

COMMON GRACE*

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THE question of where he may find a point of contact with the world for the message that he brings is a matter of grave concern to every Christian minister and teacher. The doctrine of common grace seeks, in some measure at least, to supply this answer. But to give the answer desired the concept of common grace must be set in its proper theological context. In discussing the problem, the present paper accordingly deals with (I) the Christian philosophy of history of which the common grace doctrine is a part, (II) the most comprehensive modern statement of this problem, (III) the salient features of the recent debate on the subject, and (IV) some suggestions for further study.

I. THE CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

The common grace[†] problem may quite properly be considered as being a part or aspect of the problem of the philosophy of history. Dr. K. Schilder speaks of Abraham Kuyper's great three volume work on "Common Grace" as an epic. And an epic it truly is. In setting forth his views on common grace Kuyper envelops the whole course of human culture in his field of vision. Common grace is said to be in large measure responsible for making history as a whole what it

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[†] Though the question is a matter of debate we shall, for convenience, not enclose the phrase "common grace" in quotation marks. We use the phrase, and others like it, loosely.

has been, is, and will be. On the other hand in rejecting the doctrine of common grace the Rev. Herman Hoeksema in his various writings also takes the whole of history for his field. He argues that history can best be explained if we reject common grace. It may be well then if even at the outset we question ourselves about the Christian philosophy of history. Doing so at this early stage of our paper will help us in understanding both those who affirm and those who deny common grace.

In any philosophy of history men seek to systematize the "facts" of history. The many "facts" of history are to be brought into one pattern. Or, if we wish, we may say that the many "facts" of history are to be regarded *in the light of* one pattern. The philosophy of history is, accordingly, an aspect of the perplexing *One and Many* problem.

Furthermore, in a philosophy of history the "facts" are regarded under the aspect of *change*. If there be other sciences that deal primarily with the "static", the philosophy of history deals primarily with the "dynamic" behavior of "Reality". It is natural, then, that in handling the problem of the philosophy of history the very existence of a single pattern of these *many*, and particularly of these *changing many*, should be called in question. That is to say, for one who *does not* base his thinking upon Christian presuppositions, it is natural to question the existence of an all-embracing pattern present in, and underneath, the changing "facts" of history. For one who *does* base his thinking upon Christian presuppositions it would, on the other hand, be unnatural or even self-contradictory to do so. For him the most basic fact of all facts is the existence of the triune God. About this God he has learned from Scripture. For the Christian, the study of the philosophy of history is an effort to see life whole and see it through, but always in the light of the pattern shown him in the Mount. He cannot question, even when he cannot fully explain, the pattern of Scripture, in the light of which he regards the facts of history.

But to interpret facts — all facts and especially all facts in their changing aspect — in the light of an already fully given word of God is to be "unscientific" in the eyes of current science, philosophy and theology. Current methodology as-

sumes the non-createdness of all the facts of the universe; it assumes the ultimacy of change. In this it follows the Greeks. With Cochrane² we may therefore speak of the classical-modern position and set it off against the Christian position.

The believer and the non-believer differ at the outset of every self-conscious investigation. The "factness" of the first fact they meet is in question. The several schools of non-Christian thought have different principles of individuation. Some find their principle in "reason" while others find it in the "space-time continuum". But all agree, by implication at least, that it is not to be found where the Christian finds it — in the counsel of God.

It is sometimes suggested that though there is a basic difference between the Christian and the non-Christian explanation, there is no such difference in the mere description, of facts. With this we cannot agree. Modern scientific description is not the innocent thing that we as Christians all too easily think it is. Sir Arthur Eddington's famed "ichthyologist" readily suggests this. This "ichthyologist" explores the life of the ocean. In surveying his catch he makes two statements: (1) "No sea-creature is less than two inches long; (2) All sea-creatures have gills".³ If an observer questions the first statement the "ichthyologist" replies that in his work as a scientist he is not concerned with an "objective kingdom of fishes". The only fish that exist for him are those he has caught in his net. He makes bold to say "What my net can't catch isn't fish". That is to say, description is patternization. It is an act of definition. It is a statement of the *what* as well as of the *that*. It is a statement of connotation as well as of denotation. Description itself is explanation.

Current scientific description is not merely explanation, but it is definitely anti-Christian explanation. Current scientific methodology wants to be anti-metaphysical. It claims to make no pronouncements about the nature of reality as a whole. On the surface it seems to be very modest. In fact, however, current scientific methodology does make a pro-

² Charles Norris Cochrane: *Christianity and Classical Culture* (1940).

³ Arthur Eddington: *The Philosophy of Physical Science*, p. 16.

nouncement about the nature of Reality as a whole. When Eddington's "ichthyologist" says he is not interested in an "objective kingdom of fishes" he is not quite honest with himself. He is very much interested that that "objective kingdom of fishes" shall serve as the source of supply for his scientifically recognized fishes. Some of those "objective" fishes must permit of being graduated into fishes that have scientific standing. Some of them at least must be *catchable*. So the "facts", that is the "objective" facts, if they are to become facts that have scientific standing, must be *patternable*. But to be patternable for the modern scientist these "facts" must be absolutely formless. That is to say they must be utterly pliable. They must be like the water that is to be transformed into ice-cubes by the modern refrigerator.

The scientist, even when he claims to be merely describing facts, assumes that at least some aspects of Reality are *non-structural* in nature. His assumption is broader than that. He really assumes that all Reality is non-structural in nature. To make a batch of ice-cubes Mother needs only a small quantity of water. But to hold the ice-cubes intact till it is time to serve refreshments, Mother must control the whole situation. She must be certain that Johnny does not meanwhile handle them for purposes of his own. So the scientist, if his description of even a small area, or of an aspect or a dimension, of Reality is to stand, must assume that Reality as a whole is non-structural in nature until it is structured by the scientist. The idea of brute, that is utterly uninterpreted, "fact" is the presupposition to the finding of any fact of scientific standing. A "fact" does not become a fact, according to the modern scientist's assumptions, till it has been made a fact by the ultimate definitory power of the mind of man. The modern scientist, pretending to be merely a describer of facts, is in reality a maker of facts. He makes facts as he describes. His description is itself the manufacturing of facts. He requires "material" to make facts, but the material he requires must be *raw* material. Anything else will break his machinery. The datum is not primarily *given*, but is primarily *taken*.

It appears then that a universal judgment about the nature of all existence is presupposed even in the "description" of

the modern scientist. It appears further that this universal judgment negates the heart of the Christian-theistic point of view. According to any consistently Christian position, God, and God only, has ultimate definitory power. God's description or plan of the fact makes the fact what it is. What the modern scientist ascribes to the mind of man Christianity ascribes to God. True, the Christian claims that God did not even need a formless stuff for the creation of facts. But this point does not nullify the contention that what the Christian ascribes to God the modern scientist, even when engaged in mere description, virtually ascribes to man. Two Creators, one real, the other would-be, stand in mortal combat against one another; the self-contained triune God of Christianity and the *homo noumenon*, the autonomous man of Immanuel Kant, cannot both be ultimate.

We conclude then that when both parties, the believer and the non-believer, are epistemologically self-conscious and as such engaged in the interpretative enterprise, they cannot be said to have any fact in common. On the other hand, it must be asserted that they have every fact in common. Both deal with the same God and with the same universe created by God. Both are made in the image of God. In short, they have the metaphysical situation in common. Metaphysically, both parties have all things in common, while epistemologically they have nothing in common.

Christians and non-Christians have opposing philosophies of fact. They also have opposing philosophies of law. They differ on the nature of diversity; they also differ on the nature of unity. Corresponding to the notion of brute force is the notion of abstract impersonal law, and corresponding to the notion of God-interpreted fact is the notion of God-interpreted law. Among non-Christian philosophers there are various notions as to the foundation of the universals of human experience. Some would find this foundation "objectively", in the universe. Others would find it "subjectively", in man. But all agree, by implication at least, that it must not be found where the Christian finds it — in the counsel of God. The non-Christian scientist would feel hampered were he to hold to a Christian philosophy of fact. He would feel himself to be limited in the number, and in the kind, of facts that he

might consider. So also the non-Christian scientist would feel hampered were he to hold a Christian philosophy of law. To him this would introduce the notion of caprice into science. Law, he feels, must be something that has nothing to do with personality. When Socrates asked Euthyphro whether "the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved by the gods", he sought to make plain that all law must, in the nature of the case, be above all personality. To find the essence of something we must, argues Socrates, go beyond what anybody thinks of a thing. To say that the gods love the holy is not to give us an insight into the essence of holiness. It is, as the Scholastics would say, merely to give an extrinsic definition of holiness. The *Good*, the *True* and the *Beautiful* as abstract principles, hovering above all gods and men — these are the universals of non-Christian thought. Even so-called personalist philosophies like those of Bowne, Knudsen, Brightman, Flewelling and others, are still impersonalist in the end. Whether in science, in philosophy or in religion, the non-Christian always seeks for a daysman betwixt or above God and himself, as the final court of appeal.

Believer and non-believer have opposite philosophies of fact and opposite philosophies of law. They also have, behind both of these, opposite views of man. Corresponding to the idea of brute fact and impersonal law is the idea of the autonomous man. Corresponding to the idea of God-controlled fact and law is the idea of God-controlled man. The idea of creation out of nothing is not found either in Greek or in modern philosophy. The causal creation idea is obnoxious even to such critics of the classical-modern view as Cochrane, Reinhold Niebuhr and the dialectical theologians. Only the orthodox thinker holds to the creation idea. Accordingly only the orthodox thinker finds himself compelled to challenge the whole of classic-modern methodology.

Even so we are driven to make further limitations. Roman Catholics have taken no clear-cut position on the question of creation. They divide the field of factual research between autonomous Reason and Faith. "The natural" is said to be the territory of Reason and "the supernatural" is said to be the territory of Faith. In the territory of Reason believers

and non-believers are said to have no difference. The question whether the mind of man is created or is not created, we are told in effect, need not be raised in this area. Rome is willing, in what it calls the field of Reason, to employ the ideas of brute fact, of abstract impersonal law and autonomous man, not merely for argument's sake, but without qualification.

Arminians have, by and large, adopted a similar position. It is but natural that they should. Their theology allows for autonomy in man at the point of salvation. Their philosophy, running in the same channel, ascribes autonomy to man in other fields.

It is therefore in Reformed thinking alone that we may expect to find anything like a consistently Christian philosophy of history. Romanism and Arminianism have virtually allowed that God's counsel need not always and everywhere be taken as our principle of individuation. This is to give license to would-be autonomous man, permitting him to interpret reality apart from God. Reformed thinking, in contrast with this, has taken the doctrine of total depravity seriously. It knows that he who is dead in trespasses and sins lives in the valley of the blind, while yet he insists that he alone dwells in the light. It knows that the natural man receives not the things of God, whether in the field of science or in the field of religion. The Reformed believer knows that he himself has been taken out of a world of misinterpretation and placed in the world of truth by the initiative of God. He has had his own interpretation challenged at every point and is ready now, in obedience to God, to challenge the thinking and acting of sinful man at every place. He marvels that God has borne with him in his God-ignoring and therefore God-insulting endeavors in the field of philosophy and science as well as in the field of religion. He therefore feels compelled to challenge the interpretation the non-Christian gives, not merely of religion but of all other things as well.

The significance of our discussion on fact, law and reason for the construction of a Christian philosophy of history may now be pointed out explicitly. The philosophy of history inquires into the meaning of history. To use a phrase of Kierkegaard, we ask how the Moment *is to have significance*. Our claim as believers is that the Moment cannot intelligently

be shown to have any significance except upon the presupposition of the Biblical doctrine of the ontological trinity. In the ontological trinity there is complete harmony between an equally ultimate one and many. The persons of the trinity are mutually exhaustive of one another and of God's nature. It is the absolute equality in point of ultimacy that requires all the emphasis we can give it. Involved in this absolute equality is complete interdependence; God is our concrete universal.

We accept this God upon Scriptural authority. In the Bible alone do we hear of such a God. Such a God, to be known at all, cannot be known otherwise than by virtue of His own voluntary revelation. He must therefore be known for what He is, and known to the extent that He is known, by authority alone. We do not first set out without God to find our highest philosophical concept in terms of which we think we can interpret reality and then call this highest concept divine. This was, as Windelband tells us, the process of the Greeks (*History of Philosophy*, Engl. tr., p. 34). This has been the process of all non-Christian thought. It is from this process of reasoning that we have been redeemed. On such a process of reasoning only a finite god can be discovered. It has been the nemesis of the history of the theistic proofs that this has been so frequently forgotten. Are we then left with a conflict between Faith and Reason? Have we no philosophical justification for the Christian position? Or are we to find a measure of satisfaction in the fact that others too, non-Christian scientists and philosophers as well as ourselves, have in the end to allow for some mystery in their system?

To all this we must humbly but confidently reply by saying that we have the best of philosophical justification for our position. It is not as though we are in a bad way and that we must seek for some comfort from others who are also in a bad way. We as Christians alone have a position that is philosophically defensible. The frank acceptance of our position on authority, which at first blush, because of our inveterate tendency to think along non-Christian lines, seems to involve the immediate and total rejection of all philosophy — this frank acceptance of authority is, philosophically, our

very salvation. Psychologically, acceptance on authority precedes philosophical argument; but when, as epistemologically self-conscious grown-ups, we look into our own position, we discover that unless we may presuppose such a God as we have accepted on authority, the Moment will have no significance. The God that the philosophers of the ages have been looking for, a God in whom unity and diversity are equally ultimate, the "Unknown God", is known to us by grace. It has been the quest of the ages to find an interpretative concept such as has been given us by grace.

With this we might conclude our brief survey of the principles of a Christian philosophy of history. It is well, however, that we give further consideration to the modern notions of paradox and the limiting concept. Doing so will perhaps enable us to relate our own position more definitely to current speculation. Doing so may also prepare us for a better appreciation of the difficulties facing us when we deal with such questions as those with which we are concerned in the problem of common grace.

PARADOX

Our position is naturally charged with being self-contradictory. It might seem at first glance as though we were willing, with the dialectical theologians, to accept the really contradictory. Yet such is not the case. In fact we hold that our position is the only position that saves one from the necessity of ultimately accepting the really contradictory. We argue that unless we may hold to the presupposition of the self-contained ontological trinity, human rationality itself is a mirage. But to hold to this position requires us to say that while we shun as poison the idea of the really contradictory we embrace with passion the idea of the *apparently* contradictory. It is through the latter alone that we can reject the former. If it is the self-contained ontological trinity that we need for the rationality of our interpretation of life, it is this same ontological trinity that requires us to hold to the apparently contradictory. This ontological trinity is, as the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Standards puts it, "incomprehensible". God dwells in light that no man can

approach unto. This holds of His rationality as well as of His being, inasmuch as His being and His self-consciousness are coterminous. It follows that in everything with which we deal we are, in the last analysis, dealing with this infinite God, this God who hideth Himself, this mysterious God. In everything that we handle we deal finally with the incomprehensible God. Everything that we handle depends for what it is upon the counsel of the infinitely inexhaustible God. At every point we run into mystery. All our ingenuity will not aid us in seeking to avoid this mystery. All our ingenuity cannot exhaust the humanly inexhaustible rationality of God. To seek to present the Christian position as rationally explicable in the sense of being comprehensible to the mind of man is to defeat our own purposes. To do so we must adopt the standard of reasoning of our opponent, and when we have accepted the standard of reasoning of our opponent, we must rest content with the idea of a finite God.

To the non-Christian our position may be compared to the idea of adding water to a bucket that is already full of water. "Your idea of the self-sufficient ontological trinity", he will say, "is like a bucket full of water. To God nothing can be added. He cannot derive glory from His creatures. Yet your idea of history is like pouring water into the full bucket. Everything in it is said to add to the glory of God".

No Christian can answer this full-bucket difficulty in such a way as to satisfy the demands of a non-Christian epistemology. We can and must maintain that the Christian position is the only position that does not destroy reason itself. But this is not to say that the relation between human responsibility and the counsel of God is not *apparently* contradictory. That all things in history are determined by God must always seem, at first sight, to contradict the genuineness of my choice. That the elect are certainly saved for eternity must always *seem* to make the threat of eternal punishment unreal with respect to them. That the reprobate are certainly to be lost must always *seem* to make the presentation of eternal life unreal with respect to them.

THE LIMITING CONCEPT

If we hold to a theology of the apparently paradoxical we must also hold, by consequence, to the Christian notion of a *limiting concept*. The non-Christian notion of the limiting concept has been developed on the basis of the non-Christian conception of mystery. By contrast we may think of the Christian notion of the limiting concept as based upon the Christian conception of mystery. The non-Christian notion of the limiting concept is the product of would-be autonomous man who seeks to legislate for all reality, but bows before the irrational as that which he has not yet rationalized. The Christian notion of the limiting concept is the product of the creature who seeks to set forth in systematic form something of the revelation of the Creator.

The Christian church has, consciously or unconsciously, employed the notion of the limiting concept in the formulation of its creeds. In these creeds the church does not pretend to have enveloped the fulness of the revelation of God. The church knows itself to be dealing with the inexhaustible God. The creeds must therefore be regarded as "approximations" to the fulness of truth as it is in God. This idea of the creeds as approximations to the fulness of the truth as it is in God must be set over against the modern notion of the creeds as approximation to abstract truth. The modern notion of approximation is based on the modern notion of the limiting concept. The modern notion of systematic logical interpretation as approximation is therefore based on ultimate scepticism with respect to the existence of any such thing as universally valid truth. The modern notion implies doubt as to whether any intellectual statement of any sort may be true at all. It is really no more than a hope, and that a false hope as we must believe, that there is in human interpretation an approximation to the truth. The Christian idea on the other hand rests upon the presupposition of the existence of God as the self-contained being that Scripture presents to us. The Christian idea is therefore the recognition that the creature can only touch the hem of the garment of Him who dwells in light that no man can approach unto.

If we have not altogether failed of our purpose, our discussion of the principles of a Christian philosophy of history will help us materially in understanding the literature that deals with common grace. In the first place it ought to enable those who affirm, and those who deny, common grace to be conscious of the fact that only in Reformed circles could the question have arisen at all. Roman Catholics and Arminians could not be interested in the subject. Only those who are seriously concerned with interpreting the whole of history in terms of the counsel of God can be puzzled by the question of that which is "common" between believer and unbeliever. For both the Roman Catholic and the Arminian it is a foregone conclusion that there are large areas of life on which the believer and the unbeliever agree without any difference. Only he who is committed to the basic absolute of God's counsel can, and will, be puzzled by the meaning of the relative.

The same thing must be said with respect to the Theology of Crisis. Of the dialectical theologians Barth claims to accept, and Brunner claims to reject, the doctrine of reprobation, but Barth no more than Brunner accepts this doctrine in the orthodox sense of the term. Hence their debate about creation-ordinances and common grace — Brunner affirming and Barth denying their relevancy to theology — has nothing except phraseology in common with the problem of common grace as discussed by orthodox theologians. No one, we believe, can be seriously concerned with the question of common grace unless he seeks to be truly Reformed in his interpretation of life. Calvin, called the originator, and Kuyper, the great modern exponent, of the doctrine of common grace, were primarily concerned, in the whole thrust of their endeavor, to bring men face to face with the sovereign God. On the other hand, those who have recently denied common grace have done so, once more, in the interest of bringing men face to face with the sovereign God.

In the second place, our discussion on the philosophy of history ought to make us realize that a question such as that of common grace admits of no easy and simple solution. We shall need to keep ourselves aware of the fact that we all need to employ the limiting concept, and that every statement of the truth is an approximation to the fulness of truth

as it exists in God. Like the first point, this point, too, is a reason for common humility and mutual forbearance.

In the third place, our discussion ought to make us not only sympathetic in our understanding both of the work of those who have affirmed, and of those who have denied, common grace, but also critical of their efforts. We now have something of a criterion by which to judge whether men in their affirmation, or in their denial, of common grace have worked along lines that are really in accord with the Reformed Faith. The solution of the common grace problem, to the extent that it is to be found at all, must be found by looking more steadfastly into the face of God. To what extent have those that have engaged in the debate on common grace kept this point in mind? Have they sometimes allowed themselves to go astray along the by-paths of Parmenides, Heraclitus or Plato? If we are even to *understand* the writings of Kuyper and others on the subject of common grace we must be both sympathetic and critical. How much the more then, if we are to *profit* by their work, should we both appreciate the good and avoid the mistakes they may have made?

II. ABRAHAM KUYPER'S DOCTRINE OF COMMON GRACE

Turning now to an exposition of Kuyper's great work, we regret that we cannot begin with Calvin. (A reference, in passing, must be made, however, to the dissertation of Dr. Herman Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 1928).⁴ We even pass by the pamphlet of Dr. Herman Bavinck on *Common Grace* with a remark or two. Bavinck wrote his booklet (published in 1894) with the purpose of bolstering up the claim he made for the Protestant Faith in his earlier address on *The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church* (published in 1888). It is Protestantism rather than Romanism, he avows in that earlier lecture, that expresses the truly catholic genius of the Christian religion. It is in accordance with this that

⁴ For a brief statement of the view of Charles Hodge, as well as for a more comprehensive statement of the exegetical foundation of the doctrine of common grace, we refer to the article entitled "Common Grace" by Professor John Murray in the November, 1942 issue of this *Journal* (V, 1-28).

he says in his pamphlet on *Common Grace*, "Through this doctrine of *gratia communis* the Reformed [theologians] have on the one hand maintained the specific and absolute character of the Christian religion and on the other have been second to none in their appreciation of everything good and beautiful that God has given to sinful men. Thus they have simultaneously maintained the seriousness of sin and the rights of the natural. And thus they were protected against both Pelagianism and Pietism" (p. 29).

A similar purpose has also controlled Kuyper in his work. It was his desire to press the catholic claims of the truth of Christianity that led Kuyper as well as Bavinck to set forth this doctrine of common grace.

We shall first attempt to find the general characteristics of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace. Here a difficulty confronts us. There appears to have been a certain development in his views. In the first of his three volumes entitled *De Gemeene Gratie*, he tends to define common grace in more negative, while in the second he tends to define common grace in more positive, terms. In the first volume he speaks of the essence of common grace as being a certain restraint of God upon the process of the sinful development of history. In the second volume he speaks of the essence of common grace as being a certain positive accomplishment in history that the sinner is enabled to make by God's gifts to him. It looks as though Kuyper's conception of common grace grew gradually in his own mind to include a positive as well as a negative aspect. We shall look at each of these aspects in turn, in order then, as far as we can, to bring them together into one concept.

When Kuyper speaks of the restraint of the destructive process of sin as being the essence of the doctrine of common grace he makes plain that common grace, like special grace, presupposes the doctrine of the sinner's total depravity. All men are born dead in trespasses and sins. "But", he adds, "upon death follows a process of *disintegration* of the corpse. And it is the spiritual *disintegration* of the corpse that could be and was restrained, not *wholly* but in part. Not *wholly*, in order that the fearful results of sin might be apparent to all, but *in part*, in order that also in this manner the wealth

of God's creation and of His recreating power in our sinful race might be glorified" (*De Gemeene Gratie* (Leiden, 1902), I, p. 243). He asserts a little later that the entire doctrine of common grace presupposes the fact of total depravity (I, p. 248).

Both types of grace, special and common, presuppose total depravity. The difference between the two must be indicated by the different effect they accomplish upon the totally depraved. Regeneration, a gift of special grace, Kuyper argues, removes the cancer of sin by taking out its roots. In the place of sin it gives the power of eternal life. "But common grace does nothing of the sort. It keeps down but does not quench. It tames, but does not change the nature. It keeps back and holds in leash, but thus, as soon as the restraint is removed, the evil races forth anew of itself. It trims the wild shoots, but does not heal the root. It leaves the inner impulse of the *ego* of man to its wickedness, but prevents the full fruition of wickedness. It is a limiting, a restraining, a hindering power, which brakes and brings to a standstill" (I, p. 251).

Thus it is the restraint of the destructive force of sin that is said to be the essence of common grace (I, p. 242). Now, as sin has affected the whole universe in the course of its historical development, we find, according to Kuyper, that common grace reaches out everywhere. Summing up his discussion on this point, he asserts: "Thus common grace began in *the soul* of man, by keeping the 'small sparks' from dying out. It took its second point of support in *the body* of man by supporting its physical powers and thus pushing back the coming of death. In addition to this, common grace had to produce a third type of activity, namely, in the *world* of man . . ." (I, p. 261).

The essence of common grace is the restraint of the process of sin; its scope is man and his world. Its ultimate foundation, we must add, is the mercy of God. Says Kuyper: "Thus common grace is an omnipresent operation of divine mercy, which reveals itself everywhere where human hearts are found to beat and which spreads its blessing upon these human hearts" (I, p. 251).

We cannot set forth in detail what Kuyper further says on the restraint of sin. At the moment we are looking for

a view in perspective of the doctrine of common grace as a whole. It is well to hasten on, then, to Kuyper's statement of what we may call the positive aspect of common grace.

Kuyper distinguishes in his second volume between the *constant* and the *progressive* aspects of common grace. By the constant aspect of common grace he means largely what in the first volume he speaks of as the essence of common grace, namely, the restraint of the process of sin. God's purpose with common grace, he adds in the second volume, is not merely to make human life possible by the restraint of sin, but also to provide for its progress (II, p. 600). "There is", he says, "on the one hand the constant operation of common grace which began in Paradise after the Fall, and which has remained till this day precisely what it was in the beginning and this *constant* common grace itself consists of two parts" (II, p. 600). These two parts are God's restraint of the power of destruction in nature and God's restraint "of the power of sin *in the heart* of man, to make possible the appearance of civil righteousness on the earth among sinners and heathen . . . This is the common grace that leads to the *maintenance* and *control* of our human life" (II, p. 601).

Continuing from this point Kuyper says: "Yet common grace could not stop at this first and constant operation. Mere maintenance and control affords no answer to the question as to what end the world is to be preserved and why it has passed throughout a history of ages. If things remain the same why should they remain at all? If life were merely repetition why should life be continued at all? . . . Accordingly there is added to this first constant operation of common grace . . . another, wholly different, operation . . . calculated to make human life and the life of the whole world pass through a process and develop itself more fully and richly . . ." (II, p. 601).

The course of history would, argues Kuyper, be wholly unintelligible if we forgot to bear in mind the progressive as well as the constant operation of common grace. Defining both aspects briefly again, he says: "The *constant* [operation] consists in this that God, with many differences of degree, restrains the curse of nature and the sin of the human heart. In contrast with this the *progressive* [operation] is that other

working through which God, with steady progress, equips human life ever more thoroughly against suffering, and internally brings it to richer and fuller development" (II, p. 602).

The "deep, incisive difference" between these two operations of common grace Kuyper signalizes by saying that in the constant operation God acts independently of man, while in the case of the progressive operation man himself acts as "instrument and colaborer with God" (II, p. 602). The history of civilization is here brought in as proof for his contention that man himself is the colaborer with God. At a somewhat earlier point in the second volume Kuyper says: "Common grace is never something that is added to our nature, but is always something that proceeds from our nature as the result of the constraint of sin and corruption" (II, p. 214). Here, though he speaks without limitation, he is evidently thinking only of what he later calls the progressive operation of common grace.

We must now join the two aspects of common grace of which Kuyper speaks. In a general way we may affirm that, for Kuyper, common grace is primarily a restraining power of God, working either with or without man as an instrument, by which the original creation powers of the universe are given an opportunity for a certain development to the glory of God.

This very broad and qualified definition of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace is perhaps the best we can do under the circumstances. Kuyper's exposition is not fully consistent and clear. Yet, in a well-rounded statement of his view Kuyper would wish us to include (a) the two operations spoken of and (b) the activity of man as the instrument of God at certain points.

Kuyper's statement of the doctrine of common grace has not gone unchallenged. In a number of pamphlets and books, as well as in a monthly magazine, *The Standard Bearer*, the Rev. Herman Hoeksema, the Rev. Henry Danhof and others have vigorously denied the existence of any form of common grace.

Hoeksema and Danhof argue that it is inconceivable that God should be in any sense, and at any point, graciously inclined to those who are not His elect. The wicked do, to

be sure, receive gifts from God. But rain and sunshine are not, as such, evidences of God's favor.⁵

Moreover, the idea of common grace, Hoeksema and Danhof contend, virtually denies the doctrine of total depravity. Man is inherently a spiritual-moral being. If he is said to do any good, as Kuyper says he does, this good must be a spiritual good.⁶ And if man does any spiritual good he is not totally depraved. When Hoeksema and Danhof began to write against the idea of common grace they were ministers of the Christian Reformed Church. In 1924 the Synod of that Church virtually condemned their views. It did so by making a pronouncement on three points of doctrine.

As these "three points" have ever since been at the center of the debate on common grace we include them at this juncture. As given in *The Banner* (June 1, 1939, pp. 508 f.) they are:

"Synod, having considered that part of the *Advice of the Committee in General* which is found in point III under the head: *Treatment of the Three Points*, comes to the following conclusions:

"A. Concerning the first point, *touching the favorable attitude of God toward mankind in general, and not alone toward the elect*, Synod declares that it is certain, according to Scripture and the Confession, that there is, besides the saving grace of God, shown only to those chosen to eternal life, also a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to his creatures in general. This is evident from the quoted Scripture passages and from the Canons of Dort, II, 5, and III and IV, 8 and 9, where the general offer of the Gospel is discussed; while it is evident from the quoted declarations of Reformed writers of the period of florescence of Reformed theology that our Reformed fathers from of old have championed this view.'

"Note of the editor: The following Scripture passages are given as proof: Ps. 145:9; Matt. 5:44, 45; Luke 6:35, 36; Acts 14:16, 17; 1 Tim. 4:10; Rom. 2:4; Ezek. 33:11; Ezek. 18:23. We need not print these texts since the readers can easily look them up. They can also find the passages of the Canons of Dort referred to in their copy of the Psalter Hymnal. However, inasmuch as they have no access to

⁵ H. Hoeksema and H. Danhof: *Van Zonde en Genade*, p. 244.

⁶ *Idem*, p. 131.

the declarations of the Reformed fathers, we should translate these; but since that will take considerable space we shall omit a sentence here and there, where this can be done without obscuring the thought.

“Calvin: Book II, ch. II, 16: ‘Yet let us not forget that these are most excellent gifts of the Divine Spirit, which for the common benefit of mankind he dispenses to whomsoever he pleases. . . . Nor is there any reason for inquiring what intercourse with the Spirit is enjoyed by the impious who are entirely alienated from God. For when the Spirit of God is said to dwell only in the faithful, that is to be understood of the Spirit of sanctification, by whom we are consecrated as temples to God himself. Yet it is equally by the energy of the same Spirit that God replenishes, actuates, and quickens all creatures, and that according to the property of each species which he has given it by the law of creation. . . .’ Book III, ch. 14:2: ‘We see how he confers many blessings of the present life on those who practice virtue among men. Not that this external resemblance of virtue merits the least favor from him; but he is pleased to discover (reveal — K.) his great esteem of true righteousness by not permitting that which is external and hypocritical to remain without a temporal reward. Whence it follows, as we have just acknowledged, that these virtues, whatever they may be, or rather images of virtue, are the gift of God; since there is nothing in any respect laudable which does not proceed from him.’

“Van Mastricht, First Part, p. 439: ‘Now from this proceeds a threefold love of God toward the creatures: *a general*, Psalm 104:31 and 145:9, whereby he has created, preserves, and rules all things, Psalm 36:7 and 147:9; *a common*, directed to human beings in particular, not indeed to all and to *each*, but nevertheless to *all kinds*, without exception, the reprobate as well as the elect, of what sort or race they may be, to which he communicates his blessings; which are mentioned in Heb. 6:4, 5; 1 Cor. 3:1, 2.’

“Note: the third kind of divine love (toward believers) is not mentioned in this quotation since there is no disagreement regarding it.

* * * * *

“ ‘Concerning the second point, touching *the restraint of sin in the life of the individual and in society*, the Synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confession, there is such a restraint of sin. This is evident from the quoted Scripture passages and from the Belgic Confession,

article 13 and 36, where it is taught that God through the general operations of His Spirit, without renewing the heart, restrains sin in its unhindered breaking forth, as a result of which human society has remained possible; while it is evident from the quoted declarations of Reformed writers of the period of florescence of Reformed theology that our Reformed fathers from of old have championed this view.'

"Note of the editor: The following Scripture passages are referred to: Gen. 6:3; Ps. 81:11, 12; Acts 7:42; Rom. 1:24, 26, 28; 2 Thess. 2:6, 7.

"The same Reformed writers are quoted as under the first point:

"Calvin, Institutes, Book II, ch. III, 3: 'For in all ages there have been some persons who, from the mere dictates of nature, have devoted their whole lives to the pursuit of virtue. And though many errors might perhaps be discovered in their conduct, yet by their pursuit of virtue they afforded a proof that there was some degree of purity in their nature. . . . These examples, then, seem to teach us that we should not consider human nature to be totally corrupted; since, from its instinctive bias, some men have not only been eminent for noble actions, but have uniformly conducted themselves in a most virtuous manner through the whole course of their lives. But here we ought to remember that *amidst this corruption of nature there is some room for Divine grace, not to purify it but internally to restrain its operations* (we italicize — K.). For should the Lord permit the minds of all men to give up the reins to every lawless passion, there certainly would not be an individual in the world, whose actions would not evince all the crimes for which Paul condemns human nature in general, to be most truly applicable to him. . . . In his elect the Lord heals these maladies by a method which we shall hereafter describe. In others he restrains them, only to prevent their ebullitions so far as he sees to be necessary for the preservation of the universe.'

"Van Mastricht, II, p. 330: 'God however moderates the severity of this spiritual death and bondage: (a) *internally* by means of some remnants of the image of God and of original righteousness. . . . to which things is added an *internal restraining grace*. . . . (b) *Externally*, through all kinds of means ("hulpmiddelen") of State, Church, Family, and Schools, by which the freedom and dissoluteness of sin is checked and restrained, and to which even an incentive to practice what is honorable is added.'

* * * * *

“ ‘Concerning the third point, touching *the performance of so-called civic righteousness by the unregenerate*, the Synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confession the unregenerate, though incapable of any saving good (Canons of Dort, III, IV, 3), can perform such civic good. This is evident from the quoted Scripture passages and from the Canons of Dort, III, IV, 4, and the Belgic Confession, where it is taught that God, without renewing the heart, exercises such influence upon man that he is enabled to perform civic good; while it is evident from the quoted declarations of Reformed writers of the period of florescence of Reformed theology, that our Reformed fathers have from of old championed this view.’

“Note: The Scripture passages quoted are: 2 Kings 10:29, 30; 2 Kings 12:2 (compare 2 Chron. 24:17–25); 2 Kings 14:3 (compare 2 Chron. 25:2 and vss. 14–16, 20, 27); Luke 6:33; Rom. 2:14 (compare vs. 13. Also Rom. 10:5 and Gal. 3:12).

“Note: Again we translate Synod’s quotations from the writings of Reformed fathers:

“Ursinus, Schatboek; on Lord’s Day III: ‘Concerning an unconverted person it is said that he is so corrupt that he is totally incapable of any good. To understand this one must know what kind of good and what sort of incapability is spoken of here. There is a threefold good: (1) Natural (good), as eating, drinking, walking, standing, sitting; (2) Civic (good), as buying, selling, doing justice, some knowledge or skill, and more of such, which promote our temporal welfare. (3) There is also a spiritual and supernatural good, which is absolutely necessary for inheriting eternal life. It consists in this that one turns to God from the heart and believes in Christ. The last is meant here; in the other an unconverted man can even far excel a regenerated person although he has these (as a common gift) from God. See 2 Cor. 3:5; James 1:17; Ex. 31:2; Prov. 16:1.’

“Van Mastricht I, p. 458: “Reformed (scholars) acknowledge indeed that the unregenerate person, apart from saving grace, is able . . . but they add to this that even these things are not done only through the exercise of the free will but through God’s common grace working in the unregenerate all the moral good which is in them or which is produced by them. For example, all the natural art which was in Bezalel, Ex. 31:2, 3, and all the moral good in those of whom it is said that they were enlightened by the Holy Spirit, tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, Heb. 6:4, 5.’

“Van Mastricht, II, p. 330: ‘. . . There is a natural good, for example, eating, drinking, reasoning; there is a civic good as polite and friendly association with the neighbor, and offending no one; there is a moral or ecclesiastical good, as attending worship diligently, saying prayers, refraining from gross misdeeds, Luke 18:11, 12; and a spiritual good, for example, faith, hope, etc. . . . in the state of sin the free will is indeed able to do a thing that is a natural, civic, or moral good, but not a spiritual good, which accompanies salvation.’”

We shall not pass in review the various criticisms made upon “the three points” by Hoeksema and his associates.⁷ These criticisms, together with their relative validity or invalidity will appear in substance as we turn to a fuller discussion of the latest phase of the debate on common grace.

(to be continued)

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⁷ Cf. H. Hoeksema: *A Triple Breach*; H. Hoeksema: *Calvin, Berkhof and H. J. Kuiper*; and *The Standard Bearer*.

COMMON GRACE

SECOND ARTICLE

CORNELIUS VAN TIL

III. THE LATEST DEBATE ABOUT COMMON GRACE

We must now turn to a brief survey of the controversy about common grace in its latest stage. Gradually the Reformed theologians of The Netherlands have interested themselves in the controversy so far largely carried on in America. And in recent years there has been a controversy in The Netherlands, as well as one between theologians of The Netherlands and theologians of America.

Broadly speaking there are in this latest struggle three parties. (a) There are those who would cling quite closely to the traditional, that is, the Kuyper-Bavinck point of view. Professor V. Hepp of the Free University of Amsterdam may be said to be the leading representative here. (b) There are those who deny common grace. Herman Hoeksema is now the recognised leader of this group. (c) There are those who would not deny common grace, nor yet affirm it in its traditional form, but reconstruct it. Dr. K. Schilder may be said to represent this group. It is naturally with the reconstructionists that we must chiefly concern ourselves now.

The reconstruction effort is closely related to a broad movement in theology and philosophy which attempts to build up the traditional Reformed position while yet to an extent rebuilding it. The Philosophy of Sphere Sovereignty of Professors H. Dooyeweerd and D. H. Th. Vollenhoven represents a part of this movement. It seeks to appreciate the concrete approach that Kuyper has given to the problems of theology and philosophy without clinging to certain abstractions that he retained (*cf.* "Kuyper's Wetenschapsleer", in *Philosophia Reformata*, vol. IV, no. 4, pp. 193 ff.; also Veenhof, *In Kuyper's Lijn*). We cannot further speak of this movement except to

refer briefly to an article by the Rev. S. G. De Graaf on "The Grace of God and the Structure of God's Whole Creation" (*Phil. Ref.*, vol. I, no. 1, pp. 17 ff.). In much the same way that Hoeksema argues, De Graaf argues that there can be no attitude of favor on the part of God toward the reprobate inasmuch as they are children of wrath (p. 18). Yet on the basis of such passages as Mt. 5:45, he says, we must conclude that God loves His enemies (p. 19). Of the difference between grace or favor on the one hand and love on the other, he says: "The difference between grace or favor on the one hand and mercy and patience on the other is to be defined by saying that God in His patience gives his good gifts (*weldaden*), but withholds Himself from those to whom He gives these gifts, while in His grace He gives Himself, His own communion, as is the case with those to whom He grants His covenant" (p. 20).

Of greater significance are the writings of Schilder. In his work on *Wat is de Hemel?* he seeks to offer a Christian philosophy of culture. The whole thrust of his thinking is an effort to proceed concretely. Accordingly he is critical of Kuyper's *Nebenzweck* of common grace, the provision for a history of civilization as such. He is also critical of what he thinks of as Kuyper's negative approach to the question of common grace. Culture is not to be based, he says, upon any foundation that we *still have* in common with the non-believer. Culture is rather to be based upon the original mandate given to man by God that he should subdue the earth. Thus we are brought back to the idea that man as office-bearer is called upon to glorify God in all he does. If therefore we speak of common grace at all, we should do so in connection with a "common curse" (p. 287). There is restraint both of the full blessing and of the full curse. Keeping both in mind we are truly progressive rather than reactionary. We then think eschatologically and have an open mind for the idea of the catastrophic. The popular notion of common grace as offering a neutral field of operation between Christians and non-Christians, Schilder rejects with vigor. It is not on the basis of one virtue in God, His patience, but on the basis of all His virtues that we must understand culture and history in general (p. 289).

The contribution made in this book is of great value. This contribution consists in stressing the need of concrete procedure in all our theological thinking. Schilder quite rightly attacks the idea of a territory that is common to believer and non-believer without qualification. Yet he disclaims having dealt with the problem of common grace as a whole in this book.

Generally speaking it may be said that Hoeksema took some courage from the events we have so far related. He spoke with favor of the Philosophy of Sphere Sovereignty, but was displeased that its exponents did not, as he felt they should on their premises, deny common grace (*The Standard Bearer*, XII, p. 176). He rejoiced to an extent in the work of Schilder and De Graaf. Yet he doubted (in 1936) that Schilder really wanted to maintain the antithesis (XII, p. 364) and that De Graaf really denied common grace (XII, pp. 393-4).

More hopeful, from the point of view of Hoeksema, was an article in *De Reformatie* by Dr. S. Greydanus. Greydanus argued about such gifts as those of rain and sunshine and asked the question whether, in view of the fact that the non-believer always misuses them and thereby adds to his punishment, they may be said to indicate a favor of God toward their recipients. He did not, in so many words, answer his question, but seemed to be very doubtful about the matter (*Standard Bearer*, XIV, p. 200).

We must hasten on, however, to relate something of a more specific nature. The "Three Points" of the 1924 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church came up for a fresh discussion. The Rev. Daniel Zwier requested Schilder to state whether or not he was in agreement with these three points. Zwier had been a member of the 1924 Synod and co-responsible for their adoption. In a series of articles in *De Wachter* (beginning April 4, 1939) he had expressed general agreement with Schilder's notion of the "Common Mandate". He professed a measure of sympathy with the general concrete approach to the problems of theology that Schilder was advocating. As a vigorous defender of the "Three Points" against Hoeksema, he, we can understand, was therefore much interested in Schilder's views on common grace.

The debate that followed discussed only the first point

(*De Reformatie*, May 12, 1939 and subsequent issues).⁸ The Synod evidently said, or meant to say, that there is in God a certain attitude of favor toward the non-elect. Zwier so interprets the Synod's meaning (*De Reformatie*, Oct. 13, 1939). Schilder replied to Zwier that he was unable to accept the first of the "Three Points" as thus interpreted (*ibid.*, Oct. 20, 1939).

In explanation of his position he criticizes the statement that God shows an attitude of favor "to His creatures in general". "Creatures in general" would include, he says, such things as lions and trees. But this is something quite distinct and different from "men in general". For in the case of men sin comes into the picture. And sin is not a creature. In actual men, therefore, we have to reckon with both factors, their creatureliness and their sinfulness. Accordingly it would be a mistake to conclude from the idea of God's favor toward creatures in general that there is a favor of God toward sinful, individual men. Again, "creatures in general" include fallen angels. And God certainly is not favorable to devils.

Synod failed therefore, argues Schilder, to distinguish between the mere creatureliness and the office of man. We might say that, according to Schilder, Synod failed to bring into the picture the ethical as well as the metaphysical. Hoeksema, as well as he, says Schilder, will agree that God loves all creatureliness, even in the Antichrist and in Satan.

With Zwier we believe that this criticism of Schilder's is not to the point (*De Wachter*, Nov. 21, 1939; Jan. 30, 1940). For better or for worse, Synod meant to teach that God has a certain attitude of favor to all men as men. The use of the broad popular phrase "creatures in general" gives no justification for drawing such consequences as Schilder has drawn. Besides, the broad phrase itself expresses the fact that God loves all His creatures. And as for the idea that God loves all creatureliness as such, including the creatureliness of the devil, this is, we believe, intelligible only if we use it as a limiting concept. Schilder himself has warned us to think concretely. And thinking concretely implies the use of such universals as "creatureliness" as limiting concepts only.

⁸ We need not discuss Schilder's detailed criticism of the formulation of the Three Points in *De Reformatie* of May 19, 1939 and Aug. 18, 1939.

Creatureliness as such can nowhere be found among men. It is a pure abstraction. Exegesis of Scripture may never, says Schilder, break the laws of thought which God has created in us.

The point of logic raised by Schilder is of a similar nature. Zwier replies that it is one thing to say that our Scripture exegesis must seek to be consistent, but quite another thing to say that our interpretation must accord with logic as that is generally taken. With this we must agree. If the second statement is not to be out of accord with the first, the logic referred to must be a genuinely Christian-theistic logic. It may perhaps be said that much of the abstract reasoning of Hoeksema comes from his failure to distinguish between Christian and non-Christian logic. We do not mean, of course, that the rules of the syllogism are different for Christians and non-Christians. Hoeksema refers to the idea of insanity, saying that sin has not made us insane. We may agree if he means merely that the unbeliever can follow the technical processes of intellectual procedure as well as, or often better than, the believer. But when he says or assumes that God's revelation in Scripture may be expected to reveal nothing which will be apparently self-contradictory, we demur. He attempts to "harmonize" the revealed and the secret will of God, prayer and the counsel of God. His efforts on this score would not be accepted by unbelievers. He cannot solve the full-bucket difficulty, a difficulty which they think lies at the heart of the Christian religion. To them the whole idea of a God who is self-sufficient and all-glorious precludes the idea of anything taking place in history that should glorify Him. That, they argue, is to add water to a bucket that is already full. To say that no one resists the will of God, not even the murderer, is, for them, to say that we simply believe in fatalism. Have we then the right and the courage to say that Christianity does not contradict the laws of logic. We do, by pointing out that it is God, the self-sufficient God, in whom is no darkness at all, who has made us His creatures. Then it appears natural that there should be in all that pertains to our relation to God (and what does not?) an element of mystery. As finite creatures we deal in all our contacts with an infinite and inexhaustible God. Schilder

himself has, perhaps more than any other recent Reformed theologian, stressed the necessity of being open to the "catastrophic". The non-believer can allow for no such element. He seeks with Plato for a universal that is "rigidly universal" and as such essentially penetrable to the human mind. The non-believer admits mystery, too. In fact for him mystery is ultimate, enveloping God as well as man. His position therefore is rationalistic first and irrationalistic last. Unwilling to accept anything not essentially penetrable to the human mind, and thereby assuming the equality of the divine and human minds, he ends by facing a brute factual situation on the one hand and an empty universal on the other hand. Thus the non-believer is illogical. He destroys the foundations of true logic. He may be ever so skilful in the manipulation of syllogisms, but he must still be said to be illogical. On the other hand the Christian doctrine of God is the presupposition of the possibility of true logical procedure. The rules of formal logic must be followed in all our attempts at systematic exposition of God's revelation, whether general or special. But the syllogistic process must be followed in frank subordination to the notion of a self-sufficient God. We must here truly face the Absolute. We must think His thoughts after Him. We must think analogically, rather than univocally. To reason as though we can remove all the "logical difficulties" which will naturally appear to be contained in the Christian system of truth is to say, in effect, that on the question of logic the believer and the non-believer occupy neutral territory and to assign to the unbeliever a competence he does not in reality possess.

It is well to observe in this connection that a natural concomitant of the failure to distinguish between a Christian and a non-Christian foundation for true logic is the denial of the genuine significance of the historical. Given the belief in a self-sufficient God, the idea of temporal creation and genuine historical development is absurd. So says the non-believer. And so says the Arminian, using the neutral application of the syllogism. Calvinism, we are told, makes history to be a puppet dance. The Arminian has not seen the necessity of challenging the idea of a neutral logic. He reasons abstractly, as all non-believing philosophy does. The Arminian therefore

also rejects the Reformed conception of history. He thinks of it as he thinks of philosophical determinism.

It is, we are compelled to believe, the essentially "neutral" logic, frequently employed by Hoeksema, that is back of his charge of "determinism" against those who maintain that the natural man does "good works" by common grace. The charge is identical in nature with the charge of determinism lodged against the Reformed doctrine of saving grace by the Arminian theologian. Secondly and more generally, it is, we believe, the use of an essentially neutral logic that leads Hoeksema to deny the possibility of (a) a certain attitude of favor on the part of God to the reprobate and (b) the ability of the reprobate to do good of a sort.

Now Schilder has done much in his general works to teach Reformed Christians how to think concretely. We cannot grant, however, that in his general evaluation of the common grace controversy he has approached very closely to his high ideal. What he said about Scripture in relation to logic was not calculated to make men think concretely. And what he says about the Scripture material adduced by the Synod in support of the "Three Points" seems to us to indicate that he has frequently reasoned abstractly in the way that Hoeksema did.

We now turn to a brief consideration of his analysis of some of the Scripture passages involved.

(a) Ps. 145:9.

The first passage is Psalm 145:9, "The Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works". Schilder argues, as before, that we have here the expression of God's pleasure in the fact of existence as such. God maintains the metaphysical situation and by so doing gives to "human existence the joyful feeling of existence and development".

There is here no evidence of God's favorable attitude to any generality, says Schilder. In God's attitude His whole being in all its attributes is always involved. Hence God's justice must always be taken into consideration (*De Reformatie*, Oct. 27, 1939).

With the last statement of Schilder we may well express agreement. We may add to it that in making up the balance

all of the factors existing in man at any particular time in history must be taken into consideration. It is definitely a question of history before us. If we use no distinction of date at all we have the Arminian position, according to which God has the same attitude toward all men without qualification. If we use only one distinction, that between creatureliness and office, as Schilder does, and say that God has an attitude of favor to his creation as such, we make the Antichrist and the demons an object of favor. Schilder, although criticising the Synod for holding to a position that would lead to the idea of favor toward Satan, is virtually in the same position himself when he would interpret Ps. 145 as referring merely to the metaphysical situation as such. Adding the further distinction of *date* enables us to approach somewhat more adequately, we believe, a full statement of the facts of the case.⁹ When history is finished God no longer has any kind of favor toward the reprobate. They still exist and God has pleasure in their existence, but not in the fact of their bare existence. God has pleasure in their historically *defeated* existence. His justice has prevailed over their unrighteous *striving* in the course of time. Therefore God no longer in any sense *classifies* them in a generality with the elect. It was only at an earlier date, before the consummation of their wicked striving was made complete, that God even *in a sense* classified them with the elect.

If we take this point back to the beginning of history we may find some further light shed on the subject. When God first spoke to Adam he did so as to the representative of all men. This does not mean that in God's mind the issue of each man represented was not already determined. It certainly was. Yet God undeniably dealt with the elect and the reprobate as being in some sense a generality. Adam was created perfect. When he fell all men *became* sinners; they became in Adam the objects of God's wrath. They *all* became sinners. They all became sinners *on the same day through the one act of a common representative*. They all were confronted

⁹ In his exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism Schilder himself has greatly stressed the importance of dates in history, "Het is overal foederaal historische dateering" (p. 66).

with the same conditional proposition. The elect and the reprobate are by one act of response to that single proposition led closer to their distinctive destinations. To be sure, this is true only in view of later events, the chief of which is the redemption in Christ of the elect. For all that, and because of that, there is a genuine sense in the word *common* when applied to believers and non-believers combined. It was by the same negative act to the same "offer" that *all* men lost the favor of God and became objects of the "common" wrath of God. While all men were perfect in Adam there was sameness with a difference. So when all men became sinners through Adam's sin there was again sameness with a difference. It is of the essence of *historical development* that such should be the case. The elect of God are always the objects of favor in the ultimate sense. In Adam, before the fall, they were perfect and, as perfect, God's favor rested on them. Thus their historical situation seemed to correspond to their eternal destiny. God's ultimate favor and His proximate favor seemed to correspond. Then the elect became sinners in Adam and as sinners the object of God's wrath. Yet God's ultimate attitude of favor did not change. Thus the elect, together with the reprobate, are objects of God's wrath. Yet there remains a difference. The elect are objects only of a "certain wrath" of God. Is not this a genuine wrath? If it were not, Christ would not have needed to die to "reconcile us to God". When the elect are saved, the historical situation seems once more to accord with the ultimate attitude of God. Yet they are *closer* to God than they were before. There has been *progress*. The *process of particularization* has gone forward apace. On the other hand they are still, to the extent that the "old man" in them remains active, the objects of God's displeasure. The saints are told not to grieve the Holy Spirit. Thus there are genuine historical "downs and ups" upward by which the elect are brought to their particular destination.

In a similar fashion in case of the non-elect there are "ups and downs" downward leading them to their particular destination. And the process is in both cases genuine. This not in spite of, but because of, the fact that the destiny of both classes is fixed. History has, we believe as Christians, genuine significance because God's counsel is back of it and is being

realized through it. Thus there is genuine progress, and therefore genuine variation, in the relations of the same men to the same God just because God's unvarying counsel is back of history. Why then should there not be genuine significance in the measure of generality through which God leads each class to its particular destiny? Every historical generality is a stepping-stone toward the final particularism that comes at the climax of history.

(b) Mt. 5:44, 45; Lk. 6:35, 36.

We pass on now to a brief notation on the other passages of Scripture cited by the Synod. We join the passages Mt. 5:44, 45 and Lk. 6:35, 36. Schilder sets aside what seems to be a common interpretation of these passages to the effect that we are to do good to the wicked in imitation of our Father in heaven who does good to them. Schilder says this common interpretation is illegitimate. From the presence of rain and sunshine as facts common to all we are not to conclude that there is a favorable attitude on the part of God toward His enemies. How then, says Schilder, can we expect to find God's attitude revealed in the facts of rain and sunshine?

To this we reply that Christ's words are positive as well as negative. We are to show our attitude in our deeds, in imitation of God, whose attitude we may therefore assume to be manifest in His deeds. When Schilder argues that we cannot legitimately reach a conclusion about God's attitude from the facts, we reply that we are specifically told that God's attitude is revealed in these facts. This is not to deny for a moment that, throughout it all, the rain and sunshine are means by which the wicked adds to his final punishment.

Again, when Christ is said to be *χρηστός* to the "unthankful and evil" (Lk. 6:35), Schilder would limit this to the elect, but unconverted, sinner. He speaks again of the mere continuation of the metaphysical situation as all that is implied for the unbeliever. He warns us again that the "facts" as such are no justifiable ground for a conclusion with respect to the attitude of God. We reply that there is here again a direct statement about the attitude of God, in the light of which the facts are interpreted. All the facts of history mani-

fest something of the attitude of God to men. If they did not, they would not be related to God and, therefore, be meaningless.

(c) Acts 14:16, 17.

The next passage is Acts 14:16, 17. It speaks of God not having left himself without a witness in times past, but giving gifts to men. Schilder points to the fact that Paul speaks of these gifts as being testimonies unto men of God's requirement upon them (*De Reformatie*, Nov. 3, 1939). God is engaged in preparing judgment upon men, says Schilder; we are accordingly not justified in seeing a favorable attitude in the gifts of nature.

Again we cannot understand why the one cannot be true as well as the other. To be a witness of God, of the whole God, these gifts must show His mercy as well as His wrath. God's judgment is threatened because men reject God's mercies.

(d) I Tim. 4:10. "God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of them that believe."

The word "Saviour" is by common consent taken to mean Preserver. Schilder again asserts that this refers merely to the continuation of the metaphysical situation. Zwier replies, we believe correctly, that God's preservation of the unrighteous is evidence of His favor toward them and that therefore there is some favor at least shown to the unrighteous in the fact of his preservation in this world. God is the preserver of all men, *especially* of the righteous. The "especially" cannot fairly be translated by "namely". "Especially" seems, therefore, to indicate some measure of favor, however small, to the unrighteous.

There is another Scripture passage that has been much in dispute, but we shall refer to that in our last section, to which we now turn.

IV. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

We now make bold to submit a few remarks by way of suggesting the direction in which we may possibly hope for profitable discussion on the common grace question in the

future. It is with hesitation and diffidence that we do so. And it is with the greatest of appreciation for the labors of such men as Kuyper, Bavinck, Hepp, Schilder, Hoeksema, Zwier, and others, that we say what we say.

A. THE DANGER OF ABSTRACT THINKING

It would seem to be obvious that if we are to avoid thinking abstractly on the common grace problem, we must seek to avoid thinking abstractly in the whole of our theological and philosophical effort. Perhaps the first question we should ask ourselves is whether the Kuyper-Bavinck form of theological statement in general, in which nearly all, if not all, who have been engaged in the recent common grace debate have been nurtured, does not, to some extent at least, suffer from the disease of abstraction. Perhaps the physicians have not altogether escaped the disease against which they have inoculated others. As a grateful patient it is my duty now to assert that in my humble judgment such is the case.

It will neither be possible nor necessary for our present purpose to discuss this matter at length. It must suffice to indicate what we have in mind by pointing to crucial instances. We shall deal with the question of the knowledge of non-believers. More particularly we shall deal briefly with the question of natural theology. Rome's semi-Aristotelian epistemology influences, and accords with, its semi-Aristotelian ethics. Rome's notion of the common area of Reason between believers and non-believers controls its conception of the common cardinal virtues. So also what Kuyper and Bavinck think of the reprobate's knowledge of God will influence what they think of the reprobate's deeds before God. We shall seek to intimate, be it all too briefly, that in the epistemology of Kuyper, Bavinck, and Hepp there are remnants of an abstract way of thinking that we shall need to guard against in our common grace discussion.

1. Kuyper

When we speak of Kuyper we may refer first to the booklet by C. Veenhof, entitled *In Kuyper's Lijn*. Veenhof is concerned to show that the Philosophy of the Law Idea,

developed by Drs. D. H. Th. Vollenhoven and H. Dooyeweerd, professors at the Free University of Amsterdam, is working along the lines suggested by Kuyper, the founder of that university. In the course of his proof he speaks of the stress Kuyper laid on the fact that all the creation-ordinances are subject to the will of God (Veenhof, *op. cit.*, p. 29). These ordinances or laws admit of transgression by man, while yet they do not admit of abrogation (*ibid.*, p. 32). "With great clarity Kuyper saw the law-organism which controls the world" (*idem*). Veenhof further points out that Kuyper was opposed to the idea of neutrality. For him the attitude of the heart, the center of man's activity, was involved in all true scientific interpretation (*ibid.*, pp. 32 ff.). The whole idea of a science that is based on regeneration, as this is set forth in his *Encyclopedïa*, proves the correctness of Veenhof's contention on this point. It is well to emphasize again that it is from Kuyper, more than from any one else in modern times, that we have learned to think concretely. Both on the question of the universal and on that of the particular, Kuyper has taught us that we must build on our own pre-suppositions. Yet it must be said that Kuyper has not always been able to live up to this high ideal.

Kuyper has not always been able to live up to his own conception of the universal. Dooyeweerd has shown this to be the case in his article on "Kuyper's Wetenschapsleer" (*Philosophia Reformata*, vol. IV., p. 193). Dooyeweerd shows that Kuyper has all too uncritically employed the modern philosophical statement of the problem between the universal and the particular. We shall give some of the evidence to prove that Dooyeweerd was not mistaken.

Kuyper speaks of facts and laws or particulars and universals. The former correspond to our perception and the latter to our ratiocination (*Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*, vol. II, p. 21, note). Kuyper says that the whole of our ratiocinative process is exhausted by its concern for the universals (*ibid.*, p. 21). Here Platonism is in evidence. The ratiocinative process, argues Kuyper, deals with concepts only. That is to say it deals with universals only. If we form a concept of a tree, a lion or a star, he says, we have no knowledge other than that which tells us how such a tree

or lion or star is related to other objects or how the parts of such a tree, lion, or star are related to one another (*ibid.*, p. 22). If this position were carried through consistently we should have the two worlds of Plato, the world of bare particulars and the world of bare universals standing in hopeless duality over against one another. If this position were carried through, our "systems" of interpretation would be "approximations" in the Platonic, rather than in the Christian, sense of the word, our limiting concepts would be Kantian rather than Calvinistic, and our "as if" patterned after the *Critique of Pure Reason* rather than after the *Institutes*. Kuyper, of course, does not carry through this sharp separation between ratiocination and perception. But he is able to escape the evil consequences suggested by no better means than that of inconsistency. Let us note the nature of this inconsistency.

Continuing his discussion of the relation of the intellectual process to the universals, he brings in two further notions. The universals themselves exist as a system. They are organically related to one another. Our ratiocinative process is adapted to penetrate this system of relations. And particularly our intellects are fitted to see through the higher relations. Here the gradational motif is injected in the process of describing the system of relations. This again is evidence of a non-Christian type of abstraction. A system cannot, if we start abstractly, exist otherwise than as a hierarchy. In the second place, Kuyper ushers in the notion of the active as well as the passive intellect. "Our thinking is wholly and exclusively adapted to these (highest) relations, and these relations are the objectification of our thought" (*ibid.*, p. 23). All this is still Platonic. It is more than that: it is Kantian. Kuyper himself feels that we would, by going further along this path, soon fall into subjectivism. We are saved from subjectivism, argues Kuyper, by the fact that there is such a thing as a gradual transition from one relation to another. The results of these gradually changing universals we observe for the first time in that which for ages no human eye has discerned (*idem*). We remark here that subjectivism can in no wise be avoided in this manner. Plato himself tried to avoid it thus and failed. He sought to make the universals

overlap one another. There was only one way open to him for the purpose, namely, the way of intermixture of the universals with what Adamson calls the "abstract essence of change". But to intermingle universals with ultimate change is, in effect, to deny the universality of the universals.

Kuyper, however, suddenly brings in the idea of an original Subject, who has thought the universals and has given them being. When we as human beings think ourselves into the relations of the universe we are simply thinking God's thoughts after Him (*idem*). The universals could not exist unless God had thought them. This is the Christian position. But how it is to be deduced from what up to this time has virtually been a Platonic procedure, is not apparent. Kuyper argues that we must stress the "identity of our thinking consciousness with the world of relations so far as to maintain that without an original Subject, who has thought them, and possessed the power to bring the product of His thought into dominance in the cosmos, they would not exist" (*idem*). Here the very existence of the relations is made to depend upon fiat creation by God. But if fiat creation is to be their source, if the counsel of God is to be the source of the existence and validity of the relations, the Platonic procedure, to which Kuyper has clung in his discussion so far, must be dropped. Both Platonism in its final form and Christianity hold that the universals must have transition in them. But Platonism, not believing in temporal creation, ascribes this transition to the abstract idea of ultimate chance. On this basis the ideal of human knowledge must be that of identification of the subject's knowledge with objective universals. Yet it is a foregone conclusion that not even the first step toward the realization of that idea can be taken. The universals must be both abstractly unchangeable and abstractly changing. Christianity, on the other hand, believing in temporal creation, ascribes the transition in the universals to the counsel of God. There is no abstract staticism and therefore no abstract change. On this basis the idea of human knowledge is to think God's thoughts after Him *analogically*. Hence man's intellectual effort cannot be said to be exclusively concerned with the relations; the relations do not exist otherwise than in correlativity with the "facts". Every intellectual effort

deals with facts *in relations* and with relations *in facts*. Thus the ideal of identification "of our thinking consciousness with the world of relations" must be entirely dropped. It is a remnant of the Platonic ideal. Kuyper cannot, except at the price of inconsistency, say that we are *in so far* to hold on to this ideal of identification as to warrant the Christian position with respect to God as the Creator of relations. If God is the Creator of the relations, we shall need to make a clean break with Plato. The abstract separation between facts and relations and the ideal of identification of the thinking consciousness with the world of relations, must both be dropped and dropped for good.

Kuyper has a weakness in the foundation of his epistemology. He did not start unequivocally from the presupposition of the ontological trinity. He has, to some extent, allowed himself to formulate his problems after the pattern of a modernized Platonism. In making this criticism we are aware of the fact that Kuyper himself sometimes joins perception and ratiocination closely. The strict analysis he has given, he holds, applies only if we deal with a "wholly elementary object" (*ibid.*, p. 27). But, we object, such a wholly elementary object does not exist. Hence the distinction between ratiocination and perception should have been made in the form of a limiting concept. But then the question would again arise as to whether this limiting concept were to be taken in the Christian or in the Platonic sense of the term. And there is evidence that indicates a lack of clarity in Kuyper's thought as to the distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian notion of the limiting concept. At times he argues as though the idealist's ideal of comprehensive knowledge is in itself a legitimate ideal for creatures to hold. If sin had not entered into the world, Kuyper says, the ideal of science reaching out toward the exhaustive interpretation of the whole of the cosmos, would be a legitimate idea (*ibid.*, p. 38). In accordance with this he also speaks of *universality* and *necessity* as being of the very essence of the knowledge of cosmic law (*ibid.*, p. 36). But all this is, for the moment at least, to forget that for Adam in Paradise, no less than for us, God was the incomprehensible God. This incomprehensible God reveals something of Himself in cosmic history. He does

so voluntarily and to the exact extent that it pleases Him. In searching out the ways of God's revelation, even perfect man should allow for what Schilder calls the catastrophic. He could not take for granted that the cosmos contains a set of thoughts, already fully expressed, of which man must simply seek to make a replica for himself. There is a qualitative, not merely a quantitative, difference between God and man. Kuyper has not made a clear distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian ideal of knowledge. His universals sometimes resemble those of Plato a bit too closely.

Corresponding to this lack of clarity on the question of universals is a lack of clarity with respect to facts. The abstract separation between perception and ratiocination, to which we have called attention, already leads us to expect that such should be the case. Facts seem, according to Kuyper, to have a nature that does not fit them well for apprehension by intellectual categories. Kuyper has a sort of *Ding an sich* very similar to that of Kant. Speaking of the knowledge process he says: "You behold the *morphe* in your perception; you follow the *anaphoroi* of the relations with your thought; but the *ousia* lies beyond your reach" (*ibid.*, p. 39). Individuality is said to be something that is inherently hostile to generalization, and as such obstructive of the progress of science. Where individuality is most pronounced, there science meets with its greatest difficulty. At the climax of an argument on this point he says: "From a sharply drawn character it is scarcely possible to draw any conclusions" (*ibid.*, p. 40).

In this phenomenalism we have the counterpart to the semi-Platonic notion of complete comprehension. If we hold to the ideal of absolute comprehension in knowledge we must conclude that the "facts", in so far as they do not lend themselves to this ideal, are unknowable. For would-be-autonomous man it is quite consistent to hold to the ideal of complete comprehension, and at the same time to the notion of utterly irrational fact. In contrast with this the Christian ought to abhor both the ideal of comprehensive knowledge and the idea of irrational fact. If the ideal of comprehensive knowledge were realized, it would be realized at the expense of the uniqueness of every fact of the cosmos and of the aseity of God.

If facts were irrational and not comprehensively known by God, they would not be known in any degree by man. Throwing overboard the non-Christian procedure entirely, the Christian should frankly begin his scientific work on the presupposition of the coterminity of the universal and the particular in the Godhead. With Warfield, paraphrasing Calvin, we would begin by saying: "... there is but one God; the Father, the Son, the Spirit is each this one God, the entire divine essence being in each; these three are three Persons, distinguished one from another by an incommunicable property" (*Calvin and Calvinism*, p. 232). On the basis of this conception of the ontological trinity we must hold that the facts and the universals of the created universe exist in correlativity to one another. The ideal of science should be to describe this situation as far as it can. It should not seek in its intellectual effort to make contact with some abstract universal relations. Nor should it feel itself defeated to the extent that it cannot reduce individuality to abstract relations. Why should science consider itself foiled in its efforts when it finds that it cannot reduce the individuality of man to numerical relationships? Kuyper himself has taught us the idea of the sovereignty of spheres; but he has a sort of Kantian phenomenalism that keeps him from working out this idea consistently.

There is a vagueness inherent in Kuyper's treatment of common grace. He seems to be uncertain in his mind as to what is common to the believer and the non-believer. This vagueness, we are inclined to think, may be traced to the vagueness we have now spoken of. Kuyper did not clearly see and hold to the correlativity of individual and universal that is involved in his own basic position. He has accordingly been handicapped when he sought to describe the scientific procedure. Wishing to do it according to Christian principles, he yet brings in elements of abstract non-Christian thought. Now that we have discussed briefly his failure to evolve a consistently Christian notion of universals and particulars, we call attention to his hesitation in the description of scientific procedure.

We have noted earlier that from a Christian point of view the most elementary description is done either on Christian

or non-Christian presuppositions. Kuyper's own most basic views require us to hold to this. He has taught us the importance of stressing the difference in starting-point between those who do, and those who do not, work on the basis of regeneration. With the drag of his semi-Kantian phenomenism upon him, however, he is unwilling to draw a straight line of demarcation between the Christian and the non-Christian methodology of science. In saying this we are not thinking of his distinction between what is, and what is not, strictly scientific. Says Kuyper: "To observe bacteria and microbes is in itself as little a matter of scientific interpretation as to observe horses and cows in a pasture" (*ibid.*, p. 81). We may readily allow the validity of this point. Nor are we thinking of another distinction Kuyper makes. He speaks with the German philosophers of natural and spiritual sciences, the former dealing, broadly speaking, with the *ponderabilia* and the latter, broadly speaking, with intangibles. We may readily allow a certain validity to this distinction, too. But it is with Kuyper's use of these distinctions that our difficulty begins. He seems to use these distinctions for the defence of his contention that there is an area of interpretation where the difference between those who build, and those who do not build, on the fact of regeneration, need not, and cannot, be made to count. His argument is somewhat as follows.

Kuyper shows how, because of the fact of regeneration, there must be a twofold development of science. Yet this twofold development could not, in the past, be clearly marked if for no other reason than that there is "a very broad territory where the difference between the two groups has no significance" (*ibid.*, p. 104). As a reason for this, Kuyper offers the fact that regeneration does not change our senses nor the appearance of the world about us. He therefore feels justified in concluding that the whole area of the more primitive observation, which limits itself to measuring, weighing, and counting is common to both. "The whole field of empirical research by means of our senses (aided or unaided) on observable objects falls beyond the principal difference that separates the two groups" (*ibid.*, p. 104). Kuyper does not want us to conclude from this, however, that the natural sciences as such are beyond dispute. He says the difference

is excluded merely at the point where these sciences make their beginning. "Whether something weighs two or three milligrams, may be absolutely determined by any one able to weigh" (*ibid.*, p. 105). We are to accept gratefully the fact that at the beginning of scientific interpretation in the natural sciences, there is a "common territory where the difference in starting-point and standpoint does not count" (*ibid.*, p. 106).

As a second area where the difference need not appear, Kuyper mentions the lower aspect of the spiritual sciences. Here too, says Kuyper, we deal with that which can be simply weighed and counted. Finally Kuyper speaks of a third territory that all have in common, namely, that of logic. "There is not a twofold but only one logic" (*ibid.*, p. 107). This allows, he says, for formal interaction between the two groups of interpreters.

On the ground of these three common territories Kuyper makes the following generalization: "As a result all scientific research that deals with the *ὄρατά* only, or is carried on only by those subjective elements, which did not undergo a change, remains common to both. At the beginning of the road the tree of science is common to all" (*ibid.*, p. 116).

We call attention to two ambiguities in this argument. Kuyper has first led us to think of weighing and measuring as not being part of the scientific undertaking. Observation of microbes, even with the help of instruments, he says, is no more scientific in the strict sense of the term, than the observing of horses and cows. Yet Kuyper does include this weighing and measuring in the strictly scientific task when he says that it is this precisely which believers and non-believers have in common in their scientific endeavors. Which of these two positions are we to take as really representative of Kuyper's views? It would seem that we must take the second. If we do not take the second position, what is there left of the three territories that we are said to have in common?

If then, we take the second position, the position that weighing and measuring is a part of the scientific procedure, we are face to face with the second ambiguity. Kuyper argues for the commonness of the territories on the ground of their interpretative insignificance. It is because of the *externality*

of weighing and measuring, and it is because of the *formality* of logic, that the three territories are said to be common to believer and non-believer. We are to hold, according to Kuyper's argument, that, where sin has not changed the metaphysical situation, the difference between believer and unbeliever need not be brought to the fore. This is, in effect, to say that, to the extent that the objective situation has not changed, the subjective change need not be taken into account. To point out the ambiguity in the argument is, therefore, at the same time to point out its invalidity.

What do we mean when we say that the metaphysical situation has changed because of sin? What do we mean when we say that even after the Fall man is a rational and moral creature still? We surely do not mean to deny total depravity. Accordingly there is no sinner who, unless regenerated, does not actually seek to interpret himself and the universe without God. The natural man uses his logical powers to describe the facts of creation as though these facts existed apart from God. He has rejected the common mandate. It is therefore in conjunction with the sinner's subjective alienation from God, as a limiting concept merely, that we can speak of anything as not having been destroyed by sin. In the interpretative endeavor the "objective situation" can never be abstracted from the "subjective situation". If we do abstract it, we fall back on the Scholastic position. We may then say with Étienne Gilson, the Roman Catholic, that Aristotle by the use of natural reason can think of a God, "one first being, the supreme principle and cause of nature, the source of all intelligibility, of all order, and of all beauty, who eternally leads a life of happiness, because, being thought itself, it is an eternal contemplation of its own thought" who yet must be *the* God "precisely because there is no other" God. (*Christianity and Philosophy*, pp. 35 f.).

No valid answer can be given the Scholastics by the device of reducing the area of commonness to ever smaller proportions. Any area of commonness, that is, any area of commonness without qualification however small, is a justification for larger areas of commonness, till at last there is but one common area. The only valid answer to the Roman Catholic is to say that in the whole of the area of interpretative en-

deavor the subjective difference makes its influence felt. Weighing and measuring and formal reasoning are but aspects of one unified act of interpretation. It is either the would-be autonomous man, who weighs and measures what he thinks of as brute or bare facts by the help of what he thinks of as abstract impersonal principles, or it is the believer, knowing himself to be a creature of God, who weighs and measures what he thinks of as God-created facts by what he thinks of as God-created laws. Looking at the matter thus allows for legitimate coöperation with non-Christian scientists; it allows for an "as if" coöperation. Looking at the matter thus allows for a larger "common" territory than Kuyper allows for, but this larger territory is common with a qualification. Looking at the matter thus allows us to do full justice to "antithesis", which Kuyper has taught us to stress. It keeps us from falling into a sort of natural theology, patterned after Thomas Aquinas, that Kuyper has taught us to reject. If we are to hold to a doctrine of common grace that is true to Scripture, we shall need to build it up after we have cut ourselves clear of Scholasticism.

2. Bavinck

We turn now to the great work of Bavinck on Systematic theology, his *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*. We observe at once that he is much concerned to point out that there is only one principle, according to which we are to set forth man's knowledge of God. He avows this in definite opposition to the scholastic position. There is a natural theology that is legitimate. It is such a theology as, standing upon the basis of faith and enlightened by Scripture, finds God in nature. But Rome's natural theology, he argues, is illegitimate. Its natural theology is attained by the natural reason without reference to Scripture. Against such a position Bavinck firmly asserts that theology must be built upon the Scriptures only. There must be only one principle in theology. "Even if there is a knowledge of God through nature, this does not mean that there are two principles in dogmatics. Dogmatics has only one *principium externum*, namely, the Scriptures, and only one *principium internum*, namely, the believing reason" (*op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 74).

Bavinck has not always lived up to this conception. When he develops the principles which should control science (*ibid.*, pp. 214 ff.), he adopts a moderate realism. He does this, to some extent at least, by accepting what he calls the good of empiricism and what he calls the good of rationalism, and dropping the evil of both. That is to say, the criticism he makes of rationalism might be made and has been made by non-Christian realists, and the criticism he makes of empiricism might be made and has been made by non-Christian rationalists. Against the rationalist he argues that all men are naturally realists (*ibid.*, p. 217), and that rationalism is bound to be stranded on the fact of plurality (*ibid.*, p. 218). Against the empiricist he argues that all science must begin with unproved assumptions that have not been derived from experience (*ibid.*, p. 222), and that science, in the nature of the case, is interested in the "general, the necessary and the eternal, the logical, the idea" (*idem*). But, we object, the abstract principles of rationalism are not made concrete by bringing them into relation with the brute facts of empiricism, and the brute facts of empiricism are not made accessible by bringing them into relation with the abstract principles of rationalism. When Bavinck gives the distinguishing marks of the realism that he thinks theology needs for its foundation, he says no more than that against empiricism it maintains a certain independence of the intellect, and that against rationalism it maintains a dependence of the intellect upon sensation (*ibid.*, p. 228). Accordingly, he does not make a thorough break with Scholasticism. His criticism of Scholasticism is at points little more than a matter of degree. "The fault of Scholasticism, both Protestant and Catholic, lay only in this, that it had done too quickly with observation, and that it thought almost exclusively of the confession as taken up into the books of Euclid, Aristotle, and the Church fathers" (*ibid.*, p. 229). The net result is that the moderate realism of Bavinck is not a specifically Christian position, obtained by the only legitimate principle of theology of which he has spoken. Bavinck himself tells us that the only reason why we may hold our thought of reality about us to be correct in what it says is that back of our thought, and of the world about us, is the Logos (*ibid.*, p. 235). But if this is

true, no moderate realism based on a combination of rationalism and empiricism can afford a basis for theology. Bavinck has not kept this point in mind in the construction of the general principles of his epistemology.

In consonance with his manner of derivation of a moderate realism is his manner of handling the question of the unknowability of God. The second volume of his Dogmatics begins with the sentence: "Mystery is the life of all dogmatics". The revelation of the infinite God to the finite creature, he points out, cannot be exhaustive of the being of God. God is incomprehensible. Here Bavinck should have distinguished more clearly the incomprehensibility of God from the non-Christian notion of mystery. The Christian and the non-Christian notions of mystery are as the poles apart. The Christian notion rests on the presupposition of the existence of the self-contained ontological trinity of God, who dwells in light that no man can approach unto. The non-Christian notion rests on the assumption of the existence of would-be autonomous man who has not yet exhaustively interpreted the realms of ultimate chance. The Greeks held to the latter notion. The very notion of God, as Aristotle held to it, is obtained by abstraction till a final empty concept is reached. In Aristotle's case it is the emptiest of empty negations that is decorated with the name of God.

Yet for all that, Bavinck sometimes speaks as though the concept of the incomprehensibility of God entertained by Christian theology and that entertained by pagan philosophy were virtually the same (*ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 10 ff.). Greek philosophy, he says, has frequently taught the incomprehensibility of God (*ibid.*, p. 8). *This* incomprehensibility, he says, was made the starting-point and foundation thought of Christian theology (*ibid.*, p. 10). Scholastic theology at its best has made the same confession (*ibid.*, p. 14). "The Reformation-theology has wrought no change in this" (*idem*). When "this truth of the unknowability of God" was forgotten by theology, modern philosophy brought it to remembrance (*ibid.*, p. 16).

It may be contended by some that in all this Bavinck is simply recounting history; that he is merely stating what has been and not what ought to be. But this can scarcely be

maintained. Bavinck certainly considers himself a follower of the Reformation theology. Moreover, when he sets forth the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God positively, he begins by saying: "To a remarkable degree this doctrine of the unknowability of God can be approved and accepted with gratitude" (*ibid.*, p. 23). Scripture and the church have, as it were, says Bavinck, accepted the premises of agnosticism and have been, even more deeply than Kant or Spencer, impressed with the limitations of man and the greatness of God (*ibid.*, p. 24). Bavinck then points out that the church has refused to accept the conclusions of agnosticism. By revelation man can truly know something of God.

Even in his constructive section then, Bavinck still speaks as though the only difference between the Christian and the non-Christian notions of the incomprehensibility of God were a matter of degree. This is the negative concomitant of the "moderate realism" obtained in part by Christian, and in part by non-Christian, principles of reasoning.

After what has been said, we are not surprised at Bavinck's manner of handling the "theistic proofs". Having set them forth with fulness, he bewails the fact that they are spoken of as proofs. They should, he says, rather be thought of as testimonies. "Weak as proofs, they are strong as testimonies" (*ibid.*, p. 73). They are not to be taken as arguments that compel the unbeliever to believe in God. Taken individually they can be attacked (apparently he means that they can be refuted) at every point, and tend to obstruct the spontaneity of faith. "Taken cumulatively they enable us to see Him as the divine being that must of necessity be thought by us, and must of necessity be thought of as existing, that is, the only, first, absolute cause of all creatures, that self-consciously and teleologically rules all things and that above all reveals Himself in conscience as the Holy one to whosoever believes" (*idem*). By means of them the believer can give himself an account of his own religious and ethical consciousness. They are as weapons to the believer by which he may defend himself against the unbeliever who "in any case has no better weapons than he" (*idem*).

In his little book on *The Certainty of Faith*, Bavinck speaks in a similar vein. The "proofs", he says, enable the believer

to defend himself against attack on the part of science "and show that there is as much and usually much more to say for the position of faith than for the position of unbelief" (*De Zekerheid des Geloofs* (1930), p. 64). These proofs may be unable to persuade men to faith, he adds, yet faith may accept their service, inasmuch as faith could not exist if the un-historical character of the Christian revelation could be established (*ibid.*, p. 65).

It appears anew from this treatment of the "proofs" that Bavinck has not altogether cut himself loose from non-Christian forms of reasoning. The proofs, as historically stated, are based upon the assumption that the non-Christian mode of reasoning is the only possible mode of reasoning. Would-be autonomous man sets for himself the ideal of universal comprehension in knowledge. Accordingly he speaks of a universal validity to which every rational being will readily agree. If he could establish this universal validity, every rational creature should be willing and able to accept his conclusions. Not being able by these "proofs" to establish universal validity for the existence of God, these proofs have somewhat less value, but are still probably, and to an extent, correct. Such is the usual procedure in handling these proofs. Bavinck's position has failed to show that this procedure is basically mistaken. He virtually admits that the ideal of science is abstract universal validity, which every rational creature should be able and willing to accept. He finds the difference between scientific certainty and the certainty of faith in that the former demands universal acceptance while the latter does not. "Scientific certainty rests on grounds which are acceptable to all rational creatures, and whose validity can be shown to every creature gifted with rationality" (*ibid.*, p. 26). Religious certainty rests on revelation. "In this respect then, scientific certainty is in reality more general and stronger than that which is obtained by faith" (*idem*). On the other hand, Bavinck admits that scientific certainty depends upon future inquiry which may disprove that which has been thus far believed. "The certainty of faith must therefore be of a different nature from scientific certainty. For scientific certainty, however solid and dependable, always retains this character, that it rests on the reason-

ing of men and that it can be overthrown by later and better research" (*idem*). In science we are satisfied with human certainty but in religion we need divine certainty (*ibid.*, p. 56). Speaking of the proofs and their value he argues that they are limited in their application, inasmuch as only a few men are able to employ them. Then he adds: "In addition to this they may at any moment be invalidated entirely or in part by further investigation and deeper reflection" (*ibid.*, p. 66).

This position of Bavinck, it will be noted, is very similar to the old Princeton position, and both are very similar to the Scholastic position. There are differences in degree between these three positions, but they agree in holding that all reasoning about Christian theism must be done on "common" ground. It is difficult to distinguish the position of Bavinck from that of Gilson, whom we have already quoted as saying that natural reason can, with some probability, establish the existence of a God, whom we must then believe to be *the* God because there is no other. For all his effort to the contrary, Bavinck sometimes seems to offer us a natural theology of a kind similar to that offered by the church of Rome. The difficulty here is the same in nature as that which we have already noted in the case of Kuyper.

We cannot believe that the position of Bavinck on the theistic proofs is in line with the spirit of Calvin's *Institutes*. Calvin argues throughout his first book that men *ought* to believe in God, because there is, and has been from the beginning of time, an abundance of evidence of His existence and of His character. There is objective evidence in abundance and it is sufficiently clear. Men *ought*, if only they reasoned rightly, to come to the conclusion that God exists. That is to say, if the theistic proof is constructed as it ought to be constructed, it is objectively valid, whatever the attitude of those to whom it comes may be. To be constructed rightly, theistic proof ought to presuppose the ontological trinity and contend that, unless we may make this presupposition, all human predication is meaningless. The words "cause", "purpose", and "being", used as universals in the phenomenal world, could not be so used with meaning unless we may presuppose the self-contained God. If the matter is put this way one argument is as sound as the other. In fact, then, each

argument involves the others. Nor is any one of the arguments then at any point vulnerable. And future research cannot change their validity.

If this be correct, we cannot say that the Christian may use these arguments as witnesses, though not as proofs. If they are constructed as all too often they have been constructed, they are neither proofs nor witnesses. Nor can we seek to defend our position with an argument which we really admit to be of doubtful validity. And it is out of accord with the idea of Paul, and of Paul's follower, Calvin, who stress the point that the created universe everywhere speaks of God, to say that the Christian position is at least as defensible as other positions. We ought to find small comfort in the idea that others too, for example, non-Christian scientists, have to make assumptions. We ought rather to maintain that we are not in the position in which others are. We all make assumptions, but we alone do not make false assumptions. The fact that all make assumptions is in itself a mere psychological and formal matter. The question is as to who makes the right assumptions or presuppositions. On this point there ought to be no doubt.

We must, accordingly, frankly challenge the Roman Catholic notion that the natural man knows truly of God. And we should challenge the procedure by which the natural theology of Rome is obtained. We shall need to deny that true scientific certainty is something that can be demonstrated to every rational creature. True scientific certainty, no less than true religious certainty, must be based upon the presupposition of the ontological trinity. Both forms of certainty are psychological phenomena and as such are experiences of the human being. But both forms of certainty need the same foundation if they are to be true. We shall need to challenge the possibility of either science or theology on any but a Christian foundation.

We need only to do what Bavinck has elsewhere told us to do in the matter of natural theology. He tells us that man cannot understand nature aright unless he places himself squarely upon Scripture. "For that reason it is a wrong method if the Christian in his handling of the *theologia naturalis* does, as it were, without Scripture and the illumina-

tion of the Holy Spirit . . ." The Christian must stand with both feet upon the bed-rock of special revelation in his study of nature. That is, we believe, the real position of Bavinck, but he has not been fully true to it (*Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, I, p. 205).

There is one further aspect of Bavinck's thought to which brief reference must be made.

When discussing what Bavinck says on the theistic proofs we dealt with what he calls the *cognitio Dei acquisita*. We would now add a word about what he says on the *cognitio Dei insita*. It is here that the question of the relation between the objective revelational and the subjective interpretational is most difficult. The two are found in such close proximity to one another that they are likely to be intermingled unless we make careful distinctions.

The question to be considered here is that of the *κοινὰ ἐννοιαί*, the *notiones impressae*, the *cogitationes insitae*. It is but natural that Roman Catholic theology, which holds that the natural reason can discover certain truths about God, should hold that there are ideas about God that are wholly common to the believer and the non-believer. Gilson expresses this point of view when he argues that we can discover the same truths that Aristotle discovered, by the same reason unaided by special revelation. Gilson further argues that Calvin, in holding to an "impression of divinity" or "common notion" or "innate idea" or "religious aptitude" in man, and in saying that "experience" attests the fact that God has placed in all men an innate seed of religion, virtually holds to the same position as that to which the Roman Catholic holds. He thinks the Calvinist faces an antinomy in connection with his view on this point: "At first sight, it would seem that there could not be a better solution. But it is still true that this knowledge is confronted by the problem just as certainly as is the rational certitude which the Thomistic proofs of the existence of God claim to attain. Either it is a natural certitude, in which the right to criticize the Catholic position to suppress pure philosophy is lost; or it is a supernatural certitude, in which case it would become impossible to find a place for that natural knowledge of God, which is exactly what one was pretending to conserve" (*Christianity*

and *Philosophy*, p. 41). The question now is whether the innate knowledge of which Bavinck speaks is of such a nature as to be able to escape the dilemma before which Gilson places the Calvinistic position. We believe Gilson is fair enough in demanding that Reformed theology shall come to a self-conscious defense of its notion of natural theology in general. It cannot fairly limit itself to *diminishing the area* or *reducing somewhat the value* of the natural theology of Roman Catholic theology. As long as the natural theology of the Reformed theologian is still the same in kind as that of the Roman Catholic theologian, he will find it difficult to escape the dilemma with which Gilson confronts it.

Now both Kuyper and Bavinck, following Calvin, insist again and again that we shall break with the natural theology of Rome. They insist that a true natural theology is a frank interpretation of nature by means of the principle of interpretation that is taken from Scripture. But we have noted that both Kuyper and Bavinck are, to an extent, untrue to their own principles. Neither of them has been able to cut himself quite loose from a non-Christian methodology. Both allow, to a certain extent, the legitimacy of the idea of brute facts of Empiricism and the idea of abstract universals of Rationalism. This, as noted in the case of Bavinck, makes for allowing a certain truth value to the theistic arguments, even though they are constructed along rationalistic-irrationalistic lines. Will we find something similar in his construction of the "common notions", the subjective counterpart to the theistic proofs?

To answer this question we do well to take careful note of a distinction of which we have spoken only in passing. It is the distinction between the psychological and the epistemological. If there be such things as "common notions", psychologically speaking, it does not follow that there are such things as "common notions", epistemologically speaking. Bavinck points to the fact that God's revelation is everywhere. That is to say, it is within man as well as in nature. "There is no atheistic world, there are no atheistic peoples, and there are no atheistic men" (*Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, II, p. 30). When Bavinck says that there are no atheistic peoples and no atheistic men, we must be careful to understand this

psychologically and not epistemologically. All that may be meant, so far, is that God's revelation is present in the activity of man's mind as well as elsewhere. "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them." The revelation of God about and within may take the form of re-interpretation on the part of man. Paul speaks of the invisible things of God as being *clearly seen*. Whether we take this to mean simply that they are clearly apparent, or whether we take this to mean that because clearly apparent they have been clearly observed, we are still in the field of the revelational. We have not yet reached the point of ethical reaction. When Adam was first created, he thought upon the works of God, and by thinking upon them interpreted them. This interpretation was still revelational. To be sure, this revelational interpretation was accompanied in his case with an attitude of belief. After the fall of man the same revelational interpretation continued. But after the fall this revelational interpretation was invariably accompanied by an attitude of hostility. Paul tells us that knowing God, having engaged in interpretative activity, psychologically speaking, the heathen yet glorified Him not as God.

If then we are to avoid falling into a Roman Catholic type of natural theology, we shall need to make a sharp distinction between that which is merely psychological, and that which is epistemological in man's interpretative activity. For all the stress we need to place upon the invariable concomitancy of the merely psychological and the epistemological, we need to lay an equal stress upon the importance of the distinction. "Common notions" may be thought of as nothing more than revelation that comes to man through man. As an ethical subject man, after the fall, acts negatively with respect to this revelation. As made in the image of God no man can escape becoming the interpretative medium of God's general revelation both in his intellectual (Romans 1:20) and in his moral consciousness (Romans 2:14, 15). No matter which button of the radio he presses, he always hears the voice of God. Even when he presses the button of his own psychological self-conscious activity, through which as a last resort the sinner might hope to hear another voice, he still hears the voice of God. "If I make my bed in hell, behold,

thou art there." It is in this sense that we must, at least to begin with, understand the matter when we are told that there are no atheistic peoples and no atheistic men. Psychologically there are no atheistic men; epistemologically every sinner is atheistic. Has Bavinck kept this fact in mind?

Bavinck speaks of Cicero as saying that that on which all men agree, because of their common nature, cannot be wrong. Cicero no doubt meant that there is some basis of agreement between all men, epistemologically as well as psychologically. That is to say, for Cicero there was an area of common interpretation, however small, in which all men are epistemologically in agreement. It is on such notions as those of Cicero that Roman Catholic natural theology is built. Bavinck has not always kept this point in mind. When he speaks of Cicero, he fails to make the distinction between mere psychological commonness and epistemological agreement. Moreover, he virtually contends that there is an epistemological as well as a mere psychological agreement when he adds that there is not so much difference of opinion among men about the existence as about the nature of God (*ibid.*, p. 31). This distinction between the essence and the being of God fits in with Rome's natural theology. It does not fit in, we believe, with a Reformed conception of natural theology. To make a distinction between the bare *that* and the *what* is unintelligible in any field. We cannot intelligently speak of something and afterward determine what we have been speaking of. We may grow in clarity with respect to that of which we have been speaking, but we cannot speak of something that has no delineation whatsoever in our minds. Then, too, Paul tells us, in effect, that the voice of the *true* God, the only existent God, is everywhere present. He does not, to be sure, say that this God is present in the fulness of His revelation. Yet it is the true God, *the* God, not *a* God, that is everywhere to be heard, whatever button we may press. It is the *what* not merely the *that*, of God's existence that the heathen find impressed upon them. To this *what* they, willingly or not, give interpretative expression, thereby increasing the pressure of God's requirements upon their ethical powers of reaction.

We shall do well then to be careful with such notions as divinity *überhaupt*. That is in itself an empty concept. To

say that there are no atheists, strictly speaking, because no one denies divinity *überhaupt*, is to prepare the ground for an easy descent into the natural theology of Rome. We should rather say that there are no atheistic men because no man can deny the revelational activity of the true God within him. Atheists are those who kick against the pricks of the revelation of the true God within them. To be an atheist one need not deny divinity *überhaupt*.

Bavinck, however, seems to attribute too much value to belief in the existence of abstractions. In the same vein in which he reasons against the rationalists by the help of the empiricists he also argues against the innate ideas of the rationalists. A natural theology that is built upon the idea that man has within himself the information that he needs, he says, is utterly objectionable (*ibid.*, p. 47). But this, he adds, is only one side of the story. "Every science presupposes general principles which exist in their own right. All knowledge rests upon faith. All proof presupposes, in the last analysis, an *ἀρχὴ ἀποδείξεως*. There are logical, mathematical, philosophical, ethical and thus also religious and theological principles, which are, to be sure, very general and abstract, but which are accepted by all men in all ages and which have a character of naturalness and necessity. The laws of thought are the same for all; the doctrine of numbers is everywhere the same; the distinction between good and bad is known to all; there is no people without religion and knowledge of God. This is not to be explained otherwise than by the acceptance of *principia per se nota, κοινὰ ἔννοια, veritates aeternae*, which are imprinted naturally on the human spirit. In the case of religion we must always, whether we will or no, come back to the idea of a *semen religionis*, a *sensus divinitatis*, an *instinctus divinus*, a *cognitio insita*" (*idem*). Scripture tells us, says Bavinck, that man is made in the image of God, that in his *νοῦς* he has the capacity to see God in his works, and that the works of the law are written in his heart (*idem*). Rightly understood, says Bavinck, the idea of *κοινὰ ἔννοια* means: "That man has both the *potentia* (*aptitudo, vis, facultas*) and the inclination (*habitus, dispositio*) so that in the course of normal development and in the midst of the environment in which God has given him

life, he may of his own accord without compulsion, without scientific argumentation and proof, *ἐμφύτως και ἀδιδάκτως*, arrive at some solid, certain undoubted knowledge of God" (*ibid.*, p. 48). In a case of normal development every man must come to such knowledge. "As a man, opening his eyes, sees the sun and in its light sees the objects of the world about him, so man must, in accordance with his nature, when he hears that there is a God, that there is a difference between good and evil, etc., give his consent to these truths. He cannot avoid it. He accepts these truths involuntarily, without force or proof because they stand in their own right" (*ibid.*, p. 49).

In all this there has been a wavering between a Christian and a non-Christian concept of natural theology. On the one hand Bavinck comes back to the point that the true God has not left himself without a witness anywhere, and has spoken to man even through the depth of his self-conscious activity. The last sentence in the whole section is "It is God himself, who has not left Himself without a witness to every man". If the *κοινὰ ἔννοιαι* were consistently explained along this line, we should come to the distinction between the psychological and the epistemological. We should then argue that *the* God, the only true God, has spoken to man from the beginning and everywhere. There are then no atheists in the sense that no one has been able to suppress this revelation of the true God within him and round about him. On the other hand, Bavinck works with the distinction between the existence and the nature of God. In consonance with this distinction he then speaks about universal principles. He says that on the basis of the idea of *κοινὰ ἔννοιαι* every man when he hears that there is *a* god, and when he hears that there is a difference between good and evil, must give his assent to *these truths*. But how can Bavinck say that formal abstractions, such as the existence of *a* God and the idea of difference between good and evil as purely formal statement, are *truths*? They are in themselves the emptiest of forms and as such utterly meaningless. If they are to be spoken of as having content — and Bavinck speaks of them as such when he says they are truths — the question must be faced whence this content comes. If it comes from the revelation of God, if the revelation that there is *a* God comes from *the*

God, if the idea of the *that* is to have its significance given it because it comes from the *what* of God's revelation, then we can not say that all men by nature will accept it, and as a consequence have a certain amount of true information about God. Man by his sinful nature hates the revelation of God. Therefore every concrete expression that any sinner makes about God will have in it the poisoning effect of this hatred of God. His epistemological reaction will invariably be negative, and negative along the whole line of his interpretative endeavor. There are no general principles or truths about the true God — and that is the only God with whom any man actually deals — which he does not falsify. The very idea of the existence of abstract truths is a falsification of the knowledge of the true God that every sinner involuntarily finds within himself.

Taken in its entirety, the section dealing with the *cognitio Dei insita* has not escaped the ambiguity that we found in Bavinck's general treatment of the *principia* in science, in his conception of mystery, and in his conception of the theistic proofs. It is the same ambiguity throughout that meets us. And it is the same ambiguity that we have found in Kuyper. These men have certainly led the way in modern times in the direction of working out a truly Protestant theology. But they have not quite had the courage to go consistently along the path they have marked out for us. There are elements of abstract reasoning in their procedure that lead to a natural theology which is not consistently set over against the natural theology of Rome at every point. When they deal with the objective aspect of the matter, that is with the revelational question, they cater, to some extent, to the idea of a probability position. This probability position is the result of seeking for truth in the abstract way, combining impersonal principles with brute facts. When they deal with the subjective aspect of the matter, with the *common ideas*, they do not make a clear-cut, ringing distinction between that which is psychologically revelational and that which is epistemologically interpretative.

(to be concluded)

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COMMON GRACE

THIRD ARTICLE

CORNELIUS VAN TIL

3. Hepp

Hepp has offered us a well-worked out discussion of Reformed epistemology. His book in which he does so is called *Het Testimonium Spiritus Sancti*. In the first volume he deals with what he calls the general testimony of the Spirit. It is to be followed by another, in which he is to deal with the special testimony of the Spirit.

Hepp wants to build on what Bavinck and other Reformed theologians have done. In modern times Bavinck has come nearer than any one else to teaching a general testimony of the Spirit. But even he did not mention it by name. He only prepared the way for the idea (*op. cit.*, I, p. 98). When we come to the definitely constructive portion of Hepp's work, the argument he presents runs somewhat as follows. As the special testimony of the Spirit testifies within us to the truth of Scripture, so the general testimony of the Spirit testifies within us to truth in general (*ibid.*, p. 140). The whole of the world about us is a manifestation of the truths of God. It is the Spirit's task to set forth the fulness of this revelation before the eyes of men. This may be called the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti externum*. This external testimony reveals to man; but to this must be added the internal testimony to assure men of the truth of this revelation. "Why? All revelation takes place by way of means. This is always true whether or not the revelation pertain to God or to created things. God never reveals Himself directly to us, but always through something that stands between Him and our ego. If not we should need to be able to look into the very essence of God,

we should need to be fitted for a *visio Dei per essentiam*" (*ibid.*, p. 147). Revelation as such cannot give us certainty. If we had nothing but revelation, says Hepp, we should be compelled to believe in the objects on their own account. We should therefore rather say that the objects are but messengers of the Holy Spirit. Absolute certainty I, as a creature, can obtain only when the Holy Spirit, quite independently of the objects themselves, makes me believe that their revelation brings the truth to me. And that takes place when I receive the *testimonium generale internum* (*ibid.*, p. 148). This, says Hepp, is the essence of the testimony of the Spirit. It assures but does not reveal. It assures me of the truth of the revelation about me.

This general testimony, however, does not assure me of all truth. It assures me of central truths only (*ibid.*, p. 149). These several truths do not relate to one another as members of a hierarchy. They are relatively independent of one another (*ibid.*, p. 151). There are three groups of central truths, those pertaining to God, those pertaining to man, and those pertaining to the world.

In connection with the truths pertaining to God, Hepp then discusses the value of the theistic proofs. His thought here is very similar to that of Bavinck. These proofs, he argues, put into set formulas that which comes to us from the cosmos as a whole. They press with power upon our consciousness, but cannot give us certainty (*ibid.*, p. 153). General revelation, which is, as it were, concentrated in these proofs, would lead to a guess if it were not for the testimony of the Spirit (*idem*). Hepp is most insistent that we shall keep the two concepts, revelation and assurance, rigidly apart. Even in paradise Adam could not have lived by revelation as such. Without the general testimony there would have been uncertainty. Now doubt is sin, and in paradise there was no sin. We must therefore hold that even in paradise there was, in addition to general revelation, the general internal testimony of the Spirit to that revelation.

The second group of general truths centers about man. How is man to be certain of his self-existence? Only by the general internal testimony of the Spirit. How does man know that he can depend on his senses, on the axioms of his thought,

and on the norms of his moral and aesthetic appreciation? Only by the general internal testimony of the Spirit (*ibid.*, p. 155).

The third group of central truths deals with the world. This world presents itself as working according to *prima principia*. How do I know that this is true? Only by the general internal testimony of the Spirit (*ibid.*, p. 156).

Thus the general internal testimony of the Spirit may be said to be the foundation of all science, religion, morality, and art (*idem*).

We come now to the most pivotal point of all. "From the marriage of the general testimony and revelation (here taken in its wide signification of God-revelation, man-revelation, and cosmos-revelation) *faith* is born. Wherever the internal testimony attests to the external testimony, man cannot withhold his assent. And faith always consists of giving assent by means of one's reason to some witness or other" (*ibid.*, p. 157). Hepp calls this faith *fides generalis*. He says that modern philosophy has, quite generally, allowed for this *fides generalis* (*ibid.*, pp. 158 ff.). Yet, he adds, there is a difference, even a great difference, between the faith of modern philosophy and the general faith as we should hold to it (*ibid.*, p. 161). For the modern philosopher, faith is, he says, after all, second to knowledge. For Christianity, on the other hand, faith offers far greater certainty than does science. "As for certainty knowledge cannot stand in the shadow of the *fides generalis*. For this rests on higher than subjective and objective grounds, on a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, on the testimony of God in the heart of every man" (*idem*).

Now it is because of this *fides generalis*, resulting from the marriage of revelation and the general testimony, that men accept the general truths with respect to God, man, and the world. "Taken generally mankind does not deny the central truths. By far the greater majority of men recognize a higher power above themselves and do not doubt the reality within and beyond themselves" (*ibid.*, p. 165). Here we reach the climax of the whole matter. There are central truths to which the generality of mankind, because of the irresistible power of the Spirit's internal general testimony, must of necessity give their consent.

Our criticism of this position of Hepp will, quite naturally, be similar to that which we have made of Bavinck. As long as he is unwilling to argue along exclusively Christian lines, Hepp is unable to escape making concessions to a Roman type of natural theology. He makes many valuable negative criticisms against rationalism and empiricism. But he is not fully conscious, it seems, of the fact that even a negative criticism of non-Christian positions, must be undertaken from the presupposition of the Christian position. Hepp cannot effectively oppose the natural theology of Rome if he argues against it with the methods of a scholastic type of natural theology. He apparently has two methods of reasoning against false philosophies: one based on neutral premises, and, then, an additional one based on Christian premises (*ibid.*, p. 133).

When Hepp deals with the "theistic proofs" he, like Bavinck, attributes a certain value to them even when they are constructed along non-Christian lines. Hepp says that Kant underestimated the value of these arguments. In his whole discussion of the proofs Hepp allows that an argument based upon would-be neutral ground, can have a certain validity. Of these proofs, constructed on a neutral and therefore non-Christian basis, Hepp says that they cry day and night that God exists (*ibid.*, p. 153). To this we reply that they cry day and night that God does not exist. For, as they have been constructed, they cry that a finite God exists. Nothing more could come from the procedure on which they have been constructed. They have been constructed on the assumption that we as human beings may make our start from the finite world, as from something that is ultimate. They take for granted that we already know from our study of the phenomenal world the meaning of such words as "cause" and "being" and "purpose", whether or not we have referred this phenomenal world to God. To avoid a natural theology of the Roman sort, we shall need to come to something like a clear consciousness of the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian mode of argument with respect to the revelation of God in nature. God is, and has been from the beginning, revealed in nature and in man's own consciousness. We cannot say that the heavens *probably* declare the glory of God. We cannot allow that if rational argument is carried forth on

true premises, it should come to any other conclusion than that the true God exists. Nor can we allow that the certainty with respect to God's existence would be any less if acquired by a ratiocinative process rather than by intuitions, as long as man was not a sinner. The testimony of the Spirit may well be conceived as originally controlling Adam's reasoning powers as well as his intuitive powers. On the other hand, when man has become a sinner, his intuitive powers are as sinful as his reasoning powers. There may be more area for error in a sorites than in an intuition, but the corruption of sin has penetrated to every activity of man.

Thus the imperative necessity of introducing the distinction between the psychologically and the epistemologically interpretative, becomes again apparent. God still speaks in man's consciousness. Man's own interpretative activity, whether of the more or of the less extended type, whether in ratiocination or in intuition, is no doubt the most penetrating means by which the Holy Spirit presses the claims of God upon man. The argument for the existence of God and for the truth of Christianity is objectively valid. We should not tone down the validity of this argument to the probability level. The argument may be poorly stated, and may never be adequately stated. But in itself the argument is absolutely sound. Christianity is the only reasonable position to hold. It is not merely as reasonable as other positions, or a bit more reasonable than other positions; it alone is the natural and reasonable position for man to take. By stating the argument as clearly as we can, we may be the agents of the Spirit in pressing the claims of God upon men. If we drop to the level of the merely probable truthfulness of Christian theism, we, to that extent, lower the claims of God upon men. This is, we believe, the sense of Calvin's *Institutes* on the matter.

On the other hand, every man by his *sinful nature* seeks violently to suppress the voice of God that keeps on speaking within him through his *created nature*. One way sinful human nature has of suppressing the claims of God within itself, is by saying that the objective argument for the existence of God is of doubtful validity. Sinful human nature loves to speak of abstract principles of truth, goodness, and beauty. It loves to speak of a God because it hates *the* God.

If we take both the original human nature and the sinful human nature, and realize that everywhere both are active, we have done once for all with the natural theology of Rome. On the objective side we have done with it, inasmuch as we claim for the statement of the Christian position absolute validity. For science and philosophy, as well as for theology, we frankly take our basic presuppositions from Scripture. Scripture tells us that God, the God who has more fully revealed Himself in Scripture than in nature, is yet speaking to us in the created universe about us. Scripture says that *from the beginning* He has spoken there. It says that man has known this fact, and that by his efforts at perversion he has well-nigh succeeded in silencing the voice of revelation, but that deep down in his heart he is still aware of this revelation and will be held responsible for it. We must not lower these claims to the probability level. On the subjective side we have done with a Romanist type of natural theology, because we realize the sinful nature is everywhere active. There are no *capita communissima*, on which believers and non-believers can agree without a difference. There are no central truths on which all agree. The disagreement is fundamental and goes to the heart of the matter.

Thus we are no longer face to face with the dilemma with which Gilson confronts the Calvinist. As long as we seek refuge from Romanism by having less Romanism we shall not escape the sword of Gilson. To withdraw to the inner fortress of central truths, and make even these merely probable in the objective field, and to withdraw to the psychologically primitive (intuitions, *beseffen*) in the subjective field, helps matters not at all. Gilson will find us still. Quite rightly he asserts that the attenuations of language are of no help in this matter. If we speak of the sense of deity and of the seed of religion, and mean by that some degree of common epistemological response on the part of believer and non-believer, however small the area of agreement, and however primitive the nature of the response, Gilson has a right to confront us with his dilemma. The escape from the dilemma lies, we believe, as suggested, in doing what Kuyper and Bavinck and Hepp have all at one place or another told us to do, namely, offer an interpretation of life in its totality on the basis of the

principle Scripture offers. That principle is the ontological trinity. In answer to his challenge, we would tell Gilson that, unless he is willing with us to interpret nature and all things else in terms of the ontological trinity, he can get no meaning into human experience. The interpretations of the natural reason, made by the aid of abstract principles and brute facts can, in the nature of the case, lead with rationalism (Parmenides) into a universal validity that is empty of content, or with empiricism (Heraclitus) to a particularism that has no universality, or to a phenomenalism that is a compromise between these two positions and shares the weaknesses of both.

B. THE POSITIVE LINE OF CONCRETE THINKING

What has been said by way of criticism on the remnants of abstract thinking found in Kuyper, Bavinck, and Hepp has virtually suggested the direction of thought we would follow in approaching the question of common grace. The ontological trinity will be our interpretative concept everywhere. God is our concrete universal; in Him thought and being are coterminous, in Him the problem of knowledge is solved.

If we begin thus with the ontological trinity as our concrete universal, we frankly differ from every school of philosophy and from every school of science not merely in our conclusions, but in our starting-point and in our method as well. For us the facts are what they are, and the universals are what they are, because of their common dependence upon the ontological trinity. Thus, as earlier discussed, the facts are correlative to the universals. Because of this correlativity there is genuine progress in history; because of it the Moment has significance.

To make progress in our discussion we must, it seems, learn to take time more seriously than we have done. What does it mean to take time more seriously? It means, for one thing, to realize that we shall never have an exhaustive answer to the common grace problem. We have already made a good deal of the Christian concept of mystery. With all our admiration for Bavinck we yet found that he allowed himself to be influenced by the Greek ideal of the comprehension of God.

This ideal works havoc with true Reformed theology. Perhaps we may here learn anew from the greatest of theologians, John Calvin.

Calvin lays great stress upon the incomprehensible will of God. This is particularly the case in his treatise on the predestination of God. In replying to Pighius and Georgius he falls back on this point again and again. In the first section of the book Calvin gives the doctrine of election "a slight touch". But even in this "slight touch" he refers to Romans 9:20. Of it he says: "The apostle in this appeal adopts an axiom, or universal acknowledgement, which not only ought to be held fast by all godly minds, but deeply engraven in the breast of common sense; that the inscrutable judgment of God is deeper than can be penetrated by man" (*Calvin's Calvinism, First Part, A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God*, translated by Henry Cole, p. 32). When we must answer such as argue along the lines of Pighius, says Calvin, we ask whether there be "no justice of God, but that which is conceived of by us". When men cannot see a reason for the works of God they are immediately "prepared to appoint a day for entering into judgment with Him" (*idem*). "What do you really think of God's glorious Name? And will you vaunt that the apostle is devoid of all reason, because he does not drag God from His throne and set Him before you, to be questioned and examined" (*ibid.*, p. 33). Calvin steadfastly refuses to permit abstract universal ideas to rule God. We are to hold that the will of God, the will of the inscrutable God is "the highest rule of righteousness" (*idem*). God's will is to be set "above all other causes" (*ibid.*, p. 34). Men who follow "their own natural sense and understanding" appeal to abstract justice, "because they presume to subject the tribunal of God to their own judgment" (*idem*). We should rather rest content with the Word of God. May we keep our ears open to it and shut them to the voice of strangers (*ibid.*, p. 36).

The problem Calvin is discussing is that of predestination. The objection raised against the doctrine of predestination is, of course, that it condemns secondary causes to insignificance. Pighius, says Calvin, "knows not how to make the least distinction between *remote* and *proximate* causes!" (*ibid.*, p. 90). Pighius urges the full-bucket difficulty against Calvin's

insistence that God's counsel is the ultimate cause of whatever comes to pass (*ibid.*, p. 85). Calvin in turn insists that it is quite legitimate to urge man's sin as the proximate, and God's counsel as the ultimate, cause of man's final perdition (*ibid.*, p. 76). Does he think he can offer an explanation of the relation between the ultimate and the proximate cause that will satisfy the demands of a logic, such as Pighius employs? Not for a moment. He calls on Pighius to forsake his logic with its phenomenal foundation. "Pighius, on the contrary, begins his building from the earth's plain surface, without any foundation at all" (*ibid.*, p. 74). Pighius would ask why God created such natures as he knew would sin. Pighius knows how to employ a well-turned syllogism. There is no escaping the force of his objection. If God is the ultimate cause back of whatsoever comes to pass, Pighius can, on his basis, rightly insist that God is the cause of sin. Calvin knew this. He attempts no answer by means of a non-Christian methodology. With Augustine he would throw man back into the consideration of what he is, and what is the capacity of his mind (*ibid.*, p. 70). "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God". This is a reason for man and "all that is due him". That was Paul's answer and Augustine's answer. It is also Calvin's answer: "Paul comparing, as he here does, man with God, shows that the counsel of God, in electing and reprobating men, is without doubt more profound and more deeply concealed than the human mind can penetrate. Wherefore, O man, consider (as the apostle adviseth thee) who and what thou art, and concede more to God than the measure and compass of thine own nature" (*ibid.*, p. 71).

We are to remember, then, that on the question of the relation of God's counsel to what takes place in time "the wisdom of Christ is too high and too deep to come within the compass of man's understanding" (*ibid.*, p. 82). There is nothing "in the whole circle of spiritual doctrine which does not far surpass the capacity of man and confound its utmost reach" (*ibid.*). When such a subject as predestination is discussed "numberless unholy and absurd thoughts rush into the mind" (*ibid.*, p. 86). How shall we meet these unholy thoughts and arguments in ourselves and in others? We shall not meet them by trying to defend such doctrines on the basis of a

logic that assumes secondary causes to be ultimate causes. We shall not meet them on the basis of a logic that starts from brute facts, and handles them according to abstract universal principles. We shall meet them rather by offering the ontological trinity as our interpretative concept. This will at once lay us open to the charge of the full-bucket difficulty. We are not to be affrighted by the charge of holding the contradictory. "But I would repeat my being perfectly aware how much absurdity and irreconcilable contradiction these deep things seem to profane persons to carry with them" (*ibid.*, p. 88). We shall meet this charge of contradiction by asserting that we are the true defenders of the meaning of second causes. History has meaning just because God's counsel is back of it. Sin can be given as the reason for man's destruction just because men were "fitted for destruction", and faith can be given as a reason for man's final glory just because believers were "afore prepared unto glory". "Godly consciences" (*ibid.*, p. 93) need not be disturbed by the reasonings of rationalists, or irrationalists or rationalist-irrationalists. There is, in fact, a beautiful harmony between remote and proximate causes. The harmony exists — of that, faith is sure. Faith is reasonable — of that, faith is also sure. Faith alone is reasonable — of that, faith is once more sure. Faith abhors the really contradictory; to maintain the really contradictory is to deny God. Faith adores the apparently contradictory; to adore the apparently contradictory is to adore God as one's creator and final interpreter.

Says Calvin: "If, then, nothing can prevent a man from acknowledging that the first origin of his ruin was from Adam, and if each man finds the *proximate* cause of his ruin in himself, what can prevent our faith from acknowledging afar off, with all sobriety, and adoring, with all humility, that *remote* secret counsel of God by which the Fall of man was thus pre-ordained? And what should prevent the same faith from beholding, at the same time, the *proximate* cause within; that the whole human race is individually bound by the guilt and desert of eternal death, as derived from the person of Adam; and that all are in themselves, therefore, subject to death and to death eternal? Pighius, therefore, has not sundered, shaken

or altered (as he thought he had done) that pre-eminent and most beautiful symmetry with which these *proximate* and *remote* causes divinely harmonise!" (*ibid.*, p. 91). The "scholars of God", those who are "gifted, not with the spirit of this world, but with His own heavenly Spirit" may know the things freely given them by God (*ibid.*, pp. 96 f.); but they know them because they have learned to know their places as creatures before the incomprehensible God.

There can be little doubt that if Calvin's conception of mystery were more closely adhered to in our discussion of common grace, we should lose less time and energy in misunderstanding one another. The charges of rationalism and irrationalism that have been hurled back and forth would subside to a considerable extent if we all learned to think less along rationalist-irrationalist and more along Calvin's lines. Any tendency toward either rationalism or irrationalism lowers the genuine significance of history.

The imperative necessity of maintaining a clear-cut distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian conception of mystery in connection with any problem, and in particular with the common grace problem, may now become apparent. The common grace problem deals with this question: What do entities which will one day be wholly different from one another have in common before that final stage of separation is reached? We dare not expect to approach anything like a specific answer to this problem, so long as we allow our thinking to be controlled by abstractions. But abstractions will be with us as long as we do not distinguish clearly between the Christian and the non-Christian concept of mystery.

We have already observed that the invariable concomitant of confusing the two conceptions of mystery is the lowering of the claims for the objective validity of the Christian-theistic position. The theistic proofs are said to be objectively weak. They are said to be worth something but not a great deal. Our position as Christians is merely said to be objectively *at least as good* as the position of our enemies. The result will naturally be that we relieve the pressure of God's claims upon created man. We say to him that, as far as the objective evidence is concerned, he is living up to the requirements of the

case if he merely arrives at the existence of a God, at a divinity *überhaupt*. At least he need not feel that he is falling below the mark, if he is doubtful that the true God exists. Now apply this to man's moral attitude toward God. Both parties to the debate on common grace should be willing to agree that Adam and Eve had the requirements of God's law written on their hearts. We need not concern ourselves here with the distinction between the "works of the law" and the "law". We are not speaking now of man's ethical reaction to God. We are speaking only of God's revelational relationship to man. And on that point all should be equally anxious to maintain that God originally spoke plainly to man, both in the "book of nature" and in the "book of conscience". Wherever man would turn he saw the living God and His requirements. Whether he reasoned about nature or whether he looked within, whether it was the starry heavens above or the moral law within, both were equally insistent and plain that God, the true God, stood before him.

It should also be recognized that man was, from the outset, confronted with positive, as well as with natural, revelation. Dr. Vos speaks of this as pre-redemptive special revelation (*Notes on Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*). God walked and talked with man. Natural revelation must not be separated from this supernatural revelation. To separate the two is to deal with two abstractions instead of with one concrete situation. That is to say, natural revelation, whether objective or subjective, is in itself a limiting conception. It has never existed by itself so far as man is concerned. It cannot fairly be considered, therefore, as a fixed quantity, that can be dealt with in the same way at every stage of man's moral life. Man was originally placed before God as a covenant personality.

It is no doubt with this in mind that Calvin speaks of sinners as being *covenant-breakers* (*op. cit.*, p. 65). The phrase has come into common usage among Reformed theologians. Common as the usage of the phrase may be, however, the point we have made perhaps needs stressing. All too easily do we think of the covenant relation as quite distinct and independent of natural revelation. The two should be joined together. To speak of man's relation to God as being cove-

nantal at every point is merely to say that man deals with the personal God everywhere. Every manipulation of any created fact is, as long as man is not a sinner, a covenant-affirming activity. Every manipulation of any fact, as soon as man is a sinner, is a covenant-breaking activity.

In this connection a word may be said about the question already touched upon as to whether any conclusions may be drawn about the attitude of God from observation of facts. In Schilder's discussion of the proof texts adduced by the Christian Reformed Church Synod of 1924, he speaks from time to time about "facts as such". From the "facts as such", he warns, we are not to conclude any such thing as an attitude of God toward the reprobate. "Beware, that you do not separate the facts from faith" (*De Reformatie*, Nov. 10, 1939. See also *The Standard Bearer*, Vols. XV and XVI). The point comes up again and again. As over against a Romanising type of natural theology this warning of Schilder is no doubt in order. And we have observed that as Reformed theologians we have not yet outgrown Rome's natural theology entirely. We have already criticized the idea of brute fact. But there is another side to the story.

If there are no brute facts, if brute facts are mute facts, it must be maintained that all facts are revelational of the true God. If facts may not be separated from faith, neither may faith be separated from facts. Every created fact must therefore be held to express, to some degree, the attitude of God to man. Not to maintain this is to fall back once again into a natural theology of a Roman Catholic sort. For it is to hold to the idea of brute fact after all. And with the idea of brute fact goes that of neutral reason. A fact not revelational of God is revelational only of itself.

Schilder tells us, further, that the attitude of God is revealed only to the extent that we know of the will of His eternal counsel. He speaks of this in connection with the story of the sons of Eli. In God's final purpose he has determined to slay the sons of Eli. Yet Eli is told to tell his sons that God desires not their death. "The father Eli may, and must say to his sons: be converted, ye children of Eli, for Jehovah desires not your death; that is the revealed will, the command, which you are to obey. He hates sin. But in addition to this

we are informed afterwards, that as far as the secret will of God is concerned, Jehovah did desire their death as just punishment; in part because of this they harden themselves against warning; inasmuch as wickedness is punishment as well as pollution. And in this hidden will it is that the *attitude of God* appears" (*De Reformatie*, Nov. 17, 1939).

Should Schilder wish to generalize the point he makes with respect to the sons of Eli, he would end up with the notion of brute fact. To set the problem before us as clearly as possible, we do well to think of it in connection with Adam in paradise. Would it be possible to maintain that only by the later revelation of God's final purpose could anything be known of His attitude toward man? Then Adam would at the beginning have known nothing of God's attitude toward him. No revelation of God's final purpose had yet been made. The whole future, as far as Adam's knowledge was concerned, was conditioned by his obedience or disobedience. But if this act of obedience or disobedience was to have any significance, it had to be obedience or disobedience with respect to God, whom he knew. His moral act could not be action in a void. He knew something of God and of God's attitude toward him without any unconditional revelation about God's final purpose.

We must go further than this. Man was originally created good. That is to say, there was, as a matter of fact, an ethical reaction on the part of man, and this ethical action was approved by God. It may be said that God created man with a good nature, but that the test was still to come as to whether he would voluntarily live in accord with this good nature. But surely Adam could not live for a second without acting morally. The "good nature" of Adam cannot be taken otherwise than as a limiting concept. The objective and the subjective aspects were correlative of one another. Further still, the decisive representative act was still to come. Granted that Adam's nature was an active nature, this active nature itself must be taken as a limiting concept in relation to the decisive ethical reaction that was to take place in connection with the probationary command. This goes to prove that the representative act of obedience or disobedience presupposed for its possibility the revelational character of everything

created. It goes to prove, further, that man's *good* ethical reaction must be taken as an aspect of that revelatory character of everything created. To be sure, this good reaction was not the consummated good that shall be attained in the case of those that will be in glory. Yet it was a good ethical reaction. It was good not so much in a *lower* sense as in an *earlier* sense.

The importance of stressing the idea of the *earlier* and the *later*, needs to be insisted on. We know, of course, that in God's mind there are those that are reprobate and those that are elect. This fact being revealed to us, we know that some men will be finally rejected and some men will be finally accepted. And there is no dispute as to what is the ultimate cause with respect to this difference. Both parties to the debate are with Calvin, as over against Pighius, heartily agreed that God's counsel is the ultimately determinative factor. But the difference obtains with respect to the meaning of the historical. And here the problem is, more specifically, to what extent we should allow our notion of the earlier to be controlled by our notion of the later. We think that the notion of the earlier must be stressed more than has been done heretofore.

If we make the earlier our point of departure for the later, we begin with something that believers and unbelievers have in common. That is to say, they have something in common because they do not yet exist. Yet they do exist. They exist in Adam as their common representative. They have seen the testimony of God in common. They have given a common good ethical reaction to this testimony, the common mandate of God. They are all mandate-hearers and covenant-keepers. God's attitude to all is the same. God has a favorable attitude to all. He beheld all the works of His hands and, behold, they were good. God was pleased with them.

But this favorable attitude of God to this early common perfect nature must be taken as correlative to the representative moral act of Adam. We may and must hold that every fact was revelational. Every fact was the bearer of a requirement. But, even as such, it was expressive of a favorable attitude of God to man. *Without all this the ethical act of representation would have to take place in a void.* At the same

time, this original situation was an historically unfinished situation. It required further ethical action as its correlative. The continuance of the situation required, on the part of man, the representative affirmation of God as God. And this correlativity implied that the situation would, in any case, be changed. Whether Adam was to obey or to disobey, the situation would be changed. And thus God's attitude would be changed.

We need at this point to be fearlessly anthropomorphic. Our basic interpretative concept, the doctrine of the ontological trinity, demands of us that we should be so. We have met the full-bucket difficulty by asserting that history has meaning, not in spite of, but because of, the counsel of God who controls whatsoever comes to pass. From the point of view of a non-Christian logic the Reformed Faith can be bowled over by means of a single syllogism. God has determined whatsoever comes to pass. Man's moral acts are things that come to pass. Therefore man's moral acts are determined and man is not responsible for them. So Pighius argued against Calvin. Calvin replied, in effect, that just because God has determined everything, secondary causes have genuine meaning. Applying this to the case in hand, we would say that we are entitled and compelled to use anthropomorphism not apologetically but fearlessly. We need not fear to say that God's attitude has changed with respect to mankind. We know well enough that God in himself is changeless. But we hold that we are able to affirm that our words have meaning for no other reason than that we use them analogically.

Accordingly we would not speak of God's love of creatureliness always and everywhere. Schilder uses this idea. He says that God greatly loves creatureliness everywhere, whether in the drunkard, the antichrist or the devil (See Zwier's discussion in *De Wachter*, Nov. 21, 1939). Creatureliness is then conceived of statically, as though it were something to be found anywhere and everywhere the same and always by itself. But creatureliness should be used as a limiting concept. It is never found in moral beings, whether men or angels, except in connection with an ethical reaction, positive or negative. We cannot intelligently speak of God's love of creatureliness in the devil. God's good pleasure pertains no

doubt to the devil. But that is because the devil is frustrated in his opposition to God. God once upon a time loved the devil. But that was before the devil was the devil. We shall make no progress on the common grace problem with the help of abstractions.

We need not hesitate to affirm, then, that in the beginning God loved mankind in general. That was before mankind had sinned against God. A little later God hated mankind in general. That was after mankind had sinned against God. Is there any doubt that the elect, as well as the reprobate, were under the wrath of God? Calvin says that the whole human race is "individually bound by the guilt and desert of eternal death, as derived from the person of Adam" (*op. cit.*, p. 91). So the elect and the reprobate are under a *common wrath*. If there is meaning in this — and who denies it? — there may and must, with equal right, be said to be an earlier attitude of common favor. Indeed, the reality of the "common wrath" depends upon the fact of the earlier "common grace". But *after the common, in each case, comes the conditional*. History is a process of differentiation. Accordingly, the idea of that which is common between the elect and the reprobate is always a limiting concept. It is a commonness for *the time being*. There lies back of it a divine *as if*. One syllogism, based on non-Christian assumptions, would call this dishonesty. Pighius knew how to turn such syllogisms; but Calvin knew how to answer them. Invariably he answered them by turning to the words of Paul, "Who art thou, O man?". He answered them by rejecting the whole of the non-Christian methodology, based on the ideas of brute fact and abstract universal. Pighius cannot shake the symmetry with which the proximate and remote causes divinely harmonize, even though he can easily prove that no man can comprehend their connection. Man has sinned against the true God, whom he knew for what He is. When man first sinned he did not know God as fully as we know Him now, but he did know God for what He is, as far as he knew Him at all. And it was *mankind*, not some individual elect or reprobate person, that sinned against God. Thus it was mankind in general which was under the favor of God, that came under the wrath of God.

We have said that after the common in each case comes the conditional. What then is meant by the conditional? This question has caused much trouble. The synod of 1924 of the Christian Reformed Church, before referred to, gave the general offer of the gospel as evidence of common grace. Hoeksema, on the other hand, denies that there may be said to be any such thing as a well-meant offer of salvation to a generality of men, including elect and non-elect. He thinks he finds clear support in Calvin's treatment of the general offer in relation to predestination.

If any progress is to be made in the discussion of this most perplexing aspect of the perplexing problem of common grace we shall need, in our humble opinion, to stress, as we have tried to do throughout, the idea of the earlier and the later, that is to say, the historical correlativity of universal and particular. All too frequently our difficulty is needlessly enhanced in that those who affirm, and those who deny, employ in the defence of their positions such arguments as are constructed out of the ideas of brute fact and abstract law. A rather typical argument employed is that expressed in the following words of Hepp: "Is there not a sort of grace in the hearing of the gospel by the non-elect? They hear that God has no pleasure in their death, but rather that they be converted and live. As time-believers the Word may bring them joy". Here Hepp inserts a paraphrase of Hebrews 6:4, as proof that there may be a grace which is non-saving for the reprobate.¹⁰ He then adds: "Let us not look at the lot of the non-elect in the congregation from the view-point of judgment only. Truly that judgment is a reality. But the enjoyments, which they sometimes have under the preaching of the gospel also have temporary reality, as a non-saving work brought about as they are by the Spirit" (*Credo*, July 1, 1940).

Hepp here speaks as though it were already known who are and who are not elect. He speaks as though a preacher may approach a certain individual whom he knows to be reprobate,

¹⁰ Hepp offers much valuable material on the question of common grace in a series of articles in which he seeks to prove that common grace is taught in Scripture (*Credo*, July 1, 1940 ff.).

and tell him that God has no pleasure in his death. But this is to forget the difference between the earlier and the later. The general presentation comes to a generality. It comes to "sinners", differentiated, to be sure, as elect and reprobate in the mind of God, but yet, prior to their act of acceptance or rejection, regarded as a generality. To forget this is to move the calendar of God ahead.

Arguing as Hepp argues is virtually to accept the really contradictory. It at least approaches the idea that the same ultimate will of God wills, and yet wills not, the salvation of sinners. If it does not do this, as it is obviously not intended to do, it makes for a mechanical alignment of common and special grace. All agree that common grace is not a small quantity of special grace; yet if the matter of the conditional presentation be handled as Hepp handles it, there is great difficulty in escaping the quantitative idea. It may then, to be sure, be asserted that common grace is a *lower* kind of grace, a grace meant for this life only, but it is difficult to see how this lower grace is the result of the presentation of the gospel which deals with the highest grace, that is, saving grace.

The difficulties at this point are, we must believe, considerably reduced if we observe the ideas of the earlier and the later. Calvin does not hesitate to say of mankind that it was originally "placed in a way of salvation" (*op. cit.*, p. 92). And while mankind in general was in a way of salvation, salvation was offered to all men. He recounts this as an historical fact. He argues with Pighius as to whether it was absolutely or conditionally offered, but he does not dispute the fact that it was offered to all men in Adam. "The truth of the matter is, that salvation is not offered to all men on any other ground than on the condition of their remaining in their original innocence" (*idem*). From this fact that God did at the earliest point in history offer eternal life to all men, Calvin takes his departure. One who argues like Pighius is easily able to raise objections to this as being quite impossible. He will say: God, according to the doctrine of election, did not mean to save all men. Then what meaning has it to offer eternal life to all men? And how dare you say that God placed man in a way of salvation? But Calvin does not allow himself to be led astray by reasoning based on non-Christian

assumptions. True reasoning, he says in effect, will rather maintain that the general offer has meaning and is possible because it has actually been made by God. And while it is true that this whole question of the universal offer of salvation is one of these things that can only "be fully understood or perceived by faith", we yet see such harmony between ultimate and proximate causes on the frankly revelational basis as cannot be seen otherwise.

It is with this background that Calvin then attacks the question of Christ's command to preach the gospel to all men alike. Pighius drew from the universality of this command the conclusion that God must mean all men to be saved. Against this Calvin argues that the promise is not unconditional. Speaking of the promise of Jeremiah 31:33 to the effect that God will write His law in their hearts, he says: "Now a man must be utterly beside himself to assert that this promise is made to all men generally and indiscriminately" (*ibid.*, p. 100). It is evident that God by His counsel did not ordain all men to eternal life. Yet the fact of Christ's command remains. "It is quite manifest that all men, without difference or distinction, are *outwardly called* or invited to repentance and faith" (*ibid.*, p. 95). Pighius sees a contradiction here. And on non-Christian presuppositions there would be a contradiction here. But with the Christian distinction between ultimate and proximate causes we hold, though we cannot intellectually penetrate the question exhaustively, that, instead, there is genuine harmony here. There are, we can show Pighius, no two ultimate wills in God contradicting one another. Yet we need the idea of two wills, that of command and that of secret counsel. We harmonize the two, as far as we can harmonize that which involves the incomprehensible God, by the ideas of correlativity and conditionality as these ideas are themselves determined in their meaning by the concept of God.

The universality of the gospel presentation or invitation or promise or command — they all come to the same thing, and Calvin is not afraid to use them indiscriminately — comes to mankind in general. It comes to sinful mankind, to mankind that has once before, when "placed in a way of salvation", been offered salvation. It comes to a generality that

has once in common, in one moment, in one man, rejected the offer of eternal life through Adam. Mankind is now, to use words corresponding to the earlier stage, *placed in a way of death*. Meanwhile the fact of Christ's redemptive work, in promise or in fulfilment, has come into the picture. Christ has not died for all men. He has died only for His people. But His people are not yet His people except in the mind of God. They are still members of the sinful mass of mankind. It is with them *where they are* that contact is to be made. The offer or presentation is not to those who believe any more than to those who disbelieve. The offer comes to those who have so far neither believed nor disbelieved. It comes before that differentiation has taken place. It comes thus generally, *so that differentiation may have meaning*. Christ is to be a savor of life unto life to some and a savor of death unto death to others. Those who eventually disbelieve will be the more inexcusable (*idem*).

The analogy of Calvin's argument here to his idea of original general revelation is apparent. As God's general revelation, natural and positive, plus the probationary command, originally *invited* all men to eternal life, as Calvin puts it, and men, of whom God had determined from all eternity that they should not inherit eternal life, yet were rendered inexcusable by the invitation when they rejected it, so now again, a second time, while it is still as certain as ever with God that they shall be lost eventually, and while historically they have by their sin placed themselves in the way of eternal death, they are rendered the more inexcusable by the gospel invitation, and have added to their condemnation by their second rejection of God.

Pighius objects that all this is to make of God a mocker. But Calvin introduces again his distinction between primary and secondary causes. Men "untaught of God" do not understand. They, he says in effect, use syllogisms "from the earth's plain surface, without any foundation at all". Believers, on the other hand, use syllogisms on the foundation of the ontological trinity. They know that all men have placed themselves in the way of death. "For the nature of the whole human race was corrupted in the person of Adam" (*ibid.*, p. 76). How such as are chosen by God to eternal life,

who are by God's secret counsel to be glorified, how, in short, the elect can yet, by historical representative disobedience, come under the wrath of God, they cannot understand. Must we say that the wrath of God under which they rest, according to the revealed will of God, does not tell us of the real attitude of God to them? Must we say that the real attitude of God to them is revealed only in God's electing love? Must we say that the threat of eternal death to those that are the elect was meaningless because God willed, with His secret will, that they should finally be saved? The elect did actually disobey and they came actually under the wrath of God, while yet for all eternity they are under the favor of God. Pighius here, if he desires, can use his charge of two ultimate wills in God. He may argue that, if the doctrine of foreordination is to be carried through consistently, history is naught but a puppet dance. We hold, as we are told in Scripture to hold, that the disobedience of the elect was a real disobedience and that on account of it they came under the wrath of God. For men "taught of God" it is possible to see the harmony here between the attitude of wrath, which, in this sense, the elect share with the reprobate, and the eternal attitude of God's favor to the elect only. They distinguish between primary and secondary causes. They hold to two wills in God. They know there is no conflict between these wills. They know this not because they have been able to penetrate intellectually the relationship between the two. They know it by faith, and they know it intellectually so far as to see that, unless we may hold that harmony rests in God, all human experience is a farce. They do not hesitate to say to those of the mind of Pighius that only Christianity is rational, though not rationally penetrable by the mind of man.

This mode of reasoning Calvin applies to the case of the reprobate. Their case is not inherently more difficult than the case of the elect. How can we understand that they were first taken into a generality with the elect and said by God to be good? Was not God's attitude to them displayed in that instance? Of course in God's mind there was a difference all the time. They were to him the children of wrath, even while they were pronounced good by Himself, in the earliest stage of their history. It was not some abstraction like crea-

tureliness in them that was the object of God's favor. As concrete beings, eventually to be haters of God but not yet in history haters of God, rather, as yet in Adam good before God, the reprobate are the objects of God's favor. But all this was conditional. God gave them, as it were, a sample of what would be theirs if they obeyed representatively in Adam. It was, as it were, a "lend-lease" proposition. How could God offer eternal life to the reprobate in Adam, if He did not finally mean to give it to them? Pighius would urge that to say that He did would be to make of God a mocker. Calvin would answer that God did it, and that it is the exact equivalent of God's threat of eternal death to the elect, which was involved in the same probationary command. That exactly is history. The Moment has significance, and can have significance, only against the background of the counsel of God. Threats and promises are real and genuinely revelatory of the attitude of God, just because of the counsel of God that is back of history. Thus "the calumny is washed off at once". We should not be surprised at the generality of the invitation to salvation. We should not argue that the general invitation reveals nothing of the attitude of God, on the ground that God's particular will is back of all. "Wherefore, God is as much said to have pleasure in, and to will, this eternal life, as to have pleasure in the repentance; and He has pleasure in the latter, because He invites all men to it by His Word. Now all this is in perfect harmony with His secret and eternal counsel, by which He decreed to convert none but His own elect. None but God's elect, therefore, ever do turn from their wickedness. And yet, the adorable God is not, on these accounts, to be considered variable or capable of change, because, as a Law-giver, He enlightens all men with the external doctrine of *conditional* life. In this primary manner He calls, or invites, *all men* unto eternal life. But, in the latter case, He brings unto eternal life those whom He willed according to His eternal purpose, *regenerating* by 'His Spirit, as an eternal Father, *His own children* only" (*ibid.*, p. 100).

We are, therefore, to steer clear of Platonic abstractions. We are not to use the general offer of the gospel as an abstract idea. Schilder holds that, as a general truth, we may say to the antichrist or the devil that whosoever believes will be

saved. But to make such a statement to the antichrist or to the devil as though it could involve them personally would be wholly meaningless. The antichrist and the devil are historically finished products. They are such as have finally disbelieved. The general gospel offer could make no point of contact with them. The conditional for them has passed. They have finally negated God and have been, or are being, frustrated by God; in their rejection of God they are epistemologically fully self-conscious. God loved the devil when the devil was an unfallen angel; God loved the antichrist and offered Him eternal life when he was in Adam; now that they have become the devil and the antichrist, God hates them exclusively. The general offer has meaning only with respect to those who are at an earlier stage of history. It has meaning with respect to the elect and the reprobate when they are, and to the extent that they are, members of an as yet undifferentiated generality.

In a non-Christian scheme of thought abstract universals and particulars stand over against one another in an unreconcilable fashion. Such was the case in Plato's philosophy. Aristotle sought to remedy the situation by teaching that the universals are present in the particulars. But he failed to get genuine contact between them, inasmuch as for him the lowest universal (*infima species*), was, after all, a supposed abstraction from particulars. Hence the particulars that were presupposed were bare particulars, having no manner of contact with universality. And if they should, *per impossible*, have contact with universality, they would lose their individuality. Pighius reasoned on the basis of such Platonic-Aristotelian assumptions. He therefore concluded that a general offer of salvation must destroy all differentiation and have universalism for its natural effect. If the general is to have any meaning, he argues, it must swallow up the particular. And if the particular is to have meaning, the meaning of the general must be denied.

The whole thrust of Calvin's thought is opposed to this. For him the general and the particular are coterminous in God. That is implied in the doctrine of the ontological trinity. And with this ontological trinity and the counsel of God as

the background of history, it is possible to give genuine meaning to the general without doing despite to the particular. In fact the general is a means toward the realization of the particular. The very possibility of differentiation presupposes as its concomitant a correlative generality. God as the law-giver is working out His eternal plan. God has an attitude of favor toward the originally created good nature of man. The individual men are included in this generality. They are not contrasted with this generality as those that believe or disbelieve. It could not be said of this original promise that "the contents of this externally general message is particular and applies to the elect only" (H. Hoeksema: *Calvin, Berkhof, and H. J. Kuiper*, p. 32). Nor could we say that because this promise is conditional, "it is also particular and God in reality promises eternal life only to the elect" (*idem*). Such, we are persuaded, is not Calvin's intention with his stress on the conditional character of the promise.

The burden of the whole matter lies in the fact that on any Platonic, or semi-Platonic, basis, the conditional can have no meaning. Only on a Christian, and more specifically only on a consistently Christian, basis can the conditional have meaning. Certain as we are that this is true, certain as we are that Christianity is objectively valid and that it is the only rational position for man to hold, we are as certain that we cannot exhaustively explain the relation of the infinite to the finite. To do so would be to exhaust the being of God. In his article on Predestination, Warfield says that because Calvin believed in the freedom of God, he did not believe in the liberty of man to seek exhaustive knowledge of God. Mystery, says Bavinck, is the heart of Dogmatics. But it is Christian, not Platonic, mystery that constitutes this heart.

If, then, we think along the lines suggested by Calvin, we may think of the universal offer of salvation as an evidence of common grace. It is evidence of *earlier* rather than of *lower* grace. All common grace is earlier grace. Its commonness lies in its earliness. It pertains not merely to the lower dimensions of life. It pertains to all dimensions, and to these dimensions in the same way at all stages of history. It pertains to all the dimensions of life, but to all these dimensions ever

decreasingly as the time of history goes on. At the very first stage of history there is much common grace. There is a common good nature under the common favor of God. But this creation-grace requires response. It cannot remain what it is. It is conditional. Differentiation must set in and does set in. It comes first in the form of a common rejection of God. Yet common grace continues; it is on a "lower" level now; it is long-suffering that men may be led to repentance. God still continues to present Himself for what He is, both in nature and in the work of redemption. The differentiation meanwhile proceeds. The elect are, generally speaking, differently conditioned from the non-elect. They are separated into a special people. In the New Testament period they have the influences of Christian surroundings brought to bear upon them. The non-elect are, generally speaking, conditioned in accordance with their desert; most of them never come within earshot of the external call of the gospel and have no Christian influence brought to bear upon them. Thus it becomes increasingly difficult to observe that which is common. We may be tempted to think of it as a merely formal something. We may, like the impatient disciples, anticipate the course of history and deal with men as though they were already that which by God's eternal decree they one day will be. Yet God bids us bide our time and hold to the common, as correlative to the process of differentiation. Pighius would say that the universal offer of salvation must be taken as an unconditional promise that God will write His law on every heart, and we may be tempted to answer that the universal offer is formal and is, because conditional, after all only particular, but Scripture would have us use the notion of generality as a limiting concept still. Common grace will diminish still more in the further course of history. With every conditional act the remaining significance of the conditional is reduced. God allows men to follow the path of their self-chosen rejection of Him more rapidly than ever toward the final consummation. God increases His attitude of wrath upon the reprobate as time goes on, until at the end of time, at the great consummation of history, their condition has caught up with their state. On the other hand God increases His attitude of favor upon the elect, until at last, at the consummation of history, their con-

dition has caught up with their state. While in this world, though saved and perfect in Christ, they are yet, because of their old nature, under the displeasure of God.

Again abstractions should be avoided. To say that God loves his people but hates their sin is to avoid the issue. Believers, in this life, are, and continue to be, both under the favor and under the disfavor of God. Sin is not an abstract something. The "new man" is responsible for the sin of the "old man". When Paul says it is no longer he but sin that dwelleth in him that performs certain actions, he does not seek to lift the "new man" from under the responsibility of the sin of the "old man". He merely means to prove that the "new man" is a genuine reality, whatever the appearance to the contrary. The idea of the old nature as a generality, as something the elect have in common with the non-elect, is still an important factor in the present situation. So, then, the ideas of common wrath and common grace must both be kept as constitutive factors in measuring the present historical situation by the Word of God.

What has been said may also help us to some extent in an intelligent discussion of the attitude of believers toward unbelievers. That attitude should, if our general approach be at all correct, be a conditional "as if" attitude. The attitude of Christ's followers is, as Christ has told us, to be in positive imitation of God's attitude. Hence we are to make practical use of the concept of "mankind in general". We are to use this notion as a limiting concept. We are not to forget for a moment that no such thing exists in any pure state. We are therefore to witness to men that in themselves they are enemies of God. We are to witness to them that this enmity appears even in such dimensions as that of counting and weighing. This is done if, among other things, we build separate Christian day schools. And we are to oppose men more definitely to the extent that they become epistemologically more self-conscious. To say to the antichrist that God loves sinners, and therefore may love him, is to cast pearls before swine. For all that, we still need the concept of "mankind in general". We are to think of non-believers as members of the mass of humankind in which the process of differentiation has not yet been completed. It is not to the righteous and to the unright-

eous as fully differentiated that God gives His rain and sunshine. It is not to unbelievers as those that have with full self-consciousness expressed their unbelief that we are to give our gifts. We are to give our "rain and sunshine" as God gives them, on the basis of the limiting concept, to the as yet undifferentiated or at least not fully differentiated mass of mankind.

By thus substituting the ideas of earlier and later for lower and higher we may get something approaching a solution to the question of territories. There is no single territory or dimension in which believers and non-believers have all things wholly in common. As noted above, even the description of facts in the lowest dimension presupposes a system of metaphysics and epistemology. So there can be no neutral territory of cooperation. Yet unbelievers are more self-conscious epistemologically in the dimension of religion than in the dimension of mathematics. The process of differentiation has not proceeded as far in the lower, as it has in the higher, dimensions. Does not this fact explain to some extent our attitude in practice? We seek, on the one hand, to make men epistemologically self-conscious all along the line. As Reformed Christians we do all we can, by building our own educational institutions and otherwise, to make men see that so-called neutral weighing and measuring is a terrible sin in the sight of God. To ignore God anywhere is to insult the God who has told us that, whether we eat or drink or do anything else, we are to do all to His glory. But when all the reprobate are epistemologically self-conscious, the crack of doom has come. The fully self-conscious reprobate will do all he can in every dimension to destroy the people of God. So while we seek with all our power to hasten the process of differentiation in every dimension we are yet thankful, on the other hand, for "the day of grace", the day of undeveloped differentiation. Such tolerance as we receive on the part of the world is due to this fact that we live in the earlier, rather than the later, stage of history. And such influence on the public situation as we can effect, whether in society or in state, presupposes this undifferentiated stage of development.

And this tolerance, on the one hand, and influence, on the other hand, extends, in varying degrees, to all dimensions.

Because of the fact of undifferentiation we are tolerated in our religious life as we are tolerated in the field of weighing and measuring. And we have influence in the religious life as we have influence in the lower dimensions. Those who have no depth of earth yet, sometimes and in some cases, receive with joy the seed of the Word. They have a *temporal* faith. The problem of the inner ego and the more circumferential aspect of the human person, discussed by Kuyper with the help of the copper-wire illustration, need not much concern us. It is not a question of psychology. Psychologically the whole individual is involved even to the depth of his being. When he receives the witness of the living God through nature about him, through his conscience within him, and by means of the preaching of the gospel, he is deeply engaged psychologically in an interpretative endeavor. But this deep psychological interpretative endeavor, by which he joins to himself all the multitudinous forms of the voice of God, is still, itself, merely the revelational voice of God. The question of his ethical response has not yet been broached. The real question is one of epistemology and therewith of man's ethical attitude toward God. If men were fully self-conscious epistemologically they would violently suppress the psychologically interpretative voice within them. But to the extent that they are not self-conscious epistemologically, they may even taste of the heavenly gift, be made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and taste the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, and not rebel. They allow themselves to be affected by it to some extent. It is the nostalgia of the prodigal who has left the father's home but sometimes has misgivings. On his way to the far country he may halt, he may even turn back for a distance, thinking that after all it was good and natural for a son to be in the father's home. Soon he will crucify unto himself the Son of God afresh, but for the moment the voice of God drowns out his own. He is at the moment not at all himself; he is *not yet* fully himself.

It is thus that we finally come to some fruitful insight into the problem of civil righteousness or the works of non-regenerate men. It is not that in some lower dimension no differentiation, epistemological or psychological, needs to be made by believers. It is not that there is even a square foot of neutral

territory. It is not that in the field of civics or justice, any more than in any other particular dimension, men, to the extent that they are epistemologically self-conscious, show any righteousness. The problem, as already suggested, faces us in every dimension. There are non-believers who go to church, there are those who give to the cause of missions. Nor are they hypocrites, properly speaking. The hypocrite is a person who is epistemologically self-conscious to a large degree. He "joins the church" for the sake of reward. He may very well do the works of the law externally. Dillinger often walked well-dressed in fashionable society. May not a criminal give many and fine Christmas presents today to those whom he plans to murder tomorrow? He does the works of the law. Schilder makes much of the fact that the works of the law may be thus externally performed. But the problem cannot be settled in this fashion. The very existence of the hypocrite requires us to go back of the hypocrite. To be able to act the hypocrite he must know the requirements of proper society thoroughly. How does he know the requirements of society? Because he has mingled in society and has had its requirements inscribed upon him as a demand. The very possibility of self-conscious hypocrisy presupposes an earlier undifferentiated state. It is from that undifferentiated stage that we must make our beginning.

Schilder insists that we are not to interpret Paul's words in Romans 2:14 as though they meant that the heathen do the works of the law by their own nature (*Heidelbergische Catechismus*, Deel I, p. 87). This is in itself true enough. Yet it is equally true that the question of general revelation is of basic importance for an understanding of Paul's words. The fact of general revelation may, and must, always be presupposed. Schilder himself allows for this possibility (*ibid.*, p. 89). When seeking to explain the passage, he employs the idea of the remnants of the image of God and the idea of God's general providence. Yet he holds that the first reason for the performance of the works of the law, on the part of the reprobate, must be found in their sinful nature (*ibid.*, p. 90). The sinner, says Schilder, does the works of the law hypocritically. That is to say, Schilder would have us make a large degree of epistemological self-consciousness on the part of the non-believer

the chief and primary point of departure. We shall get further in stating Paul's meaning if we make a low stage of epistemological self-consciousness our starting point. Paul is not saying that we deal with a group of people that are master simulators, having been in contact with the highest requirements of the law of God, and a group that is able to "dress as well as the best". On the contrary he is arguing that even those who have not had the special revelation of the oracles of God given to the Jews must yet be said to be sinners, that is, covenant-breakers. All men need the justice of God, for all are sinners. Yet there is no sin unless there be transgression and there is no transgression unless there be knowledge of the law. Having not the externally promulgated law, the heathen yet have enough knowledge of the law or will of God to render them without excuse. Do some think that the wrath of God is revealed upon the heathen unjustly on the ground that they have no knowledge of the will of God? Let them realize, says Paul in effect, that the revelation of God is present with all men everywhere. Let them know that even from the beginning of history this knowledge has been about all men everywhere. All men are responsible for the original positive revelation of God to mankind, as well as for the natural revelation that still surrounds them. Do some wonder whether that revelation of God has been persistent and insistent? Let them realize that that revelation is so close to all men as to be psychologically one with them. It is so close to them that, in spite of all their efforts to bury it, it speaks through their own moral consciousness. The law of God as a demand of God is written on their very hearts. The Westminster Confession does not hesitate to say that the law, not merely the works of the law but the law itself, was originally written on man's heart. And the reference given for that statement is Romans 2:14, 15. To this is then added the fact that man originally had a true epistemological reaction to this revelation of God. Man was created in "knowledge, righteousness and true holiness". This original, true, epistemological reaction in paradise is in turn revelational and therefore further requisite for the sinner.

Sin has not been able to efface all this requisitional material from the consciousness of man. The very activity of his con-

sciousness is a daily reminder to him of the will of God. Though he has tried over and over again to choke the voice of God he has not been able to do so. His evil nature would fain subdue the voice of the creation nature, but it cannot wholly do so. Involuntarily men think back, with the prodigal, to the father's home. And when the prodigal turns his face momentarily toward the father's house there comes to him the voice of approval. He may "with joy" receive the gospel though he have no depth of earth. On the other hand, when he reasserts his true self, his self that is on the way to the swine-trough, there is still a voice pursuing him, this time the voice of disapproval. So he wavers as an unfinished product. He does the works of the law not as the devil or as the anti-christ does them. They do them as arch-simulators of Christ and His people. The devil appears as an angel of light. Hypocrites imitate him. It is not thus that the average non-believer does them. If such were the case, the end of time would be here. If all non-believers did the works of the law primarily from their self-consciously developed evil nature they would, by force of their principle, seek to wipe all believers off the face of the earth. But "the man of sin", the "son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God", is restrained (II Thessalonians 2:3, 4). When no longer restrained he will attempt to make hypocrites of all unbelievers. He will work "with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved" (v. 10). In punishment for their sin "God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (vv. 11, 12). Till such time as the "son of perdition" has not been given free power, and till such time as God has not in that connection sent a strong spirit of delusion, mankind in general is not fully self-conscious of its inherent opposition to God. The pressure of God's revelation upon men is so great that they are, from their own point of view, in a sort of stupor. With the prodigal they are on the way to the swine-trough, but with the prodigal they have misgivings in leaving the father's house. The heathen have such misgivings; those that hear the gospel may have such

misgivings in a greater measure, as they taste the powers of the age to come.

In this manner the ideas of God's general providence, his general revelation, the remnants of the image of God in man, the general external call of the gospel, and man's evil nature may be brought into something of a harmonious unity. All things happen according to God's providence. That is basic. There is, according to this providence, to be a development in the direction of evil and a development in the direction of the good. These two developments grow in conjunction, in correlativity, with one another. Therefore all factors must be taken into consideration in all the problems with which we have to deal. The general development of history, of which the two developments mentioned are subdivisions, comes about through God's presentation of Himself as He is, in varying degrees of self-revelation, to man, plus man's reaction to this presentation. God always presents Himself as He is. His attributes face man as man faces God. The revelation of God is always objectively valid. The greatest obscuration the sin of man can cast over the face of nature and his own consciousness, cannot destroy the validity of revelation. Vanity and corruption are, to be sure, seen in nature. But men ought, argues Calvin, to see even this as evidence of God's presence, of God's presence in judgment. Evil is found in man's heart. Again, even this is evidence of God's presence; man is pursued by the voice of accusing conscience. When the accusing conscience challenges the wisdom of his choice against God, the voice of God is heard again. The prodigal turns about for a moment, stands still, takes a few steps back, his conscience approving, his emotional life responding with joy; the remnants of the image of God appear even while he is on his general downward path. In some cases the gospel call is heard. This tends to make some of those that hear it walk back a little farther still. But underneath it all the evil nature is operative. That nature accounts for the fact that all this turning and yearning is temporary and has not arisen from true faith in God. That nature accounts for the fact that the sinner will soon turn with more determination than ever toward the swine-trough. Even if he continues to do the works of the law, as well he may, he will do them more and

more self-consciously for the sake of reward. Finally, he may become a worthy disciple of Satan who may appear as an angel of light to deceive, if it were possible, the very elect of God.

In this way, too, we may perhaps be on the way to seeing a bit more clearly the relation between common grace and total depravity. If we stress the fact that common grace is earlier grace, it appears that it is something in connection with which total depravity shines forth in the fulness of its significance. Negatively, there is no possible toning down of the doctrine of total depravity; the attitude of favor spoken of is in no sense directed toward man's evil nature as such. It is directed toward the individual in so far as he is, epistemologically speaking, unconscious of the real significance of the path he is treading. And he is such an individual because he is a member of the mass of mankind which, in the providence of God, has not come to the climax of the process of differentiation. Positively, common grace is the necessary correlative to the doctrine of total depravity. Total depravity has two aspects, one of principle and one of degree. The first representative act of man was an act that resulted historically in the total depravity of the race. This act was performed against a mandate of God that involved mankind as a whole; without that "common mandate" it could not have been done; without that common mandate the "negative instance" would have been an operation in a void. Thus mankind came under the common wrath of God. But the process of differentiation was not complete. This common wrath, too, was a stepping-stone to something further. The elect were to choose for God and the reprobate were each for himself to reaffirm their choice for Satan. The reprobate were to show historically the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Totally depraved in principle, they were to become more and more conformed in fact to the principle that controlled their hearts. They do this by way of rejecting the common call, the common grace of God. That is to say, they do it by way of rejecting God to whatever extent God reveals Himself to them. In the case of some this includes the gospel call, while in the case of most it does not. In every case, however, there is growth in wickedness on the part of those who have seen more of the common

grace of God. So it appears that in every case of the historical process common grace is the correlative to total depravity.

Thus we have the "relative good" in the "absolutely evil" and the "relatively evil" in the "absolutely good". Neither the "absolutely evil" nor the "absolutely good" are epistemologically as self-conscious as they will be in the future. God's favor rests upon the reprobate and God's disfavor rests upon the elect to the extent that each lacks epistemological self-consciousness. In neither case is it God's ultimate or final attitude, but in both cases it is a real attitude. As there is an "old man" in the believer, so there is an "old man" in the unbeliever. As there are the remnants of sin in the believer, so there are the remnants of the image of God in the unbeliever. And as the "old man" in the believer does not, in the least, detract from his status as believer, so the "old man" in the unbeliever does not, in the least, detract from his status as unbeliever. Each man is on the move. He is, to use a phrase of Barth with a Reformed meaning, an *Entscheidungswesen*.

Another parallel suggests itself. We are to regard the natural man as we regard nature. Or rather, we are to regard nature as we regard man. There is a parallelism between the two. They go through a similar history; they go together through the same history. They are aspects of the one course of events reaching toward the great climax at the end of the age. Both were originally created good. But it was a good that was on the move. Through the fall of man both came under the wrath of God. Nature as well as man is subject to vanity and corruption (Romans 8:19, 22). But the vanity and corruption, which rest on man and nature by the curse of God, are also on the move. We must observe the "tendency" in both if we would describe either for what it is. Men ought, says Calvin, to be able to see the Creator's munificence in creation (*Institutes*, I, V, i). Men ought, in the second place, to see God's wrath upon nature. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18). "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Romans 8:22). Thus there is a downward tendency in creation. Men ought to conclude, argues Calvin, that history will end in judgment. When they do not

see their own sins punished as they deserve to be punished, men ought to conclude that punishment is deferred, not that it is not coming. Thus there is a tendency toward a climax of wrath and a deferment of this climax in order that the climax may truly be a climax, the end of a process. On the other hand, there is a tendency toward glory. The "earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God" (Romans 8:19). In the "regeneration of all things" the vanity and the corruption will be swallowed up in victory. He that would describe nature for what it actually is, must describe it as thus on the move. And so he that would describe man for what he actually is, must describe him as on the move. Applying this to the unbeliever, that lives under earshot of the gospel call, we have the following. He must be looked at (a) as having been a member of an original generality that was good, (b) as having become a member of a second generality which is wholly corrupt in principle and is on the way to a grand climax of destruction, (c) as having become a member of that generality in the midst of which the supernatural redemptive process is operative, and as a member of a generality that lives under the long-suffering of God, which would lead it to repentance, (d) as a member of a generality that is, in some cases, crucifying to itself the Son of God afresh, (e) as a member of a generality in which that process of crucifixion is still incomplete. All these generalities are presupposed in the meaning of each individual confrontation of the non-believer with the gospel; they are the correlative of the meaning of the conditional with which each one who hears the gospel is faced. All these generalities must be presupposed as still genuinely operative factors in any individual man. Not till all history is done may we drop any one of them. A fearless anthropomorphism based on the doctrine of the ontological trinity, rather than abstract reasoning on the basis of a metaphysical and epistemological correlativism, should control our concepts all along the line. A fearless anthropomorphism need not hesitate to say that the prodigal sometimes yearns for the father's house even when on the way to the swine-trough, and that the father *still* yearns for his son, the son that has broken "the law of his being".

Summing up what has been said in this section, we would

stress the fact that we tend so easily in our common grace discussion, as in all our theological effort, to fall back into scholastic ways of thinking. If we can learn more and more to outgrow scholasticism in our notions about natural theology and natural ethics, we shall be perhaps a bit more careful both in our affirmations and in our negations with respect to common grace. We shall learn to think less statically and more historically. We shall not fear to be boldly anthropomorphic because, to begin with, we have, in our doctrines of the ontological trinity and temporal creation, cut ourselves loose once and for all from correlativism between God and man. We shall dare to give genuine significance to historical conditional action just because we have, back of history, the counsel of God. Accordingly we need not fear to assert that there is a certain attitude of favor on the part of God toward a generality of mankind, and a certain good before God in the life of the historically undeveloped unbeliever. These assertions are not depreciatory of, but rather conditional to, a full assertion of the total depravity of the sinner. If we can say of one who is elect that he was at one point in his history totally depraved, we can, with equal justice, say of a reprobate that he was at one point in his history in some sense good.

Summing up our discussion as a whole we would stress the importance of looking at the common grace question as an aspect of our whole philosophy of history. And this requires for our day, it is our humble judgment, something of a re-orientation on the question of Apologetics. Perhaps we may speak of a return to Calvin on this point. At least we hold it to be in line with his *Institutes* to stress, more than has recently been done, the objective validity of the Christian reading of nature and history. Certainly no one would have hit upon the interpretation of nature and history that we as Christians have, if it had not been revealed by special grace. But this is primarily due to the fact that the natural man is blind. We dare not say that nature and history lend themselves quite as well to the non-Christian as to the Christian interpretation. That the non-Christian may present a plausible view of nature is quite true. That it is impossible to convince any non-Christian of the truth of the Christian position, as long as he reasons on non-Christian assumptions, is also true. All looks

yellow to the jaundiced eye. But for all this we would still maintain, and that, we believe, is essentially Calvin's view, that he who reads nature aright reads it as the Christian reads it.

It is only when we thus press the objective validity of the Christian claim at every point, that we can easily afford to be "generous" with respect to the natural man and his accomplishments. It is when we ourselves are fully self-conscious that we can cooperate with those to whose building we own the title. God's rain and sunshine comes, we know, to His creatures made in His image. It comes upon a sinful human race that they might be saved. It comes to the believers as mercies from a Father's hand. It comes upon the non-believer that he might crucify to himself the Son of God afresh. The facts of rain and sunshine, so far from being no evidence of anything in themselves, are evidences of all these things, simultaneously and progressively. Then why not cooperate with those with whom we are *in* this world but with whom we are not *of* this world? Our cooperation will be just *so far as* and *so far forth*. It will be a cooperation so far as the historical situation warrants.

We realize that the practical difficulties will always be great enough. We realize, too, that, theoretically, the question is exceedingly complicated. And we realize that we have a long way to go. But the direction in which we ought to work is, in our humble opinion, reasonably clear.

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