

## COMMON GRACE

### SECOND ARTICLE

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#### 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).<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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

<sup>9</sup> 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 phenomenalism 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 *cognitiones 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 ἔννοια* 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 ἔννοια* 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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