

THE MEANING OF ‘BORN FROM ABOVE’ (γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν) IN JOHN 3: A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE THEOLOGY OF REGENERATION

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Abstract

This study examines the semantic meaning of the term γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν in John 3:3–7 and its implications for the doctrine of regeneration in New Testament theology. The Greek word ἄνωθεν (anōthen) carries significant semantic ambiguity, being translatable either as “from above” or “again.” Through lexical and contextual semantic analysis, this study demonstrates that its usage in the Gospel of John consistently refers to a divine origin, as evidenced in John 3:31, 19:11, and the overall theological framework of the Gospel. Nicodemus’s misunderstanding functions as a deliberate literary device (double entendre) that highlights the contrast between human and divine perspectives. A comparative review of Reformed, Arminian, and Lutheran theological traditions reveals that divergent interpretations of ἄνωθεν directly correlate with differing understandings of the nature of regeneration. The findings affirm that regeneration is a monergistic divine act, not a product of human initiative. These theological implications hold significance for systematic theology, soteriology, and contemporary Christian education.

Keywords: γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν; regeneration; John 3; biblical semantics; New Testament theology; new birth; hermeneutics; soteriology

INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of regeneration is one of the fundamental concepts in New Testament theology, relating to the nature of salvation and the spiritual transformation of humanity. Within the framework of Christian soteriology, regeneration is understood as a divine act that produces new spiritual life within a person through the work of the Holy Spirit. This concept affirms that salvation is not merely a moral or religious change, but an ontological transformation originating from God himself (Berkhof, 2017). Accordingly, regeneration concerns not only the subjective experience of the individual, but also the divine initiative that creates a new existential reality in the human relationship with God (Rossa Stevana et al., 2024).

In the Gospel of John, the concept of regeneration is particularly expressed through the phrase “born from above” (γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν), which appears in the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3:3–7. This text is one of the most frequently cited and debated pericopes in the history of Christian theology, containing a statement with far-reaching soteriological consequences. From this declaration, various Christian theological traditions have built their teaching on the new birth, baptism, grace, and the relationship between God’s will and human will in the process of salvation (Denyka Munthe & Jeppri Nainggolan, 2025).

The importance of this text cannot be overstated. Throughout church history, theologians from Origen, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin to contemporary scholars such as D. A. Carson and Craig S. Keener have given profound attention to this pericope. Divergent

interpretations of the meaning of “born from above” have produced significant theological differences, ranging from debates over infant baptism and the conversion experience to the relationship between divine grace and human response in the *ordo salutis*.

Understanding the term γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν, however, faces complex semantic challenges, particularly regarding the Greek word ἄνωθεν (*anōthen*). Lexically, this word carries two primary meanings: “from above” and “again” or “anew.” This ambiguity creates a significant hermeneutical tension, since each possible meaning carries different theological implications (Bruckner & Prenga, 2024). If the term is understood as “born again,” the focus may be directed toward the experience of personal spiritual transformation. If, on the other hand, it is understood as “born from above,” the emphasis falls on the divine origin of the new birth, pointing to God’s initiative as the source of spiritual life (Purwonugroho, 2025).

Based on the background described above, this study formulates three core questions. First, what is the most appropriate semantic meaning of ἄνωθεν in the context of John 3:3–7, considering both lexical and contextual analysis within the whole Gospel of John? Second, how does this semantic ambiguity function as a literary device in the narrative of the Gospel of John, particularly in the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus? Third, what are the theological implications of the semantic analysis for the understanding of the doctrine of regeneration across various Christian theological traditions?

This study aims to analyze the semantic meaning of γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν in the context of the Gospel of John both lexically and contextually, to examine the literary function of the semantic ambiguity in the narrative of John 3:1–10, and to explore its implications for the doctrine of regeneration in Christian systematic theology. The significance of this study encompasses at least three dimensions. Biblically, it contributes to the exegetical study of the Gospel of John by providing a comprehensive semantic analysis of one of the most theologically significant Greek terms in the New Testament. Theologically, it enriches the understanding of the doctrine of regeneration with a strong biblical foundation. Practically, it provides a more robust argumentative basis for systematic theology discourse and contemporary Christian education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Research on John 3:3–7

Scholarly engagement with John 3:3–7, particularly regarding the term γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν, has produced a number of significant academic contributions. Denyka Munthe and Jeppi Nainggolan (2025), in their exegetical study, emphasize that the Jesus-Nicodemus dialogue must be understood within the context of the Gospel of John’s overall narrative, not as an isolated event. They argue that the pattern of misunderstanding between Jesus and Nicodemus is one of the clearest examples of the distinctive literary technique of the Fourth Gospel.

Bruckner and Prenga (2024) in their hermeneutical study examined the interpretive tensions arising from the ambiguity of ἄνωθεν and identified at least three major interpretive approaches in the history of biblical interpretation: the spatial approach emphasizing divine origin, the temporal approach emphasizing repetition, and an integrated approach that seeks to combine both meanings in a single reading. Their study concludes that the literary and theological context of the Gospel of John more strongly supports the spatial approach.

Purwonugroho (2025), in his study of the concept of the new birth in Johannine theology, offers an important contribution through an intertextual analysis comparing the use of $\alpha\nu\theta\epsilon\nu$ throughout the Gospel of John. His research demonstrates strong semantic consistency, with $\alpha\nu\theta\epsilon\nu$ consistently used in contexts referring to divine or heavenly origin.

Medlama (2024) provides an important methodological framework by affirming that semantic analysis of New Testament texts must simultaneously consider three dimensions: the lexical dimension (the word's dictionary meaning), the co-textual dimension (the word's usage within the same text), and the contextual dimension (the historical and cultural background of the text). This framework provides a solid methodological foundation for the present study, in line with the biblical semantic principles developed by Moisés Silva in his classic work *Biblical Words and Their Meaning* (Silva, 2010).

Semantic Studies on $\alpha\nu\theta\epsilon\nu$ in Academic Literature

Lexical study of $\alpha\nu\theta\epsilon\nu$ has been carried out extensively within the academic biblical studies tradition. Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG) record the semantic range of $\alpha\nu\theta\epsilon\nu$ as encompassing a spatial meaning (“from above,” “from heaven”), a temporal meaning (“from the beginning,” “from the start”), and an inceptive meaning (“again,” “anew”). In the context of John 3:3, BDAG expresses a preference for the meaning “from above,” taking into account the overall context of the Gospel of John.

D. A. Carson, in his monumental commentary on the Gospel of John, specifically addresses the ambiguity of $\alpha\nu\theta\epsilon\nu$ and concludes that while the Evangelist may have intentionally maintained the ambiguity for literary purposes, the theological meaning intended by Jesus is “from above” (Carson, 1991). Carson’s argument is grounded in a strong intra-textual analysis, particularly a comparison with John 3:31 and 19:11.

Leon Morris in *The Gospel According to John* (1995) provides a similar analysis, affirming that the meaning “from above” better accords with the theology of the Gospel of John, which consistently emphasizes that everything truly alive and life-giving originates from God above. Benoit Standaert (2018) in his study of the rhetoric of the Gospel of John adds a literary dimension showing that the ambiguity of $\alpha\nu\theta\epsilon\nu$ is part of the author’s rhetorical strategy to create a productive miscommunication between Jesus and his interlocutor.

The Doctrine of Regeneration in the Christian Theological Tradition

The doctrine of regeneration has undergone a long development in the history of Christian theology. Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD) was the most influential theologian in laying the foundation for the Western understanding of regeneration as a work of God’s grace that precedes and enables the human response of faith. In his opposition to Pelagianism, Augustine affirmed that fallen humanity is incapable of responding to God without the grace that restores the will.

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century brought the question of regeneration back to the center of theological debate. Martin Luther emphasized that regeneration occurs through the proclamation of the Word of God and the sacrament of baptism, in which divine power works without depending on human preparation. John Calvin developed a more systematic

doctrine of regeneration, affirming that regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit that renews the entire nature of the human person and logically precedes faith (Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, III.3).

Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609) raised objections to the Reformed view by arguing that God grants prevenient grace to all people, which enables a free response to the Gospel. In the Arminian view, regeneration occurs as God's response to faith offered by the human person. This debate between the Reformed and Arminian traditions continues to the present day and is directly related to how $\gamma\epsilon\nu\nu\eta\theta\eta\acute{\iota}\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\omega\theta\epsilon\nu$ in John 3 is interpreted.

In contemporary theology, Michael Horton (2011) has made an important contribution by reconnecting this soteriological debate with deep biblical analysis. Horton affirms that the text of John 3:3–7 consistently supports the view that regeneration is a sovereign act of God, creating the condition of possibility for faith, not the other way around. Anthony Hoekema (1994) in his classic work *Saved by Grace* also provides a comprehensive analysis linking the doctrine of regeneration in the Gospel of John to the entire New Testament canon.

RESEARCH METHOD

Type and Approach

This study employs a qualitative research method with a historical-grammatical biblical exegesis approach. The historical-grammatical method is an interpretive method that seeks to find the meaning intended by the original author through grammatical analysis of the text within its original historical and literary context (Osborne, 2006). This approach was chosen because it is most appropriate for answering questions about the semantic meaning of a Greek term in the New Testament context.

In its application, this study combines three sub-methods of analysis: (1) lexical analysis, examining the meaning of $\acute{\alpha}\nu\omega\theta\epsilon\nu$ based on standard Greek-English lexicons; (2) co-textual analysis, examining the word's use throughout the Gospel of John to identify consistent semantic patterns; and (3) intertextual analysis, comparing the use of relevant terms in other Johannine writings (1 John, Revelation) and in the Septuagint (LXX) to gain a broader picture of the word's usage and meaning.

Data Sources

The primary data source for this study is the Greek text of the New Testament based on the Nestle-Aland 28th edition (NA28) and United Bible Societies 5th edition (UBS5), with a focus on John 3:1–21 as the primary pericope. Secondary data sources include standard Greek lexicons (BDAG; Liddell-Scott-Jones), academic biblical commentaries on the Gospel of John, and works of systematic theology treating the doctrine of regeneration.

Data collection was carried out through systematic library research. Selected literature meets the following criteria: (1) published in reputable academic journals or by academic publishers; (2) employing exegetical or semantic analysis methodology that is academically accountable; (3) directly relevant to the semantic question of $\acute{\alpha}\nu\omega\theta\epsilon\nu$ or the doctrine of regeneration in the context of the Gospel of John.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted in stages. The first stage was lexical analysis, in which the meanings recorded in lexicons for ἀνωθεν were identified, categorized, and evaluated for their relevance to the context of John 3. The second stage was co-textual analysis, in which every occurrence of ἀνωθεν in the Gospel of John was analyzed to identify the dominant pattern of usage. The third stage was hermeneutical synthesis, integrating the results of lexical and co-textual analysis to produce the most semantically and theologically coherent interpretation.

To ensure the validity of the interpretation, this study applies the principle stated by Silva (2010): that the meaning of a word is determined primarily by the context in which it is used (*usus loquendi*), and not solely by its etymological origin or the range of lexical meanings. This principle protects the study from two common hermeneutical errors: the etymological fallacy (assuming that the origin of a word determines its meaning) and the illegitimate totality transfer (assuming that all possible meanings of a word are simultaneously present in every instance of its use).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lexical Analysis of the Term ἀνωθεν

1. The Lexical Semantic Range

According to the BDAG lexicon, ἀνωθεν is a Greek adverb with three main semantic categories identifiable in ancient Greek literature and the New Testament: (a) the spatial meaning, “from above” or “from a higher place,” referring to a source or origin from on high; (b) the temporal meaning, “from the beginning,” “from the start,” or “long ago”; and (c) the inceptive or iterative meaning, “again,” “anew,” or “once more.” All three semantic categories are well-documented in Classical, Hellenistic, Septuagint, and New Testament Greek literature. A summary of the lexical semantic range of ἀνωθεν together with examples of its usage in the New Testament is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Lexical Semantic Range of ἀνωθεν in the New Testament

Meaning	Main Translation	Example Usage (LXX/NT)	Theological Implication
Spatial	"from above" (from above)	John 3:31; 19:11; Jas. 1:17	Emphasizes divine origin as source of spiritual life
Temporal	"again" / "back" (again)	Gal. 4:9; John 3:4 (Nicodemus' understanding)	Emphasizes repetition; a second physical birth
Inceptive	"from the beginning" (from the beginning)	Luke 1:3; Acts 26:5	Emphasizes the origin or starting point of something

Source: Compiled from BDAG (2000) and the author's analysis of NA28

2. The Use of ἀνωθεν in the New Testament

In the New Testament, ἀνωθεν occurs thirteen times. An analysis of all these occurrences provides a clearer picture of how the New Testament authors employ the word. In Luke 1:3, Luke uses ἀνωθεν in the temporal sense of “from the first” or “from the beginning.” In Acts 26:5, Paul uses the same word in the sense of “for a long time,” referring to his life since his youth. Most relevant, however, is its use in James 1:17: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above (anōthen), coming down from the Father of lights.” Here ἀνωθεν is used unmistakably in the spatial sense of “from above,” referring to God as the source of every good gift. This usage strengthens the argument that in theological contexts, ἀνωθεν characteristically denotes the divine origin of something given to humanity.

Co-textual Analysis in the Gospel of John

1. The Pattern of ἀνωθεν Usage in the Gospel of John

An analysis of all occurrences of ἀνωθεν in the Gospel of John reveals a highly significant pattern. In the Gospel of John, ἀνωθεν appears in four different contexts: John 3:3, 3:7, 3:31, and 19:11. Two of these four occurrences, namely 3:31 and 19:11, use ἀνωθεν unambiguously in the spatial sense of “from above” to refer to divine origin. Table 2 below presents all these occurrences.

Table 2. The Use of ἀνωθεν in the Gospel of John

Reference	Greek Text & Translation	Meaning of anōthen	Context
John 3:3	ean me tis gennethei anōthen — unless someone is born from above/again	Ambiguous (from above / again)	Jesus-Nicodemus dialogue
John 3:7	dei hymas gennethenai anōthen — you must be born from above	"from above" (clarification)	Jesus' explanation to Nicodemus
John 3:31	ho anōthen erkhomenos — He who comes from above	"from above" (divine origin)	Testimony of John the Baptist
John 19:11	ei me en dedomenon soi anōthen — if it had not been given to you from above	"from above" (God's authority)	Jesus-Pilate dialogue

Source: Author's analysis based on the NA28 text

The data in Table 2 clearly shows that of the four occurrences of ἀνωθεν in the Gospel of John, three of them (3:31, 19:11, and implicitly 3:7) use the word in the sense of “from above,” referring to divine origin or heavenly authority. Only in John 3:3–4, where Nicodemus misunderstands Jesus' statement, does the meaning “again” appear—and even then, it represents a deliberate interpretive error functioning as a literary device.

2. John 3:31 as a Hermeneutical Key

“Ho anōthen erkhomenos epanō pantōn estin—He who comes from above (anōthen) is above all” (John 3:31, author’s translation).

John 3:31 functions as a critically important hermeneutical key for interpreting ἄνωθεν in John 3:3. This verse, part of John the Baptist’s testimony, uses ἄνωθεν explicitly to refer to Jesus’ heavenly origin. Within the adjacent literary context (John 3:1–36 constituting a coherent narrative unit), this use of ἄνωθεν in its spatial sense provides the semantic framework for the entire chapter.

D. A. Carson aptly observes that in the narrative inclusio of John 3, where the chapter opens with Nicodemus “coming to Jesus” (3:2) and closes with the declaration that Jesus is “He who comes from above” (3:31), there is a deliberate theological contrast constructed between humanity coming from below to Jesus, and Jesus coming from above to humanity. This contrast reinforces the argument that γεννηθῆν ἄνωθεν in 3:3 refers to a birth that originates from and is sourced in the reality “from above,” that is, from God himself (Carson, 1991, p. 191).

The Literary Function of Nicodemus’ Misunderstanding

1. The Pattern of Miscommunication in the Gospel of John

The Gospel of John is well-known in biblical literary studies for its distinctive and systematic use of misunderstanding or miscommunication as a narrative device. In this pattern, Jesus utters a statement containing profound spiritual meaning; an interlocutor responds with a literal or superficial understanding; and this interaction creates an opportunity for Jesus to clarify and deepen his revelation. Similar patterns appear in Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4:10–15), where living water is misunderstood as ordinary well water; in the discourse on the bread of life (John 6:41–51); and in the discussion about Lazarus sleeping (John 11:11–15).

Köstenberger (2004) notes that this technique of double entendre is not merely a communication failure but a highly deliberate theological strategy. By sustaining the semantic ambiguity in Jesus’ words, the author of the Gospel of John creates space for the reader to move from literal understanding toward spiritual understanding. In this sense, readers of the Gospel are invited to take a different position from Nicodemus: rather than being trapped in a literal reading, they are called to grasp the deeper spiritual meaning.

2. Nicodemus as a Representative of Humanity Not Yet Born Again

The figure of Nicodemus in this narrative carries symbolic significance that exceeds his role as a historical individual. He is introduced as a Pharisee and Jewish ruler (John 3:1), meaning he represents the group of people most fully qualified in religious and intellectual terms by human standards. Yet it is precisely the most religious and learned person who most completely fails to understand Jesus’ declaration about the new birth.

Nicodemus’ failure carries deep theological implications. It demonstrates that religious knowledge, lineage, social position, and human piety are entirely incapable of producing understanding of, or access to, spiritual life sourced in God. This is consistent with the

overarching theme of the Gospel of John that true life (zoē aiōnios) is a divine gift that exceeds the human capacity to achieve or even naturally comprehend (Keener, 2012, p. 547).

Theological Implications for the Doctrine of Regeneration

1. Regeneration as a Monergistic Divine Act

If the meaning “from above” is accepted as the primary meaning of ἄνωθεν in John 3:3, then the first and most foundational implication is that regeneration is an act entirely sourced in God. The phrase γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν conveys the idea that this birth has an origin not from below, not from the world, not from human capacity or initiative, but from above, namely from God. This is further reinforced by Jesus’ explanation in verses 5–8, where the new birth is associated with the work of the Holy Spirit—not with human action.

Herman Ridderbos, in his analysis of Johannine theology, affirms that the concept of the new birth in the Gospel of John must be understood in parallel with the concept of the new creation. Just as God created the first human being as a sovereign act of grace without human participation, so too regeneration is an act of new spiritual creation in which the initiative rests entirely with God (Ridderbos, 1997, p. 130). Berkhof in Systematic Theology develops this further by affirming that regeneration in the strict sense is the change God effects in the nature of the human person, which precedes and enables every human response to God, including faith and repentance (Berkhof, 2017, p. 469).

2. A Comparison of Theological Traditions and Their Hermeneutical Implications

Differences in interpreting γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν directly correlate with differences in theological position within the soteriological debate. Table 3 below presents a comparison of the positions of three major theological traditions in understanding the doctrine of regeneration based on their interpretation of John 3:3.

Table 3. Comparison of Theological Traditions in Interpreting γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν and the Doctrine of Regeneration

Aspect	Reformed Tradition	Arminian Tradition	Lutheran Tradition
Order of regeneration & faith	Regeneration precedes faith (logically)	Faith precedes regeneration	Regeneration occurs together with faith
Nature of regeneration	Monergistic (God’s work alone)	Synergistic (God + human response)	Monergistic through Word & Sacrament
Emphasized meaning of anōthen	"from above" — absolute divine initiative	"again" — personal conversion experience	"from above" — through sacramental means
Relation to baptism	Not automatically tied to baptism	Connected to personal faith decision	Regeneration occurs in baptism

Aspect	Reformed Tradition	Arminian Tradition	Lutheran Tradition
Key figures	Calvin, Owen, Berkhof, Horton	Arminius, Wesley, Marshall	Luther, Melancthon, Pieper

Source: Compiled from Horton (2011), Berkhof (2017), and Marshall (2004)

From Table 3, it is evident that despite differences in detail, the Reformed and Lutheran traditions agree that the meaning “from above” better fits the context, with its implication of emphasizing divine initiative. The Arminian tradition, while not explicitly rejecting the meaning “from above,” tends to emphasize the aspect of human response such that in practical application it moves closer to the meaning “again.”

Michael Horton (2011) astutely observes that this interpretive difference is not merely an academic matter but carries real pastoral consequences. If regeneration is entirely a work of God from above, then the proclamation of the Gospel is not aimed at persuading people to make a decision using their natural capacities, but at preaching the Word through which the Holy Spirit works to regenerate those whom God wills.

3. The Relationship between Regeneration, Baptism, and Water

One of the most hermeneutically complex questions in John 3:5 is the interpretation of the phrase “born of water and the Spirit.” Theologians have proposed various interpretations: (a) water refers to Christian baptism; (b) water refers to physical birth (amniotic fluid); (c) water and Spirit form a hendiadys referring to a single reality, namely renewal by the Spirit; and (d) water refers to the baptism of John the Baptist as a symbol of repentance.

The interpretation chosen for “water” in verse 5 has a direct bearing on the understanding of regeneration in its relationship to baptism. The Lutheran tradition and parts of the Catholic tradition tend to interpret water as referring to baptism, so that regeneration is linked directly to the sacrament. The Reformed tradition generally views water and Spirit as a single package of divine renewal, with baptism as the sign of that renewal rather than the means that automatically produces it.

Contextual analysis indicates that Jesus’ primary focus throughout this conversation is on the role of the Holy Spirit (vv. 6, 8) as the agent of the new birth. This emphasis on the Spirit as the principal actor is consistent with the meaning “from above” for ἄνωθεν, since the Holy Spirit in Johannine theology is consistently identified as the divine power that proceeds from and is sent by God (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7–15).

Relevance for Contemporary Hermeneutics

1. Semantic Principles in Biblical Study

The case of ἄνωθεν provides an excellent illustration of the semantic principles that must be applied in responsible biblical study. First, the principle of contextual primacy: the meaning of a word is determined primarily by the context in which it is used, not by a list of possible meanings from a lexicon. Second, the principle of intra-textual consistency: the same author

tends to use a word in a consistent way, so the use of ἄνωθεν in John 3:31 and 19:11 provides relevant context for interpreting its use in 3:3.

Third, the principle of theological coherence: the chosen interpretation must be coherent with the major theological themes of the author in question. Here, the meaning “from above” is more coherent with the Gospel of John’s themes of divine initiative, the heavenly origin of Jesus, and the gift of eternal life as God’s grace. Fourth, the principle of literary function: the semantic ambiguity that exists may function as a deliberate literary device, not a communicative shortcoming, so that both meanings may simultaneously be present with different functions.

2. Implications for Christian Education and Pastoral Ministry

A proper understanding of the meaning of γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν carries significant practical implications for Christian education and pastoral ministry. First, if regeneration is entirely God’s act from above, then the church’s task in Christian education is not to produce regeneration through particular programs or methods, but to proclaim the Word of God and depend on the work of the Holy Spirit. This places prayer and dependence on God at the heart of authentic Christian educational practice.

Second, this understanding shapes the way the church comprehends and accompanies the process of conversion. Rather than emphasizing a rational decision alone as the determinant of salvation, pastoral ministry grounded in γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν as a divine work will place greater emphasis on spiritual growth as the authentic evidence of regeneration, and will make room for the hope that the God who began a good work will bring it to completion (Phil. 1:6). Rossa Stevana et al. (2024) similarly emphasize that the implication of the doctrine of regeneration for the community of faith is the formation of a new identity as children of God who live in obedience to him.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive semantic analysis of the term γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν in John 3:3–7, this study arrives at three main conclusions. First, semantically, the meaning “from above” (spatial) is the most appropriate meaning of ἄνωθεν in the context of John 3. This conclusion is based on: (a) the consistent use of ἄνωθεν in the Gospel of John (3:31; 19:11), which consistently refers to divine origin; (b) coherence with the major theological themes of the Gospel of John regarding divine initiative as the source of life; and (c) support from standard Greek lexicons, which identify the spatial meaning as the primary meaning in theological contexts.

Second, literarily, the semantic ambiguity of ἄνωθεν functions as a deliberate double entendre device in the narrative of John 3. Nicodemus’ misunderstanding in interpreting ἄνωθεν as “again” is not merely an individual interpretive error but a narrative device that creates a contrast between the human perspective and divine revelation. This technique is characteristic of Johannine literature and functions to invite readers to move beyond a literal understanding toward a spiritual one.

Third, theologically, the meaning “from above” for γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν affirms the monergistic character of the doctrine of regeneration in New Testament theology. Regeneration is a sovereign divine act, arising from God’s own initiative, and is not dependent on human capacity

or potential. This understanding carries significant implications for the soteriological debate among the Reformed, Arminian, and Lutheran traditions, and is relevant to the practice of Christian education and pastoral ministry.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several recommendations are offered. First, for biblical researchers, further study is needed that explores the relationship between $\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\theta\eta\acute{\iota}\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\omega\theta\epsilon\nu$ in John 3 and the concept of *anagennaomai* in 1 Peter 1:3, 23, and *palingenesia* in Titus 3:5, to provide a more complete picture of the doctrine of regeneration across the entire New Testament canon.

Second, for theological educators, the findings of this study need to be integrated into the curriculum of systematic theology and New Testament exegesis, particularly in addressing the relationship between biblical semantics and doctrinal construction. Awareness of the semantic complexity of key theological terms in the New Testament is an essential competency for prospective church leaders and Christian educators.

Third, for pastors and Christian educators, a deep understanding of the nature of regeneration as God's act from above must drive renewal in the approach to ministry: placing greater emphasis on faithful proclamation of the Word, earnest prayer, and dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit, rather than relying on human methods and techniques to produce spiritual growth.

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