

COMMON GRACE

THIRD ARTICLE

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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 whatsoever 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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