

SHOULD EFFECTUAL CALLING AND REGENERATION BE DISTINGUISHED?

A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON THE USE OF SPEECH-ACT THEORY IN FORMULATING THE DOCTRINE OF EFFECTUAL CALLING

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ONE OF THE AXIOMS of good theological formulation and definition is expressed in the phrase, “he who distinguishes well, teaches well” (*bene distinguit, bene docet*). The point of this expression is that, in our definition of theological topics or subjects, distinct matters need to be distinguished clearly, even though they may be inseparable in other respects. To distinguish one topic from another serves to prevent confusion. The companion to this axiom is the expression, “distinction, but not separation” (*distinctio, sed non separatio*). In the enterprise of theology, clear thinking often requires that topics be distinguished but not separated. A classic illustration of the point is the Christological formulation of Chalcedon (451 AD): Christ is one and the same Person, yet having two distinct, albeit inseparable natures.

In the history of theology, distinguishing without separating is particularly significant in formulating the “order of salvation” (*ordo salutis*). Though reservations have been expressed about the validity of seeking to develop an “order of salvation,” theologians have found it necessary to distinguish the various benefits of Christ’s saving work that are communicated to believers by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.¹

1. For an extensive analysis of the formulation of the *ordo salutis* in early Reformed theology, see Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 160–201. For general discussions of the propriety and biblical basis for an elaboration of the *ordo salutis*, see Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 11–27; John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, new ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015 [1955]), 81–90; Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. & ed. by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 4:1–28; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1962), IV/3.2:505–06; and G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification*, *Studies in Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954), 25–36. Barth and Berkouwer criticize the formulation of an *ordo salutis*, arguing that it tends to detract attention from the saving work of Christ and present an unduly “psychologized” (Barth’s term) view of salvation. While I am ready to concede that this may happen in some formulations of the order of salvation, there is ample biblical evidence for identifying the distinct, yet inseparable benefits of Christ’s saving work that are imparted through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

As Louis Berkhof's standard definition of the order of salvation demonstrates, the aim is to describe the application of the benefits of Christ's saving work as Mediator in a way that honors the unity and diversity of the work of the Holy Spirit:

[The *ordo salutis* is] the process by which the work of salvation, wrought in Christ, is subjectively realized in the hearts and lives of sinners. It aims at describing in their logical order, and also in their interrelations, the various movements of the Holy Spirit in the application of the work of redemption.²

According to Berkhof's definition, while the various aspects of the order of salvation are inseparable benefits that are communicated to believers as they are brought into fellowship with Christ, they must nonetheless be carefully distinguished. A prominent example of this is Calvin's treatment of the believer's union with Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. When Calvin deals with this topic in his *Institutes*, he gives considerable attention to the distinct, yet inseparable, relation that obtains between what he calls the "twofold grace of God (*duplex gratia Dei*), namely, the graces of free justification and regeneration or repentance."³ According to Calvin, it is critically important to distinguish these graces, lest believers are tempted to view their acceptance with God as partially based upon their works of obedience to the law of God. Justification is a free gift of God's grace in Christ and rests wholly upon Christ's merits and obedience and not upon the good works performed by those who are united to Christ by faith. At the same time, Calvin is zealous to insist that Christ also renews those who are united to him by the sanctifying work of his Spirit. Though distinct, justification and sanctification are inseparable.⁴

Though there is considerable agreement among Reformed theologians that justification and sanctification are distinct yet inseparable benefits in the order of salvation, my focus in this article will be upon a more disputed topic, namely, the relation between effectual calling and regeneration. Are effectual calling and regeneration distinct aspects within the order of salvation? Are there biblical and theological reasons to distinguish carefully between effectual calling and regeneration, even though there may also be reasons to insist upon their close and inseparable connection? If effectual calling and regeneration are distinct yet inseparable aspects of the Spirit's work, how are they related in the order of salvation? Does effectual calling logically (not necessarily chronologically) precede regeneration, or does regeneration precede (logically, though not necessarily temporally) effectual calling?

2. *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941), 415–16.

3. When Calvin uses the language of "regeneration," he means to refer broadly to the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life, which in later Reformed theology was commonly termed "sanctification." In later formulations of the order of salvation, the term regeneration is typically used by Reformed theologians in a more narrow and precise sense. For a brief comment on this difference in usage, see Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 466–67.

4. Calvin often appeals to 1 Corinthians 1:30 to establish this point: "He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

Or should they be viewed as virtually synonymous or “functionally identical,” as one recent author, Jonathan Hoglund, puts it in his study on effectual calling?⁵

Hoglund’s suggestion that effectual calling and regeneration be viewed as functionally identical reflects his sympathetic use of a recent proposal by two influential contemporary theologians, Kevin Vanhoozer and Michael Horton. According to Vanhoozer and Horton, the traditional distinction between effectual calling and regeneration fails to adequately account for how the Word functions in effectual calling. Rather than viewing regeneration as a distinguishable act of the Holy Spirit, who causes the gospel Word to become efficacious in the conversion of those whom God elects to save, these authors argue that the gospel Word is to be understood as divine rhetoric, a speech act that is uniquely creative and effectual by virtue of its divine authorship. In their proposal, effectual calling is a form of divine speech that is inherently effectual to persuade its recipients to do what the gospel Word summons them to do, namely, to embrace Christ in the way of faith and repentance. According to their assessment of more traditional formulations of effectual calling and regeneration, the Holy Spirit’s action in regeneration is inadequately tethered to the gospel Word. Consequently, the traditional formulation treats regeneration on analogy to the kind of mechanical causation that obtains among entities in the physical world.

According to Vanhoozer and Horton, the traditional conception of the work of the Spirit in granting the new birth does not adequately answer the common semi-Pelagian or Arminian objection that those whom God effectually calls are treated like “stocks and blocks.”⁶ Rather than viewing the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing sinners to conversion as an act of divine calling that persuades in a personal, communicative manner, regeneration involves an action that occurs sub-consciously or apart from the sinner’s awareness or consent. Though these authors acknowledge that the older view expressly repudiated the charge that effectual calling and regeneration involve any form of coercion on God’s part, they believe that traditional Reformed formulations of the order of salvation remain vulnerable at this point. In their view, what is required is a formulation of effectual calling that ascribes to the Word spoken in gospel proclamation the power to bring about what God intends. In short, rather than viewing regeneration as a distinct act of the Spirit that *accompanies* the ministry of the gospel Word (the Spirit working *with* the Word), we need to *identify* effectual calling as itself a regenerative act (the Spirit works *in* and *through* the Word).

My interest in this article is to offer a critical assessment of this proposal, especially its appeal to a certain understanding of “speech act theory” to reformulate our understanding of effectual calling and regeneration. To provide a context for a more extended exploration of the proposal, I will begin with an overview of the predominant formulation of the relation between effectual calling and regeneration in traditional Reformed treatments of the order of salvation. Since Vanhoozer and Horton offer their proposal as an improvement upon the traditional formulation, we must start

5. *Called by Triune Grace: Divine Rhetoric and the Effectual Call* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 224.

6. See, e.g., Norman Geisler, “God Knows All Things,” in *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*, ed. David Basinger & Randall Basinger (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 69.

with a clear understanding of the traditional view's definitions of effectual calling and regeneration, including the reasons typically offered for placing effectual calling before regeneration in the order of salvation, while insisting that they are ordinarily inseparable. I will then summarize the proposal to employ speech act theory to articulate a view of effectual calling as essentially identical with regeneration. In the concluding part of my study, I will offer a critical assessment of the proposal. Though I will acknowledge some attractive features of the proposal, I will also identify several potential pitfalls that lead me to the conclusion that it is not, on balance, a significant improvement upon the more traditional formulations of Reformed theology.

1. Effectual Calling and Regeneration in Reformed Orthodoxy: A Consensus Formulation

In traditional formulations of the order of salvation, Reformed theologians generally begin with effectual calling and regeneration as distinct yet inseparable aspects of the Spirit's ministry whereby those whom God elects to save are brought into fellowship with Christ. In the most common presentation of the order of salvation, effectual calling is placed before regeneration to emphasize that the communication of the benefits of Christ's saving work ordinarily begins in time through the proclamation of the gospel Word. For lost sinners to be saved, they need to hear the gospel of Christ's saving work and the call to embrace this gospel in faith and repentance (Rom. 10:14). While the gospel Word is preached indiscriminately and graciously to all sinners, inviting them to embrace the gospel promise of salvation through faith in Christ (external calling), only those to whom the Spirit of Christ grants what the gospel call demands are saved (internal and effectual calling). What makes the gospel call efficacious in the instance of those who come to faith and repentance is the *Spirit's work of regeneration that takes place with the Word*. Regeneration or the new birth is an act of the Holy Spirit, accompanying the Word, whereby the principle of new life is imparted to otherwise spiritually dead and lifeless sinners. The gospel's call becomes effectual when the Spirit softens and enlivens the stony heart, illumines the mind of the blind, renews the will of the otherwise unwilling, and reorders the affections of those who are at enmity with God.

1.1. Three Senses or Uses of Regeneration

Within the boundaries of this consensus regarding effectual calling and regeneration, there are some differences among older and more recent treatments of their nature and inter-relation. These differences often depend upon how narrowly or broadly the Spirit's work in regeneration is understood. Anthony Hoekema offers a helpful summary of three different senses of regeneration that are found in Scripture and the history of Reformed treatments of the order of salvation:

The Bible speaks of regeneration in three different but related senses: (1) as the beginning of new spiritual life, implanted in us by the Holy Spirit, enabling us to repent and believe (John 3:3, 5); (2) as the first manifestation

of the implanted new life (Jas. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23); and (3) as the restoration of the entire creation to its final perfection (Matt. 19:28, KJV, ASV, NASB). In the last-named passage the word *palingenesia*, translated “regeneration” in the versions mentioned, and found in only one other New Testament passage (Titus 3:5), is used to describe the renewal of the entire universe—the “new heaven and earth” of 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1–4.⁷

When Reformed theologians define regeneration in the first sense—as the particular act of the Spirit in granting new birth or implanting the beginning of new spiritual life—they typically describe it as an *immediate* act that grants the elect the *capacity* to respond to the call of the gospel, moving them to believe and repent.⁸ Unless the Spirit regenerates sinners in this sense, they will remain spiritually dead, blind to the truth, unable and unwilling to seek God, hostile or indifferent in their affections. The link between the gospel call and the human response of faith and repentance lies in the new birth worked by the Spirit.⁹ Based upon the teaching of our Lord in John 3, the Spirit is the *exclusive* Author of the new birth, which involves a mysterious, instantaneous, and monergistic action of the Spirit. In this act, the Spirit alone works, and those who are born again are passive beneficiaries whose subsequent

7. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 93. Cf. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2008), 4:53: “it turns out that Scripture speaks of rebirth mainly in three ways: (1) as the principle of the new life planted by the Spirit of God in humans before they believe; (2) as the moral renewal of humans manifesting itself in a holy walk of life; and finally (3) as the restoration of the whole world to its original completeness.” Lamentably, the third use of the language of regeneration that Hoekema identifies, the renewal of the entire created order, has not received its due in traditional discussions of the order of salvation. The work of the Spirit in communicating the blessings of Christ’s work as Mediator to those who are called through the gospel Word is part of God’s greater purpose in bringing in the fullness of his kingdom, which entails nothing less than a renewed heaven and earth. Expressed theologically, the order of salvation or *ordo salutis* focuses upon the creation of a new humanity (those who are in union with Christ, the eschatological Adam), but this takes place within the broader framework of redemptive history or the *historia salutis*. As Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., puts it in his study of the apostle Paul’s soteriology, “The traditional *ordo salutis* lacks the eschatological air which pervades the entire Pauline eschatology. . . . All soteric experience derives from solidarity in Christ’s resurrection and involves existence in the new creation age, inaugurated by his resurrection” (*Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul’s Eschatology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978], 137–38). My article will largely remain within the narrower precincts of the Spirit’s work in the regeneration of those who are effectually called through the gospel into fellowship with Christ.

8. See, e.g., Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 466–76; Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:80–87; Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:41–44; and Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1952), 3:3–6.

9. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 100: “God’s call, since it is effectual, carries with it the operative grace whereby the person called is enabled to answer the call and to embrace Jesus Christ as he is freely offered in the gospel. God’s grace reaches down to the lowest depths of our need and meets all the exigencies of the moral and spiritual impossibility which inheres in our depravity and inability. And that grace is the grace of regeneration.”

spiritual vitality depends entirely upon an antecedent act of the Spirit. Spiritual regeneration or new birth is no more the consequence of anything we do or have done than is our natural birth. Just as a child is born as a result of an act in which he or she was not conscious or active, the new birth occurs by an act of the Spirit that antecedes any conscious activity on the part of the person to whom it is given. In older and especially more recent formulations of the order of salvation by Reformed theologians, this narrow, precise definition of regeneration as an immediate work of the Holy Spirit is generally affirmed. Because regeneration in the narrow sense refers to an immediate act of the Spirit that is not effected directly by the gospel Word, it is logically distinguishable from effectual calling, which in the nature of the case always takes place through the ministry of the Word. For this reason, a few Reformed theologians have argued for the logical precedence of regeneration in relation to effectual calling. However, the majority have insisted that regeneration be regarded as logically subsequent to or embedded “within” the act of effectual calling.¹⁰

Though Reformed theologians have a consensus regarding this narrow, precise sense of the work of the Spirit in regeneration, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Reformed theologians often used the language of regeneration in the second,

10. Robert Reymond, for example, argues that regeneration occurs “within” the act of effectual calling (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998], 710). Cf. Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:39: “If we take the matter in its full scope, we must say that calling, as it were, encompasses regeneration from beginning to end. It precedes and follows it, according to whether one draws attention to the consciousness of God or to the consciousness of the sinner who is called. It hardly needs to be mentioned that this preceding and following is not to be taken in a strictly temporal sense.” For a demonstration that most Reformed theologians place effectual calling before regeneration in the order of salvation, see Herman Bavinck, *Saved by Grace: The Holy Spirit’s Work in Calling and Regeneration*, ed. J. Mark Beach, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 41–65. The original title of Bavinck’s book, *Roeping en Wedergeboorte* (“Calling and Regeneration”), signals his own view that calling ordinarily precedes regeneration. Bavinck’s book was written in part to offer a gentle push back against the view of his contemporary, Abraham Kuyper, who placed regeneration before calling in his book on the Holy Spirit (*The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries [New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900], 304–37). In his work on the Holy Spirit, Abraham Kuyper distinguished regeneration in the narrow sense of an “immediate act” that occurs “before,” “during,” and “after” the preaching of the Word and regeneration in the broader sense of a “mediate” act that occurs in three distinct and successive stages (the implanting of new life in a dead heart, conversion or coming to faith and repentance, and the Christian life of sanctification). J. Mark Beach’s “Introductory Essay” (*Saved by Grace*, ix–lvi) provides an excellent treatment of Kuyper and Bavinck’s views as they were expressed in the context of debates within the Reformed churches in the Netherlands in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These debates were fueled by issues pertaining to the status of covenant children (What is the ground for their baptism? Should we assume their regeneration? Is their presumed regeneration the ground for their baptism? May we speak of a “seed of regeneration” which is sometimes planted long before it produces fruit in true conversion?). Bavinck argues that Kuyper’s views diverged at some points from the traditional Reformed consensus, and that he risked unduly separating (logically and temporally) regeneration from the instrumentality of the Word in effectual calling.

broader sense that Hoekema identifies.¹¹ Because the work of the Spirit ordinarily takes place through the ministry of the means of grace, the proclamation of the gospel Word and the sacraments, Reformed theologians generally agreed that effectual calling, regeneration, and conversion must be viewed as inseparable aspects of the Spirit's work in drawing the elect into union with Christ. In the broader sense of the Spirit's work with the Word, regeneration is not an immediate act but a *mediate* act that takes place through the instrumentality of the Word. However, even though the language of regeneration was used in this broader sense, there was a consensus that the Spirit's work in effectual calling through the Word includes a direct act whereby new life is granted to those who would otherwise remain dead in their trespasses and sins.

In order to provide a context for my consideration of the proposal of Vanhoozer and Horton, I want to begin with two illustrations of the traditional Reformed view of effectual calling and regeneration that are especially instructive. The first is the confessional summary adopted at the Synod of Dort early in the seventeenth century (1618–1619). The second is the formulation found in Francis Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* later in the seventeenth century. Consistent with its aim to offer a pastoral, consensus statement of Reformed theology, the Canons provide a less scholastic summary of Reformed teaching on the work of the Spirit in effectual calling and regeneration. Turretin also aims to offer the consensus view of Reformed theology, but his treatment is more scholastic in form.

1.2. Effectual Calling and Regeneration in the Canons of Dort: A Confessional Codification

In the arrangement of the five points of the Canons of Dort, the topics of effectual calling and regeneration are addressed in the third and fourth main points of doctrine, entitled "Human Corruption, Conversion to God, and the Way It Occurs." The authors of the Canons chose to treat these two points together, since the crucial difference between the Reformed and the Arminian parties did not emerge at the third point, which deals with human corruption and inability, but at the fourth point, which deals with the way the Spirit works in effectual calling, regeneration, and conversion. The Arminian or Remonstrant view acknowledged the radical depravity of fallen sinners and their need for God's prevenient, sufficient grace to enable them to respond to the gospel call. However, it did not affirm that God's grace alone grants this response. In the Arminian view, God's grace precedes, enables, and is sufficient to make such a response possible, but it stops short of granting what the gospel requires. In the Arminian view, God's grace grants all lost sinners the freedom to do what the gospel call requires. But this freedom also includes the power to frustrate God's gracious will

11. A noteworthy example of this usage is found in the opening paragraph of Article 24 in the Belgic Confession: "We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy spirit, regenerates him and makes him a *new man*, causing him to live a *new life*, and freeing him from the bondage of sin." This Article clearly uses regeneration as a synonym for sanctification, as its heading indicates ("Man's Sanctification and Good Works").

to save those he calls. Accordingly, in the fourth point of the Canons, the heart of the difference between the Reformed and Arminian viewpoints on election and salvation comes into sharp focus. Does the salvation of lost sinners ultimately depend upon their free, independent, and persistent decision to believe and repent? Or does the salvation of lost sinners depend upon an effectual ministry of Christ's Spirit, who graciously and powerfully draws (and preserves) those whom God elects into communion with Christ? The burden of the fourth main point of doctrine is clear: those whom God unconditionally elects in Christ are effectually called through the invincible working of Christ's Holy Spirit and Word.

The opening articles of the Canons' third and fourth main points make two claims of particular importance. The first claim focuses upon the necessity of the "grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit" for the salvation of any lost sinner. Due to Adam's original sin and disobedience, all human beings are born and conceived in sin (Art. 1 & 2). Though originally created after God's image in true knowledge, righteousness and holiness, all fallen sinners have become radically corrupted and "unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin; *without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit* they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform" (Art. 3, emphasis mine). The second, equally important claim in these opening articles is that the salvation of lost sinners comes about "through the Word or the ministry of reconciliation" (Art. 6). What the "light of nature" and the law of God are unable to accomplish due to human sinfulness (Art. 4 & 5), God accomplishes by the "power of the Holy Spirit" who works through the proclamation of the gospel Word. For this reason, God wills that the gospel be proclaimed to all lost sinners whom he "seriously" and "genuinely" calls to come to him in faith, promising them rest and eternal life (Art. 8).

After noting that the proclamation of the gospel is the means whereby God is pleased to save lost sinners, the fourth main point of doctrine takes up directly the ministry of the Spirit in effectual calling and regeneration. In two important articles that describe the nature of the Spirit's ministry (Art. 11 & 12), a distinction is made between regeneration in its broader and narrower senses. In its broader sense, regeneration includes the Spirit's use of the Word in effectual calling and conversion. But in its narrower sense, regeneration refers to an ineffable and unmediated act of the Spirit, who grants *the capacity to act* appropriately in response to the gospel Word. In the former sense, regeneration is a mediate act of the Spirit; in the latter sense, regeneration is an immediate act.¹²

12. In his treatment of the Canons of Dort, Bavinck points out the presence of this distinction between regeneration in its broader and narrower senses (*Saved by Grace*, 41–53). However, he also argues that the Canons were jealous to guard their inseparability. Though the Holy Spirit works *through* the Word in effectual calling and conversion, the Spirit accompanies the Word *with an immediate* operation "that touches the soul, and with respect to a person's intellect, will, and dispositional state, effectually changes the soul" (*ibid.*, 53). It is significant that Chapter 10 of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), "Of Effectual Calling," implicitly affirms this distinction as well in its definition of effectual calling: "All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call,

Article 11 begins by noting the inadequacy of the “outward” proclamation of the gospel to produce the fruits of faith and repentance in the conversion of lost sinners. Though God has appointed the gospel as the means to bring his “chosen ones” to conversion, the gospel Word is ineffectual to this end unless it is accompanied by an inward, efficacious work of the regenerating Spirit. The Spirit’s work includes both the “illumination” of the understanding and an act that “penetrates to the inmost being” of those whom God calls according to his purpose of election. In its description of the work of the Spirit, Article 11 draws upon a diversity of Scriptural analogies for the new birth:

by the effective operation of the same regenerating Spirit, he also penetrates into the inmost being of man, opens the closed heart, softens the hard heart, and circumcises the heart that is uncircumcised. He *infuses new qualities into the will* [emphasis mine], making the dead alive, the evil one good, the unwilling one willing, and the stubborn one compliant; he activates the will so that, like a good tree, it may be enabled to produce the fruits of good deeds.

The Spirit’s work of regeneration in the narrow sense goes beyond the power of the outward Word to move lost sinners to faith. The Word alone has no inherent power to grant those whom God calls those *capacities* of heart, mind, and will that move them to *act* properly in response to the gospel’s summons.¹³ When Article 11 uses the

by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; *enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ*; yet so, as they come most freely being made willing by his grace” (10.1, emphasis mine). In Chapter 10, the WCF also notes that effectual calling depends upon an act of God’s grace in which its beneficiary is “altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered, and conveyed in it” (10.2). Though I have chosen to focus upon the codification of the Reformed view in the Canons of Dort, the WCF’s description of effectual calling fully corresponds to that of Canons and includes an implicit distinction between regeneration in its broader and narrower senses. This becomes explicit in WCF 10.3, which speaks of the Spirit’s work of regeneration in the instance of “elect infants . . . and all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.”

13. For a helpful discussion of what is meant by the language, “infuses new qualities,” see Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:92–95; and W. Robert Godfrey, *Saving the Reformation: The Pastoral Theology of the Canons of Dort* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2019), 137–138. Bavinck notes that this language does not refer to an “infusion of substance” or an ontological change in those who are regenerated, but to a renovative or transformative work of Spirit who restores the human heart, mind, and will so that they can properly act in response to God’s Word: “Now if regeneration is neither an actual creation (an infusion of substance) nor a merely external moral amendment of life, it can only consist in a spiritual renewal of those inner dispositions of humans that from ancient times were called ‘habits’ or ‘qualities.’ . . . Hence, though these are new qualities that regeneration implants in a person, they are nevertheless no other than those that belong to human nature, just as health is the normal state of the body. They are ‘habits,’ dispositions, or inclinations that were originally included in the image of God and

language “infuses new qualities,” the authors of the Canons reject the standard Arminian view that the work of the Spirit is limited to a “gentle” or “moral” persuasion that is mediated through the Word alone.¹⁴ In the Arminian view, the grace of the Spirit that is at work in the proclamation of the gospel amounts to no more than a general, ineffectual act that grants its recipients the “power of attaining faith” but falls short of granting faith.¹⁵ To oppose this view, the Canons emphasize how, by virtue of the Spirit’s work in regeneration: those who were formerly blind are now able to see, those who were formerly dead are now alive, and those who were formerly unwilling are now compliant.¹⁶ The Spirit’s work is akin to making a tree good so that it might produce the fruits of good deeds.

Interestingly, in the article that follows this description of the Holy Spirit’s inward work that accompanies the gospel’s outward proclamation, the Canons use the term “regeneration” for the first time. Regeneration is defined in its narrow sense as a work performed by the Spirit that is “entirely supernatural” and ultimately hidden and inexpressible. The work of regeneration in this sense is comparable to a “new creation, the raising from dead, and the making alive so clearly proclaimed in the Scriptures, which God works in us without our help” (Art. 12). Faith and repentance are genuinely human responses to the Word in which believers willingly and gladly embrace the promise of the gospel. But faith and repentance occur only in consequence of a preceding act of the Spirit in the new birth. The act of the Spirit in regeneration surpasses the power of an “outward teaching” or “moral suasion” through the Word that would leave it within “man’s power whether or not to be converted”:

agreed with the law of God and whose restoration liberates the fallen, sinful human nature from its darkness and slavery, its misery and death” (4:94).

14. This language is used in the Rejection of Errors that are appended to the third and fourth main points of doctrine: “Who teach that the grace by which we are converted to God is nothing but a gentle persuasion, or (as others explain it) that the way of God’s acting in man’s conversion that is most suited to human nature is that which happens by persuasion, and that nothing prevents this grace of moral suasion even by itself from making natural men spiritual” (vii).

15. Cf. Canons of Dort III/IV, Rejection of Errors vi: “Who teach that in the true conversion of man new qualities, dispositions, or gifts cannot be infused or poured into his will by God, and indeed that the faith [or believing] by which we first come to conversion and from which we receive the name ‘believers’ is not a quality or gift infused by God, but only an act of man, and that it cannot be called a gift except in respect to the power of attaining faith.”

16. In addition to refuting the Arminian view of the work of the Spirit in the gospel call, the Canons at this point are also refuting a modified, restricted view of the Spirit’s work in effectual calling that was associated with the teaching of John Cameron (c. 1579/80–1625) and the French Academy of Saumur. According to this view, the human will always follows the conclusions of the “practical reason.” When the practical reason understands what is right and desirable, the human moral nature will follow its dictates and act accordingly. According to the teaching of the school of Saumur, the work of the Spirit in effectual calling and regeneration does not “restore” the will of those called, but only the understanding. Theologically expressed, the Spirit’s work of “illumination” is sufficient to move lost sinners to respond to the gospel call without enlivening their wills. The Canons directly oppose this restricted view of regeneration, when they speak of the Spirit’s “infusing new qualities into the will” so that it becomes “compliant.” On this subject, see Bavinck, *Saved by Grace*, 49–51.

Rather, it is an entirely supernatural work, one that is at the same time most powerful and most pleasing, a marvelous, hidden, and inexpressible work, which is not lesser than or inferior in power to that of creation or of raising the dead, as Scripture (inspired by the author of this work) teaches. As a result, all those in whose hearts God works in this marvelous way are certainly, unfailingly, and effectively reborn and do actually believe. And then the will, now renewed, is not only activated by God but in being activated by God is also itself active. For this reason, man himself, by that grace which he has received, is also rightly said to believe and to repent. (Art. 11)

In the remaining articles of the fourth main point of doctrine, several further points are made regarding the work of the Spirit in effectual calling and regeneration. First, Article 12 emphasizes the ineffability or unknowability of the Spirit's work of regeneration. How the Spirit grants new life in regeneration is not so much known as it is experienced. Believers should be content to acknowledge that God's grace preceded and moved them by an invincible working of the Holy Spirit to "believe with the heart and love their Savior" (Art. 13). Second, the Spirit's work of regeneration in the narrow sense involves more than an act that "enables" some to believe, though the choice to do so remains within their power. God grants more than "the potential to believe." Faith is God's gift, and therefore God grants "both the will to believe and the belief itself" (Art. 14). Third, the work of the Spirit in regeneration does not "abolish the will and its properties or coerce a reluctant will by force, but spiritually revives, heals, reforms, and—in a manner at once pleasing and powerful—bends it back" (Art. 16). The grace of regeneration does not act in people "as if they were blocks and stones" but instead renews human nature as it has been corrupted through sin. The Spirit does not create a new nature but renews the fallen nature of sinners so as to enable them to come to God in faith freely. And fourth, though the work of the Spirit in regeneration, narrowly considered, is an immediate act of the Spirit, God has appointed the Word, the sacraments, and discipline as the "means" whereby he is pleased to bestow his grace (Art. 17). Regeneration in the broader sense of effectual calling and conversion occurs through the gospel, which God has appointed as the "seed of regeneration and the food of the soul" (Art. 17).

1.3. Effectual Calling and Regeneration in Francis Turretin's *Institutes*

A second illustration of the traditional Reformed formulation of effectual calling and regeneration in the order of salvation is found in Francis Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*.¹⁷ Turretin's treatment of effectual calling aims to capture the consensus of Reformed thinking on the topic, distinguishing it from that of Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Arminianism. While Turretin presents the subject in a more scholastic form than the more pastoral handling in the Canons of Dort, he explicitly affirms what the Canons teach in their fourth main point of doctrine. In

17. Trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., volume 2: Eleventh Through Seventeenth Topics (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1994).

keeping with his penchant for careful definition and distinction, Turretin offers a more sophisticated treatment of the distinction between and inter-relation of effectual calling and regeneration. Therefore, Turretin's formulation of the order of salvation in his *Institutes* provides a benchmark for subsequent engagement with the topic in Reformed theology to the present day.

In the order of topics in his *Institutes*, Turretin takes up effectual calling and regeneration at the outset of his comprehensive consideration of the benefits of Christ's saving office as Mediator. These benefits were acquired for us by Christ and are applied to us in a particular order that begins with our calling through the gospel. Turretin defines the gospel call as "an act of the grace of God in Christ by which he calls men dead in sin and lost in Adam through the preaching of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit, to union with Christ and to the salvation obtained in him."¹⁸ For lost sinners to be saved in time through participation in Christ and his benefits, God ordinarily works through the gospel Word, calling all to salvation. That the communication of the benefits of Christ's saving office begins with calling confirms that God uses "means" in the conversion of sinners, namely, "the voice of the gospel and the preaching of the word, than which nothing fitter and better adapted to a rational creature could be given in order that man who is gifted with speech [*logikos*] might harmonize with the word [*logos*]."¹⁹

After noting that the application of Christ's benefits in the order of salvation begins with God's call to salvation in Christ through the Word, Turretin observes that a distinction must be drawn between "external" and "internal" calling.

A twofold calling is therefore acknowledged by us, corresponding to the twofold state of the church—the visible and invisible (*viz.*, an external and internal). The former takes place only by the ministry of the word and sacraments (which are external means of application). The latter, however, takes place with the additional internal and omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit. That knocks only at the ears of the body; this knocks at the heart also. That exerts itself only objectively; this works effectively also. That persuades morally; this persuades and draws efficaciously also.²⁰

In his elaboration of the distinction between the external and internal call, Turretin notes several similarities between them: (1) God is the Author of the call, whether external or internal; (2) the recipients of the external and internal call are the same, sinners who are fallen in Adam and dead in their trespasses and sins; (3) the instrument of the external and internal call is the gospel Word; and (4) the goal of the external and internal call is God's glory. In these respects, there is no objective or visible difference between the external and internal call. However, they also differ in several crucial ways: (1) in the external call, God speaks only "imperatively," exhorting sinners to believe and repent, but in the internal call, God speaks "operatively," "supplying the necessary strength and working within what he enjoins without"; (2)

18. *Ibid.*, 2:501.

19. *Ibid.*, 2:502.

20. *Ibid.*

in the external call, God works only by the “mode” of the Word, but in the internal call, God works by the “mode” of his Spirit also; (3) in the external call, the “amplitude” is many, but in the internal call only a few are chosen; (4) the external call is inefficacious in respect to the event, but the internal call is efficacious with respect to the event; and (5) the external call is temporal and revocable in duration, but the internal call is immutable and irrevocable.²¹

Consistent with his theology’s “elenctic” or apologetical character, Turretin observes that the distinction between external and internal calling is wrongly conceived in Lutheran orthodoxy and Arminian teaching. Both make the efficacy of the gospel call depend finally upon the human will that either resists or does not resist the call. In Lutheran orthodoxy, external and internal calling are identified or viewed as the same thing, “so that all externally called are internally called.”²² When the question is raised, what causes the call to be efficacious in one recipient and inefficacious in the other?—the Lutheran answer is that the difference arises from the will of the recipient. In consequence of an act of the human will, the call of the gospel, even though in itself efficacious to effect its purpose, is resisted and nullified. In Turretin’s estimation, Arminian teaching explains the matter “more clearly” (though also wrongly). For the Arminian, what makes the call efficacious or inefficacious is the “the good will of man [who] superadds efficacy and because they freely receive the word which the others reject.”²³ The advantage of the Arminian view is that it more openly maintains that the efficacy of the gospel call finally depends upon an independent act on the part of those called rather than upon the Spirit’s ministry that accompanies the Word. The Arminian view expressly denies any efficacy to the call. In contrast, the Lutheran view affirms its efficacy while at the same time declaring that it can be rendered inefficacious by the will of its recipient. Only the orthodox Reformed view, following the example set by Augustine in his opposition to Pelagius, affirms the efficacy of the gospel call in the case of the elect. As Turretin puts it, only the Reformed view distinguishes external and efficacious calling *a priori*, “by reason of the will and the divine decree and the nature of calling itself.”²⁴ Both the Lutheran and Arminian distinguish between external and efficacious calling *a posteriori* by reason of the independent action of the human will. The call of the gospel only becomes efficacious “eventually” or by virtue of the action of those who are called.

21. *Ibid.*, 2:502–3. In his treatment of effectual calling and regeneration, Geerhardus Vos affirms the distinction between “external” and “internal” calling, noting that this language was driven by “the conviction that the working of God’s grace may not be detached from the Word of God” (*Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:35). However, Vos also argues that the language of internal “calling,” when used to describe the Spirit’s work of regeneration, obscures two points: first, that regeneration occurs “below the consciousness”; and second, that regeneration is analogous to a “physical” act that changes those whom God calls “from one condition into another,” whereas calling is a “teleological” act that directs those whom God calls “to a certain end” (*ibid.*, 34). According to Vos, “If ‘calling’ is always something that comes from outside and presupposes a hearing, then calling cannot be internal, and it is a misuse of the word to indicate regeneration by it” (*ibid.*).

22. *Ibid.*, 2:503.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

After his introductory exposition of the nature of the gospel call, including the distinction between external and internal (efficacious) calling, Turretin offers an extended account of the seriousness and sincerity of the gospel call when it is addressed indiscriminately to all lost sinners alike. He then returns to the subject of effectual calling and offers an extended exploration of what accounts for its efficacy. In this discussion, Turretin provides a theological and biblical case for distinguishing between regeneration in its narrower and broader senses.

When Turretin offers his more extensive account of effectual calling, he begins with a summary of the position he wishes to expound and then offers five “propositions” to elaborate upon the nature and reason for the efficacy of the gospel call in drawing the elect into fellowship with Christ. His summary is as follows:

The orthodox suspend the efficacy of calling neither upon the event, nor upon its congruity. But they derive it from the supernatural power of grace and the divine and ineffable motion of God, which *so sweetly and at the same time powerfully affects the man that he cannot (thus called) help following God who calls and being converted. Although its nature cannot be indeed fully perceived by us, we embrace it in five propositions* [emphasis mine].²⁵

When Turretin states that the efficacy of calling does not depend “upon the event,” he means to refer to the ministry of the gospel in the sense of the external or general proclamation to all lost sinners. When the gospel is proclaimed, it is not always accompanied by the powerful working of Christ’s Spirit, whereby lost sinners are converted. Simply stated, not all lost sinners are called effectually according to God’s purpose of election. When Turretin also rejects the notion that the gospel is efficacious by “congruity,” he refers to the opinion of the Roman Catholic theologian, Bellarmine, and others, like Suarez and Molina, who taught that the gospel call is a form of “moral suasion” that becomes efficacious through the free, independent acts of those whom God foreknows will be disposed to cooperate with it at a suitable time and place within his providential ordering of events.²⁶ In Turretin’s judgment, the doctrine of congruity betrays a semi-Pelagian or Arminian standpoint. The efficacy of the gospel call finally depends upon a free, indeterminate act on the part of those to whom the call is extended. The doctrine of congruity shares with semi-Pelagian and Arminian teaching the idea of a “synergy” between God’s grace and the sinner’s free will in cooperating with and thereby rendering it efficacious.

The first of Turretin’s five propositions on the efficacy of the calling is a restatement of the last part of his summary, where he admits that “its nature cannot indeed be fully perceived by us.” As he states it in propositional form, “The ways of

25. *Ibid.*, 2:521.

26. *Ibid.*, 2:518. For a summary of Suarez and Molina’s views and their influence upon Arminius’ formulation of the gospel call and human freedom, see Richard A. Muller; *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 154–60, 182–90; and Cornelis P. Venema, *Chosen in Christ: Revisiting the Contours of Predestination* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-Shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2019), 230, 305–08, 326–27.

the Lord in grace as well as in nature are inscrutable.”²⁷ By granting this proposition the first place, Turretin wants to affirm a common theme present in sixteenth and seventeenth-century discussions of the topic. Just as the authors of the Canons of Dort emphasize the mysterious and ineffable manner in which the Spirit of Christ works with the Word in calling the elect to salvation, Turretin emphasizes that even his careful elucidation of the topic does not adequately comprehend the way God works in effectual calling. When it comes to the work of the Spirit in effectual calling, we must never forget the point that our Lord makes in John 3 regarding the way of the Spirit’s working: “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). Contrary to a common prejudice that his careful, scholastic theological formulations are a regrettable form of theological hairsplitting or overweening logic, Turretin expressly acknowledges that his endeavor to understand does not deny the incomprehensibility of God and his works.

The second of Turretin’s propositions is: “The movement of efficacious grace in man is not after the manner of an act or only simultaneous concurrence, but also after the manner of a principal and of previous concurrence or predetermination.”²⁸ The point of this proposition is to oppose Pelagian and semi-Pelagian views of the way God acts in concurrence with human acts, especially in respect to the call of the gospel. The common theme in all such views is that the grace of God and the will of man function as “two allied and coordinate causes in the production of an effect.”²⁹ God is not the principal Actor who moves the will of lost sinners to respond to the gospel call in faith and repentance. There is no act that God performs in calling lost sinners to himself; that is his act alone. In Pelagian and semi-Pelagian views, conversion is to be conceived after the manner of “two horses drawing the same chariot.”³⁰ Until the human will chooses to cooperate with God’s call to faith and repentance, God is powerless to act upon the will in such a way as to move it from being an enslaved will that invariably resists God’s will to being a will that freely or spontaneously does what God requires. In all forms of Pelagianism, salvation is ultimately viewed as the result of a “synergy” between God’s will and the sinner’s will. Monergism in the order of salvation is granted no place. God’s act produces no effects without the independent and coordinate act of those whom God calls. In his second proposition, Turretin maintains that God’s grace precedes and moves the human will to act and that this grace is properly to be viewed on analogy to “creation, regeneration, resurrection and similar phrases” in Scripture.³¹

27. *Ibid.*, 2:521.

28. *Ibid.*, 2:522.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.* To confirm this proposition, Turretin quotes Augustine: “God, not by the law or doctrine sounding without, but by an internal and hidden, wonderful and ineffable power, operates in the hearts of man, not only true revelations but also good wills” (*ibid.*). The quotation is taken from Augustine’s *On the Grace of Christ*. (*A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church*, ed. Phillip Schaff [New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1887], 5:227).

The third proposition of Turretin is closely linked with the second. In this proposition, Turretin introduces a significant distinction between conversion viewed as “habitual” (*conversio habitualis*) and as “actual” (*conversion actualis*): “As conversion can be considered under a twofold relation (*schesei*), either as habitual or as actual, so both God and man certainly concur, but in such a way that in both the glory of the whole action ought to be ascribed to God alone.”³² In this proposition, Turretin expresses the same point that we noted earlier in our consideration of the Canons of Dort.

Through the former, man is renovated and converted by God. Through the latter, man, renovated and converted by God, turns himself to God and performs acts. The former is more properly called regeneration because it is like a new birth by which the man is reformed after the image of his Creator. The latter, however, is called conversion because it includes the operation of the man himself. Now although in the order of time, they can scarcely be distinguished in adults (in whom the action of God converting man is never without the action of man turning himself to God), still in the order of nature and causality the habitual ought to precede the actual and the action of God the action of man. A thing ought to exist before it can work, and as the soul cannot elicit acts of the understanding and will (unless furnished with the natural powers of intellect and will in the sphere of being), so it cannot properly understand and will in the sphere of morals unless renewed by supernatural dispositions and habits.³³

The point Turretin makes in this third proposition is that lost sinners are incapable of doing what the gospel call requires, namely, believing and repenting, because they have no spiritual capacities of heart, mind (intellect), will, or affection to do so. By virtue of their corrupted and sinful nature, lost sinners have “habits of the heart” (out of which flow the issues of life) that render them incapable of responding properly to the gospel call. In the language of Scripture, an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit unless and until it has been made good; a blind person cannot see unless and until his blindness is cured; a slave to sin is unable to release himself from his bondage; a person who neither sees nor understands nor desires the things of God cannot turn to God without the new birth that the Spirit alone authors. Lost sinners are spiritually dead. In the sense of “habitual conversion,” regeneration is the source and ground for whatever acts of faith and love are performed in response to the gospel call.³⁴ Through “habitual conversion,” those whom God effectually calls are granted “principles of action which God confers upon the faculties of corrupt man.”³⁵ These principles of action are logically antecedent to any acts that lost sinners perform in faith and

32. *Ibid.*, 2:522.

33. *Ibid.*, 2:522–23.

34. Turretin cites the following passages in support of this claim: Ephesians 2:10; 1 John 4:7; 5:1.

35. *Ibid.*, 2:523.

repentance. As Turretin puts it in an uncharacteristically pithy way, a “thing ought to exist before it can work.”³⁶

Though Turretin insists on distinguishing “habitual or passive” and “actual or active” conversion, he also argues for their inseparability. In the actual conversion of those who are called through the gospel, there is a “concurrence” between God’s action and the action of those who turn to God in faith and repentance. God grants faith and repentance, but in such a way that these responses are genuinely the acts of those who are saved. Because the “heart-turning” power of the Spirit in regeneration occurs “without any cooperation from man,” it must be viewed as an act in which its beneficiary is “passive.”³⁷ However, in active conversion, God and those whom he converts act concursively, even cooperatively. Though God’s action may be the “principal cause” of conversion, the action of the converted is the “proximate and immediate” cause.³⁸ For that reason, we must not view God’s action as one that treats the converted person “like a log and a trunk.”³⁹ When the Spirit works upon the will of those who are called through the gospel, he does not “force the will and carry it on unwillingly to conversion, but glides most sweetly into the soul (although in a wonderful and ineffable manner, still most suitably to the will) and operates by an infusion of supernatural habits by which it is freed little by little from its innate depravity so as to become willing from unwilling and living from dead.”⁴⁰ By virtue of the Spirit’s life-giving power, “the will so renewed and acted upon immediately acts, converting itself to God and believing.”⁴¹

The fourth proposition of Turretin on the efficacy of calling is: “The movement of efficacious grace is properly to be called neither physical nor ethical, but supernatural and divine (which in a measure includes both these relations [*schesis*]).”⁴² Because the recipient of the call is a moral and responsible agent, God does not move those he converts in the way a physical, non-moral object is moved. God respects the moral faculty of those to whom he speaks. However, the movement of grace in effectual calling goes beyond an objective presentation of the gospel and a “mild suasion” of its recipient. Efficacious grace is “supernatural and divine, rising above all these classes” and includes aspects analogous to physical and moral modes of action.⁴³ According to Turretin, it “pertains to physical mode that God by his Spirit creates, regenerates, gives us a heart of flesh and infuses into us efficiently the supernatural habits of faith and love. It pertains to a moral mode in that it teaches, inclines, persuades and draws to itself by various reasons as if by the chains of love.”⁴⁴ But the efficacy of calling surpasses even these modes as an act of divine omnipotence, invincibly achieving its purpose without compelling anyone to act unwillingly.

36. *Ibid.*, 2:522.

37. *Ibid.*, 2:523.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*, 2:524.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*

Thus neither that strength nor efficacy compels the man unwillingly, nor sweetly moves him now running spontaneously; but each joined together both strengthens the weakness of man and overcomes the hatred of sin. It is powerful that it may not be frustrated; sweet that it may not be forced. Its power is supreme and inexpugnable that the corruption of nature may be conquered, as well as the highest impotence of acting well and the necessity of doing evil. Yet still it is friendly and agreeable, such as becomes an intelligent and rational nature.⁴⁵

In support of his claim that the efficacy of grace includes physical, ethical, and supernatural modes of divine action, Turretin appeals to the diverse language found in the Scriptures. When the Scriptures speak of “creation,” “resurrection,” “regeneration,” and “drawing” to describe the efficacy of grace, the language used likens God’s action to a physical mode. When the Scriptures speak of “illumination,” “doctrine,” “persuasion,” and similar words, this language compares God’s action to a moral mode. But the language of Scripture often combines these two modes of divine action in a way that bespeaks an efficacy that is at the same time “omnipotent and most friendly,” an act simultaneously of “power” and “wisdom,” strong but also sweet.⁴⁶ For this reason, Arminianism misrepresents the efficacy of grace when they use the language of “irresistible” to imply that the orthodox view of effectual calling ascribes a coercive power to God’s Spirit.⁴⁷ The Spirit powerfully enables and gently persuades those he draws to come to God and be saved in a uniquely divine and supernatural manner. In effectual calling, God’s Spirit works in such a way that “liberty conspires in a friendly manner with necessity.”⁴⁸ Those whom God calls must come according to his purpose of election, but they do so most freely and gladly. God compels no one to come to him in a forced and involuntary manner.

The fifth and last proposition of Turretin on the efficacy of calling is: “Although the Spirit in effectual calling does not act without the word, still he does not act only mediately through the word; but he also acts immediately with the word on the soul, so that the calling necessarily produces its effect.”⁴⁹ In some respects, the point that Turretin makes in this proposition is anticipated in those that precede it, especially his

45. *Ibid.*, 2:524–25.

46. *Ibid.*, 2:525.

47. *Ibid.*, 2:547. Turretin expresses serious reservations about the suitability of expressions like the “resistibility” and “irresistibility” of grace, even calling them “barbarous expressions” that are “little adapted to unfold what is sought” (*ibid.*, 2:547). He readily acknowledges that all lost sinners have the power to “resist” God’s grace and are not able to do otherwise. However, the key question in dispute “concerns internal and subjective grace—whether when God applies it for conversion, man can so struggle against it that the event intended by God does not follow” (*ibid.*). In response to the common objection of Pelagian and Arminian theologians that “irresistible grace” is a form of “coercion” or coercion that “forces” the will to act in a certain way, Turretin notes that God’s grace “perfects nature” and does not nullify it. As he curtly puts it, “It is impossible and absurd (*asystaton*) for the will to be forced because thus it would be nolition (*no luntas*), not volition (*voluntas*)” (*ibid.*, 2:558).

48. *Ibid.*, 2:526.

49. *Ibid.*

third proposition. However, in this proposition, Turretin directly addresses essential questions regarding the interplay between the Spirit and the Word in effectual calling and regeneration. One of these questions is: What distinctive roles do the Spirit and the Word play in effectual calling and regeneration? Another is: Should a distinction be drawn between the way the Spirit works *mediately* (with and through the Word) in effectual calling and the way the Spirit works *immediately* in regeneration according to its narrower sense?

Turretin begins his treatment of the fifth proposition by reiterating how the Spirit and the Word concur in effectual calling. Since faith comes by hearing, and hearing comes through the Word, effectual calling ordinarily occurs as the Spirit works with the gospel Word. God treats those he calls as “rational” creatures according to the “constitution of the covenant of grace.”⁵⁰ Therefore, he draws lost sinners to himself in the covenant of grace by means corresponding to the nature of those he addresses. That the Word is the means God uses instrumentally in effectual calling is especially evident from the manner in which adults are brought into fellowship with God.⁵¹ Nonetheless, the efficacy of the call does not reside in the Word alone since the Word does not possess an inherent power to bring about the conversion of lost sinners. The Word proclaims the gospel call to faith and repentance but, left to itself, remains insufficient to bring lost sinners to conversion. No matter how clearly and compellingly the Word is proclaimed, and in whatever the circumstances, the Word cannot produce conversion “unless the secret, ineffable and hyperphysical operation of the Spirit attends to affect the soul immediately and turns it by its omnipotent power.”⁵²

The burden of Turretin’s fifth proposition is that there are two prerequisites to the conversion of lost sinners. First, they must be called through the gospel to faith and repentance. And second, they must have the receptivity or “faculty” to do what the call requires. Regarding the second of these, no lost sinner who is spiritually dead has the facility to hear and respond appropriately to the gospel call.

And such and so great is the corruption introduced into the soul by sin that although there always remains in it a natural power of understanding and willing, still the moral habit or disposition of judging and willing properly has so failed that it can no longer move to a right exercise of itself by the presentation of the object . . . unless the faculty itself is first renovated. On this account, there is always a twofold grace in the conversion of man: the one objective and extrinsic, consisting in the proposition of the object; the

50. Ibid.

51. Though Turretin affirms that the Spirit *ordinarily* works *with* the Word, he also notes that there are illustrations in Scripture of instances where God’s effectual calling of some (for example, the thief on the cross or the apostle Paul) is “extraordinary and immediate” (ibid., 2:50). He also affirms that the elect children of believing parents may be granted a “radical and habitual faith” (regeneration) before they come to conscious faith in time (see, e.g., ibid., 2:583). As we noted earlier, this was the consensus view in Reformed orthodoxy and finds confessional expression in the Westminster Confession of Faith (10.3).

52. Ibid.

other subjective, acting immediately upon the faculty to render it capable of receiving the object, not only that it may be able rightly to elicit its own acts in reference to it, but also to elicit them actually. Each of them depends upon the Holy Spirit working in two ways—both in the word and in the heart; in the word as the objective cause; in the heart as the efficient cause of faith. In the word, acting morally by the revelation of the object and suasion; in the heart, working efficaciously and hyperphysically by an infusion of good habits, the creation of a new heart and the powerful impression of the proposed object.⁵³

In support of his fifth proposition, Turretin cites the opinions of Augustine, the authors of the Canons of Dort, and Calvin, all of whom ascribe the conversion of the elect to a work of the Spirit “by which he operates immediately upon the faculties themselves to dispose them to a saving reception of the word and by whose efficacy conversion is necessarily and infallibly brought about.”⁵⁴ He also provides several biblical arguments for insisting that the Word must be accompanied by an immediate act of the Spirit granting the new birth for those whom God calls to be drawn into fellowship with Christ. These arguments include: (1) the biblical description of the corruption and impotence of our fallen human nature; (2) the biblical imagery for the “mode” of the Spirit’s work, which is compared to a “creation,” a “resurrection,” a “new birth,” the “taking away of the heart of stone, and the giving of a heart of flesh”; (3) biblical passages that distinguish the power of the Spirit from that of the Word; and (4) biblical passages that speak of a gracious act that opens the heart as a necessary prerequisite to the reception of the Word.⁵⁵

After treating these five propositions, Turretin concludes his discussion of effectual calling and regeneration by addressing two critical questions. The first question is whether “in the first moment of conversion man is merely passive or whether his will cooperates in some measure with the grace of God.”⁵⁶ Turretin answers this question in the affirmative. In the first moment of conversion, the gracious work of the Spirit is, in the nature of the case, monergistic. No one gives birth to himself in order to enter the kingdom of God. Only in the “second stage of conversion” may we speak of a “synergy” or a “working together” on the part of God who calls and those who believe and convert themselves to him. The only “efficient

53. *Ibid.*, 2:526–27.

54. *Ibid.*, 2:529–30. As noted earlier regarding the language of an “infusion of habits” in the Canons of Dort (*vide supra* fn13), Turretin does not mean an “infusion of substance” or an actual creation of a new nature in fallen sinners. Turretin concurs with the consensus of Reformed theologians by expressly rejecting the teaching of the Lutheran theologian, Matthias Flacius, who taught that original sin belongs to the “substance of man,” and is not an “accident” or mere “corruption” of fallen human nature. By an “infusion of habits,” Turretin means to refer to an act whereby a corrupted nature is restored to its original “integrity” (*ibid.*, 2:541).

55. *Ibid.*, 2:530–36. Among others, Turretin cites the following passages from Scripture in support of these points: Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:26, 27; John 3:5; 8:34; 15:5; Acts 16:14; 26:18; Rom. 6:19; 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14; 3:6, 7, 9; 4:7; 2 Cor. 3:5; Eph. 2:1, 2; 4:18; 5:8; Phil. 2:13; Col. 1:21; 1 Thess. 1:5.

56. *Ibid.*, 2:542.

cause properly so called” in the first moment of conversion is “God himself regenerating or the Spirit of regeneration.”⁵⁷

The second question is whether “efficacious grace operates only by a certain moral suasion which man is able to receive or to reject. Or whether it operates by an invincible and omnipotent suasion which the will of man cannot resist.”⁵⁸ Terming this the “principal” point in dispute between the orthodox and the Arminian parties, Turretin emphatically rejects any view that limits the efficacy of grace to a mere “moral suasion.” Though God’s power in effectual calling does not exclude but presumes his use of the Word as an “external means,” the Spirit accompanies the Word in power to persuade and draw those whom he calls according to his purpose. The Spirit “concur[s]” with the Word in effectual calling, but the concurrence of the Word is not “collateral” but “subordinate.”⁵⁹ The Spirit works with the Word, to be sure, but the instrumentality of the Word remains subordinate to the agency of the Spirit, who remains the “principal” cause of the conversion of those who are called according to God’s purpose.⁶⁰

1.4. A Summary of the Traditional View

In the fourth main point of the doctrine of the Canons of Dort and Turretin’s *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, we find a consensus formulation of effectual calling and regeneration in the order of salvation. Employing the distinction between regeneration in a broader and a narrower sense, Reformed theology has characteristically viewed effectual calling and regeneration as inseparable, but nonetheless, distinct aspects of the Spirit’s work with the Word in drawing sinners into fellowship with Christ. Both the Canons and Turretin treat regeneration within the context of effectual calling. However, they also distinguish regeneration from effectual calling when considering the work of the Spirit in granting the new birth. Effectual calling is a work of persuasion that takes place through the ministry of the Word. But it requires an act that the Spirit alone performs, reminding us that the Word has no intrinsic power to effect conversion without the life-giving action of the Holy Spirit. A distinction is, therefore, commonly drawn between “external” and “internal” calling,” between the message of the gospel and the Spirit’s regenerating work that ensures the proper response to the gospel. Utilizing the language of an “infusion of habits,” the traditional view insists that the Spirit instantaneously implants the principle of life at the core of the being of those who are granted faith and repentance. This act of the Spirit is properly monergistic. The Spirit alone authors the new birth. In respect to regeneration in this sense, those who are born again are passive. Through the new birth, the Spirit renews the heart, mind, will, and affections to move sinners to respond as they should. In reply to the common charge that the Reformed view amounts to a form of “coercion,” the traditional view insists that the Spirit works in a manner that is simultaneously powerful and persuasive, invincible and sweet.

57. *Ibid.*, 2:543.

58. *Ibid.*, 2:546.

59. *Ibid.*, 2:558.

60. *Ibid.*

2. Effectual Calling as a Regenerative Divine Speech Act: A Recent Proposal

Now that we have considered two illustrations of the way Reformed theology has historically viewed the Spirit's work in effectual calling and regeneration, we are in a position to consider a recent proposal that denies any distinction between them and simply identifies effectual calling with regeneration. According to the proposal advanced by Vanhoozer and Horton, effectual calling and regeneration should not be viewed as distinct yet ordinarily inseparable aspects of the Spirit's work in drawing those whom God purposes to save into fellowship with Christ. Rather, effectual calling and regeneration should be regarded as essentially the same action effected by the Spirit's presence in and through the Word. God accomplishes his purposes in redemption through a speech act wherein the ministry of the Word is effectual to accomplish its purpose. Consistent with the general nature of God's agency in the world he creates, redeems, and brings to its appointed destiny, God realizes his saving purposes in relation to human beings in and through the Word that he speaks.

Though there are considerable similarities between Vanhoozer and Horton's versions of the proposal to view effectual calling as itself a regenerative act, I will begin with a treatment of Vanhoozer's view and only thereafter turn to Horton's view. Since Horton expressly acknowledges his dependence upon Vanhoozer's proposal for his own formulation of effectual calling and regeneration, Vanhoozer's argument deserves to be treated first. Of the two authors of the suggestion that effectual calling is a divine speech act that is regenerative in its effect, Vanhoozer offers the original and more comprehensive argument for this view. In the case of both authors, we will also observe how their redefinition of the way God accomplishes his purposes in salvation is part of their larger theological projects.

2.1. Vanhoozer's Central Theme: God is a Triune Communicative Agent

In two of his three major theological studies, Vanhoozer proposes formulating effectual calling and regeneration as a singular divine speech act. In both instances, Vanhoozer offers his proposal as a kind of test case or illustration of his theology as a whole. In his books, *First Theology*, *The Drama of Doctrine*, and *Remythologizing Theology*, Vanhoozer sets forth a new way forward for an "evangelical-catholic" theology in the aftermath of the decline of modernism and in the face of the challenges of post-modernism.⁶¹ Whereas modernism shaped the approach to theology in the

61. *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002); *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005); and *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Vanhoozer describes his theological project as an "evangelical-catholic" one: "'Evangelical' is the central notion, but 'catholic' adds a crucial antireductionist qualifier that prohibits any one reception of the gospel from becoming paramount" (*The Drama of Doctrine*, 27). Though he is sympathetic toward Reformed theology, he views the catholicity of theology to require a greater openness

period subsequent to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, postmodernism is the milieu in which contemporary theology finds itself. In Vanhoozer's estimation, the approach to theology in the period of modernism, especially among evangelical and orthodox Reformed theologians, was largely ideational or propositional. The Christian theologian's task was to systematically articulate the propositions or truths that can be gleaned from Scripture about God, the world, and humanity.⁶² However, such an approach has little prospect of success within the post-modern context of contemporary theology. Today, any attempt to set forth a system of theological truths will suffer at the hands of those who aim to "deconstruct" systems of thought and expose them as little more than "rhetorical ploys" or "language games" that have no objective existence or relation to reality.⁶³ As Vanhoozer describes it, if postmodernism has a philosophy, it is linguistics. In the language of Jacques Derrida, a post-modern linguistic philosopher of considerable influence, "There is nothing outside the text."⁶⁴

In each of his three major theological works, Vanhoozer argues that the best alternative to the older propositional form of post-Enlightenment theology and the newer linguistic (and relativistic) form of post-modern theology is what he calls a "linguistic-canonical" theology. By a "linguistic-canonical" theology, Vanhoozer means a theology that views the trinitarian being of God in terms of communicative agency. God is what he does, and what he does is speak. When God creates the world and acts in relation to it, he does so by means of communicative acts or words. Thus, a linguistic-canonical theology focuses upon the triune God's self-communicative speech acts as the Father in creation, the Son in redemption, and the Holy Spirit in sanctification. The drama of redemption occurs in stages or movements analogous to a theatrical performance in which the principal actors make their entrances and exits. God moves the story forward as the principal Author and Director of the drama. However, a linguistic-canonical theology is also based upon a particular view of Scripture as the canonical "script" that recounts the history of God's communicative acts and words in the drama of redemptive history. According to Vanhoozer, the canonical Scriptures are a divinely-authored, trustworthy witness to the word-acts of the triune God. The biblical account of the history of redemption provides the church with a normative account of God's communicative action. In the biblical metanarrative of redemption, God's speech acts culminate in the incarnation of the Son, who embodies and fulfills all that God previously communicated through his Word. Within this overarching view of the triune God's communicative acts in the drama of redemptive history, the task of the theologian is to play the part of a

and inclusivity to the diversity of ways in which the gospel has been received throughout the history of the church.

62. Vanhoozer identifies the Princeton theologians Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield, and the evangelical theologian Carl F. H. Henry as represents of a modern propositionalist approach to theology (*The Drama of Doctrine*, 267). By comparison to this approach, he aims to offer what he terms a "new postconservative type of postmodern theology" (*ibid.*, 269).

63. *First Theology*, 19.

64. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 158.

“dramaturge,” a person who knows the script thoroughly, identifies the main characters in the story and prepares the Christian church to “perform” or “re-enact” the story-line of God’s speech acts. The task of theology is to think, first of all, about God. But to do so, theology needs to engage the hermeneutical task of rightly interpreting the “authorized witness of Scripture” to the words of the triune God. As Vanhoozer concisely puts it, God is “a communicative agent who relates to and interacts with human beings in words and Spirit that together minister God’s living Word, Jesus Christ. *The triune God is a personal and transcendent communicative agent.*”⁶⁵

2.2. “Effectual Call or Causal Effect”

In his essay, “Effectual Call or Causal Effect?: Summons, Sovereignty & Supervenient Grace,” Vanhoozer offers an early, seminal account of his proposal that effectual calling should be viewed as an intrinsically regenerating action.⁶⁶ In the introduction to the essay, he clarifies his intention to present an alternative to the traditional Reformed view and to do so in a way that reflects his linguistic-canonical approach to Christian theology. As he puts it, “I shall therefore examine that Benjamin of theological concepts, the Reformed doctrine of the effectual call, keeping in mind the ways this doctrine is colored by, and perhaps itself affects, understandings of the broader God-world relation.”⁶⁷ Consistent with his general theological orientation, Vanhoozer aims to conceive effectual calling as a communicative act of the triune God. Effectual calling illustrates how the Word is the locus of God’s action in relation to the world and the unfolding story of redemption.

Vanhoozer begins by observing that the most common criticism of classical Christian theism is that “it pictures the God-world relation in terms of efficient causality.”⁶⁸ In traditional accounts of how God engages with the world, God’s action is viewed in impersonal and deterministic categories. To illustrate his point, Vanhoozer notes the common complaint of “open theists” that classical theism “drank too deeply from the poisoned wells of Greek philosophy.”⁶⁹ He also references Tillich’s complaint that classical theism conceived of God as a distinct, sovereign being who “supernaturally intervened” in the world in order to accomplish his all-encompassing purposes. All things occur according to God’s sovereign will, and God’s relation to human beings is like that of a monarch with regard to a subject.⁷⁰ He also cites the typical complaint registered by many theologians that the traditional paradigm views God as an agent who can “supernaturally” intervene in the natural

65. *First Theology*, 13.

66. *Ibid.*, 96–124.

67. *Ibid.*, 97.

68. *Ibid.*, 98.

69. *Ibid.*, 97. Vanhoozer cites Clark Pinnock as a proponent of this criticism, noting Pinnock’s claim that classical theism “wrongly conceives the God-world relation in deterministic, impersonal terms.” Cf. Clark H. Pinnock, “Introduction,” in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), x–xi.

70. *Ibid.*

order in a way that parallels efficient causality in the natural world order. Summarizing these complaints against classical theism, Vanhoozer argues that they express a common antipathy toward viewing God's acts in the world to involve a direct divine intervention or determination of what takes place. On the question of effectual calling ("how sinners get grace"), classic theism tends to answer with a "causal analysis" that conceives of God's action as the immediate author of what transpires.

For this reason, Vanhoozer maintains that the topic of effectual calling is a particularly challenging one for contemporary theology. How can the call of the gospel be construed in a way that escapes the charge that it involves a causal divine action that necessarily produces its effect? Effectual calling provides an especially "interesting test case by which to explore the respective merits of theism and panentheism."⁷¹ Though Vanhoozer wants to avoid panentheism, he aims to articulate a view of effectual calling that avoids the pitfalls of classical theism. The doctrine of effectual calling also serves his purpose well since it focuses upon "the particular problem of how divine grace brings about change in the world."⁷² Because the topic of effectual calling deals with God's relation to the world at one of its "most contentious" and "vulnerable" points, namely, the relation of the efficacy of divine calling and the freedom of those called, it is particularly germane to his purpose, namely, to understand how God acts in relation to human beings in the drama of redemptive history. A more viable conception of the relation between God and human creatures in effectual calling will provide a helpful illustration of how we can conceive God's relation to the world in terms of communicative rather than causal agency.

After identifying the occasion for his treatment of effectual calling, Vanhoozer notes that recent discussions have not offered any significant improvements upon the consensus view held in the seventeenth century. In the traditional view, effectual calling is a divine act whereby the Holy Spirit moves recipients of the gospel call to respond in the way of faith and obedience. According to Vanhoozer, because the traditional formulation includes an act of the Spirit in which the recipient of the call is unconscious and inactive, the efficacy of the Word in the gospel call is undermined. The efficacy of grace is affirmed in a manner that "casts doubt on whether grace works with human nature rather than against it."⁷³ Because the traditional view uses language like "physical" or even "hyperphysical" to describe the manner of the Spirit's working, the relation between God's act and the human response seems vulnerable to the charge that God's action is coercive, diminishing genuine human freedom in responding to the call. While Vanhoozer judges the traditional Reformed view as unsatisfactory, he also observes that the alternatives presented by many evangelical and liberal theologians are even less satisfactory. Among evangelical theologians, whether Arminian in the traditional sense or neo-Arminian in the sense of open theism, the efficacy of the gospel call finally depends upon a free, independent act of the human will to cooperate with God's grace. Among non-evangelical, liberal theologians, the default position is some form of panentheism in which God's action upon the world is "general" and indirect. Within a panentheistic framework, God and the world are

71. *Ibid.*, 98.

72. *Ibid.*

73. *Ibid.*, 102.

interdependent and traditional views of divine causality in effectual calling are inconceivable. According to Vanhoozer, none of the traditional or more recent formulations of effectual calling provide a satisfactory account of how God acts concerning human beings. The challenge facing contemporary Christian theologians is to articulate a view of God's action in relation to humans that simultaneously affirms its efficacy and the freedom of those upon whom he acts. Or to state the matter in the form of a question: Can the doctrine of effectual calling be formulated in a manner that avoids viewing God's causality in relation to human beings on analogy to a physical or coercive act?

For Vanhoozer, the answer to this question requires a new way of thinking about the God-world relationship. Rather than viewing God's relation to the world in terms of "causal agency," we need to consider God's relation to the world in terms of "communicative agency."⁷⁴ When God's agency in relation to the world, particularly those he calls through the gospel, is viewed in communicative terms, we can avoid the charge that human beings are subject to an action that overpowers them by "brute" force.

The challenge . . . is to respond to the criticisms that theism is unbiblical, blasphemous and unscientific. A secondary challenge is to account for the peculiar efficacy of God's call. The concept of the speech act enables us, I believe, to unpack the nature of the effectual call, and of God's overall relation to the world, in terms of both energy and information. Moreover, speech act theory sheds new light on certain themes from our earlier discussion: (1) how the effectual call can be regenerative, (2) how the effectual call can be internal and external, and (3) how the illumination of the Spirit relates to the illumination of the Word.⁷⁵

When Vanhoozer refers to "speech act theory," he has in mind a development in twentieth-century philosophy of language or linguistics.⁷⁶ As the language of "speech act" already intimates, words do more than simply "label" things, and sentences do more than merely "state" what is the case. When we speak, we do more than communicate information: We raise a question, summon to action, warn against danger, wish someone well, curse those with whom we are angry, and so on. Speech acts always include at least two features: a locution, the words that are spoken, and an illocution, what the words spoken aim to accomplish or effect. The key to any speech act is not what is said, the propositional content or "matter" of what is spoken, but what we do by means of what we say. As Vanhoozer puts it, "The key notion is that

74. *Ibid.*, 117.

75. *Ibid.*, 118.

76. Vanhoozer notes two sources for his understanding of speech act theory and its usefulness for a view of God's communicative rather than causal agency: Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). The terminology of "speech acts" derives from an earlier, influential study by an Oxford philosopher, J. L. Austin: *How To Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).

of illocution, which has to do not simply with locuting or uttering words but with what we do *in* uttering words.”⁷⁷ When we utilize speech act theory to understand God’s effectual call, we have a conceptual explanation for what God does in speaking or communicating with us. God does not speak to “manipulate” us or force us to act in a certain way. Rather, God communicates with us in effectual calling to understand and respond properly to his call. Effectual calling is a communicative act that occurs in and through the Word; it is not a causal act that depends upon an immediate work of the Holy Spirit that is distinguishable from the Word. Unlike the Arminian understanding of calling, God does more in the gospel call than “name” those who choose freely and independently to believe. God’s Word is not an “invitation” to faith but a “summons” that effectively draws those he calls. Like Jesus’ command to Lazarus to “come out” (John 11:43) or Paul’s ministry of the Word to Lydia (Acts 16:14), the gospel call effectively draws its recipients to faith.

In his account of effectual calling, Vanhoozer uses the language of “communicative joint” to explain how God moves recipients of the gospel call to do what the call summons them to do. When God speaks his Word within the “linguistic community” of the church, he does not move those he addresses in a “causal” manner. Though he moves his hearers to do what the call summons them to do, he does not produce this effect after the manner of “x pushes, pulls, heats, freezes, saves y.”⁷⁸ Because God addresses human beings in and through his Word, the “communicative joint” that moves them to respond as they do resides within their engagement with the Word and what it requires, “interpretation.” When God communicates himself to us, he does so as the Spirit comes to the Word and empowers it to become effectual. To explain the Spirit’s ministry of the Word in effectual calling, Vanhoozer coins the expression of “advenient grace.” The Spirit “advenes” or “comes to” the Word as the gospel is proclaimed. Viewing effectual calling as a divine speech act allows us to go beyond the traditional view that Spirit uses the Word as an “instrumental cause.” Though the language of “instrumental cause” may serve well to describe the way one were to move a piece of wood or a stone, it fails to do justice to the way God’s “work of grace is congruous with human nature.”⁷⁹ When God draws people to himself through effectual calling, his action “is not causal but communicative. The Word itself has a kind of force. One might say, then, with regard to grace, that the *medium* is the message.”⁸⁰ The Word God speaks in the gospel is more than an instrument of the Spirit’s work in effectual calling. When God communicates through the gospel narrative recounted in Scripture and proclaimed in the Word event of preaching, he

77. *Ibid.*, 98.

78. *Ibid.*, 119.

79. *Ibid.*, 120.

80. *Ibid.* Though it may seem a quibble, it is curious that Vanhoozer employs the language of “medium” at this point to describe the efficacy of the Word in effectual calling. Since he wants to say that the Word’s efficacy is not merely that of an instrumental cause, the term “medium” seems inadequate to the task. “Medium” seems synonymous with the “means” or “instrument” through which something is effected. A better way of expressing the point he seems to want to make would be to say that the message or speech act of gospel preaching is intrinsically powerful and efficacious.

does more than utter words or locutions that provide information about him, the world, and his gracious purposes in redemption. God's speech is illocutionary. When the narrative of the gospel is communicated in words, God "displays a world and commends a way of viewing and evaluating it."⁸¹

At this point in his argument for a new way of viewing the efficacy of the gospel call, Vanhoozer raises an important question: If the gospel call is a speech act that has locutionary and illocutionary aspects, how are we to make sense of the fact that not all who hear the Word respond in faith as they should? When the gospel word is preached, may we say that the effectual call "supervenes" upon the Word in such a way that all who hear are "automatically united to Christ" and saved?⁸² At this point in the course of his proposal, Vanhoozer utilizes the traditional language of an "external" and "internal" call and acknowledges that the external call does not always "entail" the other. Though external and internal calling are connected, they are not so conjoined that they always coincide. The gospel word preached is both locutionary and illocutionary. The truth of the gospel is spoken or uttered (locution). But it is spoken as an illocution that aims to accomplish something, namely, draw human beings into fellowship with Christ by faith. But unless the Spirit "advenes" or comes to the Word as the "Spirit of hearing," the preached Word does not produce its desired effect.⁸³ As Vanhoozer acknowledges, "the truth in and of itself often seems powerless to change us. Light alone does not enable the blind person to see. We need the illumination of the Spirit for that."⁸⁴ He also acknowledges that this accounts for how traditional Reformed theology always distinguished "external" and "internal calling." By this distinction, Reformed theology sought to express the truth that effectual calling requires more than the Word alone but must include a work of the Spirit that grants the ability to understand and embrace what the Word declares to be true.

The final piece of Vanhoozer's proposal to use speech act theory to explain effectual calling emerges at this point. To explain why the Spirit needs to "advene" or come to the Word in effectual calling, Vanhoozer appeals to the speech act theory's understanding of "perlocutions." A perlocution is "what one brings about *by* one's speech."⁸⁵ Suppose a speaker engages in an argument for a particular point. In that case, speech act theory distinguishes between the content of the speech (the locutions or words and sentences spoken), the aim of the speech (its illocutionary purpose or aim to persuade), and the effect of the speech (its perlocutionary effect or persuasiveness). Perlocutions have to do with the effect that the words spoken have upon those who hear them. When it comes to the gospel Word that God speaks, the Spirit's ministry empowers the Word to render it efficacious to accomplish God's purpose.

81. *Ibid.*, 120.

82. *Ibid.*, 121.

83. *Ibid.*, 122. Vanhoozer ascribes the expression, "the Lord of the hearing," to Barth, but does not provide a reference.

84. *Ibid.*, 121.

85. *Ibid.*

Now, the primary role of the Spirit, I believe, is to *minister the Word*. The application of salvation is first and foremost a matter of applying both the propositional content and illocutionary force of the gospel in such a way as to bring about perlocutionary effects: effects that in this case include regeneration, understanding and union with Christ. Not for nothing, then, does Paul describe the Word of God as the ‘sword of the Spirit’ (Eph. 6:17) It is not simply the impartation of information nor the transfer of mechanical energy but the impact of a total speech act (the message together with its communicative power) that is required for a summons to be efficacious. . . . The effectual call is best understood in terms of a conjunction of Word and Spirit, illocution and perlocution.⁸⁶

In describing what he calls the “conjunction of Word and Spirit,” Vanhoozer prefers the term “advene” to describe the Spirit’s relation to the Word in effectual calling, not the term “supervene.” Because contemporary writers often employ the latter term to describe a *general* or non-particular divine action that does not have perlocutionary power, Vanhoozer uses the term “advene” to describe a free action of the Spirit who “comes to the Word when and where God wills. The Spirit ‘advenges’ on truth to make it efficacious.”⁸⁷

In concluding his essay on effectual calling, Vanhoozer notes that his view represents neither a pantheistic view of God “supervening” on the world nor a supernaturalistic view of God approaching the world “as a stranger” whose grace “intervenes” in the world. What he wants to articulate is a “communicative theism in which God is a sovereign speaker: locutor, illocution and perlocution.”⁸⁸ When God speaks, he acts communicatively and personally engages the world as his Word. Rather than conceiving God’s action “in terms of causality,” Vanhoozer prefers to conceive God’s action in terms of his being present in the Word he speaks. However, Vanhoozer shrinks back from identification of God with his Word *simpliciter* when he adds the qualification we have already noted. God works not only in the Word he speaks but also in the Spirit. God has, so to speak, two “hands” in his relation to the

86. *Ibid.*, 122–23.

87. *Ibid.* 122. Though I will return to this issue in my evaluation of Vanhoozer’s proposal, it is noteworthy that this is one of the few places where Vanhoozer openly affirms that the efficacy of the gospel call depends ultimately upon God’s saving purpose to save some and not others. In my judgment, Vanhoozer’s use of “advene” in this part of his argument is helpful. Though I do not treat the topic here, Vanhoozer also includes an interesting footnote that seems to affirm the main burden of traditional Reformed accounts of the “immediate” work of the Spirit in regeneration (*ibid.*, 122, fn114). In his footnote he rejects the well-known position of representatives of the school of Saumur in France, who limited the work Spirit in regeneration to the illumination of the mind, assuming that the will of those whom God calls cannot fail to follow the dictates of the practical reason or judgment respecting the truth of the gospel Word (*vide supra* fn 15). Since Vanhoozer’s argument seems to track rather closely with views that would limit the Spirit’s power to what the Word alone can do, his insistence that the Word and Spirit be distinguished in effectual calling closely approximates the traditional Reformed view.

88. *Ibid.*, 123.

world, his Word and Spirit.⁸⁹ If we identify God's action simply by the Word he speaks, we will endanger the freedom of God that is preserved by way of the distinction between the Word God speaks and the "internal call" whereby he grants efficacy to the Word.⁹⁰

2.3. Michael Horton: "Covenantal Ontology and Effectual Calling"

The second advocate of the proposal to use speech act theory in formulating the doctrine of effectual calling is Michael Horton. Horton treats the topic at some length in two places. First, he devotes a chapter to the topic in the third volume of a four-part series on salvation from the perspective of the covenant.⁹¹ And second, he revisits the issue in his systematic theology in the first chapter of an extended discussion of the way God reigns in grace through the ministry of the Spirit.⁹² In both of these places, Horton makes sympathetic use of Vanhoozer's proposal in his own formulation of the commencement of the application of salvation through effectual calling. Since there is considerable overlap in Horton's formulation with that of Vanhoozer, my summary of his position and argument will focus primarily upon the distinctive features of Horton's view.

89. *Ibid.*

90. Vanhoozer provides a second account of his proposal in his more recent book, *Remythologizing Theology* (Chapter 7, "Divine communicative sovereignty and human freedom: the hero talks back," 338–87). In this volume, Vanhoozer continues his project to formulate a theology that identifies God and his relation to the world in terms of communicative agency rather than impersonal causality. The title of the chapter is revealing: Vanhoozer wants to consider how God interacts with human beings, who are the heroes or main characters in the drama of redemptive history from Adam to Abraham to Moses to Christ, who is the incarnate Word of God or the incarnational mode of God's communicative agency. In particular, Vanhoozer explores what happens when "free human heroes 'talk back' to their divine author in ways that either advance the communicative exchange or stop it defiantly in its tracks" (*ibid.*, 338). To use the more prosaic language of traditional theology, when we consider the gospel call to faith and salvation, how can we account for its efficacy in a way that is consonant with God's communicative agency and the freedom of human beings to whom he speaks. So far as I can tell, this chapter does not add anything new or differ in any material way from his earlier essay. Unlike his earlier essay, however, he does use the term "causality" to describe the "distinct communicative" power of effectual calling (*ibid.*, 373). He also expresses his appreciation for the way Barth shifted "the discussion surrounding the *concursum* between divine and human freedom from generalities about causal power to the specifics of Word and Spirit," calling it a "stroke of theological genius" (*ibid.*, 370). I leave to the reader at this point to decide whether the older discussion (pre-Barth) of divine and human freedom, including that found in the Canons of Dort and Turretin, is fairly characterized as marked by "generalities about causal power."

91. *Covenant and Salvation: Union With Christ* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), Chapter 10, "Covenant Theology and Effectual Calling," 216–42.

92. *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 556–75. In this work, Horton entitles his treatment of effectual calling, "Regeneration as Effectual Calling," affirming the point made in his earlier discussion in *Covenant and Salvation*.

As is true of Vanhoozer's proposal, Horton's discussion of effectual calling and regeneration is part of a larger theological project. According to Horton, the traditional formulation of the *ordo salutis* in Reformed theology betrays the influence of what he calls a "medieval ontology of infused habits" in its understanding of effectual calling, particularly the distinction that is drawn between the Spirit's ministry through the gospel Word and the new birth whereby some are granted the capacity to respond to the gospel call.⁹³ Rather than thinking through the implications of the Reformation's emphasis upon the "justifying Word" of God as the basis for its understanding of the application of salvation, the traditional Reformed view displays a "schizophrenic ontology" in which justification is viewed forensically. Still, the remainder of the order of salvation is attributed to regeneration as a transformative or renovative divine action. To preserve the forensic nature of God's justifying Word, the traditional view was obliged to "securely wall off" the forensic from those aspects of the ministry of the Spirit that are due to the work of the Spirit in regeneration.⁹⁴ As Horton describes his proposal,

I contend here that we should recover the earlier identification of the new birth with effectual calling and treat justification as the forensic source for all of the benefits that flow from union with Christ. Eliminating the distinction between regeneration and effectual calling entails the elimination of any appeal to the category of infused habits. Effectual calling *is* regeneration (the new birth), and although the Spirit brings about this response when and where he will, it is brought about through the ministry of the gospel, as Romans 10:17; James 1:18; and 1 Peter 1:23 explicitly state. Through the announcement of the external Word, declaring the absolution, the Spirit gives us the faith to receive the verdict, which in turn begins in us from that moment on the fruit of *faith*: evangelical repentance, mortification, vivification, sanctification, and the works of love. There is no justification apart from faith, but this faith itself is given by God through the external ministry of the gospel that the Spirit makes inwardly effective. The gospel does what it says, because it is not simply a saving message concerning Christ (illocutionary act) but is attended by the Spirit's vivifying agency (perlocutionary effect).⁹⁵

In this statement of his proposal, Horton clarifies that he intends to make use of speech act theory to demonstrate that the gospel Word, which declares God's justifying verdict in Christ, is itself effectual through the ministry of the Spirit. In this respect,

93. *Covenant and Salvation*, 216–17.

94. *Ibid.*, 216.

95. *Ibid.*, 216–17. When Horton speaks of an "earlier identification" of effectual calling and regeneration, he is referring to Reformed theologians in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries who did not distinguish them in the way that more recent theologians have. However, as I have noted in the previous section on the Canons of Dort and Turretin, this distinction was already present in early Reformed orthodoxy and, for that matter, in Augustinian formulations of the distinction between "external" and "internal" calling. I will return to this in my concluding assessment of the proposal of Vanhoozer and Horton.

his proposal is similar to Vanhoozer's. What distinguishes his proposal, however, is that he identifies the gospel Word with God's pronouncement of absolution and regards all the subsequent aspects of the order of salvation, including union with Christ and the renewing work of the Spirit in sanctification, to be grounded in and effected by the proclamation of the gospel Word of forensic justification.

When Horton speaks of Reformed theology's "earlier identification of the new birth with effectual calling," he wants to underscore how his proposal is compatible with the best instincts of Reformed soteriology. The triune God is the sole Author of salvation, and his work of salvation is by grace alone from its inception to its conclusion. Though Reformed theologians during the sixteenth century shared an ontology with their contemporaries (including Roman Catholic theologians) that was "essentially causal" (patterned after the interaction of physical causes with their effects), they nonetheless "went to great pains to insist that regeneration or effectual calling was not an impersonal operation of one object upon another, nor coercive."⁹⁶ For this reason, Reformed theologians traditionally labored to show that God does not treat humans as "blocks of stone, setting creation and redemption in dualistic opposition."⁹⁷ They viewed the "external call" and the "internal call" as intimately and inseparably joined together in effectual calling. The inseparability of Word and Spirit in effectual calling was "grounded in the ontological unity of the living Word and the Spirit."⁹⁸ Effectual calling was viewed as an integral act in which the Father preaches, the Son is preached, and the Spirit acts as the "inner preacher" who illumines the understanding, inclines the will, and disposes those who hear to respond as they should. At their best, Reformed theologians preferred to speak of "effectual calling" rather than "irresistible grace" because this language expressed a "more communicative model of divine action than causal grammars allow."⁹⁹

Therefore, the use of speech act theory in our understanding of effectual calling ought to be viewed as consonant with rather than in conflict with the traditional Reformed view. However, what speech act theory contributes is a more consistent emphasis upon the personal, covenantal, and communicative manner of God's work of grace. It offers an opportunity to employ a "conceptual scheme" from modern philosophy that is "modest in its metaphysical claims" but helpful in carrying forward the Reformation emphasis upon the Spirit's working in and through the Word in ministering the benefits of Christ's saving work to us.¹⁰⁰

Horton generally concurs with Vanhoozer's view in his formulation of effectual calling as a communicative speech act of the Triune God. Employing the conceptual scheme of speech act theory enables theology to avoid a reductionistic view of divine

96. *Ibid.*, 237.

97. *Ibid.*, 218.

98. *Ibid.* Horton's affirmation of an "ontological unity" between the Spirit and the Word requires further exploration. It could be taken as an affirmation of an *intimate relation* between the Spirit and the Word, or it could be taken as an *identification* of the Spirit and the Word. If the latter were intended, it would be difficult, if not impossible to distinguish in any way between "external" and "internal" calling.

99. *Ibid.*, 220.

100. *Ibid.*

revelation as merely the communication of “timeless principles or mere information.”¹⁰¹ Because redemptive history is a “divine drama” in which the triune God is the principal Author and agent, who accomplishes his purposes through the Word that he speaks, we are able to view the effectual call as the Spirit’s work in drawing us

into the world that the Word not only *describes* but also *brings into existence*. Spectators become participants in the unfolding drama. When the Spirit brings about in the audience the perlocutionary effect of the divine drama’s performative utterance, effectual calling does not mean mere influence or coaxing, but a thoroughly effective speech-act.¹⁰²

Though Horton agrees with Vanhoozer’s argument that effectual calling involves a divine speech act with perlocutionary effect, he demurs from Vanhoozer’s reluctance to use the language of “causality” to describe how the Spirit brings about its effect. Rather than dispense with the language of causality altogether, we need to articulate a “richer account of causality.”¹⁰³ Every speech act involves causes, and Vanhoozer himself acknowledges that God’s speech act has both “matter” and “energy” that bring about not only proper understanding but also the appropriate response. According to Horton, there is an “analogical” sense in which God’s speech acts in creation, resurrection, and effectual calling involve “some notion of cause.”¹⁰⁴ What distinguishes the causality of a speech act is the “interpersonal and so covenantal terms” by which its effect is achieved.¹⁰⁵

After offering his general endorsement of Vanhoozer’s proposal, Horton maintains that a speech act conception of effectual calling has two salutary consequences. In the first place, it eliminates any need to distinguish regeneration and effectual calling in our understanding of the order of salvation. And in the second place, it resolves an unfortunate schizophrenia that exists in the traditional formulation between the declarative and forensic pronouncement of God’s gracious justification and those “inner operations that take place apart from the declaratory Word.”¹⁰⁶

Regarding the first consequence, Horton observes that, in the formulation of the order of salvation in later Reformed scholasticism and the British-American tradition, regeneration was increasingly distinguished from effectual calling and conceived of as an immediate act of the Holy Spirit in granting the new birth. Since the immediate act of the Holy Spirit (apart from the Word) in the new birth bestows new habits of heart, understanding, will, and affection, regeneration was not only distinguished from effectual calling but also placed (logically) before regeneration. Contrary to the better instincts of earlier Reformed theologians, who identified regeneration with effectual calling, Reformed orthodoxy distinguished between them and moved in the direction

101. *Ibid.*, 224.

102. *Ibid.*, 224–25.

103. *Ibid.*, 225.

104. *Ibid.*

105. *Ibid.*

106. *Ibid.*, 237.

of an order of salvation in which regeneration precedes effectual calling.¹⁰⁷ As the Reformed tradition moved away from the teaching of baptismal regeneration, it substituted the concept of a “direct and immediate regeneration—the implanting of the *seeds* of faith and repentance—that would in due time be exercised by the elect through their hearing the gospel.”¹⁰⁸ Formulating the order of salvation in terms of a distinction between regeneration and effectual calling became the “privileged position in later Reformed theology.”¹⁰⁹

However, the problem with the traditional formulation is that it limits the efficacy of God’s Word to its locutionary and illocutionary functions. The Word does no more than communicate the truth of the gospel as to its content (locution) and as to its purpose to call lost sinners to faith (illocution). The Word itself is bereft of any power to effect what it declares. Appealing to Vanhoozer’s formulation, Horton argues that no distinction needs to be made between regeneration and effectual calling. Since effectual calling *advenes* on the external preaching of the gospel, we may say that regeneration occurs or takes place *with* and *through* the Word itself.¹¹⁰ The distinction between regeneration “apart from means” and effectual calling “through the Word” proves to be theologically as well as exegetically unnecessary. From the perspective of speech act theory, we may say that the Word is not only “vocal” but also “lively” and “active”¹¹¹ Utilizing the language of the Eastern tradition, we may even affirm that the Word is nothing less than the “living and active” energy of God.¹¹²

Regarding the second consequence, Horton argues that the traditional disjunction of forensic and renovative aspects of the work of salvation is resolved when God’s declaratory Word of justification is understood to be the source of union with Christ and all the benefits that belong to those who are in him. When God declares his justifying Word, those to whom he speaks are effectually called or regenerated, brought into union with Christ through faith, and enjoy all the forensic and renovative

107. Horton cites Charles Hodge, William G. T. Shedd, and Louis Berkhof as illustrations of a shift that took place from earlier to later Reformed scholasticism. Whereas the earlier view identified effectual calling and the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, later theologians distinguished them, placing regeneration (as a direct and immediate work of the Spirit) before effectual calling in the order of salvation. However, a careful reading of the sources, including the Canons of Dort, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and Turretin, illustrates that a distinction between effectual calling and regeneration in the narrower sense of the new birth, was fairly common among most Reformed theologians, even though their formulations of the *ordo salutis* exhibit some diversity in terminology and sequence of aspects. As I have previously noted, Bavinck’s insistence that regeneration does not take place “apart from the Word,” even though it is to be distinguished in its narrow sense from effectual calling, represents a consensus among Reformed theologians in the earlier and later periods of Reformed orthodoxy.

108. *Ibid.*, 233.

109. *Ibid.*

110. *Ibid.*, 237.

111. *Ibid.*, 239.

112. *Ibid.*, 240. Cf. Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 574: “Yet the Word in its spoken and written form is not only a creaturely witness that may or may not correspond to God’s Word at specific moments; it is the *working* (energy) of God. Combining this distinction with speech-act theory, we may say that in this respect God’s *working* is God’s *wording*.”

benefits that the order of salvation describes. Within the framework of his formulation of regeneration as effectual calling, the declaratory Word that God speaks in justification constitutes the ground and source for a more integrated view of all the benefits believers enjoy through union with Christ. Rather than viewing the forensic aspect of salvation, justification, like a solitary island surrounded by regenerative or transformative aspects, we should view the order of salvation as “forensically charged” in all of its aspects. The gospel Word that declares God’s justifying verdict effectually calls those whom it addresses into union with Christ and grants them all of his saving benefits, whether forensic or life-renewing in nature. In a covenantal ontology, God always acts to save in and through the Word he speaks, not by supernaturally implanting habits that precede his Word. As he summarizes his view:

[A] covenantal paradigm, rather than distinguishing between a forensic event (justification) and infused habits (regeneration), renders the entire *ordo* forensically charged, without confusing justification with sanctification or denying that union with Christ includes organic and transformative as well as forensic aspects. Furthermore, even regeneration and sanctification are effects of God’s performative utterance: a declaration on the level of *ex nihilo* creation: “Let there be . . . !” While union with Christ and the sanctification that results from that union are *more than* forensic, they are the *consequences* of God’s forensic declaration. Both justification (“Let there be . . . !”) and inner renewal (“Let the earth bring forth . . . !”) are the result of the speaking God: Father, Son, and Spirit.¹¹³

In short, the pronouncement of the gospel Word of justification is itself powerful to save and to produce its intended effect. It does so in a way that honors the creaturely integrity of those to whom God speaks and with whom he covenants.

3. A Critical Reflection on the Divine Speech Act Proposal

Upon the basis of my review of the traditional Reformed view of the distinct yet inseparable relation between effectual calling and regeneration, and Vanhoozer and Horton’s recent proposal to view effectual calling as a regenerative speech act, I want to conclude this article by offering several critical observations on the plausibility of these respective views. The observations I will offer are preliminary. Each of them calls for further exploration from biblical, historical, and theological perspectives.

The assumption undergirding these observations is that a plausible theological account of the relation between effectual calling and regeneration in the order of salvation must meet several tests. In the first place, it must be an account that does justice to the complex teaching of the Scriptures on the work of the Holy Spirit in communicating the benefits of Christ’s saving work to those who are called into fellowship with him through the gospel. The testimony of the Word of God in its entirety (*totus Scripturae*) must be taken into account when we seek to comprehend

113. *Ibid.*, 241–42.

how the Holy Spirit grants life and salvation to fallen sinners through union with Christ. Second, it must be an account that accurately represents the historic confessions of the (Reformed) churches, which themselves aim to summarize the teaching of Scripture. This does not mean that the confessions are exempt from scrutiny by the standard of the Scriptures, even to correction and amendment if necessary. But it does suggest that new proposals, particularly proposals that appear to be at odds with earlier confessional formulations, must be warranted by biblical and theological arguments that establish the need for the newer view. And third, it must be an account that offers a more satisfying resolution of the biblical and theological questions at stake in the matter. To put this third requirement somewhat differently, a new formulation of the nature and relation of effectual calling and regeneration should offer a more plausible explanation of the biblical and theological issues addressed in the traditional view. Accordingly, my observations in what follows aim to assess whether Vanhoozer and Horton's proposal provides a more biblical and plausible account of effectual calling and regeneration in the order of salvation than the historic formulation.

3.1. The Inseparability of the Holy Spirit's Ministry and the Gospel Call

The burden of Vanhoozer and Horton's proposal is that the order of salvation begins with a divine speech act, the gospel call communicated through the ministry of the Word of God. For human beings to enjoy the benefits of salvation upon the basis of the work of Christ, they need to be effectively and persuasively called to embrace the gospel promise in the way of faith. The ministry of the Spirit in drawing fallen sinners into union with Christ always takes place in and through the proclamation of the gospel Word. The order of salvation occurs through the vocal, life-giving power of the gospel Word that God speaks and through which his saving purpose is realized. Vanhoozer and Horton's use of speech act theory is motivated, accordingly, by the legitimate desire to emphasize the indispensable role of the Word in the Spirit's ministry of imparting the benefits of Christ's work to those whom he saves.

As we have seen, this emphasis upon the inseparability of the ministry of Spirit and the gospel Word in the salvation of lost sinners is also robustly affirmed in the traditional Reformed view of effectual calling. In the third and fourth main points of doctrine, the Canons of Dort insist that the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ is indispensable to the salvation and conversion of lost sinners. In both the Old and New Testament, "it has pleased God to save sinners" through the Word or the ministry of the gospel of reconciliation (III/IV.6). Similarly, at the outset of his extended treatment of effectual calling and regeneration, Turretin begins his exposition of the application of Christ's work to believers with their calling through the gospel. According to Turretin, God is pleased to use "means" in the conversion of lost sinners. These means are "the voice of the gospel and the preaching of the word, than which nothing fitter and better adapted to a rational creature could be given in order that man who is gifted with speech [*logikos*] might harmonize with the word [*logos*]."114 In the

114. Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:502.

traditional formulation of effectual calling and regeneration, the inseparability of the Spirit and Word in the order of salvation is a leitmotif, a governing conviction that pervades its account of the Spirit's ministry in the communication of Christ to those whom he saves. The classic Scriptural expression of this emphasis is given through the apostle Paul in Romans 10:17: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." On this fundamental point, Vanhoozer and Horton's view of effectual calling and regeneration concurs with the classic Reformation view that Christ and his benefits are communicated through, *and not apart from*, the ministry of the Word.

3.2. The Content of the Gospel Call: A Pronouncement and a Summons

Although Vanhoozer and Horton affirm the classic Reformed view that the work of the Spirit begins with the gospel call, there is a significant difference between Vanhoozer and Horton's understanding of the content of the call. In Vanhoozer's formulation of the call, gospel preaching narrates what God has done in Christ and *summons* human beings to believe in Christ and thereby enjoy the benefits of his saving work. In Horton's formulation of the call, the gospel Word is more narrowly defined as a forensic declaration, the pronouncement of the absolution of sins, or the divine verdict of justification. When the gospel Word of justification is pronounced, it functions on analogy to God's "wording" the creation into existence *ex nihilo*. This understanding of the gospel call enables us to see how the entire order of salvation is "forensically charged." Union with Christ and all the benefits of his work as Mediator, including regeneration, justification, and sanctification, are the *consequences* of God's forensic declaration: "let there be justification."¹¹⁵

Although Vanhoozer does not devote much attention to the content of the gospel call, his formulation is preferable to that of Horton in one crucial respect. In Vanhoozer's formulation, the gospel call is correctly described as a *summons* to faith, whereas in Horton's formulation, it is viewed as a *pronouncement* or a forensic declaration.¹¹⁶ However, as the term "calling" intimates, the ministry of the gospel Word always includes an "invitation" to embrace by faith the good news regarding Christ's saving work. The call of the gospel not only informs its hearers about Christ and the benefits of his saving work, but it also summons them to faith and repentance so that they may enjoy these benefits through union with Christ.¹¹⁷ Though the call has cognitive content, informing its hearers of their need for Christ and his saving work as Mediator, it takes the form of a summons, even a command to come to him

115. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 242. Cf. *ibid.*, 138: "Justification is not simply one doctrine among others; it is the Word that creates a living union between Christ, the believer, and the communion of the saints."

116. I say "predominantly" because Horton does occasionally describe it as a "summons" (e.g., *ibid.*, 225).

117. For this reason, Geerhardus Vos observes that "calling is a *teleological* act, directed to a certain end. . . . With calling a certain endpoint is brought into view, with the prospect that one would reach this endpoint, or also a certain rule prescribed that one should follow" (*Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:34).

in faith and repentance.¹¹⁸ Turretin captures this well when he defines the proclamation of the gospel as “an act of the grace of God in Christ by which he *calls* men dead in sin and lost in Adam . . . to union with Christ and to the salvation obtained in him.”¹¹⁹ Accordingly, when distinguishing the “general” or “external” call of the gospel from “internal” calling, Turretin observes that in the former, God speaks “imperatively,” exhorting sinners to believe in Christ and repent from their sins and that in the latter he also speaks “operatively,” “supplying the necessary strength and working within what he enjoins without.”¹²⁰ In Horton’s representation of the gospel call, however, the proclamation of the gospel is viewed simply as the pronouncement of God’s judicial declaration of absolution. Because God’s pronouncement of justification is a “performative utterance,” it is the source of all the aspects of the order of salvation, including forensic and renovative aspects.

Because he identifies the gospel call with the pronouncement of the divine verdict of justification, Horton presents the order of salvation in a way that diverges from the traditional Reformed view in some respects. Whereas the traditional view places justification within the framework of union with Christ through faith, Horton’s argument has more affinity to the traditional Lutheran understanding of the order of salvation that places justification before union with Christ.¹²¹ Rather than treating the forensic declaration of justification within the framework of union with Christ through faith, the forensic pronouncement of justification functions as the ground, basis, and source for union with Christ and all the benefits (forensic and transformative) that derive from such union. While Horton does not deny that justification is received by faith, his identification of the gospel call with God’s justifying verdict suggests that the latter logically precedes union with Christ through faith.¹²² Furthermore, Horton’s

118. In this connection, Hoglund helpfully proposes several “desiderata” for the content of the gospel call: “It must (1) be expressible orally, (2) have cognitive content, (3) come in the form of a summons, (4) elicit human response and (5) lead to belief or faith” (*Called by Triune Grace*, 74). In the New Testament, the gospel call is a summons to faith and repentance, and is presented, as Turretin properly observes, in an imperatival mode. See, e.g., Mark 1:14–15; 16:16; John 3:16, 18; 6:35, 47; 7:31; 11:25–26; 14:1; 20:28–31; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 11:18; 20:21; Rom. 10:9; 2 Cor. 7:9–11; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8; 1 Thess. 1:9.

119. *Institutes*, 2:501.

120. *Ibid.*, 2:502.

121. This feature of Horton’s formulation is also noted by Hoglund (*Called by Triune Grace*, 31). In historic Lutheran theology, no distinction is permitted between “external” and “internal” calling, between the Spirit’s use of the Word and sacraments in communicating God’s grace and an immediate act of the Spirit in regeneration. See, for example, Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, volume 3 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), “Comprehensive Characterization of the Reformed Teaching on the Means of Grace,” 143–83.

122. A similar ambiguity is present in Horton’s recent two-volume work on justification. In these volumes, Horton maintains that “forensic justification through faith alone is the fountain of union with Christ in all of its renewal” (*Justification*, 2 vols., New Studies in Dogmatics [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018], 1:215; cf. 2:365: “If union with Christ is the matrix for Paul’s *ordo*, justification remains its source, even for adoption”). But he also maintains that justification is one of the benefits that we receive through union with Christ (*ibid.*, 1:216; 2:394). The source of this ambiguity seems to lie in a confusion of the objective basis for the gospel call in the forensic event of Christ’s “being raised for our justification” (Rom.

position makes it difficult to distinguish between a gracious call to union with Christ that is extended to all lost sinners (the gospel offer, which calls all its recipients to faith and repentance) and an effectual call whereby the Spirit grants the response that the gospel call requires. When the gospel call is defined as a pronouncement of absolution that affects union with Christ and all that such union entails, it seems to follow that “in effectual calling God informs creatures of the status they have already been given.”¹²³ In this view, the gospel call is God’s declaration to sinners that “you are already mine.”¹²⁴ On analogy to “hyper-Calvinism,” the gospel’s proclamation does not call sinners to faith *in order* that they may enjoy union with Christ and obtain the benefits (including justification) that such union bestows. Rather than a call to union with Christ that is expressed in a “conditional” (“if you believe in Christ, you will be justified”) or imperatival (“believe and repent”) locution, the gospel declaration creates the situation it announces. To employ the language of speech act theory, Horton treats the gospel call as a speech act that declares God’s gracious verdict, but not a speech act that summons its recipients to respond appropriately to obtain the grace of justification.¹²⁵

3.3. The Biblical and Theological Rationale for Distinguishing Between Effectual Calling and Regeneration

Thus far, my observations regarding Vanhoozer and Horton’s proposal have been general and historical. The observations that I will make in this section aim to get at the heart of the matter, namely, the biblical and theological rationale for distinguishing between effectual calling and regeneration. Are there biblical and theological arguments that warrant the traditional distinction? Or is it true that the “distinction between regeneration apart from means and effectual calling through the Word is both exegetically untenable and theologically unnecessary?”¹²⁶

“Many Are Called, but Few Are Chosen”

Perhaps the most significant problem with the proposal of Vanhoozer and Horton is that it does not offer a satisfactory answer to a basic question regarding the efficacy

2:25) and the actual justification of believers that occurs when they are united to Christ through faith. To express the matter differently, Horton conflates what belongs to the “history of salvation” (*historia salutis*) with what belongs to the “order of salvation” (*ordo salutis*). Though the former grounds the latter, the actual justification of believers only takes place through faith-union with Christ. For a clear and helpful treatment of this point, see Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:21–28.

123. The language is Hoglund’s (*ibid.*, 73).

124. Hoglund also uses this language to describe the “hyper-Calvinist” view of the gospel call (*ibid.*, 68–70).

125. Cf. Hoglund, *ibid.*, 72: “I submit that Horton has identified one of God’s crucial speech acts, but that this is God’s decision or election, rather than the outworking of this election in effectual calling. Is it not conceivable on Horton’s terms that the Father announced to the Son, ‘Let there be justification,’ in a pretemporal covenant for redemption?”

126. *Covenant and Union*, 239.

of the gospel call: what accounts ultimately for the different response on the part of those who are called to union with Christ through the ministry of the Word? To express this question in the language of speech act theory, why does the gospel locution (the Word spoken) and illocution (the aim or purpose of the Word spoken) have perlocutionary effect in the case of some who respond to the Word in faith and repentance, but not in the case of others who respond to the Word in unbelief and impenitence? If God's communicative speech is lively and powerful, effectual in achieving its intended effect as a species of divine rhetoric, what accounts for the persistent resistance on the part of some recipients of the gospel Word, but not others?

One way of expressing this problem is to use Turretin's distinction between the gospel call viewed objectively as an "event" and viewed subjectively as an "efficacious" persuasion. Viewed as an event, the gospel call summons all to union with Christ through the ministry of the gospel. Considered as an "efficacious persuasion," the gospel call draws its recipients into union with Christ through faith. According to Turretin, if the efficacy of the calling is suspended *simply* upon the event itself, then it no longer derives from "the supernatural power of grace and the divine and ineffable motion of God, which so sweetly and at the same time powerfully affects the man that he cannot (thus called) help following God who calls and being converted."¹²⁷ To identify the efficacy of grace with the fact that some are persuaded through the Word to come to Christ leaves unexplained why they were persuaded while others remain unpersuaded. What is required is recognizing that the efficacy of grace is suspended upon God's gracious purpose of election (cf. Rom. 8:28–30; 11:2). As Turretin observes, the efficacy of grace depends upon God's *a priori* purpose to save his chosen people. It may not be suspended upon an *a posteriori* event in which some respond in faith to the gospel call. If the difference lies only in the event, the specter of Pelagianism seems unavoidable.¹²⁸ In the language that concludes Christ's parable regarding those who were invited to the wedding banquet, "many are called [the Word as locution and illocution], but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14; the Word in its perlocutionary effect).

The Spiritual Condition of Those Whom God Calls

In the traditional formulation of effectual calling and regeneration, one of the key biblical components is the Scriptural teaching regarding the spiritual condition of those addressed in gospel preaching. When the Canons of Dort describe those whom God calls, they offer a bleak, albeit biblical, portrait of their fallen condition. By virtue of the fall into sin through Adam, every member of the human race has brought upon himself "blindness, terrible darkness, futility, and distortion of judgment in his mind; perversity, defiance, and hardness in his heart and will; and finally impurity in all his

127. *Institutes*, 2:521.

128. Cf. Paul Helm, *Faith, Form, and Fashion: Classical Reformed Theology and Its Postmodern Critics* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 127: "Turretin and other CRT [Classic Reformed Theology] theologians of that era would say that Vanhoozer has made a mistake of principle here: he has taken the character of effectual calling to be explicable only 'from the event.'"

emotions” (III/IV.1). Similarly, when Turretin defines the gospel call, he identifies those whom God calls as persons who are by nature “dead in sin and lost in Adam.”¹²⁹

The biblical testimony that underlies the traditional formulation is extensive and compelling. According to this testimony, the sinful condition of fallen sinners includes “habits of the heart”—dispositions of mind, will, and affection—that give rise to sinful deeds that are not conformed to the holy law of God. Among the important illustrations of the uniform testimony of Scripture regarding the spiritual condition of fallen human beings, several passages are particularly instructive (Jer. 17:9; Ezek. 36:26; Matt. 15:19–20; John 3:6; Rom. 3:10–12; 5:6; 6:15–18; 8:6–8; 1 Cor. 2:14–16; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 4:17). When these and other Scriptural testimonies to the spiritual condition of lost sinners are given their due, they have obvious implications for the efficacy of the gospel call. This call addresses human beings whose spiritual condition is worse than bleak. Their hearts, out of which are the issues of life, are stony and unreceptive by nature to the overtures of the gospel. Their minds are blinded to the truth, particularly the glory of God that shines in the face of Jesus Christ. Their ears are not merely dull of hearing but deaf and incapable of hearing or believing the Word of the gospel. Their affections are perverse and distorted, expressing indifference, even hostility, to the things of God. Their wills are subject to the tyranny of the devil, their sinful flesh, and the dominion of sin and death. Left to themselves, lost sinners are habitually and dispositionally incapable of doing what God requires of them.

These kinds of Scriptural data play a prominent role in the traditional formulation of effectual calling and regeneration. For the call of the gospel to be effectual in drawing lost sinners to conversion, they need to be given renewed hearts, minds, wills, and affections. Any attenuation of the ministry of the Spirit in effectual calling that fails to address and appreciate the depth of human depravity will not provide an adequate account of the power of God’s grace in the effectual calling and conversion of the lost.¹³⁰ Though the teaching of the school of Saumur correctly rejected the Arminian view, which suspends the efficacy of the gospel call upon an independent and regenerative act of the human will, it limited the ministry of the Spirit to a work of illumination. But this limitation fails to address the heart of the problem (no pun intended). It does not include the renewal of lost sinners that touches them at the deepest core of their being, the heart. Nor does it have the renewal and liberation of their wills from bondage, granting them true freedom in compliance with God’s will. Nor does it include the renewal of lost sinners that turns affections from perverse hostility toward God to joy in him and his grace. The traditional view insists that a tree must be made good in order to produce good fruits.¹³¹

129. *Institutes*, 2:501.

130. Cf. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 100: “The fact is that there is a complete incongruity between the glory and virtue to which sinners are called, on the one hand, and the moral and spiritual condition of the called, on the other. How is this incongruity to be resolved and the impossibility overcome?”

131. Hoglund likewise observes that the speech act proposal does not provide a sufficiently “layered” explanation that accounts for the efficacy of the gospel call: “The theory on its own does not account for the various possible links between an illocutionary act and its perlocutionary effects. An analysis of how God brings about the effectual call requires a further

For this reason, it was common among proponents of the traditional view to argue that the gospel Word by itself has only the power of “moral persuasion.” When the gospel Word is considered *by itself*, apart from the Spirit’s ministry in opening the heart, enlightening the mind, granting the will compliance, and enlivening the affections, it can do no more than urge lost sinners to do what is required of them. As gospel preachers discover soon enough, their best sermons have no intrinsic power to awaken their audience and grant them the wherewithal to answer the gospel call in faith and repentance.

Scriptural Evidence for Viewing Regeneration in a Narrower Sense

Consistent with its neglect to consider the implications of the Scripture’s teaching regarding the spiritual condition of lost sinners, Vanhoozer and Horton’s proposal also does not engage directly with some of the essential Scriptural evidence adduced by Reformed theologians to support a distinction between effectual calling and regeneration. This evidence is found principally in the Gospel of John and the Johannine epistles. But it is also confirmed by many biblical passages that describe the effects of the Spirit’s ministry in a manner that surpasses any power resident in the gospel Word alone. Upon the basis of these passages, the traditional view found it necessary to distinguish, without separating, “external” and “internal” calling. These passages were also adduced to warrant a distinction between regeneration in a “broader” and a “narrower” sense.

Without attempting a thorough exegesis of the passage, the discourse of our Lord in John 3:1–8 is particularly instructive.¹³² In this passage, Christ declares that no one is able to “see” or “enter into” the kingdom of God unless he or she “is born again of water and the Spirit” (vv. 3, 5). The language used in this passage makes clear that the Spirit’s action in granting the new birth is strictly his alone. The passive form of the verb used to describe the Spirit’s action excludes any suggestion that this birth occurs in consequence of anything its beneficiaries have done. No one can boast that they gave themselves natural birth and life.

layer of description to account for the results of the call” (*Called by Triune Grace*, 183). Both Vanhoozer and Horton seem to acknowledge this, when they find it necessary to retain the distinction between “internal” and “external” calling (Horton), between God’s “two hands” (the Spirit and Word, Vanhoozer), and between “inward regeneration” and the “mere hearing of the external Word.” See, e.g., Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 237: “With the older Reformed writers, we still affirm the necessity of the Spirit’s work of inwardly regenerating hearers while affirming that this operation *beyond* the mere hearing of the external Word nevertheless occurs *with* it and *through* it.” While Horton’s statement concedes the distinction between the Spirit’s inward work and the external ministry of the Word, it lacks the further exposition of the Spirit’s inward work in regeneration that was an essential feature of the traditional view. Perhaps for this reason, Horton concedes that we may speak of “new qualities infused,” “as long as it [this language] is simply a figure of speech for the unilateral gift of faith and new birth through the gospel” (*ibid.*, 238).

132. For a more thorough treatment of this discourse, see Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, *ibid.*, 100–105.

In the same way, no one can boast that their new birth was due to their own will or act (cf. John 1:12). As Christ states clearly and emphatically, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” What accounts for the new birth is a monergistic, antecedent, and ineffable act of the Spirit. Accordingly, in the epistles of John, several passages corroborate the implications of the discourse in John 3. In 1 John, regeneration is identified as an antecedent action of God whose “invariable concomitants” or fruits include “practicing righteousness” (2:29), not practicing sinning and being incapable of continuing to do so (3:9), loving one another as God loves us (4:7), believing that Jesus is the Christ (5:1), and possesses a faith that overcomes the world (5:4).

Though John Murray acknowledges that these passages, which treat regeneration in the narrow sense of the new birth, are all found in the Johannine writings of the New Testament, they do not exhaust the Scriptural testimony regarding a *distinct* work of the Holy Spirit that gives efficacy to the gospel call. A classic illustration of this is seen in the conversion of Lydia, whose heart was “opened” by God so that she “paid attention to what was said by Paul” (Acts 16:14).¹³³ While the Pauline epistles speak primarily of “calling,” they also include descriptions of the Spirit’s ministry that grants an efficacy to the gospel Word that it does not possess intrinsically.¹³⁴ In some instances, the apostle Paul explicitly distinguishes the power of the Spirit from the Word. In 1 Thessalonians 1:5, he expresses his confidence that God has “chosen” the Thessalonian believers “because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.” In 1 Corinthians 2:4, he explains the fact that some receive the gospel in faith as a “demonstration of the Spirit and of power” and not a consequence of his “plausible words of wisdom” (1 Cor. 2:4; 2:12–13). Though the gospel Word may be “planted” and “watered” by ministers, the fruitfulness of their ministry depends entirely upon “God who gives the growth” (1 Cor. 3:6–8). God alone is able to make his Word “a savor of light” and not “a savor of darkness” (2 Cor. 2:16; cf. Isa. 55:10–11). Unless the Spirit opens the eyes of those who are blinded to the truth that the Word espouses, those who hear the Word cannot apprehend the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4). Attentiveness to the Word, understanding its teaching, and responding properly—all depend upon a work of God that exhibits the “immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe” (Eph. 1:19; cf. Eph. 4:17–24).

For this reason, the apostle describes the work of salvation as an act of “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), a veritable “resurrection” from death to life (Eph. 2:1–5; 5:14; Col. 3:1), and a renewal that grants believers a share in all the spiritual blessings that

133. Cf. Paul Helm, *Faith, Form, and Fashion: Classical Reformed Theology and Its Postmodern Critics* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 81: “For on the Vanhoozerian interpretation Luke’s account [Acts 16:14] is back to front. According to re-mythologized theology Luke’s account should have read that Lydia ‘attended to things spoken of by Paul, and so the Lord opened her heart.’ But Luke in fact says ‘whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended to the things . . .’ This looks to mean: being opened by the Lord, her heart then attended to the apostolic message about Jesus the Savior. Not so much a free response as a freed response.”

134. Paul only uses the language of regeneration in Titus 3:5.

are theirs in Christ (Rom. 6:4; 8:14; 1 Cor. 6:19; Gal. 5:15). Christ's saving work is accomplished by the ministry of the "life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17). As Bavinck observes concerning these Pauline passages, "although the word 'rebirth' may occur only once in the works of Paul, materially it is implied there in the efficacious calling by which Christ unites with himself in his death and resurrection those who have been foreknown (Rom. 6:5)."¹³⁵

Even in the two passages that are often cited to confirm that the Spirit grants new life through the gospel Word (James 1:18 and 2 Pet. 1:23), a distinction is still warranted between the Spirit who authors the new birth and the means the Spirit employs to grant it. These passages confirm that the Word's power in respect to the new birth derives from the ministry of the Spirit who works *with* the Word. But they do not teach that regeneration or the new birth is produced simply by the ministry of the Word. Regarding James 1:18, Geerhardus Vos makes two important observations. First, in the context, the apostle Peter uses the language of "giving birth" in the broad sense of "bringing something into the world" that already existed in seed form: "Then desire when it has conceived *gives birth* to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" (James 1:15). "Giving birth" is not used in this instance to refer to the "absolute beginning of sin, for desire is already sin, and death, too, is already resident in sin."¹³⁶ Second, and more importantly, the verb used in James 1:18 for "giving birth" does not refer to the masculine act of "generation" or the begetting of life, but to the feminine act of "giving birth" to the child who already is being formed in its mother's womb. Vos notes, accordingly, that

The words simply mean that the life generated within believers is drawn outwardly and brought to light by the word of truth. Everyone will agree that Scripture is instrumental for this, and that God does this through the Word. But "giving birth" is something entirely different from "generating life" or "regeneration."¹³⁷

Even in 1 Peter 1:23, which even more clearly affirms the instrumental role of the Word in the new birth, there is a significant distinction between *the imperishable seed* "from which" or "of which" the new birth is granted and the Word of God "through which" the new birth is mediated. Regarding this distinction, Vos observes that

the "from which" is not the "whereby." The light that shines on the field and the sunshine that warms it are not the seed that is buried within it and germinates and sprouts under their influence. That Peter does not equate the two can already be inferred with certainty from the fact that, according to 1 Peter 1:3, he sees in the resurrection of Christ from the dead the instrumental

135. Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:50–51.

136. *Ibid.*, 43.

137. *Ibid.*, 43–44.

cause of regeneration. The “seed” must therefore be the seed of life from Christ, planted in us by the Holy Spirit.¹³⁸

The Salvation of Those Who are “Incapable of Being Outwardly Called”

In addition to these Scriptural arguments for viewing the new birth in its narrower sense as an immediate act that accompanies the ministry of the Word, there is a theological argument for distinguishing effectual calling and regeneration that is explicitly identified in the Reformed confessions. Although the confessions acknowledge that regeneration ordinarily takes place with and through the ministry of the Word, they also affirm that the Spirit regenerates those whom God chooses to save in Christ, even though they may be “incapable of being outwardly called.” In the cases of “elect infants,” children of believing parents whom God calls out of this life in their infancy, and those who are unable to apprehend and understand the gospel, the reach of God’s saving grace in Christ does not depend upon the ministry of the ordinary means of grace.¹³⁹ Although the Spirit’s work of regeneration in their case is exceptional and therefore may not be appealed to establish the “rule,” their regeneration confirms that the Spirit’s work does not *depend upon* the ordinary use of the means of grace for its efficacy.¹⁴⁰ The exceptional work of the Spirit in the case of those who are incapable of being outwardly called serves as a reminder that the act of regeneration should not be identified with a power that resides in the Word itself, apart from a distinct act of the Spirit that grants it efficacy.¹⁴¹

The importance of this consideration for an understanding of the relation between effectual calling and regeneration should not be exaggerated. It does not contradict the truth that the ministry of the Spirit in uniting lost sinners to Christ, as a rule, occurs typically through the Spirit’s use of the ordinary means of grace, the Word, and sacraments. Furthermore, as Bavinck correctly argues, even in the exceptional cases, the Spirit acts as the “Spirit of Christ”:

[T]he Spirit who works regeneration is specifically the Spirit of Christ, who has been acquired by Christ and, after Christ himself had completed his work on earth and ascended into heaven, was sent into the church and now lives and works in it and takes everything from him. This bond is only retained if in one way or another one remains faithful to the order of calling and

138. *Ibid.*, 4:44. Bavinck offers a somewhat similar account of these passages, though he does identify the “incorruptible seed” in 1 Peter 1:23 with the Word the Spirit uses in regeneration (*Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:48–49).

139. Westminster Confession of Faith 10.3; Canons of Dort, I/17.

140. Cf. Høglund, *Called by Triune Grace*, 217–21.

141. This is illustrated in the way the Westminster Confession of Faith distinguishes between the administration of the sacrament of baptism and its efficacy in bestowing grace: “The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God’s own will, in his appointed time” (29.6).

regeneration, for otherwise the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit end up on two separate parallel tracks.¹⁴²

Bavinck also notes that, in the case of the children of believing parents, the extraordinary work of the Spirit of regeneration is not to be viewed apart from the covenant of grace and the gospel promises that are communicated through the Word to believers and their children.¹⁴³ Even in the case of such elect infants, calling precedes regeneration. Nevertheless, the salvation of elect infants and others who are incapable of being “outwardly” called remains an important theological reason for distinguishing between a “mediate” and an “immediate” ministry of the Spirit.

3.4. Divine Agency or Causality and the Instrumentality of the Word

Vanhoozer and Horton’s proposal to view effectual calling as a divine speech act with perlocutionary effect aims to represent God’s action in regeneration in a way that is personal and persuasive, non-coercive and non-manipulative. In their estimation, the traditional formulation represents God’s action in effectual calling and regeneration on analogy to the physical causation that obtains between “physical” or natural causes and effects. What is required is a more personal (Vanhoozer) or covenantal (Horton) understanding of God’s action in calling human beings into union with Christ. For this reason, Vanhoozer mostly eschews the use of the language of “causality” in the God-human interaction that takes place in effectual calling.¹⁴⁴ For his part, Horton is willing to employ the language of “causality,” provided it is properly understood in fully covenantal categories.

However, the desire to represent God’s action in personal, covenantal terms was explicit, even paramount, in the traditional formulation of effectual calling and regeneration. Both the Canons of Dort and Turretin affirm that effectual calling involves an act of divine “persuasion” that moves lost sinners to respond freely (spontaneously) to the call of the gospel. God does no violence to, nor does he act coercively, drawing those he calls into union with Christ. The Spirit works with the Word in such a way that those whom God converts are fully engaged and responsible for their own actions. As Turretin expresses it, the acts of faith and repentance in conversion are true acts of “volition” and not “nolition.”

Furthermore, the ministry of the Spirit in regeneration does not involve a displacement of the sinful nature of fallen human beings. Regeneration grants life to the sinful nature by restoring, healing, and renewing what would otherwise remain

142. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:79–90.

143. Canons of Dort I/17: “Since we must make judgments about Gods’ will from his Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature but by virtue of the gracious covenant in which they together with their parents are included, godly parents out not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in infancy” (emphasis mine).

144. Vanhoozer does use the expression, “distinct communicative causality,” in his essay, “Divine communicative sovereignty and human freedom: the hero talks back” (*Remythologizing Theology*, 373).

broken and dysfunctional. In this respect, Vanhoozer fails to do justice to the traditional formulation when he acknowledges only two possible accounts of God's action: either God acts personally, dialogically, and persuasively in effectual calling, or he acts mechanically, manipulatively, or coercively.¹⁴⁵ According to the traditional view, God acts personally and persuasively through his Word, but he also acts in a way that moves those he calls to will and to do according to his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13).

There are two important features of the traditional formulation that are largely absent in the speech act proposal of Vanhoozer and Horton. The first is the vital distinction between the Spirit's *agency* and the Word's *instrumentality* in regeneration. No matter how much emphasis is placed upon the Spirit's *use* of the Word in effectual calling and regeneration, the agent or author of regeneration is still the Spirit who uses the Word to effect God's saving purpose. According to the traditional view, unless the Spirit acts *with*, and not merely *through* or *in*, the Word, effectual calling and what it produces, true conversion, would not (indeed, could not) occur. If God's Word is perlocutionary, it would seem to follow that all its recipients would be regenerated. By collapsing or virtually identifying the ministry of the Spirit and the Word, the speech act proposal suggests that the Word is the effectual agent or source of regeneration. By distinguishing, without separating, the ministry of the Spirit and the Word, the classic view does greater justice to the Spirit's agency in regeneration but without diminishing the instrumentality of the Word.

The second feature of the traditional formulation missing from the speech act proposal is an adequate emphasis upon divine *monergism* in effectual calling and regeneration. By rejecting any distinction between effectual calling and regeneration, there is no room in the speech act proposal for a regenerative act of the Spirit in which he is the sole Author and active agent. Conversely, the speech act proposal does not include an explicit acknowledgment that in regeneration, those whom God effectually calls are passive and inactive in the nature of the case. Even though it is essential to affirm that God treats those he calls as responsible persons, it is equally important to affirm that, unless the Spirit grants the new birth, lost sinners are incapable of doing what is required of them. As John Murray acknowledges, an emphasis upon divine monergism and human passivity in how the Spirit draws lost sinners into fellowship with Christ seems to be an affront to human freedom, responsibility, and independence. But it belongs to the biblical view of the Spirit's ministry in regeneration.

We may not like it. We may recoil against it. It may not fit into our way of thinking and it may not accord with the time-worn expressions which are the coin of our evangelism. . . . But blessed be God that gospel of Christ is one of sovereign, efficacious, irresistible regeneration. If it were not the case that

145. Cf. Helm, *Faith, Form, and Fashion*, 81: "So the theological alternatives (for Vanhoozer, as far as providence is concerned) are: a response that is free and willing, or one that is brought about coercively or mechanically. Naturally, faced with such a choice, Vanhoozer opts for freedom and willingness. . . . But if a free and willing response is the whole story, then why do some receive the perlocutionary force of the story of Jesus and others not?"

in regeneration we are passive, the subjects of an action of which God alone is the agent, there would be no gospel at all.¹⁴⁶

As seen in the Canons of Dort and Turretin, the monergism of the Spirit's work in regeneration means that those whom God effectually calls are not active in conversion. There is a legitimate "synergy" that may be affirmed between God's action and the action of those who believe and repent. No one is "strong-armed" or coerced into entering the kingdom. When the Spirit and Word effectually call lost sinners, they embrace the gospel promise from the heart.

3.5. The Ineffableness of the Spirit's Work in Effectual Calling and Regeneration: A Concluding Observation

The final observation that I wish to make about Vanhoozer and Horton's proposal is that it inadequately attends to the way advocates of the traditional view affirmed the "ineffableness" of the Spirit's work in effectual calling and regeneration. Admittedly, the traditional formulation of effectual calling and regeneration employs categories and distinctions that reflect the influence of the philosophy of Aristotle and others in the Christian tradition. These include distinctions between "substance" and "accidents," "habits" and "acts," "causes" and "effects," and the like. That the traditional formulation utilized distinctions and categories that have similarities to and were undoubtedly borrowed from philosophical sources is undeniable. According to Vanhoozer and Horton, a speech act account of effectual calling and regeneration also utilizes philosophical categories that belong to contemporary linguistic philosophy. However, the advantage of speech act theory is that it does not require a commitment to a particular philosophical metaphysics or "ontology of infused habits" that was assumed by the proponents of the traditional distinction between effectual calling and regeneration.¹⁴⁷ By avoiding the ontological and philosophical assumptions that belong to the traditional formulation, a speech act approach to effectual calling and regeneration is more amenable to modern sensibilities.

The burden of my observations to this point is that the speech act proposal does not adequately explain the efficacy of the gospel call in drawing lost sinners into fellowship with Christ. My concluding observation is that its proponents have overstated the dependency of the traditional formulation upon philosophical assumptions.

The authors of the Canons of Dort and Turretin explicitly acknowledge the limits of any theological formulation of the Spirit's work in effectual calling and regeneration. Both recognize that there is an "ineffability" to the Spirit's ministry that resists theological comprehension. Remarkably, Turretin starts his treatment of effectual calling with an acknowledgment that, however carefully and precisely the topic is treated, it surpasses any theological explanation. As he puts it in his first

146. *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 104. Cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:87: "The grace of God in Christ, grace that is full, abundant, free, omnipotent, and insuperable, is the heart of the gospel."

147. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 217.

proposition, “The ways of the Lord in grace as well as nature are inscrutable.” When Turretin seeks to explain the ministry of the Spirit in effectual calling, he speaks of distinct “physical,” “moral,” and “hyperphysical” modes of action. Though each of these modes of action by the Spirit corresponds to the way God works in other respects within his providence, all of them must be understood “analogically” and not “univocally.” They bear a resemblance to the way God works out his purposes in the created order, but they may not be simply identified with their analogs within that order. Therefore, it is inappropriate to view the ministry of the Spirit in a way that attenuates God’s sovereign and effectual calling of those whom he saves, on the one hand, or that diminishes the fully personal or persuasive way in which he draws lost sinners into fellowship with Christ, on the other.

In the light of this and my preceding observations, I am persuaded that the classic Reformed view provides a more biblical and theologically satisfying account of the distinction between effectual calling and regeneration. While affirming their inseparability, this view acknowledges that the regenerative work of the Spirit alone grants efficacy to the gospel call. At the same time, it recognizes that the ineffable work of the Spirit in regeneration may not be construed as coercive or manipulative. As Bavinck expresses it, “Regeneration . . . works so little with coercion that it is truer to say that it liberates people from the compulsion and power of sin; it ‘is at the same time most powerful and most pleasing.’”¹⁴⁸

148. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:94.