

## **Points of Contact Between the Wesleyan Interpretation of Experiential Holiness and Holiness in the Dutch Reformed Tradition**

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### **Introduction**

Almost every Christian tradition and denomination has harboured people who have longed for and sought after holiness of heart, however “holiness of heart” may be defined. Traditionally the Dutch Reformed Church has positioned itself as radically opposed to Wesleyan-Arminian theological concepts. The Wesleyan-Holiness position in particular, receives much criticism. Yet, in the study of post-reformation Dutch Church History, one encounters a period in which a significant number of Churchmen who, while remaining strongly committed to the Calvinist position, testified and made a national plea for holiness.

The specific subject of this paper is the Further Reformation Movement, the *Nadere Reformatie*, which formed in the period in which controversy over the doctrine of election dominated the Dutch theological landscape. The controversy culminated in the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) and the issuance of its five sets of articles against Arminianism on April 23, 1619. The *Nadere Reformatie* movement marked its formal arrival in 1627, with the publication of Willem Teelinck’s *Noodwendig Vertoogh*. In this work, Teelinck (1579-1629) outlined a programme for the hitherto quite informal movement. The movement expired as a formal entity upon the death of Theodorus van der Groe (1705-1784). Van der Groe confessed in his *Beschrijvinge van het Oprecht en Zielzalig Geloove* that until his conversion, probably in 1735, five years after his installation as pastor in his first congregation, he had only worked with an “imaginary Christ in his mind”.<sup>1</sup>

Teelinck’s *Nadere Reformatie* clearly articulated the concerns of an increasing number of Dutch Reformed clergy who, while they strongly supported the Calvinist anti-Arminian position of the Synod of Dort, reacted negatively to the idea that correct doctrine (*leerheiligheid*) is sufficient for holiness. They insisted on a further and deeper reformation,

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<sup>1</sup> Historian S.v.d. Linde, *Christelijke Encyclopedie*, (Kampen: 1960), 3:310.

one which would move beyond pre-occupation with doctrinal formulation and orthodoxy. They yearned for a reformation which would give careful attention to the daily life of the Christian, to godly practice (*praktijk der godzaligheid*), holy living (*heiligheid des levens*), and a personal relationship with God (*persoonlijk verkeer*). To this end, they gave much more attention than was customary to preaching, house visitation, catechetical instruction, and meditation.

The sincerity and passion of the preachers of the *Nadere Reformatie* did not bring about the deep and widespread change in the church for which they hoped. Today, only a doctrinally orthodox group within the mainline Dutch Reformed Church, the *Gereformeerde Bond*, and separated groups, such as the Christian Re-reformed churches, *Christelijk Gereformeerd* and *Gereformeerde Gemeenten*, consider this period as a vital and meaningful part of their history.

This paper re-visits the *Nadere Reformatie* and compares its understanding of holiness with the point of view developed by Wesleyanism. While differences remain, this paper will show remarkable similarities in experience and doctrinal thoughts between experiential holiness in the Wesleyan tradition and churchmen in the Dutch Calvinist tradition of the 17th century.

### **A Necessary Excursus**

Although the *Nadere Reformatie* is clearly a Reformed movement, it is a highly nuanced form of Calvinism, and it is precisely at the point of those nuances that convergence with Wesleyan understandings is either made possible or closed off.

Martin Luther's writing had guided the earliest phases of the Protestant Reformation in the Netherlands, but by the 1570's, Calvinism was in the ascendancy and would soon be dominant. And, Calvinism itself was undergoing a major ideological shift. Since Calvin's death in 1564, his successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza (1519-1605), had directed the movement into an ever more scholastic mode.<sup>2</sup> Under Beza it became

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<sup>2</sup> W. van 't Spijker, *Sources of the Nadere Reformatie in De Nadere Reformatie en het Gereformeerd Piëtisme* (s'Gravenhage, 1989); see also John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York, 1954) for the development of Reformed Scholasticism.

essential that theological reflection be strictly logical, define its terms very carefully, create proper categories for classifying and arranging the results of reflection, and construct clear and undebatable connections between the categories. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), had gained full entry into Protestant Calvinistic theology by 1600, and into the theology of Beza and his progeny in particular.

Among Thomas Aquinas' contributions to early Protestantism by way of Beza and others was the modified Aristotelian understanding that the human soul has two fundamental faculties: intellect and will. Further, in typical Aristotelian fashion, Thomas reasoned that the two could not be equal in power. One must be greater. He states, "The chief part of the soul is the intellect as the philosopher (Aristotle) explains in Ethics 10.7."<sup>3</sup> Clearly Thomas sides with Aristotle: the intellect is the highest power of the soul.

John Calvin generally followed Thomas.<sup>4</sup> For Calvin, faith (on its human side) had to do primarily with knowing, with the understanding. He stated:

Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

Beza had emphasised the intellectual element in Calvin's definition and gone on to involve the will as well, except that the will to believe depended entirely upon one's being elect, i.e. upon God's prior act.<sup>6</sup> For Calvin, faith beckons us to Christ; for Beza, faith binds Christ to us.<sup>7</sup> From this point, among the Reformed, 'faith' had more and more come to mean 'right doctrine', which meant that true doctrine was to be the sign, the assurance, of true faith. True faith would be *experienced*, experienced as intellectual certainty.

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<sup>3</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, "Aquinas on Nature and Grace", *Selections from the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. by A.M. Fairweather (Philadelphia, 1954), 122-123, quoted from Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, I, Question 82, Article 3.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Inst.*, I. 15. 6.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Inst.*, III. 2. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Theodore Beza, *A Booke of Christian Questions and Answares* (London, 1578), 23-24.

<sup>7</sup> R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford, 1979), 33-37.

The *Nadere Reformatie*, stoutly Calvinist, held without equivocation to the Bezan point of view,<sup>8</sup> but found it incomplete. Without going over to Duns Scotus' point of view, they took deep interest in the condition of the heart, in the affective as well as the intellectual, and attempted to redefine 'experienced faith' so as to include both. Faith was to be strictly logical, but nonetheless it was to be experienced, deeply experienced in the affective side of life, the side of life which Duns Scotus had identified as arising from the will. And this brings us to the task at hand.

It is in the *Nadere Reformatie*'s concept of 'experienced faith' that we find significant parallels with Wesleyan thought and it is to those parallels that we now turn.

### **Conversion and the Relationship Between Justification and Sanctification**

Reformed theology and Wesleyan theology relate justification to sanctification in very different ways. In Reformed theology, justification is accomplished before the believer is even born. It is a gracious, divine, forensic act which involves no moral change in its eventual object.

*Nadere Reformatie* spokesman Jodocus Lodenstein (1620-1677) would not think of arguing with the Heidelberg Catechism, yet, he does point out a limitation of the Catechism concerning the salvific work of Christ. He objects to the limited answer the Catechism gives to the subject of justification in question 60 for Sunday 23:

*Question 60:*

How are you righteous before God?

*Answer:*

Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. In spite of the fact that my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have not kept any one of them, and I am still ever prone to all that is evil, nevertheless, God, without any merit on my own, out of pure grace, grants me the benefits of the perfect expiation of Christ, imputing to me his righteousness and holiness as if I had never committed a single sin or had been sinful, having fulfilled myself the

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<sup>8</sup> S. van der Linde, "Calvijn, Calvinisme en Nadere Reformatie," *Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie* 6 (1982): 73ff.

obedience which Christ has carried out for me, if only I accept such favour with a trusting heart.<sup>9</sup>

He objects to the exclusion of holiness as a necessity for the Christian. In referring to this, he writes:

The Christian is only assessed as he is seen by the Lord, when he is justified. There one's own holiness or good works have no merit for those who are justified are justified freely and only through grace. Yet holiness ought not to be denied, for it is everywhere proposed and taught as necessary for the Christian, as being the life and test of true faith ...<sup>10</sup>

Lodenstein divides the work of Christ into two aspects by identifying salvation and entire sanctification (*volkomen Heiligheid*) as that which Christ has earned for us. He states that salvation is given immediately when we turn to God in faith. The effect of this salvation is that the believer is moved toward the love of God. This enables us to work out the second part, that is, sanctification:

The first (salvation) he gives immediately, when we turn to him through faith, so that he moves us toward his and God's love, and we are enabled to work out the other part. This is what a Christian does in the name and fear of the Lord, fighting against his opponents, and winning over the opposition, being victorious over desires and putting their fires out, obtaining the inner attitudes (*hebbelijkheden*) of the virtues by exercising them, herewith restoring the image of the Lord in him. This is what the Lord has obtained for him.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, Calvin and his theological heirs spoke of conversion as well. Generally, they agreed that conversion is comprised of two elements: God's calling of the elect to repentance, and the elects' responding positively.

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<sup>9</sup> De Commissie Dienstboek van de Hervormde Raad voor de Eredienst, *Bijlage ten gebruike in de eredienst van de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, 29.

<sup>10</sup> Jodocus van Lodenstein, *De Weegschaal van de onvolmaaktheden der Heiligen* (Utrecht, 1664), 66.

<sup>11</sup> Lodenstein, *ibid.*, 54.

For *Nadere Reformatie* spokesman Voetius (1589-1676)<sup>12</sup> conversion means being born in the covenant and being sanctified (set apart) through the Holy Spirit from the time of conception. Those ‘born again’ are distinguished from those not in the covenant by the spiritual grace which is impressed in the elect through the Holy Spirit. It is not a disposition of mind or heart, but a spiritual supernatural ability, *facultas spiritualis seu potentia supernaturalis*. But this *facultas* may not always be in evidence. It can be revealed later.<sup>13</sup>

Voetius calls this ability or *facultas* a seed.

*Question:*

In how many ways and manners can being born again be considered and characterised?

*Answer:*

In two ways and manners.

*Question:*

What are these two ways and manners?

*Answer:*

New Birth can be characterised: 1. for the many who only understand the beginning and the seed, that out of which all other graces originate is called “the first new birth”; 2. For the many who understand that all we become, we become through Christ, this total work of redemption is called the second “the second new birth.”<sup>14</sup>

A born again person (i.e., one who has experienced the ‘second new birth’ is thus one who has this *facultas spiritualis*, a supernatural ability which is the seed and root of faith and sanctification. This ability is present from the very beginning of life. Though it may not be fully revealed for a number of years, as the predestined grow up they feel the implanted seed germinate through various stimuli, such as the church

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<sup>12</sup> W. van ‘t Spijker, “Gijsbertus Voetius,” in *De Nadere Reformatie, Beschrijving van haar voornaamste vertegenwoordigers* ed. by T. Brienens (‘s-Gravenhage, 1986), 49-84. Cf. Gisbertus Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum*, 5 vols. (Utrecht, 1648-1669). Hereinafter, this work will be referred to as *Sel. Disp.*.

<sup>13</sup> Voetius, *Sel. Disp.* 5:403; W. Van ‘t Spijker, 62.

<sup>14</sup> Voetius, *Catechisatie over den Heidelbergschen Catechismus*, 173.

community, the Word of God and the reviving cooperation of the Holy Spirit. And this issues in a yearning to live a holy life.

It seems logical that Voetius, an orthodox theologian of his time, could not allow himself to go outside the boundaries of Calvinistic orthodoxy. Yet Reformed theology would have difficulty with his understanding that instead of one divine act and conversion there are two. In the first (justification, *sententieren*), no real, ethical change takes place in the believer; in the second, which is based on the believer's act of faith (justification by faith), a change is indeed produced. This bifurcation of the act of faith and conversion brought him near to laying hands on the very heart of supralapsarian thought. Orthodox Reformed theology, in contrast to Voetius, held that the whole of the *ordo salutis* is an independent work of God alone.

Voetius also took a path different from that of Reformed orthodoxy in his emphasis on the 'second new birth'. This seemed to place the forensic aspect of justification in the background and to mute the gospel message of free and unmerited forgiveness. Voetius insisted that faith enters human existence and expresses itself ethically, and this led him to conclusions and constructs in his theology which seemed questionable to some Reformed theologians.<sup>15</sup>

Wesley did not separate justification and sanctification, but he did make a clear distinction between them. In characteristically Protestant fashion, he sees justification as a forensic change. And, he understands it to be prior to sanctification. However, for Wesley, justification, though forensic, enables the believer to grow in faith and holiness, producing increase in love, lowliness and meekness. Sanctification, for Wesley, entails an essential change in the character of the justified person: God purifies the heart from all unrighteousness. In Wesleyan thought the *ordo salutis* in detail is: prevenient grace, faith, repentance, justification (including regeneration or initial sanctification), assurance of justification, entire sanctification, assurance of perfecting in love, glorification.

### **The Place of Faith in the Process of Sanctification**

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<sup>15</sup> W. van 't Spijker, 64. Van't Spijker raises the questions: Did Voetius lose some essential reformed ideas? Did he give justification an adequate place in his theology? Was the extension in the direction of practice not something of an illusion?

Both the *Nadere Reformatie* and Wesley place faith as the one thing necessary to claim any part or all of the salvific work of God. Yet there are differences in interpretation of the place of faith. The Wesleyan will speak of exercising faith through believing that God can enter the human heart and change it. The *Nadere Reformatie*, spoke to the problem of assurance that one is indeed in possession of faith. Consequently the *Nadere Reformatie* placed the emphasis on finding faith in the believer, rather than on the believer's exercising faith. For those who do not have inner assurance of their election, faith can be found by means of a simple syllogism: "Whoever sincerely believes, is among the elect. I believe sincerely. Therefore, I am among the elect." Yet faith based on a syllogism only does not take into consideration human feelings and conditions of despair. The *Nadere Reformatie* recognised the agonising struggle of the sincere human soul for more of God as an act of faith. Therefore experienced faith came to the foreground. The *Nadere Reformatie* considers feeling, *feeling-assurance* (*gevoelszekerheid*), as experienced faith, giving an added value to the knowledge of faith. This experienced faith is the prerequisite to good works, and is equated with the union of the freed sinner with Christ.

Voetius makes clear that faith is in no way initiated by human reason. Even though scripture is religiously and morally reasonable, the cause of faith is enlightenment by the Spirit.<sup>16</sup> In this way Voetius placed the secret of faith outside the *ratio*.<sup>17</sup> The condition for receiving the gospel is faith (understood as acknowledgement of the word of God and opening oneself to be centred by that Word) and conversion (understood as the living out of the new birth), but faith and conversion come from God. Voetius proceeded to explain that the promises of the gospel are absolute and unconditional. At the same time Voetius stated (in a debate on March 15, 1656) that not only the gospel, but also the law, contained promises and that not only the law, but also the gospel, contained conditions. The conditional aspects of the gospel, however, are dependent on the unconditional promises thereof. That is to say, the promises define and control the conditions. In the end, the promises of the gospel are absolute. This would seem to imply, however, that there could be faith without conversion. Voetius attempted to resolve this tension by stating that there is a second divine act of faith and conversion in a regenerated person that

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<sup>16</sup> Gijsbertus Voetius, *Sel. Disp.*, 1:3.

<sup>17</sup> W. Van 't Spijker., 53.



is preceded by conditions.<sup>18</sup> This second divine act of faith and conversion is essentially synthetic, meaning that the grace given at the second act of faith and conversion is the driving force behind deeds of faith, e.g. conformance to the entire law of God. The first divine act of faith and conversion is essentially analytic, meaning that one is marked as one who is born again into the covenant of God and sanctified from birth and thereby separated from others who are not born again.

Voetius came curiously close to a Wesleyan approach in his treatment of the relationship between law, gospel, and the place of faith. Voetius knew that both Lutheran and Reformed scholastic theologians tended to draw a sharp distinction between the law, with its promise and punishment, and the gospel which gives inner illumination and new birth. Yet he gave the law a positive role in the salvific scheme by placing it with the gospel as the doctrine of wholesomeness revealed by God in the Old and New Testament. *Doctrina salutaris* is for him the law as well the gospel.<sup>19</sup> Through this, he emphasized the wholesome working of the law. In doing so he brought law and gospel very close together. He came to see obedience to the law as a new obedience, i.e. as an aspect of the synthetic end of faith and conversion, after regeneration. Thus obedience, the new obedience, is not only an effect of salvation, but it is also a condition for receiving it.

Wesley speaks in terms of 'expecting faith', meaning the condition within men in which God can impart holiness. This imparted holiness enters human existence and is therefore experienced. While the *Nadere Reformatie* speaks about feelings, Wesley speaks about experience. Where Wesleyans would see the exercise of faith as the conditional cause of sanctification, the *Nadere Reformatie* would see the presence of faith as a necessity to sanctification. Wesleyans see faith towards God as the response of man, who believes in his promises, his willingness, and in his ability to sanctify. The *Nadere Reformatie* sees faith as that which is inherently present in the believer as a result of an implantation from before birth. When the believer discovers and recognises that faith within him, he will be moved towards the love of God, he will deepen his awareness as a sinner, and subsequently he will grow in sanctification.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

For both the Wesleyan and the *Nadere Reformatie* spokesmen, faith is ultimately a gift from God. For the Wesleyan, the Christian is enabled by God to believe and for the *Nadere Reformatie* spokesman, God has implanted the Christian with faith.

### **The Process of Sanctification**

Both Wesleyans and *Nadere Reformatie* spokesmen see sanctification as the restoration of man to the image of God and as such, the purpose of redemption. Wesleyans see prevenient grace, which is the gift of an awareness of sin and of the will of God and the gift of the capacity to say 'yes' or 'no' to God's call to reconciliation, as the starting point of God's redemptive work in a person. Spokesmen of the *Nadere Reformatie* use the concept of an implanted seed, which is a supernatural ability in a believer to have faith, to hope and to love, as the beginning of God's redemption in a person.

Smytegelt (1665-1739) sees the holy life firmly rooted in a prior act of God. Holiness starts with forgiveness obtained through the merit of Christ. Forgiveness cleanses the sinner and makes him ready to receive the workings of the Holy Spirit. These workings create a longing and continuous desire for a pure heart in believers by,

. . . forgiving them all their ugly stinking crimes through the merit of his Son. This they accept through faith, as the Psalmist says (Ps. 51:7), "Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean," . . . God cleanses the unclean sinner when He gives him the gifts and the inner workings of the Spirit. "I cannot live in a dirty heart," says the Spirit. "I am the Lord who sanctifies you," says the Spirit (Lev. 22:32). "I must leave or sin must go," says the Spirit. "Otherwise, I cannot live in you. . . ." By incubating such attempting, passion, and longing to be holy in them, I press on in order that I may lay hold of that (Phil. 3:12)... "I can not live," they say, "with such an unclean heart, nor die, nor pray, nor be in this world."<sup>20</sup>

Wesleyan thinking and *Nadere Reformatie* thinking describe the salvific process in man in two states and four main conditions within these states. Wesley sees man progressing from the condition *natural man* to the condition *man under the law* in the unredeemed state to the condition of *man under grace 'justified'* and *man under grace 'sanctified'* in the redeemed state. The *Nadere Reformatie* sees the elect progressing in the

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<sup>20</sup> Bernardus Smytegelt, *Des Christen Heil en Sieraad*, 80.

state of death from the condition of *enmity* (*vijandschap*) to the condition of *distress in the state of death* (*bekommerd*) to the condition of *distress in the state of life* (*bekommerd*), to the condition of the *favoured* (*begenadigden*) in the state of life. Schematically this is shown as follows:

<b>Wesley:</b>	
First state:	The unredeemed
	Condition 1 - natural man
	Condition 2 - man under the law
Second state:	The redeemed
	Condition 1 - man under grace “justified”
	Condition 2 - man under grace “sanctified”

<b>Nadere Reformatie:</b>	
First state:	State of death
	Condition 1 - enmity
	Condition 2 - distress in state of death
Second state:	State of life
	Condition 1 - distress in state of life
	Condition 2 - favoured

There are many commonalities in the Wesleyan understanding and the *Nadere Reformatie* understanding of the salvific process as it moves toward sanctification. In Wesleyan thought, *natural man* is brought from his condition of insensitivity towards God, to ‘proper Christian salvation’ *under grace* through the prevenient and convincing grace of God. In *Nadere Reformatie* thought, the elect is brought from his condition of *enmity* with the things of God to the *favoured* condition of an inner change of heart. In this condition, one lives according to the ‘wishes of the Lord’ through the germinating effect of the implanted seed. The germination is brought about by the Church Community, the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit.

In the *Nadere Reformatie* man is at first in the condition of *enmity* to the law of God. The law is seen as a series of commandments expressing God's anger and hatred. It accuses and makes sin come alive. Those who fall outside of the number of the elect continue in this condition, but those who are elect have a supernatural ability, imparted by God, which is the seed and root of faith, hope, and love. This supernatural faculty is the ability to give a response (in the language used earlier, the seed germinates) when the gospel is proclaimed. The elect individual moves at this point from *enmity* to a condition of *distress* (*bekommerden*). Wesley holds the view that *natural man* is not aware that he is lost and is blind, indifferent, insensitive and unfeeling toward the law and things of God. Natural man is in a deep sleep and cannot discern spiritual good from evil. He has a vague feeling about God, but does not know him. Prevenient grace moves the response to the condition of the *man under the law* in which he is convicted of sin and moved toward repentance, resulting in his movement into the state of the redeemed.

Descriptions of the second state in the salvific process reveal greater similarity between the viewpoints of the *Nadere Reformatie* and Wesley. For the *Nadere Reformatie* this is the condition of *distress*, in which the law is no longer an enemy but has become dear to the believer. At the same time, the law makes the believer aware of his sinful state. The proclamation of the gospel, the sacrificial death of Christ and the forgiveness of sin emphasise the awareness of sin in the awakened believer. Led by the Holy Spirit, the believer enters into a condition of troubled conscience. He is awakened to his own sinful situation and toils and labours to eliminate the bad in him to no avail, and longs to see the image of God within himself. When the awakened believer (*bekommerde*) perseveres in placing himself under the proclamation of the Gospel, the Gospel's message of God's love and redemptive work, and the Holy Spirit will convince him of the love and forgiveness of God. This will lead the believer into ties of love with God, pulling him into holiness. The conviction of God's love and forgiveness brings the believer into the stage of the *favoured* (*begenadigden*).<sup>21</sup>

Wesley defines the *distress* condition as *man under the law*. The grace of God brings *man under the law* to a greater measure of self knowledge and he sees that God is a just God, pure and holy, and that he is an avenger of

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<sup>21</sup> Smytegelt, *Keurstoffen, of verzameling van vijftig uitmundende Predikatiën*, 337-338.

everyone who has rebelled against Him. Man in this condition feels not only convicted by the outward law, but also by what he sees in his own heart and in the secret recesses of his soul. He is fearful of the wrath of God and wants to break loose from sin. But the more he struggles with sin and labours to be free, the more he feels his 'chains of sin'. This agony leads him to repentance, allowing him to experience salvation by the grace of God.

Both the *Nadere Reformatie* and Wesley consider the transition between the first and the second state as the moment of conversion.

For the *Nadere Reformatie* those who have entered the condition of distress are those who have received grace. Once convinced of God's grace, the hindrance of the troubled conscience is removed, and the gift of forgiveness moves the heart away from enmity and toward obedience and it enables the believer to receive the workings of the Holy Spirit. This moment of conversion is more than a turning away from sin, it is a direct enlightenment from God, accompanied by joy after the anguish of the sense of sin and unworthiness. Yet the condition of distress returns often as one is driven toward holiness. This cyclical pattern continues as the believer turns ever more away from self and turns more toward God, thereby obtaining more assurance and love for God. This process changes the heart of the believer and he enters the condition of the *favoured*. This change of condition is an inner change of heart; it involves total surrender to 'the wishes of the Lord'.

As was demonstrated earlier, Wesley also makes a distinction in his salvific scheme between two conditions in the redeemed state. Those who have entered the redeemed state of *man under grace* experience justification as salvation from the guilt of sin and restoration to the favour of God; and they experience sanctification as salvation from the power and root of sin and restoration to the image of God. Arrival at either condition involves both instantaneous divine acts of grace and grace-guided processes. Prevenient grace pulls a person toward justification, but not irresistibly, and sanctifying grace brings a person toward entire sanctification.

### **The Perfected Christian**

Characteristic of the *Nadere Reformatie*, Lodenstein speaks of the 'friendly demands of the gospel' and the 'nature of the demands of the

gospel'.<sup>22</sup> The friendly demands of the gospel require only genuine willingness. But, according to Lodenstein, the nature of the demands of the gospel requires absolute perfection. Wesley employs a similar concept in his distinction between sin 'properly so-called' and sin in the sense of falling short of a perfect ideal. Wesley defined sin 'properly so-called' as, 'a voluntary transgression of a known law of God'. Simply stated both Lodenstein's 'friendly demands of the gospel' and Wesley's definition of sin 'properly so-called', speak in terms of willingness rather than in terms of wrong deeds. That is to say, both make volition a critical factor in defining sin. But both speak of sin as falling short of the Divine Ideal. That is to say neither is willing to allow volition an absolute or categorical role in defining sin.

Conversion is seen in the *Nadere Reformatie* as an immediate change. The believer is in a moment in 'likeness perfected', which perfecting is understood as a perfection in parts. By this we mean to say that the truly perfected man is conformed wholly to the image of God, and is conformed 'partly' to all parts of the law of God. The Wesleyan places the emphasis, as we have seen, on the habitual disposition of the soul. The perfected Christian is one who has been perfected in love, and has attained the "degree of holiness which is consistent with his present state of pilgrimage." In both concepts, perfection is limited in depth but not in scope. Both Wesley and the *Nadere Reformatie* admit that weaknesses may be found even in the most holy of persons. Wesley called these imperfections and identified them as ignorance, infirmities, temptations, and defects of understanding. These weaknesses or imperfections are not of a moral nature, but arise from imperfect knowledge, being slow to understand, and defective understanding. The *Nadere Reformatie* calls these weaknesses or imperfections sins, but distinguishes them from reigning sin and allows them to be seen as Wesley sees them, as faults and weaknesses but not, in themselves as culpable.

Smytegelt, who may be taken at this point to represent the *Nadere Reformatie*, said that the imperfections of the perfected Christian serve to remind the Christian that it is indeed only by virtue of God's grace that man enters heaven.<sup>23</sup> For the Wesley the imperfections of the perfected

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<sup>22</sup> Lodenstein, *De Weegschaal van de onvolmaaktheden der Heiligen*, 76.

<sup>23</sup> Smytegelt, *Des Christens Enige Troost in leven en in sterven*, 300.

Christians demonstrate the need for Christ's atonement even for the holiest of men.

### **Characteristics of the Perfected Man**

Comparing Wesley's description of *The Character of a Methodist* with Smytegelt's description of the characteristics of a sanctified person, one discovers many similarities. Neither is hindered by the customs of the world, nor lays up treasures in the world. Both are cleansed from pride, and endeavour to give glory to God in all that they do. Both have a heart that is pure and free from envy, malice, wrath, and unkind temper. Neither can speak unkindly of his neighbour. No unkind word is spoken by them because love watches over the door of their lips. No corrupt conversation comes out of their mouth. Both see and experience God everywhere and at all times, avoid all God has forbidden, direct all their desires and thoughts unto God and what pleases him, and both do all that God commands them to do. The list goes on and on.<sup>24</sup>

Taking into consideration all of these similarities of thought and expression within these two different theological systems of thought, it becomes quite clear that both Wesley and Smytegelt are speaking of the same sanctifying experience. They each however interpreted this experience within their own system and own theological terms.

### **Experienced Faith**

One more aspect of *Nadere Reformatie* holiness thought ought to be briefly mentioned. It has previously been stated that the *Nadere Reformatie* sought to combine the dogmatic faith of the post-Calvin Reformation with a faith that is deeply experienced in the human soul. They searched not only for a dogmatic and ethical faith, but also for a faith that was felt. In this search the *Nadere Reformatie* did not limit experiential faith to practical, moral, and ethical responsibilities. Smytegelt as well as Lodenstein assigned an important place to a mystical experience in the *ordo salutis*. The *Nadere Reformatie* spokesmen were in a sense, Neo-Platonists. They saw the finite, physical, transient world as a means through which the eternal, spiritual, intransient world breaks through and as the locus of that breaking through. The eyes of the Neo-Platonists were directed toward the transcendent spiritual world. Their

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<sup>24</sup> Smytegelt, *Des Christen Heil en Sieraad*, 81- 90.

highest bliss was to attain an encounter with this eternal, spiritual world. Smytegelt and Lodenstein preached that the Christian may experience a foretaste of heaven in which the soul, disconnected from the flesh and unencumbered, is directly aware of the Presence of God. In a sense this moment of awareness is an eschatological experience. The experience extolled by the *Nadere Reformatie* cannot entirely be equated with the ecstasy so valued by the mystics. Nor can the *Nadere Reformatie's ordo salutis* be equated with the steps of the mystic's way to perfection. The men of the *Nadere Reformatie* were Calvinists through and through. For Calvin, the hidden work of the Spirit was an inseparable part of the life of faith.<sup>25</sup> W.J. Aalders wrote poignantly:

It (mysticism in Christian experience) begins with this (Christian faith) because it (the Christian faith) presupposes revelation as being the creative touch of God with man, the spiritual birth or born-again experience; it (Christian mysticism) ends with this (Christian faith) because faith as conscious acceptance of this revelation penetrates the whole being of man with all the functions and powers of his spiritual-physical being and in all his relationships to the 'world of God' and the 'world of now' in which he lives.<sup>26</sup>

Standing firm on the principles of the Reformation, spokesmen of the *Nadere Reformatie* were always aware of the great difference between the eternal God and mortal man. Therefore they rejected the idea of the unification of God and man which characterises mysticism. For them, the true mystical experience was the hidden communion with God; this being the case, ecstatic experiences were accepted as legitimate expressions of faith.

*Nadere Reformatie* spokesmen wrote and preached about the *mediated seal* and *unmediated seal* (*verzegeling*). The subject in both cases is the assurance that one is a child of God. Within the context of the dogma of predestination, the believer is forever seeking confirmation of his status before God. Before one can say that he is a child of God and is among the elect, one had to be absolutely sure about his status. Consequently, signs of affirmation were looked for and found. The use of syllogisms was not adequate to ensure the believer that he is among the elect. One had to experience and feel it. Even temporary works of grace do not provide

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<sup>25</sup> Calvin speaks of the "secret energy of the Spirit, by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits." *Inst.*, III. 1. 1.

<sup>26</sup> W.J. Aalders, *Mystiek, haar Vormen, Wezen, Waarde* (Groningen, 1928), 429-430.



proof of the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. Only when the believer himself, from a deep inner 'knowing', can trust that he is in perfect communion with Christ, can be sure of his status. This assurance is reached through the mediated and the unmediated seal.

The *mediated seal* is similar to the use of syllogisms and takes place through meditation on the fact that the signs and the graces of a child of God are present. The Word of God is thereby guide and judge. The believer tests himself by the Scriptures and prays that the Word will test him. In this manner, he judges himself to be a child of God. He himself does not make the decision to be a child of God. He receives his sonship on the basis of Scripture, and the Holy Spirit enlightens him to the fact that he has received it and imparts to him the power necessary to make his conclusion.

The *unmediated seal* is a direct mystical experience of communion with God in which the Spirit gives a deep sense and assurance of the love and goodness of God. This results in total assurance of salvation and a state of ecstasy and great joy in the soul of the believer. This experience is not dependent on feeling alone, but is affirmed by Scripture. It is received by way of prayer and holy living in close relationship with Christ. In this experience the believer experiences God as saying from above, "You have found grace in my eyes." This is the mystical moment in which the believer sees the work of God wrought in his heart, and finds the assurance that, "It is well with my soul." Seen through *Nadere Reformatie* eyes, one could say that John Wesley's Aldersgate experience in 1738, when he found his 'heart strangely warmed', was such a mystical moment. He finally found assurance by unmediated means, directly from God the Holy Spirit.

The task of finding convergence between theological and experiential systems born in different places at different times is fraught with possibilities of misinterpretation. However, careful analyses of the theologies of the *Nadere Reformatie* and Wesley has yielded some undoubted parallels in both language, experience, and spiritual concern. In both, the yearning for holiness in this life comes through very clearly. And so does the confidence that God's grace grants that holiness to believers still in mortal flesh.