

GRACE WITHOUT CHRIST?

THE DOCTRINE OF COMMON GRACE

IN DUTCH-AMERICAN NEO-CALVINISM

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by

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The thesis *Grace Without Christ? The Doctrine of Common Grace in Dutch-American Neo-Calvinism* presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the University of Edinburgh has been composed by the candidate Rev. W.C. Campbell-Jack. This work has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree. The work has been done by the candidate. All quotations have been distinguished and the sources of information acknowledged.

RUTH

Who displays an uncommon grace

and

FIONA, DIARMID,
MAIRI and HAMISH

*A theological quartet who constitute my
severest critics and staunchest supporters.*

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ABSTRACT

Within neo-Calvinism's involvement in cultural activity the doctrine of common grace has played a major part in being the legitimisation of Christian activity in the world. The purpose of the present work is to examine, from a standpoint sympathetic to the concerns of neo-Calvinism, the nature, function and validity of the doctrine of common grace as an understanding of the relationship of God with fallen creation and the effectiveness of the doctrine in harmonising our understanding of nature and grace within that branch of theology known as neo-Calvinism.

The historical context of the common grace problem is introduced in Section I. Section II consists of a survey of how the doctrine has been treated in neo-Calvinist theology, with reference to representative theologians within this tradition, Kuyper, Hoeksema, Van Til, Schilder and Dooyeweerd. The response of Calvin to the questions raised in common grace is then examined. The greatest flaw in the construction of common grace is the distinction made between the incarnate Christ as Mediator of Redemption and the eternal Son as Mediator of Creation. The dualising tendency this introduces into the neo-Calvinist system of theology has serious effects which can only be overcome by re-asserting the importance of the Cross for the creation. In Section III there is an attempt to construct an approach to the relationship between God and creation which whilst avoiding the dualising tendencies of common grace is faithful to the Reformed tradition.

The thesis pursued is that the doctrine of common grace is unable to harmonise completely the tensions within modern neo-Calvinism following from the manner of its federally based distinction between nature and grace. The introduction of a doctrine of common grace independent of the incarnate Christ fails to encompass the full relationship between God and creation. Despite harmonising the doctrine of total depravity and the undoubted good performed by unregenerate humankind common grace also introduces tensions between creation and grace which are the consequences of federal Calvinism's spiritualistic soteriology and the pietism from which neo-Calvinism emerged in the Netherlands.

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

THE QUESTION OF COMMON GRACE

Calvinism has almost invariably been more than a distinctive theological system and has in a manner almost unequalled effectively pursued the implications of its theology for human lifestyle and culture. In this pursuit the doctrine of common grace, as developed by the neo-Calvinists emerging from the Netherlands in the last century, has provided a theoretical basis and driving force for much of the political and cultural activity pursued by Calvinist Christians during the last one hundred years. As one English Calvinist sums it up 'Common grace is the foundation of culture, since God's great plan for the creation is achieved through common grace.'¹

The Synod of Dort (1618-19) helped establish the position of the Church in the Netherlands on an orthodox federal Calvinist line in opposition to the teaching of the Remonstrants or followers of Arminius. The succeeding centuries however saw controversy as the effort to preserve the orthodoxy of Dort resulted in confrontation, notably that between Cocceius and Voetius. By the 1700s the great days of scholastic federal Calvinism seemed to be over. Intellectuals turned to the thought of the Enlightenment rather than theology and Deism encroached even upon the Church. The Church first turned to scholasticism in her opposition to Cartesian thought, and then to Cartesianism itself.²

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Church was rejuvenated by the Reveil, the evangelical revival which began in French speaking Switzerland and spread throughout France and the Netherlands. The popular pietism which was a result of this revival tended, with a few notable exceptions, to think of Christianity as being mainly concerned with the salvation of the individual soul. In the Netherlands however the effects of this revival were first felt in aristocratic and court circles, particularly in Amsterdam and the Hague. The poet Willem Bilderdijk (1756-1831) on his conversion rediscovered the meaning and value of orthodox Calvinism and understood Christ, as well as being his own Saviour, as the King of Dutch culture.³ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876), son of an upper class family who was converted at the age of thirty, came to realise the inroads the spirit of the Enlightenment had made upon European culture. As Secretary to the Dutch government during the reign of William I and later as archivist of the personal papers of the House of Orange-Nassau Groen found himself in a position to begin the development of a positive Christian approach, based upon the theology of the Synod of Dort, to the problems of Dutch political and cultural life. Discussion groups known as the Anti-Revolutionary Voter's Clubs were organised as a means of disseminating Calvinist views.

In the Netherlands we thus find a two strand revival of Calvinist orthodoxy in the early part of the nineteenth century. Amongst the congregations of the *Hervormde Kerk* there was a revival of evangelical pietism whilst in the more influential social circles of Dutch society there was a rediscovery of the political and cultural aspects of the Calvinism of Dort. The two emphases of this revival led to tensions within the *Hervormde Kerk*, the state Church, eventually leading to two major splits. Some of the more pietistic conservatives left the Church in the *Afscheiding* or Separation of 1834 and formed the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*. This body quickly grew, establishing congregations throughout the Netherlands, particularly in the north, and establishing its own theological school at Kampen. Subsequently Abraham Kuyper in 1886 led 100,000 orthodox Calvinists from the *Hervormde Kerk* in the *Doleantie* (from the Latin *doleo* to mourn) to form the *Gereformeerde Doleerende Kerk*. In 1892 major elements

of the two denominations merged to form the *Gereformeerde Kerken*, the second largest Protestant denomination in the Netherlands.

As well as being a leader in Church reform, and division, Kuyper in 1876 had also assumed the mantle of Groen as leader of what was now the Anti-Revolutionary Party and went on to develop it and establish it as a leading political force in the Netherlands, eventually becoming Prime Minister in 1901. Kuyper's activity was both prodigious and effective. The implications of orthodox federal Calvinist theology for society and culture were developed on a scale never before or since attempted or realised. The neo-Calvinism which provided a base for this activity, although not a major influence in the Netherlands today, is still, through the influence of the Free University of Amsterdam founded by Kuyper, a factor in Church and cultural life. Neo-Calvinism is also active and influential in North America through the activity of denominations established by Dutch immigrants in the nineteenth century and such institutions as Calvin College and Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan and the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Ontario.

Within neo-Calvinism's involvement in ecclesiastical, cultural and political activity the doctrine of common grace has played a major part in being the engine and legitimisation of Christian activity in the world. The purpose of the present work is to examine, from a standpoint sympathetic to the concerns of neo-Calvinism, the nature, function and validity of the doctrine of common grace as an understanding of the relationship of God with fallen creation and the effectiveness of the doctrine of common grace in harmonising our understanding of nature and grace within that branch of Reformed theology known as neo-Calvinism. To do this we ask the following questions:

- i) Does the doctrine of common grace in seeking to resolve certain tensions within the basically federal theological system of neo-Calvinism introduce other tensions?
- ii) Does common grace under its various treatments provide a satisfactory means of understanding the relationship between God, Christ and the fallen world, or is there another way compatible with Reformed theology of

accounting for the undoubted good which we encounter within a fallen and rebellious creation?

The thesis pursued is that the doctrine of common grace, under the differing treatments of representative neo-Calvinist theologians and philosophers, is unable to harmonise completely the tensions within modern neo-Calvinism following from the manner of its federally-based distinction between nature and grace.

The introduction of a doctrine of common grace independent of Christ as the incarnate Son of God fails to encompass the full relationship between God and creation. Despite harmonising the doctrine of total depravity and the undoubted good performed by unregenerate humankind common grace also introduces tensions between creation and grace which are the consequences of federal Calvinism's spiritualistic soteriology and the pietism from which neo-Calvinism emerged in the Netherlands.

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

- 1 E.L.H. Taylor, *The Christian Philosophy of Law, Politics and the State*, Nutley, Craig Press, 1966, p.60f
- 2 H. Dooyeweerd, *In The Twilight of Western Thought*, Nutley, Craig Press, 1975, p.160ff
- 3 E.L.H. Taylor, *op cit*, pp.28-30

CHAPTER ONE

THE ROOTS OF COMMON GRACE

This work is written to explore the contours, importance and effects of the doctrine of common grace within that system of Reformed theology normally termed Neo-Calvinism from the time of Abraham Kuyper onward. To do this we must first examine those characteristics of this theology which have given rise to the doctrine of common grace, and the historical context from which it emerged.

FEDERAL THEOLOGY

At its broadest the term Reformed or Calvinist is applied to those denominations and individuals within Protestantism who subscribe to the Reformed creeds rather than to the Lutheran, Anabaptist or Arminian constructions.¹ Unfortunately the sometimes interchangeable terms Reformed or Calvinist carry no single meaning, many varied and sometimes opposed understandings of theology claim to follow in the footsteps of the reformer of Geneva. Within the number of those who would be willing to name themselves Calvinist or acknowledge a primal debt to the great Reformer we can discern various strands of theology. One modern commentator on the Reformed scene in the United States of America has claimed to discern, within a single denomination in the U.S.A., 'approximately ten different types within the Reformed Church,' all of whom would claim the title 'Reformed.'² Theologians and theological schools however are not members of football teams whose allegiance can be assumed by the colour of their shirts, the shadings of Reformed colouring are somewhat more subtle than merely the blue of Rangers, the green of Celtic or the maroon of Hearts.

When examining theological groupings it is more useful to proceed on a broader front which can accommodate the nuances of theological shading rather than demarcate by minutiae.

Our concern is with that broad strand of Reformed theology which we term federal Calvinism as it has come to be expressed in modern times, with particular emphasis on neo-Calvinism. Representative, although differing in detail, amongst such Calvinist thinkers in the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries are theologians such as the Hodge dynasty of old Princeton, B.B. Warfield, J. Gresham Machen and John Murray in the United States of America; Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, Klaas Schilder and Herman Dooyeweerd in the Netherlands.

Federal Theology Today

Federal theology was not only a concern of the Church during the period of the scholastic systematisers of the seventeenth century or the nineteenth century resurgences in Europe and the U.S.A. Federal theology remains a living part of the life of the Church today. Hendrikus Berkhof is somewhat previous when he writes:

Influenced by Bullinger's federal theology, Reformed scholasticism began to speak of the situation in Paradise as a covenant of works (especially since Cocceius)... The original perfect state was regarded as a counterpart of the state of grace in Christ; in the covenant of works man could earn eternal life by his obedience to the commandment. It was only due to the fall that God had to open up an entirely different way to eternal life, in the covenant of grace. Historical criticism has put an end to this type of thinking.³

This theological scheme far from being at an end remains influential in Europe and the U.S.A. today and can even be considered to be regaining lost influence. The general revival of interest in Calvin studies⁴ has been matched by a revival of interest in this distinctive strand of Calvinism. Federal theology is enshrined in classical confessional statements such as the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Longer* and *Shorter Catechisms*,⁵ the *Canons of the Synod of Dort*, the *Belgic Confession* and the *Heidelberg Catechism*. These documents still form the confessional statements of many of the Reformed Churches and continue to function to a greater or lesser degree as

such. Whether they are held to be statements to be defended, adapted or reacted against⁶ they, and the system of theology which they enshrine, continue to inform theological discussion within the Reformed Churches.⁷

Rationalism

The most frequently voiced criticism of federal theology today is that it is equated with a departure from the Reformed faith expounded by the first generation of Reformers, especially John Calvin.⁸ Seventeenth century Reformed theology which provided the systematisation of the federal understanding is increasingly understood as the post-Reformation era rather than as the true flowering of the Reformation in the sixteenth century.

Indeed, it can be argued that in the symbols of the seventeenth century the seeds of a departure from the Reformation may be detected. It is too little known in Presbyterian Churches in the Anglo-Saxon world that the Westminster standards do not belong to the Reformation but are products of Puritanism and post-Reformation scholasticism. They reflect a legalism, moralism, and rationalism that is foreign to the Confessions of a century earlier. They lack the spontaneity, freshness, and joyfulness of the Reformation.⁹

Whilst being unwilling to comment on the joyful nature of sixteenth century Reformed confessions it has to be acknowledged that the confessions of the seventeenth century do tend to have the character of constitutional documents defining the position of the churches involved rather than as proclamations of their faith. This is hardly surprising when the historical circumstances of the compilation of these documents are considered, the Westminster standards were compiled by a committee of the English Parliament as the price of a military alliance with the Scots. The tenor of the confessional statements which define federal Calvinism is indicative of the nature of the theology they enshrine.

Federal Theology... is that kind of theology which developed in the seventeenth century (in England and Holland as well as Scotland) and which distinguished different kinds of covenant, and made out of these a framework within which all theology is cast. In so doing, it was far more influenced by certain socio-political concepts of covenant than it probably ever realised. In particular it made a hard and fast distinction between the so-called Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace.¹⁰

E.A. Dowey commenting on the influence of cultural factors in the shaping of federal Calvinism remarks that: 'Orthodox or scholastic Calvinism of the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries represents the absolutist and rationalist system building spirit of the age.'¹¹

This rationalistic spirit has marked federal theology throughout its existence. Elwyn Smith is correct in his claim that, 'conservative Calvinism never broke with the deep-rooted rationalism that had come down to it from Puritanism.'¹² That this rationalistic strain in theology still exists, sometimes in extreme forms, within federal Calvinism is clear from the work of such as Gordon H. Clark who can go so far as to equate an error in logic with sin.¹³

This insistence upon logical and theological necessity is a major factor giving rise to the development of the doctrine of common grace within federal Calvinism. Federal theologians such as those whose work we are about to examine find themselves having to deal with a tension between two seemingly conflicting understandings of natural life; on the one hand federal theology holds firmly to the total depravity of man consequent upon the fall of our first federal head Adam and our continuing inability to live out the requirements of the natural law, and on the other hand it is confronted with undeniable evidence concerning the goodness and ability of the unregenerate. At the very beginning of his monumental work on common grace Abraham Kuyper expresses the tension in this way:

'By nature dead in sins and trespasses' - this remained the testimony of all. But this seemingly did not square with reality. There was in that sinful world, also outside the Church, so much of beauty, so much that demanded respect, so much that aroused jealousy. That before one was placed the choice of either denying all this goodness against better knowledge, and thus to deviate with the Anabaptists, or of conceiving of fallen man as not so deeply fallen and thus going astray into the Arminian heresy. Placed before this fork in the road, the Reformed confession refused to go in either of the two directions.¹⁴

In its use as a solution to the problem of harmonising this tension between the fallen and totally depraved world of nature and the undeniable existence of a supposedly 'natural' goodness the doctrine of common grace has become an integral part of that strain of Reformed theology generally termed federal Calvinism. In the writings of Abraham Kuyper and those who follow him it can even be said to have become a distinctive facet of federal theology and practice.

Covenant Structure

More important to the development of the doctrine of common grace than the necessary harmonisation of doctrines is the very structure of federal Calvinism itself. Throughout its history the federal system has been developing and adapting its theology.¹⁵ However despite the clear and sometimes subtle differences between federal theologians it is possible to outline the basic principles of this theological system. At root federal theology is a theology of *foedus* or covenant, sometimes two covenants are employed, sometimes three. Initially there is a covenant of works which teaches that God made a covenant with Adam as the covenant head of all humankind.

On the basis of natural law discerned by the light of reason, and symbolic law (the tree of life, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the law of the sabbath), God made a covenant of works with Adam. If Adam could be obedient to God, God would be gracious to Adam as the 'federal' head of the human race. In this covenant of works eternal life was made conditional on keeping its terms. Within this concept all men are related to God as law giver. As expressed by a modern federal Calvinist:

In this covenant life was promised to Adam upon condition of perfect obedience and in particular obedience to God's command about not eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The sanction, in case of failure to obey, was death. This covenant was made not only with Adam but with all humanity, he being the 'federal' or corporate head of the race.¹⁶

Because Adam and all mankind following him were unable to fulfil the conditions of the covenant of works God made a second covenant, the covenant of grace whereby Christ, the second Adam, fulfils the law for the elect and bears their sin for them.

In this covenant however it is only the elect in Christ who are related to God within the covenant of grace.

God elected certain individuals out of the mass of fallen humanity and made a covenant with them in Christ their federal head. Christ offers Himself as a penal, substitutionary sacrifice to atone for the sins of the elect.¹⁷

The covenant of grace is not seen as replacing the covenant of works but is worked out and established within the continuing requirement of the covenant of works. Abraham Kuyper speaks of the covenant of works as being an eternal covenant between the Creator God and His creatures.¹⁸ God is thus seen to continue to deal with mankind as a generality on the basis of the covenant of works or fulfilment of the law. Within federal theology all mankind without exception, from Adam onward, is born under the legal requirement of complete obedience to the law.

Commenting upon this aspect of federal theology which understands law from within a covenant of works rather than as an obligation of covenant love J.B. Torrance claims that:

The federal scheme has abandoned the Irenaean doctrine of recapitulation of all things in Christ, for a Western Nature-Grace model.¹⁹

It is argued that federal Calvinism has constructed a system which is built 'on the *priority of Law over Grace*,' with the result that the scheme as a whole fails to escape from the pre-Reformation nature-grace model and if followed leaves the Church with much to say about the believer but nothing to say to the world.²⁰

It is Torrance's argument that within this scheme federal Calvinism has returned to the logical priority of nature over grace which in the pre-Reformation view taught that grace presupposes nature and grace perfects nature.²¹ This nature-grace model of the relationship of God with His creation interprets the natural world in terms of the order of creation and the Church of the elect in terms of the order of redemption.

Within this model Christ is envisaged as the Mediator of the elect and consequently only the Church is really interpreted in terms of Christ. The natural world and all that it contains, the state, civil institutions, the sciences, the arts and culture are understood in terms of created order.

Later federal Calvinists, earnest in proclaiming the complete sovereignty of Christ, have as we shall see, attempted to find the source of a complete understanding of the relationship of nature and grace within the sphere of common grace. Thus we have Herman Bavinck proclaiming concerning common grace that:

By means of this organic way of relating grace and nature, the Reformation in principle overcame the mechanical juxtaposition and dualistic worldview of the Catholic Church.²²

NEO-CALVINISM

Dutch Background

If in the English speaking world the term Calvinism is associated with a particular view of covenant theology or with the supposed 'Five Points of Calvinism,' in the Dutch speaking and influenced context the emphasis of federal Calvinism tends to refer towards a total worldview. This comprehensive worldview or *Weltanschauung* entails a cultural emphasis in its broadest sense, a system of thought which touches upon every aspect of life and is applicable at all times.

In its many strands Calvinism has always, due to its emphasis on the sovereignty of God, been emphatic in its proclamation that there is no facet of life untouched by God and therefore no facet of life which is outwith the activity and influence of the Christian and the Church. For the Calvinist all of life is religion. One of the most significant proponents of federal Calvinism and the architect of Calvinism's doctrine of common grace, Abraham Kuyper, speaks of Calvinism²³ as a scientific designation which has historical, political and philosophical implications. Kuyper places Calvinism alongside Paganism, Islam, Roman Catholicism and Modernism²⁴ as one of the five main systems of thought in the history of civilisation.²⁵

The term 'neo-Calvinism' refers to the fruit of that revival of Dutch federal Calvinism in nineteenth century Holland which is chiefly associated with Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920).²⁶ Neo-Calvinism was first employed as a pejorative term by Kuyper's opponents but was accepted by Kuyper and his followers who recognised that their views were a development and not merely a reiteration of the classical scholastic Calvinism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Some critics from within federal Calvinism see neo-Calvinism not so much as a development of historic Calvinism but, at the least, as a fundamentally flawed distortion. William Young designates the neo-Calvinism flowing from Kuyper as 'Hyper-Covenantism'²⁷ which runs the risk of 'inventing a new aberration from orthodoxy.' In Young's view:

Hyper-Covenantism by its proclamation of the 'cultural mandate,' sometimes accompanied by an inflated theory of 'common grace,' threatens to substitute 'another gospel,' scarcely distinguishable from the Modernist social-gospel, for the gospel of free and sovereign grace.²⁸

Young's somewhat overheated reaction to neo-Calvinism is not to be dismissed completely as an over-reaction. There is a discernable difference of emphasis between scholastic federal Calvinism and neo-Calvinism which is germane to our discussion of common grace. An example of this is the unfavourable estimate of the faith of the Puritans given from within neo-Calvinism by P.Y. de Jong:

The Puritans never gave whole-hearted allegiance to the Calvinistic construction of the relation between nature and grace, creation and redemption. There was always a tendency towards Anabaptist dualism. The aversion to art and culture among many, the strong tendency toward a legalistic construction of ethics and the separation of religion from daily concerns may be mentioned as evidences. Furthermore there was an unprecedented emphasis on the soteriological aspect of Christian doctrine so characteristic of all groups who do not grapple with the underlying issue of the connection of nature and grace.²⁹

Framework of Neo-Calvinism

That central to the neo-Calvinist endeavour is the attempt to find and develop the connection between nature and grace becomes clear when we examine the useful description of neo-Calvinism given by Albert Wolters.³⁰ Wolters discerns five categorical distinctives 'that define the unity and distinctiveness of neo-Calvinism as a whole.' These are:

- i. The distinction between God and creation,
- ii. The distinction between law and subject,
- iii. The distinction between earth and heaven,
- iv. The distinction between the undeveloped and the developed,
- v. The distinction between structure and direction.

Although some of these categorical distinctives, such as the distinction between God and creation, are common to any branch of Christianity, Wolter's distinctions are well grounded in as much as in neo-Calvinism they appear in a more marked form and undergird and are fundamental to the development and whole approach of neo-Calvinists in their endeavour to find a proper connection between nature and grace.

By the first distinction the neo-Calvinist means that we must reject any view which would leave room for a common denominator for God and creation. Such a common ground would mean that the difference between God and creation would be gradual rather than qualitative. One example of this is the insistence of Cornelius Van Til that the knowledge held by God and the knowledge held by man differs not only in quantity and extent but in actual quality, the thoughts of God and the thoughts of man are never identical. In Van Til's conception whilst there is identity of reference point there is no identity of content. Speaking of the Reformed faith he writes:

It holds that this identity of reference point can be maintained only on the presupposition that all human predication is analogical re-interpretation of God's pre-interpretation. Thus the incomprehensibility of God must be taught with respect to any revelational proposition.³¹

The distinction between law and subject is fundamental to neo-Calvinistic thought, especially as expressed by Herman Dooyeweerd. This is the distinction between God's creational ordinances and all that is subject to these ordinances. The totality of creation is understood in terms of cosmic law as an expression of God's sovereignty, creation is always to be approached by means of the 'law-subject correlation.' This is a correlation which always holds in every aspect of life; music, worship and architecture as well as physics and chemistry.

We are now sufficiently alive to the fact that law and subject are mutually irreducible, notwithstanding the opinions of rationalists and irrationalists. Law and subject are only possible in their indissoluble correlation³²

Likewise there is a categorical distinction between earth and heaven, or between the creation in which we as creatures exist and the creaturely dwelling place of God and the angels. In the writings of Klaas Schilder this distinction is a development of the first distinction. For Schilder the existence of heaven always proclaims the fundamental idea that God and the creature are distinguished.³³

The fourth categorical distinction, that between the undeveloped and the developed is one that, like the preceding, is given at the creation and is not consequent upon the fall. The earth must be formed or subdued, brought to fruition in the development of human culture so that its creational potentialities are unfolded to the glory of God. Culture is understood as control over material by formation according to a free design.³⁴ In Dooyeweerd's writings power is necessary for culture, 'Power is the great motor of cultural development',³⁵ otherwise the undeveloped would remain undeveloped. The cultural mandate is understood as part of God's eschatological plan for creation. This means that the endeavours of humanity in cultural pursuit whether artistic, scientific, social or political are worthwhile, dependant upon their direction, and part of creation's movement towards the final consummation.

This leads to the fifth distinction, that between structure and direction. Sin has entered the creation and there has arisen a distinction between the order of creation

and the order of sin and redemption. 'Structure' refers to the created cosmos as it was meant to be, 'direction' refers to the cosmos as it is misdirected by sin and redemptively redirected by Christ. This distinction is employed to emphasise that salvation is a recreation, that grace is not destructive of nature, neither is it supplementative of nature, but rather that it restores nature.

Within this conceptual framework common grace plays the same role as it does in the more rationalistic systematisation of Anglo-Saxon federal theology, that of providing a bridge between nature and grace. In neo-Calvinism however common grace, as we shall see, assumes a more developed role within the theological system and a more positive role in cultural development.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Pietism

Although we find occasional mentions of the term common grace in the writings of Puritan theologians and federal Calvinists throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries³⁶ it was not until the latter half of the nineteenth century that the doctrine of common grace was developed in any significant and coherent form.

For the Puritans common grace had become a means of harmonising the doctrine of total depravity and the undoubted good performed by the unregenerate. The neo-Calvinists of nineteenth century Holland³⁷ were however compelled by their historical situation to be concerned with the practical issues of how to live within society and interact with its social, political, economic and cultural life from within the context of pietism and an emphasis upon liberty of conscience and a free Church.

In Reformed pietism in the Netherlands the move to escape from state persecution and intolerance led to the development, and in some cases the implementation, of the concept of a separate Church over against the state Church which was held to have been captured, or at least hopelessly compromised and infiltrated, by the world. The pietistic spirit, prevalent amongst conservative Dutch Calvinists in the first half of the

nineteenth century, was unable to sanctify all the realms of life and, being opposed to the state and the world, withdrew from the world and from practical necessity was compelled to found institutions of its own. The involvement by Christians in protecting their own interests, such as the schools struggle of the 1870's, and in shaping the activities and structures of the world and the natural had somehow to be understood and appreciated without either subordinating society to the strictures of the ecclesiastical or subordinating the Church to the state.

For the neo-Calvinists, in the midst of a Church struggle, a solution was found for their practical difficulty in the hitherto undeveloped doctrine of common grace.³⁸ This concept encourages an appreciation of the development of the world of the natural independent of the ecclesiastical and therefore allows for the existence of art, science and culture in their own right. For the neo-Calvinists of the nineteenth century Netherlands the Christianisation of the state and society was not to take place by means of ecclesiastical control of society. Rather it was to proceed inwardly and organically by the influence of living Christian personalities who as citizens of the state realised and fulfilled their Christian responsibilities. Can one conquer anything by neglecting it or shutting oneself off from it as did the pietists from whom the neo-Calvinists emerged? By their use of the doctrine of common grace neo-Calvinists are able to lay claim to the secular realms of life for Christianity.

Practical Necessity

Theory came to the rescue of practice. Kuyper saw that this separation of institutions, which he was already practising, must be theoretically grounded, practice had to be substantiated by theory. The insertion of separate biblically grounded Christian institutions into the affairs of society had to be accounted for theologically. At this point it is interesting to note the sequence of Kuyper's activity. Kuyper joined the Anti-Revolutionary Voters Club in June 1869; editorship of the weekly *De Heraut* began on January 1st. 1870 with editorship of the daily *De Standaard* following on April 1st. 1872; he entered Parliament in March 1874; the Free University of Amsterdam was founded on October 20th. 1880. *De Gemeene Gratie* his monumental

work on common grace did not begin to be published in weekly parts in *De Heraut* until September 1st. 1895 and was concluded a fortnight before he took office as Prime Minister of the Netherlands on August 1st. 1901.

Kuyper sought by the use of the doctrine of common grace to provide a theological legitimisation for Christian involvement in society and also the creation of separate Christian social institutions. It seems at this point that practical necessity may have become the mother of theology, or at least the midwife. Where special grace or its recipients had failed common grace was resurrected to supply the deficiency. Kuyper started with a clearly defined separation between spiritual and natural, Church and state, and then attempted to employ common grace in order to reclaim the natural for God.

CHRISTIAN REFORMED SYNOD OF 1924

The inclusion of common grace within the federal system has not been free from controversy or problems. Indicative of the problematic position which the doctrine of common grace occupies within federal Calvinism is the controversy in the U.S.A. within the Christian Reformed Church in the early 1920's.

Common - Special Distinctions

Whilst maintaining the importance of a clear understanding of the antithesis between the regenerate and the unregenerate and holding that the unregenerate are capable of no spiritual good the federal Calvinist is forced to confront the problem of how it is that people who are totally depraved and devoid of the saving work of Christ can perform much that is valuable and laudable in their lives whether culturally or socially. The answer usually given, as we have seen in the case of Kuyper, is that the unregenerate are restrained at least partially in the outworking of the sinful impulses in their lives and are enabled to perform civic good through a non-saving work of God which is termed common grace. This formulation of the problem we find restated in an influential proponent of federal Calvinism within the Christian Reformed Church, Louis Berkhof, professor at Calvin Seminary from 1906-1944:

The origin of the doctrine of common grace was occasioned by the fact that there is in the world, alongside of the course of the Christian life with all its blessings, a natural course of life, which is not redemptive and yet exhibits many traces of the true, the good, and the beautiful. The question arose, How can we explain the comparatively orderly life in the world, seeing that the whole world lies under the curse of sin?³⁹

Thus at the very outset, when we are exploring the reason for the doctrine of common grace being held within federal Calvinism, we find the seeds of a dualism already evident. We find two graces of God, one redemptive the other non-redemptive. We find two realms of operation of these graces, the one in the course and society of the Christian life, the other in the course and society of the natural life. Common grace is not in danger of sliding into a dualism, rather this dualism is inherent in common grace. Berkhof exhibits this later when he writes:

Reformed theology ... insists on the *essential* difference between common grace and special grace. Special grace is supernatural and spiritual: it removes the guilt and pollution of sin and lifts the sentence of condemnation. Common grace, on the other hand, is natural; and while some of its forms may be closely connected with saving grace, it does not remove sin nor set man free, but merely restrains the outward manifestations of sin and promotes outward morality and decency, good order in society and civic righteousness, the development of science and art, and so on. It works only in the natural, and not in the spiritual sphere. It should be maintained therefore, that, while the two are closely connected in the present life, they are yet *essentially* different, and do not differ merely in degree.⁴⁰

That the distinctions between common grace and special grace within the formulations of federal Calvinism are indicative of a dualism and not merely differences of God's action within creation would seem to be indicated by the fact that the primary purposes and arenas of operation of the two forms of grace are separate whilst the source of both forms of grace in relation to Christ is left unclear. There is no recognition that redemption is the fulfilment of our created humanity.

The Three Points

As one of the leading upholders of the teaching of the Canons of Dort within the Christian Reformed Church Berkhof had taken a leading part in one of the most important discussions concerning the nature of common grace. In the United States

of America the Christian Reformed Church in the period immediately subsequent to World War I was racked by a controversy concerning this doctrine. The doctrine of common grace had been brought to the forefront of ecclesiastical discussion by the writings and activity of the neo-Calvinists in the Netherlands, particularly by Abraham Kuyper and his three volume *De Gemeene Gratie*. Whilst accepted and utilised by many within the denomination it was not universally accepted. A small group of ministers led by Herman Hoeksema, driven by the logical necessity which they saw as inherent in the structures of federal Calvinism, denied utterly that God had any relationship of favour or grace toward the non-elect. As they understood it God has only wrath for the reprobate and any good shown to them was for the purpose of ensuring the justice of or increasing the punishment due to them on the day of judgement.

The biannual Synod of the Christian Reformed Church which met at Kalamazoo, Michigan in July 1924 to try and resolve the controversy within the denomination over the subject of common grace resolved on the evening of July 7th. to pass three points⁴¹ with regard to the doctrine of common grace.

A. Regarding the first point touching *the favourable attitude of God to mankind in general and not alone toward the elect*, Synod declares that according to Scripture and Confession it is established, that besides the saving grace of God shown only to the elect chosen unto eternal life, there is also a certain favour or grace (*een zekere gunst of genade*) of God which He shows to his creatures in general. This is evident from the Scripture passages that were quoted and from the Canons of Dort, II,5, and III, IV, 8, 9, where the general offer of the Gospel is set forth.⁴²

B. Regarding the second point touching *the restraint of sin in the life of the individual man and of society in general*, Synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confession there is such a restraint of sin. This is evident from the Scripture passages that were quoted and from the Belgic Confession, article 13 and 36, which teach that God by a general operation of His Spirit, without renewing the heart, restrains the unbridled manifestation sin, so that life in human society remains possible.⁴³

C. Regarding the third point, touching *the performance of so-called civic righteousness* by the unregenerate, Synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confession the unregenerate, though incapable of doing any saving good (*Canons of Dort*, III, IV, 3,) can perform such civic good. This is evident from the Scripture passages that were quoted and from the Canons of Dort, III, IV, 4, and from the Belgic Confession Art.36, which teach that God, without renewing the heart, exercises such an influence upon man that he is enabled to do civic good.⁴⁴

Although the Synod did not consider the three points as constituting the entire doctrine of common grace and recommended that the Church should make a further study of the disputed doctrine and carry on an extended discussion concerning all that it involved⁴⁵ it can be said that the framework for discussion we find here is indicative of the federal Calvinistic concerns with common grace which gave rise to the controversy and have become to a large extent the framework for further discussion of the subject of common grace, as can be seen in the work of L. Berkhof.

Consequences of Kalamazoo

Tension can be discerned in the way the Christian Reformed Church handled the doctrine of common grace. We find the Synod operating with what is in essence a two-part scheme. Common grace and special grace are understood as two clearly distinct operations of God which are qualitatively different and which have no essential connection in operation with each other. Yet we can also see that the Synod was unable to maintain this inherent dualism, the well-meant offer of the gospel was cited in the first point as an evidence of common grace which indicates that there is some connection envisaged between the two forms of grace. However in the Kalamazoo formulation this connection was never expanded upon.

As a result of the introduction of the concept of a grace which does not save we are further forced into a situation where we conceive of God living in a relationship with His creation which is mediated in some way other than through the atoning work of Christ. Further the Synod of 1924 found it necessary to add to the three points a 'Testimony' which warned the Church against the wrongful use of the doctrine of common grace which could issue in a diminishing of the antithesis between regenerate and non-regenerate which would lead to 'worldliness.'⁴⁶ Common grace is seen by its proponents as well as its opponents as carrying within it the inherent danger of synthesis, of declaring that there is a common area in which elect and non-elect are one, an area of common ground where all differences fall away. As examples of this

we can see that Abraham Kuyper⁴⁷ found such an area in weighing and measuring and elementary scientific observations.⁴⁸

Yet it is also possible that by understanding common and special grace as being two entirely different 'graces' operating in separate spheres of created life we enter a two terrain theory of being which in some cases rather than bridging the nature-grace split actually approaches a nature-grace scheme. This incipient schema we find spilling over into other doctrines as in Abraham Kuyper and later writers following his line such as W. Masselink who can write concerning the Church that:

The Church as institute concerns herself primarily with God's special grace, whereas the Church as organism moves very definitely in the territory of God's common grace.⁴⁹

By focusing the discussion of common grace, as do the Three Points of the Synod of Kalamazoo, upon whether or not God has an attitude of favour toward the non-elect we are forced into a narrow and individualistic understanding of the concept of the doctrine. The point was a crucial one at issue between Hoeksema and the others in their rejection of common grace and those who brought them before the Synod. This has led to the significance of Christ's cosmic redemption being almost completely overlooked, everything tends to be focused upon the relationship of God with the regenerate or unregenerate individual. This means that the broader implications and significance of common grace for our understanding of God's working within creation and the effect of common grace upon the other doctrines of the Church have been neglected.

It is unfortunate that much of the discussion within Federal Calvinism has been restricted to the matters raised by the three points.⁵⁰ This because the core of the common grace problem is not dealt with in the three points. The Synod is open to the criticism that it was concerned with problems which are a result of introducing common grace as the solution to an earlier problem, and not with common grace in itself, nor with the theological system which gave rise to the necessity of such a

doctrine. The Synod did not deal with the question of why there should be such a thing as a doctrine of common grace at all. Neither did the Synod explore the basis upon which a doctrine of common grace can rest.

SUMMATION

The doctrine of common grace has been developed due to three factors arising from and bearing influence upon this strand of conservative Calvinistic theology:

- i) The rationalising and systematising nature of federal theology which demands the harmonisation of doctrines,
- ii) The necessity of providing a way of relating grace to creation in a theological system such as neo-Calvinism which is based upon an underlying scheme in which law logically and chronologically precedes grace,
- iii) The provision of a theoretical legitimisation of Christian activity in the world.

The neo-Calvinists, having emerged from pietism, posited a free Church with a clearly defined separation of nature and grace, Church and state, and were thus forced to provide an answer to the question: How can this gulf be overcome? Special grace had been used to dig a chasm between the Christian and the world, common grace, in as much as it provides a basis of operation for special grace and at the same time allows for natural revelation of God and the goodness of the natural man, is held by the neo-Calvinists to perform the necessary bridging function. This is a bridge however which is supposed to allow traffic to flow only one way.

We shall see that the position held by Calvin is that special grace is the central and most important factor, since salvation is the principle work of God and man. All other doctrines of the faith and aspects of reality are therefore to be accounted for in relation to special grace and salvation. All aspects of that which we term common grace are subordinate and subservient to it, since common grace exists for the preservation of humanity and the entire creation with a view to the salvation of the elect and that redemption of creation which shall be apparent only on the last day.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1931, pp.12,13 Kuyper reminds us that the term can even be used in some parts of the world as a pejorative epithet applied to a Protestant minority whether or not they owed allegiance to Geneva.
- 2 John Hesselink, 'The Future of a Distinctive Dutch/American Theology in the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church', in *Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church*, ed. P. De Klerk and Richard R. De Ridder, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1983.

Hesselink identifies the following strands of Reformed thought within one denomination, the Reformed Church in America:

- i) Traditional orthodox or scholastic Reformed;
 - ii) Neo-Calvinist, those influenced by Kuyper;
 - iii) 'classical' Reformed, those who focus their theology on the confessions skipping later developments in Presbyterian orthodoxy and neo-Calvinism;
 - iv) Calvinian, those who find their inspiration in Calvin rather than the confessions;
 - v) Neo-Orthodox, those influenced by Barth;
 - vi) the Van Ruler school, those influenced by Toronto;
 - vi) the Latitudinarians, those not confessionally minded but who appreciate Reformed polity and tradition when broadly interpreted;
 - vii) the political activists, those whose concerns are not so much doctrinal as ethical and practical;
 - viii) American Calvinism typified by Robert H. Schuller of the Crystal Cathedral.
- 3 H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1979, p.167
 - 4 E.A. Dowey, 'Preface to Second Printing' (October 1964) in *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1952
 - 5 W.M. Campbell, *The Triumph of Presbyterianism*, Edinburgh, St. Andrew, 1958, p.142 While correct in saying that the Westminster divines adopted the system of federal Calvinism Campbell exaggerates his case when he claims that 'one might almost say (they) initiated, the federal theology.'
 - 6 *The Westminster Confession of Faith* and reaction to it can be seen to be one of the primary factors in credal discussion in the Church of Scotland today as can be seen by the papers in *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today*, Edinburgh, 1982, ed. Alasdair I.C. Heron. Credal discussion, largely around the place of the Confession in the Presbyterian Church in America led to the compilation of the *Book of Confessions 1967*.
 - 7 The activities of publishing houses such as Banner of Truth who specialise in reprinting Puritan and later federal theology are exerting considerable influence in the spread of federal Calvinist theology today. One of the major works of federal theology in print today is Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*. Since 1958 the U.K. publishers, Banner of Truth, have published some 12 editions of this work in the U.K. Details supplied by the publisher in private communication of 30th. May 1991 indicate that up to that date Banner of Truth had sold 59,063 copies of Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*.

- 8 R.T. Kendal, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, Oxford, OUP, 1979
- H. Rolston, *John Calvin versus the Westminster Confession*, Richmond, Knox, 1972
- 9 A. C. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th. Century*, Philadelphia, 1966 p.30
- 10 J.B. Torrance, 'Covenant or Contract', in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 23.1 (1970) p61
- 11 E.A. Dowey, 'Calvinism', in *A Handbook of Christian Theology*, eds. A Halverson and A. Cohen, London, 1962
- 12 Elwyn Smith, *The Presbyterian Ministry in American Culture*, Philadelphia, 1962 p.160
- 13 G.H. Clark, 'The Axiom of Revelation', in *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, ed. R.H. Nash, Philadelphia, 1968 p.76 'The law of contradiction cannot be sinful. Quite the contrary, it is our violations of the law of contradiction that are sinful.'
- 14 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, Kampen, J.H. Kok, 1902 I.11
- 15 A.T.B. MacGowan, 'Federal Theology as a Theology of Grace', in *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, 2:41
- 16 *Ibid*, p.43
- 17 *Ibid*, p.43. Sometimes there is a third covenant inserted into the scheme, the covenant of redemption. This covenant which precedes the covenant of grace takes place within the Godhead. It is a covenant between the Father, giving the Son as Head and Redeemer of the elect, and the Son, voluntarily taking the place of those whom the Father has given Him. The covenant of redemption is employed by some federal theologians as a basis for the subsequent covenant of grace. There is however no essential difference between the two representations of the federal system.
- Speaking of the differences between those who hold to a covenant of grace and those who hold to a covenant of redemption plus a covenant of grace Charles Hodge writes:
- 'There is no doctrinal difference between those who prefer the one statement and those who prefer the other; between those who comprise all the facts of Scripture relating to the subject under one covenant between God and Christ as the representative of His people, and those who distribute them under two.' *Systematic Theology*, Edinburgh, Nelson, 1875, Vol II, p.358
- 18 A. Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, Vol. IV, Kampen, Kok, 1910, p.38ff
- 19 J.B. Torrance, 'Strengths and Weaknesses of Westminster Theology' in *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today*, p.51
- 20 *Ibid*, pp.40ff
- 21 J.B. Torrance, 'Covenant or Contract', 'The federal scheme made a radical dichotomy between the sphere of Nature and the sphere of Grace, of natural law and the Gospel, so that the Mediatorial Work of Christ is limited to the covenant of grace and the Church, the sphere marked out by the covenant of grace. All men by nature stand related to God, the contracting Sovereign, as

to a Judge, under natural law and exposed to the sanctions of law. Only the elect are related to God through Christ as Mediator. So the relationship between Church and world, Church and State is no longer understood Christologically as by Calvin and Knox, but in terms of Gospel and natural law.' p67

cf. J.B. Torrance, 'Calvin & Puritanism in England & Scotland', p.273, quoted *SBET*, 2.17 (1984) 'The separation between Nature and Grace amounts to a pre-Reformation medieval view that grace presupposes nature and grace perfects nature - a departure from the emphasis in Calvin that nothing is prior to grace.'

- 22 H. Bavinck, *De Algemeene Genade*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, p.26. 'Door deze organische verhouding van natuur end genade heeft de Reformatie de mechanische juxtopositie en de dualistische wereldbeschouwing der Roomsche kerk principieel overwonnen.'
- 23 A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1976, p.14
- 24 *Ibid*, p.32
- 25 B.B. Warfield, in a portion of one of his more ponderous sentences, speaks of Calvinism as: 'the entire body of conceptions, theological, ethical, philosophical, social, political, which, under the influence of the master mind of John Calvin, raised itself to dominance in the Protestant lands of the post-Reformation age, and has left a permanent mark not only upon the thought of mankind, but upon the life-history of men, the social order of civilized peoples, and even the political organization of states.' *Calvin and Augustine*, Philadelphia, Presbyterian & Reformed, 1956, p.287
- 26 Although Kuyper was the towering giant and figurehead of the Neo-Calvinist movement he was not its only leader. Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) author of the four volume *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, (1895-1901) whilst a very different type of man from Kuyper can lay claim to a scholarly reputation at least matching Kuyper's. Son of a Reformed minister who had taken part in the *Afscheiding* from the national Church Bavinck, unlike Kuyper, never departed from the faith of his upbringing. At Leiden he received a doctorate for work on the ethics of Ulrich Zwingli. After service for a year as minister of the Church in Franeker he was appointed by his Church to the post of Professor of Dogmatics at the Theological School of Kampen. Here he stayed, rejecting two offers of a post at the Free University of Amsterdam. He accepted the third offer only after he could satisfy his conscience that he was not harming the integrity of theological education in his Church. When Abraham Kuyper became a Minister at The Hague Bavinck succeeded him at the Free University of Amsterdam.
- 27 W. Young, 'Historic Calvinism and Neo-Calvinism', in *Westminster Theological Journal*, 36.1, pp.55ff
- 28 *Ibid*, p.60
- 29 P.Y. de Jong, *The Covenant Idea in New England Theology*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1945, pp.151-152
- 30 A. Wolters, 'Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality', in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, eds. H. Hart, J Van Der Hoeven, and N Wolterstorff, American University Press, 1983, 120ff
- 31 C. Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, (unpublished syllabus, 1971) p.171

- 32 H. Dooyeweerd, *New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Ontario, Paideia Press, 1984, II.8
- 33 K. Schilder, *Wat is de Hemel*, Kampen, J.H. Kok, 1935
- 34 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, Toronto, Wedge, 1979, pp.66f
- 35 *Ibid*, p.67
- 36 One of the earliest mentions of common grace in English is by John Bradford (c1510-1555) who writes,
 'The wicked have not God's Spirit of sanctification and regeneration to sanctify and regenerate them, though they have it concerning other gifts.' J. Bradford, *Works*, Cambridge, Parker Society, ed. A. Townsend, 1843, Vol.1, p.303
- 37 Details of the tenor of Dutch theological interaction with secular thought can be found in Vanden Berg, *Abraham Kuyper*, St. Catherines, Ontario, Paideia, 1978; Michael Wintle, *Pillars of Piety: Religion in the Netherlands in the Nineteenth Century*, Hull, HUP, 1987 and W.R. Godfrey 'Calvin and Calvinism in the Netherlands', in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*, ed. W. Stanford Reid, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1982, pp.95-120
- 38 Surveys of the use of the doctrine of common grace prior to Kuyper can be found in H. Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, Grand Rapids, Smitter, 1928, and Bronkema, p.158ff
- 39 L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1971, p.432
- 40 *Ibid*, p.439
- 41 Translations of the *Three Points of the Synod of Kalamazoo* can be found in: H. Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, Grand Rapids, 1947, 2nd ed., pp. 85ff. C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, Nutley, Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977, pp.19ff H. Van Til, *Calvinist Concept of Culture*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1959, pp.230ff
- 42 The following Bible passages were given as proof of Point 1: Psalm 145:9; Matthew 5:44,45; Luke 6:35,36; Acts 14:16,17; I Timothy 4:10; Romans 2:4; Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11
- 43 The following Bible passages were given as proof of Point 2: Genesis 6:3; Psalm 81:11,12; Acts 7:42; Romans 1:24,26,28; II Thessalonians 2:6,7
- 44 The following Bible passages were given as proof of Point 3: II Kings 10:29,30; 12:2 (compare II Chronicles 24:17-25); II Kings 14:3 (compare II Chronicles 25:2, 14-16, 20,27); Luke 6:33; Romans 2:14; (compare v.13 also Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12
- 45 H. Van Til, *op cit*, p.230
- 46 H. Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches*, Grand Rapids, First Protestant Reformed Church, 1947, pp.91ff
- 47 A. Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1980, p.157 Likewise Bavinck found common ground in: The three sisters, logic, physics and ethics are like unto the three wise men from the east, who came to worship in Jesus the perfect wisdom.' 'Calvin and Common Grace' in *Calvin and the Reformation*, New York, Revel, 1909, pp.103-104

- 48 H. Bavinck, 'Calvin and Common Grace', in *Calvin and the Reformation*, New York, Revel, 1909, pp.103-104
- 49 W. Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1953, p.399
- 50 Jelle Tuininga, *The Christological Basis of Common Grace*, unpublished M.Th. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1966, pp.10,11

SECTION II

CHAPTER TWO

ABRAHAM KUYPER ARCHITECT OF COMMON GRACE

KUYPER THE MAN

Background

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) has done more than any other federal Calvinist theologian to define a Calvinistic concept of culture,¹ and more than any other politician to implement the results of such a view of the world in practice.

The son of a Dutch Reformed minister of the state Church Abraham grew up in a home atmosphere of orthodox piety. Upon entering his own studies at Leiden his Reformed orthodoxy disappeared under the influence of the faculty, particularly his professor of systematic theology Dr. J.H. Scholten.² As Kuyper was to remark in later years 'I, too, have dreamed the dream of Modernism.'³

The young Kuyper, ordained to the pastoral charge of the village of Beesd fifteen miles south of Utrecht and preached in by his father on 9th. August 1863, was to come to another change of direction on his theological pilgrimage. This was due to the combined influence of a professor, a peasant and a religious novel. Dr. Scholten had argued at the beginning of Kuyper's divinity course that the Gospel according to John, provided a few verses were elided, definitely and clearly proved its own genuineness. Three years later in 1861 Dr. Scholten stated that John's Gospel contained no word by John himself. 'To Kuyper that complete reversal was the end of higher criticism.'⁴ The Victorian religious novel was *The Heir of Redclyffe* by

Charlotte M. Yonge which Kuyper had read a couple of years previously in order to brush up his English when emerging from a ten months convalescence following the first of his three major nervous breakdowns. In *The Heir of Redclyffe* Kuyper encountered a picture of the Church as a mother directing the steps of her children,⁵ such a Church Kuyper had never encountered, and longed for. The peasant woman was a parishioner Pietronella Baltus whose piety and all-encompassing Calvinist world-view challenged Kuyper at a time when he was searching for firmer theological foundations in his own life. Kuyper was to come to hold a more all-embracing and activist form of federal Calvinism which maximised Reformed confessionality than his father who had chosen to moderate doctrine and emphasize ethics and ecumenism instead.⁶

Breadth Of Activity

If Leonardo can be described as 'Renaissance Man' it can be fair to describe Kuyper as 'Reformation man.' A theologian and statesman, professor and pastor, founder of a university and organiser of public protest, Church leader and creator of a mass political party, journalist and editor and prime minister of his nation, author of many books and orator of stature, Kuyper packed several lifetime's work into one span. The mainspring of all this activity is found in Kuyper's much quoted dictum pronounced in his inaugural lecture on the founding of the Free University of Amsterdam in 1880, "There is not a thumb's breadth of the complete area of human existence on which Christ, the sovereign of all does not lay His hand and say "It is mine."⁷ Integral to Kuyper's view of human culture and the outworking of such a view in political and social action is his doctrine of common grace.

As we have seen Kuyper did not confine himself to the role of the man of ideas, rather he was also a man of action. A modern commentator on Kuyper and his work writes:

Kuyper was a movement leader, an institution builder, as well as an intellectual. Better, he was an intellectual as movement leader, and a rare success in that trade.⁸

Kuyper's ideas emerged within the process of organising and energising a grass roots constituency into action.⁹ It is important that we grasp the circumstances surrounding the production of Kuyper's writings when we come to consider developments within his understanding of common grace.

Most of Kuyper's published pamphlets were originally spoken addresses given on public occasions to do with Church reform, political gatherings or even fund raising events for the Free University. The same is true of his more important writings, most of Kuyper's major books first appeared as series of articles in his newspapers. These include his treatise on *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, his multi-volume work on the Christian cultural mission *Pro Rege* and his work on Calvinist political philosophy *Oms Program*. The publication which is most important for our purposes, Kuyper's monumental work on common grace *De Gemeene Gratie*, which was published in book form during his occupancy of the post of Prime Minister of the Netherlands (1st. August 1901 - 16th. August 1905), first saw the light of day as a lengthy series of articles in *Heraut* beginning in the issue of 1st. September 1895 and continuing until the issue of 14th. July 1901.

We should note that the series on common grace ceased a mere fortnight before Kuyper assumed the role of Prime Minister and was written in the midst of political struggle and with the dawning awareness of the possibility of attaining power and having, for the first time ever, to implement policy on a national level. The concrete situation faced by the intellectual as the man of action must be taken into consideration when we consider the development in Kuyper's thought concerning common grace.¹⁰

SPHERE SOVEREIGNTY

Kuyper's vision of Calvinism was not only one of a theological system, rather his vision was one of an all-encompassing life system enabling mankind to have a comprehensive and coherent view of the entirety of life. The core principle of this vision of created

life was seen by Kuyper to be the absolute sovereignty of God as Creator and law-giver ordering the world through a system of unchangeable ordinances, the 'Calvinistic belief that there is one Supreme will in God, the cause of all existing things, subjecting them to fixed ordinances and directing them towards a pre-established plan. Calvinists have never thought that the idea of the cosmos lay in God's foreordination as an aggregate of loosely conjoined decrees, but they have always maintained that the whole formed one organic programme of the entire creation and the entire history.¹¹

Creation

For Kuyper God, and God alone, is understood as sovereign, 'God only - and never any creature - is possessed of sovereign rights.¹² As sovereign God is the source of all law.¹³ The overall trend established by Kuyper is to understand creation from within an interlocking complex of discoverable law. Even redemption is to be interpreted from within this foundational system. We are assured that, while the Royal Child of Bethlehem protected sphere-sovereignty with His shield, He did not create it. It was there from of old. It was embedded in the creation order, in the plan for human life.¹⁴

The entire creation is sustained and controlled by God by means of His unalterable laws which provide the structures within which we live. These laws do not arise from outwith the nature of creation but rather constitute the very nature of creation and are the structuring principles around and within which the Creator brought into being all that was created. The Calvinist, looks upon God's decree as the foundation and origin of the natural laws, in the same manner also he finds in it the firm foundation and the origin of every moral and spiritual law; both these, the natural as well as the spiritual laws, forming together one high order, which exists according to God's command and wherein God's counsel will be accomplished in the consummation of His eternal, all-embracing plan.¹⁵

Thus we see that the sovereignty of God is a creational sovereignty touching upon the entirety of existence and is not confined to some supposedly separate arena of faith. Upon this principle is based the conviction that all life is religion. Life in its entirety is lived as a response, either obedient or disobedient, to God's sovereign claim upon His creation.

This dominating principle was not, soteriologically, justification by faith, but, in the widest sense cosmologically, the Sovereignty of the Triune God over the whole Cosmos, in all its spheres and kingdoms, visible and invisible. A primordial Sovereignty which eradicates in mankind in a threefold deduced supremacy, viz., 1. The Sovereignty in the State; 2. The Sovereignty in Society; and 3. The Sovereignty in the Church.¹⁶

This understanding of God's relationship with His creation and the humanity placed here as God's image bearers with the responsibility of caring for and developing creation provides a basis for a wideranging theological understanding of cultural and political endeavour.

Spheres

When Kuyper speaks of the uniqueness of each of the 'spheres and kingdoms' which constitute the aspects of creation his favourite expression is 'sphere sovereignty'.¹⁷ By sphere sovereignty Kuyper means that each sphere of creation has its own integrity, its own distinctive character shaped and preserved by God-given law. The three major spheres, as we see above, are the state, society and the Church. These are not however the only spheres. In his influential address *Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring* (Sovereignty in Particular Spheres) given at the opening of the Free University of Amsterdam in 1880 Kuyper declares that,

Human life... appears to be neither simple nor uniform but represents an infinitely complex composite organism... Call the parts of this great instrument cog-wheels, each driven around its own axle by its own power; or call them spheres, each filled with its own exciting life-spirit - the concept or imagery does not matter - as long as you acknowledge that there are all kinds of

spheres in life, as many as the starry hosts in the firmament, whose boundaries are drawn with firm lines, each having its own principle as a focal point... And because each has its own domain, within the boundaries of that domain each has its own sovereignty.¹⁸

Not just state, society and Church but family, school, business, science, the arts, etc., are sovereign in their own sphere. Each of the multitude of spheres has its own identity and unique task and God-given prerogatives. Within each sphere all are called to exercise the threefold office of prophet, priest and king, but the office is focused in a different manner in each sphere according to the nature of the sphere. The source of authority for each sphere is not the sphere itself, nor the state, nor the Church, but the sovereign God Himself. All spheres are directly responsible to the God who calls them into being and to exercise their authority according to their created inner nature and within their God-given area of jurisdiction. No sphere must transgress those boundaries of competence which have been set for it by God. The importance of sphere sovereignty in political and social terms is seen in Kuyper's statement that the struggle of sphere sovereignty defending itself from state-sovereignty 'is in summary form a description of world history.'¹⁹

As well as leading to opposition to unlimited political authority on the part of the state we can also discern in sphere sovereignty the foundation of Kuyper's struggle towards the secularisation of society or its freedom from control by the Church. These two aspects of opposition to usurpation of authority over a separate sphere can be seen in the first great political campaign organised by Kuyper. In the schools struggle, culminating in 1878, Kuyper organised a massive petition campaign on behalf of the rights of parents to send their children to schools of the parent's choice. It was held that the education of the children of the orthodox Calvinist was not ultimately the responsibility of the state or of the state Church but of the parents of the children. As well as laying the foundation of the Netherlands' first mass political party this struggle for the sphere sovereignty of the family also paved the way for the eventual 'Monstrous Coalition' with the Roman Catholics who, faced with the same

situation with regard to education, participated in the struggle alongside the Calvinists.²⁰

For Kuyper sphere sovereignty had not only political but cultural application. Every aspect of life came directly under the sovereignty of God and all were answerable to God within their own sphere of life and activity. Thus every individual was answerable directly to God for his or her activity without intervention by the subsidiary authority of state or Church. As well as being opposed to the subordination of life to any authority other than God the principle of sphere sovereignty also struck at the social pietism common in the Church of Kuyper's early days.

Bemoaning the pietistic social dualism of Christians throughout the nineteenth century²¹ which he saw as a denial of the Lordship of Christ Kuyper called upon Christians to bestir themselves to proclaim and enact the sovereignty of God over all creation. To this purpose it was needful that they dust off the 'ancient dogma of common grace.'

To put it even more strongly, you yourself *cannot* even confess the sovereignty of God over your own soul without at the same time acknowledging that sovereignty of God over all that exists, it is the acknowledgement of God's sovereignty also over that which falls *outwith* the sphere of particular grace through which every genuine Reformed person *must* be driven and propelled and pressed to confess also the common grace of our God.²²

Kuyper's intention demanded that he show how special and common grace cohere and co-operate, how they influence and condition each other, and what the true nature of their relationships are.²³

SPECIAL GRACE

Definition

Kuyper defines special grace thus:

God's merciful disposition towards sinners with whom He has reconciled Himself for the sake of Christ's meritorious work on the cross and to whom He now freely grants, through His Holy Spirit, out of pure, unmerited, forfeited

and gratuitous favour, according to His eternal plan of salvation, Christ and all His benefits.²⁴

It is here that we find the nature of common grace in Kuyper's thought beginning to emerge. We shall see that at the outset Kuyper defines the purpose of special grace and its sphere of operation too narrowly. By restricting redemption and 'all His benefits' to eternity, God's relationship with individual redeemed sinners was effectually abstracted from society and creation, and it was necessary to develop his conception of common grace in order to escape the duality of a nature - grace division within creation.

Supernatural Focus

Although he was to prove unable to maintain the distinction, Kuyper began by seeing special grace as supernatural and restricted to the realm of glory whilst common grace was summoned up to explain the relationship of God to the created order. At the outset this dualistic and spiritualistic conception disrupts the unity of the Christian life to the extent that the supernatural salvation experienced by the Christian never truly becomes effective within the created order. Kuyper in attempting to escape one form of duality entered into another and equally serious form, that of creating two types of grace each of which is dependent upon the other but neither of which can live compatibly with the other.

Special grace is seen as that regenerative grace of God by which He creates the Body of Christ upon earth. Regeneration is not an outward change of being but a radically religious change of heart, which is the root of man's existence and upon which all else turns.²⁵ The regenerate man or woman whose life is redirected into God-honouring paths sees every aspect of creation in the light of redemption bestowed. Thus ultimately there is no question in Kuyper's mind that truly Christian action must arise from the new man who is born again. However Kuyper has to develop his doctrine of common grace at considerable length before he arrives at this conclusion and his development of common grace as an independent fount of earthly gifts and

development militates strongly against a truly active and effective role for special grace within the temporal world.

Kuyper takes his point of departure in regeneration. The Kingdom of Heaven is the Kingdom of special grace. As we see below the distinction between time and eternity is hardened almost into a dualism, Kuyper seems to make the salvation of special grace entirely an affair of eternity with a connection with time which can be described as almost coincidental. Special grace, shed only upon the elect,²⁶ saves only unto eternal life. Kuyper explains that this special grace, in contrast to common grace, is not intended to come fully into its own in this life, but, founded upon the election to eternal life, is directed toward the life to come.

There are two spheres of human life and one of these spheres of human life embraces everything that works out of common grace and the other everything that belongs to special grace. Life in both spheres has, as we saw, a different origin and its own destination and goal. The goal of special grace is the blessing of the elect in the kingdom of heaven. With common grace the destination is partly in the birth of the elect and the opening of the possibility of the operation of the Church and in the most essential realisation of what God Almighty had put into the world by the beginning of the creation. Both goals find their common point in God's self-glorification. For both there are absolutely different ways of this self-glorification. By common grace God seeks His self-glorification as the original artist and architect of the universe and in contrast in His special grace in the realisation of the kingdom of heaven.²⁷

In its deepest essence special grace operates apart from this temporal life.²⁸ Regeneration or 'the implanting of a new life principle,' can even, if need be, operate entirely apart from this earthly life.²⁹ Conversion need not necessarily follow regeneration as in the case of infants dying before actual conversion who are not lost but saved.

Special grace is seen as recreating grace.³⁰ This means firstly that the destructive effects of sin and the curse are nullified or reversed. But much more than simply recreating the original pre-fall or 'natural' state special grace brings eternal life. The recreation is not the fashioning of a totally new form within creation, rather it is the restructuring of the natural in the reversal of the effects of the fall and the giving of

a new life principle, thus the 'natural' man becomes the 'spiritual' man. This re-creation is the work of special grace, the benefit of Christ's atoning work on the cross. Hence in contrast to the 'natural' state of Adam in Paradise, Kuyper calls this new state of the regenerate man still living within creation 'supernatural.'³¹

Thus special grace is the grace initiated in the present dispensation, on the basis of Christ's work and through the Spirit which leads to the re-creation of regeneration; a grace which will not however, until the eschaton, the rebirth of heaven and earth, translate the whole of created reality into a supernatural creation.³²

It would appear that special grace is not directly intended to engender activity in the temporal sphere. This clearly gives rise to tensions in the life of the Christian. How can activity in the created world emerge from an other-worldly focused special grace? From within this essentially pietistic view is it possible for social activity by Christians within the world to be considered as truly Christian activity? Will not concern with questions of politics, culture and the things of this world, be in itself worldly activity? Such activity surely takes us beyond the sphere of the strictly considered 'spiritual.' Special grace is forced to choose an alien area of activity for the theatre of its revelation: directed to the hereafter for its ultimate purpose, special grace must look to the present for its arena of operation. Yet how can special grace impel the regenerate elect to be active within temporal life?

COMMON GRACE

Temporal Grace

Kuyper's understanding of common grace is shaped by how special grace is seen to relate to the present age. Since the Fall this creation in which we live has been subject to the power of sin, humanity is incapable of any good and disposed to all manner of evil. God's punishment for sin is writ clear in Scripture and if He did not react 'graciously' and deal with us in some way other than with special or recreating grace this domain would instantaneously have ceased to exist. Kuyper contends that without the intervention of common grace the world would have been destroyed at the

fall.³³ The source of the prolongation of fallen life lies in the longsuffering patience of God which whilst not leading to salvation does inhibit the power of sin, Satan, death and corruption.³⁴

Within this fallen existence God's plan for creation is achieved through the presence and activity of common grace.³⁵ Common grace in its core thrust is not to be understood as spiritual and recreative, but as temporal and material. The Flood which revealed a holy wrath of God against sin also served to reveal God's gracious preservation of the temporal, 'The ark held not a second eternal life, but life of a temporal kind.'³⁶ The twofold purpose of common grace is to sustain and develop the creature within the bounds of the original state.³⁷ In the present age it is in those areas where special grace has not rendered common grace superfluous that common grace finds its own proper sphere of activity outwith the regenerate heart, within the temporal world.³⁸ If it did otherwise it would be special and not common grace. Kuyper distinguishes the domains of special and common grace as resting in the distinction between re-creation and creation, indicating a preference for this distinction over that of grace and nature.³⁹

Thus common grace finds itself defined in relation to special grace: it cannot be regenerative; it finds its goal not in the hereafter but only in the temporal; it can never be 'supernatural' or re-creative.⁴⁰ The results of common grace will only ever lead to a higher development of the natural.⁴¹ For this reason it will never bring about the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.⁴² The most that common grace can hope to do is to attempt to restore the conditions of Paradise by reducing the results of the Fall to a minimum.

Restraining Grace

The tension between the Reformed doctrine of total depravity and the evidence of goodness all around lies at the heart of Kuyper's development of the doctrine of common grace. Such is the virulent nature of sin that there must be a form of

restraint holding back its deadly effects otherwise creation would be the arena of death.

If one conceives of sin as a cause, indeed, of spiritual and physical deterioration, but not as a deadly and quickly operating poison which, unless it is restrained, leads to spiritual, temporal, and eternal death, there is no room for the restraint of sin, to which Calvin first emphatically called attention, and on which the entire doctrine of *general grace* is based. It is exactly because of this that the Reformed confession has always placed full emphasis on this deadly character of sin, and opposed every attempt to weaken the conception of sin. 'Incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil' was the formula the Heidelberg used to express this truth. And if you take your position unmoveably in this truth, then it is but natural that you will discover in the story of Paradise, and in all the rest of Scripture, and in human life round about you, and in your own heart, evidences of divine operation, by which the speedy and absolutely fatal operation of sin has been and still is restrained in many ways, even there where there is no question of *saving* grace. Or do you not find, even amongst heathen peoples and unbelievers in your own environment, many phenomena that indicate a certain inclination to good things, and a certain indignation over all kinds of crime? It is true, there is not found any inclination to *saving* good, but, nevertheless, a certain attraction for integrity and things of good report. Are there not acts of meanness, dishonesty and perversion of justice, against which the public conscience, even of unbelievers, rebels? And can one not relate numerous deeds of philanthropy and charity, performed by unbelievers which put to shame believers? When the daughter of Pharaoh rescued Moses from the Nile, did she do good or evil? And is it, then, not evident that the total corruption of our nature through sin, a truth which we unhesitatingly confess, is in conflict with reality? And do you, therefore, not clearly see that in such cases you stand before the alternative: either abandon your confession of the deadly character of sin; or maintain this confession with might and main, but then with the additional confession that there is an operation of general grace, whereby this deadly operation of sin in numerous cases is restrained.⁴³

Kuyper thus does not, as asserted later by H. Hoeksema,⁴⁴ deny the reality of total depravity, but assumes its existence as a very real power in the life of man. So deadly a power is the depravity of humankind that its seeming restraint demands an explanation. Without the restraint of sin by common grace the total depravity of mankind would find its development unchecked and every facet of life would exhibit ever more clearly the discordant effect of sin.⁴⁵

Developing Grace

Common grace however, as well as a role in restraining the effects of sin, is given the independent role of developing creation and making possible history and culture.⁴⁶ Through the action of God in common grace the power of sin and its consequences

are arrested and restrained.⁴⁷ This is seen as a continuous action of common grace, which is always the same⁴⁸ and operates irrespective of human action and reaction. As well as this negative and restraining influence common grace also has a positive and progressive culture forming and activating power in history. In this common grace driven activity man is both the instrument of God and co-worker with God.⁴⁹ *De Gemeene Gratie* Vol.I sets out the essence of common grace as the restraint of sin whilst Vol.II sets out the positive aspects of common grace.⁵⁰

As sovereign over all creation God, by means of common grace, brings about earthly progress within that divine providence which is the fountain of human history.⁵¹ History, according to God's eternal decree, is meant to run its course for the self-glorification of God;⁵² hence common grace must also have been included in that eternal decree. Without this the course of human history would be unintelligible. Special grace cannot function in a void, it requires a base of operation in history. The world must continue in existence, human beings must be born, history must develop and progress; for all of these things to take place common grace is understood as a necessity whereby the original powers hidden within creation may come to fruition and find their highest development to the glory of God.⁵³ Civilisation, enlightenment and development can never be ascribed to Satan but proceed from God.⁵⁴ Kuyper speaks of a continuous development of the human race⁵⁵ by which it collectively exhibits the image of God.

Although unable to do any spiritual good the natural man is nevertheless able to perform acts of civic righteousness. The natural man can also endeavour to perform and succeed in achieving moral good.⁵⁶ These are the means by which God shows grace to fallen humanity for through the sciences such as medicine and jurisprudence much in the way of natural and moral good has been achieved to the benefit of all mankind.⁵⁷ It is here, in the development of the arts and sciences that mankind, even although fallen, with the aid of common grace, appears as co-worker with God as well as the instrument of God. As a result of common grace the power over nature lost at the fall is restored through science and culture, by which the effects of the curse

are diminished. In this way the glory of the image of God in mankind is exhibited by our dominion over nature and development of culture, the fruits of which shall enter the eternal kingdom.⁵⁸

THE SOURCE OF GRACE

Differing Graces

Despite his protestations to the contrary 'nature' and nature endowed with common grace, and special grace with its domain of the 'spiritual' seem to function in Kuyper's thought as opposites. This is more than just a distinction within God's relationship to differing aspects of creation. We find two contrasting poles⁵⁹ which exist in mutual relationship, at once attracting and repelling each other. In Kuyper's thought it becomes a matter of either/or, special or common grace, both at once are unthinkable. There are two distinct spheres of grace which are not intended to merge or overlap.⁶⁰ The domain of common grace is confined to the temporal where the creation ordinances still operate and serve to realise the original goal and purpose of the world in the present.⁶¹

Differing Sources

Although he does not assume an absolute antithesis between the regenerate man and the fallen world there does exist a tension between the domains of the two graces.⁶² Under compulsion of this contrast between the two spheres of action Kuyper has to consider the origin of special and common grace to be different. Special grace which results in the salvation of the elect can only be seen in the light of the Cross and is rooted in Christ as the Incarnate Word, Mediator of Redemption.⁶³ Common grace, non-saving and restricted to this life⁶⁴ is in contrast understood, since all things exist through eternal Word, to have its source in the eternal Christ as Mediator of Creation.⁶⁵ This has the somewhat strange result of separating the Incarnate Christ from the creation in such a way that His assumption of the created has only incidental significance for the creation itself. At this rather important point in Kuyper's thought the earth may bear the Cross but the Cross does not bear the earth. In order to avoid the Anabaptistic error of trying to erect the Kingdom of Heaven on earth with

the subsequent ecclesiastical control of life Kuyper strives to maintain the contrast between the two graces as shall become more evident when we consider his conception of the Church. This may explain why Kuyper has difficulty in envisaging the risen and exalted Christ as the King of common grace as this would on principle break down his polar contrast. What Kuyper wants to demonstrate, but in my opinion ultimately fails to show, is:

that *grace* and *nature* belong together and that you cannot see the richness of *grace* if you do not see how its root and fibres everywhere penetrate into the joints and rifts in the life of *nature*. Now this connection you *cannot* see if 'grace' makes you think first of the salvation of your soul and not first and foremost of the *Christ of God*. It is for this very reason that Scripture constantly reminds us that the *Saviour* of the world is at the same time the *Creator* of the world; in fact, that He could only become its Saviour *because* He was its Creator. Of course, it was not the *Son of Man*, the *Incarnate Word*, that created. Also in the Mediator all that was human was itself created, creaturely, as it is in us. Yet Scripture also points out repeatedly that this firstborn from the dead is also the firstborn of every creature and that the *Incarnate Word* always was and remained the same *eternal Word* that was with God and that was God and of Whom it is written that without that Word not any thing was made that was made. Thus we can see how Christ connects with *nature*, inasmuch as He is its Creator; and with *grace*, inasmuch as He has re-creatively revealed in that nature the richness of grace.⁶⁶

Begbie points to the failure of Kuyper, and other Dutch Neo-Calvinists, to properly appreciate the 'close association between the humanity of Christ and the created order.'⁶⁷ Kuyper takes pains to distinguish between Christ as Mediator of Creation as God the Son and Christ as Mediator of Redemption as God the Son and man.⁶⁸ This means that as Mediator of Creation Christ is related to the created order only in His divinity, in His humanity Christ is related only to the elect. Thus the assumption by God of the created is effectively divorced from His role as Mediator of Creation and He is related to creation solely as ruler and sovereign. Creation and redemption in their root are split apart, as are the temporal and eternal;⁶⁹ one related to God in respect of law, omnipotence and wisdom, the other through unmerited love.⁷⁰

Kuyper has attempted to bring together the realms of nature and grace by relating them within the purposes and Person of Christ. However the introduction of a clear differentiation of purpose within the Person of Christ, with the Incarnate Son being

seen as the source of special grace and the eternal Son the source of common grace, instead of relating the graces serves to extend and harden the dichotomy at the heart of his concept of twin graces. As we shall see this has considerable consequences for the doctrines of the Church and Christian life.

CHRISTIAN ACTION

The Regenerate In The World

Action by men and women regenerated by special grace yet still living within the terrain of a creation preserved by common grace does not entail the Christian becoming a distinctly different type of citizen, rather it makes of Christians the 'best' of citizens.⁷¹ When a man or woman is regenerated they do not become part of a separate breed of citizens. The creational structures and the structures of social discourse such as marriages, families, businesses etc., remain ordinary marriages, families and businesses operating according to those ordinances obtaining for such structures.⁷² Thus activity by Christians in the affairs of the world are legitimised by use of common grace.

Kuyper emphatically opposes the idea that the regenerate soul and the temporal world are mutually exclusive opposites. When the regenerate man or woman become involved in the affairs of this world, because the created order is upheld and developed by common grace, they are not necessarily entering a spiritually alien environment and sinning. Kuyper's three volume work *Pro Rege: Het Koningschap van Christus* is an extensive development of the concept of a Christian culture which is seen as a service that the Christian owes to Christ the King. No Christian has legitimate reason for withdrawing from the world of God's creating and sustaining. By embracing common grace Kuyper seeks to avoid the antithetical dualism of rejecting any connection between the saved soul and the order of this temporal life. Kuyper hopes by common grace to be able to posit a co-operative and developmental relationship between special grace and sin-affected nature. By this means he is also able to shun the world-flight of those who attempt to erect the Kingdom of God in the present from out of the grace of regeneration. Kuyper emphatically rejects this

'radical Christianity'⁷³ because in his view it does violence to a nature endowed with common grace and leads the Church to pursue a premature triumph; the new heaven and new earth await the eschaton.⁷⁴

Unfolding Creation

Common grace operates only within creation, uses only creational materials and always relates back to creation. The unfolding and development of creation, although a result of common grace, is seen as a secular affair.⁷⁵ A Christian artist, like any other artist, works in the terrain of common grace using the tools of common grace; like any artist Christian or non-Christian, he utilises the materials of creation and draws on nature not Scripture, working according to the laws of art such as perspective and harmony which are common to all men. When the artist is also a Christian that is an added consideration⁷⁶ which redirects in a God-honouring way the purpose of the artistic work, and by pointing beyond the creation enhances the created.

Not merely to observe everything visible and audible, to apprehend it, and reproduce it artistically, but much more to discover in those natural forms the order of the beautiful, and, enriched by this higher knowledge, to produce a beautiful world that transcends the beautiful of nature.⁷⁷

But art, like other common grace enriched activities within the temporal world, arises from out of the creation, not the re-creation.

It is surprising therefore to find that Kuyper teaches that the objects of culture and their products will survive Judgement at the Last Day and express themselves in higher cultural forms than they did upon earth.⁷⁸ On the basis of Revelation 21:26 Kuyper argues that the universal human development in all fields of culture will certainly be carried over into eternity, minus of course the effects of sin.⁷⁹ Whatever has been achieved personally in the way of cultural development within the realm of common grace will be ours and not lost in the new earth,⁸⁰ this on the basis of Revelation 14:13. Our works upon earth are those labours influenced by both common and special grace.⁸¹ The parable of the talents is held to teach that what we gain here will

be a gain for eternity.⁸² It must be noted that at this point concerning the cultural activity of Christians in the world, which he has sought to legitimise by use of common grace, Kuyper has been unable to maintain the distinction between the spheres of special and common grace and has seriously breached their independence and weakened his argument for common grace.

Rebellious Activity

Unlike special grace, common grace, despite the thrust of Kuyper's basic emphasis on its role in restraining sin, can also be used as a tool of rebellion against God. As well as being harnessed to the unfolding of creation common grace and its products are open to abuse and can become a threat to special grace.⁸³ As we shall see later and at greater length unbelievers will to some extent inevitably misuse the creation potentials. Here we note a difference of emphasis between *De Gemeene Gratie* and the later *Pro Rege*. Throughout *Pro Rege* Kuyper dwells on this danger of misuse inherent within common grace. There he argues more emphatically than in *De Gemeene Gratie* for the necessity of the organisational antithesis in the sphere of common grace, for the need of distinct and separate Christian organisations.⁸⁴

PROLONGATION

Possibility of Mercy

As an abstract concept Kuyper considers it entirely possible that those souls saved by the regeneration of special grace would have been created even without the natural generation of the human race from Adam and Eve.⁸⁵ In actuality however the human race continues by natural generation.⁸⁶ Adam and Eve did not suffer physical death immediately upon the fall, instead physical life was prolonged and thus regeneration became a possibility. Without the prolongation of creation subsequent to the fall there could be no possibility of regeneration. Human beings must first be brought into existence before such beings can receive the special grace of regeneration.⁸⁷

Subsequent to the Fall the sentence of God was postponed and man did not immediately die as sin's consequence. Rather the creation was prolonged and it is this



temporal creation which provides the indispensable arena for special grace. Kuyper argues that although not itself stemming from or an aspect of special grace,⁸⁸ this prolongation which opens up the possibility of regeneration is yet grace; the postponement of the curse⁸⁹ and punishment rightly due is seen as an act of mercy, an example of divine longsuffering and undeserved kindness towards the generality of mankind.⁹⁰

Possibility of Wrath

Although ensuring the possibility of special grace Kuyper does not hesitate to describe this prolongation by common or 'natural' grace⁹¹ as terrifying.⁹² The obverse of the prolongation which opens up the possibility of regeneration lies in the fact that were the human race not prolonged the birth of the non-elect would not have taken place either. Common grace thus makes possible not only entrance into heaven but also into hell.⁹³ Common grace is therefore also 'common dis-grace,'⁹⁴ and common judgement.

Although common grace displays these two aspects Kuyper maintains it should be named after its primary quality for he does not see election and reprobation as being equally ultimate in the form of a double predestination which lends equal weight to election and reprobation.⁹⁵ Christ did not enter the world to condemn the world, but yet it is His coming that increases the condemnation of those who give no heed to so great a salvation. Nevertheless we need not conclude that Christ came in order that redemption and damnation could be equally realised. As the means of prolonging and sustaining the generation of humankind common grace is understood as nothing less than the pre-condition of special grace.⁹⁶

THE CHURCH

A Spiritual Intrusion

As we have seen in Kuyper's thought the domain of special grace must be located within the spiritual, in the heart or root of man's being, and in the life hereafter. Even if special grace and its effect is to 'radiate out' from this nucleus,⁹⁷ it must still

be understood as nothing less than an anticipation of the 'powers of the age to come.'⁹⁸ For Kuyper the Church itself⁹⁹ is thus an alien intrusion within creation, something *mechanisch*.¹⁰⁰ The Church does not fit into a temporal, natural world and must be considered an abnormality when considered from the creational perspective of common grace. The Church is as abnormal as the Cross of Christ from which it arises and is quite as contrary to nature.¹⁰¹ In writing of the Church Kuyper uses such terms as 'appearance', 'form', and 'gestalte',¹⁰² he even describes the Church as a *Fremdkorper* or 'mechanical' insertion within creation.¹⁰³ The Church as the vehicle of the means of grace is to be understood as a new creation of God's special grace.¹⁰⁴ The Church institution therefore does not originate within or emerge from creation, neither does it stem from common grace, rather it is a spiritual intrusion into creation.

Within Kuyper's conception of the Church we find again that there is significant tension caused by his discrimination between common and special grace. The Church is understood as the visible instrument of special grace¹⁰⁵ and also its temporal manifestation and demonstration in the domain of common grace.¹⁰⁶ Because of this the means of grace entrusted to the Church are essentially more than merely natural phenomena: Scripture is more than a creaturely word, the sacraments are more than visible signs, preaching is more than a natural event.¹⁰⁷ It is special grace or the redemptive acts of Christ as the core from which 'more than' makes sense which is crucial in the nature of the means of grace.

Interdependence

On the other hand however it is within the domain of common grace, which in Kuyper's thought becomes almost a synonym for creation, that special grace seeks a foothold.¹⁰⁸ Without common grace¹⁰⁹ there would be no elements for the Lord's Supper, the Incarnation itself would not have been possible because there would have been no material body. The outreach of the Church in preaching and mission, arising from special grace, needs 'the broad base'¹¹⁰ of common grace in order to realise its function. Kuyper holds that without common grace the Church would not have found a place for the hollow of its foot.¹¹¹ Thus the Church, the result and instrument of

special grace, is dependent upon and cannot exist without the assistance and undergirding of common grace. Once again common grace is seen to lose its independent purpose and is considered as a means to an end above and beyond its own sphere of competence. This is the dependent purpose of common grace¹¹² by which it finds a purpose outwith itself in the service of special grace and furnishes special grace with a toehold in the fallen creation.

Kuyper is prepared to speak about the 'mixing' of the two realms of special and common grace. He maintains that each of the two domains is restricted entirely to its own boundaries. However they are also seen to affect one another in the shared terrain of life and are constantly enmeshed in one another. They are both to be found in the heart of a single person, in one and the same societal life, family, race and people.¹¹³ There are times when Kuyper even distinguishes three terrains: sinful natural life, a living out of common grace, and a living out of special grace.¹¹⁴ In one place Kuyper even distinguishes between four such terrains.¹¹⁵

Kuyper is clear that the believer lives in the terrains of both common and special grace.

He who wishes to view the matter clearly shall have to acknowledge that a twofold grace works in the believer, particular grace stemming from the seed of God which is in them, as well as common grace which he has in common with the people of the world.¹¹⁶

In this manner the domains of common grace and special grace are drawn ever more closely together, the sphere of common grace can even be labelled as the domain of 'preparatory grace,' preparing for the means of grace and with that the possibility of the work of the Spirit by means of the Church. Despite this increasing convergence of common and special grace Kuyper strives to retain the distinction he has created between the two graces. The sovereignty of God in election is held to remain totally independent of that preparatory grace. Common grace as a 'preparatory grace' is said to determine nothing in advance with respect to special grace.¹¹⁷ The same can be

said for the means of grace themselves.¹¹⁸ At this juncture we can discern in Kuyper's thought a simultaneous drawing together and a pulling apart of the special and common grace of God.

Tensions

By arguing that the Church is an entity existing in both terrains Kuyper hopes to resolve the tensions arising from this discrimination. She is not to be understood as solely an anticipation of the hereafter in this life. Neither is the institutional Church considered as indispensable for the 'spiritual' gift of special grace. This enables Kuyper to take refuge in the Church as the mystic Body of Christ,¹¹⁹ to which the institutional Church *qua* institution does not belong. Arising from a miracle within the creation,¹²⁰ despite her future orientation, the institutional Church remains part of and rooted in temporal reality and as such is outwardly indistinguishable from all that which belongs to the domain of common grace. Thus we have a bifurcation within the Church in which the institutional Church constitutes an earthly shell in which the Church organism gathers and through which the Holy Spirit may, or may not, work. So serious is this division between the Church as institution and organism that Zwaanstra raises the possibility that:

The development of Kuyper's thought is such that the question may be seriously asked whether or not the church as organism and institution still represented two sides, or aspects, of one and the same church. By placing the church as institute alongside the church as a visible organism and assigning specifically different tasks to each, the conceptual unity of the church as an historical existing reality was seriously compromised if not lost.¹²¹

Kuyper defends the view that in principle regeneration is not tied to the administration of the means of grace but rather is an immediate work of the Spirit¹²² whose activity cannot be restricted to the means of grace. At this point in order to defend his splitting apart the institutional Church and the Body of Christ he is forced to resort to a nature-grace split by introducing a distinction between 'being' and 'consciousness,' in which regeneration is independent of that consciousness which interacts with the use of the means of grace.¹²³ But this fails to resolve the dichotomy Kuyper has

introduced, it merely moves it into the area of consciousness. Does consciousness therefore continue to fall within the domain of special grace,¹²⁴ or is it, as an activity discernable and active within temporal reality, part of the area of common grace? Consciousness is an indissoluble part of our creaturely existence. The Church as the Body of Christ operates within the domain Kuyper attributes to common grace however much she may be a means or a pointer to the ends of special grace.

Kuyper attributes to Adam in the state of rectitude a 'creaturely' function of believing.¹²⁵ Although distorted by the fall this function remains and needs reorientation rather than recreation. In this way the act of believing as such is nothing new but a restoration of that which is already existent within our created nature. Thus faith is not entirely attributable to supernatural grace, neither is it completely attributable to the natural power of men or to common grace.

Institution And Organism

Kuyper makes a distinction between the Church as institution and the Church as organism. The Church as institution is typified by being made up of office bearers, denominational structures and the means of grace. Kuyper employs the concept of Church as organism to typify the voluntary activity, energised by special grace, arising from the presence of the Body of Christ in the temporal world of common grace.¹²⁶ Such activity is not engaged under the direction of the institutional Church nor is it indirectly linked to the Church institution as such. It is important to understand that Kuyper is not propounding an individualistic concept of the Church as organism; all outgoing activity finds its source in the Church as the Body of Christ.¹²⁷ All of the regenerate are liberated members of this Body, indissolubly linked to Christ; there is no institutional structure that has direct and primary authority over that which has its source in the mystic Body of Christ.

At this point Kuyper understands the freedom of the individual Christian as being at stake; that freedom of discerning faith which can defy even the institutional Church,

but is ever and always subject to the Word of God, Incarnate and written. Again Kuyper battles for 'secularisation' and rejects firmly all forms of domination of the terrain of common grace by the institutional Church. Thus he resists the idea of 'church sponsored' Christian action in this domain.¹²⁸ Christian action emerges from the obedience of the regenerate Christian working out the implications of special grace in his or her life, it does not emerge from the decrees or injunctions of the institutional Church.

GRACE AND CULTURE

Church And State

Given the historical circumstances it is understandable that Kuyper's underlying concern is not with common grace as providing the infrastructure for the operation of special grace. Rather his real interest, as can be seen from his Stone Lectures of 1898, lies with the 'secularisation' of culture, or the emancipation of life from the domination of the institutional Church and the legitimisation of Christian culture forming activity in the world. This gives rise to the question of how special grace affects and interacts with the domain of common grace. In examining this question we must remember that basically Kuyper views common grace as independent with a function of its own.¹²⁹ Common and special grace do have the same ultimate object, the glory of God.¹³⁰ Special grace however serves this by the salvation of sinners,¹³¹ common grace by bringing creation to its divinely intended flowering,¹³² by stimulating the development of culture.¹³³

In Kuyper's thinking the Church, even when considered as an institution, and the State are entities of divergent nature; the State is an institution of common grace and the Church an institution of special grace.¹³⁴

Government is and will continue to be an institution for our earthly household and finds its ultimate purpose in this dispensation; the church is and will remain an institution for the kingdom of heaven and finds its ultimate purpose in that which lies on the other side of the grave.¹³⁵

That Kuyper's concern for cultural activity on the part of Christians demands a resolution of this split becomes clear when he argues that if the doctrine of common grace is rejected or neglected we are at a loss as to how to treat the civil state. Kuyper argues that without common grace the state must be regarded as something unclean and unholy, something best left to the unconverted.¹³⁶

Kuyper originally taught that only after the Noahic Covenant (of common grace) had come to an end would the Kingdom of Heaven set in.¹³⁷ This position was subsequently dropped to make room for the idea that the Kingdom of Heaven is to be revealed already in the present age, in the realm of common grace - in the form of visible manifestations.¹³⁸ And this now is the task of the Church.

Cultural Effects Of Special Grace

In trying to show that the impetus behind the development of human culture is to be found in common grace Kuyper attempts to demonstrate that wherever Christianity has taken hold the cultural life of all, whether regenerate or unregenerate, began to flourish.¹³⁹ World history is called upon to demonstrate the usefulness and practical cultural value of Christianity. In those places where Christianity does not flourish culture dies,¹⁴⁰ where Christianity blossoms the common life of mankind is enriched.

The Bible, the example of the life of Christ, and the Church as an institution, have a leavening effect on the behaviour of peoples and thus enhance common grace.¹⁴¹ These have an effect upon behaviour even when special grace and salvation does not ensue,¹⁴² where special grace does take its hold common grace works itself out in an even more refined and efficient manner.¹⁴³ Owing to the influence and spread of the Church social history is proceeding to become universal history.¹⁴⁴ Kuyper sees as evidence of the beneficial effect of special grace in enhancing the development of the domain of common grace¹⁴⁵ the fact that European/American culture, enriched by special grace, has developed to a position of what he envisages as a 'universal human culture'.¹⁴⁶ Those nations not living under the influence of special grace are seen to acknowledge the pre-eminence of the European/American peoples whilst colonial

nations indirectly share the benefits for the domain of common grace consequent upon special grace.

'Christian' Activity

This gives rise to the conclusion that all that is under this influence, even if it does not arise directly from the roots of special grace can be termed, however improperly, Christian.¹⁴⁷ European/American culture has at its heart the Christian¹⁴⁸ who, because he lives by special grace, makes the best citizen. Special grace is thus seen to 'baptise' and perform a 'christianising' function for the activity of common grace¹⁴⁹ in a way nothing else can.¹⁵⁰ Thus for the Christian to work for the advancement of national culture is to pursue a calling from God as it is only when rooted in Christianity that this culture can be considered true culture.¹⁵¹

Kuyper's use of the term Christian as an adjective is ambiguous. At one point¹⁵² he says that 'Christian' in terms of state and society have reference only to the faith of the person involved, not to any qualitative difference in practice. Later however he tells us that he is willing to speak of a 'Christian' statesman 'not in order to denote his personal trustworthiness thereby, but to designate that he is a different kind of statesman than an unbeliever.'¹⁵³

A Christian lifestyle in this world is the norm. A Christian marriage is a normal marriage, a Christian family a normal family, a Christian political party a normal political party - all operating according to those ordinances which obtain for marriage, family and political party.¹⁵⁴ The Christian marriage, family or political party are not to be understood as a replications of the Church in miniature, cloistered entities existing in a special supernatural sphere. Christian action in the world is the opposite of overturning or rejecting those structures which are normative in this temporal life. Thus Christian political action has to be more than agitating for legislation concerning supposedly 'Christian' concerns such as Sunday trading, abortion, national lotteries and euthanasia. A Christian political party has to be the expression of a political

philosophy based upon Christian principles that penetrates to every aspect of life within its sphere of responsibility.

Although entrusted with the task, common grace if left to itself is unable to accomplish the enhanced development of its own domain. In those nations in whose midst the Church is wanting Kuyper holds that common grace wastes away or produces only sickly fruit. As an illustration Kuyper uses natural science. Set free by the Spirit of Christ from the bonds of sin and Satan, the scientist is also set free from enslavement to nature.¹⁵⁵ Unregenerate scientists 'refuse to reckon with other than natural data'¹⁵⁶ the regenerate scientist is enabled to 'continue to find the ideal norm not in the natural but in the Triune God.'¹⁵⁷ Only this liberation enables the scientist to take that stance over against nature which is the precondition for any development of science and the conquest of nature. In Kuyper's view this makes it understandable why the natural sciences flourish only in those societies where common grace has been christianised or baptised by special grace.

Even although it does not lead to a truly Christian state, society etc., Kuyper maintains that the enhanced quality of political life, family life, etc., could not exist if an indirect influence of special grace did not operate. For this reason he does not refrain from attaching to the common grace life that is thus 'impregnated with the Gospel'¹⁵⁸ the description of Christian. This concept of the 'Christian state' is so called not because such a state directly serves the institutional Church, which it does but which would be an end transcending itself; rather it is termed Christian because its level of cultural development is due to the effect of special grace.¹⁵⁹ At this point Christian political activity enters, politics which creates the conditions which enable the Church to carry out her functions. This is reason enough for the Christian to enter the political arena. The Christian is then active in the domain of common grace for ulterior reasons - for special grace, for reason of Church rather than reason of state.

This means that Christian culture is ultimately considered to be so in the indirect service which the means of common grace and human activity within the realm of

common grace render the institutional Church. Christians can thus work in the domain of common grace directly in the interest of the Church and not toward developing the domain of common grace. The motive behind such activity is *Pro Rege*. Thus the term 'Christian' when used with reference to culture, politics etc., can in general refer to *Pro Rege* activity.

Scripture

Although himself deeply involved in political action and committed to a high view of Scripture Kuyper hesitates to affirm that norms for the state are found in the Bible. In this context he does say that many things not really related to special grace but belonging to the domain of 'natural life'¹⁶⁰ are revealed in Scripture. A political party is free to take the Bible as a guide to the extent that the Bible throws light on political problems, as on all of human life, and makes us wise unto common grace. This use of Scripture is not specifically Christian activity but universally human and can be engaged in by all.

This again indicates the often unacknowledged significance of special grace for common grace within Kuyper's work. We can see that Scripture has influence only where special grace has operated and brought to fruition its regenerative work. Only in a society where people have been regenerated will its teaching as to the 'natural life' have any real influence amongst the unregenerate. The Book of Proverbs may contain a great deal of good advice for life which is applicable to all people, but unless there is a common acknowledgement of the revelatory and salvific significance of Scripture within a society its 'good advice' will not be heeded. The common authority of Scripture is not an aspect of common grace but an indirect fruit of special grace.

Action As Anticipation

The free activity of Christians is the natural outcome of what the Holy Spirit has worked in the regenerate.¹⁶¹ Christian action is thus a revelation of the miracle of special grace, and consequently a revelation of the Kingdom of Heaven. Kuyper sees

Christian action as faith's anticipation of the kingdom that is to come and as faith's working from out of 'the powers of the age to come.'¹⁶² Only at this point is Kuyper able to speak of really distinctive 'Christian action' and 'culture,' that is action and culture springing from regenerate hearts in accordance with the revelation of God. It is at this point that we see emerging the deep antithesis between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of this world, a chasm originating in the basic underlying antithesis between the Body of Christ and the race of Adam which has fallen away from God in its spiritual root.¹⁶³

Christian activity resulting from the intrusion of special grace into temporal life, making the most of common grace as raw material for a truly 'Christian' culture, means that another way of pressing the terrain of common grace into the service of special grace is opened up.¹⁶⁴ All such activity is *Pro Rege* Christ 'has been given all power in heaven and on earth.'¹⁶⁵ Common grace preserves the structures of creation and in doing so enables special grace to lift culture to a higher development, all to the glory of Christ. There is no development for the sake of the cultural advancement itself, all is first and last a means of revealing what special grace in Christ can do within the terrain of human culture.¹⁶⁶ In this way Kuyper hopes to preserve on the one hand the spiritual heart of special grace by ensuring that its dynamic is not weakened by pursuit of 'broad' cultural activity for its own sake, and on the other hand he tries to ensure that the spiritual heart is not made contemptuous of cultural activity. He attempts to repair fences he has already found it necessary to break down.

There has thus been great movement in the exposition of Kuyper. He increasingly ascribes to special grace a dynamism which cannot be denied expression in the temporal realm of common grace: special grace cannot be contained, it must force itself out into affecting and developing the realm of the temporal. That province remains what it was, fallen and preserved by common grace, but has now become primarily the arena for the activity of special grace. Special grace spreads inexorably out from its 'spiritual' centre towards the periphery.¹⁶⁷

Now this distinction [between centre and periphery] enables us to picture to ourselves how it is possible that a change can take place in that matrix, in that single point from which all activity proceeds, without any change being discernible as yet in the broad periphery. But gradually that change in the centre is completed; accordingly it gains in strength and begins to manifest itself also in the 'issues of life;' and so at last the change or renewal becomes noticeable throughout the whole periphery.¹⁶⁸

ANTITHESIS

In Principle

If *Pro Rege* expresses the positive aspect of a Christian culture properly so called in unfolding the development of creation's potentialities Kuyper also has expressed the same basic conviction in a negative manner. This we find in his concept of the antithesis. Kuyper recognises a deeply rooted antithesis between the Kingdom of grace and the kingdom of this world, between the new humanity in Christ and the old humanity in Adam. It should be noted that Kuyper never assumes that the antithesis between the regenerate man and the fallen world is an absolute antithesis worked out in practice, it remains an antithesis of principle. That the positive work of the *Pro Rege* motive will encounter an ever increasing opposition from the world and that the kingdom of the world grasps and makes use of the gifts and developments of common grace in order to defy the Kingdom of Christ is a conviction which grew on Kuyper more and more throughout his writings¹⁶⁹ and particularly after his assumption of real political power.

Rebellion

This would obviously cause a deep problem for Kuyper's exposition of common grace. How could it be that on the one hand there existed a truly 'Christian' culture developed within the arena of common grace and impelled by the dynamism of special grace all to the glory of God, and on the other hand as noted earlier the gradual development of this culture becomes over the ages a tool of rebellion against God?

To attempt to deal with this problem Kuyper divides the operation of common grace into two areas: firstly the area of technical and intellectual culture; and secondly the

area of ethical and spiritual culture. The further continued development of rational-mechanical culture, which is undeniable, will go on hand in hand with a corresponding decline in moral culture. Kuyper argues, on the basis of Romans 1, that man's natural knowledge of God and moral sense will increasingly diminish due to the withdrawal of common grace.¹⁷⁰ As culture advances in technical development this in itself will also serve to advance godlessness which is essentially an abuse of culture.¹⁷¹ Also as a moral stance of enmity against Christ increases, common grace will be pressed into service in rebellion against Christ and His followers.¹⁷² Alongside the continuing higher development of the former culture there will be the gradual disintegration of the latter.¹⁷³ This decline of the 'higher values' of humanity will lead to increased awareness of the gap between regenerate and unregenerate. Both covenant keepers and covenant breakers will grow ever more conscious of the antithesis with consequent increase in conflict.

Here we can discern the aggressive nature of *Pro Rege* action. It was this awareness of developing conflict which spurred Kuyper in the setting up of distinctively Christian organisations in the public sector of life.¹⁷⁴ The Christian's struggle to preserve the highest values of common grace is not seen as selfish striving to preserve and foster one's own viewpoint or values,¹⁷⁵ the honour of Christ is always a blessing directly or indirectly for the whole of humanity. Kuyper can even go so far as to say that for the sake of greater solidarity amongst Christians in the *Pro Rege* cause he considers it 'fortunate',¹⁷⁶ that the rebellious character of the 'misuse' of common grace will become increasingly evident; this he thinks will serve to nullify any temptation to dilute Christianity with humanism.

Spiritual Antithesis

There are times when Kuyper stresses the commonness of common grace to the extent that he sets forth an area of commonness between believers and unbelievers which is without qualification, an area of neutrality. Kuyper contends that special grace digs a divide between Christendom and the world and only common grace offers to both realms a common terrain.¹⁷⁷ Thus in the broader cultural field there are certain

activities that remain unaffected by special grace, such as architecture and dentistry. Regeneration does not endow the Christian with greater understanding or enhanced facility in technical matters, neither does it bestow additional knowledge or craftsmanship within the arts.¹⁷⁸ The fundamental activities of science, such as weighing, measuring and counting, are the same for the natural and the spiritual man.¹⁷⁹ Observation is said to be non-scientific in nature.¹⁸⁰ Logic is also neutral.¹⁸¹ It is when we move from observation to the description and interpretation of the facts observed that we may speak of science, and it is in this area of interpretation that the impact of regeneration is felt.¹⁸²

Faith, generated by special grace, is not opposed to science for it forms the basis and presupposition upon which science can truly be built.¹⁸³ This is because 'faith must also influence that particular function by which the scientific result is obtained.'¹⁸⁴ The reason that the antithesis which is absolute is not more readily observed is because we have the facts in common and also employ a common methodology and common language. Metaphysically the regenerate share common terrain with the unregenerate, epistemologically they have the basic operations in common, spiritually they view the world from utterly opposed viewpoints.

COMMENTS

Significance

The importance of Kuyper as a theologian who in his desire to proclaim the sovereignty of the Christ who lays claim to every thumb's breadth of creation must be acknowledged. He roused from its slumbers the culturally quiescent and irrelevant Church of his day, an organism which embraced a piety marked by contempt for the world. His aims were breathtaking in their scope and his achievements are remarkable and hardly paralleled in any period of the Church's history. However if we are to proceed in attempting to understand the relationship which God bears to the creation as well as building upon the strengths we should also avoid the weaknesses of Kuyper.

The Independence Of Common Grace

The comment of H. Van Til that, 'It ought to be observed at once that Kuyper was not always consistent in holding to the independent and self-sufficient purpose of common grace,'¹⁸⁵ is accurate. However the reason Kuyper was unable to hold consistently to an independent purpose for common grace, as was his wish at the outset, was that what he tried to do was not possible. The insertion of a dichotomy into the realm of grace cannot be maintained.

Throughout Kuyper's view of the relation between common grace and special grace a dualistic tension has been seen to be constantly at work. Intended to have a different scope because special grace applies to the regenerate alone whilst common grace applies to all humanity and creation; a differing purpose with special grace aimed at a recreation transcending the natural creation order¹⁸⁶ whilst common grace is aimed at preserving and developing the creation order; they have a differing nature with special grace delivering from sin and bringing eternal salvation and common grace restraining sin and bringing temporal blessing; and ultimately they have differing grounds in Christ Jesus the Son of God and man as Mediator of Redemption and Christ Jesus the Son of God as Mediator of Creation.¹⁸⁷

The effects of Kuyper's teaching on the relationship between common and special grace can be seen in his dealing with the creation order. Kuyper attempted to give expression to the conviction that God, despite the sin of the world, upholds the world by His 'creation ordinances.'¹⁸⁸ Unfortunately he did not stress nearly enough that these ordinances are upheld by God with a view to their fulfilment in Christ Jesus, thus with a view to special grace. It is possible to say with Klapwijk¹⁸⁹ that Kuyper's common grace doctrine is not Christocentric enough, by which he means that it is not sufficiently rooted in special grace. Common grace in Kuyper is viewed as an exercise of power and influence bearing upon humanity and creation which is in effect divorced from God's grace in the suffering Christ.

As well as being unable to maintain a distinctive and independent developmental purpose for common grace, as his work progressed Kuyper was forced to adjust his view of special grace in its significance for common grace. As we have seen special grace was initially understood as being exclusively spiritualistic and eschatological. This was gradually revised to become a more fully developed special grace no longer limited to the salvation of the soul but radiating out into the domain of common grace making that domain serve *Pro Rege*. Once having adopted this position Kuyper of course is eventually forced to teach that in the domain of common grace the exalted Christ is also the King who rightly demands that common grace be pressed into His service.¹⁹⁰

Christ The Mediator

The supposition that common grace rests solely in Christ as the Son of God and Mediator of Creation proves insufficient to carry the full weight of cultural development initially imposed upon it by Kuyper. Begbie argues that in Kuyper's thought, 'Common grace... becomes little more than God's power in creation, detached from his purposes of love.'¹⁹¹ Whilst accurate this underestimates the significance of the development in Kuyper's view which we have discerned. We find that Kuyper in trying to relate common and special grace, within the restrictions of the Christological definitions correctly noted by Begbie, moves towards a position which attempts to overcome this in two linked ways. Firstly Kuyper brings out the *Pro Rege* emphasis. By relating salvation to God in terms of identification and love, and relating creation to God in terms of power, law and obligation Kuyper had created a picture of cultural development which he then had to supplement by bringing this development to serve the purposes of special grace and allowing it to be influenced by the effects of special grace. Secondly, and more importantly, Kuyper does begin to set out the idea that Christ as Mediator of Redemption is not only related to the spiritual heart of man, but is also in principle the new Root of all created reality and the new Head of the 'human race.'¹⁹² This is what enabled him to emphasise more fully in *Pro Rege* than in the earlier *De Gemeenle Gratie* that humanity is in the service of Christ throughout

the terrain of common grace.¹⁹³ Despite these attempts it can be argued that Kuyper never manages successfully either to insert special grace or to eliminate common grace.

Primacy

One of the most fundamental points of contention within Kuyper's doctrine of common grace is that special grace is based upon common grace.

Howsoever one thus wishes to put the matter, particular grace presupposes *common grace*. Without the latter the former cannot accomplish its task.¹⁹⁴

It is true that on occasion Kuyper was able to write as if special grace was the presupposition of common grace, and not the other way round as has been shown from the body and thrust of his work. However these instances¹⁹⁵ have the air of protestations intended to patch up holes in a leaky argument. H. Van Til is undoubtedly correct when he writes that Kuyper at this point put:

the cart before the horse, since God gave his promises to our first parents and also to Noah on the basis of his purpose to redeem the world in and through Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁶

Special grace does not enter into a floundering creation as a lifeboat bent on a rescue operation to pluck certain individuals from danger, rather, as we shall see in Section III below, special grace is to be understood as providing the opportunity of creation. God's purpose of redemption by the special grace of God is the basis upon which the created order exists and the purpose for which it is sustained.

SUMMATION

With a starting point which failed to appreciate sufficiently the understanding that when special grace changes the direction of a person's life by regeneration this has immediate consequences for his 'natural' life Kuyper left open the door for the entrance of common grace or a form of relationship between God and creation fundamentally removed from the Incarnation and Atonement and which as such failed

to lead to true faith and life but only to a cultivation of creational potentials. Kuyper expected no more than 'the beginnings of a breakthrough of the powers of particular grace in the visible things of this present life.'¹⁹⁷

The Church, considered as an organism, was able to be involved, and was expected to take a lead, in culture forming activity within the world. However, when considered as an institution, which is its most visible manifestation in the world, the Church tended to be isolated as an uncomfortable intrusion in creation, unable to develop in its role as a city set on a hill and a light to the nations. Uncomfortable echoes of the pietistic emphasis on separation of Church and world remain. The institutional Church at times almost comes to resemble a cave of Adullam in which Christians shelter and are spiritually refreshed and from which they make forays into the world.

The principles undergirding Kuyper's conception of the relationship between special and common grace are under too much inner tension to be able to sustain the weight he puts upon them. Kuyper himself attempts to break through the restrictions of a basically dualistic view of the relation between the terrains of common and special grace. However in his thought special grace has been too firmly concealed within the life of the mystic Body of Christ for it ever to emerge completely successfully as a determinative factor in the historical development of human culture.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 H. Van Til, *op cit*, p.117
- 2 F. Vanden Berg, *Abraham Kuyper*, Paideia, Ontario, 1978, p.20
- 3 *Ibid*, p.21
- 4 *Ibid*, p.28
- 5 *Ibid*, p.28 cf. James Bratt, *Reformed Journal*, 37.11.
- 6 James Bratt's studies in the *Reformed Journal* draw an interesting psychological picture in which Kuyper's activity, particularly in the Church struggle, is seen as 'among other things, the redemption of a tarnished Mother and the exorcism of his father.' *Reformed Journal*, 37.11.10
- 7 A. Kuyper, *Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring*, 3rd. ed. Kampen, 1930, p.32
- 8 J. Bratt, *Reformed Journal*, 37.10
- 9 Kuyper's activism has been equated with that of Martin Luther King in that, 'both had first rate minds which they subordinated to a popular cause.' J. Bratt, *Ibid.*, 37.11
- 10 Cornelius Van Til helpfully points out concerning *De Gemeene Gratie* that: 'There seems to have been a certain development in his views... In the first volume he speaks of the essence of common grace as being a certain restraint of God upon the process of the sinful development of history. In the second volume he speaks of the essence of common grace as being a certain positive accomplishment in history that the sinner is enabled to make by God's gifts to him. It looks as though Kuyper's conception of common grace grew gradually in his own mind to include a positive as well as a negative aspect.' *Common Grace and the Gospel*, Presbyterian & Reformed, Nutley, 1977, p.15
- 11 A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1976, p.115
- 12 *Ibid*, p.85
- 13 Ratzsch argues that what Kuyper means by 'law' appears to be what today would be termed 'empirical law,' a phenomenal instead of a theoretical principle. D. Ratzsch, *Abraham Kuyper's Philosophy of Science*, Toronto, Institute for Christian Studies, 1987, p.9
- 14 A. Kuyper, *Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring*, Kampen, J.H. Kok, 3rd. ed., 1930, as translated by G.J. Spykman, 'Sphere-Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition' in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. D.E. Holwerda, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1976, p.183
- 15 A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, p.115
- 16 *Ibid*, p.79
- 17 Kuyper did not introduce the concept of sphere sovereignty to Dutch Neo-Calvinism. It was employed in a limited political way by Groen van Prinsterer when asking for the autonomy of social organisations. Groen wrote of 'sovereignty within its own sphere (*Souvereiniteit in eigen sfeer*)'. Cf. H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.53 In this manner he argued for the sphere sovereignty of local town and district councils as distinct from the sphere of the state government. It was left to his successor Kuyper to develop

this concept as a creational principle of universal scope. Later Dooyeweerd was to elaborate the essentially historicist sphere sovereignty of Kuyper into a philosophical structure of creational interpretation and understanding, as shall be demonstrated in Chapter 6.

- 18 A. Kuyper, as translated by Spykman, *op cit.*, p.182
- 19 *Ibid*, p.183
- 20 Kuyper's structuring principle of sphere sovereignty when considered in political terms would appear to have been in opposition to the Roman Catholic principle of sphere subsidiarity. For a discussion of the interacting roles of the various theological and denominational groups in nineteenth century Holland see Michael Wintle, *Pillars of Piety: Religion in the Netherlands in the Nineteenth Century*, Hull, Hull University Press, 1987.
- 21 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, Vols I-III, Leiden, Donner, 1902-05 [cited hereafter according to the 3 Vol Kampen ed 1931-32 with pagination moved up 4] III.10
- 22 *Ibid*, III.14
- 23 *Ibid*, I.250; II.631f, 639f
- 24 A. Kuyper, *E Voto Dordraceno, of de Geloofte van Dordt*, 4 vols.; Amsterdam, 1892-95, II.537
- 25 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, II.298
- 26 *Ibid*, II.613
- 27 *Ibid*, II.639, 654
- 28 *Ibid*, *Gratie*, II.341
- 29 *Ibid*, II.654 The reference is to the high incidence of infant mortality.
- 30 *Ibid*, II.613; III.110ff
- 31 *Ibid*, II.243; III.110
- 32 *Ibid*, II.685, 689
- 33 *Ibid*, I.213, 220
- 34 *Ibid*, I.243; II.611
- 35 *Ibid*, II.28, 630-31
- 36 *Ibid*, I.86, 92, 296; III.107-10, 331
- 37 *Ibid*, III.107ff
- 38 *Ibid*, I.291; II.109, 331
- 39 *Ibid*, II.613f; III.110
- 40 *Ibid*, I.86, 296; II.507-11; III.107-10, 146
- 41 *Ibid*, II.276

- 42 *Ibid*, I.432
- 43 *Ibid*, I.232, 251
- 44 H. Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, Grand Rapids, First Protestant Reformed Church, 1947, 2nd. ed., pp.311-313
- 45 Kuyper speaks of the discordant effects even of restrained sin as applied to our scientific activity. *Principles of Sacred Theology*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1980, pp.106-114
- 46 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, II.118, 635; III.302
- 47 *Ibid*, I.246; II.506
- 48 *Ibid*, II.604
- 49 *Ibid*, II.507-09, 606; III.124
- 50 *Ibid*, II.600, 605, 609
- 51 *Ibid*, II.609
- 52 *Ibid*, II.611
- 53 *Ibid*, II.118; III.435
- 54 *Ibid*, II.607
- 55 *Ibid*, I.253
- 56 *Ibid*, I.252-53; II.200-01, 303-11, 416-17
- 57 *Ibid*, III. Appendix, *De Gemeene Gratie in Wetenschap en Kunst*, pp. 42, 43
- 58 *Ibid*, I.458
- 59 *Ibid*, II.685
- 60 It is interesting to note that throughout *De Gemeene Gratie*, Kuyper tends to use the Dutch words *gratie* to indicate common grace and *genade* to indicate special grace. A typical example is drawn from a single page of *De Gemeene Gratie*, II.637 'En zoo nu ook is het eenzelfde mensche, die in het maatschappelijk leven Gods "Gemeene Gratie" en op het heilig terrein Gods "Particuliere genade" geniet... Zoo moet dan de Gemeene gratie op de Particuliere genade en de Particuliere genade op de Gemeene gratie inwerken.' Such instances although not conclusive proof of a dualising tendency is indicative of a trend of thought.
- 61 *Ibid*, II.85ff; III.109, 110
- 62 The distinction in Kuyper's work between common grace with its terrain of the temporal and visible and special grace with its terrain of the spiritual is described by H. Van Til as a 'polar dualism,' *op cit*, p.134
- 63 *Ibid*, I.225ff; II.637, 646; III.123 *et passim*. This is stongly opposed by K. Schilder, *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, Goes, 1947, II.83-103
- 64 *Ibid*, I.220, 497; II.277, 679

- 65 *Ibid*, II.645
- 66 *Ibid*, I.228
- 67 J. Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1991, p.176
- 68 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, III.646-653
- 69 J. Klapwijk, 'Rationality in the Dutch Neo-Calvinist Tradition', in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, ed. H. Hart, University Press of America, 1983, p.106
- 70 J. Begbie, *op cit*, p.149
- 71 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, II.341
- 72 *Ibid*, III *passim*; cf. *Pro Rege. Het Koningschap van Christus*, Kampen, 1911, II.354ff
- 73 *Ibid*, III.27, 30, 31, 32, 423, 424
- 74 For examples of Kuyper's considerable antipathy towards *Doperse mijdinghe* 'Anabaptist separation' see *Ibid*, I.468; II.69-76, 424 *et al.*
- 75 *Ibid*, III.425
- 76 *Ibid*, III.143f
- 77 A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1976, p.154
- 78 'If an endless field of human knowledge and of human ability is now being formed by all that takes place in order to make the visible world and material nature subject to us, and if we know that this dominion of ours over nature will be complete in eternity, we may conclude that the knowledge and dominion we have gained over nature here can and will be of continued significance, even in the kingdom of glory.' *De Gemeene Gratie*, I.486-87
- 79 *Ibid*, I.462-66
- 80 *Ibid*, I.466
- 81 *Ibid*, I.466-74
- 82 *Ibid*, I.481-82
- 83 *Ibid*, I.276f, 447ff, 456; II.639 cf. *Pro Rege*, I.43ff
- 84 A. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III.184ff
- 85 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, II.661
- 86 *Ibid*, I.218, 220; II.662
- 87 *Ibid*, I.95, 212ff, 222, 254, 263; II.293, 338, 354, 684; III.423
- 88 *Ibid*, I.86, 296; II.507-11; III.107-10, 146
- 89 *Ibid*, I.222, 254, 263
- 90 At this point Kuyper is once again vigorously criticized by K. Schilder, *Is de term 'Algemeene Genade' wetenschappelijk verantwoord?*, Kampen, Zalsman, 1947 who in contrast to Kuyper refuses to speak of common grace at this juncture.

Schilder instead finds the motive for the prolongation of creation in the fact that God owed it to Himself to continue the existence of the human race and thus prolonged this temporal life. In the opinion of S.U. Zuidema 'Common Grace and Christian Action in Abraham Kuyper', in *Communication and Confrontation*, Van Gorcum, Assen/Kok, Kampen, 1972, p.76 'That Kuyper appeals to common grace in this connection can only be explained by a Gnostic remnant in his thinking.'

- 91 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, III.107f
- 92 *Ibid*, I.215f
- 93 *Ibid*, III.107ff, 215-16
- 94 *Ibid*, II.224
- 95 Whilst admitting that reprobation is not explicitly taught in Scripture Kuyper argued that it lies within the very structure of biblical truth. *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, Kampen, Kok, nd. I.vii, 252
- 96 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, I.222, 254
- 97 *Ibid*, I.220; II.268ff, *et al*
- 98 *Ibid*, II.243
- 99 Kuyper defines the Church thus: 'The essence of a visible church is and always remains the invisible church, including therewith the increased impulse of this spiritual and mystical church to manifest itself externally. The invisible body of Christ, that is the organic union of all the elect through the Holy Spirit under Christ as its head.' 'Tract for the Reformation of the Churches' quoted by H. Zwaanstra in 'Abraham Kuyper's Conception of the Church', in *Calvin Theological Journal*, 9:2 p.150
- 100 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, I.166; III.103f; *Pro Rege*, II.349, 350ff
- 101 *Ibid*, I.166
- 102 *Ibid*, II.254
- 103 *Ibid*, II.253; III.103
- 104 *Ibid*, II.253ff
- 105 A. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, II.220
- 106 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, III.34-40
- 107 *Ibid*, II.253ff, 665, 680; III.104
- 108 *Ibid*, III.124
- 109 *Ibid*, II.682
- 110 *Ibid*, II.98, 116f
- 111 *Ibid*, II.120
- 112 *Ibid*, II.626
- 113 *Ibid*, II.634 cf. I.295, 317

- 114 *Ibid*, II.665
- 115 *Ibid*, II.680
- 116 *Ibid*, III.303 cf. I.225, 468
- 117 *Ibid*, II.194, 199-207;
- 118 *Ibid*, II.238, 660 *et al*
- 119 *Ibid*, I.337
- 120 *Ibid*, III.110
- 121 H. Zwaanstra, *op cit*, p.180
- 122 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, II.212ff
- 123 *Ibid*, II.212ff
- 124 S.U. Zuidema, *op cit*, p.80
- 125 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, I.162;
- 126 *Ibid*, II.253f, 689; III.425 *et al*
- 127 *Ibid*, II.253f
- 128 *Ibid*, II.279, 287ff, 350, 665ff
- 129 *Ibid*, II.275, 279
- 130 *Ibid*, II.610-12; III.383
- 131 *Ibid*, II.610
- 132 *Ibid*, I.246, 260ff; III.144
- 133 *Ibid*, I.90, 247; II.507, 509; III.124
- 134 *Ibid*, III.20
- 135 *Ibid*, III.289
- 136 *Ibid*, III.23
- 137 *Ibid*, I.432
- 138 *Ibid*, II.672
- 139 *Ibid*, II.246, 260ff, 275ff; III.144
- 140 *Ibid*, III.105; cf. I.457
- 141 *Ibid*, I.279; II.242, 273
- 142 *Ibid*, II.242
- 143 *Ibid*, II.248, 610; III.437 *et passim*

- 144 *Ibid*, I.504; II.184, 246, 671
- 145 *Ibid*, II.177ff, 668ff; cf. *Pro Rege*, III.,311, 316
- 146 *Ibid*, II.670f
- 147 *Ibid*, II.671-73 *et al*
- 148 *Ibid*, II.341
- 149 *Ibid*, II.672, 674
- 150 *Ibid*, II.246, 278, 437
- 151 *Ibid*, III.405
- 152 *Ibid*, II.671, 672
- 153 *Ibid*, III.147 cf. Chpt 21 Kerk en Staat 9
- 154 *Ibid*, III *passim*; cf. *Pro Rege*, II.354ff
- 155 *Ibid*, II.275; *Pro Rege*, III.457ff
- 156 A. Kuyper, *Lectures in Calvinism*, p.132
- 157 *Ibid*, p.133
- 158 A, Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, III.672
- 159 *Ibid*, III.41, 52, 62, 289
- 160 *Ibid*, II.133-35; III.154, 394
- 161 *Ibid*, II.337, 644, 654ff; III.330, 338
- 162 *Ibid*, II.689
- 163 *Ibid*, III.527f, 569
- 164 *Ibid*, III.149, 570f
- 165 *Ibid*, III.281; cf. *Pro Rege*, I.370, 526, 567 *et al*
- 166 *Ibid*, II.341, 355
- 167 *Ibid*, II.684
- 168 *Ibid*, II.299; cf. II.59, 65, 68
- 169 A. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III.225 *et al*
- 170 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, I.415-16
- 171 *Ibid*, I.452; II.517; cf. *Pro Rege*, III.21, 22, 480, 522
- 172 *Ibid*, I.452
- 173 *Ibid*, I.415, 432-33, 447-450, 455-56
- 174 A. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III.184ff, *et al*

- 175 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, II.246, 277; III.405
- 176 *Ibid*, III.528
- 177 *Ibid*, II.343
- 178 *Ibid*, III.144-45, 413
- 179 A. Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, p.157
- 180 *Ibid*, p.158
- 181 *Ibid*, p.159
- 182 A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, pp.112, 113
- 183 A. Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, p.143
- 184 *Ibid*, p.152
- 185 H. Van Til, *op cit*, p.119
- 186 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, I.234ff; II.613f
- 187 In the opinion of Begbie, by denying a link between Christ's humanity and the creation, Kuyper introduces a 'subtle Nestorianism' which vitiates his theology. *Op cit*, p.147
- 188 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, I.62
- 189 J. Klapwijk, *op cit*, p.106
- 190 A. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, III.25
- 191 J. Begbie, *op cit*, p.159
- 192 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, II.183
- 193 A. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, I.193
- 194 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, I.123
- 195 *Ibid*, I.220, 224, 449; II.420
- 196 H. Van Til, *op cit*, p.231
- 197 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, II.689

CHAPTER THREE

HERMAN HOEKSEMA

THE DENIAL OF COMMON GRACE

HOEKSEMA THE MAN

Background

As a seventeen year old blacksmith Herman Hoeksema (1886-1965) emmigrated from the Netherlands to the United States of America where in 1915 he became a minister of the Christian Reformed Church, a denomination largely composed of conservative Calvinist immigrants from the Netherlands. In 1925 after a bitter controversy over the nature of common grace he, along with the Rev. Henry Danhof, left that denomination to form a new denomination, the Protestant Reformed Churches,¹ of which Hoeksema was guiding light, professor of Dogmatics in their Theological School, and editor of the denominational magazine for the rest of his active life.

The significance of Hoeksema for our enquiry lies in the nature of his theological stance. He was a thoroughgoing federal Calvinist according to the theology of the Heidelberg Confession and the Canons of Dort. Although his mother belonged to the *Afscheiding* stream within the *Gereformeerde Kerken*, as a young man Hoeksema was greatly influenced by the theology of Abraham Kuyper.² His mature theology however emerges from a view of the decrees such that it has been asserted that, unlike other federal Reformed theologians, Hoeksema consistently develops this theology to its inevitable rationalistic conclusions.³ One such conclusion being that federal theology is not only undermined by a doctrine of common grace but is effectually destroyed by the consequent introduction of Arminianism and Semi-Pelagiansim.⁴

Church Controversy

Hoeksema was also a fearless controversialist who throughout his life vigorously opposed any concession to what he saw as modernism. The first major controversy in which Hoeksema was involved concerned the supposed doctrinal deviation of Dr. Ralph Janssen, professor of Old Testament Exegetical Theology at Calvin College.⁵ Hoeksema, as a member of the Curatorium of Calvin College, was a member of a committee appointed in 1921 to investigate the teaching of Dr. Janssen and came to the conclusion that Dr. Janssen failed to treat the Scriptures throughout as the inspired and infallible Word of God. According to Hoeksema, in Janssen's teaching; 'Man was the starting point rather than God's revelation. Science and reason took precedence over revelation, and evolution over literal creation in *Genesis 1*.⁶

Although the controversy concerning Janssen's teaching centred on the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture it also contained the seed of a later and more far reaching controversy. It was Hoeksema's opponents, and particularly Janssen himself, who in a continued debate conducted throughout 1920-21 in the columns of the denominational magazine *The Banner* initially brought up the counter-charge that Hoeksema's theological position was not in line with the general position of the Christian Reformed Church with regard to common grace. In an article entitled *Met Het Zout Eer Het Ei Er Is* (With the Salt before the Egg) in *The Witness*, a monthly magazine established in Dec. 1921 to promote the conservative viewpoint within the C.R.C.,⁷ Hoeksema noted that he in turn was being attacked because of his denial of common grace.⁸ Although Hoeksema did believe that Jansen was a 'liberal' and that his liberal position demanded a theory of common grace, Hoeksema tried to keep the two matters separate within this controversy.⁹

The major controversy over common grace quickly followed in 1924 with protests concerning Hoeksema's denial of common grace being brought before the Classis Grand Rapids East in May of 1924 and the biannual Synod of the Christian Reformed Church held at Kalamazoo, Michigan, in June 1924, followed by special meetings of

Classis Grand Rapids East between Nov. 19th. and Dec. 12th. 1924.¹⁰ After the Synod adopted the *Three Points* on common grace as a practical addition to its confessional standards Hoeksema and his followers considered that there remained no room for the unqualified preaching of the sovereign grace of God in the Christian Reformed Church. Hoeksema and the Consistory of his congregation were eventually deposed by the Classis. After the ensuing court case concerning the property of the congregation, which is *de rigueur* in these circumstances, The Protestant Reformed Churches was constituted a denomination in 1925.

The Synod's three points concerning common grace contended that according to the Scriptures and the 'Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed theology':

- i) Apart from the saving grace of God shown only to those that are elect unto eternal life, there is also a certain favour or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general.
- ii) There is a restraint of sin in the life of the individual and in the community.
- iii) The unregenerate, though incapable of doing any saving good, can still do civil good.

Understanding of Common Grace

In the *Three Points* the Christian Reformed Church had no intention of elevating to confessional status an Arminian conception of common grace such that common grace could be considered a form of preparatory grace enabling fallen individuals to reach an autonomous decision regarding personal salvation. Rather the CRC claimed to hold to that view of common grace stemming from the teaching of Abraham Kuyper in which common grace has the purposes of sustaining and developing the creational potentials and providing a terrain for the operation of special grace, but does not enable fallen creatures to grasp the offer of special grace.

In the opinion of Hoeksema it seemed clear that Kuyper's view of common grace did lead too easily to 'the Arminian conception of common grace and to the Pelagian conception of the natural man.'¹¹ The doctrine of common grace, from within

Hoeksema's view, is seen to be destructive of the whole system of federal Calvinist theology as set forth by the Heidelberg Catechism. It is clear from his writings that Hoeksema conceived of a situation in which if the doctrine of common grace was allowed to infiltrate the teaching and preaching of a pure system of federal Calvinism then that theological system would be destroyed, man would be elevated to the status of co-determiner with God of his salvation and the voice of God would be merely one voice amongst many.

For Hoeksema this is not merely a matter of theological dispute, rather it enters into the very centre of the faith and life of the individual Christian and of the Church. The importance of the doctrine of common grace for Hoeksema can be seen in the way in which he frames the question to which he addressed much of his life:

Whether the life of the natural, fallen man in this world, as we observe it, must be explained as being the result of a certain grace of God, whereby sin within him is restrained; or whether all its impulses and manifestations are quite in accord with the statement of the Heidelberg Catechism that 'we are wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil.' This is not a purely scholastic question, but concerns the very heart of our Reformed truth on this point. For, if the life and walk of fallen, unregenerate man is to be explained as the fruit of grace, this fruit must certainly be good, the natural man is not wholly depraved, and the doctrine of total depravity becomes an abstraction that does not harmonize with actual experience. And again, if this is true, the truth of total depravity cannot be applied in actual life; a basis is established for the amalgamation of the Church and the world, for the co-operation of the believer and the unbeliever. In that case there is some concord between Christ and Belial.¹²

The question of common grace is therefore, according to Hoeksema, one of great doctrinal and practical importance. He points later in the same passage to the dire results in those Churches which have adopted this doctrine, a practical denial of the antithesis between regenerate and unregenerate, which has led to an intermingling of the Church and the world resulting in many Christians being lost to the world.

Hoeksema's many objections to such a doctrine of common grace as that endorsed by the Synod of Kalamazoo, and much of his voluminous production can be seen as either directly or indirectly combatting common grace, can be subsumed within the

following three areas: The nature of creation; the nature of man; and the nature and goal of providence.

THE NATURE OF CREATION

Organic Creation

The nature of creation plays an important part in Hoeksema's description and denial of common grace. Common grace is portrayed in Hoeksema's teaching as a creational grace which is not merely restraining grace holding back the full effects of sin, but as that supposedly positive means by which God establishes the Noachic covenant outside Christ.¹³ Abraham Kuyper maintains that God develops His purpose in this fallen world through the ordinances of creation. This purpose He fulfils in the unfolding and development of creation, despite the opposition of Satan. As we have seen, according to Kuyper, without the intervention of common grace creation would have sunk into chaos following the sin of Adam. At the same time as restraining sin within man common grace also creates a sphere for the realisation and development of particular grace in Christ Jesus.¹⁴

In opposition Hoeksema argues 'There is no original ordinance of creation which Satan attempted to frustrate.'¹⁵ This he does on the basis of an organic creation, that 'All creatures are one. God did not create in the beginning an aggregate of creatures, loose, independent of one another, but a world, a cosmos, a harmonic, organic whole.'¹⁶ This organic, mutually interdependent creation did not stand on its own in an independent relationship with God. At the spiritual, ethical centre of creation stood man, created in the image of God, as a relational point with God.

And through that central point the entire creation was united in love with God Himself... The Lord God sustains and governs all creatures that they may serve man, in order that man may serve his God'¹⁷

The purpose of creation is thus not to develop or be developed to the fulfilment of its created potentialities. The purpose of the organic creation is to provide a platform so, 'that it can become the stage for the tremendous battle of sin and grace.'¹⁸

The Effect of Sin

When sin entered this organic creation through the disobedience of man a breach was created between God and His creation. For Hoeksema a correct appreciation of the ethical nature of this breach is important for the development of his argument.

We must immediately emphasise that the breach was struck in the spiritual, ethical centre of the earthly cosmos, in the heart of man. Man violated God's covenant. The break is therefore spiritual, ethical in character. An essential change in the relation of things was not brought about by sin. Sin can never have as its result that creation would be destroyed, annihilated, neither that the mutual relation between the creatures and the relation of the creatures to man would be essentially changed, even though it was disturbed and marred. The creation could not have been turned into a chaos if common grace had not intervened... The natural, organic affinity continued.¹⁹

Creation, due to its organic nature which remained essentially unaffected by the spiritual, ethical event of the fall, remains in existence under the hand of God who, 'Continues to sustain and govern creation by His providential power, which has nothing to do with common grace.'²⁰ It is not the essential nature but the purpose of creation which is affected by the fall, for now we have a situation in which within fallen creation there is both love and service of God and love and service of Satan. However the organic nature of mankind remains intact.

Out of one blood God created the entire human race. From a merely natural viewpoint all men are one; and man ever continues to stand in organic connection with the cosmos, in the midst whereof he moves and develops. There is no dualism. Nature and grace are not opposed to each other, are no contraries... To be sure, the antithesis of sin and grace is called into being by the breach of sin and the entrance of grace, the latter developing along the line of election. All things continue to exist and develop according to their own nature, sustained by God's almighty power, in organic, natural affinity. But amid this temporal existence of things there arises and develops the spiritual, ethical antithesis of sin and grace, of light and darkness, of the love of God and enmity against Him, of life and death, of heaven and hell. And through all this God does all His good pleasure, and leads all things to the eternal destiny, the eternal separation of chaff and wheat, the eternal realization of His everlasting covenant.²¹

Despite Hoeksema's denial the dualistic nature of his separation of the spiritual from the created should be noted. It is this which leads Hoeksema to describe the cultural

efforts of the unregenerate as an attempt to 'develop all the powers of creation in the service of sin and iniquity.'²²

The Unfolding Creation and God's Sovereignty

Hoeksema's conception of the sovereignty of God reinforces his contention that there is no original ordinance of creation in obedience to which man must continue to labour under God within creation and which Satan attempts to frustrate. He argues that to suggest such is to intrude the concept of possibility into creation and to suggest that God can be frustrated in His development of history. This would destroy the reality of God's sovereignty as understood by Hoeksema, 'God's eternal purpose with all things is never any other than that which is actually attained.'²³ The fulfilment of perfection under the first Adam therefore could not have been God's goal, rather that goal is the realisation of His eternal covenant through the second Adam which fulfils His glory.

Even if there had been an original creation mandate to develop the potentialities of creation God Himself has rendered it impossible of fulfilment by laying creation under His curse. Man still cultivates the earth and develops his own powers and God-given abilities, but all is subject to vanity, 'and man moves within the limits of his death cell from which he can never escape except through Christ.'²⁴

If the concept of a creation ordinance is entertained this will lead to a two-fold purpose of God in which creation is on the one hand preserved by the restraint of sin and enabled to progress normally according to the supposed creation ordinance, and on the other hand creation progresses through a 'new work' in Christ Jesus to original perfection. This must be rejected as:

It is certainly a dualistic conception, for it proceeds from the erroneous assumption that sin, death, and the curse, instead of being powers which God works, manifestations of His wrath, are powers outside Him and apart from Him, which He must restrain.²⁵

The unfolding of creation to its destiny under the providence of God is therefore not to be viewed as a continuing struggle of God against the evil of man and Satan, a struggle which contains possibilities, as in a semi-Arminian conception. This supposed struggle, resulting from the introduction of common grace, is understood as one in which God restrains the sinfulness of man from reaching its proper conclusion, and in which He furthers the promotion of progress and development by the bestowal of good gifts amongst the generality of mankind. Hoeksema instead maintains that the connection between God's providence and creation cannot be understood without taking into consideration the history of the world along the twin, but parallel, tracks of sin and grace.

All things develop in a straight line, according to the counsel of God. This development and operation of God's grace and aversion, drawing and casting off, blessing and cursing, softening and hardening, continues constantly, according to His eternal good pleasure, and in connection with the operation of His providence and the organic development of our race. In the actual sense of the word one can, therefore, never speak of a checking or restraining of this process. To be sure, the end does not appear immediately at the beginning. This could not possibly be. The development, or, if you will, the process, of grace and sin is according to God's good pleasure, and connected by His providential control and management with the organic existence of all things. But this process is not restrained. It proceeds as rapidly as it possibly can. For Christ comes quickly, and His reward is with him, to give unto everyman according as his works shall be.²⁶

THE NATURE OF MAN

The Effect of Sin

As we have seen Hoeksema maintains that sin is 'in the spiritual, ethical direction of the deed.'²⁷ Although sin 'supposes a substratum in which it exists,'²⁸ the fall was entirely spiritual and ethical in its effects and even without the intervention of common grace could not have reduced the world to chaos. Although after the fall man most certainly became an enemy of God and the willing ally and servant of Satan, 'there is no reason why God should not sustain and preserve him, together with all the world and its powers, in essentially the same relationship as before the fall.'²⁹ This 'same relationship,' is of course the organic physical relationship, unchanged by the fall, which continues to exist between man, the rest of creation and God.

Sin did not, and could not possibly destroy the essential organic relation and unity of all creatures. Even though man violated the covenant of friendship with his God and became an enemy of God... God still continued to uphold and to govern 'as it were by his hand,' the universe as a *kosmos*, and that too, in such a way that man stands at the head of the earthly creation even in his sin, and all creatures must serve him.³⁰

The perfection of the original creation was not intended to continue.³¹ The original harmony was broken by sin, Adam fell and man and the entire creation were placed under the curse. God's judgement upon the world immediately after the fall is not to be understood as the due punishment for man's sin. Sin's punishment is eternal death in hell, not temporal suffering. The 'temporal punishments mentioned in *Genesis 3:15ff*, are announced after the promise of redemption... Adam fell upon Christ.³²

Restraint of Death

That man did not die immediately subsequent to the fall is not due to the death penalty which man earned by his sin being restrained by an attitude of love on the part of God toward fallen man or by the favour of common grace, this is an 'erroneous interpretation of *Genesis 2:17*... God kills man.³³ Man is already dead because God does not fail to inflict upon man the punishment due to his sin; in the physical sense man is dead, merely existing under the reign of death, even although he has continued to exist following the fall 'organically, yet he does not live. He is in the power of death also physically;³⁴ man is also dead spiritually, 'and that death he died in paradise.³⁵

Primarily Hoeksema sees God's restraint not in terms of God restraining the outworking of the full effects of sin within creation by an exercise of grace, but rather as God's restraint of His punishment of sin so as to facilitate the full outworking of the effects of sin. 'The root sin of Adam must... become fully manifest in all the horror of its iniquity in the ripened fruit borne by the whole human race.'³⁶ Hoeksema does not deny that there is a providential control by God of all that

happens within creation, whether it be the paternal care of God over the regenerate or the restraint of the evil of the unregenerate. What he does dispute is that in the case of the unregenerate this restraint can be considered an outworking of grace.

The life of the regenerate is, indeed, presented throughout the Word of God as the fruit of grace; the life of the natural man never... This overruling providence of God, whereby He holds the wicked in His power and controls all their actions, is quite different from a certain restraining grace by which the unregenerate are inwardly somewhat improved and enabled to do good.³⁷

Fallen man assuredly develops his powers and abilities, but not to the glory of God. Satan's intent is to deprive God of His glory, but not by reducing the world to chaos and utter destruction, his plan rather is to cause man to develop the powers of creation in his sinful service. 'And this is indeed the purpose of fallen man, and the spiritual character of the kingdom he is building.'³⁸ In his endeavour fallen man is not to be considered a co-worker with God trying to build within creation to God's glory, rather the reverse is true, man employs himself in the service of Satan to oppose God and glorify himself, increasing his guilt daily.

The Image of God

The theory that fallen man retains a remnant of the image of God is rejected by Hoeksema. Firstly Hoeksema compares the theory of common grace to the Roman Catholic theory of the image of God as a *donum superadditum*.³⁹ This because according to this theory fallen man is constitutionally enabled to do natural good although he is unable to perform any spiritual good.

Likewise Hoeksema rejects the distinction between the image of God in a wider and a narrower sense. To the wider sense belong man's rationality and morality and 'so-called' immortality,⁴⁰ this includes all that distinguishes man from the animals and was retained after the fall. To the narrower sense belongs man's true knowledge of God, righteousness and holiness, this is man's original state of righteousness and was lost at the fall. Although this distinction is employed in many works of Reformed dogmatics Hoeksema contends that it 'has never received official standing in Reformed

Churches.⁴¹ He argues that the view of the image of God in a wider sense is omitted from the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the *Belgic Confession*, and the *Canons of Dort*. The danger of such a distinction according to Hoeksema lies in the fact that it leaves room for the concept that there are remnants of the image of God left in fallen man, and that therefore the natural man cannot be wholly depraved.⁴²

Hoeksema contends that the image of God within man is entirely lost and perverted within fallen man. Rather than maintain that there is a remnant of the image left within man, a point of contact and seed from which there may emerge some good even within the lives of the unregenerate, Hoeksema asserts that the image of God within man has been utterly lost at the fall.

Through sin the whole relation of man to God was put into reverse. He lost the image of God, yea, that image turned into its very opposite. And the same is true of the original priesthood of creation. Instead of being consecrated to the living God, man, who fell into sin and death, was consecrated to the service of iniquity and of the devil.⁴³

We must maintain that the image of God turned into its reverse. Man's light became darkness, his knowledge changed into the lie, his righteousness became unrighteousness, and his holiness became impurity and rebellion, in all his willing and inclinations. His love changed into enmity against God. Sin is not merely a defect or a lack, but it is *privio actuosa*. The servant and covenant friend of the Lord became a friend and covenant ally of the devil. Even thus, however, the Lord continues to sustain and govern creation by His providential power, which has nothing to do with common grace. And the entire organic existence of things remained essentially unaffected.⁴⁴

Hoeksema does however employ a distinction within the image, that of the image 'in a formal and in a material sense. By the former is meant the fact that man's nature is adapted to bear the image of God... It requires a rational, moral nature to bear that image of God.' By the image in a material sense Hoeksema means that spiritual soundness by which man 'actually shows forth the virtues of the knowledge of God, righteousness and holiness.'⁴⁵

The distinction is essentially one between man as the image bearer of God having a constitutional capacity to bear God's image, and man as the image of God actually bearing God's image as he was created to do.⁴⁶ Whilst having lost the image of God

in a material sense man retains the image in the formal sense. After the fall man remains man.

Through sin man did not change essentially. He is still the same personal, rational, moral, psychological, material, earthly being. And from a natural point of view, he still stands in the same relation to the world about him.⁴⁷

Even regeneration which totally affects the heart of man does not alter the essential organic creaturely nature of the individual believer:

The regenerate man remains man. His nature remains a spiritual, ethical, moral, psychological, material, earthly nature. And he remains in the same relation to the earthly creation as before his regeneration.⁴⁸

The essence of man lies in his created capacity to have an ethical relationship with God, whether this capacity is actualised or not. Thus in salvation although the Christian is fundamentally and principally renewed through the work of regeneration, this 'does not mean an essential change of man's nature.'⁴⁹ Regeneration has a spiritual, ethical character which consists of the implantation of the life of God as it is in the exalted Christ. The Bible is seen to present 'man's redemption and deliverance from sin as the restoration of the image of God in him.'⁵⁰ This is the recovery of the original rectitude of man's whole being in relation to God and to all things.⁵¹ 'Only through the grace of Christ, our only comfort in life and death, is this image restored and raised to a heavenly level and glory that can be lost nevermore!'⁵²

Total Depravity

By this means Hoeksema hopes to maintain the traditional Reformed teaching with regard to the total depravity of mankind; that fallen man, although totally depraved is not thereby rendered utterly evil, insane and unable to live within the world which God created. As a rational creature fallen man, an integral part of the organic creation, can live and act within creation without doing a whit of actual good and without being destroyed as a consequence of his utter rebellion in every particle of his being against his Creator.

His concept of the image of God also enables Hoeksema to isolate the reprobate from any attitude of favour in the mind of God. He holds that what God loves in man is the image of Himself, thus if fallen man retains no remnant of that image then there is nothing within man which God can love and there can be no grace, common or otherwise, toward the unregenerate.

God loves in Himself, of Himself, through Himself, and unto Himself. He loves Himself. All the love and delight of His divine nature is directed to His own infinite perfections.⁵³

The love which God has for the regenerate is that love which originates in Himself and returns to Himself. 'In God love has its source, and out of Him as its source it operates in and through us, to return unto Himself.'⁵⁴

Man is not partially depraved as a result of the fall but is totally depraved. Hoeksema understands the concept of total depravity as meaning that:

Man by nature in all his existence, with all his heart and mind and soul and strength, has become a servant of sin, and that he is entirely incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil.⁵⁵

Hoeksema employs a distinction between total and absolute depravity. Normally this distinction is employed to make clear how a totally depraved sinner can still do outwardly good works. The totality of total depravity is understood as referring to the extent of depravity, that man is affected in every aspect of his being by the fall. This does not mean that man is ever and always as evil as he would be if he were absolutely depraved. For Hoeksema neither total nor absolute depravity leave any room for any good to be performed by the natural man.

For by total depravity is meant that man by nature in all his existence, with all his heart and mind and soul and strength, has become a servant of sin, and that he is entirely incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil. And by absolute depravity must be meant that the matter is settled, that there is no salvation for the sinner, that he is fallen so deeply that he can never be saved.⁵⁶

The reprobate 'are not only totally but absolutely depraved. Their case is indeed decided... Only the elect are saveable... the reprobate are absolutely lost.'⁵⁷ Hoeksema stresses this to emphasise that there is nothing in the sinful man which constitutes a point of contact for his salvation, there is nothing he can do, there is nothing he wishes to do, there is nothing he will do, all is purely of the grace of God. True, the elect are fallen, but:

They are fallen on Christ. Therefore they are saved. The reprobate, however, are hopelessly lost because they fell outside Christ.⁵⁸

Thus neither elect or reprobate can perform good of any nature whatever, neither spiritual nor civic good, outside of the grace of God in Christ Jesus and that this grace is ever the particular grace of salvation. Sin is not a partial process touching the life of man which can be restrained in its course, rather it is a condition which is absolute.

Restraint of Law

Just as he speaks of the continuing organic nature of creation so Hoeksema also speaks of an organic development of sin in which each individual works out the possibilities of his or her own sin within the limitations of their own circumstances. All the while throughout history the race progresses to the complete manifestation of its potentialities of sin in their fullness, until 'the sinner has operated even unto the end with all the capital at his disposal,' at which time the Man of Sin will be revealed and Christ will come in judgement.⁵⁹ The idea that Adam, without the restraint of common grace, would have progressed along the path of sin until he degenerated into a devil or the Man of Sin is dismissed as being at variance with the organic development of sin. Adam 'sinned entirely in harmony with his own place in the world.'⁶⁰

Hoeksema does not attribute to common grace any restraint upon sin in the life of the unregenerate man, rather it is to the law which we must look for any restraint of the outworking of sin in the life of rebellious man. Man does not have the law written on his heart, rather he has the work of the law. This means that he is able to discern the advantages for himself in outward conformity to the law of God.

The law of God is good for him, and to walk in that law has a reward. And because he discerns all this, he shows some regard for virtue and for good outward deportment. This is what is called civil righteousness. Of sin itself he does not even desire to be delivered. But he likes to be delivered as much as possible of the misery of sin, in as far as it consists in the suffering of this present time.⁶¹

The unregenerate man, who retains his rational nature, will therefore attempt to walk in the way of the law of God as long as he is able to discern an advantage to himself in so doing. In this way the 'good' which we discern being accomplished by the unregenerate is in reality the fruit of their self-serving rebellious fallen nature, an evidence of their enmity toward God, the fruit of their sin. The unregenerate man will even attempt to spread a regard for virtue amongst others, this however is from the same sinful motive.

The ungodly man desires to improve the world, at the same time maintaining himself in sin, not for God's sake but for his own. But never does he perform any good.⁶²

THE NATURE OF PROVIDENCE

The Scope of Providence

Hoeksema teaches that the scope of God's providential control of all creation is without limit. God is absolutely sovereign in relation to the world.⁶³ All things are providential, there are no such things as 'natural' laws which exist apart from God. Such laws merely reveal the orderly way in which God governs the universe.⁶⁴ Sparrows, beetles, germs, mosquitoes, fish, eagles, lions, the millions upon millions of living things within creation, sing and chirp, cry and roar, eat and rejoice: 'all directed

collectively and individually by the hand of the Sovereign of heaven and earth.⁶⁵

With regard to human beings;

God is the Lord even in relation to the thoughts and intents, the desires and aspirations, the imaginations and determination of the heart of man, and in relation to all his acts.⁶⁶

Thus Hoeksema allows no area of free agency within man in opposition to God's sovereign will. Neither does he permit the use of the concept of God's 'permission' especially in relation to the evil acts of men. The term 'co-operation' used to define God's relation to the moral acts of man is likewise denied.⁶⁷ In this manner Jacob's sons acted as 'moral agents' in selling Joseph to the Midianites, yet God so controlled and governed 'their every intention' that His purpose was accomplished through their actions.⁶⁸

Thus when we consider the fall into sin and the subsequent development and life of man within the flow of history Hoeksema declares himself without reservation to be supralapsarian. This view 'is the Scriptural and the only consistent presentation of the decree of God's predestination.'⁶⁹

History may be, and no doubt is, *infra* in its order of events. But God's eternal purpose and good pleasure dare not be conceived otherwise than according to the supralapsarian order; what is ultimate in history or in the realization of God's good pleasure is first in His eternal counsel. Not the first world, but the new creation is the goal from the beginning, because it is first in the decree of God. Not the first covenant, but the eternal tabernacle of God on a heavenly plane has the first place in the counsel of God. Salvation is no repair work, but the realization of God's eternal pleasure, of Him Who knows all His works from the beginning.⁷⁰

Grace and the Goal of Providence

God's providential control of the thoughts, emotions and actions of all men is not to be understood as grace in the lives of unbelievers. Such an exercise of God's sovereignty does not blur the distinction between elect and reprobate.

We may never separate in our minds the providence of God from the facts of sin and grace. There is no operation of God's providence next to and apart from that of grace and the curse, love and wrath, election and reprobation. The government of God is exactly of such a nature that it guides the organic whole of creation unto the final glory of the new heavens and the new earth... For it is God's positive purpose to unite all things in Christ as the new head of all creation, to preserve and perfect His covenant and His everlasting kingdom. Unto this end all things in heaven and on earth are directed; and the Most High so governs all things that they must infallibly lead unto that end. All things under God's providence co-operate unto that end.⁷¹

Hoeksema argues that the consumation will usher in the New Jerusalem, but stresses that the coming kingdom of God is not the direct fruit of God's providential control of this earth. With regard to the New Jerusalem he writes; 'this does not lie in direct line of development and progress with this present world.'⁷² The New Jerusalem will be a heavenly kingdom in which all is united in Christ, 'it is not the direct goal of the providential government of God... it will be realised only through the wonder of God's grace.'⁷³

This does not mean that Hoeksema would have us separate the operation of general providence from God's grace:

The counsel of predestination and the counsel of providence... are one counsel. God's providential government is such that all things in the present world are subservient to the realization of His eternal covenant and kingdom. But this may not be understood as if the providence of God as such leads up to the world that is to come. Between our world and the eternal world of heavenly perfection stands the Christ, the incarnation, the cross and the resurrection. And even the Church must pass through death into the glorious resurrection, so the present world must pass through the destruction of the final catastrophe, in which the very elements shall burn, into the perfection of the new heavens and earth, in which righteousness shall dwell.⁷⁴

Thus the meaning of history is not a progressive development towards the kingdom of heaven such that the world as we know it eventually merges into the glorified creation. Rather this world 'certainly is the proper stage that is set for the realization of God's purpose'⁷⁵ which purpose we see in predestination and the revelation of Christ; the gathering of the Church and the outworking of the covenant of friendship leading to the ingathering of the fulness of Israel and the Gentiles; and where sin is

clearly manifest as sin: 'that is the end of God's providence and the meaning of history.'⁷⁶

For in the beginning the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ created all things with a view to Him, Christ, and to the realization of the wonder of His grace and His everlasting covenant, through the way of sin and death, and along the antithetical lines of election and reprobation.⁷⁷

Through this governmental act of God's providence the present world becomes the stage for the enactment and revelation of the wonder of God's grace, and the realization of His purpose of predestination, election and reprobation.⁷⁸

God in creation did not leave open the possibility of different kinds of development; there were neither the possibility of Adam remaining in his original integrity or the possibility of Adam's fall and for the salvation of His people in Christ Jesus, what occurred was what was intended. God's purpose in creation was a single purpose, it:

Was not to perfect all things in the first Adam, who was out of the earth, earthy, but to bring them to final perfection in Christ, Who is the Lord from heaven. The final goal of all things which God conceived in His counsel was the new creation, in which righteousness shall dwell forever, of which Christ shall be the eternal head in Whom all things shall be united. This is the only purpose God ever conceived in His eternal counsel.⁷⁹

SUMMATION

The Decrees and History

From a logically consistent appreciation of federal Calvinism Herman Hoeksema confronted the Kuyperian doctrine of common grace and rejected it as introducing the Arminian concept of possibility into creation. Hoeksema's strenuous endeavours to protect God's sovereignty from any taint of conditionality or suggestion of dependance upon man have serious consequences. His understanding of the eternal decree of God is one which removes any significance from history and means we are compelled to view history as two straight-line developments from an eternal, single, but two sided starting point, either that of election and love or that of its obverse, reprobation and hate. All of history is sealed within this eternal decree. The decree and reality are identified, "The counsel of God is the eternal reality of all things in

God's conception.⁸⁰ Historical reality is thus seen as eternal, and in our sphere of time and space it is merely revealed.

The element of time is neglected and thus Hoeksema effectually destroys the possibility of any actual development or progress between earlier and later history. Van Til rightly criticises Hoeksema for never answering the charge that on his view the elect can never in any sense have been under the wrath of God and therefore Christ need not have died for them within history.⁸¹ Biblically the elect fell with Adam and as sinners the wrath of God fell upon them. Unless this happened and there is the reality of the sinful man being under the wrath of God there is no need of Christ coming within history to reconcile sinners to God.

The Love of God

It is within this context that we see how, when writing of the love of God, Hoeksema fails to do justice to the testimony of Scripture. This both with regard to the love of God Himself and the love which we as children of God are commanded to show. We are told that the pinnacle of love is to die for those who are our enemies. God's demonstration of His love for us is seen in this, that: 'While we were still sinners Christ died for us.' *Romans 5:8 cf. Ephesians 2:4* The biblical witness is that it was in the midst of the reality of our sin that God showed His love for His enemies by sending His only Son, His beloved, into the world.

In passages such as *Matthew 5:45* we are commanded to love our enemies so that we may be the children of our Father in heaven who causes His sunshine and rain to bless the righteous and the unrighteous alike. Hoeksema's comment on such passages is that the meaning in this case:

cannot possibly be that we must exercise fellowship with them that are ungodly, but that we shall bestow such acts on them as may manifest that we live in the sphere of perfection: we shall bless them, and pray for them. And only in those cases in which this blessing and praying becomes effective, can the fellowship of love be established.⁸²

Thus love is destroyed and perverted. Instead of being in its essence the perfection of the interpersonal relationship between two beings, love, in the writing of Hoeksema, emerges as something essentially personal and individualistic. The love which is of God's very nature is reduced to love of Himself, a reality which exists in God apart from any relation to man. When we as children of God are commanded to love the unrighteous as does our Father it becomes the means of exhibiting our own salvation. Only when the natural man is converted can we establish a 'fellowship of love' with him, because only then will he be like ourselves. James Daane rightly comments concerning Hoeksema's concept of love, 'To the extent that God's love for man is defined as self-love, to that extent the Christian concept of divine love is lost.'⁸³

Particular Grace

In Hoeksema's conception even particular grace is divorced from the love of God for the elect and becomes merely the means of actualising that which has its reality within God's eternal counsel. Grace is no longer a freely assumed love of God in response to the plight of the helpless sinner, rather grace exists in God only for Himself. Thus the sinner's salvation does not emerge as something new in history, a divine response to something outwith Himself. Hoeksema does not deny that God is merciful, but to protect God from conditionality he teaches that it is God-in-Himself who is merciful. Thus when God shows mercy to sinful man this cannot be regarded as something new, as a merciful response on God's part to the sinner as a sinner. In his desire to protect God from conditionality Hoeksema treats God as though He were static. In his endeavour to completely reject any possibility of freedom within man Hoeksema ends by sacrificing the freedom of God. Not only is God not free to love or show favour to the non-elect He is unable to respond in interrelational love to the existent situation of the elect. The eternal decrees circumscribe God as they do man, all of existent being is entrapped, there is no essential difference between beginning and end, all lie within the one single moment of the decree.

Well-Meant Offer

Neither can there be a meaningful offer of the love of God to the sinner in the preaching of the gospel.⁸⁴ Given Hoeksema's understanding of the decree of God how is it possible for us to preach the gospel when its promise is negated by the decree? Hoeksema reduces preaching to 'authoritative proclamation.'⁸⁵ Preaching the gospel cannot effect anything new, it can only actualise the salvation of the elect, and conversely the damnation of the reprobate. Thus the preaching of the gospel becomes a demonstration, not of love, but of power exercised in a hidden and arbitrary fashion.

The concepts of mercy and grace, of the love of God, employed by Hoeksema, an understanding which makes them realities existing within God apart from any relation to individual men, effectively cuts God off from history. In history the message of the gospel is merely made known. It does not reach to the need of sinful man because in essence God speaks only to Himself.

The Holy Spirit

In the 43 chapters of the *Reformed Dogmatics* which, according to Hoeksema's son and successor, is 'undoubtedly the author's major work because it is the clearest, the most systematic, and the most complete statement of his theology'⁸⁶ there is no chapter devoted to the being or work of the Holy Spirit or even reference to Him in the *Index*. The only real mention of the Holy Spirit is in connection with the doctrine of the Trinity and as the agent of God in the work of regeneration. This should cause no surprise, for if all things are willed by God in the manner suggested by Hoeksema then we must exclude any general operation of the Holy Spirit within history as God does not resist that which He has already willed. There is no resistance of God to the evil bias of the human heart, neither is there any promotion of civic righteousness nor of the development of cultural abilities.

Organic Creation

Whilst being in disagreement with Hoeksema's general theological approach it has to be acknowledged that within Hoeksema's rejection of common grace there are elements, particularly with regard to his understanding of creation, which can be welcomed. His concept of creation as an organic, harmonious, mutually interdependent whole is to be valued. Whilst finding in mankind 'the spiritual, ethical centre of God's creation,' Hoeksema does not allow this to separate mankind from the rest of creation in such a way that creation becomes little more than the backdrop against which is worked out the redemption of mankind. Rather mankind is understood as the focal point through which 'the entire creation was united in love with God Himself.'⁸⁷

The rejection of Kuyper's suggestion that the fall, without the intervention of common grace, would have entailed the creation sinking into a chaos of nothingness is to be welcomed. As we have seen above, the fall is understood to affect not the essential nature of creation but the purpose of creation. Centred upon mankind's relationship with God the fall is understood to be spiritual and ethical in nature thus, although Hoeksema does not work it out, bringing the totality of creation within the ambit of the redemptive work of Christ which restores that proper relationship. 'Creation is an image of recreation or of the regeneration of all things. The earthly is an image of the heavenly.'⁸⁸ To be sure, 'the creature bears temporarily, in connection with man, the curse; it is subject to vanity. But the unity of creation was not broken.'⁸⁹

The 'organic' concept of creation fails, however, to explain fully the moral behaviour of fallen man. Berkouwer⁹⁰ makes the point that 'it is not at all clear what Hoeksema supposes the basis of this ability to distinguish between good and evil to be.' Man's ability to obey the law of God and his willingness to encourage others to obey that law, even if only for his own personal advantage, is indicative of an ability to distinguish between good and evil. If man was constitutionally evil in the manner which Hoeksema suggests it is difficult to see how he could overthrow his own 'organic' impulse to develop his fallen inclination to unlimited evil.

If man is totally depraved in the manner which Hoeksema postulates it is not clear why every individual does not commit every sin of which he is able given his creaturely limitations of time and space. Our experience teaches us that there exist those amongst the apparently unregenerate who live in conformity to God's law, not to their temporal advantage but to their cost. Likewise there is no accounting for the respect and even longing for goodness which most of us feel.

Also it is apparent that the Bible and experience teach us that men commit sins which are contrary to nature, sins which must be considered inconsistent with Hoeksema's organic view of creation. Paul speaks clearly in *Romans 1:26-32* of how man is not only full of all kinds of evil and how he not only does that which is unnatural himself, but gives his approval to others who practice such unnatural acts. Paul's contention is not that there is some form of proportional relationship between man's sin and the organic development of creation. Rather we have the wrath of God revealed 'against the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.'

Romans 1:18

Conclusion

Hoeksema's rationalistic theology fails to do justice to the revelation which God makes of Himself in Scripture. In his schema reason, instead of being a tool given to us by God for our better understanding has become an abstract principle to which both we and God are subject. His position that federal Calvinism has difficulties with the doctrine of common grace has some validity from within his own frame of reference. However, Hoeksema's way out of the problem, that of hardening the appreciation of the decrees into an all controlling purpose of God standing immutable in eternity, has the effects of freezing history into one moment before eternity and of cutting God off from His creation. Hoeksema's solution to the problem faced by federal Calvinism must be rejected.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 The *Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches* after declaring their stand on the basis of Scripture as the infallible Word of God and outlining their liturgical forms states that:
- 'On the basis of the Word of God and these confessions:
1. They repudiate the errors of the Three Points adopted by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, 1924, which maintain:
 - A. That there is a grace of God to all men, including the reprobate, manifest in the common gifts to all men.
 - B. That the preaching of the gospel is a gracious offer of salvation on the part of God to all that externally hear the gospel.
 - C. That the natural man through the influence of common grace can do good in the world.
 - D. Over against this they maintain:
 1. That the grace of God is always particular, i.e., only for the elect, never for the reprobate.
 2. That the preaching of the gospel is not a gracious offer of salvation on the part of God to all men, nor a conditional offer to all that are born in the historical dispensation of the covenant, that is, to all that are baptized, but an oath of God that will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith.
 3. That the unregenerate man is totally incapable of doing any good, wholly depraved, and therefore can only sin.'
- quoted in A.C. De Jong, *The Well-Meant Gospel Offer*, Franeker, Wever, 1954, p.16f
- 2 G. Hoeksema, *Thus Have I Spoken*, Grand Rapids, Reformed Free Publishing, 1969, p.31f
- 3 Charged with picking Hoeksema as an easy target because of his highly questionable positions concerning reprobation, G.C. Berkouwer commenting upon Hoeksema's 'unquestionably sharp theological thought' said that 'I have seldom met a theologian who reasoned through so consistently from his original standpoint; he never wavered from his starting point.' *A Half Century of Theology*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1977, p.98 cf. J. Daane, *The Freedom of God*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1973, p.93
- 4 H. Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, p.293-304
- 5 Details of the controversy in the CRC over the teaching of Professor Janssen can be found in Harry Boer, 'Ralph Janssen: After Fifty Years,' 'Ralph Janssen (2): The Loaded Court' and 'The Janssen Case: The Aftermath', *The Reformed Journal*, Dec. 1972, Jan. 1973 and Nov. 1973
- 6 H. Hoeksema, quoted by G. Hoeksema, *op cit*, p.134
- 7 G. Hoeksema, *op cit*, p.135f
- 8 G. Hoeksema, *op cit*, p.140
- 9 Later Hoeksema was to make clear links between the doctrine of common grace and what he saw as theological deviation. This to the extent that when commenting on the soundness of Professor Louis Berkhof's theology he wrote,

- 'In as far as the latter's teaching... is reformed and orthodox, it is not to be attributed to fundamental soundness of principle and method, but largely to an inconsistent drawing of sound conclusions from unsound principles. *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, pp.24-25
- 10 Details of the controversy can be found in H. Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, pp.1-290.
- 11 H. Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, pp. 314-315
- 12 H. Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge of God*, Grand Rapids, Reformed Free Publishing Association 2nd. ed., 1976, Vol. I, pp. 175- 176
- 13 According to Hoeksema's interpretation of Kuyper, in this covenant: 'Man is God's partner and co-worker over against Satan, for the purpose of realizing the original creation ordinance of the Most High and frustrating the attempt of the devil to rob God of His glory. Thus man is able, apart from Christ and regeneration, to accomplish much good in the present world, to cultivate the earth... At the same time God carries out His purpose of salvation in Christ, gathers His Church and establishes His kingdom in the world that is thus preserved and developed through this power of common grace, and the latter is therefore subservient to the former... The meaning of history and the world's providential government with respect to the present world, according to this view, is the realization of the original creation ordinance of God.' *Reformed Dogmatics*, Grand Rapids, Reformed Free Publishing, 1966, p.741
- 14 Hoeksema claims that Kuyper's conception of common grace restraining sin and bringing about the development of the creational potentials and the purposes of God's special grace in Christ Jesus involves Kuyper in a theology which 'conceives of God in a dualistic way,' by involving him in two separate purposes. *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.740
- 15 H. Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge of God*, I.427
- 16 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.741
- 17 *Ibid*, p.741
- 18 *Ibid*, p.174 cf. *The Triple Knowledge of God*, I.433 'The present world becomes the stage for the enactment and revelation of the wonder of God's grace, and the realization of His purpose of predestination, election and reprobation.'
- 19 *Ibid*, p.741 - 742
- 20 *Ibid*, p.742
- 21 *Ibid*, p.743
- 22 H. Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge of God*, I.428
- 23 *Ibid*, I.427
- 24 *Ibid*, I.428
- 25 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.236
- 26 *Ibid*, p.744
- 27 *Ibid*, p.247
- 28 *Ibid*, p.247

- 29 H. Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge of God*, I.427
- 30 *Ibid*, I.432 - 433
- 31 *Ibid*, I.432
- 32 *Ibid*, I.433 cf. *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.257
- 33 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.267
- 34 *Ibid*, p.269
- 35 *Ibid*, p.269
- 36 H. Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge of God*, I.433
- 37 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, pp.176-177 At this point Hoeksema misrepresents Kuyper. Whilst Kuyper did hold that common grace enables the unregenerate to perform good actions he did not assert that this therefore entailed an inward improvement in their spiritual state.
- 38 H. Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge of God*, I.428
- 39 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.205
- 40 *Ibid*, p.207. Hoeksema refers to 'this heresy about man's "immortal soul." In *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.749 we learn that 'immortality is something quite different from mere continued existence, and that it refers to the glorious everlasting life which can be obtained only through the resurrection in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Thus immortality is something which only the glorified regenerate know. The unregenerate know only death in the present, and in the future only the everlasting death of hell.
- 41 *Ibid*, p.207
- 42 *Ibid*, p.207
- 43 *Ibid*, p.374
- 44 *Ibid*, p.742
- 45 *Ibid*, p.208
- 46 H. Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge of God*, III.90
- 47 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.543
- 48 *Ibid*, p.544
- 49 *Ibid*, p.462
- 50 H. Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge of God*, III.96
- 51 *Ibid*, III.98
- 52 *Ibid*, III.101
- 53 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.106
- 54 *Ibid*, p.103

- 55 *Ibid*, p.252
- 56 *Ibid*, p.252
- 57 *Ibid*, p.253
- 58 *Ibid*, p.253
- 59 *Ibid*, p.279 - 280
- 60 *Ibid*, p.279
- 61 *Ibid*, p.271
- 62 *Ibid*, p.272
- 63 H.Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge of God*, I.414
- 64 *Ibid*, I.415
- 65 *Ibid*, I.416
- 66 *Ibid*, I.417
- 67 *Ibid*, I.417 - 418
- 68 *Ibid*, I.418
- 69 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.164
- 70 H. Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge of God*, II.522
- 71 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.240
- 72 H. Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge of God*, I.429
- 73 *Ibid*, I.429 - 430
- 74 *Ibid*, I.430
- 75 *Ibid*, I.430
- 76 *Ibid*, I.431
- 77 *Ibid*, I.431
- 78 *Ibid*, I.433
- 79 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.236
- 80 *Ibid*, p.155
- 81 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, Nutley, New Jersey, Presbyterian & Reformed 1977, p.221
- 82 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.107
- 83 J. Daane, *The Freedom of God*, p.92

- 84 For an analysis of Hoeksema's conception of the well-meant offer of the gospel. A.C. De Jong, *op cit.*
- 85 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.637
- 86 Homer Hoeksema, 'Preface' to *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.v.
- 87 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.741
- 88 *Ibid*, p.174
- 89 *Ibid*, p.741
- 90 G.C. Berkouwer, *Man in the Image of God*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1962, p.158

CHAPTER FOUR

KLAAS SCHILDER THE CULTURAL MANDATE REPLACES COMMON GRACE

SCHILDER THE MAN

Background

Klaas Schilder (1890-1962), Professor of Dogmatics at the Theological Seminary of the *Gereformeerde Kerken* in Kampen, has been described as the 'greatest cultural theologian in Reformed circles since the days of Kuyper'.¹ However in distinction from Kuyper and some other Reformed theologians who have enquired into and found value in cultural development Schilder does not explain the continuance of creation and history subsequent to the fall in terms of common grace, instead he stresses the importance of the concept of the cultural mandate. By this he means that the continuance of fallen creation and sinful humanity and the cultural development which we witness within creation are not to be understood as being grounded in a general operation of the grace of God. Schilder's understanding of creation and cultural activity are instead understood as being based upon the divine determination that man as a covenant creature fulfil his created cultural function as expounded in the cultural mandate of *Genesis 1:28* to fill the earth and subdue it.

Although living and working in the Netherlands Schilder played a part in the continuing controversy within the Christian Reformed Church concerning common grace. Whilst on a lecturing trip in the United States in the spring of 1939 Schilder attempted to bring about a reconciliation between the Christian Reformed and

Protestant Reformed Churches. A discussion did take place in Schilder's presence between sixteen Christian Reformed and fourteen Protestant Reformed ministers in Grand Rapids on March 29, 1939. Unfortunately so entrenched were the positions held that Schilder's eventual response was '*k heb de smoor in* 'I'm utterly fed up.'²

Schilder's contribution to the ecclesiastical debate was cut short by the outbreak of war and the invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940. Shortly after the invasion Schilder wrote two articles in his weekly paper *De Reformatie* in the issues of the 14th and 21st. June and 16th. August 1940. The articles and his outspoken opposition to the Nazis and their collaborators quickly earned him arrest and three and a half months in prison.³

By the cessation of European hostilities in April 1945 Schilder had taken part in his own ecclesiastical division. In 1944 there was a split in the *Gereformeerde Kerken* occasioned by differences concerning the confession and Church order. That section of the Church of which Schilder became leader became known as *Gereformeerde Kerken (onderhouden de Artikel 31 K.O.)* or 'Liberated' Churches. Convinced that the CRC was in error when it drew up the Three Points in 1924 Schilder advised those 'liberated' Christians emigrating to the United States to seek affiliation with the Protestant Reformed Church. Eventually the 'liberated' Christians in north America formed the Canadian Reformed Church.

Hoeksema

Schilder's rejection of common grace and the idea of God's favourable attitude toward the sinner when He calls to repentance and belief, along with his vigorous apologetic for a conservative Reformed theology as well as the Church-splitting tendency of his ecclesiastical politics, has led some commentators such as W. Masselink⁴ and A.A. Hoekema⁵ to make the too easy identification of Schilder as little more than a continental counterpart of and collaborator with Hoeksema. Whilst there are these undoubted similarities and the two men found much in common during Schilder's two visits to the U.S.A in 1939 and 1947,⁶ there are also undoubted differences due to

Schilder's placing the presentation of the gospel within the context of covenant. Hoeksema speaks of unconditional promises which are always particular whilst Schilder speaks of the covenant promise and the gospel promise as conditional inasmuch as he wishes to emphasise human responsibility in response. For Schilder the ministry of reconciliation is grace, but this does not mean we can speak of a favour of God toward all who live under this grace. As we shall see Schilder considers that God's favourable attitude is not towards the individual sinner as such but only towards the creatureliness of humanity.

STARTING POINT

Theocentric

Schilder does not start his investigation of the possibility of common grace and cultural achievement with the question so often asked; How do we account for the existence of good in a fallen and rebellious world? In his view whilst it may be of interest to start with what we have retained subsequent to the entrance of sin this fails to discern what lies at the heart of the matter. The mind that reasons from what we have retained in a fallen creation is termed egocentric.⁷ Instead we should approach the whole matter of cultural endeavour in what Schilder terms a theocentric manner. These two contrasting attitudes are characterised as that of the lazy servant who is relieved at having got off fairly well despite everything, and that of the obedient son who seeks what may still be done, 'We have *not yet* finished the great task given to us by God.'⁸ The difference in attitude is held to be emphasised by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount when He sees it appearing in the lives of the Pharisees who approached matters from a 'still have' mind set and earned His rebuke and when He pronounces His blessings upon those who had 'not yet' attained. The Beatitudes are not pronounced upon those who still have many good things in this world but upon those who are destitute and entirely dependent upon grace.

GOD'S ATTITUDE

Creation

Rather than focus on ourselves and what we discover within creation we must first realise the purpose of the creation. Creation points beyond itself and is not of itself a sufficient end. Thus there is no grace to be discerned in the mere fact of the preservation of creation, nor in cultural development within the creation. The creation is to be understood as an instrument of God's glorification, the substratum of history, an arena in which wrath as well as grace are to be encountered. As well as providing the possibility of redemption by special grace, Schilder reminds us that hell is to be populated as well as heaven.

Consider, if God willed to punish only as many persons as He, in fact, shall punish eternally, would not these persons still have to be born? Thus, God has had to prolong time to attain a hell with just so many objects of wrath as there shall be.⁹

Rather than accounting for creation in terms of grace Schilder attempts to interpret creation in the light of all of God's attitudes, thus creation is understood in terms of wrath as well as in terms of grace and is decisively qualified by neither. It must be noted however that whilst for Schilder grace and wrath cannot, within sinful history, be understood independently of each other he does not consistently regard grace and wrath as being equally ultimate principles within history as did Hoeksema.

Grace and Wrath

Schilder argues that the 'procreation of the reprobate in God's counsel'¹⁰ requires the prolongation of time for its realisation and an historical basis upon which it can be actualised. Thus we cannot see the mere fact of the prolongation of a fallen and sinful world or the cultural development within creation as instances of a gracious attitude on the part of God to an unredeemed creation or its inhabitants. As a substratum creation is neither good nor evil but unqualified. 'This continuation and development manifest no grace. Neither do they manifest condemnation or judgement.'¹¹

At this point Berkouwer rightly challenges Schilder with reasoning in an 'abstract-hypothetical fashion.'¹² Likewise A.C. de Jong thinks that this argument is 'ingenious but [it] is pure speculation.'¹³ Schilder is justified in his contention that the prolongation of history subsequent to the entrance of sin is not necessarily an evidence of common grace. God's providential care of creation is a purposeful direction towards a specific end and is not an uninvolved sustaining of a neutral territory. This biblically attested providential ordering of existence however does not justify a theological construction based upon the speculative concept of God dealing with procreated objects of reprobation. Whilst there are modifications in Schilder's understanding of God's attitude towards the unregenerate¹⁴ he not infrequently argues deductively from a co-ordinated decree of election and reprobation and speaks of Adamites whom God sovereignly procreated for hell.¹⁵

History is to be understood in light of all of God's attitudes and therefore it is to be interpreted in terms of wrath as well as of grace. Daane argues¹⁶ that in Schilder's interpretation of history this means that history must therefore be equally directed towards reprobation and to election and that grace and wrath are understood as being equally ultimate principles. It must be noted that whilst for Schilder grace and wrath cannot, within sinful history, be understood independently of each other he does not consistently regard grace and wrath as being equally ultimate principles within history. At this point Daane fails to appreciate that whilst Schilder interprets creation in the light of all God's attitudes and thus it must be interpreted in light of wrath as well as grace he also presents a picture in which it is decisively qualified by neither. Daane fails at this point to grasp the extent of Schilder's retreat into an abstract concept of creation as an undifferentiated substratum.

Further, whilst God's grace and His wrath cannot be understood apart from each other it does not of necessity follow that they are equally ultimate. As we shall see for Schilder the continuation of created existence is eschatologically directed to fulfilment in Christ. Thus for Schilder history and the cultural activity within it is not based

upon common grace for the rebellious but is reliant upon the fulfilment of the covenant relationship in the work of redemption or special grace by which we will know the eventual crushing of evil and the ultimate victory of good.

Schilder did not always co-ordinate love and wrath, blessing and curse in a straightforward schematism as suggested by Daane, although it is true that at times there is a tendency to approach such a scheme.¹⁷ Schilder speaks of God's attitude as being not a disposition of grace-wrath in accord with a balanced double decree, but a redemptive disposition of grace which becomes wrath for those sinners who reject the serious offer of grace in the gospel. Although Schilder's position, which leads him to speculative theology concerning God dealing with procreated objects of reprobation, has drawn him in the direction of Hoeksema he does not adopt Hoeksema's rigidly logical conclusions that, emerging from a pre-temporal decree, God has only hate for the sinner who is reprobate.

Serious Offer of the Gospel

De Jong notes that when Schilder comes to speak of the preaching of the gospel and the ministry of reconciliation much of the tenor of his argument about God's disposition being conditioned by a co-ordinated double decree is abandoned.¹⁸ If there is a consistent balance to be found in Schilder's view of God's disposition towards sinners it is a balance between favour towards the sinner's creatureliness and wrath towards the sinner's disloyalty in breaking the covenant mandate.¹⁹

Schilder consistently contrasts the offer of Christ in the gospel with an offer of grace. He bluntly insists that there is no common grace in the bare offer of the gospel, 'Grace does not come in presentation'.²⁰ From this we can see why he prefers to speak of a serious offer rather than of a well-meant offer of Christ. Schilder's position is one in which God does not conditionally present salvation to all sinners, but one in which God seriously calls some sinners, the elect, to salvation, and other sinners, the reprobate, to damnation. Over the years there is a discernable alteration in Schilder's view concerning God's disposition. In the 1930 first edition of *Christus*

in *Zijn Lijden* he speaks of God's redemptive will to save the world;²¹ whilst in the second edition of 1951 he shifts emphasis to speak of God's will to glorify Himself in Christ in all human beings called into existence, both elect and reprobate.²²

Although Schilder sees God's goodwill toward humanity as being one of the Scriptural givens which must control our thinking we would be in error if we understood this as meaning that God loves all or even has an attitude of compassion upon all the individuals within mankind. It is not the individual sinner as such whom God loves but the createdness of the sinner. All humanity shares in createdness. That God has held back His anger and allowed the prolongation of creation is no mark of a gracious attitude on the part of God to humanity as such or to individuals within humanity. It is evidence only that God loves created life, the work of His hands. In this conception we can see that Schilder conceives of God as loving, not concrete individuals but an aspect of human nature abstracted from the individual. Creatureliness is conceived of as a static quality found the same everywhere. Schilder even goes so far as to argue that God loves creatureliness wherever it is found, even in the antichrist or Satan. The length to which this abstraction goes can be discerned when we find Schilder speaking of God's favourable disposition resting even upon the pulse beat of the antichrist.²³

Results

The form of his denial of the First Point of the Synod of 1924, that which concerns God's favourable disposition towards the created order, from within a theological system of forensic based covenant leads Schilder ever deeper into a hardening of attitude closely approaching the supralapsarian views of Hoeksema. Schilder, avowedly neither supralapsarian nor infralapsarian,²⁴ is led to speculation concerning God's self-love creating objects of election and reprobation. These Schilder places within a primal covenant '*oer-verbond*'²⁵ consisting of legal connections '*rechtsverbanden*.' Thus it would appear that Schilder projects wrath back into God's eternal counsel. On the basis of this construction Schilder is able to speak of God's first address to humanity in the garden as revealing both His favourable attitude to man as a creature and His

already existent wrath against man. The threat contained in *Genesis 2:17* is held to indicate an already existent wrath within God.

His rejection of an attitude of favour on the part of God towards either mankind considered as a whole or to sinful individuals within humanity leads Schilder ever deeper into theological abstraction. Scripture does not speak of a pre-temporal wrath of God which is focused upon pre-determined objects of reprobation who have broken the legal requirements of a primordial covenant. If divine wrath is mentioned in Scripture it is a motivated wrath directed towards those who attempt to thwart God's redemptive purpose for mankind. God's wrath is a holy reaction experienced by those who reject and obstruct His love. Whilst Schilder does not deny this in other parts of his work, it is obscured within his polemic against common grace.

COVENANT

Scope of the Covenant

Schilder operates upon the basis of two inter-related Scriptural givens which must govern all our thinking, 'God's goodwill towards men, and: - the original covenant statute'.²⁶ The entire sweep of human history is to be interpreted in terms of the one covenantal movement.²⁷ That which is created is brought to development in a richer unfolding through the covenant as the created fulfils its potentials. God's being cannot be enriched, however within the developing creation there is a progressive unfolding of His self-revelation. Also it is within the covenant that the nature of man as the image of God comes to an ever clearer revelation.²⁸

It was in paradise that God established the regulations governing covenant fellowship. The establishment of the covenant, which came subsequent to the creation of man in the image of God, added something to created reality. It was 'a further determination, a providential regulation of the actual working of the relationship between God and men.'²⁹ The regulatory provisions of the covenant are the promise and the demand with their consequences of blessing and threat. Along the way of obedience man would enter the condition of not being able to sin. This is not to say that man by his

own effort or from his own ability or power could enter this state.³⁰ The ability to obey was a created ability, the desire to obey was a created desire. God had to 'pull' and 'push' man 'over the threshold'³¹

Although there is an infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity there still exists a genuine partnership within the covenant.³² As responsible creatures within the covenant we have received from God all that is necessary to fulfil our obligations within the covenant. It is in this way that God calls us to live as a covenant partner. We however are able to refuse to live in such a way and cease to make use of the privileges which were ours. It is precisely the establishment of the covenant which raises the relationship of God and humanity above that of natural fate or necessity onto a platform where we are able to freely conduct the 'business of a reciprocal free bond'.³³ All of revelation is covenantally dated, subsequent to the fall everything is Christologically dated.³⁴

Historical Movement

It is his emphasis on the drive towards the eschatological denouement which characterises the approach of Schilder and which is perhaps his most valuable contribution to the common grace debate. He does not focus upon where mankind is but upon where we are going. It is the destination which for him determines the nature and the course of the journey. Heaven is the eternal Sabbath of God where we will be able to both rest from our cultural labours, as the cultural mandate shall be fulfilled, and be able to enjoy that communion with God which is only foreshadowed by our obedience to the fourth Commandment. The common commands and promises given to Adam in paradise were pointers to a future when in a catastrophic event God will usher in His Sabbath.³⁵

The journey between paradise and consummation is characterised as one of commission, command and mandate. On such a journey grace is held to be too narrow a term to encompass the purpose and import of human activity, or God's relationship with mankind. God lays upon all mankind an inescapable duty which

cannot be denied without consequence.³⁶ At this point Schilder, by analysing our original relationship to God as one of the covenantal responsibility of doing the will of the Father in every aspect of life and calling, implies that the restoration of that relationship in Christ means that the regenerate person becomes once again God's willing co-worker in every aspect of cultural activity, whilst the unregenerate covenant breaker remains to labour in ungracious rebellion. All activity, whether under grace or wrath, becomes purposeful activity from within the covenant setting, leading to a final destination and outcome. Thus Schilder sees creation linked only indirectly to Christ through the regeneration of the elect. If we are to come to an appreciation of the centrality of Christ to all history we must develop an understanding of the cosmic scope of the Incarnation.

DEVELOPMENT

Prolongation

Schilder questions whether we may speak of common grace in a common operation of the Holy Spirit.³⁷ Whilst not denying that there is a restraint of sin Schilder would also maintain that there is a restraint of grace, both of which are inherent in time. We must not talk of common grace without speaking of its obverse the common curse.³⁸ Restraint is a characteristic of created temporal existence, even in paradise God restrained the giving of full blessedness otherwise there would have been no fall. With the ultimate cessation of this restraint time itself will cease to be. Restraint however is no evidence of a gracious disposition of God to the generality of humankind, the same restraint is also a matter of common curse.

By conceiving of history as a prolongation providing an undifferentiated substratum for the outworking of both grace and wrath it would seem that Schilder has again slipped into abstract reasoning. Rather than speak of human beings existing within an historical situation Schilder tends to proceed from an eternal counsel and towards a final end. In this construction God's preservation of creation becomes, for a significant portion of mankind, merely the concealment of wrath. The whole question

of common grace however centres upon the concrete and ongoing situation in which we find ourselves and within which we encounter God.

Prolongation in itself is neither blessing or curse, rather it is the platform upon which history is enacted and culture developed. The progress of development within creation is understood as the result of inherent forces within the natural process. According to Schilder's view we can see that it is important that we understand that the existence of nature in time necessarily implies movement. This instinct to development within mankind was in the garden a God glorifying instinct; after the fall it became twisted and self-indulgent.

Faithful Covenant Activity

The activities of humankind which go to make up our common life, eating, drinking and bearing children are not to be considered as having within themselves either grace or curse. Rather it is eating and drinking and bearing children within faith which is an evidence of grace. This is common to all who know Christ as their Redeemer, a knowledge which has an effect upon all cultural activity. But it does not imply a general operation of grace towards the totality of mankind.³⁹ In a similar manner all cultural activity which emerges from a faithless motive, eating and drinking and bearing children, is activity under the curse. After the fall the inevitable antithesis is not to be found in nature itself, rather it is found in the separate employment of creation by the regenerate and unregenerate, in the motivation of our cultural activity.

One nature (although a twofold use of nature); one material (although a twofold fashioning of this material); one terrain (although a twofold development of that terrain); one cultural impulse (although a twofold cultural striving). And since all *fashioning* of the material, the good as well as the evil, is *bound* to the nature, the structure and the laws of this material, the result of the believer's work will, of course, always exhibit much similarity to that of the unbeliever. It is not the similarity of their diverging spirits, but that of the stiffness and obstinacy of the *material*. Potters differ much; so do sculptors. The one builds a temple, the other a dance hall. But the clay, the marble, they fetch from the same pit.⁴⁰

The regenerate man or woman must not be content to dine on the crumbs falling from the table of the unregenerate. This negative and reactionary attitude is that which is found in the abuser of the doctrine of common grace, the person who takes what they can from the world to their own profit, concerned only that they be able to discern the point at which they begin to jeopardise their soul in their attraction to the world. Rather the outlook of the regenerate is to be the broad one of the covenant creature who looks at the cosmos through the eyes of an obedient office bearer called to cultural activity in the real world of time as a preparation for the ultimate Sabbath of God.⁴¹

COMMONNESS

Terrain

Just as there is no common operation of grace under which the generality of mankind experiences the blessings of the Holy Spirit so there is no common terrain of activity either. Such a cultural terrain understood as a neutral terrain of common grace introduces an area where the antithesis between Church and world is lost and where all can toil happily together without differentiation.

The 'culture terrain' becomes a sort of neutral zone between the contending camps of church and world, where we are now and then able to pause, an 'equipping place' where we are able to have our common catnap. It is, as well, the shop-floor for neutral business of both sorts.

But for all that it is mistaken. There is no question of a terrain of common action that in its essence is a pure gift for communal recreation, a sector of common play. A terrain of grace, undiluted, is first of all heaven.⁴²

The best that we can say is that both the 'camps' of Church and world are employed within a common workshop.⁴³ Although nature is one the cultural endeavour of humanity, due to the effect of sin, is twofold. This antithesis between the regenerate and the unregenerate exists in actuality and must be recognised.⁴⁴

The Image of God

Both groups of humanity, the regenerate and unregenerate, share a humanness and as such the cultural mandate applies to all mankind, as does the cultural impulse. At this point Henry Van Til fails to appreciate the significance of Schilder's view of the image of God when he says that in Schilder's view there is a being together 'of all men in this world as a result of the universal humanness of the creature image-bearer of God.'⁴⁵ For Schilder the image of God is not something which we have and which operates as a basis of commonality but is something which we may possibly regain. *Genesis 9:6*, and also *James 3:9* are interpreted by Schilder as teaching that God made man in His image at the time of creation, but neither passage is understood to teach that fallen man was permitted to retain that image after the fall.⁴⁶ The image of God within man is something which has been lost but may possibly be regained in the future.

Who knows what may still happen to this washed-out world? Who knows whether, perhaps, at some time in the future, the image of God will be seen again? So interpreted, this passage says everything about the past and probably much about the *future*, but nothing about what man is *at the present time*. These words only tell us what God intended with man when he created him, what he purposed when he formed him.⁴⁷

Schilder's exegesis of the passages in question would seem to discount the fact that the prohibitions against murder and misuse of the tongue are based upon the supposition that the victims of our actions are made in the image of God. If we lost the image at the time of the fall and only regain it in redemption then as A.A. Hoekema asserts 'these words lose their thrust'⁴⁸

Schilder rejects⁴⁹ the distinction between the broader and narrower meaning of the image of God as being both arbitrary and uncertain when it comes to the broader understanding of the image. This distinction is seen as an abstract one which cannot be supported from Scripture⁵⁰ Instead Schilder wishes to distinguish between creation and image. In this understanding our createdness is the precondition for the bearing of the image, Scripture in speaking of the image makes mention first of all of the

createdness of man,⁵¹ but createdness in itself does not constitute the image. For Schilder the actual image lies in the office which created man received. In this view the image of God is not something received and static, a form of status within creation, rather image is understood in terms of calling, a dynamic relationship with the God of the covenant. The image inasmuch as it means the active service of God vanishes in rebellion. The glory of the image is detected only in the active service or imaging of God in the life of the man or woman renewed and being renewed by Christ. Fallen man is unable, using his human qualities and abilities in rebellion against God, to show forth the image of God. Within such a view cultural fellowship is possible only on a basis of shared faith in God through the Christ.⁵²

To establish communion in our common humanity as members of the mystical body of Christ, that is Christian culture.⁵³

In response to the covenantally rebellious motive of the unregenerate their cultural striving becomes an end in itself, art is practised for art's sake and science for the sake of science. There is however no such thing as 'pure' culture 'de cultuur' any more than there can be 'pure' reason. The cultural activity of the unregenerate never reaches its fulfilment because the basic unity of being and purpose are lost and therefore can only produce fragments.

Within this world in which there are two camps struggling in cultural incompatibility we are involved in the paradoxical struggle entailed in the Scriptural commands to both leave Babylon (*Revelation 18:4*) and also not to avoid the people of the world (*I Corinthians 5:9-10*). To condemn Babylon however is not to condemn the common createdness upon which her harlotry is based. The conflict between the Christian's life in this world which lies in sin and the command never to go out of the world is the same conflict which lies between our condition of being in inevitable contact with men and our duty of fellowship.⁵⁴ In the life of the individual Christian it is the constant struggle between sin and grace (in its saving aspect), between obedience and disobedience, which is decisive in the cultural endeavour.⁵⁵

CHRIST AND HISTORY

Cultural Endeavour

Schilder maintains⁵⁶ that heaven always proclaims the fundamental antithetical idea that God and the creature are ever to be distinguished. This antithesis however is always relativised by a deeper conjunction. Heaven's message is also that God and man are never separate and that it is the conjunction which determines the nature of the disjunction. It is Christ who stands at the centre of history and all that which follows His exaltation finds meaning in Him. It is the Christ of the historic creeds, united but not mixed with humanity, in whom we find the essence of our view of history.⁵⁷ History and man's development and cultural achievement are to be viewed within a framework of Christ's redemptive work. It is not nature or history which is condemned by God, rather it is sin, and through the sinless Christ God restores nature and history. Christ, the second Adam, bears the wrath of God for us and fulfils on our behalf the cultural mandate given originally to the first Adam.

Christ is not seen as bringing into being something altogether new, rather His task is the restoration of that which was from the beginning, and this is what He actually achieves.⁵⁸ It is in Christ that the reality of a harmonious culture appears. It is in Christ that God by special grace makes the dead come to life and makes the man of God equipped for every good work.⁵⁹ It is He who establishes the true communion which enables a properly directed cultural endeavour to take place.⁶⁰ Culture is thus a matter of a decision of faith.

Fellowship of Faith

True cultural endeavour is possible only where the will of God is followed in conscious obedience. The possession of the same nature or shared interests does not mean that true communion follows. A common goal can only be achieved when it is undergirded by love for the same principles. Cultural fellowship is possible only on a basis of the fellowship of faith.⁶¹ The Church, of which Christ is the Head, must never attempt to become a director or controller of cultural activity itself, but she must instead be the greatest indirect cultural force.⁶²

It is Christ who creates new creatures and enables us to fulfil our calling even in this fallen world. The Christian family consciously living a distinctly Christian lifestyle is a dynamic witness of healthy and normal living to an abnormal world.

A Christian labourer, who dares to be himself as Christian, is again a piece of health in an unhistoric, business-like-Americanised world; he is worth more in subdued force than a whole college of science that has not seen God.⁶³

It is Christ who watches over us as we pray and worship and as we work with brush or broom in our attempt to develop from out of creation what God has placed within it. Our culture is an eschatologically driven culture. The real value of cultural endeavour does not lie in the intrinsic value of the artifacts produced. The spiritual values shall remain even when the products of God's co-workers have been melted down in the fires of the consummation. The real value of work lies in the preparation of the arena for the struggle between the Christ and the antichrist. Throughout the process of human life and endeavour God pursues His purpose of achieving His greatest work, the triumph of the last one of His elect over the world, in the power of Jesus Christ.⁶⁴

It is for the sake of Christ that the historical process has been placed between the existence of the two paradises, not merely for the work of salvation but for the work of the Redeemer-Judge.⁶⁵ In his work Kuyper sees common grace as providing a substratum within which the Church is able to do its work of proclamation and worship. Schilder here turns this completely around and argues that it is special grace which provides the platform for cultural activity. As long as God continues to gather His Church the world is given an opportunity for repentance.⁶⁶

The End Times

At the end of time the antichrist will be revealed and by God's permission will be able to perform signs and wonders through technical inventions. True culture however will come to an end when God's providence no longer restrains the rebelliousness of humanity.⁶⁷

The culture of the antichrist will leave in its wake only torsos, when the horizon is aflame with the fire of God's judgement, which may still be seen at the brink of the sea of glass.⁶⁸

Schilder takes issue with Kuyper's contention that the fruits of common grace will enter into glory. This is done on three grounds. Firstly the exegetical, according to Schilder the events of *Revelation 21:24*, where we read of the kings of the earth bringing their splendour into the celestial city, occur within the present dispensation. Schilder holds this verse to refer to a segment of the process of the coming and development of God's Jerusalem in time. Those amongst the noble of the earth who repent bring their cultural achievement and treasure to the feet of Christ, which will have an effect in eternity.⁶⁹

Secondly Schilder points out that Kuyper bases his argument on an analogy with the resurrection body. This analogy is rejected on the grounds that it is impermissible to regard the corporeal body which was buried as the seed of the spiritual body which is raised. Kuyper here is said to have committed the error of comparing incomparables.⁷⁰

Thirdly, Schilder points out that the saints will be passive in the process of the resurrection and that God brings them into His presence catastrophically. Rhetorically Schilder asks what cultural product could resurrected men and women with radically altered bodies possibly wish to retain in heaven. Could such artifacts of earthly culture serve any purpose in glory? After the fires of judgement will there be any traces of earthly culture remaining? When the stars and planets flutter down like blossom out of the sky will germs of culture have any significance? All things within creation are for the Church, those who will enter into heaven and know perfect communion with God. This is not however the driving point in history or human endeavour as entire cultures have risen and fallen without having any effect upon the Church. The Church is not ultimate but penultimate. The real point of cultural striving is not to be found in the fulfilment of human drives or the egocentric

satisfaction of our needs. History exists for the glory of God who has made all things for Himself, for all is Christ's and Christ is God's.⁷¹

The Catastrophic

It is the eschatological concept of the catastrophic which forms the crux of Schilder's idea of history. At one point in time a new state of affairs will be inaugurated as the climax of history. But it must be emphasised that this takes place within the creation period.⁷² Heaven, towards which history is driven, is not a totally other world. To argue so is to deny the significance of the Incarnation. It is the coming in the flesh of the Son of God which is the pivotal point of all history, purposing the beginning and controlling the end. Throughout *Christus in Zijn Lejden*, his work on the sufferings of Christ, Schilder presents Christ's life as the endurance of the catastrophic curse. The fall which brought about the ruin of creation was a single moment in time, restoration of perfection will not come by an evolutionary process of change but by one catastrophic leap.

This process of the catastrophic event is embedded in the very structure of history.⁷³ The first creative act, the calling forth of matter out of nothing is indicative of this method. In the work of creation God, day by day, added something new, transforming and transcending what was already in existence. Each day succeeded the previous as a convulsion through which the chaos was transformed into the cosmos. On the sixth day man was created in order to labour in loving service until that moment when God Himself will come as a thief in the night and catastrophically usher in His eternal Sabbath.

SUMMATION

Fulfilment in Christ

Schilder has made a valuable contribution to the debate on common grace. His emphasis on making our point of departure the concept of man as the office-bearer of God, called and equipped to cultivate the potentials of this world reaches to the heart of a Christian philosophy of culture. By analysing our relationship with God as

one of covenantal responsibility Schilder leads us to conclude that our restoration through Christ cannot fall short of the goal of making us co-workers with God in every sphere of cultural activity. Within Kuyper's presentation of common grace we have definite indications that common grace sets up a subsidiary objective of its own. Schilder would firmly place all cultural activity within the context of fulfilment in Christ. It is the grace of redemption which provides the undergirding basis of creation.

Antithesis

Schilder places the motivation for the continued existence of creation after the fall in the determination of God to glorify Himself through the salvation of sinners in Christ. There is no antithesis between God and nature or God and creature rather the antithesis lies between sin and grace. Thus he avoids the notion of a terrain of common activity in which the antithesis between regenerate and unregenerate is underplayed or even lost. In this way Schilder enables Christians to avoid the pastoral danger of thinking of a duality within their own being in which they live at one time in an area of common grace and at another time in an area of special grace.

Catastrophic

Whilst emphasising the importance of cultural endeavour as an outworking of our covenant relationship his other emphasis on the catastrophic within history prevents us from viewing our cultural achievements as being all important. God is still sovereign and it is in His hands that history is held and by His will that it is driven.

Abstract Concepts

Schilder however would appear to base the concrete actions of men and women upon the earth within a framework of abstract concepts. His concept of God loving the creatureliness of individuals whilst enabling him to deny any attitude of favour of God toward non-elect sinners is an abstraction which we cannot discover in Scripture. Likewise Schilder's idea of history as prolongation providing a substratum for the outworking of grace and wrath would appear an abstraction. Berkouwer points out

that here Schilder is proceeding from God's eternal counsel rather than from God's speech to men in historic relationships. The God who reveals Himself to us loved the world enough to send His only Son. The thrust of the gospel is the redemptive love of God in Christ Jesus. The rejection of common grace should not be allowed to lead us into an understanding whereby the prolongation of time and the development of history and culture are to be construed as resulting from a balance between grace and wrath which leads us to conclude, at least in part, that there is an equal ultimacy of the decrees.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 H. Van Til *The Calvinist Concept of Culture*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1959, p.137
- 2 G. Hoeksema, *op cit*, p.255
- 3 L. Praamsma, *The Church In The Twentieth Century*, Ontario, Paideia Press, 1981, p.160
- 4 W. Masselink, *Common Grace and Christian Education*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, n.d., p.51
- 5 A.A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, Grand Rapids/Exeter, Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1986, p.193
- 6 G. Hoeksema, *op cit*, pp.244-45, 282. For a comparative analysis of the views of the two theologians see A.C. De Jong, *op cit*.
- 7 K. Schilder, *Wat is de Hemel*, Kampen, Kok, 1935, p.286
- 8 *Ibid*, p.286
- 9 K. Schilder, *Christus en Cultuur*, 2nd. ed., Franeker, Wever, 1948, p.63
- 10 K. Schilder, *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, Goes, Oosterbaan & Le Contre, Vol.I, 1947, Vol.II, 1949, Vol.III, 1950, Vol.IV, 1951. IV130
- 11 K. Schilder, *Christus en Culture*, p.63
- 12 G.C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1952, p.72
- 13 A.C. De Jong, *op cit*, p.153
- 14 As demonstrated by De Jong, *op cit*, pp.154-58, it is possible to discern a change in emphasis between the earlier and the later Schilder in which he shifts emphasis from the call to repentance being a call of sovereign love to a call of sovereign authority.

Schilder did not consistently apply his favour-disfavour construction. He wrote of Golgotha as the proclamation of God's love and spoke of sinner's closing their ears 'before love's legitimate complaint,' *Wat is de Hemel* p.75. God's ultimatums in the preaching of the gospel are spoken of as 'het ultimatum van de genade'. *Christus in Zijn Lijden*, Kampen, J.H. Kok, 1951, 2nd ed. II.166
- 15 K. Schilder, *Is de term 'algemeene genade' wetenschappelijk verantwoord?*, Kampen, Zalsman, 1947, p.66
- 16 J. Daane, *A Theology of Grace*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1954, p.141
- 17 De Jong speaks of tendencies in the work of Schilder towards a co-ordinated double decree 'which come into focus precisely at those points where Schilder polemicizes against common grace, particularly against the idea of a certain favourable disposition which God reveals towards unbelieving sinners.' *op cit*, p.150
- 18 De Jong, *op cit*, p.154

- 19 Commenting upon Schilder's use of this formulation Cornelius Van Til remarks that 'Creatureliness as such can nowhere be found among men. It is a pure abstraction.' *Common Grace and The Gospel*, Nutley, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977, p.27. In keeping with his general position Van Til maintains that we shall make no progress on the common grace problem with the help of abstractions. *Ibid*, pp.24-33
- 20 K. Schilder, *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, II.240
- 21 K. Schilder, *Christus in Zijn Lijden*, 1st. ed., Kampen, 1930, II.138,9
- 22 K. Schilder, *Christus in Zijn Lijden*, 2nd. ed., p.170
- 23 K. Schilder, *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, IV.116
- 24 *Ibid*, III.476
- 25 *Ibid*, IV.116
- 26 K. Schilder, *Wat is de Hemel?*, p.197
- 27 *Ibid*, p.247
- 28 K. Schilder, *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, I.319
- 29 *Ibid*, I.318
- 30 *Ibid*, I.395
- 31 *Ibid*, I.393 cf *Wat is de Hemel?*, pp.132ff
- 32 *Ibid*, I.321
- 33 *Ibid*, II.275ff
- 34 *Ibid*, I.80
- 35 K. Schilder, *Wat is de Hemel?*, p.287
- 36 *Ibid*, p.288
- 37 K. Schilder, *Christus en Cultuur*, p.60
- 38 K. Schilder, *Wat is de Hemel?*, p.287
- 39 K. Schilder, *Christus en Cultuur*, p.64
- 40 *Ibid*, p.76 cf. p.59
- 41 K. Schilder, *Wat is de Hemel?*, p.285
- 42 *Ibid*, 2nd. ed. 1954, p.208
- 43 K. Schilder, *Christus en Cultuur*, p.59
- 44 *Ibid*, p.89
- 45 H. Van Til, *op cit*, p.143
- 46 K. Schilder, *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, I.296f

- 47 *Ibid*, I.297f
- 48 A.A. Hoekema, *op cit*, p.17
- 49 K. Schilder, *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, I.292
- 50 *Ibid*, I.300
- 51 *Ibid*, I.215ff
- 52 K. Schilder, *Wat is de Hemel?*, p.75
- 53 K. Schilder, *Christus en Cultuur*, p.93
- 54 K. Schilder, *Wat is de Hemel?*, p.114
- 55 *Ibid*, p.117
- 56 *Ibid*, pp.60, 61, 121
- 57 *Ibid*, p.68
- 58 *Ibid*, p.129
- 59 K. Schilder, *Christus en Cultuur*, p.87f
- 60 *Ibid*, p.88
- 61 *Ibid*, p.75
- 62 *Ibid*, p.112
- 63 *Ibid*, p.73
- 64 K. Schilder, *Wat is de Hemel?*, p.305
- 65 K. Schilder, *Christus en Cultuur*, p.66
- 66 K. Schilder, *Wat is de Hemel?*, p.290
- 67 K. Schilder, *Christus en Cultuur*, p.84f
- 68 *Ibid*, p.85
- 69 K. Schilder, *Wat is de Hemel?*, p.291f
- 70 *Ibid*, p.293f
- 71 *Ibid*, pp.300-7
- 72 *Ibid*, pp. 64, 67, 298
- 73 *Ibid*, p.64

CHAPTER FIVE

CORNELIUS VAN TIL COMMON SOVEREIGNTY REPLACES COMMON GRACE

VAN TIL THE MAN

Background

Throughout his life Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) was a notable proponent of what he saw as a consistently Reformed apologetic. The Van Tilian corpus is to a considerable extent an attempt to expound the philosophical implications of the theological system of federal Calvinism.

Born in 1895 in the northern village of Grootegast, grandson of a tavern keeping adherent of the *Afscheiding* and son of a godly dairy farmer Van Til never departed from the theology in which he was raised. When Van Til was ten his parents emigrated to the United States where they settled as farmers in Indiana. Brought up in the Christian Reformed Church Van Til attended Calvin College in Grand Rapids. In one of the few autobiographical notes in his writings, Van Til writes of sitting:

spellbound, listening to the young preacher who had just come to the Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The preacher had the physique of a blacksmith and the mien of a Napoleon. But his name was Herman Hoeksema.¹

After one year's study at Calvin Seminary Van Til moved on to Princeton Seminary to study for the ministry. Upon completion a further two years were spent at

Princeton University studying under Archibald Allen Bowman the Scottish idealist before completing his doctorate. After serving as minister of a small rural congregation of the Christian Reformed Church for a year Van Til returned to Princeton in 1928 to teach apologetics at the Seminary. Upon the reorganisation of the Seminary in 1929 Van Til joined the teaching staff of the newly formed Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia where, apart from a term's secondment to Calvin Seminary in 1952, he stayed for the rest of his teaching career.

Apologetics

Van Til spent his working life as an apologist and for him apologetics was the inevitable outworking and defence of a particular understanding of theology. It is in relation to systematic theology that apologetics finds its centre,² and for the practise of apologetics to go beyond its theological base would be to raise up an autonomous system of thought. The two disciplines are closely intertwined because both flow from the same source, complete subjection to God's revelation of Himself in Scripture, the self-attesting infallible Word of God. To take a stance, in any field of thought, outwith special revelation is rebellion, a refusal to acknowledge the authority of God's revelation and an attempt to haul God before the bar of man's autonomous reason.³

Federal Calvinism

Foundational for Van Til's understanding of the whole structure of reality is federal Calvinist theology. Holding to the representational nature of the first and second Adam, he maintains that:

It may even be said that *Calvin's covenant idea is Theism come to its own*. The covenant idea is nothing but the expression of the representational principle constantly applied to all reality.⁴

Van Til dedicated himself to the outworking of the philosophical implications of what he sees as 'consistent Calvinism'.⁵ He insists that all theology and philosophy, excluding the Reformed understanding, ultimately leads to a universe where chance is placed above God. He has developed his apologetic system because he believes that

it is the only consistent way of defending the theology of the Bible. The Reformed system which provides the framework for his apologetic stance, including the presupposition of Scripture as the infallible Word of God, is that to which we refer as federal Calvinism.⁶ Van Til has consciously sought to form an apologetic which is true to the fundamental insights of Reformed theology as expressed over the last century by federal and neo-Calvinists.⁷ In Van Til's view, 'It is only in the Reformed theology that we have a method of apologetics that meets the requirements of the hour.'⁸ From this position he baldly and boldly proclaims that:

The Reformed faith is theism come to its own. If there be other theisms they are not true theisms. How could they be? Are there several true Gods? There is but one true God; there is therefore but one true theism, namely, Christian theism, the theism of the Bible. There is but one God, the God triune of the Scriptures. And it is the vision of this God 'in his majesty' that constitutes the essence of the Reformed Faith.⁹

Common Grace

We must not however think that Van Til merely replicates the systems and arguments of earlier theologians with a few attempts at fine tuning. Van Til can rightly be termed 'without doubt the leading exponent of presuppositionalism,'¹⁰ and 'the father of presuppositionalism in America.'¹¹ In his development of a presuppositionalist apologetic Van Til has been prepared to combat what he sees as less consistently Christian approaches wherever he finds them.¹² We see this willingness to wrestle with giants when, on the subject of common grace, Kuyper is criticised for not making 'a clear distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian ideal of knowledge.'¹³ In the opinion of Van Til:

There is a vagueness inherent in Kuyper's treatment of common grace. He seems uncertain in his mind as to what is common to the believer and the non-believer.¹⁴

It is as an apologist that Van Til approaches the question of common grace and not as a systematician. His interest in common grace arose because it seemed to have a basic significance for the subject of Christian apologetics. His conception of

common grace is thus broader than that of those who tend to discuss common grace mainly in terms of harmonising a theological system by asking the question as to whether or not there is an attitude of favour on the part of God towards unbelievers.¹⁵ Whilst willing to employ the traditional manner of expression when discussing common grace¹⁶ Van Til's importance stems from his placing the discussion in the larger framework of thought he terms the 'Christian philosophy of history.'

A basic emphasis in Van Til's thought, typical of neo-Calvinism, is on coherence and interconnectedness within creation.¹⁷ Common grace is seen by Van Til as an attempt to provide a partial solution to the tensions inherent in an apologetic system stressing the absolute antithesis existing in principle between the thinking of the regenerate and the unregenerate. Federal Calvinist theology generally contains several passionately held tensions such as that of maintaining the 'universalism' of the free offer of the gospel whilst also holding fast to particular election. How is it possible to hold to election, particularly double election, without doing violence to the 'whosoever will' aspect of biblical teaching?

Seven Steps

Van Til never produced an extended systematic treatment of the doctrine of common grace. The nine chapters of *Common Grace and the Gospel*, his most detailed publication on the subject, consists of pamphlets, magazine articles, an appendix to a class syllabus and a book review, separately published in the twenty one years between 1947 and 1968, all topped off with a chapter freshly written for the collection published in 1972. In this work he 'with great diffidence and hesitation... has sought a solution for the apologetic problem and for the problem of common grace.'¹⁸ Van Til asserts that there are some seven steps which are to be taken if we are to work out the problems of common grace.¹⁹ Despite the lack of any clear and systematic outworking of these progressive stages in his writing it is possible to flesh out the steps to give a clearer impression of Van Til's teaching on common grace.

STEP ONE

The triune God unavoidably and clearly reveals Himself in general and special revelation as the God who controls and manifests His plan through 'whatsoever comes to pass.' It is this will or decree of God that comes to expression in nature and history, here 'lies the basis, the unity and the guarantee of the success of "science."'20

The Antithesis and Commonality of Facts

Epistemology is of central importance for our understanding of the doctrine of common grace. If there is a common operation of God in the lives of all mankind and within creation generally the knowledge of God's presence in creation must impact upon the existence of the regenerate and unregenerate alike.

Believer and non-believer differ at the outset of every self-conscious investigation of every item of knowledge, the factness of every fact is in question. 'Every fact *is* its function, therefore every fact contains in conjunction with all other facts, the covenantal claims of God upon man.'²¹ 'Brute' or unstructured fact is the presupposition of modern science in which facts are unstructured until categorised and defined by the mind of man. Presenting himself as a describer of facts the modern scientist is instead a maker of facts. A universal judgement about the nature of existence is presupposed in the 'description' of the modern scientist. This is not just a difference in the explanation of the fact, it is a difference in the description of the fact. 'Description itself is explanation.'²² By claiming that it makes no pronouncement about the nature of reality as a whole, scientific methodology nevertheless does make such a pronouncement about the nature of reality.

When believer and unbeliever are fully epistemologically self-conscious they will have no fact in common. They also always have all facts in common in that both are unavoidably confronted by the same God and the same created universe. For Van Til the regenerate and unregenerate have everything in common metaphysically whilst having nothing in common epistemologically. The epistemological antithesis is of an ethical and not a metaphysical nature. The antithesis is however absolute only in

principle, just as the regenerate still has the 'old man' within and is unable to be completely true to his God-honouring principle, in a similar manner the unregenerate, restrained by common grace, is unable to be completely true to his God-denying principle.²³

No matter how much he may seek to deny it the unregenerate man cannot eradicate his situation as a creature made in God's image.

The non-regenerate man seeks by all means to 'keep under' this remnant of a true theistic interpretation that lingers in his mind. His real interpretative principle, now that he is a covenant breaker, is that of himself as ultimate and of impersonal laws of logic that operate independently of God, who determines what is possible and probable. To the extent, then, that he proceeds self-consciously from his own principle of interpretation, he holds the very existence of God, and of the creation of the universe, to be not merely improbable, but impossible. In doing so he sins, to be sure, against his better knowledge. He sins against that which is hidden deep down in his own consciousness. And it is well that we should appeal to this fact. But in order to appeal to this fact we must use all caution not to obscure this fact. And obscure it we do if we speak of the 'common consciousness' of man without distinguishing clearly between what is hidden deep down in the mind of natural man as the revelation and knowledge of God within him, and what, in rejecting God, he has virtually adopted as being his final interpretative principle.²⁴

Abstract Thought

For the covenant-breaker law is an abstract impersonal principle, above personality. By abstract Van Til means a principle which is not derived from special revelation. The unbeliever, following Socrates, claims that the Good, the True and the Beautiful are all abstract principles above God and man. For the believer law is part of creation and as such an aspect of God's revelation of Himself. For Van Til law is not merely the enunciation of legal principles and rules for life, rather it is the embodiment of God's controlling providence and His pre-interpretation of all facts and action.²⁵ As such law is personal, God-interpreted law, there is no impersonal abstract concept of any kind between God and man.²⁶ It is this abstraction of thought which Van Til sees as being a serious weakness in the approach to common grace by others:

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.²⁷

God has given an unavoidable revelation of Himself. The universe as a divine creation displays God's presence as sovereign Creator, Preserver and Judge. Every fact confronts man with the eternal God. Despite Van Til's vehement rejection of evidentialist apologetic method it is his contention that the theistic proofs, if constructed aright, are objectively valid, whatever the attitude of those to whom they come.²⁸

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.²⁹

Presupposition

The right construction is one based upon the presupposition of the ontological trinity, without which all predication is meaningless. Constructed without this presupposition the proofs are neither proofs nor testimonies. Such proofs merely cry that a finite god exists, they are constructed on the proposition that from the finite we can reach the infinite. They take for granted that we can have meaning without direct reference to God. To speak of a 'probable' argument for God is utterly alien to Van Til's thought. God is everywhere revealed in nature and man's consciousness, we *cannot* maintain that the heavens probably declare the glory of God. If rational argument is carried out on true premises it *must* reach the conclusion that the true God exists. The cosmological, teleological, anthropological, moral and ontological arguments, if constructed upon the presupposition of the ontological trinity, would give birth to experiential knowledge of God.³⁰

Van Til happily accepts that his arguments are circular in that the proofs have as their presupposition that which they set out to prove.³¹ This he contends would be true of

any proof of ultimates. We can never step outside our presuppositions and the language of proof is always the language of primary commitment.

STEP TWO

In setting man the task of subduing the earth we find the command to engage in the scientific enterprise and an:

expression of the generally benevolent attitude of God to mankind. This is not grace, for grace presupposes sin. But it presupposes God's favorable attitude toward man³¹

In this command God deals with man conditionally, seeking a self-conscious covenant reaction to His direction and promise.

Cultural Mandate

Man was created with a purpose, to glorify God. Within creation the task of man and his moral activity is not to be thought of as culturally creative but as *'receptively reconstructive'*.³² Man is ever to think God's thoughts after Him. Man has never been left alone in the universe without communication from God in the form of His self-revelation. 'At the beginning of history man was given the task of subduing the earth. He was to subdue it "under God" and thus to the glory of God.'³³ Within creation man's will in relation to God is only observable in act.

For man as bound to act, God has set his program. God gave this program by way of self-conscious communication at the beginning of history. Man's *summum bonum* was set before him, individually and collectively. He was to subdue the earth and bring out its latent power to the glory of God. He was to be a willing servant of God, one who would find his delight in obedience to God.³⁴

Such was the position of mankind within creation from the very beginning that the condition of the created world would depend upon the activity of man. The covenant idea of man as a *'covenant personality'*,³⁵ that is as a creature living unavoidably under the rule of a sovereign God, informs all of Van Til's thinking. For Adam, 'every fact was the bearer of a requirement.'³⁶ As Van Til maintains, 'God is man's ultimate

environment.³⁷ The covenant idea being so all pervasive leads to the conclusion that there are now, subsequent to the fall, and in relation to every possible field of activity only two classes of men, there are covenant breakers and there are covenant keepers.

Everything that man does with respect to nature, he does either as *keeping* or as *breaking* the covenant of grace that God has made with man. Thus the scientist in the laboratory and the philosopher in his study are both dealing with their materials either as a covenant-keeper or a covenant-breaker. All of man's acts, all of man's questionings, all of man's affirmations, indeed all of his denials in any dimension of his interests, are covenantally conditioned.³⁸

Image of God

The restraint which God places upon our fallen propensities enables fallen mankind, even although operating on covenant-breaking principles, to fulfil the creational task and build the culture of the human race. Part of this restraint is man's constitution as an image bearer of God.

As the image-bearer of God, operating in a universe controlled by God, the unbeliever contributes indirectly and adventitiously to the development of human knowledge and culture.³⁹

Man after the fall continues to be an image bearer of God, thus he can never be devoid of an ethical reaction. Even the lost hereafter will remain image bearers:

Common grace is therefore a favor to sinners by which they are kept from working out to the full the principle of sin within them and thereby are enabled to show some measure of that involuntary respect and appreciation for the law of God that speaks to them even through their own constitution as well as through the facts of the world outside.⁴⁰

Organically related to the universe around him man was to be prophet, priest and king under God in the midst of this created world.⁴¹ Within creation man is like God in everything in which it is possible for a creature to be like God. The image of God within man is understood to be an integral part of God's revelation to man which was found within man's nature.⁴²

As image bearers we are analogues of our Creator. Intellectually, as a personal, self-conscious entity, man is a finite analogue of the infinite Creator in the area of knowledge. Because we are image bearers there is 'a point of contact for the Holy Spirit'⁴³ embedded within the constitution of all human beings which enables the apologist to, 'Appeal to man as man, God's image.'⁴⁴ It is due to the fact of creation in the image of God that human beings have knowledge of the world and of God which whilst not exhaustive is nevertheless true knowledge.⁴⁵

Van Til sees the image of God in man as that sense of deity which constitutes the principle of continuity which is presupposed as that in relation to which man's ethical reaction in the re-interpretation of knowledge takes place. As receptors of the revelation of God within their own constitution men can never be devoid of an ethical reaction. Firstly, living under God's general favour and reacting favourably, then reacting unfavourably and knowing the curse and wrath of God.

Non-saving grace does not preserve the image of God in its wider or narrower form if these concepts are taken in scholastic fashion:

How can common grace keep sin from being principial hostility to God? There are no degrees in the principle of depravity. In this narrower sense the image of God has been lost. On the other hand common grace does not preserve the image in the wider sense, if this image is thought of that which is unchangeable. How can remnants be saved of that which was never subject to change?⁴⁶

Van Til refuses to see common grace as a way of toning down the doctrine of total depravity by which the remnant of the image of God in man is understood to be seen as:

little specks of true knowledge, true righteousness, and true holiness. The difference between the believer and the unbeliever then becomes one of degree.⁴⁷

This is the conclusion that Van Til finds inescapable from Kuyper's treatment of the image of God in man as consisting in the wider sense in man's essence and in the narrower sense in his nature. In the wider sense Kuyper sees the image as the essence of man, his capacity to know and to will. In the narrower sense the image is understood to consist of that true knowledge, righteousness and holiness which was lost at the fall. Van Til maintains that if these two senses of the image of God in man are treated as separate manifestations we find ourselves in severe difficulties. If one cannot be lost without ceasing to be human whilst the other is lost at the fall we enter a situation where we say that the essence of man is unchanged whilst his nature is fundamentally altered. To hold this says Van Til is to assert that man's essence has 'become an entirely featureless entity.'⁴⁸

STEP THREE

The relationship between the will of decree and the will of command cannot be understood by man. We must think analogically, and therefore become 'fearlessly anthropomorphic,'⁴⁹ thinking God's thoughts after Him. We cannot say that God cannot show favour to the generality of mankind because he intends that ultimately they will receive wrath.

Analogical Thought

Although the Reformed faith leads to difficulties Van Til maintains that only within an entire philosophy of God's relationship to history as taught by the Reformed confessions are answers found to the questions of human responsibility and point of contact. Van Til rejects any idea that the Reformed 'solution' is systematic in the sense of being logically penetrable to the mind of man in the manner of the premises and conclusion of a syllogism. Van Til stresses that man's knowledge to be true knowledge must ever be analogical of God's knowledge.⁵⁰ That which we know is true but is limited by creatureliness. This limitation is in part a limitation of the extent of man's knowledge in that we can never know all that God knows. But more fundamentally, that which we know is not the same as that which God knows. Primarily the difference is qualitative and only secondarily is it quantitative. Van Til,

whilst maintaining that the Reformed faith teaches that the reference point for any proposition is the same for God and for man, goes on to say that:

this identity of reference point can be maintained only on the presupposition that all human predication is analogical re-interpretation of God's pre-interpretation. Thus the incomprehensibility of God must be taught with respect to any revelational proposition.⁵¹

Van Til refuses to discuss questions arising from the tensions within federal Calvinism on the basis of a logic which assumes secondary causes to be ultimate cause.⁵² The Reformed position is held to be the only one which saves us from the necessity of ultimately accepting the really contradictory. The truly contradictory is shunned whilst the apparently contradictory is 'embraced with passion.' We deal everywhere with the mysterious God, and at every point we run into mystery. 'All our ingenuity will not aid us in seeking to avoid this mystery.'⁵³

It is impossible on the basis of abstract logic to solve the full bucket difficulty; that is, harmonise sovereignty and free will, the secret and revealed wills of God, prayer to an omnipotent God who knows the end from the beginning, the free offer of the gospel to those predestined to election or reprobation. In eschewing the search for a rigidly absolute universal Van Til rejects the elevation of logic into a standard before which God must bow. He does however maintain that we have the right to say that Christianity does not contradict the laws of logic. Logic must be employed only in conscious subjection to the revelation which God gives of Himself in the Scriptures.⁵⁴

Van Til finds in Calvin a steadfast refusal to allow abstract universal ideals to rule God.⁵⁵ Phigius' objection to predestination, that it renders secondary causes insignificant, is rejected as resting on the demands of logic. Calvin answers the objection by saying that predestination shows that the counsel of God is more profound than man can encompass. Van Til insists that we make use of Calvin's acceptance of mystery in our discussion of common grace, 'We shall never have an exhaustive answer to the common grace problem.'⁵⁶

STEP FOUR

Total depravity means that sin has affected man in all his functions. 'Man is 'wholly defiled,' not partly defiled in all his functions. He hates God and his neighbour. He therefore seeks to suppress the truth within him... He *cannot* but sin.'⁵⁷

Total Depravity

A major emphasis within Van Til's work is his adamant refusal to compromise, but rather maintain and emphasise the antithesis between the *religieuze grondmotieven* of the covenant keeper and the apostate. His insistence that epistemology is an ethical matter⁵⁸ and not metaphysical safeguards the revelatory nature of all God's work without allowing us to think that the natural man can by his own unaided effort construct a true reinterpretation of God's prior interpretation of any fact.

When we fell it was through the attempt to become autonomous and do without God in every respect.⁵⁹ God's interpretation of the universe was rejected and we sought to interpret all around without reference to God. This foundational aspect of the first sin continues throughout fallen humankind, 'Sin is an attempt on the part of man to cut himself loose from God.'⁶⁰ In the nature of the case this attempt to break away from God could not be metaphysical, if it were so man would cease to be. Sin is 'a breaking loose from God ethically and not metaphysically.'⁶¹

Epistemologically humanity is to be understood as being in an ethical relationship to God. It is impossible for human beings to completely suppress the knowledge of God revealed within creation and within our own constitution as image bearers. However,

After the fall... all men seek to suppress this truth, infixed in their being, about themselves. They are opposed to God. This is the biblical teaching on human depravity.⁶²

Through the fall of mankind in Adam, the first man, the representative of all humanity, 'all became creature worshippers.'⁶³ The effect of the fall has touched the

core of man's being 'Sin has been most ruinous in the heart and mind of man.'⁶⁴ By the fall we are affected in all of our functions. When Van Til speaks of total depravity he does not mean that man is merely tainted in every part of his being. Van Til holds that:

Man is 'wholly defiled,' not partly defiled in all his functions. He hates God and his neighbour.... He *cannot but* sin.⁶⁵

The fall and the ensuing total depravity of all mankind are to be understood as steps within a historical progress which leads towards the final destination of regenerate and unregenerate, a progress which demands common grace.

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, there were to become more and more conformed in fact to the principle that controlled their hearts. They do this by rejecting the common call, the common grace of God.⁶⁶

Thus common grace when encountered by the totally depraved becomes within the historical process the means of confirming the reprobate in their God-dishonouring way.

STEP FIVE

God is redeeming a people for Himself. "Those who are God's people are *totally saved*... They are *absolutely* saved in principle."⁶⁷

Election

The election of which Van Til speaks is election as understood in terms of scholastic federal Calvinism,⁶⁸ even if perhaps the implications which he draws from it are not

those usually derived. From all eternity God has planned to redeem His people. 'Reconciliation is possible only if God brings about salvation for man and therewith reunion with himself. Christ came to bring man back to God.'⁶⁹ Just as the fallen are totally depraved in principle, those who are saved are totally saved, 'they are *absolutely* saved in principle.'⁷⁰

Within the decrees of God Van Til maintains the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation.

I do indeed maintain the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation. I must maintain this if I am to maintain that by his counsel God controls whatsoever comes to pass.⁷¹

Van Til holds that the denial of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation is in effect the denial of the ultimate sovereignty of God which entails the loss of any meaningful history. In such a case men would become the ultimate cause as well as the proximate cause of their own destiny.⁷²

God's decree is one; it is eternal. It precedes all that happens in time. What happens in time, in history, is the realization of that decree. Providence is the unfolding of that decree and nothing is independent of that providence.⁷³

Regeneration

The offices of Christ as prophet, priest and king are considered in epistemological fashion. As prophet Christ reveals true knowledge. As priest He died 'to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God,'⁷⁵ and also as 'the question of knowledge is an ethical question at root,' Christ could not give us true knowledge of God or the universe unless he died for us as priest. To give true knowledge, Christ as king must subdue us. Only by giving due emphasis to the organic connection between all the aspects of Christ's work can we 'avoid all mechanical separation of the intellectual and moral aspects of the question of knowledge.'⁷⁵ In Christ the regeneration brought about by the action of the Holy Spirit is not only a matter of being forgiven our sin but is a reawakening to a rightful understanding of all that surrounds us.⁷⁶

Regeneration is absolutely necessary and absolute in principle, it is however not absolute in effect. There is a learning and developing process which the regenerate must undertake of which regeneration is only the beginning.⁷⁷ Regeneration of the individual is part of that historical development which Van Til sees as the process of God working His purposes out within creation as the cleavage between the covenant keeper and the covenant breaker grows ever clearer.⁷⁸

STEP SIX

It has been charged that with the doctrines of election and reprobation the free offer of the gospel becomes meaningless. But Scripture teaches both man's ultimate responsibility for his own sin and the ultimate determination of the destiny of men by God. We must think 'concretely and scripturally rather than abstractively and deductively from one aspect of revelation.'⁷⁹

Rejection of Abstract Solutions

Do election and reprobation render proclamation of the free offer of the gospel meaningless? Can God and man both act in a significant form, or does the free activity of the one destroy the possibility of free activity on the part of the other? If men are predestined to eternal damnation by a sovereign God, can they be said to act freely, and further is it possible to consider their works as civic righteousness?

Although ultimately resting in mystery⁸⁰ Van Til attempts to respond to these questions by calling attention to the danger of confusing the metaphysical and ethical aspects of man's being and the metaphysical and ethical aspects of common grace. In doing so he challenges the view which would envision a split between God's activity and man's activity into two self-sealed independent compartments which would result in one utterly destroying the significance of the other. This we find in hyper-Calvinism which can stress the sovereignty of God to the extent of engendering fatalism and in Arminianism⁸¹ which in emphasising the significance of man's free choice can make God dependent upon man.

Van Til argues that every argument emerging from a non-biblical principle of interpretation contains a limitation or obliteration of some aspect of experience or reality. Rather than opting for either fatalism or complete freedom he seeks an answer in a biblical realism which recognises God's creative activity and presupposes the divine decrees as the basis for man's every activity. On any other basis man and God are made into rival ultimates in a metaphysical conflict. He attempts to do justice to the biblical thinking by upholding God's sovereignty and also the integrity of human choice and experience.⁸²

Again he insists on pointing out that all created reality is revelational of God, 'Without thus making all created reality revelational of God the ethical reaction of man *would take place in a vacuum*.'⁸³ Even the rejection of God is revelational of the God who confronts man everywhere. God cannot in the nature of the case confront man anywhere if he does not confront him everywhere.⁸⁴

It is only on the assumption of the sovereignty of God that we can even ask the question of significance, never mind find an answer to it.⁸⁵ That the requirements of logic operating in what Van Til would see as an autonomous fashion demand the surrender of either the sovereignty of God or the reality of secondary causes such as the integrity of man's will is no obstacle to seeking such a solution.⁸⁶ It is God who, in His sovereign control of all that occurs, gives significance to the truly free choice of human beings.

If God is not the source of possibility then He cannot make salvation possible for men: and if He is the source of possibility then He is the source because He is in control of all actuality.⁸⁷

Free Offer of the Gospel

We have seen that in the hands of Van Til common grace is more than the sustaining of the universe, the restraint of sin and the giving of good gifts to all mankind. As an apologist Van Til sees every fact within creation as an unavoidable confrontation

with the unbeliever calling him back to repentance and a covenant keeping relationship with God. Thus within apologetic argument Van Til states that:

Common grace must rather serve the challenge of God to men to repentance. It must be a tool by means of which the believer as the servant of Christ can challenge the unbeliever to repentance.⁸⁸

The generally favorable attitude toward mankind at the beginning of history becomes the sincere offer of the gospel and common grace to all who have sinned.... Therefore God's good gifts to men, rain and sunshine in season, are genuinely expressive of God's favor unto them. At the same time they are a general testimony by which the Spirit of God labors with men to call them to repentance, and therefore to the fulfilment of the task originally assigned to mankind in Adam.⁸⁹

Is there, as maintained by the Christian Reformed Church, evidence of common grace in the general gospel offer? In response Van Til again stresses the idea of earlier and later, the historical correlativity of the universal and the particular. The presentation of the gospel offer comes to the generality of mankind. It comes to sinners, differentiated in the mind of God as elect or reprobate, but prior to their acceptance or rejection, regarded as a generality. Van Til refuses to discuss common grace as though the eschaton has already occurred. The gospel offer is made to sinful elect and favoured reprobate alike.

Van Til's conception of common grace is one of God's all controlling providence and unavoidable revelation of Himself which gives not only the physical gifts of rain and sunshine but gives the very possibility of science and understanding. All humans in the core of their being are, despite any rebellion, touched by God's common grace. Speaking of the unregenerate man Van Til writes:

There is operative within him the sense of deity; he cannot efface it without effacing himself. And the significance of this metaphysical situation is again and again brought home to him by the striving of God's Spirit through common grace. In consequence he cannot but see that God is good; that he has been long-suffering with him in his sins, that the Father is calling him back.⁹⁰

The free offer of the gospel and the call to repentance are presented to all men by every fact surrounding them. All know unavoidably that God exists and is their Judge, but as sinners they suppress the truth they know. In principle this suppression, due to hatred of God, is perfect.⁹¹ If the non-believer's interpretative principle were true there would not even be the possibility of science or true understanding of any fact. The principal hostility toward God is not worked out in the life of the unbeliever who as yet is restrained by common grace.⁹²

Van Til contends that we may think of the universal offer of salvation as an evidence of common grace if we understand it to be evidence of earlier grace rather than a lower grace. 'All common grace is earlier grace.'⁹³

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 reprobate when they are, and to the extent that they are, members of an as yet undifferentiated generality.⁹⁴

At the first stage of history there is much common grace. But this creation grace requires a human response, it is conditional and progressive. The rejection of common grace causes a differentiation proceeding through the course of time. Common grace decreases, with every conditional act the remaining significance of the common is reduced. This proceeds until the eschaton when the present condition of all men catches up with their eternal state of election or reprobation.

STEP SEVEN

If from before the fall God had in mind the ultimate plan for men and this did not reduce His favourable attitude to mankind at the beginning of history why should God's general favour not continue after the fall? '*Only if sin were taken to be the act of a being that is in itself ultimate would that be the case.*'⁹⁵ The generally favourable attitude toward mankind at the beginning of history becomes the sincere offer of the gospel and common grace toward those who have sinned. 'Therefore God's good gifts to men, rain and sunshine in season, are genuinely expressive of God's favor unto

them.⁹⁶ These gifts are also approaches by God to the natural man that he might repent. It is through common grace that the natural man is able to do good works.

Progressive Differentiation

Van Til stresses that although the epistemological antithesis between the regenerate and the unregenerate is absolute it is absolute only in principle. We do not yet live in a time when the antithesis is clearly worked out in the lives of men, as yet neither the believer nor the unbeliever is epistemologically fully self-conscious.⁹⁷ Both groups are however on the move to their eventual destiny.

Van Til demands that we take history seriously.⁹⁸ Rather than deducing everything by strict logic from the decrees, as did Hoeksema, Van Til tries to operate within the concrete situation and take the historical development of sin and grace into consideration.⁹⁹ He maintains that because of the nature of time 'we shall never have an exhaustive answer to the common grace problem,¹⁰⁰ too often we allow our concept of the later to control our notion of the earlier. By this he means that humanity falls into either the category of the elect or that of the reprobate, a differentiation which will be apparent on the Last Day. These categories of elect and reprobate are not to be allowed to control our understanding of the situation in which we find ourselves today where these categories are only imperfectly perceived.

As yet this differentiation is not complete, we still live in the earlier days. We must make the earlier our point of departure for the later. With the progress of differentiation throughout history men will, however, increasingly conform to and work out their basic covenant keeping or covenant breaking principles.

So in the problem of common grace we must not argue for differences without qualification or for identities without qualification. The former is done by Hoeksema; the latter is done if we insist that there must be a neutral territory between believers and unbelievers.¹⁰¹

This in the broadest sense is what Van Til means by the common grace problem: that common situation which believers and unbelievers share for the time being whilst neither is completely true to the presuppositions upon which they base their lives.¹⁰² Neither believer nor unbeliever is fully that which he shall become. Thus Van Til says:

For this reason then we must not hesitate to say that God has a *common* attitude of favor to all mankind as a generality. We must not fear to assert that though the ultimate end of God for the elect is their salvation they yet are under God's displeasure when they do not fully live up to his requirement for men. Similarly we must not fear to assert in the case of the reprobate that though they are ultimately vessels of wrath they yet can be in history, in a sense, the objects of the favor of God.¹⁰³

Whilst all humanity was perfect in Adam it was a sameness with a difference, there was a distinction in their ultimate historical development already known to God. When Adam fell there was again a sameness with a difference. All men had lost the favour of God and become objects of wrath. However the elect are always the objects of God's favour in the ultimate sense. In Adam they were perfect, as such God's favour rested on them. Their historical situation corresponded with their eternal destiny, God's ultimate favour and His proximate favour at this moment seem to correspond. When they became sinners God's ultimate favour towards the elect did not change, yet, as sinners like the reprobate they became the objects of God's wrath. There is a difference though in that the elect are not objects of God's ultimate wrath but only of a 'certain' wrath of God. Van Til does not explain the nature of this non-final wrath, it is however a genuine wrath, otherwise as he explains there would be no need of the crucifixion.¹⁰⁴

When the elect are regenerated their historical situation once more corresponds to God's ultimate attitude. Yet they are closer to God than before, there has been progress, the process of particularisation has gone forward. Although saved the regenerate know that their 'old man' remains active, and they are to this extent the objects of God's wrath. Thus although there has been genuine progress the process has not yet reached its ultimate fulfilment in the complete sanctification of man.

Similarly with the reprobate there is genuine historical progress leading to their destination. The progress of particularisation is genuine because both classes move towards a fixed destination. There is a genuine variation in the relationship of the same man to the same God just because of God's unvarying counsel lying behind history. 'Every historical generality is a stepping stone towards the final particularisation that comes at the climax of history.'¹⁰⁵

When Van Til speaks of common grace as earlier grace diminishing as history unfolds to the consummation,¹⁰⁶ we must note that he refers not to God's revelation of His grace in nature diminishing in time but to man's response to that revelation. There is a progress and development in the response of mankind to God's revelation.

SUMMATION

Definition

For Van Til common grace is in effect God's power revealed in the whole stream of human activity wherever it is found. The God who created all that exists did not leave creation subject to the whims of chance or fate but continues to exercise His power for His own glory. It is the sovereign God, who determines all that comes to pass, who makes the free activity of men within history meaningful. Although consciously unaware of God and His control, the unbelieving world along with its inhabitants and leaders, is subject to this common grace of God. Whatever men and women freely do they fulfil the will of the sovereign God as He realises His purposes for mankind. It is He who reveals to man the meaning of that activity within creation. All activity is action in relation to the God who does not leave any part of creation devoid of His imprint.

Van Til is willing to express himself in the traditional manner concerning common grace speaking of 'a certain attitude of favor to unbelievers.'¹⁰⁸ He also speaks of common grace in terms of the restraint of sin: 'And common grace is the means by which God keeps man from expressing the *principle* of hostility to its full extent, thus enabling man to do the "relatively good."¹⁰⁹ It is the reality of this control over

human existence and affairs which makes life liveable for all humanity, elect and unregenerate. The unregenerate 'is restrained by the non-saving grace of God from "being as bad as he can be," and as bad as he will be when his principle has full control of him.'¹¹⁰ If common grace whilst pointing men toward God does not bring the sinner to repentance neither does it allow him to destroy the world in the outworking of his rebellious principle.

For Van Til common grace is more than favour or restraint upon evil, it is an enacting and fulfilling of God's will in history. Under such control the development which we term history becomes a dynamic movement of process from creation, through the differentiation of mankind, to the fulfilment of all things in the second coming of Christ. It is within this overarching control that the individual's history has direction and purpose. For Van Til common grace has in effect become a synonym for common sovereignty.

Eternal Decrees

The greatest strength of Van Til and his understanding of common grace is his attempt to work from the concrete situation in which men and women find themselves.¹¹¹ He tries not to proceed from the eternal decrees understood as a fixed decision in a timeless eternity. We must ask if Van Til's attempt to think Scripturally and historically instead of a-historically can succeed within a form of theology employing as a central operative principle the divine decrees and which lays emphasis on logical consequence.

Despite his emphasis on the concretely historical Van Til cannot avoid making God's eternal decrees his ultimate point of departure. Thus he is unable to do justice to his own healthy emphasis that common grace must be understood in reference to progress within time. God's eternal decrees are outwith time, and when these are made fundamental to the theological task and become a basis of our present understanding of and a point of departure for our reflection on common grace, the

inevitable result is that we must finally, with Van Til, retreat to the conclusion that this is all very mysterious.¹¹²

Christ and Common Grace

A major problem with Van Til's conception of common grace is that in attributing it solely to God as sovereign he conceives of common grace and creation apart from Christ. Whilst acknowledging that common grace is to be understood in a Christocentric fashion, this is:

done chiefly for the apologetic purpose of indicating that so long as man lives and breathes on earth, God through Christ, indirectly or directly, in all earnestness pleads with him to repent and turn back to God.¹¹³

The nature of Christ's kingship over the domain affected by common grace, which is integral and complete, is not explored. Van Til's reluctance to work out the nature of Christ's relation to common grace produces an internal split within the Christian ground motive, through which its integrated character is fragmented. Saving grace is seen as centring upon the cross of Christ whilst non-saving grace, despite being in part a plea to repent and turn back to God, is not understood as stemming from or even connected to the incarnate Christ who assumed and bore the created. The 'certain wrath' in the case of the elect is as we have seen propitiated by the cross, the ultimate wrath in the case of the reprobate is delayed by an exercise of God's sovereign will.

Generalised Application

The charge can be levelled that Van Til teaches that common grace comes only to mankind in general and not to specific individual reprobates. Van Til undoubtedly can give this impression.¹¹⁴ Much of this criticism however is based on the assumption that Van Til's common grace never comes to real people. James Daane seems to take¹¹⁵ the 'earlier' in Van Til to mean earlier than actual history, that is, some form of *Urgeschichte*. This is to apply to Van Til categories of thought which he would reject vehemently. The Adam to whom Van Til refers, whilst representing all humanity, was

also a specific human individual existing in the same space time continuum that we do.¹¹⁶

Van Til does teach that the gifts of rain and sunshine indicate an attitude of favour toward the specific individual, who by his misuse of the gifts of God increases his punishment.¹¹⁷ However, despite his protestations can we apply Van Til's conception of common grace as earlier grace to the individual unbeliever rather than just to mankind as a generality or to the individual as representative of a type? Van Til attempts to teach that the gospel offer comes to men not as already elect or reprobate, but indiscriminately to an undifferentiated mankind in general. This grace shown in the gospel offer is conditional and earlier grace,¹¹⁸ grace for the time being as both elect and reprobate progress toward complete epistemological self awareness. The nearer the unbeliever comes to that goal, the less grace there is for him. Does this mean there comes a time in the life of the individual unbeliever when there is no longer any grace for him or her, that time when they have achieved complete epistemological self-consciousness? When a man or woman has reached this stage it can hardly be said that the gospel is a well meant offer to the individual unbeliever. Neither can it be said that God loves that sinner.

Natural Revelation

Van Til rightly stresses the organic nature of 'God's one grand scheme of covenant-revelation.'¹¹⁹ Both aspects of revelation, special and general, being self-revelation of the same God Van Til is able to state that it is 'the same God who reveals himself in nature and in grace.'¹²⁰ However at this point we come across two related difficulties.

Van Til argues that we only see truth if we adopt as our interpretative principle the presupposition of God's self-revelation in Scripture. He who seeks to interpret reality by any other principle in effect functions as an atheist. This leads Van Til to argue that our knowledge of God is psychological and arises from our creation in the image of God. This does not seem to square with the biblical evidence. From *Romans 1:20*

we learn that God's invisible qualities 'have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.' It appears that some knowledge of God's existence and character is unavoidably be gained by observation of the created order. Whilst fallen humanity acts rebelliously with respect to the knowledge of God we thus possess we cannot avoid the fact that this understanding is more than psychological, it is intellectual knowledge of God. It may be subsequently distorted but the perversion of truth does not invalidate the truth known from creation. The claim that fallen man has no epistemic ability fails to do justice to the evidence of Scripture where God invites man to, 'Come now, let us reason together' (*Isaiah 1:18*). In the apologetic task, to invite man as a rational creature to think within the bounds of his fallen nature is not necessarily the same as acknowledging him to be an autonomous judge over God.

By recognising that man made in the image of God has innate knowledge of God, Van Til is able to identify a point of contact for apologetic argument with non-regenerate mankind. However he fails to recognise that unregenerate man acquires further knowledge of God by reflection on the work of God's hands in creation and history. In the early missionary journeys of the Church we find the apostles calling on unbelievers to turn to the living God who:

Has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy. (*Acts 14:17*)

The whole of creation points all to the incontrovertible truth that not only a Creator exists but that this Creator has a nature which can be discerned, by rational reflection, from His works in creation.

Secondly, whilst it is by common grace that nature is sustained and mankind is enabled to read plainly and unavoidably of the character of God from within nature Van Til states categorically that there is no revelation of grace in nature. It is this lack of any revelation of grace in nature that necessitates God's special revelation in Scripture.

The necessity of Scripture lies in the fact that man has broken the covenant of works. He therefore needs the grace of God. There is no speech or manifestation of grace in nature... The natural man needs grace in its unadulterated form.¹²¹

Van Til's conception of common grace is God's all controlling providence and unavoidable revelation of Himself which gives not only the physical gifts of rain and sunshine but gives the very possibility of science and understanding. All humans in the core of their being are, despite any rebellion, touched by God's common grace.¹²² The perspicuity of natural revelation¹²³ leaves mankind without excuse for not seeing God in every fact and action within creation.¹²⁴

Our problem is how can a human being unavoidably confronted, within his innermost nature and by every fact and action within a universe upheld by common grace, by the Spirit of God striving through that common grace to recall him to covenant faithfulness, yet fail to be confronted by a revelation of grace? In Van Til's understanding common grace, whilst undoubtedly stemming from the grace of God, does not reveal grace but rather highlights the wrath of God. It would seem then that the purpose of natural revelation, which Van Til sees as an aspect of common grace, is to emphasise the absolute need for special grace.

Common grace is subservient to special or saving grace. As such it helps to bring out the very contrast between this saving grace and the curse of God. When men dream dreams of paradise regained by means of common grace, they only manifest the 'strong delusion' that falls as punishment of God upon those that abuse natural revelation. Thus the natural appears all the more in need of the gift of the grace of God.¹²⁵

Commonality and Graciousness

We must ask how common is the common grace of God which is exhibited to the undifferentiated mass of mankind. Van Til himself replies:

We conclude then, that 'common grace' is not strictly *common*. The 'common' grace that comes to believers comes in conjunction with their forgiven status before God; the 'common' grace that comes to unbelievers comes in

conjunction with their unforgiven status. Externally considered, the facts may be the same, but the framework in the two cases is radically different.¹²⁶

In this case the lack of any real commonality would also seem to indicate a lack of grace for the reprobate. Just how real are common grace and the general offer of the gospel to all mankind? Favour given to the eternally elect may well show the graciousness of God, the same 'favour' given to the eternally reprobate as a means of ensuring and increasing their punishment has surely lost its gracious nature. It is the eternal disposition of God which colours the favour shown to mankind,

We must not separate the 'facts' of history, i.e. the manifestation both of God's favor and of His wrath, from his *attitude* expressed in these facts.¹²⁷

If the free offer of the gospel does effect that differentiation of mankind as a generality into the eternally decreed reprobate and elect, and if common grace 'comes upon the non-believer that he might crucify to himself the Son of God afresh,'¹²⁸ do these two concepts have any reality when ultimately rooted in a timeless divine decree? Despite his attempt to operate concretely with the historical and not with the abstract Van Til is unable to escape the consequences of starting from an eternal decree outwith history. In Van Til's terms common grace has become a 'mystery' hidden beyond time and 'ingenuity will not aid us in seeking to avoid this mystery.'¹²⁹

Positive Contribution

The positive contribution of Van Til to apologetic debate generally is to be commended, particularly the thorough manner in which he exposes the antitheistic presuppositions of supposedly autonomous man in philosophy and theology. More clearly than any of the other thinkers examined Van Til recognises that man as made in the divine image possesses a knowledge of God that is innate and on this basis he rightly asserts that all people unavoidably know God by virtue of their constitution as human beings. It is the possession of innate knowledge of God which provides a point of contact for the presentation of the Gospel to non-Christians. Unfortunately Van Til fails to do justice to the fact that in addition to innate knowledge human

beings, blessed by the general illumination of the Logos, are able to acquire further knowledge of the Creator by reflection upon the work of God in creation.

Due to his assumption of the eternal decrees as an ultimate point of departure which removes any relationship between creation and the unregenerate with the incarnate Christ, Van Til's attempt to work from the concrete situation in which men and women find themselves ultimately flounders. His emphasis on rejecting the abstract and working with the concrete must be retained. In working out the relationship of God to fallen mankind we must work Scripturally and historically. Both special revelation and our existent situation as human beings would seem to indicate that the fact of creation in God's image entails the ability to live and move, breath and function within God's creation.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, Nutley, New Jersey, Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977, p.209
- 2 C. Van Til, *Apologetics*, unpublished class syllabus, p.3
- 3 'The Bible is thought of as authoritative on everything of which it speaks. Moreover, it speaks of everything. We do not mean that it speaks of football games, of atoms, etc., directly, but we do mean that it speaks of everything either directly or by implication. It tells us not only of the Christ and his work, but it also tells us who God is and where the universe about us has come from. It tells us about theism as well as about Christianity. It gives us a philosophy of history as well as history. Moreover, the information on these subjects is woven into an inextricable whole. It is only if you reject the Bible as the word of God that you can separate the so-called religious and moral instruction of the Bible from what it says, e.g., about the physical universe.' *Ibid*, p.2

This view of Scripture, therefore, involves the idea that there is nothing in this universe on which human beings can have full and true information unless they take the Bible into account.
- 4 C. Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, den Dulk, 1969, p.96
- 5 'Only when Protestant theology... sees its apologetics to be an aspect of its theology of free grace can the glad tidings of the gospel ring out clearly and fully to men.' C. Van Til, *The Case for Calvinism*, Philadelphia, Presbyterian & Reformed, 1975, p.106 cf *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, p.97
- 6 C. Van Til, 'Introduction' to *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, by B.B. Warfield, Philadelphia, Presbyterian & Reformed, 1970, p.29
- 7 C. Van Til, *The Case for Calvinism*, p.22
- 8 C. Van Til, *The Reformed Pastor and Modern Thought*, Presbyterian & Reformed, 1971, p.30
- 9 C. Van Til, *The Defence of The Faith*, p.220
- 10 R.C. Sproul, J. Gerstner & A.Lindsay eds., *Classical Apologetics*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1984, p.183
- 11 B.A. Demarest, *General Revelation*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1982, p.147
- 12 Van Til's remarkable 'Introduction' to the 1948 collection of B.B. Warfield's essays on the nature and authority of the Bible *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* is, to a large extent, a thoroughgoing attack on the very method which Warfield employs in defending the infallibility of Scripture.
- 13 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, Nutley, Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977, p.39
- 14 *Ibid*, p.40
- 15 J. Tuininga, *op cit*, p.32

- 16 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.175, 230 cf. C. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1969, p.225
- 17 J. Begbie comments that Calvinists by and large have little time for Idealism *op cit*, p.82. Van Til was greatly influenced by Idealism and tended to see God as the Absolute. cf. *The Apologetic System of Cornelius Van Til*, W.C. Campbell-Jack unpublished M.Th. thesis Aberdeen University 1987.
- 18 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.186
- 19 *Ibid*, p.186-189
- 20 *Ibid*, p.186
- 21 *Ibid*, p.115
- 22 *Ibid*, p.3
- 23 C. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, p.225
- 24 C. Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, unpublished class syllabus reprinted 1971 p. 39f cf. *Defence of the Faith*, p.55 'It is true that the non-regenerate consciousness of man cannot entirely keep under the requirements of God that speak to it through its own constitution. Thus God's will is heard through it in spite of it. Hence the natural man excuses or accuses himself for his ethical action. But for the main point now under consideration this point may be ignored. For to the extent that man is not restrained by God's common grace from living out his sinful principle, the natural man makes his own moral consciousness the ultimate standard of moral action.'
- 25 C. Van Til, *Defence of The Faith*, p.27
- 26 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.62
- 27 *Ibid*, p.64
- 28 *Ibid*, p.49 cf. *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, p.291
- 29 *Ibid*, p.49 cf. 'To say that the argument for Christianity and for the existence of God is absolutely valid, I am merely applying the idea that God's revelation without and within man is perspicuous. If then man rightly interprets this revelation he has an absolutely valid argument for the truth.' *Ibid*, p.180
- 30 C. Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p.1, cf. *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, pp.278-284
- 31 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p. 186 The assumption that grace presupposes sin is common in a theological stream in which grace is seen primarily as a response to sin. This is apparent in Van Til's colleague John Murray who, whilst recognising that a grace did exist before the fall, is unable to categorise it as such grace can not be seen in relation to sin, 'The grace that was in operation prior to the fall was not 'saving' grace, and neither was it, in the sense of the doctrine we are now discussing, 'common grace.' *Collected Writings*, Vol.2 Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1977, p.97
- 32 C. Van Til, *The Defence of The Faith*, p.53
- 33 C. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, p.44
- 34 C. Van Til, *Apologetics*, p.12

- 35 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.69
- 36 *Ibid*, p.72 cf. 'To see the face of God everywhere and to do all things, whether eat or drink or do anything else, to the glory of God, that is the heart of the covenant idea. And that idea is, in the nature of the case, all inclusive.' *Apologetics*, p.26
- 37 C. Van Til, *The Defence of The Faith*, p.42
- 38 C. Van Til, *The Protestant Doctrine of Scripture*, den Dulk, 1967, p.4
- 39 C. Van Til, *My Credo*, p.18
- 40 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.208
- 41 C. Van Til, *The Defence of The Faith*, p.14
- 42 *Ibid*, p.53
- 43 C. Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, p.76
- 44 C. Van Til, *My Credo*, p.21 cf. 'It is, therefore because all men are image bearers of God and because the 'facts' and 'laws' of the world are what they are, as revelatory of God's acts of revelation in and through them, that the natural man remains accessible to God. No man can escape the call of God which confronts him in his own constitution as well as in every fact of the world that surrounds him.' *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, p.292
- 45 C. Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p.24
- 46 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.207
- 47 C. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, pp.204-206
- 48 *Ibid*, p.203
- 49 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.186
- 50 C. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, pp.16-17, cf. *Defence of the Faith*, pp.39-46
- 51 C. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p.171
- 52 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.67
- 53 *Ibid*, p.10
- 54 *Ibid*, p.28
- 55 *Ibid*, pp.65-68
- 56 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.64
- 57 *Ibid*, pp.187-188
- 58 C. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, p.293 'It is evident that by epistemological reaction I mean his reaction as an ethically responsible creature of God.'
- 59 C. Van Til, *Apologetics*, p.15

- 60 C. Van Til, *The Defence of The Faith*, p.46
- 61 *Ibid*, p.46
- 62 C. Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p.253
- 63 C. Van Til, *The Defence of The Faith*, p.31
- 64 *Ibid*, p.34
- 65 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.188
- 66 *Ibid*, p.91
- 67 *Ibid*, p.188
- 68 C. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*, Philadelphia, Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977, p.85
- 69 C. Van Til, *The Defence of The Faith*, p.16
- 70 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.188 The election of which Van Til speaks is election as understood in terms of federal Calvinism. In Van Til's consideration Loraine Boettner in *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, Philadelphia, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974 'simply seeks to repeat the classical teaching on predestination.' *Christianity and Barthianism*, p.85
- 71 C. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane*, Philadelphia, Presbyterian & Reformed, 1959, p.67
- 72 *Ibid*, p.69
- 73 *Ibid*, p.72f
- 74 C. Van Til, *The Defence of The Faith*, p.17
- 75 *Ibid*, p.18
- 76 *Ibid*, p.35
- 77 C. Van Til *The Defence of the Faith*, p.17
- 78 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and The Gospel* p.178
- 79 *Ibid*, p.188
- 80 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.134
- 81 C. Van Til, *The Defence of the Faith*, p.19
- 82 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.192
- 83 *Ibid*, p.176
- 84 *Ibid*, p.177
- 85 C. Van Til, *The Case for Calvinism*, p.110
- 86 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.141f

- 87 *Ibid*, p.123
- 88 C. Van Til, *The Defence of the Faith*, p.175
- 89 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.189
- 90 C. Van Til, *The Defence of the Faith*, p.173f
- 91 *Ibid*, p.174
- 92 *Ibid*, p.174f
- 93 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.82
- 94 *Ibid*, p.81 cf. pp.64, 85
- 95 *Ibid*, p.188f
- 96 *Ibid*, p.189
- 97 *Ibid*, p.92 cf. pp.30, 31, 72, 93
- 98 *Ibid*, pp.82-95
- 99 'We cannot gloss over the speech of God in time in order to deduce conclusions from the decree of election and reprobation.' G.C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1983, p.76
- 100 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.64
- 101 *Ibid*, p.187
- 103 *Ibid*, p.186
- 104 *Ibid*, p.221
- 105 *Ibid*, p.32
- 106 *Ibid*, p.82f
- 107 C. Van Til, *The Defence of the Faith*, p.53
- 108 C. Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p.241
- 109 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.174
- 110 C. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, p.225
- 111 C. Van Til, *The Theology of James Daane 1959*, p.63
- 112 *Ibid*, p.63
- 113 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.230
- 114 *Ibid*, p.74 cf. p.84f
- 115 J. Daane, *A Theology of Grace*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1954
- 116 C. Van Til, *The Defence of the Faith*, p.191
- 117 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.115

- 118 *Ibid*, p.82f
- 119 C. Van Til, *The Protestant Doctrine of Scripture*, p.4
- 120 C. Van Til, *Apologetics*, p.28
- 121 *Ibid*, p.28
- 122 C. Van Til, *The Defence of the Faith*, p.173f
- 123 C. Van Til, *The Protestant Doctrine of Scripture*, pp.7-12
- 124 C. Van Til, *Apologetics*, p.35
- 125 C. Van Til, 'Nature and Scripture', in *The Infallible Word*, ed. P. Wooley, Phillipsburg, Presbyterian & Reformed 1978, p.271f
- 126 C. Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p.240
- 127 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.230
- 127 *Ibid*, p.95
- 128 *Ibid*, p.10

CHAPTER SIX

HERMAN DOOYEWEERD

LAW AND COMMON GRACE

DOOYEWEERD THE MAN

Background

Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) was born in Amsterdam within a home blending the two streams of thought making up the *Gereformeerde Kerken*, his father was an admirer of Abraham Kuyper whilst his mother was an adherent of the pietistic school of the *Afscheiding*. Entering the law faculty of the Free University of Amsterdam in 1912 Dooyeweerd completed his formal studies in 1917 with the presentation of his doctoral thesis entitled *The Cabinet in Dutch Constitutional Law*. After employment in various minor civil service posts Dooyeweerd in 1922 was appointed assistant director of the Kuyper Institute in the Hague, the newly established research centre of the Antirevolutionary Party.

The Kuyper Institute was initially founded to supply advice on specific legal, political and economic issues to Antirevolutionary Party M.P's. and officials. Before accepting the post Dooyeweerd made it clear that he thought the Institute could perform its task only if its advisory role presupposed a systematic theoretical conception of political activity. Any individual issue, he asserted in a memo to the board of the Institute,¹ requires a clear insight into the foundations of a neo-Calvinist life and world view. As well as giving him the opportunity of reflection on the nature of a Christian approach to thought this post involved Dooyeweerd in editing the popular *Nederland en Oranje* and being founding editor of *Antirevolutionaire Staatskunde*, the monthly

magazine of the Kuyper Institute which dealt with practical and theoretical issues in politics² and economics.

It was in 1926 that Dooyeweerd returned to the Free University as professor of Philosophy of Law, Encyclopedia of Jurisprudence and Old Fatherland Law, a position he held until his retirement in 1965. His inaugural address focused on the significance of the idea of law, in the sense of the universal structures of order in creation, for the science and philosophy of law. In subsequent years Dooyeweerd devoted his efforts to developing a revolution in philosophical thought.

Cosmonomic Philosophy

Dooyeweerd attempted to lay the systematic foundation of what has become a new school of thought, generally termed cosmonomic philosophy. In 1935 Dooyeweerd helped establish the Association for Calvinistic Philosophy and became chief editor of its academic journal *Philosophia Reformata*. Also in 1935-36 he published his three volume study *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*, literally translated as 'The Philosophy of the Law Idea.' Later this was considerably revised, expanded and published in English as the four volume *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (1953-58). In this, his major work, Dooyeweerd attempts a transcendental critique of theoretical thought and the establishment of radically Christian foundations for the philosophical enterprise. An important part of this enterprise is the elucidation of a general theory of law spheres within which we can comprehend the created order.

Although later to reject the description 'Calvinistic' philosophy in favour of 'Christian' philosophy the roots of cosmonomic philosophy are clear. In attempting to lay the foundation of and expound a comprehensive Calvinistic philosophy which 'includes within its range all of Christian thought'³ Dooyeweerd freely acknowledged the tradition upon which he builds.⁴

The philosophy of the cosmonomic Idea, from the beginning of its development to its first systematic expression in this work, can only be understood as the

fruit of the Calvinistic awakening in Holland since the last decades of the XIX century, a movement which was led by Abraham Kuyper.⁵

This school of philosophy has a number of distinguished adherents in Europe and North America. In disciplines as diverse as economics and art Bob Goudzwaard and Hans Rookmaaker, both professors at the Free University of Amsterdam and followers of Dooyeweerd, have done much to spread the influence of this philosophy. Cornelius Van Til at one time was generally acknowledged the leading proponent of this philosophy in North America. Although remaining an editor of *Philosophia Reformata* Van Til later became critical to the extent that it would be inaccurate to consider him a member of this school. In Toronto there has been established the Institute for Christian Studies, specifically founded for the purpose of advancing this school of thought.

Christ and Common Grace

As part of his attempt to formulate a framework by which we can come to an integrated understanding of all existence Dooyeweerd emphasises the importance of acknowledging that common grace cannot be understood apart from Christ. Klapwijk correctly recognising this tells us that:

Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven and others in the Netherlands have reformulated Kuyper's view of common grace more satisfactorily on a Christocentric basis. Or, phrased differently, they have clearly stated that not only does the earth bear the cross but first and decisively, the cross bears the earth. The common grace doctrine, once anchored Christocentrically, need not become disconnected from Kuyper's reformational starting point: the biblical teaching of a comprehensive religious antithesis. The common grace doctrine offers in this way the possibility for a more correct evaluation of non-Christian thought.⁶

To explore the validity of this assertion that in the work of Dooyeweerd we have an example of a satisfactorily Christocentric view of common grace which would allow us a more correct understanding of the relationship between earth and cross or nature and grace we must first examine the outlines of his philosophy.

THE LAW

Boundary Law

The 'law idea' is probably the most fundamental notion in the philosophy of Dooyeweerd. According to Dooyeweerd it is by law that God controls all things and provides the norms for existence. All of created reality is governed by a divine order of law holding for every type of phenomenon, creatureliness presupposes subjection to law. Law is not only a set of rules for functioning within reality, it is seen by Dooyeweerd as the enabling foundation of creaturely existence. Without 'its determination and limitation, the subject would sink away into chaos.'⁷

The law, which originates 'from God's holy creative sovereignty'⁸ is 'the *universal boundary (which cannot be transgressed)* between the *Being* of God and the *meaning* of the creation.'⁹ The creation is subject to the law whilst God is free from the law; the law is nevertheless consistent with His character and God can be expected to act in a manner consistent with His law.¹⁰ In the examination of created reality by the regenerate heart and under the control of 'Word-revelation,'¹¹ we may discern those structures within which God's rule over all creation is expressed and in so doing we are able to know something of the nature of the God whom we are everywhere called to love and honour.¹² Our knowledge of God's natural revelation is:

exclusively guided by faith in the Word of God. Through this Word alone the eyes of the mind were opened to the understanding of the universal revelation of God in created nature.¹³

Unity and Diversity

As sunlight enters a prism and is refracted into the full range of the visible spectrum so law, a supra-temporal reality, enters the cosmic order of time and is broken up into its various modes of meaning.¹⁴ Within the multiplicity of laws thus revealed the great command is the central meaning and summation of all God's laws, the:

law for creation displays a great diversity of modalities. But this whole modal diversity of laws is related to the central unity of the divine law, namely, the commandment to love God and our neighbour.¹⁵

Thus the central command takes many forms in the temporal world, we have laws of logic, laws of physics, language, growth, social laws etc., as well as laws of ethics and faith, but such laws always demonstrate a coherence of system.

Everywhere the ordinances of God which obtain for the various aspects of created reality display an indissoluble, mutual coherence, for their root unity lies in the single religious commandment that we love God with all our heart. Here the creation order reveals its integral character.¹⁶

SPHERES

Ways of Being

At the heart of Dooyeweerd's philosophy lies his analysis of the entire spectrum of theoretical thought which he distinguishes as a hierarchy of progressive complexities. Kuyper's emphasis on the unity of creation under God and the sovereignty of separate realms is extended in a systematic fashion into a system of considerable complexity which attempts to encompass every aspect of creation. The speculative nature of Dooyeweerd's 'biblical' world view is illustrated in his assertion of sphere sovereignty and selection of spheres, or modal aspects.¹⁷ Dooyeweerd distinguishes between fifteen fundamental ways of being.¹⁸ As modes of being they are sharply distinguished from the concrete individual things to which they belong. The aspects are the ways or 'modes' in which things, events and relationships concretely function. Every created thing whilst being able to be viewed in relation to all the spheres of being is classified in relation to the highest law-sphere in which it functions as a subject. Thus a flower possesses a subject function in the biotic sphere. A plant does not possess a psychical subject function, however as the object of our sensory perception it has a psychical function as an object.

The mutually irreducible modal aspects range from the arithmetical sphere with its meaning nucleus of discrete quality up to the pistical sphere with its meaning nucleus of faith. The lower modalities form the foundation of the higher modalities, or as Dooyeweerd terms them the 'earlier' and 'later' aspects. The foundational modal

aspects are termed 'substratum spheres' and those which are based on them are called 'superstratum spheres.' Thus the historical aspect is a superstratum sphere with respect to the logical, sensitive, biotic, physical, kinematic, spatial and arithmetical spheres which precede it, each of which is a substratum of the historical. Likewise the historical aspect is a substratum of the linguistic, social, economic, aesthetic, juridical, ethical and pistical spheres.

History

In his discussion of history, the eighth law-sphere, Dooyeweerd refuses to include under history merely that which has occurred in the past.¹⁹ Such an attitude Dooyeweerd terms 'historicism' and rejects because by absolutising the historical aspect of creation it tends to relativise all of life and destroy eternal values.²⁰ Historicism of this nature is said to lead to such a 'typical outcome' as national socialism.²¹

Historical facts are only accessible to *human* experience. Their historical identity and their diversity from other events rest on the basis of analytical distinction, without being themselves of an analytical character. For they are modally determined by the nuclear moment of the cultural aspect only: that of formative control.²²

Dooyeweerd focuses on cultural development as the primary theme of his discussion of the historical modal aspect.²³ The power to control or mould the social process of cultural development is the crux of the historical aspect.

The nucleus of the historical aspect, that which guarantees its proper nature and irreducibility, is the *cultural* way of being. Cultural activity always consists in giving form to material in free control over the material. It consists in giving form according to free design.²⁴

In this way human cultural activity differs from the activity by which forms arise in nature. The spider's web or the crystalline forms are not cultural forms because they did not arise through free design and free control of the material but through natural processes and instincts which operate according to fixed, unalterable laws.

Mastery or control, in its original modal sense, elevates itself above what is given and actualized after a fixed pattern apart from human planning. It pre-supposes a given material whose possibilities are disclosed in a way exceeding the patterns given and realized by nature, and actualized after a free project of form-giving with endless possibilities of variation.

It always seeks new roads in such a way that what precedes fructifies that which follows, and thus a certain continuity is preserved in cultural development.²⁵

Dooyeweerd thus conceives of his philosophy of history as an idea of Christian cultural development.²⁶ This comprehensive idea, which embraces the entire course of the development of human civilisation and is of clear importance to the doctrine of common and enabling grace, is however in conflict with Dooyeweerd's classification of history as one of the law-spheres or modalities within creation. By linking the meaning of the cultural mandate in *Genesis 1* directly to the nuclear moment of the historical aspect²⁷ Dooyeweerd can be seen to reduce the meaning of an all-embracing religious task to the meaning of one of his fifteen modes within created reality.²⁸

GROUND MOTIVE

Although finding its roots in federal Calvinism this attempt to create a whole Christian philosophy is not to be understood as merely an effort to apply the principles enunciated by Kuyper to the field of philosophy. Dooyeweerd was trying to map out a way of understanding the totality of reality based upon the central basic-motive of the Scriptures which he understood as the biblical ground motives²⁹ of creation, fall and redemption. The notion of a ground motive is fundamental to Dooyeweerd's analysis of the history of western culture and philosophy. He attempts to demonstrate how these motives have shaped all areas of theoretical reflection. A ground motive is a coherent ultimate vision of reality which guides the unfolding of one of the four major cultural periods characterising western civilisation.

Thomas

In examining the main ways of seeing reality which have controlled the development of culture Dooyeweerd found himself wrestling with the tensions created by the nature

- grace dialectic which he saw as controlling much of Christian thought since the medieval period.

The ground motive of nature and grace contained the seeds of a 'religious dialectic.' That is, from the outset the christian motive of grace and the conception of 'nature,' which was oriented to the Greek religious ground motive, stood in irreconcilable opposition and tension. Wherever possible, this real religious tension drove life and thought from one pole to the other. On the one hand, the danger arose that the nature motive would overrun the motive of grace by summoning the mysteries of grace before the court of natural reason. On the other hand, there was the constant temptation of mysticism which attempted to escape 'sinful nature' in a mystical experience of supernatural grace and thus inevitably led to asceticism and world flight. Finally, there was the constant threat that every connection between nature and grace would be systematically cut off in such a way that any point of contact between them would be denied. In the latter case we are confronted with an honest acceptance of an open *split* between 'natural life' and the christian religion, both of which are *entirely independent* of each other.³⁰

In Dooyeweerd's conception the synthesis intended by Thomas which would display a radical connection between nature and grace, reason and revelation, was a failure. The original divergent religious motives of Greek and of Christian thinking would not permit an harmonious marriage. Rather than an harmonious synthesis, in Dooyeweerd's understanding, Thomas arrived at a double dialectic:³¹ firstly with his acceptance of Aristotelian philosophy Thomas had inherited a religiously deep form-matter dialectic;³² secondly he was confronted with the dialectic formed between this Greek understanding of nature and the doctrines of the Church which were supposed to control the realm of grace.³³

Kuyper

In connection with the nature-grace motive Dooyeweerd does not limit his criticism to Thomas alone nor to the medieval period. Dooyeweerd is as eager to criticise later Protestant scholasticism as he is to criticise earlier Roman Catholic scholasticism. Dooyeweerd finds in the work of Kuyper³⁴ two distinct if intertwined lines of approach. Firstly there is the line which stresses the Christian motive of creation, fall and redemption. Secondly there is in addition the line which is more traditionally scholastic and which exhibits an attitude of synthesis with medieval and modern streams of thought. Dooyeweerd approvingly draws attention to Kuyper's insistence

that we must recognise the religious roots of all approaches to science and philosophy, roots which are antithetically opposed to one another and must be recognised as such. On the other hand Kuyper himself employs what Dooyeweerd sees as certain Kantian and Hegelian approaches and ideas with regard to the pursuit of science and philosophy as though this was not a problem from the Christian position.³⁵

The basic ground-motive of the Christian religion, and consequently any true interpretation of life, can be subsumed under the theme of creation, fall into sin and redemption by Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word of God in the communion of the Holy Spirit. 'This basic motive is the central spiritual motive power of every Christian thought worthy of this name.'³⁶

Dooyeweerd's speculative, or non-theologically controlled, approach upon which we have already commented is again encountered when we come to his emphasis on the fundamental importance of the creation - fall - redemption motif. When Dooyeweerd speaks of the 'basic motive' or 'central spiritual motive' or 'core of the divine Word-revelation' he does not wish our understanding of creation - fall - redemption to 'be confounded with the ecclesiastical article of faith.' Dooyeweerd stresses that such a foundation for Christian thought is:

independent of any human theology. It's radical sense can only be explained by the Holy Spirit, operating in the heart, or religious centre of our consciousness, within the communion of the invisible Catholic church.³⁷

CREATION

Meaning Character

For Dooyeweerd created reality does not exist in some fashion as uninterpreted fact, as 'nature' or 'substance' which only later acquires meaning and purpose through its relation to God or through human subjectivity. Creation at the core of its existence is meaning; created reality cannot be conceived of or understood as having a single independent atom or moment or movement. The meaning character of created reality is delimited by the law of God which is understood as 'the universal boundary (which

cannot be transgressed) between the Being of God and the meaning of His creation.³⁸ For Dooyeweerd the totality of creation is dependent on God as Creator and this creation everywhere reveals its creaturely nature through its 'universal character of referring and expressing.'³⁹ The created order does not bear or possess meaning, it is meaning. Meaning is:

the convergence of all temporal aspects of existence into one supertemporal focus, and this focus... is the religious root of creation, which has meaning and hence existence only in virtue of the sovereign creative act of God.⁴⁰

In what Dooyeweerd terms the 'transcendental direction' all created reality in every aspect of its being refers beyond itself toward the religious fullness of meaning which Dooyeweerd terms the 'heart.' At the same time all created reality in every aspect of its being also expresses the fullness of the Divine Being, this Dooyeweerd terms the 'foundational direction.' Thus we can see that for Dooyeweerd 'Meaning is the being of all that has been created and the nature even of our selfhood. It has a religious root and a divine origin.'⁴¹

God's sovereignty as Creator means that He is the absolute, complete and integral origin of all that exists. Thus Dooyeweerd immediately precludes any dichotomy of motive principle within that creation.

As the creator, God reveals Himself as the Absolute and Integral Origin of the 'earthly world', concentrated in man, and of the world of angels. In the language of the Bible he is the Origin of heaven and earth. There is no original power which is *opposed* to Him. Consequently, in His creation we cannot find any expression of a dualistic principle of origin.⁴²

As sovereign Creator God has placed humanity within creation with a purpose of service. It is as the lord of creation that man is meant to serve God in the unfolding of creation in the fullness of its transcendental direction.

The powers and potentials which God had *enclosed* within creation were to be *disclosed* by man in his service of love to God and neighbour.⁴³

This could only happen as mankind, the lords of creation, held to the 'central command of love.'⁴⁴

FALL

Religious Root

The fall from God began 'at the point where man no longer listened to the Word, for in turning his heart away from the Word he closed off the human faith function to the voice of God.'⁴⁵ 'Because of the fall, the position of power to which God called man in the development of culture was directed toward apostasy.'⁴⁶ Thus Dooyeweerd holds that since the fall there have been two basic religious ground motives 'two central mainsprings operative in the heart of human existence.'⁴⁷ There is the dynamic of the Holy Spirit, and in opposition there is the dynamic of the spirit of this world. The ground motive of the Holy Spirit is identified as 'the motive of creation, fall and redemption by Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Ghost.'⁴⁸ The spirit of the world is manifest in two forms within western civilisation. There is the 'form-matter motive' of ancient Greece and Rome and the 'motive of nature and freedom' which is prevalent in modern thought.⁴⁹

Image of God

It is in the heart, soul, or spirit of man that God is creaturely mirrored. Dooyeweerd uses all three terms to denote that point 'where human existence finds its religious root unity.'⁵⁰ Man, created in the image of God, is in the religious community of mankind 'the integral and radical unity of all the temporal functions and structures of reality.'⁵¹ It is in the heart of man that God has concentrated the meaning of all created reality. God, according to Dooyeweerd:

has expressed His image in man by concentrating its entire temporal existence in the radical religious unity of an ego (the heart) in which the totality of meaning of the temporal cosmos was to be focused on its Origin.⁵²

Thus in man is 'integrally concentrated the entire meaning of the temporal cosmos.'⁵³ The heart of man is the 'central reference-point of our entire temporal horizon of experience with its diversity of modal aspects.'⁵⁴ 'This is the religious centre and spiritual root of man's temporal existence in all its aspects.'⁵⁵ Thus God has the absolute right to rule in every aspect of man's life, be it emotion, thought or action, and the right to rule in every aspect of the life of every man.

With the fall into sin man is no longer able to attain true self knowledge. Self-knowledge is completely dependent upon true knowledge of God, 'which man lost with the fall when apostate ground motives took possession of his heart.'⁵⁶ Created in God's image, when man lost the true knowledge of God he also lost true knowledge of himself and the creation surrounding him and of which he is part. This loss is not to be seen as affecting only man's understanding of creation. According to Dooyeweerd no aspect of created reality can be considered independent of its relation to man who is the religious root of all creation. The fall of man therefore encompasses the fall of the entire creation.⁵⁷ Man was created in the image of God as the lord of all creation. The powers and potentials of creation were to be disclosed by man as he lived a life of service of love toward God and his fellow man. With the fall 'the spirit of apostasy began to govern the community of mankind and with it all of temporal reality.'⁵⁸ Thus for Dooyeweerd the fall is the apostasy of the centre:

of this *radix* of existence, it is the falling away from God. This was spiritual death, because it is the apostasy from the absolute source of Life. Consequently the fall was radical. It involved the whole temporal cosmos, since the latter had its religious root only in mankind.⁵⁹

Humankind has introduced distortion into temporal reality. However, whilst sin has affected the harmony of the law-spheres⁶⁰ the introduction of sin has not destroyed the fundamental law-order of creation, the structures and divine principles which regulate human action are not altered by the fall. 'Sin changed not the creational decrees but the direction of the human heart.'⁶¹

REDEMPTION

Creational Renewal

The entire creation, organic, inorganic and animal realms, have been marred because of man's sin and directed towards an apostate faith function and will only be saved through man's redemption. In Christ the image of God is restored, the human heart redirected towards God and a true relationship with the creation order recovered. The Good News of the Christian faith is the revelation of the redemption of fallen creation.

The Divine Word, through which, according to the pronouncement of John's Gospel, all things were made, became flesh in Jesus Christ. The Word entered into the root and the temporal ramifications, in body and soul, of human nature. And therefore it has brought about a radical redemption. Sin is not *dialectically* reconciled, but it is *really* propitiated. And in Christ as the new root of the human race, the whole temporal cosmos, which was religiously concentrated in man, is in principle again directed toward God and thereby wrestled free from the power of Satan.⁶²

This does not mean that either the non-regenerate or the regenerate are viewed as having immediately and automatically attained a fullness of recovered centrality, 'until the return of Christ, even humanity which is renewed in Him still shares in the apostate root of mankind.'⁶³

Dooyeweerd presents a picture of redemptive renewal of the totality of creation stemming from the renewed religious heart of man in Christ. Rather than presenting a two grace scheme in which there are two distinctly differing types of grace with two differing purposes it would be fairer to say that Dooyeweerd speaks of God's gracious redemption of the cosmos through Christ Jesus in which His unitary grace has two aspects, each with differing functions but proceeding from the same source and for the same purpose, the redemption from sin of the totality of creation.

The redemptive struggle against sin in the power of Jesus Christ is not confined to the souls of men. This present age is characterised by the struggle between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness in every sphere of society.

In the light of the christian basic motive of Redemption, culture belongs to the Kingdom of JESUS CHRIST. And the task set to mankind in the cultural commandment of creation should be fulfilled in a continuous contest with the historical development of the power of sin, a contest to be waged through the spiritual *δυναμῆς* of the Redeemer.⁶⁴

THE COMMON GRACE OF CHRIST

Definition

Dooyeweerd defines common grace thus:

Common grace in the first place consists in the maintenance of the temporal world-order in all its structures against the disintegration by sin. In this sense common grace embraces 'the evil and the good together' and is restricted to temporal life.⁶⁵

'Common grace,' that is, the grace given to the community of mankind as such, without distinction between regenerate and apostate persons... Common grace curbs the effects of sin and restrains the universal demonization of fallen man, so that traces of the light of God's power, goodness, truth, righteousness, and beauty still shine even in cultures directed toward apostasy.⁶⁶

Unlike Calvin⁶⁷ Dooyeweerd refuses to speculate as to the nature of a creation in which, without common grace, the principle of sin within a fallen world is allowed free expression and development.

I do not know what the full effect of unrestrained sin on reality would be like. Thanks to God this unhampered influence does not exist in our earthly cosmos... In our temporal cosmos God's Common Grace reveals itself, as KUYPER brought to light so emphatically, in the preservation of the cosmic world-order. Owing to this preserving grace the framework of the temporal refraction of meaning remains intact⁶⁸

In the midst of the struggle between the antithetical ground motives of obedience and rebellion in their divergent attempts to determine the direction of the development of the created order the creation is sustained in hope.

God maintains the fallen cosmos in his *gratia communis* by His creating Word. The redeemed creation shall finally be freed from its participation in the sinful root of human nature and shall shine forth in a higher perfection.⁶⁹

Christ

The grace of God in Christ is not limited in its operation to the sphere of the elect, nor does Dooyeweerd hold that the Church institution alone is a channel of God's grace. Rather Dooyeweerd holds to an universal grace of God in Christ which is at work resisting sin and upholding and restoring creation, making possible all the good deeds of every class of men and maintaining and unfolding the creational structures.⁷⁰ That this grace is evident within a fallen and rebellious creation is due to the renewal of creation by Jesus Christ and:

From this it follows that particular grace is the real root and foundation of common grace. It is therefore absolutely contrary to the Biblical standpoint when a distinction is made between two independent realms or spheres of grace.

As the Redeemer, Christ is the Regenerator of the entire fallen cosmos. As the Mediator of the Covenant of grace in its religious fullness, He is the Root of common grace, the King whose kingship embraces the whole of temporal life. The *civitas terrena*, as the world in apostasy, cannot claim any sphere of life as its own in opposition to Christ.⁷¹

Common grace is 'meaningless without Christ as the root and head of the regenerated human race'⁷² This because common grace is only manifest in the temporal cosmos and the creation is of necessity related to its religious root and has no existence apart from it. Common grace is that grace of God shown to undifferentiated mankind as a whole, this mankind is regenerate in its new root in Christ but has not as yet been freed from its old apostate root. This Dooyeweerd sees as the meaning of the parable of the tares amongst the wheat who must grow together until the harvest.⁷³ Dooyeweerd emphasises the fact that all creation is rooted in and thus upheld and renewed in Jesus Christ, the second Adam:

In the full Scriptural sense of the word Christ Jesus is the 'second Adam', in Whom nothing of God's creation can be lost. Only in Him all the nations of the earth are blessed according to the testimony of the Scriptures. Only in Him is God willing to have mercy on his fallen creation, and only in Him can the conserving effect of common grace have its creaturely root. Outside of Him there is no Divine grace, no 'common grace' either, but only the manifestation of God's wrath on account of sin. This conserving common grace also embraces the apostate, dead members of mankind for the sake of the full and true human race, included in the *corpus Christi*, in the *ecclesia invisibilis*.⁷⁴

There is no grace or goodness toward the fallen world other than that mediated through Jesus Christ the Redeemer of the Covenant, the source of all blessing and Saviour of the world. "The religious root of common grace is Christ Jesus himself, who is its king, apart from whom God would not look upon his fallen creation with grace."⁷⁵ It is only because of Christ's redeeming work that the whole universe is upheld. The effects of common grace which mankind enjoy and have enjoyed in the temporal cosmos at any point in history are the fruits of Christ's work. Only in the light of the Redeemer does God see creation.⁷⁶

It would appear that in Dooyeweerd the unitary grace of Christ operates in a twofold manner as conserving and as regenerating grace. Dooyeweerd envisions no division of a reality separated into two spheres, "which is essentially nothing but an after effect of the dualistic basic motive of "nature" and "grace."⁷⁷ The Christian does not live in harmony with all men within one sphere and simultaneously live in another sphere within which he is utterly separated from the unregenerate. This does not mean that the antithesis is abolished or even undermined. Common grace is understood in light of the antithesis, it is because of sinful rebellion in the temporal heart of creation that common grace is granted.

Grace For Mankind

It is Dooyeweerd's refusal to interpret regenerating grace in an individualistic sense, as though it were solely directed to the salvation of individual persons, which enables him to stress the dependence of the conserving aspect of grace upon the regenerative purpose of grace.

Special grace, however, is concerned with the renewal of the religious root of the creation in Christ Jesus as the Head of the regenerated human race and must not be considered in an individualistic soteriological sense. From this it follows that particular grace is the real root and foundation of common grace. It is therefore absolutely contrary to the Biblical standpoint when a distinction is made between two independent realms or spheres of grace.⁷⁸

If grace in its purpose of regeneration were concerned solely with the ingathering of the elect considered as the ultimate salvation of an accumulation of individuals then it would be cut loose in any integral fashion from grace in its purpose of conserving and unfolding the potentialities of creation, which tendency is seen in the Three Points of Kalamazoo. In Dooyeweerd's conception common grace does more than provide the stage upon which the drama of salvation is worked out. Instead common grace and special grace are organically related to the same purpose, that of the opening up of all that God has created to its ultimate fulfilment in Christ Jesus.

Dooyeweerd does not hesitate or refrain from using the term grace with reference to unbelievers; but he states emphatically that this is not grace for the fallen and rebellious *individual alone* but must be viewed as God's relationship with the entirety of mankind in Christ. Common grace is 'not grace for the apostate individual, but for all mankind in Christ. It is *gratia communis*, common grace rooted in the Redeemer of the world.⁷⁹ Although shed abroad upon mankind as a whole,⁸⁰ common grace apart from Christ 'does not become a blessing, but a judgement on humanity.'⁸¹ Thus although of temporal benefit to mankind as a whole common grace is not a means of 'blessing' to apostate man.

Creation Ordinances

Dooyeweerd speaks of 'modal and radical typical structures of temporal reality given at the creation.'⁸² Because these structures or ordinances of creation are upheld by common grace in Jesus Christ, the non-regenerate are unable not to acknowledge them and this results in a restraint of sin even upon the most rebellious of God's subjects.

In his common grace God upholds in the first place his creation-ordinances and therewith also the 'nature of man.' These ordinances are the same for Christians and non-Christians. And it is a token of God's common grace that even the man of power most hostile to God must time and again yield and *capitulate* before these ordinances if he desires to see a lasting result from his work.⁸³

Dooyeweerd envisions under the concept of common grace a state of being in which after the fall the created structures did not lapse into an ungodly chaos but in which the fallen creatures of God's hand continued to live and move and have their being within creational structures which remained integrally valid.

It is all due to God's common grace in Christ that there are still means left in the temporal world to resist the destructive force of the elements that have got loose; that there are still means to combat disease, to check psychic maladies, to practise logical thinking, to save cultural development from going down to savage barbarism, to develop language, to preserve the possibility of social intercourse, to withstand injustice, and so on. All these things are the fruits of Christ's work, even before His appearance on the earth. From the very beginning God has viewed His fallen creation in the light of the Redeemer.⁸⁴

God upholds by common grace the creation ordinances which are the same for Christian and non-Christian and in this manner maintains 'human nature.' As we have seen even the most ungodly must 'bow and capitulate before God's decrees if he is to see enduring positive results from his labours.'⁸⁵ The ungodly however are unable to grasp these ordinances in the light of their radical religious root and therefore their subjection to God's ordinances of creation must always and inevitably remain piecemeal. It is the continued existence of the creation ordinances after the fall which not only allow the unfolding of the potentialities within creation but also 'in spite of common grace' uphold creation, which allows for the continued existence of sin. If it were not for the law, understood by Dooyeweerd as the progressive complexity of law-spheres, we would not know sin.

An illogical reasoning can occur only within the logical modality of meaning: illegality in its legal sense is only possible within the modality of meaning of the jural sphere; the non-beautiful can only be found within the modal aspect of meaning of the aesthetic law-sphere, just as organic disease remains something within the modal aspect of meaning of the biotic law-sphere, and so on. Sin, as the root of all evil, has no meaning or existence independent of the religious fullness of Divine Law.⁸⁶

In this manner apostate culture, although upheld by common grace, must always reveal a 'disharmony arising out of an idolatrous absolutization of certain aspects of God's creation at the cost of others.'⁸⁷ Common grace does not destroy the antithesis, rather

common grace is understood in the light of the antithesis as it is granted because of sin.

Cultural Development

Dooyeweerd acknowledges as 'grace' that which man possesses by virtue of his created nature. The main purpose of grace considered as common grace in Dooyeweerd's thought is that of restraint of the outworking of the full potentiality of the fall and the development of culture in the exercise of power in the disclosure of possibilities 'in a way exceeding the pattern given and realized by nature and actualized after a free project of form giving with endless possibilities of variation.'⁸⁸

The cultural mode of formative activity is grounded in the creation order, and is in obedience to the cultural mandate which God immediately gave man to subdue the earth and have dominion over it.

God placed this cultural command in the midst of other creational ordinances. It touches only the historical aspect of creation. Through this aspect, creation itself is subject to cultural development.⁸⁹

It becomes clear that historical development, sustained by common grace, is not to be considered as merely supplementative to an invariable ontic order, but it is constitutive of the creation order.

Historical development is nothing but the cultural aspect of the great process of becoming which must continue in all the aspects of temporal reality in order that the wealth of the creational structures be concretized in time. The process of becoming presupposes the creation; it is the working out of creation in time. Time itself is encompassed by the creation. The process of becoming, therefore, is not an independent, autonomous process that stands over against God's creation.⁹⁰

The creation of which we are the heart and in which we live and move and have our being is a creation which is becoming. In his attempt to integrate creation and redemption more fully than Kuyper, Dooyeweerd relates the existence and purpose of creation more fully to the redemptive grace of Christ. Created and upheld by Christ

our creation is moving under God's hand to its final destiny, the fulfilment of redemption in Christ.

SUMMATION

Central to Dooyeweerd's understanding of creation is an all-encompassing law-order which is upheld and served in its unfolding by common grace. Although there are problems in Dooyeweerd's use of law he does show us the way forward in his attempt to integrally relate history and the development of cultural activity to the purposes of the incarnate Christ in redemption. The stress in Dooyeweerd's work on the unitary nature of grace in Christ is a positive development to be preserved and utilised in Section III. We must, however, question whether Dooyeweerd succeeds to live up to his own best insights.

Whilst there is much that is admirable in Dooyeweerd's philosophy it is not without problems. Dooyeweerd's emphasis on a regulated creation with an intrinsic law structure has so controlled his understanding of temporal reality that law does appear to have a priority over grace in Christ. Redemption itself seems to be largely understood in terms of the fulfilment of creational structures. Whilst it may be argued that this is a comment upon an emphasis in Dooyeweerd's thought, caused by the nature of the task upon which he was engaged, rather than an intrinsic weakness, it is possible to indicate several consequences of this emphasis which pose problems for our understanding of God's relationship with creation.

LAW

Boundary

When we consider the nature of the law, which occupies a fundamental stage in the construction of his philosophy, it is necessary to point out that Dooyeweerd's conception of law as a universal boundary between God and creation has the unfortunate effect of placing the law in an unclear and unfocused intermediate area between creation and God Himself. If God is the Creator and the existent world is

His creature and there is no revealed third category of being, where does 'law' considered as a boundary fit into the structure?

Whilst there are statements indicating that the law originates from God's holy creative sovereignty,⁹¹ when balanced against the general trend of Dooyeweerd's thought we are still left unclear whether the law which can be discerned within creation is to be considered an integral part of the created structures or if it is to be thought of as essentially divine; we are left, despite Dooyeweerd's attempts to clarify the situation, with the question, From which side of the 'boundary' does law actually originate? When we look at the body of Dooyeweerd's work law is usually treated as a type of created structure within the universe. His usual treatment of the law is that it is understood as that framework which ensures the maintenance and harmonious running of the cosmic apparatus and which forms the subject matter for the sciences in their endeavour to uncover the nature of the reality about us.

It has been indicated by commentators such as Frame⁹² and Begbie⁹³ that Dooyeweerd's subordination of theology to philosophy absolves his supposedly biblical standpoints from the type of scrutiny which they require. From Scripture it would appear that whilst nature obeys God's law the law of God itself is not an integral part of the created structure but is divine.⁹⁴ The 'law of God' is a reference to the 'Word of God' (*Psalm 119:89*) and the 'Word of God' is directly equated with God Himself (*John.1:1*), it would appear that the law is an expression of the character of God. Obedience to the law is obedience to God, and there are even divine attributes ascribed to it (*Psalm 19:7ff; 119; Isaiah.55:11; John.17:17*). The law of God is not spoken of as part of the created mechanism of the cosmos, rather the law of God is treated as the spoken claim of God upon His creatures, God speaks the law as an expression of His being, He does not create it as something external to Himself. Of necessity God acts as law to all being other than Himself, to be God is to be source of ultimate law. To know God is to know His law and to obey the law is to obey God Himself, it is to show love for God and to remain in the love of God (*John.14:15, 15:10*).

Law of Love

Dooyeweerd's view of law as it appears within creation raises further questions. It is maintained that the diversity of laws must be understood, grasped and obeyed in light of their religious root, the love commandment of service to God and neighbour.⁹⁵ It is left unclear as to what way all the laws discerned within creation, such as the laws of physics, biology, chemistry, etc., are to be seen as expressions within cosmic time of God's supra-temporal law of love. It would be difficult to demonstrate satisfactorily how Boyle's Law concerning the expansion of gasses is an expression of the law of love to God and to neighbour. Dooyeweerd asserts both that the law of love is a supra-temporal manifestation of God's sovereignty and that other laws within creation are temporal expressions of such a law, the 'whole modal diversity of laws is related to the central unity of the divine law, namely, the commandment to love God and our neighbour.'⁹⁶ Can we discern the extent and implications of God's law of love other than from Scripture?

We do not find within the Bible a revelation of an exhaustive cosmology. When the Bible speaks of God's revelation of Himself in nature it does not suggest that we are being given information as to zoology, cookery or astronomy, rather this revelation within nature is intended to reveal God Himself (*Romans 1:18-20*). The proper subject of revelation is always God Himself. By our study of nature we learn many things and there is a sense in which all these facts and processes have been revealed by God. Dooyeweerd's problem is that he goes further than that by maintaining that in the law of love we have a root for law and a philosophical system including the basic principles of the sciences, which system can be discerned within nature and has as much divine sanction as the originating and great command to love God and neighbour. We are directed to nature as a revelation of the character of God, as in *Romans 1,2*, but Scripture does not teach that there is contained in nature a supplementative revelation which contains a fuller revelation than the written Word.

Righteousness

We must also question the relation of these laws of God to the righteousness of God. The study of nature yields useful information with regard to the structures of creation, structures which in 'naive experience'⁹⁷ we term the 'laws of nature.' In Dooyeweerd's philosophical terminology these are the functional laws of the various irreducible modal spheres. Is it possible to sin by breaking one of the laws of the spheres? Can it be considered sinful or rather is it merely stupid or ignorant to break one of the 'laws' of mathematics in the first sphere, the arithmetical, by adducing that $2 + 2 = 5$?

Dooyeweerd writes:

The Idea of the fulfilment of meaning in Christ undoubtedly implies that in the specific universality of each law-sphere the opening-process gives temporal expression to the full religious abundance of God's creation both on its law- and its subject-side. In this world, however, this sphere-universality cannot unfold itself perfectly in accordance with the guidance of the religious fullness of meaning. The development is affected by sin.⁹⁸

The clearest elaboration of this comes from J.M. Spier in *An Introduction to Christian Philosophy* which he describes as 'largely a popular exposition of the philosophy system developed by Herman Dooyeweerd.'⁹⁹ Spier maintains that sin:

is not limited to the pistical sphere but is present in many others as well... in the historical it is the opposition to the norm of culture which opposition is found in conservatism, reaction, and revolution.¹⁰⁰

This ability to act sinfully is found also in the other spheres, as is demonstrated in Spier's discourse upon the aesthetic modality.¹⁰¹

Law as Mediator

Is it possible to discern norms for human activity other than in the written revelation of God, or raise to the discoverable regularities of creation or the accepted standards of taste for any particular place and period to the normative level of God's Word? Whilst we must study creation in light of and in order to be able to implement the

written revelation of God nowhere are we able to uncover new and extra-Scriptural commandments or norms within creation which would in effect be to declare the insufficiency of Scripture. In Dooyeweerd's philosophy law seems to function in the role of a non-divine mediator between God and man. In this Dooyeweerd, despite his rejection of natural theology, reveals dependence upon two distinct kinds of revelation. He seems to speak of revelation within a static structural law-ordered creation which is dependent upon a directive Word-revelation to be brought into action and to be interpreted aright by the heart of man.¹⁰²

The insertion of law as further mediator between God and creation would seem to indicate that instead of Dooyeweerd developing Kuyper's doctrine of common grace in a Christocentric direction he is instead, at this point, reducing the relevance of Christ. In Kuyper's theology all that existed or happened was to be understood, through His two-fold Mediatorial role, only in relation to and through Christ. In Dooyeweerd's philosophy we are able to discern the fundamental structures and orders of creation and life without reference back to God except through law.

SPHERES

Order of the Spheres

It is not clear whether the law spheres are elements of the existent world as would seem to be indicated above, or whether they are merely the way in which we human beings perceive and order the world around us, which would be the outcome of a form of natural theology. Dooyeweerd would seem to wish the spheres understood as indissoluble aspects of creation, part of the way in which things are. However, despite this it must be assumed that they are in fact an attempt to categorize that which we perceive. This can be illustrated by the responses of a friendly and an unfriendly critic to the positioning of one of the spheres. In Dooyeweerd's ladder of spheres the lingual precedes the social because, according to Spier 'Without a spoken or sign language, without symbols social intercourse would be impossible.'¹⁰³ This is true, just as it is equally true, as pointed out by Frame,¹⁰⁴ that there could be no agreed upon symbolism if we did not presuppose some form of social intercourse. The two spheres

would appear to be mutually dependent as to their place in a hierarchy rather than one being the unequivocal basis of the other.

Granted that there is a kind of sense and order to be discerned in the list of modes which Dooyeweerd hands over full grown on the opening page of *New Critique* it must be admitted that it is possible to construct other plausible arrangements of the spheres.¹⁰⁵ Here we have another example of a philosophy which, however much it may have proceeded from a renewed 'heart' is still an attempt to construct a system from nature without the control of Scriptural revelation. Nowhere does Dooyeweerd attempt to give a biblical basis for his ladder of spheres.

GRACE

Differing Graces?

We are warned by Dooyeweerd not to fall into the trap of confining regenerating grace to a sphere of the inner spiritual life and common grace to a general sphere of natural human life. Such a view, possible due to the scholastic nature of the terminology employed, 'would contradict the radical and integral meaning of the Biblical basic motive of creation, fall into sin and redemption.'¹⁰⁶

In considering the trend of Dooyeweerd's thought we must ask the fundamental question: Why propose a differentiation between common grace and special grace? As it is 'absolutely contrary to the biblical standpoint when a distinction is made between two independent realms or spheres of grace'¹⁰⁷ we must question Dooyeweerd's continued use of a distinction within God's grace. Both have the same origin, the love of God shed abroad in and through Jesus Christ the Redeemer of the elect and Regenerator of the entire cosmos.¹⁰⁸ Regenerating grace is understood as, '*the true root of temporal conserving grace*'.¹⁰⁹ Both forms of grace have the same purpose, the restoration of that which was lost at the fall and the development and fulfilment of creation.

At this point we must consider the criticism of Johnathan Chaplin who charges Dooyeweerd with inconsistency:

'Special grace' is that gracious intervention of God into his fallen creation which has a specifically *redemptive purpose*. 'Common grace', by contrast, has a *preservative* function, maintaining the orders of creation in the interim between the fall and the final consummation of the kingdom in the end times. This distinction is, however quite inconsistent with Dooyeweerd's formulation of the 'biblical ground motive' in which the purpose of redemption is seen precisely as the restoration of the entire creation.¹¹⁰

Chaplin has correctly pointed out the integral relationship between creation and redemption which is reflected in the relationship between the dynamics of special grace and common grace. So integral is this relationship that they are in fact the one grace. The redemptive grace of Christ in leading creation to its fulfilment has effects which would normally in federal Calvinism be considered non-soteriological. Dooyeweerd uses the term common grace for the effects upon a law-ordered creation of God's purposes of redemption. The indissolubility of the two graces is stressed in Dooyeweerd's work because in effect there is only one grace, that grace which is operative within the creation-fall-redemption ground motive. Although not freeing himself from the framework inherited from Kuyper, Dooyeweerd has moved in a positive direction to re-emphasise the centrality of Christ.

Writing of special grace and the radical change brought about by Christ in the apostate root of the cosmos Dooyeweerd claims that particular grace 'bears a *radical-universal* character.' He goes on to write in terms that would indicate that conserving grace is in fact an aspect of or working out of regenerating grace.

Already in the *present* dispensation this radical change of direction in the root of life must necessarily reveal itself in temporal reality, in its conserving effect as well as in its regenerative operation. Its conserving effect is primarily manifest in the preservation of the temporal world-order by God in Christ Jesus, as Head of the Covenant, so that the disintegrating effect of the fall into sin in temporal life is checked.¹¹¹

It would appear that in Dooyeweerd we have a conception which sees the creation itself being sustained, not by common grace but by law. The subsequent unfolding of the potentialities of creation, which includes the restraint of the effects of sin is, in fact, seen as led by special grace within the creation-fall-redemption motive. Dooyeweerd's attempt to integrate creation and redemption more effectively than Kuyper is effective. By stressing the Christological basis of all grace within the basic biblical motive grace is understood only within the framework of the movement towards redemption. We are returning to a position in which once again not only does the earth bear the Cross but the Cross bears the earth.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 L. Kalsbeek, *Contours of a Christian Philosophy*, Toronto, Wedge, 1975, p.20
- 2 J. Skillen comments that Dooyeweerd 'has presented the most thorough political philosophy ever developed in Dutch Calvinist circles.' *The Development of Calvinist Political Theory in the Netherlands*, Ph.D. thesis, Duke University, 1974, p.16
- 3 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Jordan Station, Paideia Press, 1984 Vol. I.523
- 4 J. Chaplin, *Dooyeweerd's Theory of Public Justice*, Toronto, Institute for Christian Studies, 1983, pp.6ff.
- 5 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I.523
- 6 J. Klapwijk, 'Rationality in the Dutch Neo-Calvinist Tradition', in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, ed. H. Hart, J. van der Hoeven, N. Wolterstorff Lanham, University Press of America, p.106
- 7 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I.518 cf. 512
- 8 *Ibid*, I.108
- 9 *Ibid*, I.99
- 10 *Ibid*, I.93
- 11 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, Toronto, Wedge, 1979, p.99
- 12 *Ibid*, p.59
- 13 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, II.307
- 14 *Ibid*, I.101-102
- 15 H. Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, Nutley, Craig Press, 1975, p.8
- 16 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.89
- 17 The existence of the spheres or modal aspects is handed over *de novo* at the beginning of *A New Critique* without justification. Dooyeweerd does not offer any argument to the effect that the universe is so arranged. Neither does he argue the competence of the human mind to discern the structures. Rather, Dooyeweerd assumes that there are such spheres and then proceeds to ask what spheres there are.
- 18 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I.3 cf. *Roots of Western Culture*, p.41, *In The Twilight of Western Thought*, p.7
- 19 *Ibid*, II.193
- 20 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.42
- 21 *Ibid*, p.40
- 22 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, II.231

- 23 *Ibid*, II.195
- 24 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.64
- 25 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, II.197-198
- 26 *Ibid*, II.364-365
- 27 *Ibid*, II.246
- 28 C.T. McIntyre, 'Dooyeweerd's Philosophy of History', in *The Legacy of Herman Dooyeweerd*, ed. McIntyre, University Press of America, 1985 pp.89-96
McIntyre has correctly pointed out that Dooyeweerd's discussion of the historical aspect points away from a modal treatment of history to a transmodal one.
- 29 A ground motive is an ultimate vision of reality which guides the four major historical periods which have characterised western civilisation. These are: the Greek 'form-matter motive', the medieval 'nature-grace motive', the modern humanistic 'nature-freedom motive' and the biblical motive of 'creation-fall-redemption.' The concept of controlling ground motives is fundamental to Dooyeweerd's analysis of the development of culture and philosophy. He attempts to demonstrate how these motives have shaped all areas of western civilisation.
- 30 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.137
- 31 *Ibid*, pp.117f
- 32 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I.71
- 33 *Ibid*, I.179ff
- 34 H. Dooyeweerd, 'Kuyper's Wetenschapsleer', in *Philosophia Reformata*, 4e Jaargang, 1939, p.197
- 35 *Ibid*, pp.222-227
- 36 H. Dooyeweerd, *In The Twilight of Western Thought*, p.42
- 37 *Ibid*, p.42
- 38 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I.99
- 39 *Ibid*, I.4
- 40 *Ibid*, II.30
- 41 *Ibid*, I.4
- 42 *Ibid*, I.173-174
- 43 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.30
- 44 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I.60 cf. *Roots of Western Culture*, p.30
- 45 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.90
- 46 *Ibid*, p.67

- 47 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I.61
- 48 *Ibid*, I.61
- 49 *Ibid*, I.65
- 50 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.33
- 51 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I.174
- 52 *Ibid*, I.55
- 53 *Ibid*, I.174
- 54 H. Dooyeweerd, *In The Twilight of Western Thought*, p.27 cf.121 Dooyeweerd's conception of the heart of man as a supratemporal concentration point of a temporal 'function mantle' has come under considerable criticism. cf J.W. Skillen *op cit.*, pp.323-331 and John Frame, *The Amsterdam Philosophy: A Preliminary Critique*, Phillipsburg, Harmony Press, no date, pp.22-25
- 55 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.30 cf. p.161
- 56 *Ibid*, p.33
- 57 *Ibid*, p.30
- 58 *Ibid*, p.30
- 59 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I.175 cf *Roots of Western Culture*, p.36
- 60 *Ibid*, II.335
- 61 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.59
- 62 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I.175 cf. *Roots of Western Culture*, p.37
- 63 *Ibid*, II.175
- 64 *Ibid*, II.262
- 65 *Ibid*, III.506
- 66 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.37
- 67 J. Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.17
- 68 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, II.33
- 69 *Ibid*, I.175-176
- 70 *Ibid*, III.525
- 71 *Ibid*, III.506-507
- 72 *Ibid*, III.523
- 73 *Ibid*, I.523

- 74 *Ibid*, III.525 cf. I.523
- 75 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.38
- 76 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, II.35
- 77 *Ibid*, III.523
- 78 *Ibid*, III.506
- 79 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.38 cf. *Vernieuwing en Bezinning*, Zutphen, Van Den Brink, 1959, p.38
- 80 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I.523
- 81 *Ibid*, II.309
- 82 *Ibid*, III.526
- 83 H. Dooyeweerd, *Vernieuwing en Bezinning*, p.37
- 84 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, II.34-35 cf. I.63
- 85 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.37
- 86 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, II.34-36 cf. *Roots of Western Culture*, p.37
- 87 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.38
- 88 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, II.198
- 89 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.65
- 90 *Ibid*, p.79
- 91 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I.108
- 92 J. Frame, *op cit*, pp.40-43
- 93 J. Begbie, *op cit*, pp.123f
- 94 At this point Frame's objections, *op cit*, pp. 27-31, to Dooyeweerd's use of the term law prove valid.
- 95 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.37
- 96 H. Dooyeweerd, *In The Twilight of Western Thought*, p.8
- 97 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I.3
- 98 *Ibid*, II.335
- 99 J.M. Spier, *An Introduction to Christian Philosophy*, Nutley, Craig Press, 1973, p. v
- 100 *Ibid*, pp.128, 129
- 101 *Ibid*, p. 93

- 102 H. Fernout, *Man, Faith and Religion in Bavinck, Kuyper, and Dooyeweerd*, Toronto, Association for Advancement of Christian Scholarship, 1975, p.93
- 103 J.M. Spier, *op cit*, p.42
- 104 J. Frame, *op cit*, p.21
- 105 V. Poythress, *Philosophy, Science and the Sovereignty of God*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976, pp.192-196
- 106 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, III.524
- 107 *Ibid*, III.506
- 108 *Ibid*, III.507
- 109 *Ibid*, III.527
- 110 J.P. Chaplin, *op cit*, p.203
- 111 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, III.524

CHAPTER SEVEN

JOHN CALVIN

COMMON GRACE IN EMBRYO

INTRODUCTION

Neo-Calvinist proponents of common grace, those who revise the doctrine, and those who reject the concept utterly all claim to be continuing in the line of Calvin, not only in their general theological conceptions but in their reaction to and outworking of the common grace question. In a modern, basic and influential work of systematic theology from a federal perspective we find the following statement which could have been echoed by nearly all who investigate the subject of common grace:

Calvin especially developed the idea of common grace, that is, a grace which, while it is the expression of the favour of God, does not have a saving effect.¹

In direct contrast however we have the statement of Charles B. Partee.

A great deal of attention has been given to the doctrine of common grace by some Calvin scholars. They expand, schematize, and *distort* Calvin's cautious remarks on the closely related topics of natural or general revelation, universal providence, and common grace.²

With a diversity of views such as those which we have already examined, all claiming to be in line with Calvin's thought, it is worthwhile to investigate what Calvin himself had to say concerning the issues involved. This, not so that we can uncritically accept what Calvin says and decide between rival contenders to the true succession, but so that we may be able to understand the statements of modern Reformed theologians

in the light of their historical context. Also by coming to an appreciation of the work of the greatest of Reformed theologians and how he deals with those subjects considered under the doctrine of common grace we may be able to find avenues of approach which will prove fruitful in developing a clearer understanding of common grace.

METHODOLOGY

The most comprehensive work on the treatment of the doctrine of common grace in the Calvin corpus is that undertaken by H. Kuiper in his book *Calvin on Common Grace*.³ This book, which has been enormously influential in shaping a modern Reformed understanding of common grace is the product of study undertaken at the Free University of Amsterdam after World War I. The approach of Kuiper has become the generally accepted federal Calvinist interpretation of Calvin's understanding of common grace.⁴ Kuiper's work gathers together and systematises those references to God's non-salvific action in the lives of unbelievers which Calvin has left scattered throughout his works.

Federal Approach

Kuiper's work is thorough, not to say exhaustive. However it has two main methodological flaws.⁵ Firstly, in attempting to systematise those portions of Calvin's work relevant to the question of common grace it avoids the most basic question; Did Calvin actually employ a doctrine of common grace? By beginning with the assumption that Calvin held to a doctrine of common grace with similarities to that upheld by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 and then utilising a theological method of the systematisation of doctrines which Calvin did not employ in his own work, Kuiper has searched the Calvin corpus, picked flesh from widely scattered bones and constructed a body of evidence which proves to his own satisfaction that Calvin did teach a form of the doctrine of common grace.

From his work however it is evident that Calvin lays greater stress on exegetical theology than on systematic theology. As A.A. Hoeksema remarks:

Calvin was concerned to be a theologian of the Word of God - to reproduce as faithfully as he could the teachings of Scripture. Wherever possible, he tried to bring the teachings of Scripture into logical harmony with each other. Whenever this was not possible, he was not afraid to admit there were Biblical teachings which he could not rationally harmonise. For Calvin fidelity to Scripture was more important than mere intellectual consistency.⁶

Likewise Edward Dowey comments on Calvin's systematisation, or lack of it:

Calvin, then, was completely convinced of a high degree of clarity and comprehensibility of individual themes of the Bible, but he was also so utterly submissive before divine mystery as to create a theology containing many logical inconsistencies rather than a rationally coherent whole... Clarity of individual themes, incomprehensibility of their interrelations - this is a hallmark of Calvin's theology.⁷

Kuiper and those who accept his reading of Calvin's theology, use the theological method of scholastic federal Calvinism, a method which lays considerable stress upon that internal consistency which Calvin did not emphasise in his work. By employing this method it is possible to make Calvin fit the Procrustean bed of alien categories without asking what Calvin's intent actually was or investigating the categories within which Calvin as opposed to some of his modern followers operated.

Secondly, Kuiper's work classifies Calvin's treatment of this area of doctrine according to the recipients of God's favour. Thus he propounds a universal common grace which extends to all creation, general common grace which extends to all mankind and covenant common grace which extends to all those living within the sphere of the covenant. This anthropological approach is essentially alien to Calvin's methodology or general theological outlook as exhibited in the *Institutes* and the *Commentaries* which if they are anything are God centred rather than man centred. Again we find Kuiper, and those who accept his standpoint, imposing upon Calvin categories arising from controversy in early twentieth-century Michigan rather than attempting to ascertain what Calvin was saying in mid sixteenth century Geneva.

God's Purposes

Rather than beginning with the assumption that Calvin did have a doctrine of common grace and then attempting to systematise Calvin's teaching on this doctrine according to the proposed recipients, an approach more faithful to Calvin would be to begin with the purposes of God which are usually subsumed under supposed common grace. Within Calvin's works there are a number of reasons given for the providential control by which the non-elect are held to benefit from God's goodness. As will be clearly seen these are not always motives which we would normally associate with grace towards the generality of humankind, but rather seem to be more directly connected with promoting the wellbeing of the totality of the elect.

- a) The promotion of the welfare of humanity in general.⁸
- b) In order to turn us from sin and draw us to Himself.⁹
- c) In order to render the ungodly inexcusable.¹⁰
- d) In order that guilt should not be increased.¹¹
- e) In order than judgement should be increased.¹²
- f) The advancement of the Church.¹³
- g) God's own glory.¹⁴

It is clear from the purposes of God listed in the progression above that in Calvin's thought God bestows His goodness on the unregenerate largely because He wishes to provide for the welfare of the Church, leading ultimately to His own glory. The good that humanity receives from God proceeds from His loving kindness and evidences that same love of God for His children. The wilful refusal by rebellious men and women to acknowledge this goodness of God results, however, in their own condemnation. That which is given in love is perverted and turned to the detriment of the recipient.

Terms

It is generally acknowledged¹⁵ that there are only four passages in all of Calvin's works¹⁶ in which the adjective 'common' is used in conjunction with the noun 'grace' and in two of these passages the Reformer is clearly speaking of saving grace. The usual reference in Calvin's works is to God's beneficence or favour, or to gifts which flow from God's goodness. The fact that Calvin does not use the term common grace

whilst indicative is not conclusive evidence that he had no doctrine of common grace. As we shall see there is ample evidence that Calvin taught that there was a response of unmerited favour on the part of God towards unregenerate humanity. Unfortunately today's federal Calvinist too often makes the unexamined assumption that this is to be equated with a doctrine of common grace. It is our contention that whilst God's goodness to the unregenerate is undeniable and is unquestionably undeserved goodness, Calvin does not consistently use the term grace with reference to this goodness, neither does he propound a doctrine of common grace as taught by some later Reformed theologians.

The Reformed tradition has primarily used the word grace to refer to God's work of salvation, His irresistible grace in bringing those who are dead in sin to life in Christ. This is Calvin's normal usage of the term grace.¹⁷ However, to know God is to know His grace, any revelation of Himself to sinful humanity, in Word or in action, is of necessity a product of the grace of the God who defines Himself as 'love.' God's unavoidable nature is love. All existence by its very created status is a product of and touched by His grace. To attempt an understanding of God's relationship with creation as such under the concept of common grace is almost to verge on a tautology and is to use too diffuse a category which resists meaningful differentiation. Calvin instead treats the continued existence of humankind and the cosmos, not from the standpoint of human experience, but from its place in the purposes of God under the categories of creation and redemption. At the beginning of the *Institutes* Calvin tells us that:

First, as much in the fashioning of the universe as in the general teaching of Scripture the Lord shows himself to be simply the Creator. Then in the face of Christ he shows himself the Redeemer.¹⁸

The general pattern of the *Institutes* follows from this statement with Book I treating of the knowledge of God the Creator and Books II, III, and IV treating the knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ, the way in which we receive the grace of Christ and its benefits and effects, and the means of grace for the Church.

CREATION

Rather than follow the methodology of Kuiper and those who come after him it would seem more useful to try to follow the lead of Calvin himself as we attempt to discern how he treats those subjects normally understood by federal and neo-Calvinists as belonging to the province of common grace. If we begin where Calvin begins, with the knowledge of God the Creator, we quickly see that Calvin clearly teaches that there exists a goodness of God which extends to the totality of sin cursed creation.

Dependent Creation

Calvin affirmed the creation of the world *ex nihilo* teaching that God created the world through the Word who was begotten of the Father before all time. The world was fashioned through the Son who upholds all things by His power.¹⁹ The unformed mass out of which God fashioned the world was sustained by the Spirit who continues to sustain creation. In Calvin's view the order that was brought out of chaos was not something which stabilised nature in such a way that it became independent and able to be sustained from within. On the contrary, the order within creation is dependent, requiring the direct intervention of God in His providential care.

But if that chaos required the hidden inspiration of God lest it suddenly dissolve; how could this order, so fair and distinct, subsist by itself unless it derived strength from elsewhere? Therefore, let the Scriptures be fulfilled, 'Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth,' [Ps. 104:30] and, on the other hand, as soon as the Lord takes away his Spirit all things return to their dust and vanish away.²⁰

Calvin emphasises the inherent fragility and instability of the created order. *Psalm 104* is understood to teach that the order within creation is not self-sustaining but requires the constant presence of God.²¹ Only a divine power could be responsible for the order which we discern within creation. That the stars and planets hold their course without collision filled Calvin with wonder. Only the presence and activity of God could account for this regularity and harmony. God's providential control of nature could be discerned in the heavens.²² Calvin's wonder at the beauties of nature is

grounded in the belief that God's presence is to be seen there, upholding, restraining, directing creation. The joy Calvin took in the wonders of creation presupposes nature's inherent fragility. Only God's power could preserve this orderliness, and the exercise of this power is based upon the joy God takes in the created, the stability of creation depends upon 'the continual rejoicing of God in his works.'²³

The Fall

At the fall the forces of disorder entered the world, Adam's sin constituted 'the subversion of all equity and well-constituted order.'²⁴ The integral nature of the created is seen in the fact that the fall of Adam affected all creation. With the fall the fragile creation assumed a threatening aspect, constantly verging on the brink of disorder.

In a word nothing is certain, but all things are in a state of disorder... We throw heaven and earth into disorder by our sins. For if we were in right order as to our obedience to God, doubtless all the elements would be conformable to us and we should thus observe in the world, as it were, an angelic harmony.²⁵

The fall makes the intervening providence of God even more necessary lest the creation collapse into chaos. The entire existent creation would 'dissolve at almost every moment and all its parts fail in the sorrowful confusion which followed the fall of Adam, were they not borne up from elsewhere by some hidden stability.'²⁶

Preserved Creation

Early in the *Institutes* Calvin indicates that the reason for God creating all things and His continuing preservation of creation lies in 'his goodness alone.'²⁷ Likewise we are later taught that 'the same fruit of God's liberality' bestowed upon the wicked is also enjoyed by the 'brute animals.'²⁸ Calvin also teaches that some creatures enjoy special blessing in distinction to other creatures. His comments²⁹ give reason to believe that Calvin considered the extraordinary strength and beauty of some plants and animals to be a special gift within that circle of goodness granted to creatures as creatures.

Calvin makes a distinction between that goodness which is granted to all creatures and that goodness bestowed on humanity in particular. According to Calvin, *Psalm 8*, in part, celebrates the special goodness which God manifests to mankind in distinction from the rest of creation. The Spirit of God preserves everything that is, but humanity is given the singular gift of reason and understanding. That members of the human race are given special gifts peculiar to themselves within their status as human beings alone rather than in light of their being members of the regenerate or unregenerate is taught in the *Institutes* where Calvin writes; 'reason... by which man distinguishes between good and evil, and by which he understands and judges, is a natural gift.'³⁰ This ability of moral discernment and reasoning is not shared with the dumb beasts or with any of the other aspects of creation but is shared to a greater or lesser degree within the totality of mankind.

This universal beneficence of which all creatures are the recipients seems therefore to involve at its most basic little else than the existence and continued preservation of the various aspects of creation according to their previously created structures. According to Calvin all sin-cursed creatures are the recipients of divine goodness in this respect - they all participate in the blessing of preservation. It is this fact of existence in itself, under God's providential sustaining and oversight of all creation, which is interpreted as a sign that Calvin propounded a doctrine of God's grace towards whatever is in being, or universal common grace.

Whilst those with superior powers of reasoning should give the thanks to God and use their gifts of reason in His service can we rightfully consider the possession of such natural gifts by mankind in general as evidence of God's grace towards us? Calvin does recognise the 'universal apprehension of reason and understanding by nature imparted in men' to be due to 'the peculiar grace of God.'³¹ This though is whilst making a comparison between mankind before and after the fall, Calvin stressing that after the fall anything we have is purely the result of God's goodness and mercy towards undeserving and rebellious sinners, such an attitude which can only be described as gracious. However, if the abilities we receive as part of our created

nature, those attributes which constitute us human beings in distinction from the animals, or even our bare existence itself, are to be considered not as God's ordering of creation within His purposes of ultimate redemption but as products of common grace providing a sub stratum upon which God erects the house of the elect how meaningful or useful is the term?

To say that it is evidence of God's grace that He did not make me a lump of granite or an oak tree is meaningless. We are what we are by God's creation of us and whilst there can usefully be made comparisons between differing objects belonging to a single classification we have no standard of comparison between members of different classes. That Curtley Ambrose has the build and reflexes of an ideal Test class fast bowler can be considered a matter of God's favour to him as an individual member of his class within creation. We cannot, however, consider it a matter of God's favour that He didn't make Curtley Ambrose a cucumber. The supposed transfer of the attributes of a member or members of one category to another is inadmissible. Our powers of reasoning are considered by Calvin to be part of what makes us human and distinguishes humanity from the rest of creation.³² These ontological evidences of supposed common grace, such as the fact of existence itself, are surely best understood otherwise than as primarily examples of God's common grace.

Contemplation of Creation

In a passage which speaks clearly of the fact of existence itself and the differentiation between the varying aspects of creation Calvin leads us towards a proper understanding of the way in which we should understand our place within creation. From the contemplation of the history of creation Calvin asserts that we can learn much of the relationship between God and ourselves:

We shall learn that God by the power of his Word and Spirit created heaven and earth out of nothing; that thereupon he brought forth living beings and inanimate things of every kind, that in a wonderful series he distinguished an innumerable variety of things, that he endowed each kind with its own nature, assigned function, appointed places and stations, and that, although all were

subject to corruption, he nevertheless provided for the preservation of each species unto the Last Day.³³

Such contemplation will lead us firstly into the 'holy meditation' by which 'with true faith' we apprehend 'what it is for God to be Creator of heaven and earth.'³⁴ Thus we see that our existence within creation and our study of creation is intended to lead us to a faithful understanding of something of the nature of God the Creator.

There remains however a second part of this contemplation³⁵ which is yet 'more closely related to faith,' and that is by the contemplation of the benefits God has given us 'to feel his power and grace in ourselves and in the great benefits he has conferred upon us, and so bestir ourselves to trust, invoke, praise, and love him.' This reaction to the contemplation of creation is because, 'God has shown by the order of Creation that he created all things for man's sake.' As an example of this care over the ordering of creation being for the sake of mankind so that we should react to these evidences of God's care for us with love and praise Calvin uses the establishment of the universe in six days.³⁶

We can see that for Calvin the existence of creation itself and even the very manner of its coming into being and its consequences are not to be seen as a mark of grace towards the creation as such, either brute creation or humanity within it, but rather, although certainly a gracious action, it is an incitement to the faith which leads the Church to 'trust, invoke, praise, and love him.'³⁷

Providence

Further we find the creation and the continued existence and diversity of creation being related to God's 'providence and fatherly solicitude.' In Calvin's writings providence implies God's permanent and universal activity within the created universe. 'Providence means not that by which God idly observes from heaven what takes place on earth, but that by which, as keeper of the keys, he governs all events.'³⁸

All events are governed by God's secret plan. And concerning inanimate objects we ought to hold that, although each one has by nature been endowed with its own property, yet it does not exercise its own power in so far as it is directed by God's ever-present hand. These are, thus, nothing but instruments to which God continually imparts as much effectiveness as he wills, and according to his own purpose bends and turns them to either one action or another.³⁹

Is it then legitimate to describe the goodness of God in providentially sustaining creation as an example of common grace? Calvin glories in mankind's utter dependence upon God's unmerited mercy shown towards sinners, yet he consistently hesitates to term such an attitude or the actions it leads to as grace, or to deal with them under a doctrine of common grace as understood by later Reformed theologians. When used in the context of God's creating and upholding of the universe and all that it contains we can see that in Calvin's writings the term 'grace' is sometimes used in a loose fashion to indicate that which we immediately experience to our benefit, whether or not we acknowledge it as the goodness of God as we ought. Calvin contrasts this care and oversight with that which we more normally term grace:

In this ruin of mankind no one now experiences God either as Father or as Author of salvation, or favourable in any way, until Christ the Mediator comes forward to reconcile him to us. Nevertheless, it is one thing to feel that God as our Maker supports us by his power, governs us by his providence, nourishes us by his goodness, and attends us with all sorts of blessings - and another thing to embrace the grace of reconciliation offered to us in Christ.⁴⁰

The difference between God's sustaining of creation and His grace is more than a semantic difference. By introducing the concept of common grace separated from Christ's work as Mediator of Redemption Kuyper introduced a realm separate from that of God's purposes of redemption in Christ. As we saw, Kuyper, having initially introduced this realm for the purposes of legitimising Christian political activity in the world, was unable to maintain the distinctiveness of the two realms. Gradually his concepts were revised until we find the grace of reconciliation radiating out into that which was previously considered the domain of common grace making that domain serve *pro Rege*.

The Active Image of God

There has been considerable discussion as to whether or not Calvin believed the image of God was lost in the fall. If the relational character of the *imago Dei*, that one stands in a proper relationship with God is meant, then the image was clearly lost in the fall. On this basis Barth, Niesel and Torrance have argued for the loss of the image.⁴¹ In the understanding of these authors Calvin held that the sinful human being no longer retains the mirroring function characteristic of the image of God.⁴² Brunner, however, argued that in Calvin's view a remnant of the image remains in the sinner; the image of God in Calvin's thought is held to belong to the order of creation and was 'engraved' on the soul.⁴³ Our reason and will, the capacity for language, knowledge and culture are seen as remnants of the divine image still present in fallen humanity.

Calvin emphasised the radical difference between the human being's pre and post-fall nature, 'The knowledge of ourselves is twofold, namely, to know what we were like when we were first created and what our condition became after the fall of Adam.'⁴⁴ The ordered and harmonious nature of the pre-fallen soul is stressed by Calvin.

Accordingly the integrity with which Adam was endowed is expressed by this word [*imago*]. When he had full possession of right understanding, when he had his affections kept within the bounds of reason, all his senses tempered in right order, and he truly referred his exceptional gifts bestowed upon him by his Maker. And although the primary seat of the divine image was in the mind and heart, or in the soul and its powers, yet there was no part of man, not even the body itself, in which some sparks did not glow... From this we may gather that when his image is placed in man a tacit antithesis is introduced which raises man above all other creatures and, as it were, separates him from the common mass.⁴⁵

The image is understood by Calvin as the original order in the soul and the relationship whereby Adam 'truly referred his excellence to the exceptional gifts bestowed upon him by his Maker.' Because the soul was ordered aright the will was free to follow reason, and reason was capable of knowing and loving God. Human reason, understanding, prudence, and judgement sufficed for the direction of earthly life and 'by them men mounted up even to God and eternal bliss.'⁴⁶ The prefallen,

ordered soul was created for the purpose of knowing and praising God through the contemplation of nature which is 'a sort of mirror in which we can contemplate God who is otherwise invisible.'⁴⁷

In contrast the fallen soul is deformed and disordered. Due to the fall we were shorn of supernatural gifts and our natural gifts were corrupted.⁴⁸ Humans no longer refer their excellence to their Creator and as a consequence can no longer discern God in nature. The relational character of the image was destroyed. However, although corrupted the natural gifts remain, they could not be completely wiped out without human beings ceasing to be human.

Since reason, therefore, by which man distinguishes between good and evil, and by which he understands and judges, is a natural gift, it could not be completely wiped out; but it was partly weakened and partly corrupted.⁴⁹

The fact that human nature retains a will and a mind means that a remnant of the divine image is retained and that the human being is relentlessly active. The active nature of the human mind is manifested most clearly in idolatry.⁵⁰ The fallen will is also active and is 'with the most eager inclination disposed and hastening to sin.'⁵¹ We sin willingly, compulsion is an external force which operates contrary to the nature of the will, human beings sin out of the inner necessity of their fallen wills and not because of external compulsion.

Sin, in Calvin's view, distorted but did not destroy the underlying order of creation; all that exists continues to serve the head of creation, the human race. Although we are now much lower than the angels,⁵² we remain human and the head of creation. Calvin argues that the 'every man' in 'The true light that gives light to every man' (*John 1:9*) refers not to those born again of the Spirit, but to 'the whole race of men.'⁵³ This common light is manifested in the unredeemed mind in the universal drive to know, create and develop laws and civilisation. The active nature of even the fallen human being is evidenced in the arts, sciences, and laws of state. We are so constituted that everywhere human beings seek out knowledge:

Wretched people that we are, there are none of us who do not covet knowledge, and it is a natural desire that burns in all men. Insomuch that we shall see many who expend all their wealth, and spare neither their bodies nor their lives. And to do what? To get knowledge. We see others run about from place to place. And why? To get knowledge. All men, then, have that desire, some more and some less, and there is not a person so ignorant as not to long for knowledge.⁵⁴

His will enslaved to sin the fallen man can neither do nor will any spiritual good. The human being however remains relentlessly active. On a natural level human nature still exists, as even Barth acknowledged 'even as a sinner, man is a man and not a tortoise.'⁵⁵ Calvin equated the image of God with the continued existence of human endowments such as reason and will. With reference to our knowledge of God this remnant of the image renders us inexcusable and as such plays only a limited role in natural theology. We should not, however, restrict our appreciation of Calvin's use of the concept of a remnant of the image to the issue of our knowledge of God. Calvin employs the idea in the context of the continuation of human society. 'Calvin's fascination with this remnant stemmed not only from his humanism but from his awe before the continual survival of a human race that did not become bestial.'⁵⁶ The general drive to create and understand is part of our surviving created nature as bearers of the image of God, not an addition given to motive an otherwise inactive lump.

Natural Law

Calvin does not appear to have been interested in natural law of itself and did not develop a 'theology of natural law.' Rather he used the principle of natural law as an extension of his doctrine of providence to explain the survival of civilisation. 'His appeals to nature and natural law were on the level of appropriation, not of doctrine.'⁵⁷

Although fallen the order of nature continues as a mirror of God's glory and a testimony to His providence.⁵⁸ Creation's continuation after the fall reflects the glory

of God and provides for the human being who is the chief work of creation.⁵⁹ Human life has been preserved because it is created in God's image.

If anyone should object that this divine image has been so obliterated, the solution is easy: first there yet exists some remnant of it; so that man is possessed of no small dignity. Secondly, the Celestial Creator himself, however corrupted man may be, still keeps in view the end of his original creation.⁶⁰

God continues to support and preserve creation and an orderly society because he had once decreed that the earth is to be inhabited by humankind.⁶¹

The order of nature interpreted by the human conscience constitutes an invaluable restraint upon the disorderliness introduced by sin. 'The law of God which we call the moral law is nothing else than that natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved upon the minds of men.'⁶² Human beings are able to recognise the dictates of nature and in so doing are able to participate in the order and development of society by virtue of their created constitution as human beings. It is our createdness which makes us recognise and shun crime such as murder. Murder is not only criminal but abhorrent to our nature, since we are made in the image of God murder is contrary to the order of nature and 'our natural sentiment.'⁶³ Similarly adultery, polygamy and incest which are contrary to divinely established order are 'against nature.' A king is unable to command that which nature forbids:

for no legislator can effect that a thing which nature pronounces to be vicious should not be vicious; and if tyrannical arrogance dares to attempt it, the light of nature will presently shine forth and prevail... even among the heathen nations this law, [against incest] as if engraved and implanted on the hearts of men, was accounted undissolvable.⁶⁴

As well as family ties being in accord with the 'order of nature'⁶⁵ the same appeal to nature can be found in Calvin's teaching concerning civil government.⁶⁶ The rule of law corresponds to that natural sense in human beings which recognises the need for order within creation.

For Calvin the perception of fallen mankind of the unalterable law of nature corresponds to the constant need for order so that society might continue after the fall. It is by such insights that human beings are restrained from descending to the level of beasts. Not only does the direct providential intervention of God in restraint of wickedness prevent the fall into disorder and chaos being completed, but also the created natural instincts of humanity serve to preserve society. Restraint, as well as being exercised by God, is also exercised even by fallen humanity through the recognition by the conscience of natural law. The appeals by Calvin to nature reveal a pattern of argumentation in which the natural mind is still able to discern the need for order and restraint within society. The natural perception of natural law serves as a bridle restraining fallen humanity from falling into the chaos of complete sinfulness. This ability to perceive the need for order in society also has a positive aspect undergirding the procreation of the race, the nurture of children and even the ability to recognise the image of God in our neighbour.⁶⁷

GIFTS FROM GOD

Blessings in Createdness

That God loves the human race in general and exhibits concern for its welfare is clearly taught by Calvin, as is apparent from the following:

Not only does he sustain this universe (as he once founded it) by his boundless might, regulate it by his wisdom, preserve it by his goodness, and especially rule mankind by his righteousness and judgement, bear with it in his mercy, watch over it by his protection; but also that no drop will be found either of wisdom or light, or of righteousness or power or rectitude, or of genuine truth, which does not flow from him, and of which he is not the cause.⁶⁸

We are thus assured by Calvin that this kindness of God in providentially ordering creation is extended to all of humanity wherever they may be and that every single member of the human race is a recipient of gifts from 'the fountain of every good.'

That this general goodness which is shed abroad to the totality of humanity is not confined to a supposedly autonomous and neutral physical sphere inevitably shared

by elect and non-elect is seen by Calvin's attitude to the gift of prayer which is open to all. Writing on prayer in the *Institutes* Calvin expounds *Psalms* 65:2 thus:

For what is more lovely or agreeable than for God to bear this title, which assures us that nothing is more to his nature than to assent to the prayers of suppliants? From this the prophet infers, that the door is open not to a few but to all mortals.⁶⁹

To be human is to be made in the image of God, this in itself is enough to earn the gratitude of men and women. Life and length of life is a gift and blessing intended to lead us to acknowledge God and thus 'be freed from too much desire for it [life], to which... we are of ourselves inclined by nature.'⁷⁰ It is through a Father's gift that life is maintained, a life during which 'each one undoubtedly feels within the heavenly grace that quickens him.'⁷¹ Bread which sustains life is the gift of God's paternal hand.⁷² Nature is subservient to the interests of humanity.⁷³ That the sun shines upon all the earth,⁷⁴ and that God waters the earth with dew and rain⁷⁵ is a sign of His favour. It is paternal care on the part of God and evidence of love that He protects the life of men.⁷⁶ The wild beasts are restrained.⁷⁷ Mankind is not only provided with the necessities of life but with joys in such gifts as work, art and food and wine. These are to be understood as 'God's gifts' which Calvin sees as being given so that we may enjoy them as being 'attractive to us, apart from their necessary use.'⁷⁸ Thus such gifts of God are not merely to sustain us in life but are to be gratefully accepted and positively enjoyed in themselves as gifts from a loving Father.

Specific Gifts

Some individuals are blessed with special talents withheld from others. Acuteness, proficiency in the arts, heroism, integrity and leadership are, according to Calvin, gifts of God.⁷⁹ Some of the unregenerate, although utterly devoid of saving grace, have an especially great measure of divine gifts.⁸⁰

Whilst the blessings of marriage and children are not universal neither are they restricted to the elect.⁸¹ Calvin acknowledges that 'God would have it accounted to

his special favour that he leaves some in barrenness but graces others with offspring.⁸² God bears with heathen nations and peoples, extending kindness to them, granting them time to come to repentance.⁸³ There are many instances of restraint in the lives of individuals, such as Abimelech.⁸⁴ God sometimes listens to the pleas of the unregenerate.⁸⁵

Thus we see that Calvin gladly acknowledges that which we receive upon earth as 'gifts,' 'blessings,' and 'goodness,' and even uses the verb 'to grace' to describe the giving of these gifts. However the point at issue in the discussion concerning the doctrine of common grace is not as to whether these gifts exist in themselves, even Herman Hoeksema acknowledges that the reprobate receive good things from God. The real questions to be asked concern the purpose for which the gifts are given, and the attitude of God which lies behind the giving of the gifts. We have already seen that these evidences of God's goodness towards the generality of humankind are meant to stir us to acknowledge our dependence upon and indebtedness to the God who has created all and that behind the giving of the gifts lies the fact that God is leading creation to its fulfilment in Christ. We find again that the thrust of Calvin's theology is not creational but recreational.

Calvin's attitude to the products of non-Christian culture and science appears quite subtle. On the one hand, he does not want to reject or even depreciate the gifts which God has distributed outwith the circle of the elect. That would be a deep ingratitude to the giver!⁸⁶ On the other hand, Calvin refuses to consider these gifts merely in and of themselves and to value them as purely human achievements. The burden of Calvin's concern is with how these gifts *function* in the lives of people. Do they serve to satisfy individual ambition and insight or do they tend to the service and glory of God? It is in the latter area that man on his own inevitably falls short.

But as sculpture and painting are gifts of God, what I insist is, that both shall be used purely and lawfully, - that gifts which the Lord has bestowed upon us for his glory and our good, shall not be preposterously abused, nay, shall not be perverted to our destruction.⁸⁷

General Revelation

Although due to the fall our intelligence is corrupted, reason is still one of the essential properties of our nature and through this endowment we are raised above the brute beasts.⁸⁸ As we have seen there is implanted in the human mind a love of truth and the active desire to investigate it.⁸⁹ The writings of heathen authors on many subjects, helpful to the regulation of human affairs are held to prove that human nature, fallen and unregenerate, still receives and retains many gifts. Heathens, aided by the Spirit of God, have written excellent works on many subjects. It is interesting to note the frequency with which Calvin himself quotes Plato, Vergil, Cicero and other heathen authors with frequency, approval and unfeigned appreciation. Thus Calvin argued that we are free to appropriate the wisdom of the pagans because God was the source of all wisdom and because He provided the arts and sciences for the welfare of humanity. After noting the case of Menander in *I Corinthians 15:33* Calvin wrote that we are at liberty to borrow from every quarter because everything comes from God; 'He has put into the mouths of the wicked some true and wholesome doctrine.'⁹⁰

God who by the Holy Spirit dwells only in the faithful, also 'fills, moves and quickens all things by the power of the same Spirit.'⁹¹ Therefore:

If the Lord has willed that we be helped in physics, dialectic, mathematics, and other like disciplines, by the work and ministry of the ungodly, let us use this assistance. For if we neglect God's gift freely offered in these arts, we ought to suffer just punishment for our sloth.⁹²

Despite his undoubted appreciation of the gifts of the unregenerate Calvin never loses sight of the fact that those natural gifts which remained after the fall have been corrupted and produce only 'an unstable and transitory'⁹³ understanding. The Lord:

Indeed, gave them a slight taste of his divinity, that they might not hide their impiety under a cloak of ignorance'; however, 'they saw things in such a way that their seeing did not direct them to the truth, much less enable them to attain it.'⁹⁴

Here in Calvin we hear echoes of Plato's allegory of men sitting in the cave, with their backs against the light, so they see but the shadows of images. Calvin's evaluation of Plato is germane at this point since according to Calvin Plato, although the most religious and circumspect of all the philosophers, yet 'vanishes in his round globe.'⁹⁵ Even although pagan authors by chance 'sprinkle their books with droplets of truth, how many monstrous lies defile them!'⁹⁶

With regard to spiritual apprehension and understanding the unaided human reason is yet more limited. Apart from the illumination of the Spirit granted to the elect, we cannot penetrate into the kingdom of God. This does not mean however that the unregenerate are totally devoid of any spiritual endowment or ability, all people still retain a *sensus deitatis* which accounts for the religious inclination of people everywhere. This sense of deity is the seed of religion. Calvin holds that all people can distinguish between the just and the unjust, the honourable and the base, and as we have already seen whatever is just and honourable and true is held to come from God.⁹⁷ At root however this knowledge of the rule of life is defective.⁹⁸

Calvin's writings indicate that he considered God's general revelation of Himself, which is open to all, to be a gift stemming from divine goodness. We find that he teaches that all of mankind is indebted to God for the countless benefits He bestows, and goes on to say that:

there is no one who is not indebted to God's infinite kindness, and even on this account alone He has abundantly put us in His debt by condescending to reveal himself to us.⁹⁹

The context of this comment on *Romans 1:21* makes it clear that Calvin teaches that God's general revelation is a divine benefit to the totality of humankind. This general revelation is always present, God drawing His creation to Himself whether in times of prosperity or of adversity:

Even amidst the many miseries with which life is filled, this divine goodness still shines forth, that God invites us to Himself, and exercises us in the knowledge of Himself.¹⁰⁰

Calvin teaches¹⁰¹ that the works of God furnish us with a picture of the divine perfections, the human race being invited to acquire from this depiction the knowledge of God, and in consequence of this knowledge, true and complete happiness. We are further taught¹⁰² that whilst general revelation is not sufficient to lead us in the right path, still God woos us to Himself by those many kind acts which bear witness to His goodness.¹⁰³

It must be acknowledged, therefore, that in each of the works of God, and more especially in the whole of them taken together, the divine perfections are delineated as in a picture, and the whole human race thereby invited and allured to acquire the knowledge of God, and, in consequence of this knowledge, true and complete felicity.¹⁰⁴

RESTRAINT

General Restraint

For Calvin God was not the momentary Creator of the deists who could withdraw and stand back from creation or change His purpose; and, therefore He could not abandon what He had fashioned even after the disruption of sin. God loved the reflection of His glory, especially the divine image in mankind, and, consequently, He preserved them in existence. The continuation of the societal life of the human race depended on the continual restraint of a disordered nature. In order that human civic life might continue, God not only preserved nature for His own glory but also specifically restrained those forces which would destroy man.¹⁰⁵

Chief amongst these forces is the evil one himself, who although permitted to traverse the earth is restrained in his activity by God. Living in a fallen, distorted and abnormal world which appears to be 'aimlessly tumbled about,' the saints instead of quailing under the assault of the wicked one are urged to remember the providence of God.

Now if their welfare is assailed either by the devil or by wicked men, then indeed, unless strengthened through remembering and meditating upon providence, they must needs faint away. But let them recall that the devil and the whole cohort of the wicked are completely restrained by God's hand as by a bridle, so that they are unable either to hatch any plot against us or, having hatched it, to make preparations or, if they have fully planned it, to stir a finger toward carrying it out, except so far as he has permitted, indeed commanded. Let them, also, recall that the devil and his crew are not only fettered, but also curbed and compelled to do service. Such thoughts will provide them abundant comfort.¹⁰⁶

Humanity

Although after the fall we live under the dominion of sin we are still curbed to a certain degree by divine intervention which restrains the full expression of our fallen nature, all of which leads to the gratitude, patience and security of the believer.¹⁰⁷ Calvin teaches that the law contained in special revelation curbs sin in the wicked who know this law, not by any inward working affecting their disposition, but by threat of punishment.¹⁰⁸ Whilst this curbs sin in a limited group its benefits also reach those who do not belong to that group by preserving social order and thus promoting the welfare of society in general.¹⁰⁹

When speaking of God's gifts of virtues and of restraint to some individuals¹¹⁰ Calvin does not claim that such goodness is common to the generality of mankind but does maintain that mankind as a whole benefits by the virtues of illustrious men. In commenting on *Genesis 33:4* he indicates that God works in many ways to prevent the ungodly from turning the world upside down. Sometimes they are restrained from sin inwardly by the softening of their hearts, sometimes He keeps the wicked from doing harm by the exercise of His power. Whilst the latter does not involve the granting of internal grace it involves God's care for humanity in general inasmuch as it is conducive to the preservation of the human race.

Civil Government

Despite the restraint of the devil and that ministered by the law and the inward working of God lawless people undoubtedly exist and their propensities must be curbed and held in check by the powers granted to the civil magistrate.

We should understand, furthermore, that the powers of the magistrate are clearly from God, not as pestilence, famine, war, and other punishments for sin are said to be from Him, but because He has appointed them for the just and lawful government of the world.¹¹¹

The state *functions* in Calvin's thought as a divinely ordained means of restraint which curbs and mitigates the effects of sin. The chief tasks of civil government are:

Civil government has as its appointed end, so long as we live among men, to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behaviour to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquillity.¹¹²

In short, it provides that a public manifestation of religion may exist among Christians, and that humanity be maintained among men.¹¹³

Thus we see that God's providential control of humankind and the provision of social institutions are not intended as the means of preserving creation for its own sake. Rather they are intended to lead to the glory of God through the protection of the Church and the maintenance of human society enabling us to glimpse something of the nature of the Creator through that which He has created.

COVENANT COMMON GRACE.

The Concept

As well as that divine goodness bestowed upon all creation and shown to the human race in general which are understood by some under the headings of universal common grace and general common grace it is argued that Calvin taught a third and progressively narrower area of God's grace shown otherwise than as saving grace.¹¹⁴

This is termed covenant common grace.

Even in a true and well-ordered church, the reprobate are called by the name of God. Here then Calvin indicates that there is a non-saving grace in New Testament times which is peculiar to those who have a name and a place in the Church.¹¹⁵

This concept of a covenant common grace operating within the fold of the visible Church requires a blurring of the distinction between regenerate and non-regenerate or elect and reprobate. It is clear that, although included in the term, by covenant common grace is not merely meant that men and women receive goodness from God as a result of living within the sphere of the Church's activity. This would encompass such instances as unbelievers receiving education or medicine from Christians intent on showing the love of Christ for all. The suggestion rather is that Calvin teaches that there is something more, a kind of spiritual half-way house between being dead in sin and alive in Christ Jesus.¹¹⁶ This is adduced from Calvin's references to the fact that all belonging to the household of the Church participate in the means of grace characteristic of the Church. However Calvin in this context is arguing that the sacraments are a means of grace despite the fact that they are received by the impious, not that they effectually operate in some gracious manner in the life of the unbelieving.¹¹⁷ 'They avail and profit nothing unless received in faith.'¹¹⁸

Calling

Calvin sees the preaching of the Word in itself as one of the clearest manifestations of divine goodness to those living within the covenant sphere. In the preaching of the Word there is made a 'promiscuous' offer of life, an offer received by elect and reprobate alike.¹¹⁹ Deprivation of the Word is seen as a trial and affliction or even a punishment.¹²⁰ However it is difficult to see that the mere hearing of the Word, whilst a blessing and mercy in itself, is enough to constitute the hearer a partial or temporary member of the covenant of grace.

Calvin makes it clear that the promiscuous offer of life, that external calling of all who hear the gospel received by elect and reprobate alike, is a double edged sword. The preaching of the Word in both its precepts and promises is designed to bring to mind the wickedness of the unregenerate:

God by his precepts stings the consciences of the ungodly, so as to prevent them from enjoying their sins while they have no remembrance of his

judgements, so, in his promises, he in a manner takes them to witness how unworthy they are of his kindness.¹²¹

It is true that according to Calvin the temporary faith exhibited by some unbelievers is the product of an 'inferior operation of the Spirit.'¹²² By means of this spiritual influence some temporary believers are favoured with a certain internal illumination of a non-saving character. Although Calvin does use the term 'grace' in this connection it is difficult to see how he can be using it as other than a loose synonym for an operation of God which produces in the life of the reprobate effects outwardly similar to those produced by saving grace in the life of the elect. Giving the reason for those who evidence temporary faith Calvin states:

The Lord, the better to convict them, and leave them without excuse, instils into their minds such a sense of his goodness as can be felt without the Spirit of adoption.¹²³

Adoption

Calvin does speak of 'the common adoption which extends as widely as the external preaching of the Word.'¹²⁴ It is clear however that Calvin does not use the term adoption with the same precision as is employed by many systematic Calvinists. In the passage under discussion Calvin is speaking of *adoption* as the vocation or calling of an entire people to sonship in Christ, the reference is clearly not to their actual adoption within the covenant of grace. The whole quotation reads:

But when an entire people is the subject of discourse, reference is made not to the secret election, which is confirmed to a few, but the common adoption, which spreads as widely as the external preaching of the word.

This can be contrasted with those instances where Calvin speaks of the two uses of the word Church, the primary meaning being:

That which is actually in God's presence, into which no person is received but those who are children of God by grace of adoption and true members of Christ by sanctification of the Holy Spirit.¹²⁵

It will be recognised that the latter interpretation of Calvin's use of adoption is more in line with his general teaching than the former which would see adoption as such applying to all who hear the gospel message. That even within a well ordered Church the reprobate are termed the children of God¹²⁶ is not as Kuiper argues because Calvin assumes that they occupy a mid-way position in regard to the election to eternal salvation. Rather it is because Calvin wishes to protect the Church from that 'ill-advised zeal for righteousness'¹²⁷ which would result in the rooting out the wheat as well as the tares.

General Election

Calvin makes it clear he does not identify membership of the covenant of grace with the particular election of individuals to salvation. Prior to particular election Calvin speaks of a general election of those who are part of the covenant community. God's choice of Abraham and his offspring is given¹²⁸ as an example of election in a wide sense, that is the giving of special revelation and care rather than as referring to individuals chosen from eternity to be saved. Calvin then goes on to introduce a narrowing distinction within his concept of election:

We must now add a second, more limited degree of election, or one in which God's more special grace was evident, that is, when from the same race of Abraham God rejected some but showed that he kept others among his sons by cherishing them in the church.¹²⁹

The 'more limited degree of election' must refer to that which we refer to as particular election. Calvin then goes on to deal with the particular election of individuals, explaining that God's:

free election has been only half explained until we come to individual persons, to whom God not only offers salvation but so assigns it that the certainty of its effect is not in suspense or doubt.¹³⁰

That Calvin makes a clear distinction between membership of the covenant community and particular election is seen later in the same passage.

It is easy to explain why the general election of a people is not always firm and effectual: to those with whom God makes a covenant, he does not at once give the spirit of regeneration that would enable them to persevere in the covenant to the very end. Rather, the outward change, without the working of inner grace, which might have availed to keep them, is intermediate between the rejection of mankind and the election of a meagre number of the godly.¹³¹

It is clear that Calvin is not afraid to say that God enters into a covenant with those who later fall away from the faith or never even come to acknowledge Him as Lord and God at any time. We can conclude that for Calvin, outward membership within the group of covenant people is a great blessing which flows from God's love and which is perverted into curse by the actions of responsible human beings.

Association

Certain people receive gifts and goodness from God out of regard for the fact that they are connected with the Church. Although some of these benefits touch the life of the spirit and others are bodily blessings all these special gifts have a temporal character.

According to Calvin a number of bodily benefits are given to unbelievers for the sake of the godly.¹³² Many temporal benefits were bestowed on the Jews as a nation because they constituted the ancient covenant people.¹³³ We are taught that all the blessings which the Jews received proceeded from their adoption.¹³⁴ Certain people received bodily benefits just because they were allied in some way to the Jews.¹³⁵

Sometimes those gifts bestowed on the non-elect were of a more directly spiritual character. Capernaum was visited with divine grace when the Son of God chose it as His dwelling place.¹³⁶ Apostolic favour given to Judas is called a clear mirror of divine favour.¹³⁷ Judas was personally endowed with outstanding gifts,¹³⁸ and was given the opportunity to turn to repentance,¹³⁹ as was Sapphira.¹⁴⁰ Calvin teaches that it was a

great honour for the Jews to be united in the flesh with Christ, speaking of 'this relationship established by grace.'¹⁴¹ Again, whilst it is undeniable that the non-elect are recipients of gifts from God's hand it is by no means clear that these gifts, intended either primarily for the good of the elect or the condemnation of the non-elect, are best considered as evidence of a distinct form of grace with a purpose other than that of the outworking of God's plan of redemption.

FULFILMENT

Calvin's view of the function of nature in God's plan of redemption have received less attention than other aspects of his work. Milner and Wallace have shown that the 'restoration of order' is an underlying theme of Calvin's view of sanctification.¹⁴² According to the teaching of Calvin God is working towards the reclamation of the entire cosmos. There is an unbroken continuity within creation.

Redeemed Cosmos and History

Because of sin the cosmos was subjected to disorder and corruption which works against that 'natural inclination, according to which the whole nature of things tends to its own preservation and perfection.'¹⁴³ The creation and all its parts are subjected to sin but continue to function in hope of redemption, 'they sustain themselves with this hope, postponing their longing until the incorruption which has been promised them is revealed.'

The renewal of which Calvin speaks includes the renewal of social order and history. Since all things were distorted and perverted in the fall the work of redemption returns the world to its original order. Christ is the one who has come to restore all things to order.

But since it is the office of Christ to bring everything back to its state and order, that is the reason why he [Isaiah] declares that the confusion or ruin that now exists in human affairs shall be removed by the coming of Christ; because at that time, corruptions having been taken away, the world shall return to its first origin.¹⁴⁴

This restoration of order is of course accomplished only gradually. The passages in Calvin describing the restoration of the world in the past tense, that all was 'brought back to a fixed order again at the coming of Christ,'¹⁴⁵ can be accounted for by Calvin's assurance that the work of Christ is complete and certain although perhaps not yet actualised. Calvin is clear that although begun the restoration of creation to its intended order still awaits.

Christ, by his death, has already restored all things as far as the power to achieve this and the cause of it are concerned; but the effect of it is still not fully visible because that restoration is still in the process of completion and so, too, our redemption, insofar as we still groan under the burden of servitude... Therefore, if at the present time, we see much confusion in the world, let that faith encourage us and revive us, the faith that Christ shall one day come and restore all things to their former condition.¹⁴⁶

The judgement which occurs at the end times is not to be understood as condemnation, rather Calvin refers to the last judgement as a final restoration of the order initiated by Christ:

The word 'judgement' is interpreted by some as 'reformation' and by others as 'condemnation.' I agree with the former interpreters who explain it such that the world must be restored to legitimate order. The Hebrew word 'mishpat' which is translated as 'judgement' means a rightly ordered constitution. Now we know that outside of Christ there is nothing but confusion in the world; and although Christ has already begun to set up the kingdom of God, his death was the true beginning of a properly ordered state and the complete restoration of the world.¹⁴⁷

It is the advent of Christ, His death and resurrection, which is for Calvin the eschatological pivotal point of the history of the world. At that moment the renovation of the world, all that was needful for the reordering of this sin afflicted, disordered world, was completed in Christ. Every subsequent event can have meaning only in relationship to the 'renovation of the world which took place at the advent of Christ,'¹⁴⁸ the decisive event in the history of the cosmos.

The redeemed believer lives in accordance with natural law not because of the necessity of survival which it guarantees, nor from the shame and restraint it imposes.

The faithful obey divine and natural law out of love.¹⁴⁹ The redeemed live in accordance with nature because they are being returned to the nature intended for them at the creation. The ordered life of renewed humanity plays its part in the restoration of an ordered creation. In the end the secondary means of ordering the present world are working to their own dissolution.¹⁵⁰ Until the time when we see God 'face to face' Christians are called to fulfil their vocations within the world in His service. With his eye on the future perfection brought into being by the return of Christ, the present life in which human beings exercise their God-given gifts and abilities is never disparaged by Calvin. For Calvin the Church is the spearhead of the renewal of both society and the cosmos.

SUMMATION

The Love of God

God is good to the totality of non-elect creation according to His inner nature and is acknowledged to love outwith the circle of the elect, loving all who bear His image.¹⁵¹ This love is not to be equated with the love God holds towards the elect, a love so clearly different from His attitude to the non-elect that when speaking of the differences between the faithful and the wicked Calvin can say: 'It is indisputable that no one is loved by God apart from Christ.'¹⁵² Calvin, however, contends that God has 'three degrees' of love for humanity.

In respect of the redemption that was purchased in the person of Him who gave Himself to death for us [Gal. 3:13] and became accursed to reconcile us to God His Father. That is the first degree of love, which extends to all men, inasmuch as Jesus Christ reaches out His arms to call and allure all men both great and small, and to win them to Him.

But there is a special love for those to whom the Gospel is preached, which is, that God testifies unto them that He will make them partakers of the benefit that was purchased for them by the death and passion of His Son. And forasmuch as we are of that number, we are double-bound already to our God.

Now let us come the third bond, which depends upon the third love that God shows us, which is that He not only causes the Gospel to be preached unto us, but also makes us to feel the power thereof, so as we know Him to be our Father and Saviour, not doubting but that our sins are forgiven us for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, who brings us the gift of the Holy Spirit, to reform us after His own image. When God imprints in our hearts the doctrine that

is preached unto us by the mouths of men, let us understand that he shows us a third love.¹⁵³

Thus we can see that for Calvin God's threefold love as exercised in all its forms is directed towards the salvation of human beings; the purchase of redemption, the preaching of the Gospel, and the regenerating operation of the Holy Spirit.

Whilst God, whose nature is love, most assuredly loves the created can we maintain that Calvin asserts that God acts with a separate common grace toward the world? The broad thrust of Calvin's teaching is that grace is insolubly tied to the merit of Christ,¹⁵⁴ the elect live directly within the orbit of this grace. The rest of creation live within the providence of a loving God which, on the way to the recreation of all things in Christ, brings many undisputed and undeserved benefits. Such is the extent of his soteriological thrust that whilst being absolutely clear that the non-elect receive many, good gifts from the hands of God Calvin can also just as clearly deny that the reprobate receive a single drop of God's goodness.¹⁵⁵

While the wicked are plied with the huge and repeated benefits of God's bounty, they bring upon themselves a heavier judgement. For they neither think nor recognize that these benefits come to them from the Lord's hand; or if they do recognize it they do not within themselves ponder his goodness... Therefore since the Lord, by his promises, invites man not only to receive the fruits of his kindness but also to think about them, he at the same time declares his love to man.¹⁵⁶

The gifts and goodness of God displayed in His providence and the promises of the Gospel fulfilled in Christ all originate within the love of God. However loving the origin of God's gifts we cannot therefore construe them within the same terminology as that graciousness of God which results in the regeneration of His people.

Universal Providence

In Calvin we have a full, clear and welcome recognition of the good done by God to the unregenerate and the rest of creation. Whilst there is a stress on the total depravity of mankind¹⁵⁷ Calvin acknowledges that which remains to mankind even in

a state of sin and is quick to recognise and utilise the good done by the unregenerate, the range of quotations from classical antiquity employed in his own works is impressive. Calvin is ever ready to 'spoil the Egyptians of their goods,' but for the man who supposedly, 'Developed alongside the doctrine of particular grace the doctrine of common grace,'¹⁵⁸ he is strangely reluctant to acknowledge the fact that the possession of these creational gifts and abilities is evidence of a separate grace towards the unregenerate which is founded outwith the incarnation and atonement of Christ.

Calvin unhesitatingly affirms a universal providence, but he does not proceed to develop what today would be termed a 'world view' in which the doctrine of universal providence is first of all isolated and then treated as the presupposition of the full range of human activity in the arts and the physical and social sciences. Calvin objects to the idea of separating creation from providence and understanding providence as the provision of a kind of neutral context for undifferentiated human life and activity rather than as God's special care for all that He has created. The coming of God Himself into the creation in the life and death of Christ with His purpose of redemption is too central to Calvin's thinking to be considered as incidental to the totality of creation and of moment only to the elect. God's care is experienced by His children and He provides for all things.¹⁵⁹ Within the context of this universal providence Calvin thinks that unbelievers are without excuse for not worshipping God and that God's activity is not entirely curtailed by that unbelief, but he does not proceed to employ the doctrine of universal providence as a neutral beginning place for all activity. God does indeed sustain creation and all humanity through the power of His Spirit, but Calvin's doctrine of providence is based on God's direct care of believers and His purpose of the redemption of all He has created.

Calvin insists that the doctrine of universal providence is only a partial understanding of God's providence. The purpose of Calvin's discussion of universal providence is not to define common ground between believer and unbeliever, but to insist that the whole order of nature is the result of the special providence of God. Although it is not until Book IV of the *Institutes* that he deals formally with the Church Calvin

points out even as early as Book I of the *Institutes* that the providence of God is concerned to maintain the Church. Thus the basic understanding of God's providence is not as the provision of a underlying common grace, but the conviction that God has power to protect the faithful and bring all things to completion in Christ. This means that every success is to be regarded as God's blessing and every calamity as His curse, so that even the evils visited upon the faithful belong to God.¹⁶⁰

Calvin speaks at times of God's goodness and gifts in order to avoid on one hand a denial of the reality of human depravity and to avoid on the other a depreciation of what God by his Spirit is doing outwith the family of faith. We must bear in mind, however, that although Calvin sometimes speaks of God's grace to humanity in general or to particular individuals amongst the unregenerate he does not use 'common grace' in a fixed technical sense as did Kuyper and those who followed him. Rather, following the language of the Scriptures, Calvin can just as easily speak in terms of God's kindness, of his mercy and gentleness,¹⁶¹ of his particular grace to all or to a few, or again simply, and most frequently, of God's providence.

The recognition of the power and effectiveness of those remnants of the image of God and the value of the natural constitution remaining in a creation which despite sin retains the imprint of the hand of God in its natural constitution militates against a view demanding an extra doctrine of animating common grace. It is possible to discern in Calvin's works those elements which gave rise to the later doctrine of common grace. We can also see that it was possible to develop this only by underplaying the value which Calvin places upon the remaining creational structures. That which remains points to that which is coming. In Calvin Christ is redeeming not only the elect but all creation.

FOOTNOTES

Biblical quotations refer to Calvin's Commentaries on the indicated passages.

- 1 L. Berkhof, *op cit*, p.430 cf. p.434 'He developed alongside of the doctrine of particular grace the doctrine of common grace.'
- 2 C. B. Partee, 'Calvin on Universal and Particular Providence', in *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, ed. Donald K. McKim Grand Rapids, Baker, 1984, p.71
- 3 H. Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, Grand Rapids, Smitten Book Co., 1928.
- 4 L. Berkhof, *op cit*, pp. 434-435. J. Murray, *Collected Works II*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1977, p.94. C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.14. A.A. Hoeksema, *Created in God's Image*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1986, p.190. M.C. Andrews, *Doctrine of Grace in St. Augustine and John Calvin*, unpublished STM thesis, University of Dubuque, 1963, pp.69-72
- 5 J.W. Anderson, *The Grace of God and the Non-Elect in Calvin's Commentaries and Sermons*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, New Orleans Baptist Seminary 1976. Anderson criticises Kuiper's categories of universal common grace, general common grace, covenant common grace and special grace on two grounds.
 1. The categories are helpful but they are superimposed on Calvin's thought.
 2. In the process of analysis Kuiper has lost sight of the unity of all grace and that its function is always to lead the sinner to God. For Calvin (Sermon on Job 37:7-13) every bite of food is a call to salvation.
- 6 A.A. Hoekema, 'The Covenant of Grace in Calvin's Theology', in *Calvin Theological Journal*, 22:2 Nov. 1967, p.134
- 7 E. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1952, p.40
- 8 J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Battles translation, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1960 I.5.14; Genesis 6:3,13; 39:1-2; Romans 2:4. Hereafter all references from the *Institutes* are indicated by Book, Chapter and Paragraph number alone.
- 9 I.3.1; II.2.18,20; II.5.5; III.24.8,17; Genesis 6:13; 19:12; 26:10; 35:16; 37:25-27; 38:7, 14.
- 10 Genesis 20:6
- 11 I.5.6; III.3.25; III.2.32 'The large benefits which the divine liberality is constantly bestowing on the wicked are preparing them for heavier punishment.' Calvin also argues that the use by the unregenerate of any gift from God is theft. Deuteronomy 28:12; Isaiah 65:20; Jeremiah 33:8
- 12 I.17.7,11; II.2.16; III.3.25; III.20.15; III.24.17; 'Introduction' to *Commentary on Genesis*, Genesis 4:20-22; 14:1-9; 18:23; 31:22; 33:4; 39:3-5; 41:9-13; Deuteronomy 32:7
- 13 III.20.15; III.24.2; IV.17.33; Genesis 4:20-22
- 14 III.2.32
- 15 H. Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, p.178

- 16 J. Calvin, Amos 9:7; Romans 5:18; Colossians 1:20; Hebrews 1:5
- 17 W. Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1980, pp.120ff.
- 18 J. Calvin, I.2.1
- 19 I.14.20
- 20 Genesis 1:2
- 21 Psalm 104:5
- 22 I.14.21
- 23 Psalm 104:32
- 24 Genesis 3:1
- 25 Jeremiah 5:25
- 26 Romans 8:20
- 27 I.5.6.
- 28 III.2.32
- 29 Psalm 104:16-18
- 30 II.2.12
- 31 II.2.14
- 32 II.2.12
- 33 I.14.20
- 34 I.14.21
- 35 I.14.22
- 36 I.14.22
- 37 F. Bronkema, *The Doctrine of Common Grace in Reformed Theology: New Calvinism and the Doctrine of Common Grace*, unpublished Th.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1928. Bronkema whilst fathering common grace upon John Calvin lays great emphasis upon the primarily soteriological thrust of Calvin's theology.
- 38 J. Calvin, I.16.4
- 39 I.16.2
- 40 I.2.1
- 41 K. Barth, 'No! Answer to Emil Brunner', in *Natural Theology*, pp.80ff; Niesel, *The Theology of John Calvin*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1980, p.67-68; T.F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, London, Lutterworth, 1949, pp.23-81
- 42 T.F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, p.36 Torrance emphasises that Calvin saw the divine image in terms of a mirror which reflects its object, God.

- 43 E. Brunner, 'Nature and Grace', in *Natural Theology*, pp.20ff
- 44 J. Calvin, I.15.2
- 45 I.15.3
- 46 I.15.8
- 47 I.15.1
- 48 II.2.4
- 49 II.2.12
- 50 I.5.12
- 51 II.3.5
- 52 Psalm 8:6
- 53 John 1:9
- 54 Sermon on Ephesians 3:14-19
- 55 K. Barth, 'No! Answer to Emil Brunner', p.79
- 56 S.E. Schreiner, *The Theatre of His Glory*, Durham, Labyrinth Press, 1991 p.56
- 57 *Ibid*, p.94
- 58 J. Calvin, Psalm 96:10
- 59 I.14.22
- 60 Genesis 9:6
- 61 Isaiah 45:18
- 62 IV.20:16
- 63 Genesis 4:15
- 64 *Harmony of the Five Books of Moses*, Leviticus 18:6
- 65 Sermon on Ephesians 5:31-33
- 66 II.2.15
- 67 Sermon on Deuteronomy 2:1-7
- 68 I.2.1. cf. I.5.4-8; I.16.1-2; I.17.1; II.2.17; III.10.2; IV.20.1. 'Preface' to *Commentary on Genesis*; Genesis 9:2, 5-6; 33:4.
- 69 III.20.13cf. I.5.3 & 7; I.16.3; Romans 1:21
- 70 III.9.3; Genesis 38:7
- 71 I.5.3; cf. I.16.1
- 72 I.16.7

- 73 I16.7
- 74 I.16.7; Genesis 38:7
- 75 I.16.5
- 76 I.2.1 cf. Genesis 9:5
- 77 Genesis 9:2
- 78 III.10.2; Genesis 4:20-22; 43:33-34
- 79 I.11.12; II.2.14 & 17; II.3.4; Genesis 4:20-22
- 80 II.3.4
- 81 I Cor. 7:1; I.16.7; Gen. 21.1
- 82 I.16.7.
- 83 Genesis 39:5 cf. Genesis 41:9-13
- 84 Genesis 26:6, 11
- 85 III.20.15
- 86 II.2.15
- 87 I.11.12
- 88 II.2.12-17
- 89 II.2.12
- 90 Titus 1:12 cf. I Corinthians 15:33
- 91 II.2.16
- 92 II.2.16
- 93 II.2.16
- 94 II.2.18
- 95 I.5.11
- 96 II.2.18
- 97 I.2.1 cf. I.5,4-8; I.16,1-2; I.17.1; II.2.17; III.10.2; IV.20.1. 'Preface' to Commentary on Genesis; Genesis 9:2,5-6; 33:4
- 98 I.3.3 cf. I.4.1; II.2.18-24; II.5.19; II.8.1; Genesis 26:10; 29:14; 31:43; Romans 2:14-15; 7:7, 15.
- 99 Romans 1:21
- 100 Genesis 38:7
- 101 I.5.10
- 102 I.5.14

- 103 B.A. Demarest, *General Revelation*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1982. Demarest categorizes Calvin's negative statements with regard to natural revelation under three heads:
- i) Statements intended to oppose the conjectural speculation of scholastic theology.
 - ii) Statements upholding reasons showing the inability of natural revelation to effect evangelical or saving knowledge of God.
 - iii) Rhetorical outbursts made in the heat of argument and never intended to reflect doctrinal commitment. pp.59-60
- 104 I.5.10
- 105 S.E. Schreiner, *op cit*, p.39
- 106 I.17.11
- 107 II.7.10
- 108 II.7.11
- 109 II.7.10
- 110 III.14.2-3
- 111 Romans 13:1 cf. IV.20.4
- 112 IV.20.2
- 113 IV.20.3 cf. IV.20.9
- 114 H. Kuiper, *op cit*, p.192 'The father of Reformed Theology also acknowledges a grace which is common to God's elect and all those who live in the covenant sphere and are members of the covenant of grace taken in its widest significance. Calvin himself calls this grace the grace of the covenant, (II.10.5; Acts 3:25), the grace of adoption (Gen. 25:23; Deut. 27:9-10; Ps. 95:6; Acts 2:39; 22:1), the common grace of election (Hebr. 1:5), and promiscuous grace. (III.21.7).'
- 115 *Ibid*, p.195 In connection with Calvin's comments on *I Corinthians 10* Kuiper argues that: 'Calvin intimates that it is possible to belong to the people of God in a certain sense and to receive many benefits which are restricted to the sphere of the covenant and yet fall from grace... So here again he speaks of a non-saving covenant grace granted to both elect and non-elect men in the New Testament times.'
- 116 *Ibid*, p.196 Kuiper argues that in III.21.7 Calvin intimates that adoption into the covenant holds a kind of middle place between the rejection of the human race and the election of a small number unto salvation.
- 117 IV.14.7
- 118 IV.14.17
- 119 Genesis 25:23
- 120 II.5.13; II.11.14
- 121 I.5.10
- 122 III.2.11

- 123 III.2.11 cf. III.2.12; 'Sometimes, however, he communicates it also to those whom he enlightens only for a time, and whom afterwards, in just punishment for their ingratitude, he abandons and smites with greater blindness.' III.24.8
- 124 Genesis 25:23
- 125 IV.1.7
- 126 Genesis 17:7
- 127 IV.1.13; IV.12.11
- 128 III.21.5
- 129 III.21.6
- 130 III.21.7
- 131 III.21.7 The original text which Battles has translated as 'intermediate' reads *medium quiddam* or 'middle way' whilst the French text speaks of *grace moyene* or 'middle grace.'
- 132 Matthew 9:2
- 133 Genesis 16:11
- 134 Deuteronomy 32:6
- 135 III.3.25; Genesis 16:11-12; 27:39; 36:1-5, 9-23.
- 136 Matthew 11:23
- 137 III.22.7
- 138 John 13:18
- 139 John 13:1,27
- 140 Acts 5:8
- 141 Romans 9:5
- 142 R.S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, Edinburgh and London, Oliver & Boyd, 1959. Particularly in Part III pp.103-192 Wallace shows that Calvin's doctrine of sanctification is built upon the concept of the 'restoration of order.'
- 143 Romans 8:20
- 144 Isaiah 65:25
- 145 Ephesians 1:10
- 146 Acts 3:21
- 147 John 12:31
- 148 II.10.2

- 149 R.S. Wallace, *op cit*, p.141f Wallace cites numerous passages demonstrating Calvin's positive evaluation of the teaching and effectiveness of natural law.
- 150 I Corinthians 15:24
- 151 L. Berkhof, *op cit*, p.434
- 152 Genesis 9:6
- 153 III.2.32
- 154 Sermons on Deuteronomy 4:36-38
- 155 II.17.1-2
- 156 Deuteronomy 28:12; Isaiah 65:20; Jeremiah 33:8
- 157 II.1.8, II.1.9, II.2.12. 'Therefore let us hold this as an undoubted truth which no siege engines can shake: the mind of man has been so completely estranged from God's righteousness that it conceives, desires, and undertakes, only that which is impious, perverted, foul, impure, and infamous. The heart is so steeped in the poison of sin, that it can breathe out nothing but a loathsome stench. But if some men occasionally make a show of good, their minds nevertheless ever remain enveloped in hypocrisy and deceitful craft, and their hearts bound by inner perversity.' II.5.19
- 158 L. Berkhof, *op cit*, p.434
- 159 E. De Peyer, 'Calvin's Doctrine of Providence', in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 10 (1938), De Peyer contends that 'General Providence gives to human nature its plenitude and completion. Particular Providence directs the effects of this nature. Saving Providence brings to man the elements of a new nature or of nature restored.'p.37 Within this structure he holds that particular providence is to be identified with common grace. The outline of Calvin's general outlook concerning providence is: a) general providence; b) particular providence or common grace; c) special providence or saving grace. p.35
- 160 I.17.7-8 cf. Daniel 9:14
- 161 I.5.14; II.2.17; III.3.25

REVIEW

From a standpoint sympathetic to the concerns of neo-Calvinism as outlined in chapter 1, we have examined the nature, function and validity of the doctrine of common grace as an understanding of the relationship of God with fallen creation and the effectiveness of the doctrine of common grace in harmonising our understanding of nature and grace within that branch of Reformed theology known as neo-Calvinism.

The questions to which we addressed ourselves at the outset were:

- i) Whether the doctrine of common grace in seeking to resolve certain tensions within the theological system introduces other tensions.
- ii) Does common grace under its various treatments provide a satisfactory means of understanding the relationship between God, Christ and the fallen world, or is there another way compatible with Reformed theology of accounting for the undoubted good which we encounter within a fallen and rebellious creation?

After reviewing this doctrine within the context of neo-Calvinism we can see that the history of common grace has given rise to disagreement, controversy and ecclesiastical disruption. It would appear that at least a *prima facie* case exists to support our case. Examination of representative theologians has shown that the doctrine of common grace has by no means been accorded universal and harmonious acceptance within the tradition. The fundamental flaw in the doctrine is that by separating creation from an integral relationship with the incarnate Christ we create tensions between the two graces in their origin, development and purpose.

In common grace modern neo-Calvinists take up an old weapon, develop and reinforce it and with it resist attempts to explain the natural in deistic, pantheistic and atheistic fashion. By means of common grace fallen nature, including humanity and its undoubted achievements, is brought under the control and guidance of God without any reference to the incarnate Christ. Kuyper maintains that without the common

grace intervention of God creation itself would descend into chaos. Common grace in restraining sin and enabling mankind to prosper is understood to undergird and make possible the continued existence of the natural and the development of its potentials. Thus the development of this doctrine has been seen as a solution to the problem of the tension caused by the undoubted good produced by those who are held to be totally depraved and alienated in their hearts from God. Its development has also fostered the growth of a specifically Christian involvement in political, social and cultural activity.

The insertion into creation of a grace divorced from the incarnate Christ and His redemptive purposes, by a neo-Calvinist theology stressing the importance of cultural activity, paradoxically leads to a devaluing of the created. By arguing that creation would have disappeared into chaos without the intervention of common grace and that all positive human ability and achievement is an addition by grace to the fallen state we can come close to arguing in effect not that nature is sustained by and for God's purposes of redemption but that an essentially evil and disintegrating creation has by intervention become graced. Common grace has to try to maintain a position between the two extremes of a dualistic view of grace and the Person of Christ on the one hand and the identification of creation with grace on the other.

The employment of the doctrine of common grace as a means of harmonising tensions within the formulations of a federal theological structure introduces a methodological weakness into the discussion of the relation of God to His creation. By stressing total depravity and the sovereignty of God in election there is posited an absolute spiritual dichotomy between the elect and the reprobate; and yet the good works of the reprobate cannot be denied. Utilising common grace as a possible solution to a problem in the harmonisation of doctrine leads to a distortion of the question of the relation of unbelievers to God and the progress of history toward its destined end. The formulation of the common grace problem in this manner leads to seeing common grace as a one sided problem focusing on the manner by which rebels enjoy so many good gifts at the hand of God. This lays down a restricted field of enquiry which

determines the conclusions to be reached before the journey begins. The formulation of the problem in this fashion demands the introduction of something akin to the doctrine of common grace.

A great weakness of this approach is that it tends to treat the common grace problem as though there were an absolute, observable divergence between the elect and the reprobate already existing in time. However whilst salvation is eternal and absolute, within creation we experience grace as fallen creatures unable to receive the coherence and fullness of meaning. It is with fear and trembling that we work out our salvation, groping individually and collectively towards that divergence which exists in supra-historical time and which shall be known fully on the Last Day.

The antithesis, whilst it is in principle absolute in epistemological terms, is not as clearly discernable as is sometimes portrayed by neo-Calvinists. The eschatological salvific divergence between regenerate and unregenerate is not the only factor which comes into play when discussing commonality in our relationship with God. Whilst there is a radical epistemic divergence based upon special grace there remains in nature an ontological and metaphysical commonality between regenerate and unregenerate. The failure to accept, welcome and explore the tensions inherent within creation between that which is provisional and imperfect within our experience and that which is yet to be revealed in Christ Jesus leads to a diminution of our comprehension of ourselves and the creation we inhabit. If we are to discern the dynamic of human existence and progress within history we must search for that which encompasses the judgement and renewal of all human life, history and creation.

The attempt by Kuyper to provide the Church with a means of entering the cultural and political arena was magnificent in its breadth of aim and in its confident hope. Unfortunately the doctrinal undergirding which Kuyper employed to substantiate this endeavour introduced tensions within neo-Calvinism which he was unable to resolve. As we have seen having formulated a position in which the relationship between God and creation was fundamentally separated from Christ's incarnation and atonement

Kuyper was unable to maintain the separation between the two supposed forms of grace. The dynamism of special grace forced itself out into affecting and developing the realm of the temporal. The concept of a common grace resting solely in the eternal Christ as Mediator of Creation proved unable to sustain the weight of cultural development. Although attempting to overcome the dualising tendencies of his position Kuyper has too firmly contained the redemptive grace of the incarnate Christ within the mystic Body of Christ for it to emerge as a determinative factor in the development of creation's potentials.

Not all within federal Calvinism have accepted the employment of common grace. The response of Herman Hoeksema to the doctrine whilst logically compatible with his understanding of the Calvinist theological system fails to appreciate the scope of God's revelation. In his effort to remove any suggestion or taint of Arminianism introduced by common grace Hoeksema constructs a system of such rigidity and determinative control that history disappears in a pre-temporal moment and God is understood to view creation as a plastic entity, a means to an end. God's love disappears in self love and in the world of human beings love is lost in the abyss of the antithesis. Hoeksema's position however does have strengths which we can utilise. His understanding of the fall as an ethical event which did not change the essential nature of creation is helpful in that it allows the possibility of creational development according to its own structures, although fallen. His understanding of the organic nature of creation firmly links humanity to the cosmos.

Klaas Schilder's contribution to the debate on common grace is most valuable. His understanding of humanity as covenantally responsible office-bearers of God, called and equipped to develop the potentials of creation in obedience to the cultural mandate, points us in the direction of a Christ centred drive to fulfilment in redemption. The emphasis on Christ as the centre of history and the One in whom the reality of an harmonious culture appears is one which must be maintained and developed.

Cornelius Van Til whilst being unable to escape the consequences of starting from the eternal decrees outwith history in an approach which does little to dispel the 'mystery' of common grace is able to avoid the extremes of Hoeksema. Van Til unfortunately is unable to propose any real commonality or grace for the reprobate, his reluctance to work out the nature of Christ's relationship to creation produces a split within the Christian ground motive fragmenting its integrated character. More positively, pointing us toward a covenantally conditioned creation again leads us in the direction of re-establishing the link between the incarnate Christ and creation.

Herman Dooyeweerd's understanding of creation containing potentials for development within history leads us in the direction of the becoming creation yet to be fulfilled in the new central point of existence, Christ Jesus. Dooyeweerd more clearly stresses the Christological basis of all grace and as such understands grace only within the framework of the movement towards redemption. Unfortunately Dooyeweerd's retention of the distinction between special and common grace introduces an inconsistency in his formulation of the biblical ground motive. In effect Dooyeweerd uses the term common grace to describe the effects upon a law-ordered creation of God's purposes of redemption in the incarnate Christ. As we go forward we must overcome this inconsistency and attempt to discern how grace and creation can be seen to be related without the intrusion of common grace.

John Calvin the Father of Reformed theology, welcomed the recognition of the good done by God in relation to the non-believing and objected to the idea of separating creation from providence. Creation was not a form of neutral context for undifferentiated human activity but rather the focus and context of God's providential activity. We must recognise Calvin's acceptance of the effectiveness of those remnants of the image of God and the value of the creational structures remaining after the fall. These militate against the necessity of introducing an additional doctrine of sustaining and enabling grace. The emphasis in Calvin on the drive to the fulfilment of redemption in Christ should become the controlling emphasis in our understanding of the creation which we inhabit.

Having come to the conclusion that common grace under its various treatments does not provide a satisfactory means of understanding the relationship between God, Christ and the fallen world, we must proceed to establish whether there is another way compatible with Reformed theology of accounting for the undoubted good which we encounter within a fallen and rebellious creation. This we shall attempt to do in Section III. In the light of the incarnate Christ we must focus our attention upon that which is already common in the following areas: the nature of the creation; the human condition and our shared life within a fallen creation; and the nature of the redemption and the antithesis. By doing so we should come to an understanding of our common cultural task and find a basis for co-operation between the regenerate and the unregenerate.

SECTION III

INTRODUCTION

CHRIST AT THE CENTRE

As used in Scripture grace is the undeserved favour of God which works toward the redemption complete in the incarnate Christ. Concretely it means the attitude or disposition of favour on the part of God toward that which has lost any claim to His love. We do have 'gifts of grace' but these gifts are always seen in the light of God's disposition. Unbelievers receive many gifts from God which are undoubtedly undeserved, but these gifts are the fruits of God's grace building towards the final redemption. As Dooyeweerd reminds us, the good things unbelievers receive are not grace for the apostate individual but for mankind in Christ.¹

We have noted how neo-Calvinist theologians in general are unclear as to the connection of common grace with Christ's redemptive work. In making the connection between Christ and creation Kuyper employed a distinction between the work of Christ in creation and in redemption. Thus, in order to substantiate Kuyper's concept of a non-redemptive grace sustaining a creation otherwise separated from God due to the fall and liable to disintegrate into chaos and nothingness, God's work of sustaining and developing creation was split off from His work of redemption. That Kuyper was unable to maintain this distinction and also taught that the objects produced by common grace will enter heaven is indicative that he found difficulty in keeping the realms of creation and redemption apart. As we have seen the clear distinction between the realms of common and special grace which he propounded at the outset of his work became less clear toward the end.

Creation and Redemption

Both creation and redemption have their basis in God's covenant with His people. Since God's grace is expressed within the framework of covenant it is this grace which is the undergirding right and motive for both creation and redemption, the two are not to be separated in an inherently dualistic fashion. The world was created by Christ and is redeemed by Him and this is the basis of its continuance and development. God's favour is not an added element to creation. Rather it is the background and ruling motif in the work of creation.

We cannot read passages such as *Colossians 1:15ff* and *Hebrews 1:1-4* without being struck by the intimate connection between creation and redemption in Christ. In *Colossians 1* Paul speaks in vv. 13 and 14 of Christ and redemption, in vv. 16 and 17 of Christ and creation and then in v.18 reverts to redemption by saying that this Christ in whom all things were created is head of the Church. Berkouwer notes that:

Especially in *Col. 1* we may observe the deep harmony of the soteriologic and cosmologic aspect, because the point is not a dualistic condition of Christ as Creator *and* Saviour, but the absolute fullness of the salvation in Christ, *by* and *in* whom are all things.²

To a large extent this emphasis has been lost by the proponents of common grace. The dualism between creation and redemption is linked to the distinction between Christ as Mediator of creation and Mediator of redemption. At this point it is well to remember the warning of Dooyeweerd that:

As soon as you attempt to understand common grace apart from Christ and refer it back exclusively to God as Creator, you are driving a wedge in the ground motive of the Christian religion between *creation* and *redemption* and introducing an inner discord into this ground motive whereby it loses its radical and *internal* character.³

This is supported by the statement of Schilder who, when referring to Christ as the firstborn, origin and *hoofdpunt* or chief point, says:

These last words, borrowed from Paul's letters give testimony to Christ's cosmological and soteriological significance as *inseparable from each other*.⁴

Berkouwer in a lengthy passage emphasises the integral relationship between the soteriological and creational. After indicating the relationship between *John 1:1* and *John 1:14* is one of coherence he goes on to explain it thus:

But this Jesus is not a *strange* Saviour, but he enters *his* world, which, estranged from the Word-revelation, prefers the darkness above the light, which manifests itself again in Israel (his own) when they are offended by Christ's lowly state. It is he, who, as the Logos, has made all things, who was eternally with God and who is God himself, the Revelation of God, also in his creation. For he, who is the Revealer of the Father in his historic appearance in the flesh, is the Revelation of God *in* and *from the beginning*. He is the eternal *Word* which God sends forth also in the creation of the world. In *this* Word is the communion with God. He, who is the light of the world in the reconciliation, is the Logos who is the light of men from the beginning. All communication with God is communication *in him*. He is the Word, God's *speech*.⁵

Creation and redemption in Christ cannot be separated without doing violence to the biblical revelation. The fallen world is to be viewed only through the light of the incarnate Christ. Humans are made in the image of God which we find most clearly revealed in the true image, the incarnate Christ. God's favour or love is the basis of the covenant made with Adam and after Adam broke the covenant it was renewed in the second Adam, Jesus Christ. The Word which in the beginning was God and was with God is the eternal Son who is the revelation of God's favour to all of humanity. The Son is He who upholds the covenant between God and humanity and became part of creation to that end. If the covenant failed we would know true meaninglessness, the entire creation finds its existence conditioned and sustained by the covenant of grace established by God. The existence of creation outside the covenant of grace and outside Jesus Christ as the head of the covenant is unthinkable. The Son's work of redemption has reference to the whole of creation.

Abstract Prolongation

Kuyper argues that when Adam fell God postponed the sentence of death which was to follow immediately upon disobedience and so prolonged the world.⁶ This

prolongation by common grace is envisaged initially as a static undergirding, existing merely to give special grace the opportunity of redeeming the elect. This is to view the elect as abstracted from the creation in which they live, and remove them from the relationships which sustain them, as we find in some understandings of the antithesis. We are redeemed in the wholeness of life in the midst of all our relationships, and the redemption of those relationships in Christ is only possible when they rest in the favour or grace which He establishes. If these relationships existed only as remnants of the original blessing of all created things in the covenant originated with Adam and grace was then intruded to save the elect from their fallen state then believers would be truly alien in the world.

It is on the basis of Christ as the focal point of our understanding that we shall endeavour to work out our appreciation of the world we inhabit and our continuing relationship with God. To do so we shall, with Dooyeweerd, employ the Creation-Fall-Redemption structure as encapsulating the existence of our being in the dynamic of God's movement towards fulfilment.

From a theological position sympathetic to the concerns of the neo-Calvinists we shall endeavour to outline an understanding of the relationship between God and His creation which does not need the insertion of common grace and yet remains within the Reformed tradition. Whilst there are sources outwith the stream of theology analysed who provide valuable insight, such as Barth, we shall attempt to construct our approach employing insights drawn mainly from the theologians discussed, preserving the Reformed emphasis whilst rejecting the dualism introduced by common grace.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 H. Dooyeweerd, *Vernieuwing en bezinning*, p.38
- 2 G.C. Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, p.257, ft.47
- 3 H. Dooyeweerd, *Vernieuwing en bezinning*, p.387
- 4 K. Schilder, *Wat is de Hemel?*, p.226
- 5 G.C. Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, p.285f
- 6 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, I.94ff

CHAPTER EIGHT

CREATION

CREATION

The discussion of common grace by its proponents can be categorised as seeing common grace existing to sustain and develop fallen nature whilst special grace exists to reverse the course of fallen nature in the salvation of the elect. Thus we find a clear breach between orders of creation and redemption. The discussion of common grace has followed upon Kuyper's lines with common grace fulfilling an undergirding, sustaining and preserving function within creation whilst special grace essentially saved individuals from out of creation. If we are to find a more integrated understanding of God's relationship with the entirety of His creation we must begin by trying to discern the basis upon which creation exists and the place and nature of humanity within creation. The assumption by God of the created and His presence and work in the midst of creation is the dynamic upon which the redemption is mediated.

Becoming Creation

The cosmos was brought into being with a divinely ordained purpose of fulfilment. The statement in Genesis 1 that the world was created good is not to be understood as encapsulating a static ideal of perfection. What the term *tob* indicates is not 'perfection' conceived of as an absolutised ideal, but 'suitability for a purpose.' God's work of creation was brought to its conclusion and His sabbath entered with 'everything perfect in its kind, so that every creature might reach the goal appointed by the Creator, and accomplish the purpose of its existence.'¹ From the very beginning the creation has been in the process of becoming.

The good external purpose of the existence of creation and the basis of its continuation is that of full communion between God and creature. We are involved in the continuing process of becoming, fully authentic being lies ahead of us as a promise of fulfilment. In the Garden Adam and Eve had to work out their relationship with God in the midst of creation. Ultimately creation itself will be formed anew and become a world serving the radically renewed humanity remade in the image of Christ in their service of glorifying God. In this, the redemption wrought by the incarnate Christ is neither unconnected with creation nor a disruption of creation. Rather redemption is a fulfilment of that for which creation was brought into being.

Dependent Creation

That this world in which we live and move was created by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ carries the implication that the creation and that which it contains is itself and in its intention good and of importance, 'For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.' (*I Timothy 4:4*) Not only is everything by reason of its origin and in its created purpose good this also means that there is nothing created which can be considered absolute, creation is contingent. 'Nothing is less than a creature of God, but no more either.'² Calvin holds that God, in bringing into being out of nothing all that exists, proves that He alone is eternal and self-existent.³ In relation to Him all else exists on another plane of being. Because it is created by the divine there is nothing within creation which is in itself God or finds the root of its being from within itself.

Dooyeweerd's philosophy, from within the creation motif, emphasises both the plurality of existence and also indicates the tensions and disruptions which result from failing to discern the cohering structural laws and norms which obtain for each sphere of existence. The universe which is our environment and of which we are an integral constituent part is a universe with a purpose and governed by a rule which originates outwith itself. In Van Til's phrase 'The laws are but generalizations of God's method of working with the particulars.'⁴

Because the creation finds its ground outwith itself and in the faithfulness of its creator we can discover a reality in diversity and development. Rather than being mere appearances of an internally related dynamic which erupt in surface appearances our diversity of existence finds both a unity and an individual purpose beyond itself which brings coherence of understanding and meaning. Van Til unhesitatingly points us towards the ontological Trinity as the solution to the question of unity and diversity which we find within creation. It is within this same trinitarian dependency that we discover not only substance but meaning and purpose in creation. Only when seen in relation to its creator can our existent world have direction and purpose, 'God is our concrete universal.'⁵ In Van Til's concept of understanding and meaning each aspect of reality finds an individual dignity and purpose beyond its mere existent being, all reality being covenantally conditioned or seen in relationship to God. All human beings are either covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers. It is here in the 'concrete universal,' especially as He discloses Himself to us in Christ Jesus the Incarnate God, that we can find a connecting link between creation and redemption, nature and grace.

COVENANT

Nature of Covenant

In Calvin we are told of the importance of stressing that, based upon God's faithfulness, there is only one covenant.⁶ This is developed in Schilder who, as we saw, emphasises that the entire sweep of history is to be interpreted in terms of the one covenantal movement.⁷ That which is created is brought to development in its unfolding as that which is created fulfils its potentials within the covenant of God. Covenant is the form and the intention of God's relationship with His creation which is ultimately fulfilled in the Christ.

It is the form of the relationship which we experience with God. Not a subject - object form, covenant is an inter-subjective relationship between God and man, Creator and creature. Not two subjects on the same level, but a relationship in which a Subject in sovereign love makes room for other subjects as distinct from Himself, yet

without losing anything of the divine sovereignty of his own subjectivity. It is the intention of the relationship as this, which although fulfilled in Christ, must be actualised in created experience. Covenant means encounter with God - experiencing His deliverance, promise, threat and commandment. The people as a whole and the individual must respond to these initiatives of God. Covenant makes history in being expected, failed and realised.

In the declaration 'I will be your God,' the Creator takes the initiative. In His grace He turns toward fallen men and women and makes them Israel. The covenant rests entirely upon His free favour. As a divine pledge the covenant is future-oriented, in the covenant God binds Himself and promises that in the future He will show the same grace and power that He has done in the past. Unilateral in origin the covenant is bilateral in purpose, God takes the initiative and mankind responds. God asks of His covenant partner trust and obedience, 'You shall be my people.' The law is the instrument of covenant, inviting and caring, 'Do this and live.' The story of creation is the story of the faithfulness of the great covenant partner in response to the unfaithfulness of the lesser covenant partner.

The covenant estrangement between God and His people is so terrible that the Mediator between God and man could only effect reconciliation at the cost of His life. In His person Jesus came to fulfil the covenant, He was the obedient human in whose life and death the covenant was fulfilled so that the blessing of God might be made known in the world. The unique relationship between Son and Father takes place within the context of covenant, central to it is the living out of the faithfulness of the Father and the response in perfect obedience of the Son.

The thread which runs through history is God's intention of adopting people as His children, to make them His faithful covenant partners. The covenant, although focused upon Israel, has a universal purpose. The God of the Israel of the covenant is the God of the entire creation. He acts in and through nature and the history of all creation does not happen apart from Him. His particular concern with Israel will

at the end be seen to have served the purpose of including all people in His redemptive work.

Covenant Creation

Neo-Calvinists generally tend to see covenant principally in terms of law,⁸ yet covenant, whilst containing a legal relationship, is founded upon grace. It is by God's grace that the covenant was established and it is by His grace that it is fulfilled in Christ, it is He who enables men and women, the crown of creation, to turn toward him. In a broad sense all God's dealings with creation are covenantally conditioned through His immediate relationship with mankind as an integral part of creation, in the promise and demand, blessing and curse which are involved in the one covenant movement. At this point we find in neo-Calvinism a disjunction between the covenant of works, or fulfilment of the law, and the covenant of grace. 'There is a stark contrast in Holy Scripture between the covenant of grace which is based on faith and the covenant of works which is based on human action.'⁹ It is this stark contrast in which the covenant of works is seen as underlying and making necessary the covenant of grace which allows the neo-Calvinists to see creation primarily in terms of law structures which embody God's sovereign will.

One of the consequences of this view of creation is that it gives undue weight to a static ideal of perfection and underplays the covenantally conditioned provisional and becoming nature of the creation. Rather than existing as part of and for the sake of the covenant creation is viewed as a neutral substratum necessitating direct divine intervention outwith the incarnation to explain the progress and development of fallen creation. Creation is interpreted in light of its own terms rather than in light of the redemption accomplished in Christ Jesus.

Because it is the God of the covenant who regulates the course of nature (*Genesis* 8:22; *Psalms* 104; 107; 148) we can depend upon creation continuing to exist in an orderly manner and can make decisions and plan development relying on the fact that the created universe is both knowable and predictable. The good creation is an

orderly creation. However as well as being predictable our creation is not a closed system but is open to change. Nature is not allowed rest but rather is driven on towards a goal (*Romans 8:19-21*), we exist within a reality which is in the process of becoming. Creation and providence are, as Calvin indicates, inseparably joined.¹⁰ The world was created with a purpose beyond its own bare existence and God guides all things to their appointed end. We may with Calvin:

refer to Christ's statement that from the very beginning he and the Father were always at work [*John 15:17*]; and to Paul's teaching that 'in him we live, move and have our being' [*Acts 17:28*]; also, what the author of the Letter to the Hebrews says, meaning to prove the divinity of Christ, that all things are sustained by his mighty command [*Heb. 1:3*]... God so attends to the regulation of individual events, and they all so proceed from his set plan, that nothing takes place by chance.¹¹

We are only able to grasp that purpose of God when we stop thinking in personal terms and begin to find the realisation of all existence in covenant fellowship with God. At this point we must beware the danger of excessive anthropocentrism. The non-human creation assuredly exists for the service of humanity, 'God himself has shown by the order of creation that he created all things for man's sake.'¹² However, we should not with Schilder take this primary purpose of creation to mean that the creation has no relatedness of its own to God, that it is an undifferentiated entity in which creation's 'continuation and development manifest no grace. Neither do they manifest condemnation or judgement.'¹³ At this point Schilder maintains that the history which is to be interpreted only in terms of the one covenantal movement is human history. Scripture, however, knows nothing of an abstract createdness as such. The sun and moon, sea creatures, storms, mountains and hills praise the name of the Lord (*Psalms 148*). Creation is neither a neutral substratum of existence providing a stage upon which God's work of human redemption is enacted, nor is it to be considered in any way independent of God, it is the living God who determines and conditions all existent reality. Creation testifies to its own finitude and therefore speaks of an infinitely free creating God who transcends creation.

Creation is the underlying covenantal work, redemption is the continuance and the recreation. Schriener helpfully reminds us that 'In Calvin's view, God's redemptive purpose encompasses creation to the second coming. As the realm of God's creation and action, all of history unfolds under the divine plan of salvation.'¹⁴ It is in the Christ that the covenant, or mutual radical orientation of God and man, the head of creation, comes into its fullness.¹⁵ For most people God is only a shadow on the horizon, if consciously present at all. For many He is something present if dimly defined. For a few He is much and influences every aspect of life. Only for Christ is He everything.

It is to covenant fulfilment that God calls and draws us, the moment when He shall be 'all in all.' It is this which the New Testament describes as the fulfilled covenant communion of God in Christ with those who have become conformed to the image of Christ. This fulfilment will be shared by everything within creation. In *Revelation 21:3* we learn that the dwelling of God will be with men in the new heaven and new earth, believers will be in heaven as they continue to live on the new earth. The promise that God will dwell with them and that they shall be His people are the terms of the central promise of the covenant of grace. The fact that this promise is repeated in the vision given to John of the new earth indicates that it is in the new earth that God finally grants the fulfilment of the promises of the covenant. On the old earth we receive the firstfruits, on the new earth we receive the 'full harvest' of the covenant.¹⁶

Christ and Creation

Creation bears the imprint of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and is principally intended as the arena of our encounter with Him. In this way creation can be understood, not only as the arena, but as the first step of God's redemptive acts in Christ. We look at creation with an eye to Christ; just as God the Father is the Creator of heaven and earth so the Son is the instrument of that creative process. Creation is seen as the work of the Word who became flesh (*John 1*), of Christ (*I Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16-17*) and of the Son (*Hebrews 1:2*). These passages,

which move from the creating to the redeeming work of Christ without discernable break, are more than sources of information concerning relationships within the Trinity and should be understood as indicating an integral connection between creation and the work of Christ. Hendrikus Berkhof sums up their import when he writes:

The statements want to say: the world was created in view of Jesus Christ; God would not have created the world if not in connection with his coming and exaltation.¹⁷

Redemption in Christ means that creation is returned to its original goal through the one who created it and upholds its existence. Created in light of Christ, His incarnation and exaltation, without Him the world would not have existence. It is the book of the redemptive grace of Christ which contains a chapter on nature and its orderly and purposeful continuation, not the book of nature which contains a chapter on grace. Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, in whom we see the Father is our assurance of reality, it is in Him that we have true knowledge that creation exists, that there is a sphere of reality dependent upon but outwith God. Creation may well be, as argued by Kuyper, the arena in which is played out the drama of salvation but as well as being the external basis or even opportunity of grace creation also and more fundamentally finds its own inner basis in the redemptive activity of Christ. Creation is the outward appearance of covenant.

The concept of creation as a closed event with the resulting pre-fall cosmos existing in a paradisiacal state of rectitude and with mankind living in relationship with God under a covenant of works reverses the order of things. If we understand creation from within a theological viewpoint in which Christ enters as an *ad hoc* counter-measure, a gracious response in order to restore a state of existence lost at the fall in which man was able to know salvation through his own work, then we find the order of saving grace logically as well as chronologically subservient to the order of nature and law.

Because after the fall God is understood to continue to deal with mankind as a generality upon the basis of the covenant of works or legal requirement of the fulfilment of the law, federal Calvinism's logical priority of nature over grace requires an independent rationale for creation's continued existence. Also when the covenant of grace in Christ is understood as an external reaction on the part of God as the means of rescuing man from out of his existent fallen condition, this brings the attendant necessity of a doctrine of common grace to explain the continuance of that existent fallen condition. Through this relative independence of creation in common grace we find results such as Kuyper's contention that the fruits of common grace will be found in heaven. Thus aspects of creation are understood to find their fulfilment outwith Christ's work of redemption. In the doctrine of common grace the position of mankind as an integral constituent part of creation is disrupted and humanity is separated from the remainder of the cosmos.

THE IMAGE OF GOD

If an acceptable understanding of the good performed by the unregenerate and their relationship to God and His elect is to be constructed we must proceed from that which is common in creation not, as with Hoeksema, from that which separates. Any solution to the 'common grace problem' as well as acknowledging the continuing significance of the creation and God's purpose in the covenant must come to an understanding of the place of humanity within creation. Our understanding of humanity must be founded upon the basis of those remnants of the image of God in which we were created (*Genesis 1:26*) and which we retain despite our fallenness (*Genesis 9:6*); and upon the natural abilities and desires retained by virtue of our created status and life within God's creation.

To understand the place and functioning of humanity within the creation we must first discover the nature of man. According to the Bible and the traditional teaching of Reformed theology our essence lies in the fact that we are created as the image of God (*Genesis 1:26,27; 9:6; James 3:9*). We are also spoken of as being, and bearing in our character, the image of God (*I Corinthians 11:7; 15:49*). It is as such that we,

whilst remaining part of creation, are differentiated from the rest of the created universe and stand alone as the crown of creation.

Although it is the image of God which distinguishes humanity from all other creatures, if we wish to discover the nature of the image of God we must not look to those aspects of our constitution which separate us from the animals such as reason, moral judgement etc., rather we must look primarily to 'Christ, who is the image of God' (*II Corinthians 4:4 cf. Colossians 1:15*). The invisible God is made visible in His incarnate Son, Jesus Himself tells us 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father' (*John 14:9*). It is the Son who 'is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being' (*Hebrews 1:3*). What we discover in Christ's perfection is what God intended and intends for humanity and creation. Central to the life of Christ is His relationship with God, with neighbour and with creation.

Image as relationship

If we maintain that the image of God which is borne by man is the capacity and the ability to live in a covenant keeping relationship of love with God and with his fellow man in the context of the environment they share then we can attain a dynamic conception of the image of God in man in which we distinguish between creation and image.¹⁸ The image of God and its eventually perfect restoration in humanity redeemed through Christ forms the presupposition for the created person in the wholeness of existence. The image itself is not to be discovered in the static possession of attributes. Rather it is to be discovered or disclosed in the employment of our created qualities and potentials in active loving service of God, following our calling and the fulfilment of our covenant relationship.

Calvin argued that, 'although God's glory shines forth in the outer man, yet there is no doubt that the proper seat of his image is in the soul.' Pointing towards a relational understanding of the image Calvin writes that:

The integrity with which Adam was endowed is expressed by this word [image of God], when he had full possession of right understanding, when he had his affections kept within the bounds of reason, all his sense tempered in right order, and he truly referred his excellence to exceptional gifts bestowed upon him by his Maker.¹⁹

The image was visible in 'the light of the mind, in the uprightness of the heart, and in the soundness of all the parts.'²⁰ The image of God was to be found in our activity in living before God and reflecting His glory.

The two capacities of the soul which Calvin relates to the image of God are the understanding and the will.²¹ These capacities however do not in themselves constitute the image of God.²² The basic understanding of the image in Calvin's work is encapsulated in his metaphor of the mirror. T.F. Torrance writes:

Only whilst the mirror actually reflects an object does it have the image of that object. There is no such thing in Calvin's thought as an *imago* dissociated from the act of reflecting. He does use such expressions as *engrave and sculptured*, but only in a metaphorical sense and never dissociated from the idea of mirror.²³

Dooyeweerd retains Calvin's emphasis on both capacity and function by which 'God is creaturely mirrored in the heart, soul, or spirit of man. This is the religious centre and the origin of all created reality, so the whole of temporal existence was concentrated on that origin in the soul of man before the fall into sin.'²⁴ Dooyeweerd goes on to relate this mirroring function to the whole of temporal reality through the disclosing activity of man in his service of God.

Retained Image

If we maintain this active concept of the image as being a function of man's existence in relationship to God we must ask whether the image has been lost with the advent of sin. If the image is to be found solely in the actuality of relationship then it must be considered completely lost with the destruction of that relationship in the fall.

God deals with mankind in relational categories, which categories are the foundation of the concept of covenant, as maintained by Hoeksema.²⁵ This personal relation is irreversible. We are created by God in His image, which at the least implies that, analogical to God, we have the freedom to act and in action to exercise power and choice. We are able to respond, be counter-players, take an initiative; in fact on behalf of and under God we even exercise dominion over the rest of creation with the responsibility to fashion and develop it. We however prefer to use our freedom to attempt to withdraw from the intended encounter and fellowship with God. Instead of exercising our natural abilities in a God imaging fashion in love of God and neighbour we choose to exercise our abilities in love of self. This is sin, that we deny our image bearing character and demand the autonomous exercise of our God-given powers. Thus we become God's competitor instead of His partner. Consequent to the fall, in defiance of God, we attempt to exercise our constructive impulses upon an apostate and rebellious course. In the life of the natural man and woman God is at best marginalised and only apprehended as a threat to the autonomy of the individual and society.

Although at times it seems as if he argues that the image was lost in the fall and speaks of the image having been 'destroyed' by sin and 'obliterated' by the fall²⁶ Calvin does maintain that the fallen man is still in the image of God. It is the common retention of this remnant of the image, although marred and distorted, which is the motivation for us to treat all people with kindness:

We are not to consider that men merit of themselves but to look upon the image of God in all men, to which we owe all honor and love... Therefore, whatever man you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse to help him... Say, 'He is contemptible and worthless'; but the Lord shows him to be one to whom he has deigned to give the beauty of his image... Say that he does not deserve even your least effort for his sake; but the image of God, which recommends him to you, is worthy of your giving yourself and all your possessions.²⁷

Despite the fall, we retain God's image in principle. It is due to the fact that we still retain God's image in this sense that we have both the capacity and responsibility to

perform deeds of civic righteousness and lead a relatively good moral life. We are still duty bound, and able within the limits of our creaturely fallenness, to develop the creation potentials implanted from the beginning in our being, to live in relative harmony with others, to labour and create, to perform acts of charity and selflessness.

That we conceive of the image of God in a dynamic fashion in which the glory of the image of God shines forth in our service of God does not mean that we must hold that fallen men and women who exercise their powers in rebellion against God have lost the image completely. Hoeksema maintains not just that the image was lost at the fall but that, 'through the fall it was changed into its very opposite.'²⁸ Schilder asks how fallen man, using his qualities and abilities in rebellion, can reflect or image God. 'Can man's humanness as such be the image?' asks Schilder rhetorically.²⁹ His argument is that if the image means the active loving service of God then it disappears when man rebels against God. Against this we would maintain that the image is not only our active obedience in imaging God within creation but also our created capacity for and need of this type of covenant-fulfilling relationship. If our capacity to enter and our need to fulfil this active imaging relationship with God had disappeared completely with the fall, wherein lies the sin of the unregenerate who stubbornly refuse to enter into or fulfil a right relationship with God?

Some, such as Hoeksema³⁰ and Schilder³¹ maintain that although it is possible for us to regain that image in the ultimate future, subsequent to the fall we no longer bear the image in the present. For Schilder *Genesis 9:6* is interpreted as saying much about our created being in Paradise before the fall and most likely speaks about a future when the image may be regained, but in his opinion it says nothing about the present.³² It is difficult to harmonise this with a passage which informs us that we who are fallen people should not commit murder because our victim would inevitably be someone who is in the image of God. As Calvin remarks when commenting on this passage:

Should any one object, that this divine image has been obliterated, the solution is easy; first, there yet exists some remnant of it, so that man is possessed of no small dignity.³³

Likewise in *James 3:9* where we are instructed not to curse men who are made in God's image. At this point James does not refer to our cursing our brother and sister Christians but rather our cursing of men *anthropous* - a term designating human beings in general whether regenerate or not. However sunk in sin a person may be God is displeased when we curse him because that person is still made in the image of God. To use the terms employed by A.A. Hoekema fallen man retains the structural aspect of the image whilst having lost the functional aspect.³⁴

Created Image

Our contention that the image of God consists in the capacity and purpose³⁵ of living in a loving relationship with God does not divorce the image from the created. It is as created that the human being images God. The created is not however to be understood as the presupposition of the image, as though the purpose of the image of God within man was to serve and develop the potentials of creation. The totality of creation itself, including our humanness, exists to glorify God. This we do by actively conforming to God with all our qualities. The created qualities serve us in our functioning and it is within creation that we image God. In describing man as 'the only creature that can perceive and respond to the creative word,'³⁶ H. Berkhof brings together these two elements of the image. Whilst maintaining that the functioning aspect is the primary element of the image A.A. Hoekema rightly maintains that:

The image of God in man must... be seen as involving both the structure of man (his gifts, capacities and endowments) and the functioning of man (his actions, his relationships to God and to others, and the way he uses his gifts).³⁷

The capacity to mirror God in a creaturely fashion is part of the core of every human being, at the very root and heart of his or her temporal existence as it is actualised in every feeling, thought or movement. It is this ultimately indestructible core facet

of all individuals which constitutes us human and defines our existence in our relationship to God. As such our humanity in every aspect ought to be focused upon and directed toward a total service of love towards God. 'So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.' (*I Corinthians 10:31*)

Conclusion

As Begbie remarks 'Creation is not a mere prelude to grace.'³⁸ Before the fall creation existed by the grace of God which leads to fulfilment in Christ. The great concern of the Christian is not the salvation of the individual's soul, rather it is the glory of God. The glory of God extends beyond the individual and encompasses the purpose of all creation, although the human being stands at the head of creation we are never to be understood as the whole of or as the purpose of creation. Humanity, made in the image of God, belongs to the organic creation which reveals and reflects the power, wisdom and glory of God.

It is not only as individual human beings or as the totality of mankind that we were created to mirror God in our relationships. Mankind was created within the context of a particular environment and with a relationship with that environment, God created us as lords of creation with duties of service. The potentials concealed within creation were to be unfolded and developed to the glory of God. The very creation itself is related to God through humankind. When Adam sinned the entire creation fell away from God and the earth was cursed because of our action (*Genesis 3:17*) and even today, although subject to frustration, the 'creation waits in eager anticipation for the sons of God to be revealed,' on that day when 'the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God' (*Romans 8:19,21*).

FOOTNOTES

- 1 C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Genesis 1:31
- 2 H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1979, p.161
- 3 J. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.14.3
- 4 C. Van Til, *The Defence of the Faith*, p.27
- 5 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and The Gospel*, p.7f
- 6 J. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.10.1 The first covenant was inviolate due to the faithfulness of God, there could be no other covenant, 'He who once made a covenant with his chosen people had not changed his purpose, as though he had forgotten his faithfulness.' *Commentary on Jeremiah*, 31:31 Schreiner is accurate when she comments that, 'The argument to which Calvin returned most frequently was based on the unchangeable nature of God's attributes. The divine attributes become the starting point which, if acknowledged, forces one to conclude that God must continue to care for and govern his creation.' *op cit*, p.33
- 7 K. Schilder, *Wat is de Hemel?*, p.247
- 8 J.B. Torrance, 'Covenant or Contract', in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34, pp.225-243
- 9 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, I.163
- 10 J. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.16.1
- 11 *Ibid*, I.16.4
- 12 *Ibid*, I.14.22
- 13 K. Schilder, *Christus en Cultuur*, p.63
- 14 S.S. Schreiner, *op cit*, p.108
- 15 H. Ridderbos, a colleague of Dooyeweerd writes 'Christ's nativity is the fulfilment of the promise of the covenant in Israel.' *The Coming of The Kingdom*, trans. H. de Jongste, Ontario, Paideia, 1962, p.193
- 16 A.A. Hoekema, *The Bible and The Future*, Exeter, Paternoster, 1978, p.285
- 17 H. Berkhof, *op cit*, p.167
- 18 Douglas John Hall persuasively argues that the image of God is not an endowment with particular qualities or attributes which humans possess by nature; rather, it is a quality which pertains to our relationship with God. The human vocation is 'to image' God, Hall argues that we should understand *imago* in terms of a verb rather than a noun. *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1986
- 19 J. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.15.3
- 20 *Ibid*, I.15.4
- 21 *Ibid*, I.15.7

- 22 Whilst admitting that the two outstanding capacities of the human spirit are rationality and will Calvin is not ready to identify these capacities as constituting the image of God. 'The integrity with which Adam was endowed... when he had full possession of right understanding, when he had his affections kept within the bounds of reason, all his senses tempered in right order, and he truly referred his excellence to exceptional gifts bestowed upon him by his Maker. And although the primary seat of the divine image was in the mind and heart, or in the soul and its powers, yet there was no part of man, not even the body itself, in which some sparks did not glow.' *Institutes*, I.15.4
- 23 T.F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, Lutterworth, London, 1949, p.36
- 24 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.30
- 25 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, pp.324-325
- 26 J. Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis 1:26*
- 27 J. Calvin, *Institutes*, III.7.6
- 28 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.211
- 29 K. Schilder, *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, I.306
- 30 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.213
- 31 K. Schilder, *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, I.296-297
- 32 *Ibid*, I.297-298
- 33 J. Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis 9:6*
- 34 A.A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, Eerdmans/Paternoster, Grand Rapids/Exeter 1986, pp.68-73
- 35 Earlier theologians such as Irenaeus and Thomas stressed the view that the image of God in man was to be found in his structural capacities, whilst modern theologians such as Barth and Berkouwer stressed the functioning aspect as being constitutive of the image of God.
- 36 H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, p.182
- 37 A.A. Hoekema, *op cit*, p.73
- 38 J. Begbie, *op cit*, p.171

CHAPTER NINE

THE FALL

One of the tensions existing within federal Calvinism is how to explain those actions of fallen and radically rebellious men and women which are nevertheless undeniably in conformity with or analogous to the law of God. Reformed anthropology can be said to revolve around the concept of total depravity. By this is meant that every human being in every facet of his or her character is touched by sin to the extent that fallen humanity can do no good. The fall introduced a breach between God and His creation. Kuyper developed the doctrine of common grace in an attempt to bridge this breach and explain how good could be experienced in a fallen world.

It is noteworthy that Scripture does not directly address itself to solving this problem. In *Romans 2:14,15* Paul does not make an attempt to give an explanation for this. The possibility of such acts occurring within the life of one who has turned away from God is acknowledged, Paul does not however go on to examine in any systematic fashion how this can be reconciled with the radical nature of our apostasy.

The people of God have been given the inestimable advantage of being 'entrusted with the very words of God' (*Romans 3:2*). The Gentiles, those who exist outwith God's covenant people, 'do not have the law' and yet it is possible for them to 'do by nature the things required of the law.' The Gentiles are acknowledged to be able to conform to the law; without the inner motivation of a loving relationship with God there are times when they still, in outward manner at least, perform actions which are similar to those required by His law. Paul does not tell us that they obey the law or keep the law, only that they 'do by nature things required by the law.' (*Romans 2:14*) It

is by nature that these actions are performed, that is as the Gentiles are in themselves, fallen and apart from special revelation and the regeneration of God.

THE FALL

Extent of the Fall

In *Genesis* we read that sin is as old as humanity, and yet it is not inherently part of creation. Such is the nature of our createdness that we need to find our life in love of God by sheltering in Him and knowing Him as our security and hope. Sin is our refusal to find such a rock upon which to build our lives, sin is our attempted negation of God. As existent human beings we have no experience of life without sin, such a condition is a hope in Christ. The fall, or introduction of sin into creation, most certainly did occur, in an exercise of free choice there was a first rejection of God. It is of importance to come to an understanding of the nature of creation fallen into sin.

Kuyper based his doctrine of common grace upon the non-biblical assumption that unless checked the development of sin would lead to a disintegrating chaos and ultimate non-existence. Further the deadly character of sin, even within a sustained creation is such that 'unless it is restrained leads to spiritual, temporal, and eternal death,' Kuyper took his 'position unmovably in this truth,'¹ So deadly is the power of sin that creation's continuing existence and sin's seeming restraint in the lives of men and women demands an explanation.

Along with Hoeksema and Schilder we must reject the idea that without the intervention of common grace creation would have disintegrated. Hoeksema rightly emphasises that the breach caused by the entrance of sin into the world was 'spiritual, ethical in character.'² As Van Til emphasises sin is 'a breaking loose from God ethically and not metaphysically.'³ It is not the essential nature of creation which has been affected by the fall, rather it is the purpose, or the direction of creation's development, which has been distorted. Here we must agree with Hoeksema where he focuses our attention upon the purpose of creation. The entirety of temporal

creation is to be considered only in relation to God. Those potentials which God had enclosed within creation were to be disclosed by mankind in covenant service of God and neighbour. Adam's sin, as our federal head, was his apostasy which redirected creation's development. The non-human creation, which finds its meaning and purpose through mankind, although cursed by the entrance of sin was not in its essence altered by the entrance of sin. What was altered was the direction in which it related to God. As Dooyeweerd writes,

The fall into sin was indeed radical and swept with it the entire temporal world precisely because the latter finds its religious root unity only in man.⁴

Preservation of Creation

Having brought the cosmos into existence God did not abandon it after the fall but preserves and cares for it in such a way that it is held on course toward the goal of His intention in the fulfilment of the covenant relationship. Of those biblical statements which do concern preservation the most important is *Genesis 8:20-9:17* which speaks of the covenant God made with Noah. In this portion of Scripture, held by Kuyper⁵ to be the prime source of the doctrine of common grace, we find God reaffirming the covenant with all the survivors of the Flood, animal as well as human. This covenant has force 'As long as the earth endures' (*Genesis 8:22*) which looks toward the eschatological nature and purpose of the creation. It seems here that we find a projection from Israel's covenant faith in relation to the entirety of creation. The preservation of the creation, despite the entrance of sin, is an action of God by which He allows the continuation of the world in order that by later instances of the covenant such as that with Abraham (*Genesis 12:3*) He might bring about a full salvation in Jesus Christ.

Leaving unpunished the sins of humanity committed beforehand is ascribed to God's 'forbearance' (*Romans 3:25*). In the New Testament we find that the provision of all that is needed to sustain life, in which 'He has shown kindness' (*Acts 14:17*), is the provision of a gracious God who, allowing 'all nations to go their own way' yet

sustains them that they might seek Him (*Acts 14:15-17*). Preservation and the provision of that which we need in order to survive and even know joy (*Acts 14:17*) are not ends in themselves but point toward the greater end that we might seek God and His Kingdom.⁶

The creational structures, with their preserving function and their potentialities are not an end in themselves but a means to a greater purpose. By maintaining our existence and exhibiting clearly the care and love of God the creational structures exist to lead us to God. Calvin reminds us that the contemplation of God's goodness evident within creation is meant to lead us to 'bestir ourselves to trust, invoke, praise, and love him.'⁷ The preservation of creation points us towards salvation and the fulfilment of all that is at present seen only in shadow or hidden by rebellion.

The creation in which we live is entrusted to mankind as the stewards of God. Because of our sin we vitiate even our best efforts to develop the potentialities of creation. There is no step forward which does not carry the potential in the hands of rebellious and sinful men to draw us back. Yet in our endeavour to follow the command of God and our created nature we continue to live and draw out the potentials of creation. The creation itself and our cultural activity within it exist through and for the sake of God's grace in redemption. God created this world for Himself and it is the mirror of His perfection, not only in the created act itself but in its continuance. God still loves the creation itself for it is His (*John 3:16, Psalm 50:12*) and is held together by the Son (*Colossians 1:17*), the same Son who was sent to reconcile all things to the Father (*Colossians 1:20*) so that Christ became the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (*I John 2:2*).⁸ The creation is God's creation and shall be reconciled to Him through the Christ (*II Corinthians 5:19*). Its form however shall be changed for there shall be a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness shall dwell forever. The old shall disappear, consumed in judgement, the new shall appear, transformed in grace. The new creation will reveal fully and effectively the character purchased in the atoning work of Christ.

CONFORMITY TO THE LAW

The structures for creation within which the children of God, obedient and disobedient, continue to live remain valid despite sin's advent. The fundamental conditioning laws which make possible the existence of things, events, social interaction etc., remain in force. Every aspect of creation is subject to the laws of God. These laws, the multiplicity of norms and legislation established by the Creator and discerned in special and general revelation, are the structuring framework outside of which it is inconceivable that anything could exist.

Not all laws are of the same nature, a law of logic differs from a moral law; the law of gravity is of a different form from a law concerning the metabolism. The rebel against God can never totally deny God without also denying himself; if he lives in anger and rejection of God he distorts his own innermost relationship; he cannot flee from reason into unreason, from logos to chaos; he cannot absolve himself from the law of gravity; if he is cut he bleeds. Without the law 'the subject drops away into chaos, or rather into *nothingness*'.⁹ The structural laws forming creation remain, what has changed due to the entrance of sin is the way in which we encounter, develop and utilize the structures for creation; it is this rebellious misappropriation which is the result of our alienation from God.

Law and Love

At this point we question Begbie's conclusion that the Mediatorial distinction Kuyper employs in discussing the work of Christ separates creation from the love of God¹⁰ and leaves it under the law and power of God. Speaking of the Dutch Neo-Calvinists he says that in most cases, 'they were tied to a theology in which God's power rather than his love was pre-eminent, and in which obedience dominated their view of what it is to be human.'¹¹ Whilst, due to their acceptance of a covenant of works with its logical and temporal priority of law over grace, this may have led to an emphasis on law and obedience in the theologians discussed it does not necessarily follow that an emphasis on law and obedience topples love from its pre-eminence.

We should not neglect the nature of law as an instrument¹² of covenant love. It is as the covenant giving God that He is our God and we are His people and it is from this relationship that law emanates. This is seen even in the negative statements of the most basic form of the law in the Decalogue. The 'Thou shalt nots...' of the commandments hedge about and invite covenant creatures to live within the safety of the covenant promises. The law as given was not in its intention threatening but rather is primarily inviting, which is the source of its admonitory tone. The law is unequivocal in its demands of absolute trust and obedience and makes it clear that it is necessary for us, if we are to find life in its fullness and happiness, to live within God's law. Thus the law in its inviting nature is accompanied by warnings concerning the consequences of rejecting the covenant of life. It is a loving Father who warns His children of the consequences of rejecting and overthrowing the guidelines He has given them for their own benefit. For those who reject this love the covenant partner takes the form of an enemy.

Christ Jesus came, God incarnate, to fulfil the law not to do away with it. In the perfection of His life the true Image showed us how the true life is one lived in loving obedience to the Father. Love and obedience should never be split apart and considered as two distinctly separate aspects of our relationship with God. On His last night with His disciples Jesus told them 'If you love me, you will obey what I command' (*John 14:15*).¹³ A little later Jesus reversed the order, 'Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me' (*John 14:21*). It is not either love or obedience, rather both must be present for either to truly exist. Love to be fulfilled must in its expression find a context. For fallen mankind the context of our love is the creational environment in which we live and move as God's creatures. Law is the framework within which we work out and develop our love for God.¹⁴

We should not consider law as existing in radical opposition to gospel, rather it is a summons to participate in the gospel. The Word of God, however cloaked, always comes to mankind as a word of grace, calling us to realise in our lives that which

exists in Christ. It is within the structure of the law which was created by the God who is holy love that we live in relation to the God who made us and placed us within the midst of His creation. In the *Institutes* Calvin describes the law thus:

It will not be difficult to decide the purpose of the whole law: the fulfilment of righteousness to form human life to the archetype of divine purity.¹⁵

Law and gospel can and must be distinguished as two aspects of the one revelation of the God of holy love. They cannot however be placed in juxtaposition as two separate revelations, each with their own content, identity and purpose. If we do this the love degenerates into little more than cloying emotion and sentimentality, and obedience is transformed into harsh and fearful duty.

Conformity and Obedience

It must be recognised that conformity to the law need not in itself be regarded as obedience to the law. It is possible to conform to the law of God without giving any consideration to He who has given the law. Conformity involves action which coincides with a command. The concept of obedience involves listening to a command and reacting to it in a positive manner (*Matthew 7:24*).¹⁶ The obedience of the person who, hearing God's Word and from a regenerate consciousness, attempts with the help of the Holy Spirit to live by and with that Word is a very different matter from the person whose behaviour, for a multitude of reasons, may coincide with the law of God. This is not to dismiss such outward conformity to the law as being of no value. Without outward and coincidental conformity to the law of God life itself would become an unbearable chaos of terror and evil. In this world, alienated from God at its root as it is, we yet find remarkable instances of compassion and mercy, trust and even sacrificial love. Are these the results of the preservation of our existence within God's ultimate purpose of redemption in Christ Jesus or are they something in addition to the inevitable outworking of our preserved human condition?

DIVINE GIFTS

In speaking of divine gifts to man Calvin distinguishes between the natural and the supernatural gifts;¹⁷ upon the fall we lost the latter, such as faith, love and righteousness, but kept the former, such as understanding, judgement and will. Thus in Calvin's thought we have two kinds of good, the supernatural and heavenly which is only restored as a fruit of regeneration; and the earthly or natural good, left to us as a result of our nature as part of God's creation. The natural endowments remain through God's permission, for if He had not spared us the fall would have swept away our whole nature.¹⁸ If we ask at this point whether Calvin is referring to God's gifts as attributes given to human beings after the fall or to attributes allowed to remain subsequent to the fall it is clear that he rightly speaks of human endowments which remain, although marred and distorted, despite the fall.

Federal Calvinist theologians when dealing with common grace often fail to draw our attention to that which is worthy of emphasis, that Calvin consistently refers to the *natural* gifts of God which have been corrupted by the fall.¹⁹ Although these natural gifts were marred the distortion did not go so far as to completely destroy their utility. We would be unable to maintain for instance that man's understanding was totally distorted and darkened, for this would contradict our experience.

Innate Knowledge of God

Prior to the fall Adam and Eve knew and communed with God. This was a direct knowledge in giving the command to rule the earth and all within it (*Genesis 1:28*) and the command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (*Genesis 2:16,17*), and indirect knowledge in that the unmarred creation plainly exhibited the perfection of the Creator (*Genesis 1:31*). At this point in the story of mankind the relationship between God and humanity was one of intimacy unbroken by rebellion and the blindness of rejection. This harmony was destroyed by the disaster of the fall and the ensuing curse.

The fall, in as much as it did not mean the cessation of all existence, did not bring about an absolute disjunction between the Creator and the created. Calvin suggests²⁰ that 'there, no doubt, still survives in us some small remains of the first creation.' The human being is created as a covenant personality. At the core of our existence is the fact that we who bear the image of God are created in and for a relationship with God and it is only within terms of this relationship that our existence has definition. To deny the existence of this relationship is to be a fool (*Psalm 14:1*). Whilst the fall, humanity's unilateral declaration of independence, has disrupted our relationship with God, it does not however constitute us autonomous or endow us with a self-regulating principle of origin or principles of life.

We possess, in virtue of our creation in the image of God, by means of our intuition and employment of our created physical senses and reason a vestigial but nevertheless still true knowledge of God. Basing his argument on the nature of God's knowledge of Himself Van Til reminds us that:

We may safely conclude then that if God is what we say he is, namely a being who exists necessarily as a self-complete system of coherence, and we exist at all as self-conscious beings, we must have true knowledge of him... All this we express theologically when we say that man is created in God's image. This makes man like God and assures true knowledge of God. We are known of him and therefore we know him and know that we know him.²¹

This knowledge of God is not confined to the pre-fall state but remains after the fall. Speaking of the fallen, non-regenerate consciousness Van Til writes:

Since it could not cut itself loose from God metaphysically and since God for the purpose of realizing his plan of redemption, *rudera* or *scintillae* of the knowledge of God and of the universe remain.²²

As Calvin reminds us in the very first chapter of the *Institutes* self knowledge is dependent upon true knowledge of God. Created in God's image humanity rejected a true relationship with God, as we have argued this rejection is ethical in nature and not metaphysical, true knowledge of God remains but is interpreted from an

autonomous principle. Whilst emphasising the noetic effects of sin Van Til nevertheless insists that:

We know that sin is an attempt on the part of man to cut himself loose from God. But this breaking loose from God could, in the nature of the case, not be metaphysical; if it were, man himself would be destroyed and God's purpose with man would be frustrated. Sin is therefore a breaking loose from God ethically and not metaphysically. Sin is the creature's enmity and rebellion against God but is not an escape from creaturehood.²³

By reason of our creaturehood and in regard to the natural things of creation, of which humanity is an organic part, we can to some extent, still know, think and even will that which can be classified as relative good.

Our imaging relationship being disordered the employment of our natural abilities is fearfully corrupt and distorted, yet these abilities are not completely withdrawn. If our natural, created endowments were totally withdrawn we would cease to be human and would not know existence. The fall, whilst rendering us prone to every sin and unable to please God because all our actions spring from a covenant rejecting motive has rendered us neither irrational nor hopelessly psychotic. Fallen human beings, as individuals and members of society, are able to perform deeds of relative good, because we still, as integral parts of God's creation, live and have our being within the creational structures. Although fallen our nature remains human nature.

Created in God's image we bear within our psychological constitution the ineradicable realisation that God is Creator and Sustainer of all that exists. These intuitions which are suppressed and rejected by the unregenerate are not acquired by observation or understanding, they are innate. What Van Til terms 'innate knowledge'²⁴ and Calvin the 'sense of Deity'²⁵ is to be understood from within a metaphysical perspective. Although the unregenerate attempt to suppress this knowledge of God it is ineradicable. For us to eradicate completely our knowledge of God we would have to destroy ourselves. Our knowledge of God is unavoidable. Calvin maintained that

all unavoidably perceived the existence of God, 'Man cannot move unless he experiences that God dwells in him.'²⁶

Innate Knowledge of God's Law

In *Romans 1:18ff* Paul argues that all humanity is without excuse and stands guilty before God and is liable to punishment. Although all know God, 'because God has made it plain to them' (*Romans 1:19*), we have deliberately chosen godlessness. We note that God has made certain things clearly plain 'to them,' that is to the consciousness of Gentile unbelievers, and that what has been made plain is knowledge of the existence and nature of God, *to gnoston to theou*. It would seem from the context of this passage, particularly *Romans 1:20*, that Paul refers to both an inferential knowledge gained by reflection upon creation but also an *a priori* knowledge existing at the heart of every person's own created constitution. The knowledge spoken of would seem to be the response of our created nature to our existent condition.

Intuitional knowledge of God consists not only of the knowledge of God's existence and therefore of our relationship with Him but also involves a consciousness of God's moral law (*Romans 1:32*). We know not only that God exists and values certain actions and attitudes and abhors others but also that we are ultimately answerable to such a God. This intuitive moral knowledge of God is more than a vestigial apprehension of right and wrong. In *I Corinthians 13:12* Paul speaking of the knowledge which the saint shall have in heaven writes, 'Now I know in part; then I shall know fully.' The word used for knowledge 'in part' is *ginoko* whilst the word used for knowing 'fully' is *epiginoko*. 'In *Romans 1:32* "knowing the ordinance of God" means "knowing full well," whereas in verse 21 "knowing God" simply suggests that they could not avoid the perception.'²⁷ *Romans 1:32* would therefore seem to indicate that all of mankind possesses a developed and intuitive knowledge of the requirements of God's moral law and also a knowledge that failure to live by these requirements entails drastic consequences.

In *Romans 2:14-15* Paul sets forth the argument that all are without excuse and stand condemned before God because all have broken God's law. The Jews because they have broken the law given in special revelation, the Gentiles because they have broken the unwritten law whose requirements are implanted within their hearts. Commenting on this passage Calvin writes:

There is no nation so opposed to everything that is human that it does not keep within the confines of some laws. Since, therefore, all nations are disposed to make laws for themselves of their own accord, and without being instructed to do so, it is beyond doubt that they have certain ideas of justice and rectitude... which are implanted by nature in the hearts of men... All Gentiles alike institute religious rites, make laws to punish adultery, theft, and murder, and commend good faith in commercial transactions and contracts. In this way they prove their knowledge that God is to be worshipped, that adultery, theft, and murder, are evils, and that honesty is to be esteemed.²⁸

Paul does not argue that the Gentiles who are deprived of God's special revelation consciously seek to do God's will with the purpose of glorifying Him. Rather he argues elsewhere that apart from God's intervention there are none who can keep the law of God in its inward sense, 'Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God' (*Romans 8:8*). Some commentators and translators take *Romans 2:15* to read of 'a law written on their hearts.'²⁹ This is not a legitimate interpretation. In speaking of specific concrete actions in conformity with the law what Paul says is that the Gentiles 'do by nature things required by the law,'(*Romans 2:14*) that is, that they have an outward conformity to the requirements of God's laws.³⁰ The important point is that it is 'by nature' that the unregenerate do these things. That is they do these things apart from any gracious addition to their already existent natural created state.

Law is the will of the immanent God with regard to the being, activity and relationships of any and every part of His creation. This law of God is not arbitrary law imposed without regard or relationship to the nature of the creature. God's law is in harmony with the nature of the creature, to exist and to operate within the context of God's law is natural to the creature. To disagree with and act against the law of God whose requirements we fulfil by nature is abnormal and results in even further disruption of our created and fallen existence.

Demarest³¹ criticises Berkouwer³² for maintaining that 'the requirements of the law' written on the hearts of unbelievers are the norms, ideas and ideals, the affects of the law that the unbeliever learns by means of general revelation and illumination from his social and religious environment, but which is not to be considered a natural endowment. Berkouwer maintains that, 'We are touching here - generally speaking - upon the profound problem of norm consciousness which can never be understood if we proceed from the mere human nature *without* revelation.'³³ According to Berkouwer the law of God works upon the human heart but it cannot be implanted within that heart as an innate endowment. Demarest argues that there is 'a precise parallelism' between the moral law given to the Jews in special revelation and the moral law which is possessed by the Gentiles. 'The Gentiles are obliged to perform their duties before God because they have in their hearts what the Jews have in writing.'³⁴

Although Demarest overstates his argument by positing a 'precise parallelism' it must be pointed out that in the parenthesis of *Romans 2:14-15* Paul is arguing that both Gentiles and Jews will be judged by the same law, which is received by the one outwardly and by the other inwardly, but by virtue of which all know the difference between right and wrong, and in relation to which all are held accountable for their apostate actions. As Dooyeweerd remarks 'What is the sin of a heathen if he knows the law for creation only 'rationally' and if this law is not engraved into his heart, into the root of his being.'³⁵

Likewise Schilder states that it is invalid argumentation to deduce from the passage that God 'gives in his general revelation in the heart of man or that God in his general revelation works from within to the outside.'³⁶ Within the passage there is no indication that the requirements of the law written on the hearts of all is a post-fall addition to our natural constitution. Accordingly it seems that the natural man acts in accordance with his nature and not in conformity to an external general revelation. Thus the outward obedience of the unregenerate to the requirements of the law is not

to be understood, at least initially, as a result of general revelation³⁷ but is the result of humans fulfilling, even in a fallen and distorted manner, the potentials inherent in their humanity.

Enlightened Self-Interest

General revelation does however have a part to play in the performance of good and useful acts by apostate mankind. Even the fallen are able to discern the advantages of an outward walk in conformity with the way of the law of God. This is what Hoeksema sees as the reason for the outward conformity of rebellious mankind to the law of God.

The law of God is good for him, and to walk in that law has a reward. And because he discerns all this, he shows some regard for virtue and for good outward deportment. This is what is called civil righteousness. Of sin itself he does not even desire to be delivered. But he likes to be delivered as much as possible of the misery of sin, in as far as it consists in the suffering of this present time.³⁸

It is no mystery that the unregenerate will attempt to walk outwardly in the way of the law of God as long as they discern personal advantage by so doing. The unregenerate even attempt to spread regard for virtue among others, this however will always be in pursuit of a motive arising from within an apostate nature. The person who seeks to maintain their rebellious status against God will also at the same time seek to improve what they see as their personal status, comfort and well-being. This not for the sake of obedience to God or a conscious desire to draw close to Him but for their own motives and self-satisfaction.

Berkouwer rightly criticises the concept of utility as being inadequate to explain the phenomena of love, mercy and sacrifice which we encounter in fallen creation. He is certainly correct when he states that utility as employed by opponents of common grace such as Hoeksema and Schilder is inadequate 'if it is meant to explain all fallen man's acts which are "analogous to the law."³⁹ Motives such as self preservation, self propagation and self satisfaction at best only account for a sterile and functionally

lonely existence and fail to account for many of those actions which are most valued and precious to human beings. It is clear that it is not merely a form of enlightened self-interest which motivates the unregenerate to acts which conform to God's law.

Creational Remnants

Despite the tragedy of the fall humanity still retains remnants of the original gifts of God. By such we mean those remnants of the original physiological constitution accorded to humanity when God created us in His own image. This means that fallen humanity, as an organic part of creation, retains those facets of character such as understanding, reason and will which we need in order to live within creation. Berkouwer dismisses this argument, when used by Schilder, by saying that 'this same sinful nature can also be the cause of wholly different deeds.'⁴⁰ The argument is that if we are attempting to account for the fallen man's conformity to God's law and do good we must go beyond our nature as part of God's creation.⁴¹

By asking 'Should we not have expected the whole of life to manifest the break with God?'⁴² Berkouwer raises the spectre of a total depravity which is an utter depravity. For the whole of human life to manifest a break with God which allowed no relative good or outward conformity with God's law would require that human existence would cease. If we accept Berkouwer's seeming contention that without the addition of common grace the whole of life must exhibit uncompromisingly the break with God we would in effect be arguing for the demonisation of humankind. Our total depravity means that every aspect of our being is tainted by sin, this does not mean that we are utterly depraved and in every aspect of our being demonstrate utter rejection of God and His law.

In fallen humanity reason is flawed and turned to apostate motives and clearly evidences in every thought, word and deed the break with God. Reason however undoubtedly still exists and continues to operate within its fallen context. Without reason the most rudimentary matters of culture which are necessary for the maintenance of life, such as agriculture, architecture and social organisation, would be

impossible. That man has the wit to select the most suitable seeds, plant them and share the harvest with his family is evidence that as a reasoning creature he is an integral part of God's creation, able to know himself and his environment even if that knowledge is distorted. That the same man can select the best weapon in order to crush someone's skull because of a fancied slight is evidence that reason and motive are corrupted, not that they have ceased to exist.

The real problem of common grace is not how Carl Orff could compose *Carmina Burana* or Hugh MacDiarmid write *A Drunk Man Looks at The Thistle* or how Claude Monet could paint *Haystack: Snow Effect*. The problem is not how can the unusually good or unexpectedly worthy be produced by those who are in rebellion against God. The problem is how ordinary men and women who try as much as possible to shut God out of their lives can continue to live those lives in relative harmony with God's creation. If we consider cultural, social and ethical behaviour only in light of the pinnacles of human achievement we lose sight of the extraordinary nature of that which we accept as everyday. The difference between an aesthetically uneducated man putting plaster ducks on the wall in an effort to beautify his living room and Charles Rennie Macintosh designing a complete room down to the smallest detail of the furnishing is a difference of scale not of motivating principle. Human cultural endeavour consists of the attempt to take what is already present in creation and in some form fashion it so as to enhance life. This is true whether we are trying to interpret the essential character of another human being through the medium of oil paint on canvas or whether we are trying to scramble eggs. The problem is not how can we achieve remarkable things but how can we function at all.

The performance by the unregenerate of what is encompassed by the law proceeds from the nature of creation and from within man himself, in the words of Paul 'they are a law for themselves' (*Romans 2:14*). True human nature is preserved in a fallen world and humanity remains human. This in itself is not grace but rather the presupposition of the covenant of grace, and of judgement. By reason of our indissoluble relationship with God, marred and distorted as it is, we continually and

unavoidably stand before Him. God's preservation and continuation of creation is a response-demanding act. Every breath taken, every seed sown, every brick laid, every song sung is done in relation to the living God who created us human and asks from love that our hearts be set upon Him.

GENERAL REVELATION

When we consider the concept of general revelation we note⁴³ that Van Til has few problems with *Romans 2* which teaches an understanding of God's requirements within man's psychological make up. When we return to *Romans 1* we note that the system of understanding taught by Van Til has a problem. As we have already seen in Van Til's teaching man possesses within himself the knowledge of God by virtue of having been created in the image of God. Psychologically speaking Van Til insists that there are no atheists, all human beings, whether regenerate or unregenerate, unavoidably know God.⁴⁴ Epistemologically however all the unregenerate act as practical atheists. No interpretation of any fact open to man is valid unless that interpretation is based upon the presupposition of the ontological Trinity. This means that the natural human being knows nothing aright. Speaking of creation Van Til correctly writes:

Because the universe is actually the creation of God, it continued to show forth something of the character of God even after the fall. It could not show the character of anyone or anything else but of God... What Scripture therefore emphasises is that even apart from special revelation, men *ought to see that God is the Creator of the world.*⁴⁵

However, despite the presence of a clearly discernable revelation of God in nature the unregenerate person refuses to read the revelation aright.

With the entrance of sin, however, man cut his study of himself loose from God, and therewith also cut his study of nature loose from himself. For this reason all the study of nature that man has made since the fall of man, has been, in a basic sense, absolutely false.⁴⁶

Van Til criticises Calvin in that he, 'did not bring out with sufficient clearness at all times that the natural man is as blind as a mole with reference to natural things as

well as with respect to spiritual things.⁴⁷ Van Til's argument if it halted at this point would entail fallen mankind walking in utter darkness being unable, because of apostate rebellion, to know, understand, will or perform any good thing at all, even relative good, there would be an utter and completely destructive alienation within the individual, between individuals, between individuals and nature, and between individuals and God.

According to Van Til the sinner is rescued from such alienation by his inconsistency. It is as a matter of expediency that the fallen creature habitually slips into coincidentally correct interpretations of fact. The inconsistency which marks the life of the unregenerate which allows him or her to live within the creation of a God whom they reject is paralleled by Van Til with the inconsistency of the regenerate believer who fails to live consistently with his or her new principle of life.

Fortunately the natural man is never fully consistent while in this life. As the Christian sins against his will, so the natural man 'sins against' his own essentially Satanic principle. As the Christian has the incubus of his 'old man' weighing him down and therefore keeping him from realizing the 'life of Christ' within him, so the natural man has the incubus of the sense of deity weighing him down and keeping him from realizing the life of Satan within him.⁴⁸

Mere habitual inconsistency however does seem a somewhat inadequate explanation for Renoir's garden paintings or for a family living in abject poverty placing a jam jar of wild flowers on a bare kitchen table. The mother who chooses to feed her child whilst going hungry herself is motivated by something more than pragmatic inconsistency.

Van Til pictures common grace as earlier grace⁴⁹ decreasing over time as epistemological self-consciousness increases. It can be argued that as self-knowledge is a good thing an increase in self-knowledge should be interpreted as an increase in common grace. Van Til claims otherwise, saying that it leads to a reduction in common grace. He argues that the knowledge of God in *Romans 1* is not intellectual knowledge gained by reflection upon what exists but rather is psychological knowledge

based upon our created nature and distorted by our fallenness, *Romans 1* thus cannot be interpreted without reference to *Romans 5*.⁵⁰ It would seem that acceptance of the availability of general revelation whilst rejecting any ability of fallen man to interpret that revelation aright necessitates an intervention from outwith to enable him to function, however inconsistently, in any human fashion. Thus common grace is required to enable fallen man to be inconsistent. Whilst drawing a picture of common grace fully withdrawn at the end of time Van Til does not envisage man in the awfulness of complete rebellion being unable to function as a human being. This would indicate that fallen humanity, even devoid of common grace, retains some natural ability to function.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion taught by Paul in *Romans 1* that even 'men who suppress the truth by their wickedness' (*Romans 1:18*) should be able to comprehend 'God's invisible qualities' which are to be 'understood from what has been made.' (*Romans 1:20*). The verb *kathoratai* (have been clearly seen) denotes perception by the senses and would indicate that through physical examination the observer is able to receive information and make judgements based upon the evidence in nature. The invisible qualities of God are 'understood' - *nooumena* present passive participle of *noeo* 'to perceive, apprehend, understand, gain insight into'⁵¹ This leads us to conclude that even fallen man gains some knowledge of the character of God by rational reflection upon that which has been created. Paul seems to be saying that the visible data within the created order provides facts upon which correct theistic conclusions can be based.

Whilst it is possible to argue that the references in *Job 38-39* and *Psalms 8, 19, 93, 104* to being able to interpret creation aright are all within the context of faith there are important New Testament texts which specifically refer to the ability of the unregenerate to read creation aright to some extent. In *Acts 17:22-31* Paul in his Areopagus speech to the Athenians refers them to the knowledge of God, however inadequate and distorted, which they had gained from the observation of and reflection upon the world around. In *Romans 1:18-21* the apostle speaks clearly of our ability

and responsibility to read creation and draw from it valid conclusions about God and our relationship with Him.

Three Sources of Ability

If our first source of ability to know God and ourselves and our place and ability to function within creation is our essential character as image bearers of God, and the second source of ability to function is our innate constitution as an integral part of creation, then the third source of ability to function is knowledge acquired by rational reflection on the facts surrounding us. Not only do we know intuitively whom we are as created humanity in relation to God we can also discern and understand to some extent, although not to any saving effect or true understanding of God, the revelation within creation. If, as we maintain, the natural person is able by reason of innate constitution and by use of fallen reason to discern from within the created order the most fundamental and important fact of existence then surely that same innate constitution and ability to reason will enable us to function within the creation of which we are an integral part. If 'God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen' (*Romans 1:20*) then what is visible can also be clearly seen and understood and human beings, however rebellious, can live and move and have their being in God's creation.

Creation Abused

It is our unavoidable understanding of God at a metaphysical and psychological level which forms the necessary presupposition for our ethical opposition to God. Confronted in the very core of our being by the unavoidable reality of God's nature as Creator and Sustainer of all that is, we assert our own ultimacy and choose the way of the covenant-breaker. Walking along this path we appropriate the things of God and pervert them to our own ends. In our apostasy we choose to rebel and try to suppress within ourselves the very idea of God and plead our own autonomy. This means that when confronted by the witness which God leaves within the created order the unregenerate person reacts with hostility. As covenant breakers we deliberately attempt to reject any trace of the knowledge of God. The general revelation of God

within nature exists, the very heavens declare the glory of God (*Psalms 19:1ff*), and appeals to the created constitution by which we intuitively know the existence of a relationship between ourselves and God calling us to a life of worship and willing service. Yet because of our rebellious nature this general revelation in itself affords us no saving light. This does not mean however that our observation of creation affords us no light whatsoever. We quite literally do not walk in darkness.

RESTRAINT OF SIN

The above position furnishes a creational basis for those operations normally accounted for by the bestowal of common grace upon unredeemed humanity and does away with the necessity of accounting for outward good upon a basis of the restraint of evil. Accounting for good by the restraint of Satan and the devils, and the restraint of some of our rebellious propensities, as Kuyper initially attempts, merely creates the bare possibility of the existence of good but does not account for its existence or even the desire for good amongst human beings in the first place. Any attempt to account for good in a negative manner, by the restraint of evil, inevitably falls short as Kuyper found in writing *De Gemeene Gratie* which evidences a progressive understanding from the negative, restraint of sin, to the positive, bestowal of ability.

Reason not Enough

Sin exists only in relation to God. Without God embodying, declaring, and in His law commanding good there could be no evil or knowledge of evil. Sin, since it has no self-determining existence of its own, whilst disrupting creation and introducing disorder, is unable to introduce a fundamental dualism into the heart of creation. There is no two-fold creation; all humanity lives within the same creation, confronted by the same facts, spoken to by and relating to the same God within the context of the covenant of grace in Christ. That the materials and potentials for relative good continue to exist within creation, and we should not be surprised that those given responsibility by God for creation should utilise these, does not explain the fact that the sinful distortion within all of us does not burst out in all its destructive potential.

The use of reason and our created thirst for relationship is not enough to explain the relative restraint of sin within individuals and amongst humanity at large. Reason is a tool at our disposal which is employed by the fallen will in various ways, not always 'analagous with the law.' Adolph Eichman employed this tool of reason to run the railway network supplying the Nazi concentration camps with chillingly bureaucratic efficiency. When it suits us we also employ the tool of reason to rationalise or justify that which we know by conscience to be wrong.

Grace outwith the Covenant of Grace

Calvin rightly asserts that the magistrature is called into existence by God, 'the right of government is ordained by God for the well-being of mankind'⁵² and is therefore regarded as a mechanical means for the restraint of sin and evil. This means of restraint is not to violate the laws of God and must always respect the image-bearing nature of man, the duties and responsibilities of government therefore must be carefully defined. All other means of supposed common grace are natural, involved in the laws and the development of the structures of already existent creation.

Whilst accepting that government is a God-ordained function⁵³ the question to be asked concerning government, and other forms of restraint such as social acceptability, is not whether they are ordained by God for the restraint of sin and our wellbeing but whether this form of oversight and care should be considered as emanating from common grace. When we consider creation as related to God primarily through and in relation to the saving grace of God evidenced in the life, death and resurrection of Christ we can consider created existence itself in terms of covenant fulfilment and rejection. By introducing a separate form of 'grace' evidenced in the common activities of mankind we create the possibility of a neutral area of life outwith the confrontations, demands, challenges and blessings of the covenant of grace.

It is possible to acknowledge the providential control by God of all that happens upon earth, whether it be His paternal care of the regenerate or the restraint of the

wickedness of the unregenerate whilst still denying that in the case of the unregenerate this is an outpouring of grace. The life of the regenerate is undoubtedly presented throughout the Bible as the fruit of grace; the life of the natural person whilst interpreted in the light of grace is never understood as the object of grace. The overruling providence of God, whereby in the service of the fulfilment of His underlying intention of redemption He holds the unregenerate in His power and oversees all their actions, is different from a certain grace by which the unregenerate are inwardly improved and enabled to do good.⁵⁴

Mankind Given Over

In *Romans 1:18ff* we are told that because of our culpability concerning our God-denying attitudes and actions we have been given over to our own inventions. Thrice in the passage Paul declares that 'God gave them over' (*Romans 1:24,26,28*). Due to our rebellious attempt to deny God He has abandoned us to our fallen sinful impulses. A.A. Hoekema argues that this giving over applies to specific times in the lives of specific individuals who have shown themselves especially unworthy in their rebellion.⁵⁵ Calvin however interprets 'the godlessness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness' v.18 as being the 'ungodliness of which all men stand convicted.'⁵⁶ Commenting on v.24 Calvin writes 'It makes no difference that they were not all involved in such vicious corruption, for in reproofing the general corruption of men it is proof enough if everyone without exception is forced to admit to some faults.'⁵⁷ The context of the passage, in which Paul is emphasising the one ray of hope for mankind, the gospel which is 'the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes' (*Romans 1:16*), would indicate that Paul's concern was not to speak of a restraining grace but its opposite, the clear evidence of the wrath of God against ungodliness which calls us to repentance and faith.⁵⁷

Opposition to considering restraint of sin a matter of common grace intervention by God should not lead us into the error of Hoeksema who maintains that, 'Scripture knows nothing of such an operation of God whereby He restrains man in his sinful development.'⁵⁹ In the case of Abimelech (*Genesis 20:1-18*) we find an individual, who

was clearly not a believer, being prevented by God from unknowingly committing the sin of adultery. That God promised Abimilech that Abraham would pray for him so that he might not die (v.7) would seem to indicate that this should be considered a gracious act on the part of God. This speaks unavoidably of an external curbing of sin in the providence of God. Hoeksema's argument that this is to be considered as an exceptional individual case and should not be developed into a general principle has more validity than his further argument, which lacks biblical confirmation, that Abimilech was in reality a believer.⁶⁰

It appears from Scripture that God not only restrains some unregenerate individuals from particular courses of action either directly as in the case of Abimilech or indirectly as in the case of Herod in preventing the murder of the infant Jesus by directing the Magi to return home without informing the king as to the whereabouts of the Christ. This restraint in the lives of individuals is to be understood in the same way as we understand the giving of particular gifts and abilities. Rather than considering the rain and sunshine as instances of God's grace to apostate individuals they are best comprehended as the providential actions of God in working out His plan of redemption in Christ Jesus of that which he Has created. As Partee remarks, 'The basic understanding of God's providence is not a neutral common grace, but the conviction that God has the power to protect the faithful.'⁶¹ The gifts of rain and sun which are given alike to the righteous and the unrighteous (*Matthew 5:43-48*) evidence a love of God for His creation. As well as being visual aids in encouraging Christians to love their enemies in imitation of their perfect Father these actions of God are to be understood in light of *Romans 1:20* which speaks of God's invisible qualities being clearly seen in creation, part of God's speech to all mankind calling them to fulfilment of their covenant relationship in Christ.

SUMMATION

God is faithful to His original creation; He brought it into being, sustains and governs its existence through His loving law and in Christ Jesus has assumed the created in order to renew and transform. Fallen creation, its structures and the law which we

find in nature and special revelation are not to be dismissed as unworthy or as of lesser importance in God's order of things. Rather they are to be accepted as part of the movement of God's love in His purpose of redemption.⁶² God is, through Christ the sole Mediator, reclaiming and recreating the creation which after the fall was subjected to corruption and stood in need of renewal. This redemptive activity restores creation to its original purpose, the praise of God. The created will not be abandoned but renovated or recreated in glory. Commenting on *I Corinthians 15:28* Calvin remarked that some had interpreted the statement that 'God will be all in all' as meaning that everything will dissolve into nothing. Calvin argued that this passage meant that all things will be brought back to God who is their beginning and end. 'I will say just one thing about the elements of the world, that they will be consumed in order to receive a new quality while their substance remains the same.'⁶³

That which is considered to be a result of supposed common grace is more adequately understood as being an integral part of God's single redemptive movement in the fulfilment of His covenant promises in and through the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of God the Son. Creation needs a common grace neither to sustain it nor to unfold its potentials. That which came from the hand of God, although fallen, remains His. It is neither evil and liable to disintegrate into chaos nor a neutral substratum of value only in the part it plays as the theatre of human redemption, rather it is in itself the theatre of God's glory, power, wisdom and goodness.

Fallen creation does not continue to exist by grace, rather it exists for grace. The becoming creation with all its potentials is the context of our interactive relationship with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who leads us to fulfilment.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, I.248
- 2 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.741f
- 3 C. Van Til, *The Defence of the Faith*, p.46
- 4 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.36
- 5 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, I.11ff
- 6 The thrust of the two passages from the Sermon on the Mount commonly employed in the defence of common grace, Matthew 5:43-48; 6:25-34 is not primarily concerned with God's sustaining rebellious mankind with good gifts. Rather they are directed in the first passage towards encouraging us to imitate the Father's perfection of love, and in the second passage towards making the pursuit of the daily concerns of life a secondary consideration in comparison to the seeking of God's kingdom.
- 7 J. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.14.22
- 8 Unless we interpret the word 'world' in its primary sense we either fall into universalism or condemn ourselves to the sophistry of John Owen who spends several pages arguing that world means anything but world. J. Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, reprinted Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1967, Vol.X.307ff
- 9 H. Dooyeweerd, *New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I.12
- 10 J. Begbie in a trenchant passage writes that due to the disassociation of common grace from the incarnation, 'Grace is thus dissociated from the being of God as a triunity of love, and is effectively depersonalised. God is not inherently gracious; it is only after the fall that he begins to act in a gracious way, as a response to human sin. The depersonalisation of grace is seen nowhere more clearly than in the traditional Kuyperian doctrine of common grace. This 'grace' has nothing to do with God's love. It is viewed causally and impersonally in terms of the divine power or influence on humanity and the world at large. What needs to be asked is whether there is such a thing as divine power which is not at the same time an expression of divine, personal love.' *Op cit*, p.149
- 11 J. Begbie, *op cit*, p.178
- 12 H. Berkhof, *The Christian Faith*, pp.230-233
- 13 Commenting on John 14:15 Calvin writes, 'Even our love for Christ is not faultless unless it is joined to pure obedience.'
- 14 Tracing to Luther the devaluation of the importance of law within theology stemming from the Reformation, Dooyeweerd writes: 'Under Okham's influence, Luther robbed the law as the creation ordinance of its value. For him the law was harsh and rigid and as such in inner contradiction to the love commandment of the gospel.' *Roots of Western Culture*, p.140
- 15 J. Calvin, *Institutes*, II.5.51
- 16 In obedience to God's Word a relationship is assumed and it is in this obedience that a relationship with Christ is developed (Matthew 12:50; John

14:23). God's commands call for such a personal relationship, a complete giving of life encompassing heart and soul (Deuteronomy 5:29; 26:16).

- 17 J. Calvin, *Institutes*, III.2.12
- 18 *Ibid*, II.2.17
- 19 *Ibid*, II.2.12-17
- 20 J. Calvin, *Commentary on Psalms*, 19:7
- 21 C. Van Til, *Defence of the Faith*, p.40
- 22 *Ibid*, p.49
- 23 *Ibid*, p.46
- 24 *Ibid*, p.152
- 25 J. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.3.1.; I.4.4.
- 26 J. Calvin, *Sermons on Job*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1952, p.158
- 27 W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Westwood N.J., Revell, 1940, p.125
- 28 J. Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*, 2:14-15; cf. I.3.2
- 29 C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to The Romans*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1932, Romans 2:15
- 30 Van Til distinguishes between the covenantal law which in principle is written on the hearts of Christians (Heb. 8:9-13) and the work of the law which is in the hearts of the unregenerate (Rom. 2:14-15). *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p.105. Unregenerate man can obey the law externally, after a fashion.
- 31 B. Demarest, *op cit*, p.232
- 32 G.C. Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, pp.175-187
- 33 *Ibid*, p.187
- 34 B. Demarest, *op cit*, p.232
- 35 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.121
- 36 K. Schilder, *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, I.102f
- 37 *Ibid*, I.110
- 38 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.271
- 39 G.C. Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, p.161
- 40 G.C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, p.160
- 41 'That man's fallen nature as fallen can not serve as explanation is clear enough. But neither do the 'remnants' of the non-fallen nature of themselves lead to *conformitas*, since they can be misused by corrupt man.' *Ibid*, p.160f

- 42 *Ibid*, p.161
- 43 B. Demarest, *op cit*, p.151
- 44 C. Van Til, *Defence of the Faith*, p.40
- 45 C. Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p.76
- 46 *Ibid*, p.81
- 47 *Ibid*, p.82
- 48 *Ibid*, p.243 Kuyper also parallels sin and grace being restricted in their full development. Berkouwer bluntly responds 'this parallel is not a legitimate one.' *Man: The Image of God*, p.154f
- 49 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.82f
- 50 C. Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p.81
- 51 Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek English Lexicon*, Cambridge, CUP, 1957, p.542
- 52 J. Calvin, *Commentary Romans*, 13:1
- 53 Whilst Hoeksema recognises that man's sinful propensities are restrained he argues that this restraint is a combination of fear of punishment and the censure of society. Consistent with his overall approach Hoeksema argues that the magistrature is not initiated by God in response to sin's entrance into the world. 'Government is not a special institution ordained by God in his common grace for the restraint of sin, but is also in our present world organically developed from the family.' *Triple Knowledge*, III.287
- 54 The effect of considering the magistrature as a product of common grace can be seen in the differing treatments of Calvin and Kuyper of the relationship between the Church and the state. As reflected in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXIII.3 Calvin in *Institutes*, 4:20 sees the civil magistrate as having a duty toward the first table of the law as well as the second; that the state and the Church, both appointed by God, have mutual rights and duties and therefore a sacred reciprocal obligation to meet. As we have seen in the case of Kuyper, the neo-Calvinist by common grace creates for the state and secular science a separate realm of existence apart from the Church. Under common grace the state is not to be separated from God or His purposes but does find its duties in this regard confined to the second table of the law.
- 55 A.A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, p.195
- 56 J. Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*, 1:18
- 57 *Ibid*, 1:24
- 58 The word used for 'giving over' *ekev* is not to be understood as a passive 'letting go,' rather Matthew 10:21; 17:22; 24:9 and Acts 8:3 all use *ekev* in an active sense. In Romans 1 the word is used in the same was a positive action of God, whereby in His wrath He allows the fallen mankind that would not glorify Him, nor be thankful, to receive the full results of their rebellious attitudes. The term denotes a positive act of delivering up which does not presuppose a previous period of restraining grace. As this giving over refers to the totality of human kind we come to the conclusion that it refers to direct results of the fall which brought about that 'wrath of God' which 'is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men' (Romans 1:18). It seems a somewhat strange exegesis to argue with Hoekema for the

continuing restraint of sin from a passage which speaks of the withdrawal of the restraint of sin.

- 59 H. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.279
- 60 H. Hoeksema, *Triple Knowledge*, I.179
- 61 C.B. Partee, *op cit*, p.75
- 62 'Calvin continually argued that as the object of God's love and redemption, the created order was not to be shunned.' S.E. Schreiner *op cit*, p.111
- 63 J. Calvin, *Commentary on I Corinthians*, 15:28

CHAPTER TEN

REDEMPTION

PROVISIONAL CREATION

As we saw in Calvin's understanding of the image of God humankind is relentlessly active. As part of creation, we form a group which does not quietly acquiesce in existence as such, for us goodness does not correspond to a static ideal of perfection, humanity constantly reaches out. Those who have already grasped the promise in Christ are dissatisfied sojourners, aware of the antithesis and unable to accept this world as it is. Consequently Christians work within creation, pursuing the divinely given cultural task of developing its potentials in covenant love to serve the present and coming Christ, 'For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.' (*Hebrews 13:14*) The non-believer, although rejecting the promise in his heart, is still unavoidably a constituent part of the becoming creation. Beguiled and enraptured by the attraction of the static 'things' of the world and in rebellion against his own created purpose he cannot help, despite his destructive inner motive, but erupt into constructive movement. Retaining the marred and deformed image of God we are not yet totally alienated from our created purpose. The good performed by the unregenerate is evidence of that created purpose which they cannot deny.

It is because the world has been given hope (*Romans 8:20*) that it is groaning (8:22). The groans of creation are not the pains and hurts of sin but the pains and 'eager expectation' (8:19) of childbirth. Concerning this hope Calvin writes:

From hope comes the swiftness of the sun, the moon, and all the stars in their constant course, the continued obedience of the earth in producing its fruits, the unwearied motion of the air, and the ready power of the water to flow. God has given to each its proper task, and has not simply given a precise command to do His will, but has at the same time inwardly implanted the hope of renewal.¹

Opening of Creation

In Neo-Calvinism there is an emphasis on direct intervention by God in His providence in such a way that we can gain the impression that the cosmos is a plastic entity, malleable and constantly being shaped and reshaped by God. The exception to this view is Dooyeweerd the thrust of whose argument is that creation has an inner structure directed towards progressive development. This 'opening process' is what enables that which is latent within the spheres to be disclosed. The spheres are not immobile but rather form a dynamic whole in which there is constant movement or unfolding. The term 'opening' is used to designate the fact that under certain conditions the anticipatory moments of a sphere unfold or open in such a way that the meaning of the sphere is enriched.

That this developmental process is fundamental to Dooyeweerd's understanding of creation is seen in his insistence that the norm for the opening² or disclosure of culture requires the differentiation of culture into spheres that possess their own unique nature.

Cultural differentiation is necessary so that the creational ordinance, which calls for the disclosure or unfolding of everything in accordance with its inner nature, may be realized also in historical development.³

Only in the developing differentiation of culture can the unique nature of each creational structure reveal itself fully.⁴ The potentials for development in creation exist and are either used or abused by fallen mankind, development when misdirected is a God-defying act. It is this opening process which Dooyeweerd understands as making possible the cultural development of society from a primitive or closed and undifferentiated stage to a civilised or open and differentiated state.⁵

'The story of creation itself indicates that the cultural mode of formative activity is grounded in God's creation order.'⁶ Thus in Dooyeweerd there is acknowledgment of the structural aspect of creational becoming.

Historical development is nothing but the cultural aspect of the great process of becoming which must continue in all the aspects of temporal reality in order that the wealth of the creational structures be concretized in time. The process of becoming presupposes the creation; it is the working out of creation in time. Time itself is encompassed by the creation. The process of becoming, therefore, is not an independent autonomous process that stands over against God's creation.⁷

Creational and cultural development is thus to be understood as an integral part of the created nature of reality and not necessarily as an addition to reality subsequent to the fall.

INCARNATION

The life and death of the incarnate Son of God form a coherent whole, His assumption of our created humanity was essential to the sacrificial death which He died on our behalf, and His relationship with creation cannot be separated from the work which He purposed to do and achieved upon the cross. The incarnation is the revelation of God's purpose; in the incarnation and crucifixion we find the culmination of God's self-giving from the beginning, entering into a relationship with that which is other than God. When the Word of God became flesh He became the last Adam (*I Corinthians 15:45-47*) for the purpose of restoring that which was lost by the first Adam. It was not only in His death and resurrection but also in His life and the ministry which built up to the cross that Christ fought against the forces of destruction. His death, 'the righteous for the unrighteous' (*I Peter 3:18*) was founded upon the sinless life led upon earth by the Incarnate Son.

Incarnation and Redemption

It is as Mediator of Redemption that Christ was God become man (*Colossians 1:14,15*). The Son is the image in which humanity is created and to which we must

conform, the entire created order coheres in the Son (*Colossians 1:17*), and the incarnate Son makes visible the perfection which we have sinfully perverted in our rebellion. The incarnation is not centred upon the identification of fallen humanity with He who is the Image, rather it focuses upon His identification with we who are made as image bearers, in His initiative God took upon Himself the created.

The purpose of the incarnation, the assumption by God Himself of the created nature, was that of reconciliation and the consequent restoration and recreation in fulfilment. Our understanding of creation cannot be isolated from the incarnation of the Son in His redemptive purpose as Kuyper attempts, for His coming is the establishment of creation's purpose. As Schreiner reminds us we find in Calvin that, 'God's redemptive purpose encompasses creation to the second coming. As the realm of God's creation and action, all history unfolds under the divine plan of salvation.'⁸ The incarnation was an eschatologically driven mediatorial mission related to the entirety of creation. Schilder's insight that it is the Christ who stands at the centre of history⁹ and that all history and cultural achievement are to be viewed within a framework of Christ's redemptive work guards us against Kuyper's split between creation and humanity resulting from his distinction between a common and a special grace. The weakness of Schilder's position at this point is that he did not link creation integrally with Christ but only indirectly through the regeneration of the elect in Christ.

The Incarnation's Cosmic Scope

In Scripture the world is presented as a creation fashioned by God for His own glory (*Job 38-41*). As such the creation in its entirety is loved by God as His own creation and possession. The fall into sin and rebellion did not destroy this love. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (*II Corinthians 5:19*); it is this world which God loves and into which He sent His Son in order to save and not condemn (*John 3:16,17*). Christ became the propitiation for the sin of the whole world (*I John 2:2*). The work of Christ is not restricted only to the salvation of the innumerable throng of the elect. The work of Christ is ultimately nothing less than the redemption of the entire creation from the power and effects of sin. God's redemptive work has at its

core a cosmic dimension and He will not be satisfied until the entire universe has been cleansed of the effects of sin.

This redemption (wrought by Christ)... acquires the significance of an all-inclusive divine drama, of a cosmic struggle, in which is involved not only man in his sin and lost condition, but in which are also related the heavens and the earth, angels and demons and the goal of which is to bring back the entire created cosmos under God's dominion and rule.¹⁰

The world which is the concern of the Son of God and has its unity and coherence in Him (*Colossians 1:17*), is the original creation which shall not be destroyed but reconciled and saved (*II Corinthians 5:19; I Corinthians 7:13*) even although its form shall be changed for there shall be a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness will dwell for ever.

Christ's Recreation

In *II Peter 3:13* and *Revelation 21:1* the word used to designate the newness of the new cosmos is not *neos* but *kainos*. The word *neos* means new in time or origin, whereas *kainos* indicates new in nature or in quality. The expression *ouranon kainon kai gen kainon* (a new heaven and a new earth, *Revelation 21:1*) means therefore, not the emergence of a cosmos entirely different from the present cosmos, but the emergence of a universe which, though it has been gloriously renewed, stands in continuity with the present universe. The expression 'restore everything' (*Acts 3:21*) *apokatastaos panton* suggests that the return of Christ will be followed by the complete restoration of all God's creation to its original perfection, thus pointing to a renewal or restoration of all that was marred by the fall rather than the creation of an entirely new universe. The world which is to come is the renewal of the world which we have in common with all mankind.

All history moves towards the goal of a new heaven and earth. The ultimate meaning of transcendent purpose is centred in an expected future in Christ. The goal of Christ's redemption is the renewal of the entire cosmos.¹¹ The fall affected not only man but brought low the entire creation, redemption from sin must involve the totality

of creation. Calvin speaks of the 'sacramental' nature of the rainbow and the tree of life¹² and indicates that God speaks both to as well as through creation.

The history which we experience centres upon Christ, the Mediator who is God and man is also Lord of history. As 'ruler of the kings of the earth' (*Revelation 1:5*) He is the One in whom and through whom creation and humanity with its cultural endeavour receives its meaning. Without the Redeemer of the world history has no purpose.

In the cross of Christ, as in a splendid theatre, the incomparable goodness of God is set before the whole world. The glory of God shines, indeed, in all creatures on high and below, but never more brightly than in the cross, in which there was a wonderful change of things (*admirabilis rerum conversio*) - the condemnation of all men was manifested, sin blotted out, salvation restored to men; in short, the whole world was renewed and all things restored to order.¹³

Begbie helpfully points out Kuyper's error in employing an inherently dualistic concept of Christ as Mediator of Redemption as the Son and man and as Mediator of Creation as the eternal Son alone, as a means of understanding the relationship of creation to God. As Begbie comments, 'We are left with the uneasy feeling that creation and redemption belong to two distinct spheres.'¹⁴ Does God have differing grounds for being merciful to mankind? God upholds the creation ordinances with a view to their fulfilment in Jesus Christ, creation and redemption are not to be considered in dualistic fashion unless we wish to lose an understanding of the richness of both. We shall come no closer to an understanding of the common grace problem until we look at creation in the light of God's redemptive work in Christ leading the world through historical time to its culmination when He comes again and makes all things new.

Complete and Provisional

All is already completed in Christ, as Calvin reminds us,¹⁵ in that crucial point of history all has been renewed and restored. The eschatological pivotal point has already occurred.¹⁶ With the cry 'It is finished' all that was necessary was completed.

Creation still awaits the visible renewal and restoration of all things and until then the entire creation lives with the tension existing between the goal already achieved in the cross and the destiny yet to be achieved on His return to inaugurate the perfect kingdom of His rule. As we work out our loving service in the midst of this tension we find meaning in the historical only by reference to that which has already occurred in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of the Son of God. An abstract conception of creation as an undifferentiated substratum fails to grasp the full importance of the incarnation. Creation and history have no meaning apart from Him.¹⁷

Eschatology is no concern with the end times or the final moments of history. Rather it is a concern with the present dynamic of creational existence and development, with the continuing cosmic rule of God involving the judgement, sustaining and renewal of human life within the creation structures. The world is no longer a garden, rather it is a building site, a factory floor, an arena of struggle within which we encounter God and serve His purposes. Our encounter with God is not in a secluded retreat where the piously inclined may practice religion apart from the vicissitudes of life. It is in the factory, workshop, study or studio that we fulfil our calling. As we wrestle with the creational structures we hammer out the reality of our relationship with God as covenantal creatures playing our part in the development.

Christ the True Image

The fall and the extent of our subsequent total depravity is appallingly real and dare not be minimised, although not dissolving into nothingness the direction of all life is toward a covenant-breaking existence. We are so undeniably spiritually dead in trespass and sin that, except inadvertently, we cannot be spiritually or morally pleasing in God's sight. Mankind as a whole and every single human individual is deserving of nothing other than the wrath of God. The natural human heart is totally corrupted and unable to know or do any heavenly good. The fall into sin affected not only mankind. An organic part of creation and given dominion over the earth man by the perversion of his own nature defiled the creation and brought it down with himself.

God the Son is not only He by whom all things were created and the continuing sustainer of the cosmos (*Colossians 1:15-17*) He is also the Redeemer in and through whom the purposes of God in creation are brought to fulfilment. The reconciliation which Christ came to effect means the ultimate restoration of creation and the fulfilment of the destiny for which it was intended. The functioning image of God in the heart of our being must be restored, and this is done by God the Son who is the true image after whom we were created. He became flesh in order to become the second Adam or second man (*I Corinthians 15:45-47*) for the purpose of undoing the curse brought about by the first Adam.

It is in Christ Himself that the active relational nature of the image is most clearly seen. A.A. Hoekema finds three areas of 'strangeness' in the humanity of Christ. The strangeness is the difference between what He is and what we should be, a strangeness which points us toward what true humanity is. Firstly, Christ is wholly directed toward God; next, He is wholly directed toward the neighbour; finally, He rules over nature.¹⁸

Whilst our relatedness to God and neighbour is commonly seen to be part of our life in Christ our relatedness to creation has generally been ignored as part of our imaging function. If the capacity to rule over and develop creation is part of our createdness remaining after the fall as would be indicated by *Genesis 9:1-3*, part of what makes us essentially human, then the need for an addition to our created nature to enable us to raise our heads above the mud is obviated. This is not to argue that somehow we can by our own efforts achieve anything of the slightest worth before God. Rather it is to maintain that our creation in the image of God is the context of our rebellion against God, and also the hope of our and creation's renewal in Christ the true image.

The two great commandments to love God and neighbour do not contain a third injunction to love creation. Hall, however, argues 'that the extrahuman creation constitutes a third focus of the love commandment.'¹⁹ This he does on the basis of an extrapolation from the action of 'rabbi Jesus' when He gave 'expression to

commands that he believed were already implicit in the tradition.’ By this Hall means the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount that lust is already adultery and hate is already murderous. The consequence of this for Hall is that the time has come ‘when it is necessary for the rabbinic and prophetic ministry of the people of God to announce that the love of the natural order is already implicit in the biblical ontology.’²⁰ Whilst agreeing that ‘love of the natural order is implicit in the biblical ontology’ the prophetic proclamation of this by rabbi Hall, or by any section of the Church, is unlikely to persuade neo-Calvinists.

It is in the Scriptures that we find the Christ, the true image in whose likeness we are being remade, described as the creator, sustainer and lord of creation. Here we find the paradigm of our relationship to the natural world. At this point Calvin, albeit cautiously, affirms that ‘Man’s having dominion over the earth comprises some portion, though small, of the image of God.’²¹ As God is revealed in *Genesis 1* as creating and ruling over the entire creation and as Christ, the incarnate God is revealed as sustaining and ruling nature, so mankind is pictured in *Genesis 1:28* as the vicegerent of God ruling nature as God’s representative. Having this relationship to the rest of creation is essential to and constitutive of our existence.²²

Due to his doctrine of common grace Kuyper’s treatment of the cultural mandate is ‘muted’²³ whilst Hoeksema tries to ignore it and Schilder casts it in the light of a command to be obeyed. The cultural mandate of *Genesis 1:28* whilst undoubtedly a command is more, it is a blessing to be received within which we fulfil our created purpose. God created a cosmos with inherent order and in its midst placed mankind with the blessed function of ruling creation as creatures made in His image. The cultural mandate is a blessing based upon our created nature and expressed in the functioning dynamic of our image-bearing relationships by which we mirror the God of creation in our cultural activity.

Sin is a distorting influence within and touching upon all of creation. Despite this it is not an integral part of creation. Like fairground mirrors we continue to reflect,

however, due to the fall the image we reflect is hideously distorted. The image bearing nature of man does not require an additional grace unconnected with the incarnate Christ and granted in post-fall bestowal in order to function within creation. The need of fallen mankind is for a special grace enabling the functioning of the imaging capacities to conform in covenant faithfulness to the true image revealed in the incarnate Christ.

Image Renewed

As Schilder, following Calvin, reminded us it is the Christ who stands at the centre of history.²⁴ The development of our cultural achievement in the midst of creation is to be viewed in light of His redemptive work. God does not condemn nature, but sin, and through the sinless Christ restores nature. It is in the Christ that the reality of humanity appears and the true communion which enables properly directed cultural activity to take place.²⁵

It is in Christ that the regenerate man and woman has put on a new self which 'is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator' (*Colossians 3:10*). The use of the present tense would indicate that 'being renewed' *anakainoumenon* is a progressive action in which the new self is renewed in knowledge, according to the image of the Creator. The goal of redemption is that God's people, in the functioning of their lives, will be faultless image-bearers of God. This would be to advance even upon the condition of those who were first created in God's image. In Paradise Adam and Eve were not fully developed as image bearers, they still had to live, in a becoming creation, with the possibility of sin.

Redemption is not the creation of a new humanity separated from the rest of mankind in their existent being. Rather it is the renewal of the image which takes place in the process of redemption, that which was perverted is repaired. The person who had been using those natural capacities given to fulfil his or her role as image bearer of God in a rebellious fashion is now enabled to employ those same abilities in a God glorifying way. 'For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the

likeness of his Son' (*Romans 8:29*).²⁶ Cultural activity is, as the neo-Calvinists remind us, a matter of faith. It is the special grace of redemption which enables fallen and renewed mankind to fulfil our creational potentials in obedience to God.

Corporate Image

Dooyeweerd reminds us that redemption is not an individualistic matter:

Scripture teaches us not only that the heart or soul is the religious centre of the entire individual and temporal existence of man but also that each man is created in the religious community of mankind. This is a spiritual community; it is governed and maintained by a religious spirit that works in it as a central force.²⁷

Redemption which is the re-establishment of our humanity in a God honouring direction is set in a corporate context. It is as our ability to relate to God is redirected that we can fulfil our ability to relate to those around us and to the creation we share. It is in this fashion that Calvin saw the Church, 'as the organ that led to the renewal of both the cosmos and society.'²⁸ It is those who are being renewed in the image of God who most fully and clearly reflect the image of God.

Kuyper fails to explain the significance of the concept of the image of God for his understanding of both our common life upon earth and soteriology. He states that it is true that the bearer of the full image is not the individual single person but the whole of the human race.²⁹ Kuyper does not however relate this aspect of our possession of the image of God to soteriology, which should be done if the salvation of the individual includes or is related to the restoration of the universe. 'This social aspect of man's creation in God's image has nothing to do with salvation or one's personal status before God.'³⁰ Kuyper neglects the significance of our creation in the image of God for soteriology, which has as its purpose the restoration and fulfilment of the creation, so that the entire universe may show forth the full image of God. There is an organic connection between the restoration of the image of God in the believer and the restoration of the universe.

Although the spearhead of the new humanity it is not only the Church which encapsulates the corporate aspect of the image of God. The image of God in its totality can be seen only in humanity as a whole. Herman Bavinck forcefully makes this point:

Not the individual man, and not even man and woman together, but mankind as a whole is the fully developed image of God... The image of God is far too rich to be completely represented by a single human being, no matter how gifted he might be. That image can only be disclosed in its depth and riches in the whole of humanity with its millions of members. As the traces of God [*vestigia Dei*] are spread out over many works of God, both in space and time, so the image of God can only be seen in its totality in a humanity whose members exist both after and next to each other... To that humanity belong its development, its history, its expanding mastery of the earth, its advancement in knowledge and art, and its dominion over all other creatures. All of this is an unfolding of the image and likeness of God according to which man was created. just as God has not revealed himself only at the time of creation but continues and enlarges that revelation from day to day and from age to age, so it is also with the image of God; it is no unchangeable magnitude but one which unfolds and develops itself in the forms of space and time.³¹

The full measure of all history and cultural activity must be taken into consideration if we are to grasp the riches of the image of God. The contributions of all, human beings with the capacity to image God, are to be welcomed and grasped. Those who live in rebellion against God and use their abilities for their own ends, although they reflect a distorted image, still are image bearers within God's creation, living, working, acting with the gifts and abilities He has given.

The image of God must become the basis of our understanding of the common. The image is not to be regarded as a supernatural addition to the human personality, but as an integral part of our organism as created and sustained by God constituting our essential nature as human beings as part of but distinct from the rest of creation. Here lies a basis for an organic view of creation, our humanity, secular life and activity, art and culture, and a Creator God. By centring our understanding of the common in the image of God, especially as revealed in the incarnate Christ the true image, and the creational structures we introduce a point of contact between nature and grace, between the natural and the spiritual man. The basic unity would be substantiated by a working unity. Creation itself exists, not in or for its own intrinsic

value or aims, but for the purpose of giving special grace a *locus operandi*, and all ultimately existing for the glory of God.

THE ANTITHESIS

The doctrine of common grace is employed as a means of explaining why two groups of people who in the root of their being are antithetical in their orientation toward God are still able to derive mutual profit from their differently purposed thought and activity. According to Van Til:

We must begin by emphasizing the *absolute ethical antithesis* in which the 'natural man' stands to God. This implies that he knows nothing truly as he ought to know it. It means, therefore, that the 'natural man' is not only basically mistaken in his notions about religion and God, but is as basically mistaken in his notions about the atoms and the laws of gravitation. From this ultimate point of view the 'natural man' knows nothing truly. He has chains about his neck and sees shadows only.³²

Within such a perception of knowledge, in which the regenerate 'can discern and do spiritual good because it is God who works in him both to will and to do,'³³ and the unregenerate 'knows nothing truly,' there is the necessity of some form of bridge enabling the two types of humanity to function together in common.

Antithesis

The term antithesis refers to two entities or principles which are set over against each other. Although entering philosophical discussion by the time of Kant who employed it to denote the negative member of the antinomies of reason and being subsequently employed by Hegel to denote the second phase of the dialectical process it does not appear to have achieved prominence in theological discourse until the rise of neo-Calvinism in the Netherlands during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Kuyper employed the term whilst rejecting its Hegelian connotations.³⁴ He discerned that the harmonising monism of an overarching synthesis tended to erase all boundaries and reconcile all differences.³⁵ Against this view he proclaimed that between Jerusalem and Athens there exists a vast gulf and that commitment to Christ cannot be harmonised and co-exist with a humanistic world view.³⁶

The term antithesis as employed in neo-Calvinism denotes the fundamental opposition which is held to exist between the Christian conception of life and those conceptions of life found in a world which is estranged from God. For Kuyper and Van Til, as we have seen, there exists a radical antithesis between those who live in obedience to Christ and those who live in rejection of Him. The whole of creation was regarded as being involved in a struggle of fundamental interpretative motive, as Kuyper terms it '*principle* must be arrayed against *principle*'.³⁷

For Dooyeweerd the antithesis although reconciled in Christ is still radical in our experience.

Our temporal world in its apostate religious root lies under God's curse, under the curse of sin. Thus there is a radical antithesis in the subject-side of the root of the earthly cosmos. It may be that this antithesis has been reconciled by the Redemption in Jesus Christ, but in temporal reality the unrelenting struggle between the kingdom of God and that of darkness will go on until the end of the world.³⁸

In all fields of life and human activity discipleship of Christ is held to demand an antithesis, a separate vision of reality and responsibility for activity, even separate forms of Christian organisation established in opposition to those patterns of culture and activity already existing.

Origin

Prior to the fall there was no enmity or dislocation within the cosmos and an undifferentiated creation knew nothing of antithesis, God looked and saw and it was good. Before the fall our understanding and knowledge was 'derivative.' and in a creaturely fashion although limited was true.³⁹ Differentiation was initiated within the created order as a result of actions arising from within creation. The creation, in the person of its covenant head Adam, stood aside from the Creator.

Amongst neo-Calvinists the antithesis between covenant keepers and covenant breakers finds its biblical point of departure in *Genesis 3*. The rebellion against God began with the choice to attempt to live outwith His revealed law. The breach within creation is rightly understood by neo-Calvinists as being founded in man's assumption of an autonomous interpretative principle. What is sometimes ignored is the nature of God's reaction to the breach. God's is a reactive movement in response to a prior rebellion by His creatures, more importantly it is a movement of mercy, promise and grace. Humanity was not left stranded in the solidarity of sin but God promised to create division between the Father of Lies and the Mother of Men. Calvin writes that the statement of *Genesis 3:15* 'concerns not only Christ but the whole of mankind. Since we must acquire victory through Christ, God declares in general terms that the woman's offspring is to prevail over the devil.'⁴⁰

The antithesis resulting from the rebellion is held to cut across every social, racial, intellectual, economic and cultural division of mankind. The two cities, the city of God and the city of the world, stand in fundamental opposition to each other for they serve differing gods. One serves the pretender and follows his false interpretation of reality, the other serves the true God and by His grace challenges the claims of the pretender. The dynamic nature of the antithesis in gracious confrontation is captured by Berkouwer who rejects a static concept of the antithesis whose discussion is confined to epistemology. In objecting to what he terms a legalistic antithesis Berkouwer reminds us that, 'The divinely intended and posited antithesis - Israel and the nations - is here robbed of its essence when it is not understood that in Israel is contained the blessing for the nations.'⁴¹

The true and radically fundamental contrast in the antithesis finds its origin and expression in the mercy of God which is why the Church finds its true activity not in antithetical isolation from the world but in antithetical action towards the world. It is in this way that the Church takes on the likeness of the Father who makes His sun to rise on the righteous and unrighteous alike. The gift of Christ is not a move on the part of God to effect the reconciliation of a portion from out of the world but is

rather a move into the world leading towards the fulfilment of that for which the world was originally created. Rather than viewing the antithesis as an obstacle to creational development we should understand it as an aspect of the dynamic of Christ's overcoming.

Humanity

Whilst the antithesis finds its root in the conflict between Christ and anti-Christ, between grace and sin, it finds its expression in the lives of individual men and women. This confrontation occurs in two areas; in individuals as we struggle with existence knowing the good we should do and yet finding ourselves doing evil, and it also occurs within society where we find ourselves confronted with other men and women with whom we share a common creation, but one which we view with differing interpretative principles. The Christian is separated from others by a basic underlying orientation of life, he also shares with all of fallen humanity his status as creature and sinner. Under what basis then are we to consider the contending parties in the antithetical struggle?

According to Kuyper regeneration, 'breaks humanity in two, and reveals the unity of human consciousness.'⁴² This seems an acceptable and even fundamental point to contrast those who belong to Christ and those who reject His Lordship. However when we investigate Kuyper's concept of regeneration we see that it does not happen, or rather does not necessarily happen, on the level of conscious experience. For Kuyper regeneration was, '*the implanting of a new life principle*'. This implanting of 'the faith-factor' normally takes place below the level of consciousness so that in the case of those infants who 'dying before actual conversion, they are not lost, but saved.'⁴³ Thus for Kuyper conversion need not necessarily follow regeneration. Consequently until conscious conviction of sin and the exercise of faith in repentance and profession we can have no knowledge of who is regenerate and who is unregenerate. In this view a regeneration impinging upon time only in an instantaneous and complete moment and as a single action and not a process has no

necessarily integral connection with history. Kuyper fails to anchor the antithesis firmly enough in history.

Hoeksema⁴⁴ retreats even further from the historical and constructs the antithesis in terms of elect and reprobate. Thus the antithesis is understood in terms of the divine decree, the human groups involved consisting of those who have and those who have not been chosen to eternal life. This has the apparent advantage of being simple and clear, a sharp cleavage drawn by God Himself. Unfortunately such a rooting of the antithesis in the abstract is of little practical use. In the context of our existent situation in a fallen world its sharp lines become less than clear. The antithesis in this conception is grounded in the secret counsel of God and refers to individuals who are not identifiable. It makes the antithesis rest in a timeless act of God, not in any specific characteristic within the individual. If we consider the individual as elect we submerge the historical moment of conversion and its outworking, if we consider him as reprobate we remove from him hope of amendment. Further, grounding the antithesis in the decrees fails to recognise that the elect and regenerate Christian still struggles with his fallen existence, the antithesis is never absolute in the human historical situation.

A more useful appreciation of the antithesis is presented by Harry Boer when he says it lies, 'between those who have and those who have not, in fact, responded to the gospel and to the Christ who is its centre.'⁴⁵ This has the clear advantage of making the antithesis concrete and existential and rests upon the discernable action of Christ in the life of the individual. Instead of the antithesis existing between ideal (Hoeksema) or potential (Kuyper) persons Boer sees it existing between real, individual and identifiable persons. Moreover these persons exist in the midst of process and can be considered as part of the onward movement of history playing a part in the development of possibilities. Nothing is lost in this conception as the background to the actuality of the exercise of faith is the electing grace of God and His action in the life of His children.

Probably the greatest advantage of considering the antithesis as lying between believer and unbeliever is that whilst recognising the absolute element within the antithesis it precludes the possibility of speaking of an absolute antithesis without qualification. The action of belief does not emerge from within human volition but is the result of divine intervention resulting in a renewal of being by which Christians are radically differentiated in the functional core of their existence from all those who refuse to believe. However the believer is a concrete individual and not an abstraction. It is with fear and trembling that we work out our salvation, complete sanctification in which the antithesis could be actualised as absolute in experience only occurs in glory. The antithesis is encountered in the concrete situation.

Antithesis in Practice

Can the outworking of our salvation within the bounds of human society be conducted upon an antithetical approach? Must we insist that the claims of Christ demand that we establish a strict demarcation between the ideas of the Christian and those prevalent in the non-Christian sectors of science, politics, art and every other cultural activity? Kuyper maintained that the opposition between belief and unbelief must of necessity lead to two systems of scientific endeavour.

These two scientific systems... are not relative opponents, walking together half way, and, further on, peaceably suffering one another to choose different paths, but they are both in earnest, disputing with one another *the whole domain of life*, and they cannot desist from the constant endeavour to pull down to the ground the *entire edifice* of their respective controverted assertions, all the supports included, upon which their assertions rest. If they did not try this, they would thereby show on both sides that they did not honestly believe in their point of departure.⁴⁶

Despite his assertion that the two differing views of reality are comparable to 'parallel lines (which) never intersect'⁴⁷ Kuyper often suggests various forms of co-operation between Christians and others. The commonality of measurement and empiric investigation are areas where Kuyper claims that 'palingenesis works no change in the sense, nor in the plastic conception of visible things.'⁴⁸ and thus it may be said that the lines are not parallel but do at points intersect. Granted that there are

fundamental differences should we not also acknowledge that there is legitimate creational ground for communication and even co-operation between people of differing world views?

Science

For Kuyper critical reflection, science, and philosophy are grounded in God's creation order. Science, a fruit of common grace, is 'God's own creation.'⁴⁹ Common grace, and not sinful man, is held to be the reason that men such as Plato, Aristotle, Kant and Darwin have shone as 'stars of the first magnitude'.⁵⁰ However sin has darkened the understanding, and it follows that all science would end in self-deception without common grace. Kuyper never loses sight of the fact that science is seriously affected by sin.

A general consensus is to a large extent possible in natural sciences which depend on the exact observation and measurement of objects, but in the humanities the subjectivity of the researcher comes to the fore. In disciplines such as history questions arise concerning the origin, coherence and purpose of things, questions which cannot be solved through observation, measurement or purely logical thinking.⁵¹ It is at this level that two kinds of science - regenerate and unregenerate - become possible. Here an antithetical position can be clearly demonstrated and a truly Christian science is demanded. The distinctive character of such a Christian science is not primarily determined by the consideration of the data of Scripture but by the consciousness of the investigating subject, who is a regenerate individual.

Kuyper's position as regards human rationality is ambiguous and contains tensions. Due to the tendency to separate the fields of common and particular grace, Kuyper seems hesitant as to whether and how he can introduce the principle of the antithesis. Must the idea of common grace function as the basis for antithetical action and Christian initiative in the world? In *De Gemeene Gratie*, starting from the principle of common grace, Kuyper tries to limit the antithesis mainly to the higher sciences.⁵² But when in his *Lectures on Calvinism* he starts from the opposite idea and emphasises

the principle of antithesis, he often appears to ignore his ideas on common grace. In the chapter 'Calvinism and Science' a few sentences are addressed admiringly to the 'treasures of philosophical light' found in ancient Greece and Rome, legitimised with the argument from common grace.⁵³ Yet immediately following this appreciation Kuyper advocates a comprehensive organisational antithesis between 'normalists' and 'abnormalists' and unfolds a programme of universal Christian scientific activity. It appears that Kuyper did not succeed in harmonising his views on the antithesis and on common grace.

We cannot, nor would we wish to, deny that the opposition of the world view held by believer and non-believer is a total and all-encompassing one which marks all reflection. The question to be answered first is whether the antithesis leads to an exclusively antithetical stand at all levels of scientific or cultural enquiry and practice. If the answer is in the negative we must then enquire as to whether co-operation is to be based upon common grace as with Kuyper, on an 'as-if' basis as with Van Til, or whether there may be another solution.

POSITIVE ANTITHESIS

Practice

It is our contention that we must reject an absolute antithesis as being an overstatement of the case. In our experience of history there is always an element of mystery surrounding groups and individuals. The development of the world unfolds within an environment of antithesis and religious opposition, but only rarely does the mystery unfold. The antithesis does not reveal itself in the tangible manner we posit in academic discussion. It is not as clearly perceived as Kuyper wished to suggest with the establishment of specifically Christian political, cultural and social organisations in the Netherlands.

We see this most obviously in practice in that representative thinkers such as Augustine amongst the Fathers and Calvin amongst the Reformers and Kuyper, Van Til and Dooyeweerd in modern times have absorbed and reflected upon the works

of unbelieving thinkers and have formulated and produced their own views often in confrontation and communication with such unbelievers. The consistent practice of such Christian thinkers who emphasised the antithesis between believer and unbeliever would seem to indicate that there is at least a *prima facie* case for investigating whether or not there is also in principle a legitimacy for arguing that from the side of rebels against God people can hold truth and seek to turn to their own profit the possibilities which God has implanted within creation. It is hardly necessary to establish that Christian thinkers can be victims of sinful and rebellious impulses. Dooyeweerd sets his concept of the antithesis clearly within this context.

This antithesis does not draw a line of personal classification but a line of division according to fundamental principles in the world, a line of division which passes transversely through the existence of every Christian personality. This antithesis is not a human invention, but is a great blessing from God... To deny this is to deny Christ and His work in the world.⁵⁴

Dooyeweerd did not merely take his place in the conflict directed by Kuyper. For Kuyper, conditioned by the context of his political struggle, the antithesis was a means of separation which legitimised separate Christian organisations. For Dooyeweerd the antithesis was a tool to be used in the healing process. Writing in a Holland still to recover from the devastation of World War II he could say:

The Christian principle in the first place prompts a deep compassion for the spiritual and temporal needs of our nation and of the whole world, which have gone through the fire of God's judgement. What does man want? Fanfare does not befit the ruins of our entire Western civilisation. The antithesis can, at present, certainly not strike a militant note. It can, as always, only be professed in truth in the realisation of the absolute solidarity of Christians and non-Christians in the collective guilt of mankind which has carried the earth to the brink of destruction.⁵⁵

It was this perspective which enabled Dooyeweerd to engage in fruitful discussion with non-Christian thinkers. For him the employment of the antithesis was not a condemnation of the world but a means which could be used of God in breaking open the hearts of unbelievers to the liberation of Christ.⁵⁶

Co-operation

In the view of Van Til the antithesis excludes even a hint of neutrality between believer and unbeliever. 'In the interpretative endeavour the "objective situation" can never be abstracted from the "subjective situation,"⁵⁷ thus any co-operation in the world of men can only be 'as-if' co-operation.⁵⁸ The antithesis is grounded in the truth that no person can be neutral toward Christ, we are either for Him or against Him, either we acknowledge Him as Lord and Saviour or we reject the One through whom and for whom all creation was brought into existence. In the Bible we have no picture presented of a middle ground with respect to God. Thus according to Van Til we are only able to co-operate with the unbeliever on the basis of 'a conditional "as if" attitude.'⁵⁹

This does not encompass the whole picture. It is God who is sole Creator, Satan may be able to destroy and distort and instigate enmity but he is unable to create a separate world in which to rule. The basis of our antithetical struggle is provided and upheld by Christ. It must be emphasised that even the antithetical cannot take place without the creationally common. For there to be antithetical confrontation or communication there must be some element of commonality or else we create a situation in which the dumb hold a dialogue with the deaf.

Van Til's concept of 'as-if' communication between believer and unbeliever, as well as grounding our common life upon an inconsistency, posits a communication based on misunderstanding. Is it ethical for the Christian to co-operate with the unbeliever as-if they had something in common when in actuality they have no single fact or datum in common? Would we not then be urging Christians to labour alongside non-believers upon the basis of a fiction? Ethically an as-if co-operation means the Christian operating on the principle that the end justified the means. Further, if common grace is earlier grace as maintained by Van Til and is diminishing over time we should be able to discern a decrease even in the area of as-if co-operation between believers and unbelievers as the area of commonality diminishes. A mere as-if co-operation without any actual commonality would fail to account for the evidence

of increasing fruits in the common development of creation. Enterprises such as the space programme of the U.S.A. demand not as-if co-operation but very real co-operation based upon the actuality of created commonness.

Communication between believer and unbeliever is a necessity, not only in scientific reflection but in every aspect of life. Whether discussing abstruse philosophical details, investigating the properties of mineral ores or comparing recipes believer and non-believer share a common creation and createdness which demands communication at every level. Dooyeweerd remarks:

Philosophical thought as such stands in an inner relationship with historical development,... no thinker whatever can withdraw himself from this historical evolution. Our transcendental ground-Idea itself... rejects the proud illusion that any thinker whatever could begin as it were with a clean slate and disassociate himself from the development of the age old process of philosophical reflection.⁶⁰

No other option exists than to set forth our understanding of reality in categories of thought, in language, and within an area of discourse and understanding existing in a shared culture. Christian reflection, insofar as it allows itself to be formed and led by God's revelation, is antithetical inasmuch as it is alien to and at enmity with the wisdom of the world. However Christian reflection is also synthetic in as much as this foreignness is intruded with liberating effect into the discourse of the world. As well as enriching the understanding of non-believers the believer in turn can and does profit from the understanding and discoveries of the non-believer.⁶¹ It is the conjunction of both these elements of antithesis and synthesis which we find in *II Corinthians 10:5* where Paul says antithetically, 'We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.' Only to immediately follow it with the synthetic statement that, 'we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.'

The antithesis lies between grace and sin, but grace and sin are not static categories of being but are active principles modifying creation whilst the structures of creation

continue to exist. Only as the creational structures persist do they support the necessary antithetical confrontation when grace intrudes into a world fallen into disorder. On a physical level believer and unbeliever have a common stake in the creation. Both are sustained by the same food and thirst for the same water, are weakened by the same diseases and cured by the same medicines, build with the same bricks and wear the same clothes.

Schilder rightly locates the antithesis in the separate employment of the plastic creation by the regenerate and the unregenerate. The similarity of cultural products made by the regenerate and unregenerate is due, not to a diminishing of the effect of the antithesis by common grace but to the character of the creational material.

Since all *fashioning* of the material, the good as well as the evil, is bound to the nature, the structure and the laws of this material, the result of the believer's work will, of course, always exhibit much similarity to that of the unbeliever. It is not the similarity of their divergent spirits, but that of the stiffness and obstinacy of the *material*.⁶²

Creational commonality extends beyond the physical. If we are to have a shared concern for agriculture and art, nature conservation and medical science as well as all the other activities which benefit the generality of society and the individual we must have a shared universe of discourse. Believer and non-believer employ the same logic and regulate their thought and communication by the same rules. Kuyper acknowledges, "The formal process of thought has not been attacked by sin, and for this reason palingenesis works no change in this mental task. There is but one logic, not two."⁶³ Although embraced from an apostate motive the unregenerate mind, while unable to grasp the fullness of transcendent truth, can still hold truth. An unbelieving biologist is able to describe and explain the structure of a daisy at great length. A four year old believing child sees the daisy as something nice which God made, a God-honouring object. Whilst the child is able to penetrate to the heart of the meaning of the daisy and grasp its truth and purpose the biologist still knows truth about the daisy and can help the child understand more about this portion of creation; and the believing child is entitled to listen to and learn from the non-believer, all to

the glory of God. Thus are the Egyptians spoiled of their goods by the critical appropriation and assimilation of non-Christian learning.

Greater and Lesser Systems

Van Til teaches that the principles which control the two classes of elect and reprobate penetrate without reservation into the heart of every fact apprehended by them to such an extent that no commonality remains and an antithesis is enshrined within every fact. Brute facts do not exist, every fact is a God-interpreted fact, 'the denotation of the whole universe exists by virtue of the connotation or plan of God'.⁶⁴ To know any fact truly is to know it within a God-created system, to think aright is to think God's thoughts after Him. The fact cannot be abstracted from the system and still be known, its factness is constituted by its existence within the system. Despite Van Til's urgings that when approaching the realm of the common we must eschew the abstract and think in terms of the concrete he fails to appreciate the dangers of emphasising an ideal and ultimate total system at the cost of ignoring the multitude of lesser systems which exist within creation.

Within the lesser systems such as number, the laws of physics or even the conventions of grammar there is commonality. Entities existing in a particular system take their definition from that system. The non-Christian may hold $1 + 1 = 2$ as an autonomous fact or the chance product of chaos, but he also means something concrete concerning the sum of a certain integer when added to itself. It is only when referred to the larger context which is itself the locus of the antithesis that difference enters. Our botanist and child were referring to differing levels of system. It is on the level of interpretative principle that Christian and non-Christian find themselves in opposition. However if the opposition is to be articulated it must be grounded in creational commonality. If an unbeliever from apostate motives grasps a hitherto unrealised aspect of truth from within God's creation the Christian is legitimately entitled to appropriate that truth under the larger system. This is not from common grace but from understanding creation as covenantally conditioned in Christ, within which the

non-believer's assertion of autonomy can not be given credence by allowing him a complete independence from Christ.

SUMMATION

God remains true to His creation and continues to take joy in the work of His hands as He pursues His gracious covenantal purpose in creation. Like Calvin's⁶⁵ ours should be a salvation-history theology. Christianity begins with creation and is the continuing story of God's covenant with Israel, a covenant renewed in Christ and encompassing all peoples, which eventually leads to the fulfilment of creation. God not only secures the salvation of the elect but reclaims all aspects of His creation. Throughout this history God governs His creation both in the cosmos and human history enabling the Church to spearhead the becoming creation and allowing the non-believing to encounter Him unavoidably with every movement of their cultural endeavour.

An antithesis which colours our interpretation and utilisation of every factual datum in the universe should be maintained. However for the believing sinner to live and move and have his or her being within a fallen universe and be able to live alongside their unbelieving partners we need neither a doctrine of common grace nor an 'as-if' co-operation. It is creation itself, fallen but not utterly destroyed, and still from the hand of God and intended for restoration through Christ, which supplies the common material of our communication and endeavour. Creation exists for the sake of the covenant fulfilment of God's purposes in Christ. As His creatures we share the same creation and employ its materials in our cultural endeavour. Whether that endeavour is based upon covenant keeping or covenant breaking motives is where the antithesis lies. We, like the materials which we shape and develop are part of Christ's creation, being kept by Him for the fulfilment of God's single covenant of grace which is established already in His redemptive assumption of our createdness in His life and death and resurrection. Christ is our commonness.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 J. Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*, 8:20
- 2 Each sphere or modality has anticipatory and retrocipatory moments. The anticipatory moment of a sphere is that by which it refers to a higher sphere. An example of this is efficiency, a meaning moment found within the historical sphere, which points forward to the higher economic sphere. Retrocipation is a meaning moment which points back to an earlier sphere. The use of the term 'extension' in the logical sphere, although it is used with reference to logical argument points back to the spatial modality. If the anticipatory moments of a particular sphere are closed the sphere is considered static. When the anticipatory moments are open the sphere is enriched and is understood to have an expansive function. The guiding function is the highest function of a structural whole, a state, a school, a stone which qualifies or characterises it. Thus the guiding function of a plant is the biotic, the guiding function of a state the juridical. It is this function which leads the other functions of the entity. The physical function of a plant (as studied by a botanist) is different from physical functioning elsewhere, because it is guided by the biotic. When an anticipatory moment of a lower sphere points toward a function which becomes its leading function then that anticipatory moment is opened. Dooyeweerd, *New Critique*, II. chp.3 *passim*
- 3 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.74
- 4 *Ibid*, p.79
- 5 By the opening of the ethical anticipation in the juridical sphere the meaning of justice is developed and society can move from the principle of the *lex talonis* to the consideration of extenuating circumstances in the administration of justice. The historical aspect in Dooyeweerd's understanding of history as 'formative power' is pivotal in the opening process. L. Kalsbeek, *Contours of a Christian Philosophy*, p.312
- 6 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.64f
- 7 *Ibid*, p.79
- 8 S.E. Schreiner, *op cit*, p.108
- 9 K. Schilder, *Wat is de Hemel?*, p.68
- 10 H. Ridderbos, *Paul and Jesus*, trans. D.H. Freeman, Philadelphia, 1958, p.77
- 11 Rather than seeing the incarnation as an intrusion or interference in our creation we should, with T.F. Torrance, see that: 'The incarnation is the deep ontological intersection of the patterns of our world by the divine order of love - that is, the intersection of patterns that have somehow gone wrong and have become twisted into disorder - in order to inject into them a reordering at a deeper level... But this intersection of our disorder and irrationality and evil by the divine order of love incarnate in Jesus Christ necessarily involves the atoning passion of God in Christ, by which our disordered existence is restored to order even in its ontological foundations beyond anything that could be conceived by us.' *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, Belfast, Christian Journals, 1980, p.133

- 12 J. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.14.18 cf. Barth holds that the question whether the Word is also addressed to the cosmos at large we can neither affirm nor deny, though 'we dare not reject the possibility.' *Church Dogmatics*, III.4.332
- 13 J. Calvin, *Commentary on John*, 13:21
- 14 J. Begbie, *op cit*, p.147
- 15 J. Calvin, *Commentary on Acts*, 3:21
- 16 J. Calvin, *Commentary on John* 12:31
- 17 Two hundred and fifty years ago the federal Calvinist Jonathan Edwards taught that all history is a preparation for the coming of Christ, either the incarnation or the Second Advent. Speaking of the period between the fall and the incarnation Edwards writes 'The great works of God in the world during this whole space of time, were all preparatory. There were many great changes and revolutions in the world, and they were all only the turning of the wheels of providence to make way for the coming of Christ, and what he was to do in the world.' J. Edwards, *Collected Works*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1974, I.536
- 18 A.A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, Grand Rapids/Exeter Eerdmans/Paternoster 1986 p.74 cf. Hall, *op cit*, p.186f
- 19 D.J. Hall, *op cit*, p.124
- 20 *Ibid*, p.126
- 21 J. Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, 1:26
- 22 A.A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, p.79
- 23 J. Begbie, *op cit*, p.151
- 24 K. Schilder, *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, I.68
- 25 K. Schilder, *Christus en Cultuur*, p.87f
- 26 In the NIV 'likeness' is the commonly used translation of *eikonos* or 'image.' Conformity to the image of the Son and therefore to the Father is given as the goal for which God has predestined His people. Although begun in regeneration and continued in sanctification, within which we 'are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory' (II Corinthians 3:18), this purpose will only fully be realised in the life to come, when we shall be perfectly like Christ (I Corinthians 15:49; Philippians 3:21; I John 3:2).
- 27 H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p.30
- 28 S.E. Schreiner, *op cit*, p.114
- 29 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, II.625
- 30 *Ibid*, II.626
- 31 H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, II.621-622 translated and quoted by A.A. Hoekema, *op cit*, p.100
- 32 C. Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p.26
- 33 *Ibid*, p.28

- 34 A. Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, p.327
- 35 *Ibid*, p.328
- 36 A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, Ist Lecture
- 37 *Ibid*, p.11
- 38 H. Dooyeweerd, *New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, II.32f
- 39 C. Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p.25
- 40 J. Calvin, *Institutes*, II.13,2; I.14.18
- 41 G.C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, p.323
- 42 A. Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, p.152
- 43 A. Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, p.295
- 44 H. Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge*, I.425
- 45 H. Boer, *The Concept of Antithesis*, p.247
- 46 A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, p.133
- 47 *Ibid*, 134
- 48 A. Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, p.157
- 49 A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, III.495
- 50 *Ibid*, III.498
- 51 *Ibid*, III.499, 508, 512
- 52 *Ibid*, III.515
- 53 A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, p.121, 125
- 54 H. Dooyeweerd, *New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I.524
- 55 H. Dooyeweerd, *Verniewing en Bezinning*, p.3
- 56 Writing from personal experience of witnessing Dooyeweerd in academic discussion with non-Christians Klapwijk recalls, 'that Dooyeweerd's transcendental critique was not only the key that unlocked his own philosophy: it was also the key with which he hoped to crack the closed systems within which other thinkers had entrenched themselves - the key to the door of their hearts. Truly, while his criticism was exhaustive, his solidarity was inexhaustible.' J. Klapwijk 'Dooyeweerd's Christian Philosophy', in *The Reformed Journal*, March 1980, p.23
- 57 C. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p.43
- 58 *Ibid*, p.44
- 59 *Ibid*, p.84
- 60 H. Dooyeweerd, *New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, I.118

- 61 This two-way relationship is described as 'reciprocity of transformation' by Klapwijk 'Antithesis-Synthesis and the Idea of Transformational Philosophy', in *Philosophia Reformata*, 51 en 2, p149f
- 62 K. Schilder, *Christus en Cultuur*, p.59
- 63 A. Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, p.159
- 64 C. Van Til, *The Defence of the Faith*, p.42
- 65 S.E. Schreiner, *op cit*, p.121

CONCLUSION

Introduced by Abraham Kuyper and developed and modified by other theologians of the tradition the doctrine of common grace has come to play an important part in the overall theological system of neo-Calvinism and has become a powerful and influential motivation for cultural activity. Neo-Calvinism sees common grace functioning within the Creation-Fall-Redemption schema as an undergirding power of God, not integrally related to redemption by the incarnate Christ, which sustains and develops the created. The introduction of this secondary grace has brought with it a dualising tendency which has produced tensions within neo-Calvinism. Kuyper by intruding the dual concepts of Christ the eternal Son of God as Mediator of Creation and Christ the incarnate Son of God as Mediator of Redemption, whilst attempting to legitimise the cultural activity of non-believers, effectively devalued the becoming creation and the part which humanity as the bearers of God's image play in its development and eventual redemption in Christ.

The story of the doctrine of common grace following after Kuyper is to a large extent the story of how neo-Calvinists have attempted to cope with the negative as well as the positive legacy of a towering figure in the tradition. By going back further than Kuyper and taking our lead from Calvin we can find a differing and more valuable approach to creation. Basing our understanding of the relationship between God and His becoming creation upon the incarnate Christ and His purpose of redemption we find that it is possible to view creation as valuable in itself and not just as a platform upon which humanity struts. An organic part of creation and given the responsibility of developing the creation's potentials to the glory of God humankind are called to take part with creation in the coming redemption.

Rather than view grace within the context of the relationship of the individual with God we should try to understand it in the light of the end toward which grace leads.

By doing so we should be protected from both the arrogance which has marked much of our relationship to the non-human creation and the pantheising tendency prevalent in much modern environmental concern. The purpose of our cultural activity in the solidarity of mankind within the God given and sustained environment of organic creation is to allow the reality of creation, including ourselves as the crown of creation, to express itself to the glory of God.

Created in the image of God to be head of the covenant creation, when we deliberately sinned we broke the covenant which God had established. God restored that broken covenant by His own good pleasure. The covenant of grace which is established after the fall is the restoration of the same covenant of God's favour which existed before the fall. The main difference within the covenant before and after the fall is that which was granted originally was unmerited grace and that which we now experience within the covenant is forfeited grace.

The movement of grace touches upon the whole of humanity. To use the terminology of Dooyeweerd creation found its concentration point in Adam as first head of creation. In Adam's fall all creation fell. God Himself then became the covenant head of creation in Christ, the second Adam. It is in Him that the whole creation now finds its concentration point and in the incarnate Christ is restored to its original purpose. The continued existence of creation is possible only through the covenant of grace in Christ Jesus, it is He who established and sustains creation and has become the head of the covenant in order to establish true communion between God and mankind. Grace is towards an end rather than towards individuals. All gifts, blessings and benefits which come to us come through Christ and for His sake. Mankind in its totality lives, whether it acknowledges it or not, in the light of the cross of Christ.

Within the covenant of grace with Christ there is an inherent universal blessing and call to joyful, willing service and purpose. This call is to the totality of humanity. All mankind however do not live as covenant keepers. This does not mean that they are

untouched by the covenant, we must retain the emphasis that all mankind is covenantally conditioned. We all ought to live obediently within the covenant. The covenant of grace in Christ is unavoidable and is the light by which we see the lives of all men and women, even of those who ultimately choose to reject the Christ.

The establishment of such an approach to the relationship between God and His creation opens the possibility of a richer understanding of the Church as the spearhead of the becoming creation. As the Body of Christ upon earth the Church has the task of imaging the Christ, To do so she must, like Him, enter the creation with power and grace. Developing this understanding of the Church's task is the next step to be taken.

Due to the blessing flowing from God's purpose of redemption the world is sustained and even unbelievers are enabled to perform acts of relative good. The work and activity of non-believers is not wasted. They have been able to build and develop the potentialities of that creation which is being saved by Christ; the life of the non-believer, although lived in apostasy, is not devoid of real blessing from God and has not been totally in vain for the entirety of God's work. Neither is this for the purpose of increasing the condemnation as argued by Hoeksema. Grace is toward redemption and the universal blessing of Christ should be received and welcomed, but not termed common grace.

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