

“WHETHER REGENERATION BE NECESSARILY CONNECTED WITH BAPTISM?”: PETRUS VAN MASTRICHT AND THE EFFICACY OF INFANT BAPTISM

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Introduction

IN HIS WORK ON REGENERATION, Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706), raised a question frequently addressed in the works of Reformed Orthodoxy (ca. 1560-1725): “Whether regeneration be necessarily connected with Baptism?”¹ Interest in this question appeared largely due to polemic with Roman Catholic, Remonstrant, and, to a lesser extent, Socinian teaching. However, despite the interest in the question in the seventeenth century, little attention has been paid to this question in the secondary literature.² For this reason, Mastricht will be used as a case study for the consideration

1. See Moise Amyraut, “Disputatio de Paedobaptismi,” in *Syntagma thesium theologiarum in Academia Salmuriensi variis temporibus disputatarume* (Samue, 1665); Cornelius Burges, *Baptismall regeneration of elect infants professed by the Church of England, according to the Scriptures, the primitive Church, the present reformed churches, and many particular divines apart* (Oxford, 1629); Gisbertus Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum pars secunda* (Utrecht, 1654), 410. Johannes Cocceius, “Explicatio cateheseos Heidelbergensis,” volume 6 in *Opera omnia theologica, exegetica, didactica, polemica, philologica*, 8 vols (Amsterdam, 1673-1675) (hereafter *explication*); *ibid Summa doctrinae de foedere et testament Dei* (Amsterdam, 1648), cap.XIII. §454 (hereafter *Summa*); reprinted as *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God* translated by Casey Carmichael (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2016); Pierre Du Moulin, “Disputatio Baptismo, Pars Tertia: De fructu & efficacia Baptismi” in *Thesaurus disputationum theologiarum in alma Sedanensi academia* (Geneva, 1661), 778-789. Herman Witsius, *De Efficacia et Utilitate Baptismi in Electis Foederatorum Praentum Infantibus* (Utrecht, 1693) Hereafter *De Efficacia*.

2. A few exceptions to this: J. Mark Beach, “Introduction” to “On the Efficacy and Utility of Baptism in the Case of Elect Infants Whose Parents are Under the Covenant,” translated by J. Mark Beach, *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 17 (2006): 121-126 hereafter *The Efficacy of Baptism*; Aaron Clay Denlinger, “Baptism,” in *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 609-642; Scott R. Swain, “Lutheran and Reformed Sacramental Theology, 17th-19th Centuries,” *Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 362-379; David Wright, “Baptism at the Westminster Assembly,” *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, vol. 1 (Geanies House: Mentor, 2003 reprinted 2005): 171-186. All of these, however, only partially treat post-reformation developments and so a considerable gap in scholarly literature remains to be filled.

of the question. His teaching will be placed in its own context and compared with his contemporaries.

1. General Overview

Mastricht's answer to this question proves complex as it hinges on a certain understanding of regeneration as well as the sacraments, especially baptism. His first treatment of baptism can be found in his 1677 disputation *Casum Conscientia* which addresses the erroneous opinions of the Socinians on the sacrament and the proper treatment in the case of converts from Socinianism.³ Mastricht addressed these issues further in his *magnum opus* the *Theoretica-Practica*⁴ specifically in the chapters "De Ecclesiae Sacramentis,"⁵ and "De Sacramentis Regenerationis."⁶ His primary treatment of the question, however, appears in the elenctic portion of his chapter on regeneration, "De Redimendorum Regeneratione."⁷ These sections will be considered alongside the English translation of the chapter on regeneration published in 1770 by the title, *A Treatise on Regeneration*.⁸

In sum, Mastricht answered the question, "Whether regeneration be necessarily tied to baptism?" in the negative. Instead, he maintained that baptism signified and confirmed that which had taken place *prior* to baptism in the case of adults and infants. He bases this answer on his understanding of baptism as a *seal* of regeneration and regeneration as the first act of sanctification as distinct from its second acts, namely, conversion and progressive sanctification. Although various opinions existed, Mastricht maintained that his was the majority report in the Reformed theological tradition. In this essay, his treatments of the sacrament of baptism and regeneration will be more fully considered and compared with other Post-Reformation authors.

3. Petrus van Mastricht, *Diatribes Theologicae Determinantis Casum Conscientia: An Socinianus, a Socinianis, more Sociniano baptizatus, ad Catholicos transiturus, sit baptizandus ante? Pars Posterior, Quam Divina Annuenta Gratia, Sub Praesidio D. Petri van Mastricht, S. S. Theol. Doct. & Professoris Ordinarii. Sustinere admittetur Theodorus Groen, Heusda Batav. Ad diem 13. Octoboris, horis locoque Solitis* (Ultrajecti, 1677).

4. Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia, qua per singular capita Theologica, pars exegetica, dogmatica, elenctica & practica, perpetua successione conjugantur. Editio Nova, accedunt: Historia Ecclesiastica plena fere, quanquam compendiosa: Idea Theologiae Moralis: Hypotyposis Theologiae Asceticae & c. Auctore, Petro van Mastricht, SS. Theol. In Academia Ultraj. Doctore & Professore. Tomus Primus. (Trajecti Ad Rhenum, 1724)*, Hereafter *TPT*.

5. Mastricht, "De Ecclesiae Sacramentis," *TPT*, VII. iii. 907-915.

6. Mastricht, "De Sacramentis Regenerationis" *TPT*, VII. iv. 915-928.

7. Petrus van Mastricht, "De Redimendorum Regeneratione," *TPT* VI. iii. 757-774.

8. Petrus van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration. By Peter Van Mastricht, D.D. Professor of Divinity in the Universities of Francfort, Duisburgh, and Utrecht.; Extracted from His System of Divinity, Called Theologia theoretico-practica; and Faithfully Translated into English; with an Appendix, Containing Extracts from Many Celebrated Divines of the Reformed Church, upon the Same Subject*, (New Haven: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1770). Hereafter, *Treatise on Regeneration*.

2. Baptism in the *Theoretica-Practica*

The seventeenth century witnessed an extraordinary interest in the efficacy of infant baptism especially in the writings of the Dutch Reformed. Although the Reformers dealt with the legitimacy of the practice of paedo-baptism,⁹ the question of its regenerative efficacy remained largely un-broached.¹⁰ Most often, in reference to children, the Reformers focused on the sacrament’s initiatory aspect (i.e. signifying membership into the covenant of grace).¹¹ Although this provided rationale for the application of the sacrament on the basis of the children of believers membership in the visible church, it provided less assurance of the child’s membership in the invisible church.¹²

Interest in the question was exacerbated by pastoral and polemical issues. Although the seventeenth century in the Netherlands experienced remarkable prosperity, the period was also characterized by what Simon Schama, described as “crushingly high” infant mortality rates in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century.¹³ Schama’s examination of art and literature from the period discloses a preoccupation with providing grieving parents with assurance of their children’s eternal security. This assurance was supported, in part, by the child’s baptism.¹⁴

9. See Ulrich Zwingli, “Refutation of the Tricks of the Baptists,” in *Ulrich Zwingli 1484-1531: Selected Works* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1901), 123-258.

10. Calvin, for example, claims that circumcision and baptism both spoke of regeneration. However, he also maintained that baptism confirmed our fellowship with Christ and membership in the covenant and within the church. When he speaks of the efficacy of baptism, he teaches that in the case of infants, baptism signifies and seals their membership in the covenant and fellowship with Christ but he comes short of saying that it seals regeneration. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1940), IV. xvi. 1324-1332. See also *The First Helvetic Confession* (1536) §22 (hereafter FHC) which maintains that baptism is “the laver of regeneration,” yet confirms infant baptism on the basis of church membership.

11. See especially Zwingli; this has led some scholars, such as David F. Wright to argue that this was a primary reason for the rise of Covenant theology. (David F. Wright, “Baptism at the Westminster Assembly,” in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, ed. Ligon Duncan [Genies House: Mentor, 2005], 161-186).

12. William Perkins, for example, in addressing the question of the “efficacy of baptism,” did not even consider the question in relationship to infants. He dealt solely with adults that repented and professed faith in Christ. William Perkins, *A Commentarie, or Exposition, upon the Five First Chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians* (London: John Legatt, 1617). Reprinted in *The Works of William Perkins*, ed. Paul M. Smalley (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 2:221-226.

13. Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 517. Herman Bavinck maintained that the infant mortality rates in the Netherlands remained high. On average, 12 in every 100 children died before reaching the age of one while 15 in 100 die between the ages of one to four. See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. John Friend, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003-2008), 4:65, n.54.

14. Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 518.

Roman Catholics charged the Reformed with wrongfully applying the name “seals,” to their practice of Baptism by their denial that the sacraments worked *ex opere operata*.¹⁵ Remonstrant objections likewise exacerbated the need for clarity on the issue. They insisted that the accomplished work of Christ could only be appropriated through an active faith and repentance apart from which no one could hope to be saved.¹⁶ Invariably, logical consistency implied that infants unable to repent and believe must necessarily be damned.¹⁷ Similar to the Remonstrants, the Socinians decried the practice of infant baptism and denied any efficacy in it.¹⁸

This question of infant salvation rose to conciliar interest in the Reformed church at the Synod of Dort (1618-19). The canons of the Synod concluded that by virtue of their covenant membership, believing parents had no reason to doubt their deceased infant’s election, and, therefore, eternal security.¹⁹ The doctrine of original sin particularly came to bear on the question. According to Reformed teaching, by ordinary regeneration, all mankind inherited fallen human nature at conception and, consequently, were dead in sin at the moment life began.²⁰ How could sinners that were dead in their trespasses and sins be received into the kingdom of heaven?

The Westminster Assembly (1643-1645) began to address these questions. In the Confession’s chapter on effectual calling, the divines maintained three positions

15. See the fifth session of the Council of Trent, June 17, 1546, sections 3, 5 which anathematizes those who deny the complete efficacy of baptism to remove the corruption of original sin from infants. See “The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent,” *The Creeds of Christendom: with a History and Critical Notes*, ed. Philip Schaff, 6th ed. (1931; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 2:85-87. See too, “Canons of Dort.”

16. *Articuli Arminiani sive Remonstrantia*, Art.I-II, in *The Creeds of Christendom*, III:545-549.

17. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:85.

18. Thomas Rees (editor), “Introduction” to *The Racovian Catechism, with Notes and Illustrations, translated from the Latin: to which is Prefixed a Sketch of the History of Unitarianism in Poland and the Adjacent Countries* (London: 1818), esp. 252-253. The teaching of the Socinians spread swiftly in Western Europe particularly in England and in the Netherlands. The Racovian catechism, first published in 1605, facilitated the spread of the ideas when translated into English in 1652 followed by Dutch translations in 1659 and 1666. These things challenged Reformed teaching on several issues including infant baptism.

19. Head I, Article XVII: “Since we are to judge of the will of God from his Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they together with the parents are comprehended, godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy” (Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3:585).

20. This was codified early in Reformed confessional literature. Zwingli’s *Short Christian Instruction* (1523) §3; First Helvetic Confession §§ 8-9 (Hereafter FHC); Gallican Confession, §§IV-V (Hereafter GC); Belgic Confession, §§XIV-XV (Hereafter BC); Second Helvetic Confession, VIII (Hereafter SHC); *Canons of Dort*, Head 3-4, §§ II-IV; Westminster Confession of Faith 6:1-6 (Hereafter WCF); Westminster Larger Catechism 22-29 (Hereafter WLC); Westminster Shorter Catechism 13-19 (Hereafter WSC).

that built upon the teaching of Dort.²¹ First, regeneration grants the ability to respond to the gospel call; second, regeneration is distinct from “answer[ing] the call.” Consequently, thirdly, sometimes the elect (particularly in the case of those dying in infancy) are regenerated and saved without being “outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.” Hence, the effectual nature in the case of elect infants dying in infancy is established.²² However, it must be noted that Westminster significantly qualifies the position of the Canon of Dort. The Westminster divines distinguish “elect infants” from the more general reference of Dort to “children of believers.” The work of Westminster constituted a significant development in Reformed confessional literature yet many questions remained unanswered.

In summary, the combination of polemical, and pastoral considerations led to greater reflection during the Orthodox period on the understanding of paedo-baptism beyond confirmation of covenant initiation to its connection with regeneration. In the *Theoretica-Practica* Mastricht discusses these issues and prepares the way for his explanation of the efficacy of baptism in the case of infants.

2.1. De Sacramentis Ecclesiis

Mastricht begins his treatment of the sacraments by generally defining a sacrament as a “sign and seal of the covenant of grace.”²³ In this, Mastricht is in keeping with standard definitions of his post-Reformation contemporaries particularly those emerging in the federal theological systems. William Ames (1576-1633) defined the sacrament, “a Divine institution, whereby by sensible signes, the blessings of the new covenant are represented, exhibited, and applied.”²⁴ Ames’ student Joannes Cocceius (1603-1669) described them as, “signs of the covenant” or testimonies of the friendship of God.”²⁵ Herman Witsius (1636-1708) called them, “seals of the whole covenant.”²⁶ Wilhelmus a Brakel (1635-1711), defined sacrament as, “a visible sign and seal of the covenant of grace, instituted by God to display Christ in His suffering and death to believers, and to seal them that they are partakers of Christ and all His merits.”²⁷

21. WCF 10.3, “Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth: so also are all other elect persons who are uncappable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.”

22. WCF 28.6.

23. Mastricht, *TPT*, VII. iii. §vi. 908-909.

24. William Ames, *Medulla Theologica* (Amsterdam: Joannem Jansoniam, 1634) translated into English as *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity: Drawne out of the Holy Scriptures and the Interpreters Thereof, and Brought into Method* (London: Edward Griffin, 1639), I. xxxvi. §. 12. 162-163. Hereafter the Latin will be referred to simply as *Medulla* and the English translation as *The Marrow*.

25. Joannes Cocceius, *Summa*, §202.

26. Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending A Complete Body of Divinity* translated by William Crookshank (London: 1822), Book I. Chap VI. §XXIV. Hereafter *Economy*.

27. Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1992-1995), 2:479.

However, Mastricht's definition differed slightly from the more general definitions of some of his peers which lacked the covenantal emphasis. Mastricht's childhood catechist and predecessor at Utrecht, Johannes Hoornbeeck (1617-1666), called them "seals of divine and saving promises from God toward us."²⁸ Francis Turretin (1623-1687) as "signs and seals of the grace of God in Christ."²⁹

As a *sign*, a spiritual and invisible reality is represented physically and visibly, namely the substance of the covenant of grace. But by the testimony of Romans 4:11 they do more than this.³⁰ The sacrament must also "confirm and signify the promise" to those who have "true personal (*privatum*) faith."³¹ However, herein consists a point of contention from the Anabaptists and Socinians on one side and papists and Lutherans on the other. Thus, Mastricht entertains several questions pertinent to the issue.

First, he asks, "Whether the sacraments are bare (*nuda*) signs; or is it a token of the profession of Christians; or a true seal that signifies divine promises?" The Anabaptists and Socinians confirm the former portion, that the sacrament is a token of confession while Papists and Lutherans believe it to be an "infallible seal of confidence of the certainty of salvation" working *ex opere operata*.³² Although the Reformed agree that the sacrament may serve as a token of profession, it is more than that, in that they affirm that "the thing signified represents, offers, and exhibits, by the covenant of the divine promise (*ex pacto promissionis divinae*)," while also denying that they work invariably.³³

But, Mastricht adds, one might protest that the application of sacraments to hypocrites proves the contrary. First, he maintains that this cannot be the case for it certainly did not hinder God from establishing circumcision even though the same possibility stood. Second, Mastricht asserts that the sacraments are "sealed under the

28. Johannes Hoornbeeck, *Theologiae Practicae Tomus Alter, Authore Johanne Hoornbeeck, S. Litterarum in Ecclesia, & Academia Lugduno-Batava Doctore, & Professore*. (Trajecti ad Rhenum, Ex Officina Henrici Vestereegh, 1646), 380.

29. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1992-1997), Topic XIX, Q.1, §.IX. Hereafter *Institutes*.

30. Calvin's comments on Rom.4:11 may be considered typical of Reformed exegesis: "We have indeed here a remarkable passage with regard to the general benefits of sacraments. According to the testimony of Paul, they are seals by which the promises of God are in a manner imprinted on our hearts, (*Dei promissiones cordibus nostris quodammodo imprimuntur.*) and the certainty of grace confirmed (*sancitur gratiae certitudo.*) And though by themselves they profit nothing, yet God has designed them to be the instruments (*instrument*) of his grace; and he effects by the secret grace of his Spirit, that they should not be without benefit in the elect ... Hence it remains a fixed principle, that sacred symbols are testimonies, by which God seals his grace on our hearts." John Calvin "Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans" in *Calvin's Commentaries 22 vols* translated by John Owen (reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 19:164-65.

31. Mastricht, *TPT*, VII. iii. §vi.

32. Mastricht, *TPT*, VII. iii. § xv.

33. Mastricht, *TPT*, VII. iii. § xv.

condition of true faith.”³⁴ As Brakel elaborates, “Such an argument would be valid if, as the Papists maintain, the sacraments would have an inherent efficacy. However, since no one is sealed by the sacraments except those who partake of them by faith, this objection is without validity.”³⁵

Mastricht here anticipated a potential objection. Detractors might here protest that the Reformed baptize infants without faith and, since faith is a prerequisite of any efficacy, the sacraments cannot seal in such instances. Mastricht responds in two ways. First, by citing 2 Cor.4:13 and 1Cor.7:14, he claims that the elect (whether infants or adults) possess the Spirit of faith. Secondly, he maintains that the sacrament does not require faith but the *promise of faith*. That is, it presupposes the faculty of faith not faith itself and indeed, ‘it is not strong.’” He illustrates this by speaking of an eyeglass (*conspicillis*). The eyeglass enhances vision while presupposing vision. It does not grant the vision, but it gives greater clarity and confirmation of what was already present in a lesser degree—namely, the ability to see.³⁶ Likewise, he argued, the sacrament does not create faith or require faith but requires the *habitus* of faith, even if in seed form, and confirms and enhances faith in the elect.

There is in the writings of the Orthodox writers the common utilization of this distinction between the *habitus* and *actus* of faith which is utilized in connection with infant baptism. Arguing against Bellarmine who claims that both take place at baptism by the operation of administration, Ames argues that in the case of infants, the *habitus* or *principium* of grace is poured out (*infundere*), hence the ability to believe, yet not *actual faith*. Yet even the habit or principle is not invariably tied to the administration of the sacrament.³⁷ Frederic Spanheim (1632-1701) similarly distinguishes between the *principium* of faith and *actualem fidem* and concludes ‘That infants may possess the root and principle of faith.’³⁸

Consequent, to his description of the sacrament as a looking glass, Mastricht denies that the sacrament works *ex opere operato* because the elements don’t confer grace but confirm the grace that it presupposes.³⁹ Mastricht continues his consideration of the efficacy of the sacrament of baptism in the case of infants in *De Sacramentis Regenerationis*.

2.2. De Sacramentis Regenerationis

Following Ames and Spanheim, Mastricht delineated between two types of sacraments: sacraments of regeneration and sacraments of nutrition.⁴⁰ To the first

34. Mastricht, *TPT*, VII. iii. §.xv. Objection E. “Obsignat sub conditione *vera fidei*.”

35. Brakel, *Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 2:479-80.

36. Mastricht, *TPT*, VII. iii. §.xv. Objection H.

37. William Ames, *Bellarminus Enervatus, Sive Disputationes Anti-Bellarminae, Tomus Tertius* (Amsterdam: Joannem Janssonium, 1630), Cap. III. Ques.3; Thes.II. Hereafter *Enervatus*.

38. Spanheim, *Dubiorum Evangelicorum, Pars Tertia* (Genevae: Sumptibus Petri Chouet, 1655) Dubium XXVII. §XII. Hereafter *Dubia*.

39. Mastricht, *TPT*, VII. iii. §xvi.

40. Ames, *Medulla*, I. cap LX. §.5, 16. Frederic Spanheim, *Dubia*, XXVII. §.VI.

group, Mastricht assigns circumcision and, its NT counterpart, baptism. To the second group he assigns the Passover and ultimately, the Lord's Supper.⁴¹

Mastricht seeks to prove that the sacraments of circumcision and baptism signified and sealed regeneration by exegeting Colossians 2:11, 12. Mastricht taught that circumcision and baptism pointed to the same things and that the latter supplanted the former in the New Covenant dispensation.⁴² In these sacraments, the chief thing pointed to is the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit. In circumcision, the foreskin (which represented fallen nature) was rolled away symbolizing God's removal of sin through regeneration. Likewise, in baptism the washing with water represented the regenerating cleansing of the Holy Spirit (Tit.3:5). For Mastricht, although the sacrament of baptism signifies several things (i.e. membership in the covenant of grace, union with Christ, etc.) it is chiefly a sacrament of regeneration and therefore must somehow seal regeneration to its recipients whether adults or infants.⁴³ But how can it seal infants?

Before Mastricht can defend the efficacy of baptism in the case of infants, he must prove against detractors the legitimacy of baptizing infants. In the elenctic section of "De Sacramentis Regenerationis," Mastricht asks whether or not infants are "faithfully baptized?" He notes that the Anabaptists and Socinians deny this but that the Reformed all affirm it. He defends the Reformed with seven reasons.⁴⁴

1. Infants of believers are under the promise of the covenant of grace (Acts 2:38-39).⁴⁵
2. Infants of believers are sharers of the benefits of that covenant: regeneration and remission of sins (Jer.31:33-34).⁴⁶
3. Infants of believers are members of the church and heirs of its benefits (Eph.2:11-13; Cor.12:13; Rom.6:3-4).⁴⁷
4. Infants were given the sign of the covenant of grace under the Old Testament (Gen.17:10, 12); which was succeeded by baptism in the New (Col.2:11-12).⁴⁸
5. Baptism is the circumcision of the NT and should presumably continue in the same way (Col.2:11-12).⁴⁹

41. Mastricht, *TPT*, VII. iv. §I.

42. In this he remains squarely in the Reformed Tradition. See for example Zwingli, *Refutation of the Tricks of the Baptists*; Calvin, *Institutes*, XVI.§4; and WCF 27.5, "The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the New."

43. Mastricht, *Theoretica-Practica*, VII, iv. §XII.

44. Mastricht's argumentation compares favorably with Francis Turretin. See *Institutes* Topic XX.

45. 'Sint sub *promissione foederis gratia*, quibus Baptismus addicitur' *TPT*, VII. iv. §XXXV.

46. 'Beneficiorum *foederis gratiae*, regenerationis & remissionis peccatorum Jer. Xxxi.33.34 sint participes.'

47. 'Sint membra corporis Christi *mystici*, alias future *extra Christum, absque Deo, absque spe salutis* Eph.II.11.12.13 adeoque figillo initionis 1 Cor. XII.13. Rom.VI.3.4. potiri debeant.'

48. '*Sigillum foederis gratiae*, sub V.T. spectarit ad *infants* Gen. XVII.10, 12.'

49. 'Baptismus sit—circumcisio N.T. Col.II.11-12, sicut circumcisio fuit Baptismus V.T.'

6. Infants are participants of the Holy Spirit (1Cor.7:14; Jer.1:5; Lk.1:15).⁵⁰
7. Infants of believers are federally holy before God (1Cor.7:14; Is.49:22).⁵¹

Mastricht follows his basic defense by addressing a number of objections commonly raised by Socinians and Anabaptists.

First, Mastricht responded to the objection that paedobaptism lacked an explicit command or example in the New Testament. He refuses to yield to that assumption and retorted that the mandate to baptize those who have received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:47) provides the explicit statement that opponents demand since infants received the Holy Spirit in Scripture (Luke 1:15; Jer.1:5). Turretin similarly argued, “For since they have the thing signified, they cannot and ought not to be deprived of the sign (Acts 10:47).”⁵²

Next, Mastricht responds to the objection that faith and certain information are prerequisite to baptism both of which fail in the case of infants. He responds that information is only required in the case of adults. Likewise, he reminds that Matthew 28, μαθητεύω refers to the inception of Christian discipleship, not maturity which is consistent with the baptism of children with little information. Likewise, in regards to faith, Mastricht maintains that this is only the case in adults. In circumcision, the infants of believers were baptized on the presumption of the seed (*seminali*) of faith and not actual faith. The objection is illegitimate because it would apply as much to circumcision as it does baptism. Since circumcision did not require actual faith in infants, neither can baptism.⁵³

Finally, Mastricht concluded this section by dealing with the charge that infants don’t understand the use and efficacy of baptism. He responded to this in two ways: 1. Nor did they know this in circumcision; and 2. That they will learn in time that their baptism established a covenant relationship with God.

It should be noted, at this point, that Mastricht stood firmly within the Reformed tradition. His arguments in defense of the practice of infant baptism are standard in his theological school. The relationship between circumcision and baptism, as defined by Col.2, serves as the basis for his sacramentology. From this passage, he constructed grounds for the practice of paedobaptism and fortified his position against objections. However, he postpones consideration on the efficacy of infant baptism in sealing regeneration to a separate chapter in which he describes what how he understands regeneration.⁵⁴

50. ‘Sint participes Spiritus S. 1Cor.VII.14, ut patet in Jeremia Jer.1.5, in Baptista Luc.I.15 tales autem baptizandos esse, Petrus manifeste doceat Act.x.47.

51. ‘Fidelium liberi *Deo* generentur Ezech.xvi.20, ac proinde Deo *sancti* sint foederaliter 1Cor.vii.14 Conf. Jes XLIX.22.

52. See also Turretin who argues similarly, *Institutes*, Q. XX. §.IX.

53. Mastricht, *TPT*, VII. iv. §.XXV. objection B-E.

54. See Cocceius, *Summa*, §447 and Spanheim, *Dubia*, XXVII, §.V. Both theologians at this point, along with many others, see baptism as the replacement or substitute for circumcision in accordance with Colossians 2:11-12.

3. Regeneration in the *Theoretica-Practica*

3.1. Introduction

In the late sixteenth century, the doctrine of regeneration became a major topic of interest. From 1584 until 1678, the year of Maastricht's publication, a series of English and Dutch publications centered specifically on the subject.⁵⁵ Particularly in the European universities especially Zurich, Leiden, Marburg, Franeker, Geneva, Berne and Utrecht, this locus emerged as a regular topic of scholastic disputation.⁵⁶

55. Listed in order of appearance: John Udall, *Amendment of Life three sermons, upon Actes 2. Verses 37.38. containing the true effect of the worde of God, in the conversion of the godly: and the maner how it changeth their harts, and reformeth their lives, which is the true worke of regeneration. By Iohn Udall, preacher of the worde of God, at Kingstone upon Thames* (London: J. Windet, 1584); Thomas Morton, *A treatise of the threefolde state of man wherein is handled, 1 His created holinesse in his innocencie. 2 His sinfulness since the fall of Adam. 3 His renewed holiness in his regeneration* (London: R. Robinson, 1596); Thomas Morton, *Two treatises concerning regeneration, 1. Of repentance, 2. Of the diet of the soule shewing the one, how it ought to be sought after and attained unto, the other, how it beign gotten, is to be preserved and continued* (London: Thomas Creede, 1597); Raphael Eglinus, *Theses didacticae undeviginti de regeneratione nostril, regeneratorumque officio* (Marpurg, 1614); William Whately, *The New Birth: Or, a Treatise of Regeneration. Delivered in Certaine Sermons; and Now Published* (London: Thomas Man, 1630); Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining: or A treatise of grace and assurance. Wherein are handled, the doctrine of assurance. The use of signs in self-examination. How true graces may be distinguished from counterfeit. Several signs of grace, and many false ones. The nature of grace under divers Scripture notions or titles, as regeneration, the new-creature, the heart of flesh, vocation, sanctification, &c. Many chief questions (occasionally) controverted between the orthodox and the Arminians. As also many cases of consciences. Tending to comfort and confirm saints. Undecieve and convert sinners. Being CXX sermons preached of Emanuel Colledge in Cambridge, and now pastor of the church of Sutton-Coldfield in Warwickshire* (London: A Miller, 1652); David Dickson, *Therapeutica sacra: seu, De curandis casibus consientiae circa regenerationem per foederum divinorum prudentem applicationem: libri tres* (Edinburgi: Christophorus Higgins, 1656); David Dickson, *Therapeutica sacra shewing briefly the method of healing the diseases of the conscience, concerning regeneration* (Edinburgh: Evan Tyler, 1664); George Swinnock, *The Door of Salvation Opened by the Key of Regeneration; Or, A Treatise Containing the Nature, Necessity, Marks, and Means of the Regenerate* (London: Parkhurst, 1664).

56. The following are the more notable published disputations which touched upon the topic of regeneration. They are listed in chronological order: Marcus Beumler, *De cognition hominis lapsi et instaurati tertia disputatio de psalmo XIX ubi de peccato, justification & regeneration disseritur* (Tiguri, 1597); Marcus Beumler, *Theorem Theologicum: Annes S. Paulus ad Rom.VII. a versu XIV, usque ad Finem, de se, ut converso & regenerato, aut, non converso, loguatur* (Tiguri, 1609); Jacobi Armini, *Disputationes Magna partem S. Theologiae compectentes, Publicae & Privatae*. (Leiden, 1610); Raphael Eglinus, *Theses Didacticae Undeviginti, De Regeneratione Nostril, Regeneratorumque Officio, Rom.6, In Incluta Marpurgensi Academia publica disputationi Subjectae, Sub Praesidio Reverendi Clarissimi Viri* (Marpurg, 1614); Johannes Maccovius, *Disputatio Theologica, De Regeneratione* (Franeker, 1625); Gisbertus Voetius, "De Regeneratione," *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum, Pars Secunda* (Utrecht, 1639); Johannes Cocceius, *Disputationes XXII theologico-practicae, de*

The primary culprits that stimulated the increased interest in regeneration in the High Orthodox (ca. 1620-1700) period were Arminians, Socinians, Catholics, and even Lutherans. In the polemical portion of his treatment of regeneration, Mastricht confronts these theological opponents. This portion makes up a larger part of his treatment on regeneration than any other section (exegetical, doctrinal, and practical) which confirms the highly contentious nature of the doctrine in the Post-Reformation period.⁵⁷

3.2. *De Redimendorum Regeneratione*

Mastricht’s primary text upon which he builds his doctrine is John 3:5, “Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born of Water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.”⁵⁸ From the scriptural text, Mastricht concluded that the spiritual death of man in sin necessitated regeneration if anyone were to respond to the outward call of the gospel. He defined regeneration as the power which God alone gives to the elect which enables them to embrace Christ and receive the benefits of the spiritual life. This is a once and for all act done by God alone that completely transforms the individual. In this act, the recipient is completely passive and can do nothing to cause it or prepare for it, resist it or lose it. But, perhaps most importantly for Mastricht, regeneration is limited to the *first act* by which a person is given the power to believe, but distinct from actually believing and therefore, imperfect.⁵⁹ With this basic description in place, there are two things that prove pertinent to the question of baptism’s efficacy: 1. Mastricht’s narrow definition of regeneration 2. Infant regeneration.

First, one should note the narrowness of Mastricht’s definition. In regeneration, Mastricht speaks only of a power, or an ability given in the initial change of nature. Conversion, faith, repentance, sanctification, etc. are all fruits of this change but do not constitute the change itself. In this he recognizes that he differs from some of the “practical divines” who speak of “marks, motives, and means of regeneration” as if the fruits and nature are indistinguishable.⁶⁰ However, he continues in the trajectory

via salutis, hoc est, de electione, redemptione, vocatione, justificatione, sanctificatione, glorificatione, Praeside Clarissimo, Doctissimoque Viro, (Franeker, 1649); Alexander Morus, *Victoria Gratiae. Alexandri Mori De gratia et libero arbitrio disputationes Genevenses adversus Dionysium Petavium Jesuitam* (Medioburgin, 1652).

57. Witsius confirms the polemical reasons for his treatment on regeneration as well especially responding to papists, Pelagians and Remonstrants. See Witsius, *Economy* III.vi. esp. §VIII, X.

58. This is a pivotal text in post-Reformation treatments. See Voetius, *Select Disputationum Theologicarum, pars secunda*. 432; Johannes Cocceius, *Summa*, §223; Witsius *The Economy*, III.vi. §III.

59. Mastricht, *TPT*, Lib. VI. Cap.iii. §§.III-XXII.

60. He might have Cocceius in mind here who reduces both acts under one head—sanctification. Johannes Cocceius, *Theologigo-Practicae, De Via Salutis, hoc est, De Electione, Redemptione, Vocatione, Justificatione, Sanctificatione, Glorificatione* (Franeker, 1649). In *Summa* he specifically argues for the interchangeability of the term regeneration with

of his teacher and predecessor Voetius who claimed that regeneration is an instantaneous action. Although it is truly successive, and introduces godly habits, nevertheless, regeneration begins in an instant antecedent to any habit, repentance, or faith.⁶¹ Witsius expresses himself similarly.⁶²

Mastricht, determines to speak of regeneration in this narrow way. To support his definition, he employs a number of biblical phrases which speak of regeneration in the way he suggests. He says that terms used to describe this act are the “circumcision of the heart,” “new creation,” “drawing,” illumination,” “turning the will,” and spiritual “resurrection, and quickening,” as well also, the term from John 3, *anageneesis*, “re-born/born from above.” These are all things that imply instantaneous change and excludes process. He concludes, “Thus regeneration, in the proper sense of the word, is only a *second* and spiritual *generation*, in which the *soul* receives its *spiritual life*, as the body receives its *natural life* from the first generation.”⁶³

Flowing from this definition also emerges a sharp *limitation* of regeneration to the first act. Mastricht asserts that although the first act (regeneration) is necessary for any subsequent acts (conversion, sanctification), the first and second acts must be clearly distinguished theologically and chronologically. He again appeals to the analogy of physical life to explain this spiritual principle.

For as, by *natural generation*, a man receives neither the habits or acts of reasoning, speaking, or writing, but only the *power*, which under proper circumstances, in due time, comes forth into act: So also, in regeneration, there is not bestowed upon the elect, any *faith*, hope, love, repentance, &c. either as to habit or act; but the *power* only of performing these exercises, is bestowed; by which, the regenerate person doth not as yet actually believe, or repent; but only is *capacitated* thereto.⁶⁴

The payoff to this is that, “one *truly* regenerate may, both as to habit and act, be for a time, an unbeliever, destitute of repentance and walking in sin.”⁶⁵ This does not

conversion, §223, ‘Alterum, quo adducimur ad foedus, est *Regeneratio* efficax Spiritus vitae Christi, quae & *Conversio* dicitur.’

61. Voetius, “De Regeneratione,” 434. ‘Interim pauca haec ad distinctionem eorum pertinentia, notamus. 1. *Primam* esse actionem instantaneam: *secundam* vero successivam, quod ad ipsas dispositiones seu habitus introductos: *tertiam*, quod ad eadem, instantaneam.’

62. Witsius defines regeneration, as “that supernatural act of God, whereby a new and divine life is infused into the elect person spiritually dead, and that from the incorruptible seed of the word of God, made fruitful by the infinite power of the Spirit” (*Economy*, III. vi. §IV.) He further notes that the Scripture knows of only two states: born again or not; sheep or goats etc. So it must be an immediate and once and for all act that cannot be repeated. (*Economy* III. vi. §VIII).

63. Mastricht, *Treatise on Regeneration*, VI, iii. §V.

64. Mastricht, *Treatise on Regeneration*, 27-28.

65. Mastricht, *Treatise on Regeneration*, §XVII. Witsius also elaborates on Mastricht’s point: “I own there are various degrees of regeneration in the second act; and that the seed of it sometimes lies hid under the earth, or at most exerts some slender and initial, and as it were, infantile operations, differing very much with respect to perfection from those which a more

deny that often, perhaps normally, a person is regenerated and converted nearly simultaneously such as in the instance of the thief on the cross. But, it is not *necessarily* the case.⁶⁶ Maastricht likely makes this concession to allow room for infant regeneration and consequently, the salvation of covenant children dying in infancy.

In his limitation of the term, Maastricht represents a development in the Reformed understanding of regeneration. The Reformers, as Maastricht himself notes, generally spoke of regeneration in a broad sense, as including conversion and sanctification.⁶⁷ There was no clear separation between a first and second act. However, problems emerged from this that led to clarification by the Orthodox of which Maastricht is a representative. Yet Maastricht was not alone in this development. Other theologians similarly saw the need for greater precision. Witsius, made the distinction between a first and second acts of sanctification very similar to Maastricht. The Genevan Francis Turretin likewise utilized a similar distinction with slightly different nomenclature. He described sanctification as either passive, (such as in regeneration), or active, (such as in conversion).⁶⁸ The attribution of conversion to the will, as in Arminian theology, provoked the Reformed to recognize the need to begin using the more restricted sense as did Maastricht.

However, this clarification of language does not denote divergence but rather a natural and necessary delineation.⁶⁹ The Reformed confessional literature regularly speaks of the requirement of a completely new nature instantaneously wrought by the Spirit of God to make conversion possible.⁷⁰ Yet they were not always careful to distinguish between the change of nature in which men are passive (regeneration) and

advanced spirit of sanctification produces; yet seeing the former also have their rise from the fountain of new life, it is plain, that they who exert them are to be ranked among the regenerate.” *Economy*, III. vi. §.VIII.

66. He continues: “We mean not to deny here, that it may be, and often is the case, that a sanctification of the Spirit, in a *general* sense, comprehending vocation, regeneration, conversion & sanctification properly so called, is effected at one and the same time: Which seems to have been the case with the thief on the cross, converted by Christ in his last moments. We only mean that they *may* be separated as to time, and that oft times this is *actually* the case.” See §XVII, 28.

67. “The Reformed consider a reformation of manners, as belonging not to regeneration, in its strict and proper sense, but to conversion and sanctification; while they place regeneration solely in the reformation of the inner man, understanding, will and other faculties” Maastricht, *Treatise on Regeneration*, §XXIII.

68. Francis Turretin, Topic IXX, Q.20, §.XX, “Infants cannot be capable of active sanctification or conversion (as to the sense and knowledge of the blessing); but they can be capacious of passive regeneration, as to the principle and the impression of the divine image, which ought to exert itself in its own time.”

69. See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), IV:64-76.

70. Geneva Catechism, “Our mind is too rude to be able to grasp the spiritual wisdom of God which is revealed to us through faith; and our hearts are too prone to distrust or to perverse confidence in ourselves or other creatures to rest of their own accord in God. But the Holy Spirit by his illumination makes us capable of understanding those things which would otherwise far exceed our grasp, and brings us to a sure persuasion by sealing the promises of salvation in our hearts.” J. K. S. Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 105.

the change which actively employs the human will (conversion). Debate with Catholics, Socinians, and Arminians led the Orthodox to use language more precisely and carefully.

However, it should be noted that in this narrowness of definition, Maastricht also expresses continuity with the Reformers in the breadth of his doctrine of regeneration. This spiritual renovation, in contrast to Socinians and Arminians, extends to all the human faculties: mind, emotion, and will, along with the lesser faculties such as affections and senses. The transformation, according to Maastricht, is comprehensive. In this, Maastricht is in keeping with the Reformed consensus.⁷¹

In his commitment to this narrow and limited sense of regeneration, Maastricht is concerned with allowing possibility of regeneration *in utero*, or at least, in the earliest stages of life. Having observed the high rates of infant mortality in the Netherlands at this point, a historical and contextual motivation is clearly perceived.⁷² Exegetically, however, Maastricht derives his position specifically from three texts. He appeals to Jeremiah 1:5 where God spoke to the prophet Jeremiah, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.” Next, he appealed to the foretelling of the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah by the angel of the Lord. In Luke 1:15 we read: “For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb.” Lastly, he cited Paul’s address to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:15, “And that from a child (βρέφος) thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” The Greek term βρέφος was normally utilized in ancient literature to denote 1. An unborn child, or embryo or 2. A baby or infant.⁷³

In these biblical examples, Maastricht saw examples of regeneration in the womb or early infancy. In these cases, he recognized that long before the recipients of regeneration could articulate faith in Christ, these men possessed the Holy Spirit. If regeneration is *necessarily* linked chronologically with conversion, then these biblical accounts cannot be explained except, perhaps, in a metaphorical sense. However, Maastricht’s narrow definition of regeneration permits him to separate the first and the second acts thereby allowing that these men were regenerated in the womb prior to

71. See GC §VIII; BC § XXIV; Canons of Dort, III-IV, Art.12; WCF 10.1-2; WLC 67; WSC 31; and also Calvin, *Institutes*, III. iii., Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Una Semplice Dichiaratione sopra gli XII Articoli della Fede Christiana* (Basel: John Hervagrus, 1544); translated by Mariano Di Gangi in *The Peter Martyr Reader* (Kirksville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 1999), §31.

72. Witsius explicitly connects the question of baptisms efficacy to infant mortality. He writes: “Although it is not safe to pry too curiously into the secrets of the divine counsels or to draw too confident conclusions concerning the lot of those dying in infancy, that a distinguished privilege belongs to those infants whose benefit it is in divine providence to be born of parents of whom the grace of the Most High has honored with the saving fellowship of his covenant.” (*The Efficacy of Baptism*, 127).

73. Walter Bauer, F. W. Gingrich and Frederick Danker (editors), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 147.

their conversion. As in circumcision under the OT, these men would have legitimately and efficaciously been baptized for such is required where the Spirit has been given (Acts 10:47).

4. Whether Regeneration be Necessarily Connected to Baptism

Having outlined his own understanding of baptism and regeneration Mastricht has put the foundational pieces in place to answer the question: “Whether regeneration be *necessarily connected* with baptism.”⁷⁴ In the opening lines of the elenctic section, Mastricht quickly works through the varying opinions of those outside the Reformed camp. The Socinians “rightly deny it (the immediate efficacy of baptism),” yet they do it by false presuppositions. They make the sacrament a *sign* only without any efficacy. The Anabaptists answer similarly by making baptism only effectual in so far as it confirms church membership.⁷⁵ In this, according to Mastricht, they provide the right answer for the wrong reasons.

The papists answer the question in the *affirmative*, and they do this by holding that the sacrament works *ex opere operato*. Slightly differently, Mastricht maintains that the Lutherans state that the sign *normally* represents the thing signified. In a qualified sense, they too answer the question in the affirmative. In this both parties err for reasons he would later give.

Having briskly surveyed the varying positions of those outside the Reformed community, Mastricht spends a lengthy amount of time describing the varying positions of the Reformed before presenting his own position. Mastricht delineates four distinct positions on the timing of the efficacy of infant baptism. The first group, Mastricht asserts, hold that baptism signifies a future regeneration. In other words, when a child is baptized, he is presumed unregenerate. The efficacy of the sacrament, therefore, only takes place when, in the course of time, the elect child expresses faith and repentance. Baptism can only be efficacious in a future sense. Mastricht holds that the “celebrated Amyraldus,” is the main proponent of this thesis.⁷⁶ Witsius goes to great lengths to disprove his theory, though Mastricht feels little constrained to do so.⁷⁷

Mastricht charges this position with conflating conversion and regeneration. By not distinguishing the first act (regeneration) from the second acts (conversion and sanctification), he is forced to draw his conclusion that the efficacy is limited to the future. If, however, one properly delineated between the two acts, he could maintain that baptism actually sealed something the moment it was administered rather than deferring to some future time.⁷⁸

Mastricht speaks to a second group, “others, from modesty declining to determine the point, think it depends on the sovereign will of God, whether to bestow regeneration *before* baptism, at the time of its administration, or afterwards.”⁷⁹ To this

74. Mastricht, *Treatise on Regeneration*, §XXXI, 45-50.

75. Mastricht, *Treatise on Regeneration*, §XXXI, 46.

76. Moise Amyraut, “Disputatio de Paedobaptismi.”

77. Witsius, *The Efficacy of Baptism*, §§.XXXIII-XXXVII, 151-155.

78. Mastricht, *Treatise on Regeneration*, §XXXI, 46-47.

79. Mastricht, *Treatise on Regeneration*, §XXXI, 47.

group, Maastricht assigns Jerome Zanchi, William Ames, and Friedrich Spanheim.⁸⁰ Both Maastricht and Witsius show deference to these men at this point even though disagreeing. Neither attempts to discredit this position although both take different positions.

Although Maastricht formerly claimed that all the Reformed opposed the positions of the papists and Lutherans, yet he distinguishes a third group that shares considerable similarity with their views. He claims that this group, which includes Lewis Le Blanc,⁸¹ Pierre Jurieu,⁸² Theodore Beza,⁸³ “and others,” “choose to think that regeneration is effected at the *very time* of baptism, *ordinarily* at least.”⁸⁴ Maastricht spends the most time disproving this theory. He offers five reasons for why the regenerating influences of the Spirit cannot be “confined” to the act of Baptism as the “Lutherans have it.” First, he implies the inconsistency of this position. If they hold that the sacraments are seals, as Maastricht said all the Reformed held (see above), then they must consistently apply their definition of a sacrament. For baptism to serve as a seal, it presupposes what it signifies—i.e. regeneration. Otherwise, how could the act signify anything?

Second, Maastricht distinguishes between the sign and the thing signified. It is not the waters that purify, rather that water symbolizes spiritual purification and the washing away of original corruption. The waters signify what the Spirit does and therefore, since “the pollution of the soul is not purged away by the baptism of the water, therefore regeneration is not confined thereto.”⁸⁵

Third, Maastricht argues that all baptized persons would be able to tie their regeneration to the moment of their baptism. This, he says, cannot be maintained Scripturally or experientially. Fourthly, he adds that regeneration cannot be limited to any sacrament and he cites Mark 16:16 as exegetical support: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” He continued, “’tis expressly said, that even a baptized person, if he believes not, shall be damned.”⁸⁶ Lastly, he concluded, that “the Holy Ghost is said to regenerate according

80. Hieronymus Zanchius, *In D. Pauli Epistolam ad Ephesios, commentarius*, (Neostadi, 1594), 418. William Ames, *Bellarmino enervato*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1630), III: 68-72. ‘Deus igitur potest vel ante, vel post Baptiz. Eandem gratiam communicare.’ Spanheim, *Dubia*, XXVII. §.VI. To this group might also be added Wilhelmus a Brakel who claims that the sacrament is efficacious for the parents of the baptized child and becomes effectual to the infant, “upon coming to the years of discretion, [he] derives from his baptism its sealing efficacy to his comfort and sanctification.” *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, II. p.502.

81. Lewis Le Blanc, *Thesis Theologicae*, §§45, 46.

82. Pierre Jurieu, *The Pastoral Letters of the Incomparable Jurieu, Directed to the Protestants in France Groaning under the Babylonish Tyranny: Wherein Sophistical Arguments and Unexpressible Cruelties made use of by the Papists for the making Conerts, are laid open and expos’d to just Abhorrence. Unto which is added, a brief Account of the Hungarian Persecution* (London: T. Fabian, 1689), 166-188; 554-565.

83. Theodore Beza, *Acta Colloquij Montis Belligartensis: quod habitum est, Anno Christi 1586. Fauente Deo Opt. Max.* (Tubingae: Georgium Gruppenbachium, 1587), 20-26, 106.

84. Maastricht, *Treatise on Regeneration*, §XXXI.

85. Maastricht, *TPT*, VI. iii. §.XXXI.

86. Maastricht, *Treatise on Regeneration*, 48.

to his sovereign pleasure; as the wind bloweth where it listeth, so is everyone born of the Spirit.”⁸⁷

Mastricht ends with what he sees as the majority opinion and the one that he personally holds. “The common opinion of the Reformed is, that the baptism of infants (at least of the *elect*) presupposes regeneration as already effected; because that which is not, cannot be *sealed* by baptism. And this opinion appears to me most agreeable to the truth.”⁸⁸ In other words, there is no distinction made between adults and infants receiving baptism. Just as adults are baptized on the presumption of regeneration, so must infants be in consistency with circumcision. This is compatible with the position of his predecessors, Voetius and Cocceius and his contemporary Herman Witsius who goes to great pains to convincingly demonstrate that it was the position of Calvin.⁸⁹ Although Mastricht doesn’t explicitly describe the connections to infant salvation at this point (although it is likely to be assumed), his predecessors and contemporaries do.

In his defense of infant baptism, Turretin writes that, “If infants who are to be saved bring with them from their mother’s womb inborn corruption, they must be purged of it before they can be admitted into the kingdom of God, into which nothing polluted enters.”⁹⁰ Hence, for the elect who die in infancy, baptism must effectually seal a prior act of regeneration. Cocceius is even more adamant, maintaining:

That those who die in infancy, having been initiated into the covenant of circumcision by parents keeping covenant, are not cut off from their people, but the sanctified inherit the kingdom of heaven through the Holy Spirit of promise. For there is nothing that makes the covenant ineffective except unbelief and repudiation of the Word of God, which is not in infants.⁹¹

Further, consistently with the Synod of Dort, Cocceius concludes, “And certainly the counsel of grace spreads to all the children of believers who die in infancy.”⁹² Consequently, “it is inhuman to exclude those from the symbols of communion of saints, who are saints and not ἀκαθάρτοι.”⁹³

87. Mastricht, *Treatise on Regeneration*, 48.

88. Mastricht, *Treatise on Regeneration*, 47. See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, IV: 57, n.36.

89. Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, vol.2. 410, Quoted by Witsius and translated by J. Mark Beach in *Efficacy of Baptism* §.XXXI. “The well-known opinion of these theologians [the reformed] is that the efficacy of baptism consists not in producing regeneration but in sealing a regeneration already produced;” Cocceius, *Explicatio*, Q.71, “Baptism is the testimony that washing and regeneration have taken place, not that they happen at that moment.” Translated by J. Mark Beach in *Efficacy of Baptism*, §. XLIV; Witsius, *The Efficacy of Baptism*, 143-144. Cf. also §. XXXII and Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, vi.18.

90. Turretin, *Institutes*, Topic XIX. Q. XX. §. XX.

91. Cocceius, *Summa* §.454

92. Cocceius, *Summa*, §458.

93. Cocceius, *Summa*, §560.

Conclusion

Here Mastricht ends somewhat abruptly, however, this is not surprising given his full treatment of the related issues in the *Theoretica-Practica*. By understanding his teaching on sacraments and regeneration, Mastricht's logic appears quite clear. In summary, Mastricht's answer to this question is bound up with several theological positions. Many of these points run within the strand of general Reformation treatments while others represent an ongoing trend of development within that tradition.

(1) *The Sealing aspect of the sacraments*. Consistently with Romans 4:11 and Genesis 17, Mastricht maintained that sacraments are not just "naked signs," they signify and confirm and therefore must effectually seal regeneration when applied or else they are less than seals. Herein Mastricht articulates the standard Reformed sacramentology. However, not all Reformed theologians accept that the seals are unequivocally efficacious in sealing. Many Reformed theologians deny that the sacraments unequivocally seal anything at the time in which they are administered. Some writers, such as William Ames, emphasized to a much greater degree than Mastricht, the conditional aspect of the sealing efficacy of the sacraments.

(2) *The interchangeability of baptism and circumcision*. Since, consistently with his exegesis of Colossians 2:11-12, the two signs signified the same things, the practice of Baptism and Circumcision must correspond—i.e. circumcision was given to infants under the OT so they should in the NT. This approach to infant baptism found considerable unanimity among the Reformed.

(3) *Circumcision and Baptism as sacraments of regeneration*. As confirmed by Titus 3:5, 1Cor.7:14, and John 3:3, 5, Mastricht maintained that circumcision and baptism were primarily sacraments of regeneration. Although many of his predecessors and contemporaries understood the regenerative elements of baptism, Mastricht constituted a shift in emphasis. This is particularly apparent in his defense of infant baptism. Whereas the Reformers generally defended the practice by appealing to their inheritance of the covenant of grace, Mastricht moved from covenant membership to the promised benefits of the covenant—namely remission of sins and regeneration. This does not constitute something completely novel, Calvin spoke similarly, yet it does constitute a greater emphasis in the post-Reformation period than during the first and second generation Reformers.

(4) *The limitation of Regeneration to the first act of sanctification*. In his exegesis of John 3:5, Mastricht concluded that regeneration must be limited to the first act of sanctification, and separating it from conversion, Mastricht can allow the efficacy of baptism in confirming regeneration to infants who are unable to respond to an outward call of the gospel. In this sharp distinction between the two acts of sanctification, Mastricht distinguishes himself from Reformers and Orthodox theologians such as Ames and Cocceius. Although at times his predecessors spoke of different aspects of regeneration, Mastricht represents a greater commitment to precision than did his forbears on the passive and active elements of the new birth.

(5) *Infant regeneration*. In distinguishing between first and second acts of regeneration, Mastricht can allow for the possibility, and indeed, the likelihood of

infant regeneration in the case of covenant children (or at the least, *elect* covenant children). By appealing to John the Baptist, Jeremiah, and to a lesser extent, Timothy, Mastricht finds biblical examples of infant regeneration—those who had received the power of the Spirit prior to conversion. Given that they had received the thing signified, there was no reason to keep them from the sacrament that confirmed regeneration. In this he shared agreement with Witsius and Turretin among others. Therefore, in holding these positions, Mastricht arrives at his position.

(6) *Infant members of the covenant receive baptism as a seal of their prior regeneration.* As Witsius later argues, it is consistent with a hermeneutic of charity to assume that infants who receive baptism, who are federally holy by the covenant solidarity between believers and their children, likewise have effectually received the sign of regeneration.⁹⁴ Thus, Mastricht concludes that baptism generally efficaciously confirms that covenant children have experienced the first act of regeneration prior to their baptism. This is especially certain in the case of those dying in infancy.

This position differs from several key figures of the Reformed community such as Amyraut, Ames, Spanheim, Jurieu, and Beza. Yet it shares unanimity with others namely, the Synod of Dort, Voetius, and Witsius. However, even these are at times more cautious than Mastricht. Witsius, for example, emphasizes to a greater extent than Mastricht and Dort, the contingency upon election and the mystery contained therein. In other words, ultimately, one cannot with perfect certainty assume a covenant child to be elected even though there is perhaps great probability of that.⁹⁵ Mastricht is far less constrained by this caution than is Witsius as evidenced by his unequivocal assertions.

In conclusion, these considerations may benefit modern scholarship in two distinct ways. First, it continues to challenge the older-scholarship that charged Orthodoxy with being speculative, abstract, and non-exegetical. Mastricht, a representative of Reformed Orthodoxy, built his theology on vigorous exegesis, in a polemical context, in service to the church (in this case in reference to children dying in infancy). Second, it cautions modern scholars from making premature judgments. The theological and pastoral pursuits proved highly complex for Mastricht and Reformed Orthodoxy. The commitment to the systematic and exegetical approach to theology highlights the interconnectivity and, consequently, the complexity of the theological enterprise. To answer the question of the efficacy of infant baptism required extensive consideration of sacramentology in general, baptism in particular, and the discrimination of various acts in regeneration. This complex picture encourages modern scholars to be cautious and nuanced in their judgments of discontinuity between the Reformers and Post-Reformers.

94. Witsius, *The Efficacy of Baptism*, §I-V.

95. Witsius, *The Efficacy of Baptism*, §VI.