:499.

²⁵⁰ GD3:498.

Bavinck does not spend an excessive amount of time arguing his case against the continuation of the “extraordinary” gifts of the Spirit. For him, there is another aspect that is more important. It is the work of the Spirit to lead the congregation in worship and in a moral life.²⁵¹

This is a critical notion for the purposes of this work. In relating the working of the Holy Spirit to the congregation, Bavinck locates it in a twofold idea. The ancient Church experienced the Holy Spirit as the One who led them in worship of God and in Christian conduct. Even in the Old Testament he was the One who brought about all true, spiritual, and moral life.²⁵² Jesus’ farewell discourse in John 14-16 reiterates these truths.

For Bavinck, then, all of life is worship of God and from that worship Christian character is developed and Christian conduct is exercised. This manifests the ethical emphasis in Bavinck’s theology. This emphasis is not merely “academic,” but has many implications for the Christian walk of faith. Bavinck was not concerned merely to set forth certain truths that would do little more than function to serve an “historical” faith or “dead orthodoxy.”

His intent was to present to the Church of Jesus Christ a proper emphasis on the preaching of Christ coupled with a sound and healthy view of worship. The preaching and worship would lend themselves to the application the preached truths in a truly and specifically Christian behavior. The Holy Spirit plays a key role in this *applicatio*.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

The Holy Spirit and the “Unio Mystica.”

The Holy Spirit effects the most intimate fellowship between Christ and his Church and among all believers.²⁵³ He has been poured out on the New Testament Church for the purpose of applying the *ordo salutis*. In this work, Bavinck re-emphasizes pneumatological Christology and christological Pneumatology.

Christ is central in the objective, judicial deed of the forgiveness of sins. Christ obtained this benefit for his people. This objective salvific event is followed by the ethical and mystical benefit of sanctification. Christ not only takes the guilt of sin away, he also breaks its power.²⁵⁴

With this focus upon Christ, Bavinck immediately shifts the discussion to the Holy Spirit and declares that he works faith in the child of God, ensures him of his adoption, and is the Author of a new life.²⁵⁵ Faith is not merely the acceptance of God’s witness concerning himself and man; it is also the beginning and principle of a holy walk.²⁵⁶

In and through the Holy Spirit Christ comes to his own people and lives within them. Conversely, in and through the Holy Spirit believers are *in Christ*. This fellowship affects their *life, thinking, and behavior*.²⁵⁷ Again, it is noteworthy how Bavinck ties the previous three elements into a unified whole.

Our life, thinking, and behavior are inseparable. It would be unthinkable for him, for example, to posit a holy Christian walk typified by antinomianism. By means of

²⁵³ GD3:500, “De Heilige Geest is het, die de innigste gemeenschap tusschen Christus en zijne gemeente en tusschen alle geloovigen onderling tot stand brengt.”

²⁵⁴ Ibid. “Maar deze objectieve, rechterlijke weldaad der vergeving is de eenige niet; zij wordt door de ethische en mystische weldaad der heiligmaking gevolgd. Christus neemt de schuld der zonde niet alleen weg, maar breekt ook hare macht.”

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid. “De Heilige Geest is daarom niet alleen degene, die het geloof werkt en van het kindschap verzekert, maar Hij is ook auteur van een nieuw leven; en het geloof is niet maar aanneming van een getuigenis Gods, doch ook aanvang en beginsel van een heiligen wandel, 2 Cor. 5:17, Ef. 2:10, 4:24, Col. 3:9, 10.”

²⁵⁷ GD3:500-501.

fellowship with the Person of Christ, the Holy Spirit brings the believers into union by all their Savior's benefits and treasures.²⁵⁸

In the covenant of grace, the Spirit forms the believers into one Body, makes them one in heart and soul, and causes them to grow into complete maturity in Christ.²⁵⁹

The "Reformed" perspective.

Bavinck contrasts his own view of the fellowship of the believer with Christ with both the Roman Catholic and Lutherans positions.²⁶⁰ He then characterizes the Reformed position with the idea that there is no fellowship with the benefits of Christ without simultaneous fellowship with his Person.²⁶¹ If the first benefit of grace already supposes fellowship with Christ, then the application and giving of Christ to the congregation precedes everything.²⁶² This is the Reformed doctrine.²⁶³

Already in the *pactum salutis* God's decree included a *unio mystica* and substitutionary atonement between Christ and his people.²⁶⁴ Every benefit of grace is encapsulated in Christ and is already prepared for his Church. Everything has been completed; God is reconciled; man has nothing to accomplish.²⁶⁵ All of the treasures and benefits that Christ merited and achieved become the subjective possession of the believer in God's time.²⁶⁶ This spells out the *ordo* and the *applicatio salutis* simultaneously.

²⁵⁸ GD3:501.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ GD3:502-519.

²⁶¹ GD3:519.

²⁶² GD3:520, "Indien het toch waar is, dat de allereerste weldaad der genade reeds de gemeenschap aan den persoon van Christus onderstelt, dan gaat de toerekening en schenking van Christus aan de gemeente aan alles vooraf."

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

The application of salvation is Christ's work. He is the active one; he distributes himself and all his benefits to those who are his by means of a *gratia irresistibilis* and *inamissibilis*.²⁶⁷ Just as certainly as re-creation took place objectively in Christ, it must be equally certain that restoration will take place through the Holy Spirit in Christ's Church.²⁶⁸

Just as the accomplishment of redemption by Christ, as Mediator and Head of the covenant, had to occur in the covenant, so also the application must take place covenantally as well. Therefore, the Church must not be thought of individualistically or atomistically. It is a *covenant* community. Each true congregation of Christ is an organism and not merely an aggregate of people.²⁶⁹ As such, life, thinking, and behavior, although performed by individuals, are not meant to be individualistic.

Poenitentia.

As the Holy Spirit leads the believers in the way of truth, the "new life" is not comprised of an immediate experience of grace and redemption, but in a firm decision and a committed act of obedience to God's will.²⁷⁰ This is no *legalis poenitentia*, but one that flows forth from faith and is only possible in union with Christ. It is a *poenitentia* that is typified by *mortificatio* and *vivificatio*.²⁷¹

Poenitentia is another essential part of the Christian life. Without it, the *Christian* life does not exist. Its "ingredients" are mortification of sin (*mortificatio*) and coming to life

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ GD3:521.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ GD3:522.

²⁷¹ GD3:522-523.

in Christ (*vivificatio*). True *poenitentia* is expressed by the believer's thankfulness to God for the gift of salvation.²⁷²

In the development of Reformed theology faith and *poenitentia* obtained an independent significance in the *ordo salutis*. This had a twofold advantage. In the first place, faith could be brought into a much deeper contact with the doctrine of justification as a purely juridical act whereby God declared the sinner righteous. In the second place, *poenitentia* was ascribed an ethical significance.²⁷³

In Calvin's theology his emphasis on *mortificatio* and *vivificatio*, allows *poenitentia* to find expression in two ways. In the first place, it pertains to a grieving on the part of the believer with heartfelt sorrow that he has offended God by his sin. In addition, the believer learns to hate his sin more and more and to flee from it.

In the second place, it is a heartfelt joy in God through Christ and a love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works. Good works are only those that are performed from the posture of true faith, in accordance with the law of God, and to his glory. God's law is the norm or standard of these good works.²⁷⁴

The Reformed theologians ascribed a "normative" significance to the law of God for the believer's moral life. God's law is not merely a "mirror" wherein the believer discovers and observes his sinfulness. It is also the norm or standard of his thankfulness to the Lord.²⁷⁵

²⁷² GD3:524.

²⁷³ Ibid. "Ten eerste kon de fides nu veel inniger met de justificatio in verband gebracht, en deze zuiver in juridischen zin als eene vrij spraak Gods worden opgevat. . . . En het tweede voordeel bestond daarin, dat aan de poenitentia nu zonder vreeze eene ethische beteekenis kon worden toegekend."

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ GD3:525.

Christian conduct thus has its origin in the gift of faith, its “rule” in the law of God, and the glory of God as its goal.²⁷⁶ In Reformed theology the advancement of the glory of God became the task of the Christian life.²⁷⁷

Subjectivism.

Bavinck desired to honor the subjective outworking of salvation, but not at the expense of the objective factors of salvation such as Christ, Church, Word, and Sacrament.²⁷⁸ While he was able to locate much that was good both in theology and philosophy outside the Reformed faith, his abiding criticism remained that they placed the religious subject at the center and allowed the objective truths of the faith to fade into the background.²⁷⁹

Bavinck’s views the *ordo salutis* as an enrichment of the practical regulation of the Christian life. Its true practicality is not situated in man as the center, but in God himself who paved the way for Christ and revealed him.²⁸⁰ Thus subjectivism is avoided when man realizes: (1) That all the benefits that God grants in the covenant of grace are granted *per et propter Christum*.²⁸¹ (2) That the application of the benefits of Christ must exist in accordance with justification, but also in sanctification, which includes renewal according to the image of Christ.²⁸² In the trinitarian “economy” of salvation the Work of sanctification is assigned to the Holy Spirit. In the essential unity of Father, Son, and

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ GD3:525-526.

²⁷⁸ GD3:538.

²⁷⁹ GD3:526-567.

²⁸⁰ GD3:568.

²⁸¹ GD3:574.

²⁸² Ibid.

Holy Spirit, it follows that the Holy Spirit must be in union with the Work of the Son. (3)
That the working of the Holy Spirit is nothing less than an *applicatio salutis*.²⁸³

Applicatio salutis.

The question is not: What must man do in order to participate in salvation? The question is this: What does God do in his grace in order to make the congregation participate in the complete redemption Christ has accomplished?²⁸⁴

The *applicatio salutis* must be viewed theologically not anthropologically from start to finish. In the “economy” of salvation the Holy Spirit is its Author. The entire *via salutis* is “*gratia Spiritus Sancti applicatrix*.”²⁸⁵ This *applicatio salutis* includes every *moral* factor on the part of the believer.

In this sense, God’s grace remains grace. It is not partly God’s grace and partly man’s merit.²⁸⁶ In Reformed theology grace is and remains *ethical*.²⁸⁷ Without the gift of faith it is impossible to please God and enter his kingdom.²⁸⁸ Therefore the preaching of the gospel is indispensable to obtain the treasures of Christ, for the Holy Spirit binds himself to the Word of God.²⁸⁹ Yet, man remains treated as a morally responsible being. Man merits nothing but is called to a holy walk that worships God in life, thinking, and behavior.

According to Bavinck, the Holy Spirit applies the benefits Christ has obtained for the believer in three specific areas.

²⁸³ *GD3*:576.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ *GD3*:578.

²⁸⁷ *GD3*:583. Italics mine—RG.

²⁸⁸ *GD3*:602.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

First is the illumination of the believer by the Spirit. The same Spirit who inspired the Bible (objective) illuminates the conscience of the believer (subject).²⁹⁰ The second area is the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration. Lastly, there is the "preserving, leading, and sealing working of the Holy Spirit."²⁹¹

It is this last set of workings of the Spirit that Bavinck sets forth in a particular manner in his theology. His interest in and focus upon the *unio mystica* led him to locate the working of the Holy Spirit in the covenant meal that God instituted for the manifestation of intimate fellowship: the Lord's Supper.

In the Old Testament this fellowship was brought into relationship with God's redemption of his people from Egypt in the Passover. In the New Testament the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was brought into the closest possible unity with Christ, the Holy Spirit, the covenant of grace, the ethical life of the believer, and the *unio mystica*.

Summary

In this article we have examined the question of the validity of teaching an *ordo salutis*. It was noted that Reformed theologians differ on this subject. We began by investigating John Calvin who is a seminal theologian for Reformed thinking. We also investigated the interesting approach of Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. Due note was taken of the fact that G.C. Berkouwer rejects the notion of the Bible teaching an *ordo salutis*, while John Murray believes that the Bible does, in fact, teach one. Louis Berkhof takes somewhat of a "mediating" position all the while acknowledging that there were logical

²⁹⁰ GD3:603.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

reasons for accepting the *ordo*. A.A. Hoekema recognizes the validity of the *ordo* and, at the same time, the validity of the criticisms of it.

Calvin, Gaffin, Hoekema, and Berkouwer came closest to Bavinck's position. Bavinck does provide an adequate "exit" from the controversy as it has been stated. In that sense, he rises above the controversy and, at the same time, provides a most practical solution for it.

The several "strands" of concepts that comprise his theology make it clear that his emphasis on the union of the believer with Christ sets up the groundwork for treating it as the central theme or motif in Bavinck's theology. We shall now turn our attention to some of the "strands" in Bavinck's theology that apply to the *ordo*. What are those "strands?" We shall examine them in turn.

God-centered and not man-centered.

It is clear from the foregoing that Bavinck's entire theology is God-centered. The entire *ordo* is from God from beginning to end. Because it is God-centered, it must be Christ-centered and Spirit-centered. Bavinck is concerned to protect the true sovereignty of God in his discussion of the *ordo*.

At the same time, man is treated as a morally responsible being in the *ordo*. Even though the focus is on God, man plays a role. This role is not described in terms of man's meritorious effort. There are, however, aspects which are purely divine acts and others where—ruling out all concepts of meritorious works—man, too is active.

For example, effectual calling and regeneration are divine acts.²⁹² Repentance (unto life) and faith in Christ are both divine and human activities.²⁹³ Other purely divine acts

²⁹² *GD3*:501.

include justification,²⁹⁴ adoption, and (definitive) sanctification.²⁹⁵ Progressive sanctification and a walk in holiness and love consist of a divine and human activity.²⁹⁶ Glorification is God's exclusive divine act in man's life.²⁹⁷ This is also consistent with Hoekema's position described previously.

Promissio.

Bavinck's emphasis of God's covenant of grace and his trustworthiness and faithfulness are linchpins in his theological methodology. The covenant of grace is not a mere theological construct but rather the theological outworking of an intimate union between God and man. This union is situated in God's gracious sure and certain promise to be the God of his people and they, in turn, are to be his people with all that that entails.

This covenantal refrain echoes the mutual relationship between God and man. God's covenant of grace affects the totality of man's life, thinking, and behavior. No facet or aspect of man's life is excluded from the covenant relationship. This relationship has objective and subjective elements in balance. Bavinck's explanation is far removed from the speculative and rationalistic and is fully ensconced in the redemptive-historical actions of God. Bavinck's description of the intimacy of the covenant of grace focuses on God, salvation, the order of salvation, and the proper place of man. Bavinck achieves this balance by constantly referring to the midpoint: salvation *in Christ*. All of this is based on God's promises to man. These promises are grounded in the very nature of God.

²⁹³ *GD3*:493.

²⁹⁴ *GD4*:160.

²⁹⁵ *GD4*:233-234; *ORF*, 469.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ *GD3*:501.

Taking a point from Calvin, Bavinck concentrates his thoughts upon the former's emphasis on growing into one body with Christ, putting on Christ, and being engrafted into him. This occurs through faith, which involves two components: knowledge and trust.

Appropriation.

Bavinck's contribution to the discussion is also focused on the appropriation of the accomplished salvation. This notion is closely coupled to God's promises.²⁹⁸ God's redemption is not a sterile *principium*, but is an integral part of God's plan to save sinners. Appropriation is connected to a vital faith. Faith is exercised throughout the believer's life and encompasses its totality.

Regeneration, faith, conversion, renewal, and the like, often do not point to successive steps in the way of salvation but rather summarize in a single word the entire change that takes place in man in redemption.²⁹⁹ Bavinck's "list" of the components in salvation is more complete and more all-encompassing than others of the Reformed persuasion and also avoids the accusations of not including faith, hope, and love as components of redemption.

His *ordo* is not one with successive steps or stages, but one that manifests and exalts God's grace within which Bavinck distinguishes various aspects. The benefits of salvation are distinguished but cannot be separated. Like faith, hope, and love they form a triple cord that cannot be broken.

²⁹⁸ Comp. *Inst.* 3.2.16, 561.

²⁹⁹ *GD3*²:682.

Bavinck avoids an imbalance between the objective and subjective by his emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in the application of salvation.³⁰⁰ It is the Holy Spirit that takes everything from the risen and ascended Christ—according to his deity as well as his humanity—and imparts it to the believing subject.³⁰¹

The fourfold “office” of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit does this by way of a fourfold office (*munus*). In the grace of calling the Holy Spirit exercises his *munus elencticum* and *didacticum*. His work here includes the *gratia praeprans*, *praeveniens*, and *operans*.³⁰²

In justification the Spirit’s office of *paracleticum* is in the foreground along with the work of *gratia illuminans*.³⁰³

The third aspect of the Spirit’s office is involved with sanctification where his *munus sanctificans* is most evident. The day to day renewal of the believer by the Spirit is a manifestation of his work of the *gratia cooperans*.³⁰⁴

In the grace of glorification, which begins in this life, the Holy Spirit exercises his *munus obsignans* and restores the believer according to his *gratia conservans* and *perficiens*. In this life perfection is not reached but in glorification the Christian shall be completely conformed to the image of Christ, who is the first-born among many brothers.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁰ GD3:500.

³⁰¹ GD3:601, “Alle weldaden des heils, welke de Vader aan de gemeente van eeuwigheid heeft toegekend en de Zoon in den tijd heeft verworven, zijn tevens gaven des Heiligen Geestes; door den Geest neemt Christus, en door Christus neemt de Vader zelf al zije kinderen in zijne innigste gemeenschap op.”

³⁰² GD3:604.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

In its totality, the work and working of the Holy Spirit is nothing less than an application, an *applicatio salutis* of the way of salvation.³⁰⁶

Christ's threefold office and the believer.

Another key manner in which Bavinck's doctrines of the *ordo*, the way of salvation, and the application of salvation is provided by his emphasis on the threefold office of Christ and the corresponding threefold office of the believer.

As has already been mentioned, three extensive chapters on the Person and Work of Christ precede Bavinck's chapter on the order of salvation. Especially when describing the work of Christ Bavinck focuses his attention on Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King.

There is a corresponding threefold "office" of the believer to the threefold office of Christ. The importance of the "engrafting" of the believer into Christ finds part of its expression in this corresponding threefold office. As Christ is their great Prophet who reveals the will of God to them, so in the believer's office of prophet, he is to confess the name of his Lord and Savior.

As Christ is their great High Priest, who offered himself once-for-all on the cross as a sacrifice for their sins, so the believer as one made a priest by grace is to present himself as a living sacrifice of thankfulness to his Lord.

As Christ is the believer's eternal King, who governs him by his Word and Spirit and defends and preserves him, so the Christian is to exercise the office of king by fighting with a free and good conscience against sin and the devil in this life, and by preparing to reign with Christ eternally over all creatures.

³⁰⁶ GD3:576.

Bavinck accomplishes several important matters in his theology with this construction. In the first place, he maintains the God-centered focus of salvation. His use of the “offices” of Christ and the Holy Spirit aid him to this end. At the same time, however, he also presents man’s place in redemption. Man remains a rational moral being who is responsible for his life, thinking, and behavior. Bavinck achieves this without falling into the excesses of either objectivism or subjectivism.³⁰⁷

At the same time, Bavinck warns and protects against both an “intellectual” faith as well as antinomianism. The Christian’s holy walk must involve and engage the totality of his being. Since salvation is total and complete, all of man’s being must be renewed. This renewal includes the moral life of the Christian that has its origin in faith in Christ, its rule or standard in the law of God, and the glory of God as its goal.³⁰⁸ This occurs by means of the *ordo* or way of salvation.³⁰⁹

Even though Bavinck repeatedly emphasizes the fact that salvation is by sovereign grace alone,³¹⁰ he is equally adamant that this grace was not antithetical to the ethical, but rather is an integral part of it.³¹¹

Implications of Bavinck’s view for the Lord’s Supper.

Bavinck’s description of the *ordo* and *way* of salvation laid an important foundation for the Reformed world to follow. Some, such as Hoekema, have followed him very

³⁰⁷ GD3:500; 507.

³⁰⁸ GD3:525.

³⁰⁹ GD3:567, “Het is de heilsorde, ordo or via salutis, die daarop antwoord zoekt te geven. Want daaronder is te verstaan de wijze waarop, de orde waarin, of de weg, waarlangs de zondaar in het bezit komt van de weldaden der genade, die door Christus verworven zijn.”

³¹⁰ GD3:578, “Alle weldaden des verbonds, welke Christus verwierf en de Heilige Geest toepast, kunnen samengevat worden onder den naam van genade.”

³¹¹ GD3:583, “En daarom moet de genade ook een zoodanige zijn, die het verstand verlicht en den wil buigt, die dus niet alleen zedelijk, maar ook hyperfysisch werkt en de krachten herstelt. Doch bij Rome is deze physische werking der genade een tegenstelling van de ethische, in elk geval eene de ethische verre te boven gaande; *bij de Reformatie is en blijft zij ethisch.*” Italics mine—RG.

closely, others have not followed him closely and thereby they have missed some of the essential notions pertaining to the mystical union. One of the key implications of the union is situated in the Lord's Supper. In the progression of this work, it will be demonstrated how the *unio mystica* is the central motif in Bavinck's theology and how it finds one of its finest expressions in the Lord's Supper.

As we shall see later, Bavinck never inveighed against those who believe it is necessary to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly. He was well acquainted with Calvin's desire to celebrate weekly, but maintained what his church confessed and prescribed: the celebration of the holy meal at least once a quarter according to the Church Order of the Synod of Dordrecht.

In Bavinck's thinking the work and the working of the Holy Spirit endures long after the celebration of the Supper was finished. The Spirit is continuously at work in the life of the believer by means of the *unio*. Since Bavinck does not express himself on the matter of a weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper, it may be assumed that he would not have objected to such a celebration. He merely views weekly communion with Christ through the sacrament as unnecessary.

How does Bavinck develop his thinking along these lines and what are the influences and influential theologians that shaped this development? In order to understand how Bavinck incorporates everything he taught in the first three volumes of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* into the fourth volume, we shall need to trace his ideas concerning the nature of the sacraments. From there, we shall investigate Bavinck's doctrine of the Lord's Supper. This sacrament forms a central motif in the work and working of the Holy Spirit and his application of the salvation obtained by Christ.

How does Bavinck envision the Lord's Supper as part of the Spirit's preserving, leading, and sealing work? In order for this to become clear, we shall first examine how Bavinck explains the sacraments as a means of grace.