

Articles from 1940–1949

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Facts

The Banner
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In *The Banner* of December 21, 1939, Prof. J. G. Vanden Bosch reflects on an article of mine on “A Calvin University” that appeared in *The Banner* of November 9, 1939.

As I seek to make reply to the criticism of Prof. Vanden Bosch I wish first to admit that there is a certain lack of clarity in my article, particularly in the section which begins with the following sentence: “The third step which the current scientific method is asking you to take is to test the truth of any hypothesis by experience.” I should have placed the word experience in quotation marks to make plain, even at the beginning of the section which this sentence introduces, that I was speaking of the non-Christian notion of experience.

Perhaps my lack of clarity explains the fact that my critic thinks it germane to the subject to argue for the necessity of inductive study. It would surely be “*te Gereformeerde*” and therefore not at all “*Gereformeerde*” to turn to the Bible instead of to the telescope to study the stars. On that Dr. Woltjer, my critic, and I can heartily agree. But that was not the point at issue.

The main issue may conveniently be stated in the form of a syllogism. The major premise of my article was that all facts are God-interpreted. My minor premise was that the current scientific method in its assumptions denies that all facts are God-interpreted. My conclusion was that no Christian can accept the current scientific methodology as it is without denying his Christianity.

The Major Premise

As to the major premise my critic, his authorities, and I are in the most absolute agreement. My critic says of my first premise that it is “true enough.” No Reformed person could say less. God has interpreted all facts. Is that less true of light than of the “forbidden fruit” of which Eve ate. Not one bit. The further question as to how man must seek to learn about God’s interpretation of such “facts” as light does not now concern us. Empirical study will surely have a large place when we study light but even in empirical study it is God’s interpretation of light that we are after from beginning to end.

The Minor Premise

My minor premise was that the current scientific method in its assumptions denies that all facts are God-interpreted. Let us again turn to the question of light. Scripture says something definite about light. It says that light was created by God. It says that light functions by the Providence of God. The phenomenon of light has a definite place in the

counsel of God. The empirical study of light should start from these Scriptural principles with respect to light. Says Dr. Grosheide: “*Wetenschap is feiten bezien bij het licht van beginselen.*”¹ Creation and Providence are foundation principles. Says Dr. Grosheide: “*Daar zijn grondbeginselen, onveranderlijke, eeuwige waarheden, hoe men ze noemen wil, die rechtstreeks door God zijn geopenbaard en die door geen feiten kunnen worden aangetast. Hoeveel feiten de mutatie- of evolutie-theorie ook mogen schijnen te bevestigen, de Christen houdt vast, dat God de wereld schiep. Hoereel stelsels ook worden gegeven omtrent de ellende van het menselijk geslacht, ze mogen op nog zooveel ervaring gegrond zijn, wij blijven rekenen met de zonde. Het past dan te bedenken, dat het beginsel meer is dan het feit.*”² Speaking of God’s thoughts as expressed in the world about us, Grosheide tells us: “*Die gedachten zijn eerst. Hij heeft ons van die gedachten jets in Zijn Woord geopenbaard, opdat we die vasthouden zouden bij ons onderzoek van de schepping.*”³

But all this is the rankest heresy in the eyes of the current scientific methodology. What would Millikan or Eddington or Curtis or Conklin or Einstein say about the methodology proposed by Grosheide? Here is a man who has already prejudged the case, they would say. Here is a man who does not want to begin the study of facts with the facts themselves, they would say. Here is a man who limits us in the hypotheses which we may make about facts, they would say. Here is a man who deliberately refuses to allow us to test our hypotheses by the facts, they would say. Grosheide is not “neutral” in the current scientific sense of the term. He is “prejudiced” from the point of view of the average scientist. To say that nature must be studied in the light of the Bible and therefore in the framework of such principles as creation and the fall is to brand oneself as a hopeless obscurantist in the eyes of the average scientist. Yet Grosheide will do with nothing less. And as for Woltjer he too asserts or assumes the absolute authority of Scripture in what it says about physical facts and he too unequivocally asserts the doctrine of creation.⁴ Apparently he does not think that he is “*te Bijbelsch en te Gereformeerd*” in doing so.

It is another matter whether what Grosheide says about the “neutral zone,” in the passage quoted by my critic, can be harmonized with what I have quoted above. So much is certain that what he says on this point must be taken together with what he has so vigorously and constantly maintained about the primacy of such principles (or facts) as creation and the fall. It must be taken together with the fact that he definitely rejects the current scientific notion that principles are derived from experience.⁵ He describes the procedure of seeking for principles on the basis of brute facts as being like to that of children who first place a number of beans in a box and afterwards are greatly surprised to find those beans in that box. It must be taken together with the fact that for him a fact cannot even be observed except with the help of principles.⁶ Grosheide asserts that a fact

¹ *Beginselen en Feiten*, p. 26.

² *Idem.*, p. 28.

³ *Idem.*, p. 25.

⁴ *Her Wezen der Materie*, p. 26.

⁵ p. 11.

⁶ p. 14.

apart from principles is a “logical abstraction.”⁷ That for Grosheide a fact apart from a principle is a logical abstraction and no more appears from the following: *“Bij de feiten is waarnemen van groote beteekenis. Maar toch, ik kan pas na denken vaststellen, dat iets, dat ik waarnam, feit mag heeten. Het enkele zien of hooren brengt mij zoover niet. Integendeel, ik moet het waargenomene door mijn denken tot een van de besproken groepen kunnen brengen en dan kan den slotsom zijn: ik heb met een feit te doen.”*⁸

It is after he has said all this that Grosheide turns to the question of neutrality. He speaks of the purely descriptive method of many scientists and asks whether we can join hands with them. His answer is: *“Een dergelijk standpunt is zeker te veroordeelen, want her beginsel is inderdaad overal van invloed. Ziet men dat niet dan is het oog beneveld. In dien zin is er dan ook geen neutrale zTMne.”*⁹ A little later he adds: *“Houden we dit alles in het oog, dan kunnen we zeggen, in de wetenschap is nooit en nergens een neutrale zTMne. Want wetenschap vraagt altijd naar samenhang, verklaring en heeft daarom beginselen noodig.”*¹⁰ These last words immediately precede the passage quoted by my critic. And the first sentence after the passage quoted by my critic reads as follows: *“Maar dat maakt de wetenschap als zoodanig niet neutraal.”* It appears then that when Grosheide speaks of that of which I spoke, namely of the current scientific methodology, he says about it to all intents and purposes the same thing that I said. When he speaks of “facts” as logical abstractions he also speaks of a neutral zone but when he speaks of facts he unites them at once with principles and allows for no neutrality.

The Conclusion

The conclusion of my article was that one who adopts the current scientific method as it is therewith sacrifices his Christian faith. Both Grosheide and Woltjer say the same thing in effect. What my critic quotes from these men proves nothing to the contrary. But perhaps it is time that we should continue to discuss the question on the merits of the case. I should be happy if Prof. Vanden Bosch would seek to show by argument (a) that my major premise is incorrect or (b) that my minor premise is incorrect or (c) that my conclusion does not follow from my premises.

There are other problems in connection with the whole question of scientific methodology of which I have not spoken. No doubt there are many of them of which I am not qualified to speak. I have spoken only of general principles and of these general principles even a layman has a right to speak. There is one point, however, that I would mention in conclusion. I have been told again and again that such a position as I have maintained spells a lack of appreciation of the work of non-Christian scientists. But why should that be the case? Must I accept the fundamental errors of these scientists with respect to their anti-Christian assumptions in order to appreciate the good that they have been able to do in spite of these errors? To ask the question is to answer it. The burden of proof is on those who would force me to accept either all or nothing of what the non-Christian scientist has to offer.

⁷ p. 14.

⁸ p. 20.

⁹ p. 22.

¹⁰ p. 23.

Reply To Professor J. Vanden Bosch

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Before entering upon a discussion of some of the questions raised by Prof. Vanden Bosch let me assure him that it was not from a desire to be “strategic” that I failed to discuss some of the implications that might be involved in the main contention of my first article. I verily thought he meant to challenge my main contention itself in his *Calvinalia* remarks. When he quoted the high authority of Dr. Woltjer to prove that we must go to nature to study nature I thought he meant to show that any proposition which directly involves a false implication must itself be wrong. Accordingly I sought in my reply to make my main contention clear and did nothing more.

I do not mind, however, discussing the implications of my main contention. In doing so I can express some difficulties that I have with respect to what seems to be a rather common attitude among us when we evaluate the accomplishments of men of science who are not Christians. Perhaps some one will then be kind enough to indicate that my difficulties are unfounded.

Let me then first repeat the main point on which Prof. Vanden Bosch expresses agreement with me. For God there are no brute facts; all facts are God-interpreted. That was our starting point. Secondly, we note that the current scientific method in its assumptions denies that all facts are God-interpreted. The conclusion is that no Christian can accept the current scientific method as it is without denying his faith.

The main thrust of the whole matter is that we shall act self-consciously as Christians in our scientific methodology. To act self-consciously in our methodology implies primarily, it seems to me, that we are not to forget even when we are in the laboratory that we have a certain amount of fundamentally important information about all facts in the universe. We cannot ignore that information and act as if we did not have it. We must, on the contrary, in our study of nature build upon this fundamental information and seek to make a consistent whole of what we already know and what we are about to learn. This is not to be super-pious, nor is it to ask the impossible of human nature; it is to seek to do, as best we may, what God requires of us when He says that we shall do all things to his glory.

Starting then from the conviction that all facts are God-interpreted I am ready to face any fact that can possibly exist. No matter how irrational or exceptional some facts may appear to me to be, I know that they are rationally related to one another in the plan of God. On the other hand I know there is a limitation as to what sort of facts I can meet. There are no facts and therefore I can meet no facts that would prove the doctrines of creation and providence untrue. There are no facts and therefore I can meet no facts that would prove material directly revealed in Scripture untrue. It would be sinful of me to look for such facts.

Starting again from the conviction that all facts are God-interpreted I have great liberty in the making of hypotheses. God may have thousands of ways of relating facts of which I have as yet no knowledge. I am not narrowly limited in the making of my hypotheses to what seems possible to the mind of man. There is no limit to my scientific imagination except one. That one limit is that I shall not try to think thoughts by which I should un-think God.

In contrast with this the non-Christian scientist insists on having an absolutely clean slate. He insists by assumption that facts, all facts, are brute facts no less for God than for man. By assumption he denies at the outset of his work the doctrines of creation and providence. Thus "the scientific method" is unscientific. It refuses to accept well established and fundamentally important information about the facts which it is about to investigate; the result is bound to lead to falsification.

In other words we may criticize "the scientific method" by saying that it is falsely abstract. In insisting by implication that all facts must be brute facts for God as well as for man, non-Christian scientists are as those who insist that a finger to be studied scientifically must first be abstracted, that is severed, from the hand of which it is a part. They are as those who insist that there may be millions of fingers that were never attached to hands at all. They are as those who take these millions of abstracted fingers and place them in neatly labeled boxes made for the purpose. The result is a fundamental falsification of the whole picture of reality. Accordingly I do not see how we can escape the requirements of reconstruction if we are to use "the scientific method" at any point.

We try to get around this difficulty by saying that as Christians we may and should use "the scientific method" for certain aspects or spheres of reality only. And we seek to safeguard our position further by saying that when we come to making up the final count, when we frame a "life and world view" our Christian principles assert themselves in a controlling manner. But it does not appear that we have thus escaped the difficulty. The falsification involved in the mistakenly abstract procedure of "the scientific method" permeates literally to every aspect and sphere of reality.

Nor does it afford us any relief if we say that "the scientific method" deals merely with description and not with explanation. The least that scientific description seeks to do is to offer us a picture of rational relations between certain facts and this is itself explanation. By a method of false abstraction we are bound to obtain a false description. Accordingly we cannot allow that the scientific method offers us a description of truth content at any point that does not need to be reconstructed.

My chief difficulty then is this. On the one hand we are deeply convinced of the truth of Scripture. On the other hand we want to use "the scientific method" up to a point without reconstruction. We then do our best to patch the two together. The result is a compromise. Suppose I take a small cup and put some water and some poison in it. Then I take a large cup and put only water in it. Now I empty the contents of the small cup into the large cup adding it to the water already in the large cup. And then I hope that it will do no one harm to drink from the large cup because the quantity of poison is now so small in comparison with the total quantity of water that I can afford to neglect it.

It seems to me that as a layman I have a right to voice this difficulty even if I can offer no solution to the problem that we face. The problem is, I take it, what we are to think of the work of non-Christian scientists. If the way in which we often seek to bring

together our Christian faith and our scientific procedure, involves a compromise, are we then to conclude that we must reject the work of non-Christian scientists altogether?

To answer this question, it seems to me, we can profitably begin from the point that the facts and the laws of created existence are indeed in a fundamental sense the same for Christians and non-Christians alike. They are objectively or revelationally the same whatever one's attitude to them may be. The *Logos* of creation testifies everywhere of Himself. Calvin says over and over that men ought to see the revelation of God's presence everywhere and most of all in themselves. Suppose then that for argument's sake we think away all interpretative activity on the part of man. It is quite legitimate to do this. Grosheide does this with respect to the battle of which he speaks. He attempts to think of the mind as a camera, as a pure transmitter of revelational content. But Grosheide knows very well that no purely revelational activity ever takes place in practice. Interpretation is as a matter of fact involved in every mental activity. And certainly scientific manipulation is inherently interpretative. For this reason Grosheide says that as soon as the revelational material is "scientifically dealt with, immediately a great difference will arise because at once evaluation enters in." What is set forth by the effort of scientific description is never a mere camera product; it is always an interpretation. Even so, the distinction between the purely revelational and the interpretative is extremely useful.

The point is this. The natural man in all his interpretative efforts seeks to suppress the revelational content that comes to expression round about and within him. But in spite of and by means of his efforts at suppression the revelational display of truth proceeds to develop. Accordingly a great deal of truth about the facts and laws of the universe has been brought to light by those who love not God. And as Christians we may and should make grateful use of truth from whatever source it springs because ultimately all truth springs from God.

The April rains are on as I write this. I have a sort of animal delight in green grass. My animal delight is due to the fact that I daily make necessary and legitimate abstractions. My neighbor's animal delight is due to the fact that he has not yet, in his common sense statement that the grass is green, self-consciously made his illegitimate abstraction. My neighbor's remark about the green grass is therefore formally the same as mine, and may for practical purposes, because the interpretative function of both of us is and needs often to be, largely dormant, be thought of as though it were the same, but is, even so, when interpretatively considered, not the same. It is thus that we may be in the world while not of the world.

I wonder if it is not along such lines as these that we may find a solution for the problem that faces us. Are there implications here which I do not see? It is my impression that I am walking along the line of thought suggested by Calvin's *Institutes* in the rough sketch I have tried to make. Am I mistaken in this? The whole question seems to merit full discussion; we can only welcome the efforts of *The Calvin Forum* to forward the cause; may its call for participants in the discussion not go unheeded.

Princeton's President And Pagan Philosophy

The Presbyterian Guardian

1940

Volume 7, Page 19ff

Has the chief source of theological error departed from Princeton Seminary now that Professor Emil Brunner has gone back to his own country? We do not think so. The chief source of error remains in the person of its president, Dr. John A. Mackay. He is either unable or unwilling to distinguish Christian from non-Christian literature. How then can he do anything but lead Princeton ever farther from the path of the historic Christian faith?

In *The Presbyterian* of November 23, 1939, Dr. Mackay writes an article in which he discusses a book by the late Professor A. A. Bowman. Now Professor Bowman was a truly great teacher and a first-rate philosopher. With all that Dr. Mackay says in praise of his greatness we can, having been in his classes for some years, most heartily concur. But there is one thing that Professor Bowman never pretended to be, either in his classes or in his writings, and that is a believer in historic Christianity. And yet Dr. Mackay virtually recommends Bowman's philosophy as being essentially sound. At least, he has not a word of criticism to offer for a philosophy that is basically un-Christian.

Bowman's notion of God is quite the opposite of that set forth in the famous Shorter Catechism definition. He is amazingly frank to admit that for him the eternity of God is nothing but unending time. He says, "In the concept of God, the definitory notion must be that of eternity. He is the eternal spirit—this, not in the timeless sense, but in the sense of everlasting endurance. The being of God defines itself in relation to its time conditions, as an absolutely perfect adjustment of every past to every future in a present that is infinite in each direction."¹ Bowman places great stress upon his contention that time is the condition of every form of spiritual existence. This may even be said to be the main thrust of this book as of his other writings. Bowman holds that, unless we think of both God and man as cumulativetemporal experiences, the world about us cannot be made intelligible. We mention this fact to indicate that Bowman is perfectly explicit in his denial of what, for the Westminster standards, is the basis of all sound theology.

In the second place, Bowman in effect denies what the Shorter Catechism affirms when it says, "The work of creation is, God's making all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good." Bowman insists repeatedly that he holds to a "self-contained" and self-existent physical world as he holds to a self-contained and self-existent spiritual world.² This point is not incidental but fundamental

¹ *A Sacramental Universe*, p. 369.

² *A Sacramental Universe*, p. 9. See also *Studies in the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 1, p. 52; Vol. 2, p. 390.

to his position. It is the exact counterpart of his notion of God as a temporally cumulative experience. Or, we may say that for Bowman God must exist as a temporally cumulative experience just because the physical universe exists as non-created reality. Bowman seeks to bring two independent variables into one heterogeneous system. That is his avowed purpose. Accordingly he can say: "For the definition of creation is the functional dependence of the physical world in its entirety on the energies of the spirit."³ Two forms of irreducible existence, the physical and the spiritual, are to throw mutual light on one another.⁴ Bowman therefore holds that "man, with all his limitations, is necessary to God."⁵ Whatever Bowman may mean by "creation of a spatial universe," in the passage quoted by Dr. Mackay, he assuredly cannot mean the historic doctrine of creation out of nothing without betraying the fundamental principle of his philosophy. Even from the quotations given by Dr. Mackay it is clear that Bowman's philosophy is basically pantheistic. What sense is there to the idea of space as "the unconsciousness of omniscience, the unconsciousness of God," or to the idea of the "vibrations of the physical world" as "the overtones of the divine orchestration," except upon a position that has once for all cut itself loose from the notion of God as the self-contained free Creator of the world?

It is in the light of such notions of God and of the creation of the world by God that we must understand the quotation Dr. Mackay gives from Professor Bowman on the doctrine of the incarnation. After this quotation, Dr. Mackay remarks: "Here is a philosopher who did his thinking in living contact with human wayfarers, one who knew with them the agony of self-defeat, who discerned the perversion of a true human instinct in the modern cult of the deified tyrant, who recognized man's need of an historical incarnation of the divine if he was to know the road he should take and be able to achieve goodness upon it, who saw and adored that incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth. Such a philosophy has something real to say to the world of our time."

Bowman, however, means by the incarnation of the divine in Jesus no more than a particularly high instance of the general principle of incarnation that manifests itself everywhere that spirit comes into functional contact with the physical. Every man's "embodied life" is at its best "an activity of incarnation."⁶ Bowman's philosophy cannot and does not make room for the notion of the incarnation by which "the only Redeemer of God's elect became man, and so was, and continueth to be God, and man, in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever." For Bowman there is no essential difference between the "nature" of God and the "nature" of man. Surely it is to fail fundamentally of one's duty as a minister of the gospel—not to speak of one's duty as the president of a seminary solemnly committed to the propagation of the Reformed Faith—not to warn Christ's little ones against such a destructive philosophy as is presented in the writings of Professor Bowman. His philosophy is perhaps as fine a philosophy as one could find on non-Christian bases, but it is subversive of the fundamentals of the Christian Faith.

In conclusion, we would contrast the sad failure of Dr. Mackay to warn against patent error with the open avowal of error on the part of the Rev. A. A. Griffing, a minister of

³ *Idem.*, p. 369.

⁴ See *Studies in the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 1, p. 42f. and Vol. 2, p. 413.

⁵ *Idem.*, Vol. 2, p. 333.

⁶ *A Sacramental Universe*, p. 370.

the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., in an article that appeared in the December 7th issue of *The Presbyterian Tribune*.

Mr. Griffins among other things declares: "I cannot say that the Confession of Faith says for me all I feel about the Atonement, or that it even hits the core of it." This is noteworthy and praiseworthy frankness. We know just where we are when a man openly asserts his disagreement with the doctrine of atonement which his church accepts in its creed. But if Bowman had spoken more fully on the atonement than he did he would also have maintained that not even the core of his views is expressed in the Westminster Confession. Bowman holds that through his views of time as a cumulative experience one can think of man as identifying himself with his own past while at the same time disowning the evil in it. Bowman virtually argues that men can do away with their own sins by self-consciously disowning them. He presents Jesus as appealing to this inherent capacity in man to save himself. "The subject can even in a sense repudiate his experiences. He can refuse to identify himself with certain passages in his subjective history: he can disown his past and dissociate himself from elements in the present of his inner life. This is a possibility of which the Founder of Christianity was wont to take advantage when He addressed Himself, over the head of those experiences which we call men's sins, to the core of personality within the agent."⁷ We are not at all surprised to find this doctrine of Kantian self-salvation in the philosophy of one who wants by all means to walk in the footsteps of Kant. The open denial of the historic doctrine of the atonement made by Mr. Griffing and the "non-aggression pact" made by Dr. Mackay with a somewhat less open denial of the atonement should challenge the "Fundamentalists" in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. to do some-thing more than utter faint intermittent protests.

⁷ *A Sacramental Universe*, p. 192.

John Goes To College—Part One

The Presbyterian Guardian

1940

Volume 8, Page 129ff

Suppose we think of a young man who goes to college. He was taught in his boyhood days that the world was made by God. He was taught that the human race, and animals too, came into being through the creative act of God. He has believed all these things about origins up to this point. Now he is confronted with a new view of things. He is confronted with the evolutionary conception of the origin of the universe and of man. What will he do? Will he accept this new view? Should he accept it in order to retain his intellectual integrity? This is the question that we propose to ask ourselves.

We may call this boy John. Suppose that after a class in biology one morning John meets Jim. Jim has been at college for a year or two and has already accepted the new teaching with respect to evolution. He is very enthusiastic about it too. He feels that it has liberated him from the shackles of ignorance and innocence. From the world of Santa Claus he has been brought into the world of reality. From a child he has become a man.

John is diffident still, but ventures at last to ask Jim whether he too once upon a time believed this old doctrine of creation. "To be sure I did when I was young, but now I have learned better. You see," Jim says, "when I was young my parents just taught me the story of creation out of the Bible and I could not investigate for myself.

Now that I can look through my own eyes, I can see for myself the evidence which proves the truth of evolution. My parents never had the opportunity to go to college. They never looked through a microscope or a telescope. They never used the empirical or scientific method. They merely accepted what they believed on the authority largely of ministers preaching in the churches and then taught their children accordingly. Now we live in the age of science and discovery."

"Well, what do you tell your father and mother when you come home for Christmas? Do they never ask you whether you still believe what you were taught?"

To these questions Jim answered that his mother and father could not understand the new point of view anyway, so what was the use of troubling to argue about it. He said that he told them he still believed in creation. This he could do honestly because in a metaphorical way you can call the process of development by this poetical name of creation. You may say that you certainly believe in Santa Claus and so you may also say that you believe in creation.

John was feeling somewhat upset. He sensed that somehow this thing could not be disposed of so easily. He sense that, if creation by God be true, certain things follow with respect to our lives. We ought then to be obedient to God, and will suffer punishment if we are not obedient. He began to see that he must investigate this matter openly and fully.

The first question he asked himself was whether the fact that he had been taught this doctrine of creation when a child was a point against the doctrine itself. He wondered whether there were not some boys who had been taught evolution when they were children, just as he had been taught creation when he was a child. Evolution had been with us now for several generations. Do not evolutionists teach their children that evolution is true, just as creationists teach their children that creation is true? And as to the schools where they received instruction, are there not many schools in which evolution is taken for granted as being true? Then, too, what about the many museums of the land? Do they not arrange the material in such a way that every intimation is given that evolution is a fact that cannot be doubted by any intelligent person? How about the thousands upon thousands of children of grade and high school age who are constantly led through the Museum of Natural History in New York? Is there any doubt but that they are taught this new doctrine on authority? Is Henry Fairfield Osborn's tree of life in the Hall of Man in that museum anything but authoritative instruction about the truth of origins?

John quite rightly sensed that, if there is to be any fruitful argument, the case must be considered on its own merits. Presumably we are none of us sprung full grown from the foreheads of the gods these days. We all come into this world as babes. When we were children we could not accept anything except on authority. Children's minds are not developed to the point where they are capable of independent judgment. Parents do well to try to develop the independent judgment of children as fast as they can, but they cannot do it so fast that they avoid indoctrinating their children about many things. Every boy or girl who has gone through the grades is indoctrinated in all the chief matters of life. We may then safely put aside this point. We shall have to look at the question itself, thought John. He began to feel that neutrality is a fiction and, in the nature of the case, impossible. No one comes to the question with an "open mind." Do the believers in creation come to the question in an unbiased fashion? Certainly not! Do the believers in evolution come to the question with an open mind? Also certainly not!

But is there not a third class? Can we say that all men are either believers in evolution or believers in creation? And particularly can we say of young people that they are believers in either of these? Are not they open-minded? They have not even studied the question for themselves. How then can they be believers in either one or the other position?

John was driven to investigate this question of whether there is a third possibility. For suppose there are only two positions at bottom, the theory of creation and the theory of evolution. Add to this the fact that all people have accepted when children what their parents have told them. Then there are only two classes of people, believers in evolution and believers in creation. It is then doubtless true that those who are young have not investigated themselves the question, but they are believers none the less. They are young believers, they are untrained and uninformed believers, but they are believers.

Dick Comes In

When John and Jim had finished their conversation and John had gone to his room to reflect on these matters, Dick knocked on the door. When he entered he soon observed that John was uneasy about something. The conversation about football did not run

smoothly. "What's on your mind?" Dick asked. "Snap out of it. Let's go out for a hike." Out for a hike they went.

It was not long before Dick forced John to tell him just what was on his mind. It was the struggle between the creation and evolution doctrines. What was Dick's answer to this perplexing question? Did he not believe creation when he was a boy? Did he not believe evolution? Dick seemed to be a liberating spirit. He whistled a merry tune. There was no great difficulty for him on this question. Did he accept evolution? Certainly. The facts were too overpowering for anyone who has eyes to see. Any self-respecting person would have to accept evolution. Did he then still believe in creation? Well no, not exactly; but what difference did it make? Did one's belief in creation determine one's course in life? What do evolution and creation have to do with religion? Did Dick believe in religion? Oh yes, he was not a secularist. He believed we should all of us together as religionists oppose the secularist and materialist. Do not many of the leading scientists today believe in a spiritual universe?

At this point Dick brought in such names as Eddington, Jeans, Millikan, Mather and others. Did he ever hear of that book by Edward H. Cotton on *Has Science Discovered God?* asked Dick. No, John had never heard of it. What was in it? Well, Cotton asked several of the leading scientists, by way of a questionnaire, whether in their scientific investigations they had found God. And what was the result? asked John, visibly excited. The answer of all of them without exception was, said Dick, that they did discover God. There was a time, Dick continued when evolutionary science was in the first bloom of youth, when it was a little too self-confident. At that time many scientists were materialists and mechanists. There was Haeckel, with his book on *The Riddle of the Universe*, who sought to explain everything with the help of material and causal principles. But those days are past. Scientists now stand reverently before the mystery of the universe. They recognize that they do not fully understand all things. They even recognize that they are not really any nearer to the mystery of existence than they ever were. On the contrary, they are quite ready to insist that every new discovery opens up vistas of new possibilities. They hold that on ultimate issues science has no pronouncement to make. Jeans puts it that way at the conclusion of his book, *The Mysterious Universe*. And here is where religion comes in. It works in that aspect of man's life which is not covered by scientific investigation. It satisfies the non-intellectual aspect of man's personality just as science satisfies the intellectual aspect of man's personality.

John's eyes began to brighten. A way of escape from the dilemma between evolution and creation seemed to present itself. Here were leading scientists themselves recommending this solution. These scientists were not irreligious men themselves. They believed in a spiritual universe. They believed in religion. They believed in God. They justified their position by saying that origin does not determine validity. What man is now, not what man once was, is the important thing. Is his present belief in God any the less valid and valuable because his ancestors were arboreal?

Still more hopeful did John become when Dick told him of the many ministers who also offered this third alternative to an uncompromising hostility between the creation and the evolution ideas. Do not the Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick and with him many other leading clergymen continue to preach about Christ, though they are fully persuaded of the truth of evolution? And do they not continue to preach out of the Bible, the book

on which John had been nurtured in his childhood days? Most assuredly they do. Do they seem to find any disharmony between science and religion? Not at all. They accept evolution and yet preach Christianity. Here, then, must be the solution.

Dick left the room with his same merry tune. Maybe he had helped that poor fellow John just a little bit.

John threw himself upon his bed. He was either very near to a solution or he was very much more muddled than ever. If these leading scientists and these leading clergymen were right, the solution was found.

But there he was about to bow to authority again. The imposing array of names almost had him, but was he not to consider the case on its merits? Could these men wish him to do anything else?

John's Disappointment

But do science and religion really operate in two different fields? Had he not been taught as a boy that man was created in the image of God? Had he not been told that man, by his own willful disobedience, then became a sinner? Had he not been told that since the fall in paradise every man in the universe is a sinner, subject to the wrath of God, because as a creature he will not obey his creator? And had he not been taught that Christ dies upon the cross as the substitute for man in order that He might bear the penalty for man? Or is this not Christianity?

He realized that things were now more complicated than ever. He should have to ask himself now what Christianity really is and what evolution really is. Is Christianity that which, for example, Dr. Fosdick says it is, or is it that which his parents taught him it is? He could see that if Christianity is that which Fosdick says it is, there would be no difficulty about his harmonizing creation with evolution. The definition of Christianity itself is then made in the face of the hypothesis of evolution. Historically Christianity has certainly not meant what Fosdick means by it.

It did not take John very long to see that the struggle was on anew. He saw very soon that it ought to make a very fundamental difference in our lives whether evolution or creation is true. He saw that at least historic Christianity has been logical if not true. If creation is true, historic Christianity is also true, and if evolution is true, the historic Christianity is not true. If creation is the truth about origins, then the evil in this world is not an eternal something for which man has no real responsibility.

Then evil is the result of man's willful disobedience. For this man must naturally be separated from God. Thus there can be no acceptance with God unless sin has been removed and man himself cannot remove it. Hence substitutionary atonement is true or man looks hopelessly to the future. The conclusion can be no other than that; though Fosdick and his friends may have harmonized evolution and religion, they have not harmonized evolution and the historic Christian religion.

John had now learned to liberate himself, to some extent at least, from the fear of authority. Not as though we should not honor men, and especially men of science, for their great learning and accomplishments, but that we should not accept a fundamental position simply on their authority. Gradually John saw that evolution and creation are, when considered in all their implications, views about reality that cover the same field. They are, moreover, views between which no reconciliation is possible. Every attempt

that has been made and is being made to bring the two together by saying that evolution is the method of creation, or by saying religion has nothing to do about origins, is accomplished by closing one's eyes to the logical implications of both the belief in creation and belief in evolution. If creation is true there is an absolute God, a God who will come with final judgement on His disobedient creatures unless they are forgiven. If evolution is true there is at most a finite God who is himself subject to certain laws that are higher than He. This God cannot bring us into judgment.

And would not that be fine? If we could only prove that we cannot possibly be brought into judgment! Has evolution proved that? It certainly has if it is true. If evolution is true there will be no judgment to come. That much is logical. If only it is true, thought John. If only it is true! Deep down in his heart he wished for all that he was worth that evolution might be true. Was this, then, open-mindedness on the question? No, it certainly was not. Was he now in a position to study the matter on its merits? And was anybody able to study the question with an open mind? Were not all men to begin with like himself, anxious to prove evolution true in order to escape the judgment to come?

In this confused state of mind, John decided that he would see, as far as he could, what are the facts in the case. He would like nothing better than to prove evolution true. He was aware in this bias in himself. Who would not desire to escape eternal punishment? Yet he wanted to be sure that he would not too soon conclude that evolution is true for fear of the consequences. If he should decide that evolution is true, if he should thus depend on the philosophy for the future that this acceptance of evolution involves and then it should prove untrue, he would be brought into judgment after all.

How Discover The Truth?

But now the question was once more how to find out the truth about the matter. Was he not informed by some of his friends that it was wholly a matter of the laboratory? Were not the facts said to be overwhelmingly conclusive on the debate? He was told that when evolution first made its appearance there was nothing but a highly artificial explanation of origins. In many books by scientists he found that he was told that there was really no scientifically defensible answer to the question of origins at all till evolution appeared upon the scene. Then the facts were brought to light. Then the empirical method, the genuinely scientific method was first applied to the question.

Now there were some misgivings in his mind as to what can and what cannot be proved. Is the question to be settled simply by an appeal to facts? Is it as simple as would be a question about the color of a cow? If one says it is black and the other says it is white, they can simply go to the cow and settle the matter. Well, it might be as simple as that if evolution could really be shown to happen before our eyes. So, then, why not go to the laboratory to see what can be done?

And why not read to see what men have done?

Then began a time of searching for all the factual information that he could find. Dick arrived in the midst of it. He was enthusiastic about evolution. John asked him whether it had really been proven true by experiment. Dick was quite certain that it had, though he had never seen it happen himself. They agreed, therefore, to ask various scientists what had happened with respect to experimental evidence.

When they began to investigate this point they found somewhat varying answers on the part of scientists. Yet when asked for exact information they would say that no experimental evidence has yet been found for evolution. Most of them were willing to grant that, as far as experimental evidence is concerned, Bateson spoke rightly in Toronto some years ago when he said that none has yet been found. There is much discussion on the Mendelian laws, reversion to type, and so forth, but there is no experimental evidence that one species has actually changed into another species.

At this point an argument arose between Dick and John as to the meaning of the word "species." What is it that characterizes a species and distinguishes it from a mere variation? After much searching the two boys could not find a complete agreement on this question among scientists. There seems to be a serious difficulty connected with the question. Most scientists will regard cross-fertilization as the chief mark of a distinct species. So, then, what needs to be found is one species derived from cross-breeding from another species. Yet if this cross-breeding is accomplished constantly and freely, the two species merge and, if carried through logically, all species merge. In that case, there are no species to talk about. It would seem that, in order to prove their theory true, evolutionists must first make all things flow. But when they have made all things flow by freely deriving one species from the other, they have not proved their theory because then there are no longer any species to talk about. In this way Bateson says that, on the one hand, we need to look for a derivation of one species from another but after this has been accomplished we must look for an indubitably sterile hybrid so that the change may bestopped at the proper time.

These things began greatly to worry John. He was now extremely anxious to prove evolution true. Yet it became clear to him that the matter could not easily be settled by an appeal to "facts." There in the realm of the experimental, where it could most easily be settled by facts, the greatest scientists themselves maintain that it has not been settled. Moreover they admit that there is little hope that it will be settled in the future. It began to appear more and more, then, that evolution is a philosophy of life that cannot be so easily proven by an appeal to facts.

John Goes To College—Part Two

The Presbyterian Guardian

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In the preceding installment, John faces the fact that the doctrine of creation is irreconcilable with the theory of evolution. He decided to investigate evolution on its own merits, and to come to a conclusion about its trustworthiness. He recognizes that a belief in evolution would be most convenient, for it would remove the necessity of a substitutionary atonement and the fear of a final judgment. He discovers that evolution cannot easily be proven by an appeal to facts, for even scientists admit that there is no scientific evidence to support the theory. It begins to appear to John that evolution is a philosophy of life for which he will have a great deal of difficulty in finding proof.

Direct evidence failing, Dick and John discuss the indirect evidences as they are usually advanced in books on evolution. They discussed the question of comparative anatomy. What did they find in the textbooks on evolution? They found evidence of a great deal of similarity between the makeup of one species and the makeup of other species. They found also that from these similarities the scientists frequently draw the conclusion of derivation. But this is a logical *non sequitur*. If the arm of a man resembles the foreleg of a horse it does not prove that one has been derived from the other. Similarity of appearance does not prove derivation nor does it prove common origin. To be sure, if the theory were proved true by undeniable evidence it would find corroboration in these similarities, but since it is not and cannot be proved true from unmistakable sources these similarities prove nothing at all in themselves. The similarities that are found in nature among the various species are certainly not out of harmony with the creation idea. In fact, we should expect that, if creation of all species by one God is the theory that we need, then there would be great similarity everywhere. It is not a case of one being an obscurantist and another willing to look at the facts. As Christians we should all be willing to look at the facts.

The boys turned to embryology. Here, too, there is much similarity and also much diversity between the embryo of one species and the embryo of other species. But this, too, proved nothing for evolution. Similarity never proves derivation.

They looked at the question of vestigial organs. They found a great deal of difference on this point among scientists. What some call vestigial organs others at later times seem to have found useful. But, waiving these considerations, we again note that there is nothing here that is not wholly consistent with the concept of creation. With creation goes invariably the doctrine of sin—man's breaking away from God. With this goes God's punishment on man and on nature; hence all disease and corruption, including death in this world. Men are but atrophied replicas of their former selves. It is no wonder that some organs of various species are atrophied; it is a wonder that they are not altogether atrophied.

The boys then turned to geographical distribution. They read a great deal about the migrations of animals from Asia to America by way of the Bering Sea. But in all that they read on this subject it again appeared that the facts as we see them do not prove evolution in distinction from creation. They are all of them perfectly consistent with the idea of creation.

Finally they look at the question of geology. As to the rocks themselves, what did they find? They found once more a tendency of some layers of rocks to be lower than other layers of rocks. These have often been called the older layers. But, on the other hand, there are many geological "faults" in many parts of the world. The result is that here, too, there is much similarity but also much diversity. This certainly does not prove evolution in distinction from creation, since creation allows for this very thing.

Then as to the fossils that are found in the rocks, the boys again learned nothing that would prove evolution against creation. The "missing links" are missing still. Henry Fairfield Osborn has made many imaginary plaster casts of the Tree of Life. Dick pointed to them with some pride as he was seeking to prove the theory, though with waning enthusiasm now. John, too, felt elated for a moment. Yet he soon discovered that the evidence for the missing link has been all too scarce. Not one "missing link" has been convincing proof of evolution so far. Then, too, why should there be such scarcity of evidence? Why should not the bones of these vertebrates called "missing links" be discovered in the same abundance as the bones of recognized species?

It was certainly discouraging for the boys. They sat down to think it all over. They read once more the conclusion of Scott's little book on evolution in which he says that after someone has read of all the evidence he will say: "Is this all?" To this Scott replies that it is much like finding a trail in the woods. Where the white man sees nothing, the trained Indian hunter is alert to sense a trail of a hidden animal. Does this, then, sound as though creation were such a foolish theory and the facts so overwhelming of evolution that any man in his right mind—and not too prejudiced—must see the truth at once? Bateson says no proof of the origin of species has been found. Osborn says that, as far as the evidence from geology is concerned, earliest man cannot be shown to have been less intelligent than present-day man. Scott says of all the evidence for evolution that it takes a delicately trained eye to see its significance. They all three firmly believe in evolution.

The boys were greatly dejected after their investigations. Dick was dejected because he had not been able to substantiate his claims. John was dejected because evolution has not been proved true to him; John was anxious to escape the idea of a judgment to come. And now they seemed once more thrown into the realm of speculation. It appeared to be basically a philosophical question after all. Was it not a scientific question? To be sure. Let science say all it can say. But science itself runs into philosophy and cannot help doing so. If evolution were proved true a non-Christian philosophy of life would be proved true. It would then be proved that reality is such that all that Christianity says about it is not true. For that reason the boys now agreed that they would no longer indulge in the calling of names. They would no longer claim that the one is scientific while the other is not. They would agree to look at all the facts and then see what conclusions can and must be legitimately drawn from them. In short, they would see which philosophy of life—that which had evolution as part of its teaching, or that which had creation as part of its teaching—is the more reasonable.

The Philosophy of Evolution

What they began to do then was to analyze what the theory of evolution really implied if taken comprehensively. They realized that it was quite inconsistent for some men to say that they are scientists and, as such, are not interested in philosophical speculations. If some of the things are really true that some specialists in a certain field say are true, then they have said something so far reaching about the whole of reality that all men, themselves included, are affected in the very center of their existence by it. Evolution as a scientific question cannot be separated from the question of cosmic evolution, as the early generation of evolutionists clearly saw. Huxley, Spencer, Fiske and others were very well aware of the fact that they were seeking to introduce a new philosophy of life. They realized that their view said something very definite about the origin of the whole universe and therefore said something very definite about God. Fiske, for instance, has taken great pains to show what sort of God we can believe in if we accept evolution. And the many writers on the relation of science to religion, as, for example, J. Arthur Thomson, have told us very definitely what sort of religion is consistent with evolution. So also all the writers of such books as Cotton's, mentioned above, and many others, tell us very definitely what sort of God is consistent with the evolution theory.

Of what nature is reality if evolution be true? In what sort of God may we believe if evolution is true? We cannot state this matter fully, but we can say that if evolution be true, there is at best a finite God. Some evolutionists who wish to point out that their theories are not harmful to religion seek to show us that God is some sort of principle of coordination in this universe. There are many varieties of this sort of God. Others hold that if they believe in God at all they must believe in Him as a distinct personality, but He is then at least a derivative personality. We need only to think of such names as Alexander, James and Whitehead, in order to think of the variety of deities that are offered to us. Yet these deities are all of them very similar. They are all derivative deities. Above them hovers the realm of bare possibility out of which as a matrix they themselves together with the universe have emerged.

As an illustration of this sort of view, think for a minute of the position of Jeans. He tells us in the introduction of his book, *The Mysterious Universe*, that in the first chapter he talks as a scientist, but that in the last chapter is merely speaking as a philosopher and that there everybody may throw his hat in the ring. Yet in the very first section of the first chapter he tells us that some millions of years ago, nobody knows why or how, the human race came into existence. And all this was purely accidental. But accidents will happen. Therefore we should not be too greatly surprised. With Huxley we might say that if we should set six monkeys to typing they would eventually produce all the books in the British Museum. If we should see one particular monkey in its blind strumming produce a Shakespearean sonnet, it would seem strange enough to us, but if we think of all the possibilities involved in the law of chance there would be nothing really unexpected in this.

Now in the first place we should note that this is not meant as a travesty. It is seriously put forth by Jeans as a reasonable philosophy of origins. I do not quote it in order to gain a questionable advantage by appealing to the natural negative reaction that orthodox people feel to such a statement of the philosophy of evolution. The boys when

reading this were somewhat struck by its apparent extreme character. Dick brought up the point that many evolutionists believe in purpose. A great many evolutionists are not mechanists. But the exact point which, after much argument, they saw is this: that the only type of purpose to which evolutionists of one school or another may hold is, in the last analysis, a purpose that falls within the universe and is therefore itself subject to the law of chance that governs the universe as a whole. The only conception of purpose that is not subject to the law of chance is the conception of purpose which proceeds from a God who is the creator of the universe and therefore the creator of the so-called laws of chance. Now in such a God the evolutionist cannot believe. He would be giving up evolution if he did. It therefore appears that the seemingly extreme example of Jeans, that the whole universe is basically accidental, is involved in the evolution position, and it also appears that the only alternative to this position is that of God who is absolute and therefore the creator and the judge of the world.

To put it another way, the contrast between the philosophy of evolution and the philosophy of creation lies in the question of whether rationality is derivative. The evolutionist says that rationality is derivative. The creationist says that it is ultimate. The creationist does not say that it is ultimate in man but that it is ultimate in God. The evolutionist says that it is, to be sure, not ultimate in man, but that neither is it ultimate in God.

At this point John finally began to realize the hopelessness of defending the philosophy of evolution. The evolutionist must say that God cannot possibly exist. He must say that rationality is subject to chance in all reality. He says this by implication if not explicitly. For if this universe is subject to the rationality of God who is its creator, it would be impossible to say anything that is really true about even the smallest thing in this world without taking God into consideration. In that case the very existence of things, as well as their meaning, would depend upon their relation to God. If therefore, you left God out of consideration in studying this world, you would be engaged in false abstraction and would be bound to emerge with a distorted picture of reality.

Now the evolutionist has been doing just that. He has assumed what he should prove. He has assumed the whole of his metaphysics. He has assumed, to begin with, the existence of facts as independent of God. He has assumed, in the second place, the whole of his epistemology. He has assumed that the human mind exists independently of God and can do its interpreting independently of God. But this is what he should prove.

Now on the evolutionist's contention that he is dealing only with a truly empirical or scientific method, such assumption of that which is to be proved is an unpardonable sin. But, more important than that, we do not really blame the evolutionist for assuming what he should prove. On the question of origins, what can any human being do than first state his philosophy, which at once involved a method and a conclusion, and then see what it does to human experience? Since in evolution—as in everything else when we take more than a superficial view—we deal with most basic issues in which we ourselves are involved, we can only state a position and then set out to argue that it is reasonable. So we should not blame the evolutionist for saying at the onset that he believes such a view of the universe to be the most reasonable which holds to the derivative character of rationality. We merely object to his saying that he is making no assumptions when, as a matter of fact, he is.

Then as to the argument itself, we note that the evolutionist has to make and does make a universal negative conclusion on the basis of a little stream of experience. When he takes for granted that anything happens by chance, he really takes for granted that everything happens by chance. He thus negates God. He says in effect that there cannot be a judgment coming. Yet he himself admits that all his reasoning about anything is based upon a short span of human experience of at most a few thousand years. How is it possible that evolutionists are able to predict, on such a basis, what can and what cannot happen for millions of years to come? Yet this is exactly what every evolutionist does.

If I should go to sleep on a railroad track, how could I be safe? Only if I were certain that no train would come for several hours. How could I be certain of this? Only if I control the railroad or have the full assurance of the man who controls the railroad. And if you say that people do not fall asleep on railroad tracks, I reply that every spot in this universe is like a railroad track if creation be true. In that case, we may be face to face with the judgment at any time. We cannot escape this question by saying that we have no metaphysical needs. Our physical needs will at the time of death turn suddenly into metaphysical needs.

To vary the illustration, how could the dwellers on a little island declare their independence and claim that they were the only people on the face of the globe, unless they had gone far and wide over the whole expanse of the universe?

Our conclusion from this is that the universal negative statement which every evolutionist and every non-theist makes presupposes the very God against whom he makes that statement. Every human being has to make statements that involve the nature of reality as a whole. No human being is himself ultimate. Therefore every statement is for or against God and every statement is really for God. The negations of God are indirect affirmations of God. Creation is, we believe, the only philosophy of origins that does not destroy human reason itself. It is really not a question as to which position is more reasonable. Evolution and creation give no quarter and expect no quarter. They are bound up with mutually exclusive philosophies of life. Creation is bound by that philosophy of life which says that rationality must be absolute or we could have no intelligent experience about anything. Evolution is bound up with that philosophy of life which says that experience can float in the void.

When the boys had gone through these points more fully than we have been able to report, John was convinced that there was no escape from the judgment to come. The facts had shown themselves inextricably interwoven with philosophy and the philosophy of evolution is inherently self-contradictory; it destroys human reason itself. After that he called nobody names. He called a spade a spade. He sought to help as many as he could to get down to fundamental questions on this subject in order that they might really think through the implications of their own theories. He saw that modern evolution and modern philosophy as a whole stand or fall together. Much as he disliked to be against the current of the times on this subject, he had to cling to that which did not destroy his own intellectual self-respect.

Kant Or Christ?

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The late Dr. Shailer Matthews was lecturing on Christian Ethics. An orthodox student asked the question whether, in discussing the Ethics of Jesus, it were necessary to inquire into His claim to divinity. Dr. Matthews replied in some such words as these: "If you have some dentistry or plumbing done you do not ask the dentist or the plumber to explain to you the technique of plumbing or of dentistry." "True," answered the orthodox student in turn, "but if I am the man with the toothache I want to know whether it is a plumber or a dentist that is working at my teeth."

Dr. Matthews' position may, I suppose, be said to be fairly typical of modern theology in general. Modern theology is, generally speaking, opposed to metaphysics. It has been informed by the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

The Pervasive Influence Of Kant

Sir Arthur Eddington, in speaking of the philosophy of physical science tells us that "the physical universe is defined as the theme of a specified body of knowledge, just as Mr. Pickwick might be defined as the hero of a specified novel."¹ "A great advantage of this definition," says Eddington, "is that it does not prejudge the question whether the physical universe—or Mr. Pickwick—really exists."² He illustrates his position by telling us of an ichthyologist. This ichthyologist explores the life of the ocean. "Surveying his catch, he proceeds in the usual manner of a scientist to systematize what it reveals. He arrives at two generalizations: (1) No sea-creature is less than two inches long. (2) All sea-creatures have gills."³ In explanation he adds: "Anything uncatchable by my net is *ipso facto* outside the scope of ichthyological knowledge, and is not part of the kingdom of fishes which has been defined as the theme of ichthyological knowledge. In short, what my net can't catch isn't fish."⁴ The ichthyologist is not interested in "an objective kingdom of fishes." Eddington's position is, we believe, fairly typical of modern science in general. Modern science too has been informed by the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

John Dewey's *The Quest for Certainty* contains a running argument against the notion of "antecedent being." "There are no conceivable ways in which the existence of ultimate

¹ *The Philosophy of Physical Science*, p. 3.

² p. 3.

³ p. 16.

⁴ p. 16.

unchangeable substances which interact without undergoing change in themselves can be reached by means of experimental operations. Hence they have no empirical, no experimental standing; they are pure dialectic inventions.”⁵ For Dewey scientific objects are “statistically standardized correlations of existential changes.”⁶ Dewey’s position is, we believe, fairly typical of modern philosophy in general. Once more modern philosophy, like modern religion and modern science, has been informed by the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

God the Ultimate Interpreter

We are not surprised then that Professor Albert Einstein finds no difficulty in harmonizing science and religion: a positivist science and a positivist religion ought to be good friends. Nor is it any marvel that he should reject the notion of a personal God; only a religion without God fits in with a science that has no God. Indeed one of the great virtues of the frankly positivist positions of Matthews, Eddington, Dewey and Einstein is that it makes the issue between historic Christianity and modern thought so plain that he who runs may read it. “Tenderminded” Idealists and Realists of various schools befuddle this issue. They speak of some sort of antecedent being. They still speak of some sort of structure in the universe which the human mind finds as a datum. This might, on the surface, seem to make them sympathetic to a Christian point of view. It takes the “tough-minded” Selective Subjectivist to reject the “objective kingdom of fishes” altogether, the “tough-minded” Pragmatist to assure us that data are taken not given, and the “tough-minded” Relativist to inform us that a truly religious person occupies himself with thoughts, feelings, and aspirations to which he clings because of their superpersonal value.” Historic Christianity should expect no pity from the followers of Immanuel Kant.

With more or less consistency the followers of Kant ascribe, by implication if not otherwise, ultimate definitory power to the mind of man. Christianity, on the other hand, ascribes ultimate definitory power to the mind of God. What Eddington ascribes to man, the power of exhaustive dialectification of significant reality, Christianity ascribes to God. The God of Christianity has identified and does identify by exhaustive description. He has exhausted all classification so that for Him the *infima species* and the individual are identical. In modern science, in modern philosophy and in modern religion a would-be autonomous man wields the ‘Logician’s postulate’ in sovereign fashion denying significant reality to that which has not been trimmed on his Procrustean bed. There is no no-man’s land of neutrality between these two positions. Two “Creators” stand face to face in mortal combat. Two minds, each claiming to define fact before the other can meet fact stand squarely opposed to one another. If Christianity is true, the “facts” are what God says they must be; if the Kantian position is true, the “facts” are what man says they must be. The method employed by modern science, philosophy and religion does not seek to find God’s structure in the facts of the universe. Man’s structural activity is itself made the ultimate source of significant predication. The rejection of the God of Christianity is the prerequisite of the acceptance of current scientific, philosophical and

⁵ p. 118.

⁶ *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, in *The Library of Living Philosophers*, Volume 1, p. 578.

religious methodology. There cannot be two ultimate interpreters. The orthodox position makes God, the modern position makes man the ultimate interpreter of reality.

Tillich And Niebuhr Both Kantian

The issue seems clearer than ever. Unfortunately there are those on the modern and there are those on the orthodox side who obscure the issue anew. By way of illustration I point to Tillich, Niebuhr and Barth on the modern and to Romanism on the orthodox side.

In his criticism of Einstein's recent article in *The Union Review* Professor Paul Tillich discusses four points. Says he: "Einstein attacks the idea of a personal God from four angles: The idea is not essential for religion. It is the creation of primitive superstition. It is self-contradictory. It contradicts the scientific world view."¹ In his reply Tillich assumes with Kant that the phenomenal world is self-existent and self-operative. He believes in a personal God but in a personal God who is finite. He employs the Kantian form of argument against the idea of a God "interfering with natural events or being." In short the sort of God Tillich believes in ought to be quite unobjectionable to Einstein. It were better to draw the issue simply and plainly as Einstein does.

Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr's writings seem at first blush to clarify rather than obscure the issue. Niebuhr seeks to distinguish the Christian from the classical-modern view of man. He does not hesitate to say that the classical view "is determined by Greek metaphysical presuppositions" and that "the Christian view is determined by the ultimate presuppositions of Christian faith"² In a recent article in *The Union Review* he says: "the one element in modern culture which gives it unity and cohesion in all of its variety and contradictions is its rejection of the Christian doctrine of original sin." For all this we are grateful indeed. Yet at the critical moment Niebuhr himself accepts the classical-modern rather than the Christian view of man. Niebuhr's criticisms on naturalism and ideal-ism are in themselves exceedingly fine. These criticisms might on the surface seem to commit him to the doctrine of a self-sufficient God and the Christian doctrine of sin. Yet such is, we are forced to hold, not the case. Niebuhr's position is similar to that of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard, he argues, has taught us how to bridge the impassable gulf between "ideas" and "facts" presupposed by both naturalism and idealism. He has done so with his notion of the self, the Individual. This Individual, he argues, unifies within Himself true universality and true particularity.³ We reply that Kierkegaard's Individual is but the *homo noumenon* of Kant in modern dress. It is the personification of the ideal the autonomous man sets for himself.

Niebuhr Rejects Causal Creation

We are, accordingly, not surprised to find Niebuhr rejecting what he calls "literalistic errors" on the question of origins. "The relation of man's essential nature to his sinful state cannot be solved within terms of the chronological version of the perfection before

¹ *The Union Review*, November, 1940, p. 8.

² *The Nature and Destiny of Man: Vol. 1. Human Nature*, p. 12.

³ *Human Nature*, p. 263.

the Fall. It is, as it were, a vertical rather than horizontal relation. When the Fall is made an event in history rather than a symbol of an aspect of every historical moment in the life of man, the relation of evil to goodness in that moment is obscured.”⁴ But if the “literalistic errors” are to be rejected the naturalistic and idealistic errors, against which Niebuhr has so vigorously protested, must be accepted.

The error of the naturalist, argues Niebuhr, is to regard causality as the principle of meaning.⁵ But without causal creation by a God of self-contained meaning the world of causality is what the naturalist says it is, a world without meaning. The “vitalities of history”⁶ then have in them the power to defy forever the “structure” that “God” may seek to impose upon them. It is true enough that naturalistic interpretations “do not understand the total stature of freedom in which human life stands” and that they are unable “to appreciate the necessity of a trans-historical norm for historical life.”⁷ It is equally true, however, that Niebuhr, in rejecting causal creation, retains a naturalistically interpreted world which must artificially be brought into relationship with the world of the “trans-historical.”

The error of the idealist, argues Niebuhr, is that he has a God of pure form, of abstract structure. But a God who is not the causal Creator of the world can be nothing more than pure Form. We may impersonate this Form but all the bellows of our imagination cannot give it life. “Formless stuff” and “abstract law” is the only alternative to causal creation.

Also Barth Denies God’s Self-Sufficiency

What then does Niebuhr offer us that is better than the “idolatry” of naturalism and the “idolatry” of idealism? He offers us a combination of these idolatries. For all his criticism on naturalistic and idealistic “idolatries” he yet turns these “idolatries” into subordinate principles which, for him, are true in their place. “Naturalism” and “idealism” are after all thought to be right as far as they go. The “ultra-rational foundations and presuppositions” of the Christian faith will, according to Niebuhr, have to accord with the presuppositions of naturalism and idealism.

Niebuhr keeps the “ultra-rational” principles within proper bounds, within bounds that the “autonomous individual” can readily allow. The contrast between the classical-modern and the biblical view of man has after all been effaced. The superrationalistic dimensionalism that comes forth from the crucible of this procedure may be said to be “nearer to the Christian faith and a more perverse corruption of it” than either naturalism or idealism.

A theology that is based on the *Critique of Pure Reason* can do no justice either to the idea of God or to the idea of man. It would be simpler and more true to fact if Tillich and Niebuhr would follow the example of Eddington, Dewey, and Einstein. The same thing holds true with respect to Karl Barth. Barth’s challenge to “modern Protestantism” is to be taken *cum grano*. Modern Protestantism is modern; it is Kantian. So is Barth. The underlying epistemological and metaphysical presuppositions of Barth and of “modern

⁴ *Idem.*, p. 269.

⁵ p. 134.

⁶ p. 142.

⁷ p. 164.

Protestantism” alike are found in the critical philosophy of Kant. The quarrels between them are but family quarrels soon to be mended when anyone comes with the challenge of a self-sufficient God. Barth’s ire does not rise to the fulness of its power till he is face to face with the doctrine of the sovereign God. With the help of Kant he brings down this God to the position of correlativity with a self-existent temporal flux. We conclude that such men as Tillich, Niebuhr and Barth obscure the issues that face modern man.

The Fundamental Issue

From the orthodox side the issue is also obscured. It is obscured in particular by the adherents of Scholastic theology. To go back from Kant to St. Thomas and back from St. Thomas to Aristotle offers no help. Professor Etienne Gilson, for all his brilliant effort, can find no harmony between a philosophy based on autonomous reason and a theology based on revelation.

Protestant Apologists have been all too ready to follow the Scholastic line. Bishop Butler’s Analogy and the many books based on it still cater to autonomous reason. But for all this obscuration both on the part of the modern and the orthodox theologians the issue is at bottom simple and clear. A consistent Christianity, such as we must humbly hold the Reformed Faith to be, must set an interpretation of its own over against modern science, modern philosophy and modern religion. Its thinking is controlled, at every point, by the presupposition of the existence of the self-sufficient God of which the Bible speaks. It is upon the basis of this presupposition alone, the Reformed Faith holds, that predication of any sort at any point has relevance and meaning. If we may not presuppose such an “antecedent” Being man finds his speck of rationality to be swimming as a mud-ball in a bottomless and shoreless ocean.

Reason, which on Kantian basis has presumed to legislate for the whole of reality, needs chance for its existence. If reality were God-structured the human mind could not be ultimately legislative. The idea of brute irrationality is presupposed in modern methodology. At the same time it is this brute irrationality which undermines every interpretative endeavor on the part of would-be autonomous man. There is on the modern basis no possibility of the identification of any fact let alone the possibility of finding an intelligent relationship of one fact to another fact. The possibility of science and philosophy as well as the possibility of theology presupposes the idea of a God, whose counsel determines “whatsoever comes to pass.” Only then has the spectre of brute fact and ultimate irrationality been slain. If we are to follow the method of modern science, modern philosophy and modern theology Merlin will never walk the earth again. Modern thought is, like the Prodigal Son at the swine-trough but, unlike the Prodigal, it will not return to the Father’s house.

A Substitute For Christianity

The Presbyterian Guardian

1943

Issue 12, Page 35

The second in a series of articles on Princeton Theological Seminary *The Presbyterian Guardian* has from time to time discussed the theological views of members of the Princeton Seminary faculty. This was but natural for a journal committed to the propagation and defense of the Reformed Faith. As has been shown again and again, several of the professors at Princeton, though pledged to defend the Reformed Faith, have departed far from it. For this situation Princeton Seminary as a whole is responsible. The present article, however, deals not with the broad policies of the seminary as a unit. It limits itself to the views of Professor Elmer George Homrighausen.

Before his election as Professor of Christian Education on October 12, 1937, Dr. Homrighausen was known to be very sympathetic to the views of Karl Barth and his school. Not to speak of his activity as a translator of Barth's writings, his book *Christianity in America*, 1936, proves this fact conclusively.¹ Now the issue between the Reformed Faith and Barthianism is not limited to the question of Biblical inspiration. It is far wider than that. Barthianism involves an entire reconstruction of all the doctrines of historic Christianity. Not merely Calvinism but also evangelical Christianity is reinterpreted according to the requirements of a nonchristian philosophy. Barthianism has no room for a self-existent God, or for His direct revelation in nature, history, and scripture. It rejects the historicity of man's creation and fall; it reduced all the acts of Christ's redemption to cosmic events happening to all men alike.

It was this type of theology, apparently, that the authorities at Princeton wanted taught. Yet Dr. Homrighausen's appointment was not confirmed at the 1938 General Assembly. Apparently, in view of certain opposition, the Standing Committee on Theological Seminaries voted to take no action. But Dr. Mackay, President of Princeton Seminary, and himself an ardent devotee of the newtheology, together with the Board of the Seminary, presented Dr. Homrighausen's name again at the 1939 assembly. This time they were prepared with new ammunition. Under date of May 11, 1939, there appeared in *The Presbyterian*, pp. 8f., a brief article from the hand of Dr. Homrighausen, entitled "Convictions," seemingly so orthodox in nature as to be able to silence every critic. And silence every critic it very nearly did. These critics had largely limited their opposition to Dr. Homrighausen's views of Scripture. And now Dr. Homrighausen asserted his view of Scripture in the following words: "As for the Scriptures, I believe they are the only infallible rule of faith and practice." What more could anyone desire? And as for the other doctrines of Christianity, the following may serve as a sample: "I believe in God's self revelation in actual history, from the beginning and continuing in various and diverse manners throughout Israel's history, until in Jesus Christ He revealed Himself fully,

¹ see a review of this book in *The Presbyterian Guardian*, Feb., 1938.

personally, redemptively, finally. I want to emphasize the fact that I believe in historical revelation.” After this the storm abated.

When asked what had caused him to change his views since the 1938 assembly, Dr. Homrighausen is said to have made the reply, “I just grew up.”² In *The Christian Century* of April 12, 1939, he gives an account of the stages of orthodoxy, when God was to him an “all-seeing judge.” Then came his entrance into the ministry with a “consistent theologic-philosophical intellectualism.” There followed, third, a period of liberalism, a substitution of a theology of experience for a theology of intellectualism. After this, he says, he traveled the road to Damascus. “What struck me and my liberalism was the dialectical theology.” This fourth stage itself had its stages, until at last the fifth or final stage was reached. It was the stage of independence. This final stage was marked by certain criticism but not, he asserts, by a rejection of Barthianism. “To this day I agree with the main tenants of the dialectical theology, and regard them as essential to evangelicalism if it is to revive and meet the issues of the age.”

In April, 1939, then, Dr. Homrighausen, as he says, was walking on his own theological legs, and as such was affirming his allegiance to the main tenets of Barthianism. These tenets include the complete rejection of Scripture and history as a direct revelation of God. Yet it was in May of the same year that he wrote his article entitled “Convictions,” in which he affirmed his belief in Scripture as the infallible rule of faith and practice, and in which he stressed particularly the fact that God reveals himself in history. The two positions are flatly contradictory one of another.

But, you say, a month intervened between the publication of these two articles. Perhaps, then, there was also a sixth stage. Perhaps Dr. Homrighausen only thought he was walking on his own theological legs in April, 1939, while in fact his real walking began in May. But quite apart from the strain this puts on our credulity, there is the fact that in the midsummer number of *Christendom*³ of the same year, Dr. Homrighausen reviewed the book of Edwin Lewis, *The Faith We Declare*, and said of it, “I laid this book down with a sense of envy and gratification. I wish it had been given to me to write it.” His entire review is one of enthusiastic approbation. Yet for Lewis the Bible is anything but the infallible rule of faith and practice. Lewis says, for example, “It seems unquestionable, even as the critics say, that the fourth gospel was never written as sober, scientific, objective history.”⁴ The tenets of Lewis’ book are very similar to those of Barthianism.

Moreover, in *The Union Review* under date of May, 1942, Dr. Homrighausen says of the Word of God in relation to Scripture, “This Word is not merely so much literature, static proof texts, or curriculum material. Liberalism has rightly emancipated us from a liberal biblicism.”⁵ If this be caricature, it is at any rate a rejection of the orthodox doctrine of the Bible as the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

Again in “Attend to Your Reading,” a pamphlet published in 1942 under the auspices of the American Bible Society, Dr. Homrighausen expresses agreement with Dr. C. H.

² *The Presbyterian Guardian*, March 10, 1940, p. 78.

³ vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 473ff.

⁴ p. 81; see further the review of this book by John P. Clelland in *The Westminster Theological Journal*, May, 1940, pp. 153ff.

⁵ p. 12.

Dodd's conception of The Authority of God's Word in Scripture. But Dodd's book on *The Authority of the Bible* is as far as the poles removed from the idea of infallibility. No written word, Dodd argues, can be infallible. "The written word is the medium through which we reach the personality and its experience. It is never a perfect medium.

'For words, like nature, half reveal and half conceal the soul within.'

But it is the best we have. In almost all parts of Bible we can feel ourselves in touch with religious personalities, some of them displaying exceptional inspiration, all of them men of insight and sincerity."⁶ Or again, "Nowhere is the truth given in such purely 'objective' form that we can find a self-subsistent external authority."⁷

If Dr. Homrighausen in 1942 finds himself in substantial agreement with such sentiments, there must have been in his theological growth a seventh as well as a sixth stage, and the seventh would seem to be virtually identical to the fifth.

Yet it is not the "saga of a soul" but the welfare of souls with which we are concerned. This discussion of dates and growth is by the way. We are taking for granted that Dr. Homrighausen was consistent with himself. The natural answer to this puzzle of dates is that he meant his "orthodox" statement of May, 1939, (in *The Presbyterian*) to be taken as consistent with the main tenets of Barthianism which he held at about the same time and later. That such is the case finds adequate corroboration in his book, *Let the Church Be the Church*, published by the Abingdon-Cokesbury Press in 1940. This book has been reviewed in *The Presbyterian Guardian* by the Rev. Edward Heerema.⁸ We can say only a few words here.

As is to be expected, this later book is less outspoken in its rejection of orthodoxy than was his earlier one. But the principles on which both books are built are the same. In both a form of nonchristian philosophy is substituted for evangelical Christianity.

The latter book presents an eloquent argument for "God's primacy and contemporary relevancy," but the God actually presented is not primary at all and wholly irrelevant. For He is not the Creator God of Scripture for whom and unto whom are all things. The facts of the world are assumed to be self-existent. To be sure, the term "creation" is used, but as in the case of Barth and Brunner, it is used figuratively. It is used so as to avoid any possible conflict with what evolutionary scientists may wish to say about the origin of this world or of man. The whole domain of nature and history is virtually given over to the non-believing scientist to do with as he pleases. To read the Bible truly, says Dr. Homrighausen in his pamphlet "Attend to Your Reading," we must not look for a Biblical "philosophy of life." If we do we shall not hear the sovereign Word of God.⁹ The "sovereign Word of God" therefore, according to Dr. Homrighausen, points to a God who has not actually created the universe and has no control over it. But such a God, we reply, is wholly irrelevant and meaningless to man.

With a figurative or metaphorical notion of creation goes a figurative or metaphorical notion of the fall. For Dr. Homrighausen the fall does not refer, any more than the creation, to an historical event. To be sure, he does not go out of his way in this book to attack the doctrine of an original pair called Adam and Eve. Yet his whole argument

⁶ p. 295.

⁷ p. 289.

⁸ Sept. 10, 1941, pp. 54ff.

⁹ p. 7.

would fall to the ground if he should give place to them. Adam's creation stands simply for the idea that man has great capacities within him,¹⁰ and Adam's fall for the idea that man is yet far from having reached the goal he has set for himself. "Man is a 'fallen' creature, a sinner. He falls below his ideal."¹¹ With Barth and Brunner, Dr. Homrighausen might just as well say that we are all Adam. The story of Adam and Eve, we are told, speaks to us of "man's perennial biography and that of his race."¹² What happens to Adam—that is, the mythical Adam—happens to all of us in actual life again and again.

Here, according to Dr. Homrighausen, Christ comes into the picture. He brings the ideal we have set for ourselves near to us. Through Him the ideal becomes real; through him the revelation becomes historical. But even so, not directly historical. To say so would be to bury Jesus in the graveclothes of a theological system. Ordinary calendar history cannot at any point bear the direct revelation of God. Nothing very definite can therefore be said about Jesus and His work. "The cross preaches a personal message,"¹³ and personality is always beyond anything that can be said about it. If then there are those who say the cross is unjust, we reply that they are right. But we must also say that they are wrong. "True, from a legal standpoint, it is unjust. But from the personal viewpoint, such 'injustice' is being practiced everyday, and especially in the highest reaches of personal character."¹⁴ In either case, if we are to accept Dr. Homrighausen's presentation, the natural man need take no offense at the Cross. The Cross does not say anything about the realm of science, and in that of personality it merely exemplifies a general principle. The Cross may still be mysterious, but that is because personality, wherever found, is mysterious.

Let us then, the argument virtually continues, contemplate as best we can, with all our mutual contradictory systems of atonement helping us as so many pointers, this marvelous incarnation of personality. "He brought with him a new realm of reality. That is an inescapable fact. In him and through him a new humanity began. He injected a serum of superhuman vitality into the hardening arteries of humanity."¹⁵ Here our ideals seem largely to be realized. "According to our best moral judgement, another Jesus has not appeared since or before."¹⁶ "How repentant Jesus was! Though dogmatic, yet his dogmatism never rested in himself or in his idea about God, but in the reality of God!"¹⁷ "He came disclosing the real world within ours, which we never could have found for ourselves. He came telling men—exeging to them—about their real selves that lie buried and unrecognized within them."¹⁸

With such an impelling exemplification of personality brought comparatively near to us, we cannot help but follow. The church must then be born. "The church is born

¹⁰ *Let the Church be the Church*, p. 148.

¹¹ *Idem.*, p. 150.

¹² "Attend to Your Reading," p. 8.

¹³ *Let the Church be the Church*, p. 104.

¹⁴ *Idem.*, p. 107.

¹⁵ *Idem.*, p. 175.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Idem.*, pp. 36f.

¹⁸ *Idem.*, p. 32.

witness and incarnation; it is God's and man's necessity."¹⁹ Leaving the Flatlands "where men know but two dimensions,"²⁰ we reach out unto God who "is the assurance that the universe is not capricious."²¹ We are now in "the house of personality" with Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick.²² Into it all may come. The "Divine Embrace" is in its nature all-comprehensive. The "epochal event" that took place in Jesus may take place anywhere and everywhere.²³ For as we see the "looming mystery of God," we also see, as involved in it, the church as the "looming personal household."²⁴ In its bosom the church has "preserved the dream of an earth redeemed and renovated."²⁵

To keep this dream ever before us, we must attend to our reading of Scripture. "Through the centuries, the reading of its words have brought to mind the story upon which Christianity rests."²⁶ Through constant reading, "strange new world of the Bible," the dimension of personality, is made "continuously contemporaneous" to us. And in response we are taken up into that world. "For those who 'read' the Scriptures, there is a restoration of the timeless and eternal element in their thinking and living."²⁷ Thus through contemplation of Christ as pictured in the Bible we can see how God is made human and man is made divine by means of indefinite personal growth.

It is this gospel of personal growth that Dr. Homrighausen would propagate in the church through the influence of his chair in Christian Education at Princeton.²⁸ It is this purely naturalistic philosophy of personalism that he would use also as a banner by which to effect church union. Together with Dr. Mackay he has been busily engaged in extending the current ecumenical movement. It is, in short, this personalist philosophy as a substitute for the Reformed Faith, even for historic Christianity, which Princeton Seminary is doing its best to propagate through Dr. Homrighausen's work. It is perfectly plain that for Dr. Homrighausen Scriptures do not tell on their own authority and directly of certain events that have taken place on certain calendar dates in the past. The past is for him, as for Barth, a dead past. The revelation in history of which he speaks is a revelation in some other history, that merely touches ordinary history as a tangent touches a circle. When he speaks about the Bible as the infallible rule of faith and practice, and when he speaks of revelation as historical, he, together with the Modernist and the Barthian, merely uses a figure of speech. He is then thinking and speaking "existentially," and to think existentially means in practice to think allegorically, figuratively, and unrealistically about the story of redemption told in the Scripture. By embracing and propagating this sort of theology Princeton Seminary is now undermining and

¹⁹ "Attend to Your Reading," p. 9.

²⁰ *Let the Church Be the Church*, p. 51.

²¹ "Attend to Your Reading," p. 7.

²² *Let the Church Be the Church*, p. 54.

²³ *Idem.*, p. 135.

²⁴ *Idem.*, p. 135.

²⁵ *Idem.*, p. 139.

²⁶ "Attend to Your Reading," p. 4.

²⁷ *Idem.*, p. 8.

²⁸ see his address on "The Task of Christian Education in a Theological Seminary," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, July, 1940.

attacking—and in fifth-column fashion—all that for which the Hodges, Warfield, and Machen stood.

Common Grace

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Second Article: Volume 8, Pages 166–200
Third Article: Volume 9, Pages 47–84

Common Grace—First Article ¹

The question of where he may find a point of contact with the world for the message that he brings is a matter of grave concern to every Christian minister and teacher. The doctrine of common grace seeks, in some measure at least, to supply this answer. But to give the answer desired the concept of common grace must be set in its proper theological context. In discussing the problem, the present paper accordingly deals with (1) the Christian philosophy of history of which the common grace doctrine is a part, (2) the most comprehensive modern statement of this problem, (3) the salient features of the recent debate on the subject, and (4) some suggestions for further study.

1. The Christian Philosophy Of History

The common grace² problem may quite properly be considered as being a part or aspect of the problem of the philosophy of history. Dr. K. Schilder speaks of Abraham Kuyper's great three volume work on *Common Grace* as an epic. And an epic it truly is. In setting forth his views on common grace Kuyper envelops the whole course of human culture in his field of vision. Common grace is said to be in large measure responsible for making history as a whole what it has been, is, and will be. On the other hand in rejecting the doctrine of common grace the Rev. Herman Hoeksema in his various writings also takes the whole of history for his field. He argues that history can best be explained if we reject common grace. It may be well then if even at the outset we question ourselves about the Christian philosophy of history. Doing so at this early stage of our paper will help us in understanding both those who affirm and those who deny common grace.

¹

This article is based upon a paper which was read before The Calvinistic Philosophy Club at its Autumn, 1941 meeting in Philadelphia, and which appeared in mimeographed form in the Proceedings of the Club for that year. In view of the great interest in the subject, the paper has been revised and condensed for publication in this Journal. It will appear in parts, the second of which will, it is expected, appear in the next issue.

²Though the question is a matter of debate we shall, for convenience, not enclose the phrase "common grace" in quotation marks. We use the phrase, and others like it, loosely.

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

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

But to interpret facts—all facts and especially all facts in their changing aspect—in the light of an already fully given word of God is to be “unscientific” in the eyes of current science, philosophy and theology. Current methodology assumes the non-createdness of all the facts of the universe; it assumes the ultimacy of change. In this it follows the Greeks. With Cochrane³ we may therefore speak of the classical-modern position and set it off against the Christian position.

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

It is sometimes suggested that though there is a basic difference between the Christian and the non-Christian explanation, there is no such difference in the mere description, of facts. With this we cannot agree. Modern scientific description is not the innocent thing that we as Christians all too easily think it is. Sir Arthur Eddington’s famed “ichthyologist” readily suggests this. This “ichthyologist” explores the life of the ocean. In surveying his catch he makes two statements: (1) “No sea-creature is less than two inches long; (2) All sea-creatures have gills.”⁴ If an observer questions the first statement the “ichthyologist” replies that in his work as a scientist he is not concerned with an “objective kingdom of fishes.” The only fish that exist for him are those he has caught in his net. He makes bold to say “What my net can’t catch isn’t fish.” That is to say, description is patternization. It is an act of definition. It is a statement of the what as well as of the that. It is a statement of connotation as well as of denotation. Description itself is explanation.

³ Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 1940.
Arthur Eddington, *The Philosophy of Physical Science*, p. 16.

Current scientific description is not merely explanation, but it is definitely anti-Christian explanation. Current scientific methodology wants to be anti-metaphysical. It claims to make no pronouncements about the nature of reality as a whole. On the surface it seems to be very modest. In fact, however, current scientific methodology does make a pronouncement about the nature of Reality as a whole. When Eddington's "ichthyologist" says he is not interested in an "objective kingdom of fishes" he is not quite honest with himself. He is very much interested that "objective kingdom of fishes" shall serve as the source of supply for his scientifically recognized fishes. Some of those "objective" fishes must permit of being graduated into fishes that have scientific standing. Some of them at least must be catchable. So the "facts," that is the "objective" facts, if they are to become facts that have scientific standing, must be patternable. But to be patternable for the modern scientist these "facts" must be absolutely formless. That is to say they must be utterly pliable. They must be like the water that is to be transformed into ice-cubes by the modern refrigerator.

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

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

We conclude then that when both parties, the believer and the non-believer, are epistemologically self-conscious and as such engaged in the interpretative enterprise, they cannot be said to have any fact in common. On the other hand, it must be asserted that they have every fact in common. Both deal with the same God and with the same

universe created by God. Both are made in the image of God. In short, they have the metaphysical situation in common. Metaphysically, both parties have all things in common, while epistemologically they have nothing in common.

Christians and non-Christians have opposing philosophies of fact. They also have opposing philosophies of law. They differ on the nature of diversity; they also differ on the nature of unity. Corresponding to the notion of brute force is the notion of abstract impersonal law, and corresponding to the notion of God-interpreted fact is the notion of God-interpreted law. Among non-Christian philosophers there are various notions as to the foundation of the universals of human experience. Some would find this foundation “objectively,” in the universe. Others would find it “subjectively,” in man. But all agree, by implication at least, that it must not be found where the Christian finds it—in the counsel of God. The non-Christian scientist would feel hampered were he to hold to a Christian philosophy of fact. He would feel himself to be limited in the number, and in the kind, of facts that he might consider. So also the non-Christian scientist would feel hampered were he to hold a Christian philosophy of law. To him this would introduce the notion of caprice into science. Law, he feels, must be something that has nothing to do with personality. When Socrates asked Euthyphro whether “the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved by the gods,” he sought to make plain that all law must, in the nature of the case, be above all personality. To find the essence of something we must, argues Socrates, go beyond what anybody thinks of a thing. To say that the gods love the holy is not to give us an insight into the essence of holiness. It is, as the Scholastics would say, merely to give an extrinsic definition of holiness. The Good, the True and the Beautiful as abstract principles, hovering above all gods and men these are the universals of non-Christian thought. Even so-called personalist philosophies like those of Bowne, Knudsen, Brightman, Flewelling and others, are still impersonalist in the end. Whether in science, in philosophy or in religion, the non-Christian always seeks for a daysman betwixt or above God and himself, as the final court of appeal.

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

Even so we are driven to make further limitations. Roman Catholics have taken no clear-cut position on the question of creation. They divide the field of factual research between autonomous Reason and Faith. “The natural” is said to be the territory of Reason and “the supernatural” is said to be the territory of Faith. In the territory of Reason believers and non-believers are said to have no difference. The question whether the mind of man is created or is not created, we are told in effect, need not be raised in this area. Rome is willing, in what it calls the field of Reason, to employ the ideas of brute fact, of abstract impersonal law and autonomous man, not merely for argument’s sake, but without qualification.

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

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

The significance of our discussion on fact, law and reason for the construction of a Christian philosophy of history may now be pointed out explicitly. The philosophy of history inquires into the meaning of history. To use a phrase of Kierkegaard, we ask how the Moment is to have significance. Our claim as believers is that the Moment cannot intelligently be shown to have any significance except upon the presupposition of the Biblical doctrine of the ontological trinity. In the ontological trinity there is complete harmony between an equally ultimate one and many. The persons of the trinity are mutually exhaustive of one another and of God's nature. It is the absolute equality in point of ultimacy that requires all the emphasis we can give it. Involved in this absolute equality is complete interdependence; God is our concrete universal.

We accept this God upon Scriptural authority. In the Bible alone do we hear of such a God. Such a God, to be known at all, cannot be known otherwise than by virtue of His own voluntary revelation. He must therefore be known for what He is, and known to the extent that He is known, by authority alone. We do not first set out without God to find our highest philosophical concept in terms of which we think we can interpret reality and then call this highest concept divine. This was, as Windelband tells us, the process of the Greeks.⁵ This has been the process of all non-Christian thought. It is from this process of reasoning that we have been redeemed. On such a process of reasoning only a finite god can be discovered. It has been the nemesis of the history of the theistic proofs that this has been so frequently forgotten. Are we then left with a conflict between Faith and Reason? Have we no philosophical justification for the Christian position? Or are we to find a measure of satisfaction in the fact that others too, non-Christian scientists and philosophers as well as ourselves, have in the end to allow for some mystery in their system?

⁵ *History of Philosophy*, Engl. tr., p. 34.

To all this we must humbly but confidently reply by saying that we have the best of philosophical justification for our position. It is not as though we are in a bad way and that we must seek for some comfort from others who are also in a bad way. We as Christians alone have a position that is philosophically defensible. The frank acceptance of our position on authority, which at first blush, because of our inveterate tendency to think along non-Christian lines, seems to involve the immediate and total rejection of all philosophy this frank acceptance of authority is, philosophically, our very salvation. Psychologically, acceptance on authority precedes philosophical argument; but when, as epistemologically self-conscious grown-ups, we look into our own position, we discover that unless we may presuppose such a God as we have accepted on authority, the Moment will have no significance. The God that the philosophers of the ages have been looking for, a God in whom unity and diversity are equally ultimate, the "Unknown God," is known to us by grace. It has been the quest of the ages to find an interpretative concept such as has been given us by grace.

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

Paradox

Our position is naturally charged with being self-contradictory. It might seem at first glance as though we were willing, with the dialectical theologians, to accept the really contradictory. Yet such is not the case. In fact we hold that our position is the only position that saves one from the necessity of ultimately accepting the really contradictory. We argue that unless we may hold to the presupposition of the self-contained ontological trinity, human rationality itself is a mirage. But to hold to this position requires us to say that while we shun as poison the idea of the really contradictory we embrace with passion the idea of the apparently contradictory. It is through the latter alone that we can reject the former. If it is the self-contained ontological trinity that we need for the rationality of our interpretation of life, it is this same ontological trinity that requires us to hold to the apparently contradictory. This ontological trinity is, as the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Standards puts it, "incomprehensible" God dwells in light that no man can approach unto. This holds of His rationality as well as of His being, inasmuch as His being and His self-consciousness are coterminous. It follows that in everything with which we deal we are, in the last analysis, dealing with this infinite God, this God who hideth Himself, this mysterious God. In everything that we handle we deal finally with the incomprehensible God: Everything that we handle depends for what it is upon the counsel of the infinitely inexhaustible God. At every point we run into mystery. All our ingenuity will not aid us in seeking to avoid this mystery. All our ingenuity cannot exhaust the humanly inexhaustible rationality of God. To seek to present the Christian position as rationally explicable in the sense of being comprehensible to the mind of man is to defeat our own purposes. To do so we must adopt the standard of reasoning of our

opponent, and when we have accepted the standard of reasoning of our opponent, we must rest content with the idea of a finite God.

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

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

The Limiting Concept

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

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

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

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

In the second place, our discussion on the philosophy of history ought to make us realize that a question such as that of common grace admits of no easy and simple solution. We shall need to keep ourselves aware of the fact that we all need to employ the limiting concept, and that every statement of the truth is an approximation to the fulness of truth as it exists in God. Like the first point, this point, too, is a reason for common humility and mutual forbearance.

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

2. Abraham Kuyper's Doctrine Of Common Grace

Turning now to an exposition of Kuyper's great work, we regret that we cannot begin with Calvin. (A reference, in passing, must be made, however, to the dissertation of Dr. Herman Kuyper, *Calvin on Common Grace*, 1928).¹ We even pass by the pamphlet of Dr. Herman Bavinck on *Common Grace* with a remark or two. Bavinck wrote his booklet (published in 1894) with the purpose of bolstering up the claim he made for the Protestant Faith in his earlier address on *The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church* (published in 1888). It is Protestantism rather than Romanism, he avows in that earlier lecture, that expresses the truly catholic genius of the Christian religion. It is in accordance with this that he says in his pamphlet on *Common Grace*, "Through this doctrine of *gratia communis* the Reformed [theologians] have on the one hand maintained the specific and absolute character of the Christian religion and on the other have been second to none in their appreciation of everything good and beautiful that God has given to sinful men. Thus they have simultaneously maintained the seriousness of sin and the rights of the natural. And thus they were protected against both Pelagianism and Pietism."²

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

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

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

¹ For a brief statement of the view of Charles Hodge, as well as for a more comprehensive statement of the exegetical foundation of the doctrine of common grace, we refer to the article entitled "Common Grace" by Professor John Murray in the November, 1942 issue of this *Journal* (5, 1-28.)

² p. 29.

be apparent to all, but in part, in order that also in this manner the wealth of God's creation and of His recreating power in our sinful race might be glorified."³ He asserts a little later the entire doctrine of total depravity.⁴

Both types of grace, special and common, presuppose total depravity. The difference between the two must be indicated by the different effect they accomplish upon the totally depraved. Regeneration, a gift of special grace, Kuyper argues, removes the cancer of sin by taking out its roots. In the place of sin it gives the power of eternal life. "But common grace does nothing of the sort. It keeps down but does not quench. It tames, but does not change the nature. It keeps back and holds in leash, but thus, as soon as the restraint is removed, the evil races forth anew of itself. It trims the wild shoots, but does not heal the root. It leaves the inner impulse of the ego of man to its wickedness, but prevents the full fruition of wickedness. It is a limiting, a restraining, a hindering power, which brakes and brings to a standstill."⁵

Thus it is the restraint of the destructive force of sin that is said to be the essence of common grace.⁶ Now as sin has affected the whole universe in the course of its historical development, we find, according to Kuyper, that common grace reaches out everywhere. Summing up his discussion on this point, he asserts: "Thus common grace began in the soul of man, by keeping the 'small sparks' from dying out. It took its second point of support in the body of man by supporting its physical powers and thus pushing back the coming of death. In addition to this, common grace had to produce a third type of activity, namely, in the world of man ..."⁷

The essence of common grace is the restraint of the process of sin; its scope is man and his world. Its ultimate foundation, we must add, is the mercy of God. Says Kuyper: "Thus common grace is an omnipresent operation of divine mercy, which reveals itself everywhere where human hearts are found to beat and which spreads its blessing upon these human hearts."⁸

We cannot set forth in detail what Kuyper says further on the restraint of sin. At the moment we are looking for a view in perspective of the doctrine of common grace as a whole. It is well to hasten on, then, to Kuyper's statement of what we may call the positive aspect of common grace.

Kuyper distinguishes in his second volume between the constant and the progressive aspects of common grace. By the constant aspect of common grace he means largely what in the first volume he speaks of as the essence of common grace, namely, the restraint of the process of sin. God's purpose with common grace, he adds in the second volume, is not merely to make human life possible by the restraint of sin, but also to provide for its progress.⁹ "There is," he says, "on the one hand the constant operation of common grace which began in Paradise after the Fall, and which has remained till this day precisely what it was in the beginning and this constant common grace itself consists

³ *De Gemeene Gratie*, Leiden, 1902, 1, p. 243.

⁴ 1, p. 248.

⁵ 1, p. 251.

⁶ 1, p. 242.

⁷ 1, p. 261.

⁸ 1, p. 251.

⁹ 2, p. 600.

of two parts.”¹⁰ These two parts are God’s restraint of the power of destruction in nature and God’s restraint “of the power of sin in the heart of man, to make possible the appearance of civil righteousness on the earth among sinners and heathen.... This is the common grace that leads to the maintenance and control of our human life.”¹¹

Continuing from this point Kuyper says: “Yet common grace could not stop at this first and constant operation. Mere maintenance and control affords no answer to the question as to what end the world is to be preserved and why it has passed throughout a history of ages. If things remain the same why should they remain at all? If life were merely repetition why should life be continued at all? ... Accordingly there is added to this first constant operation of common grace ... another, wholly different, operation ... calculated to make human life and the life of the whole world pass through a process and develop itself more fully and richly ... ”¹²

The course of history would, argues Kuyper, be wholly unintelligible if we forgot to bear in mind the progressive as well as the constant operation of common grace. Defining both aspects briefly again, he says: “The constant [operation] consists in this that God, with many differences of degree, restrains the curse of nature and the sin of the human heart. In contrast with this the progressive [operation] is that other working through which God, with steady progress, equips human life ever more thoroughly against suffering, and internally brings it to richer and fuller development.”¹³

The “deep, incisive difference” between these two operations of common grace Kuyper signalizes by saying that in the constant operation God acts independently of man, while in the case of the progressive operation man himself acts as “instrument and co-laborer with God.”¹⁴ The history of civilization is here brought in as proof for his contention that man himself is the co-laborer with God. At a somewhat earlier point in the second volume Kuyper says: “Common grace is never something that is added to our nature, but is always something that proceeds from our nature as the result of the constraint of sin and corruption.”¹⁵ Here, though he speaks without limitation, he is evidently thinking only of what he later calls the progressive operation of common grace.

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

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

¹⁰ 2, p. 600.

¹¹ 2, p. 601.

¹² 2, p. 601.

¹³ 2, p. 602.

2, p. 602.

¹⁵ 2, p. 214.

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

Hoeksema and Danhof argue that it is inconceivable that God should be in any sense, and at any point, graciously inclined to those who are not His elect. The wicked do, to be sure, receive gifts from God. But rain and sunshine are not, as such, evidences of God's favor.¹⁶

Moreover, the idea of common grace, Hoeksema and Danhof contend, virtually denies the doctrine of total depravity. Man is inherently a spiritual-moral being. If he is said to do any good, as Kuyper says he does, this good must be a spiritual good.¹⁷ And if man does any spiritual good he is not totally depraved. When Hoeksema and Danhof began to write against the idea of common grace they were ministers of the Christian Reformed Church. In 1924 the Synod of that Church virtually condemned their views. It did so by making a pronouncement on three points of doctrine.

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

<bq>'Synod, having considered that part of the Advice of the Committee in General which is found in point 3 under the head: Treatment of the Three Points, comes to the following conclusions:'

'A. Concerning the first point, touching the favorable attitude of God toward mankind in general, and not alone toward the elect, Synod declares that it is certain, according to Scripture and the Confession, that there is, besides the saving grace of God, shown only to those chosen to eternal life, also a Certain favor or grace of God which He shows to his creatures in general. This is evident from the quoted Scripture passages and from the Canons of Dort, 2:5, and 3 and 4:8 and 9, where the general offer of the Gospel is discussed; while it is evident from the quoted declarations of Reformed writers of the period of florescence of Reformed theology that our Reformed fathers from of old have championed this view.'

Note of the editor: The following Scripture passages are given as proof: Ps 145:9; Mt 5:44-45; Lk 6:35-36; Acts 14:16-17; 1 Tm 4:10; Rom 2:4; Ez 33:11; Ez 18:23. We need not print these texts since the readers can easily look them up. They can also find the passages of the Canons of Dort referred to in their copy of the Psalter Hymnal. However, inasmuch as they have no access to the declarations of the Reformed fathers, we should translate these; but since that will take considerable space we shall omit a sentence here and there, where this can be done without obscuring the thought.

Calvin: Book 2, ch. 2, 16: 'Yet let us not forget that these are most excellent gifts of the Divine Spirit, which for the common benefit of mankind he dispenses to whomsoever he pleases.... Nor is there any reason for inquiring what intercourse with the Spirit is enjoyed by the impious who are entirely alienated from God. For when the Spirit of God is said to dwell only in the faithful, that is to be understood of the Spirit of sanctification, by whom we are consecrated as temples to God himself. Yet it is equally by the energy of

¹⁶ S. H. Hoeksema and H. Danhof, *Van Zonde en Genade*, p. 244.

¹⁷ *Idem.*, p. 131.

the same Spirit that God replenishes, actuates, and quickens all creatures, and that according to the property of each species which he has given it by the law of creation ...' Book 3, ch. 14:2: 'We see how he confers many blessings of the present life on those who practice virtue among men. Not that this external resemblance of virtue merits the least favor from him; but he is pleased to discover (reveal—K.) his great esteem of true righteousness by not permitting that which is external and hypocritical to remain without a temporal reward. Whence it follows, as we have just acknowledged, that these virtues, whatever they may be, or rather images of virtue, are the gift of God; since there is nothing in any respect laudable which does not proceed from him.'

Van Mastricht, First Part, p. 439: 'Now from this proceeds a threefold love of God toward the creatures: a general, Psalm 104.31 and 145.9, whereby he has created, preserves, and rules all things, Psalm 36.7 and 147.9; a common, directed to human beings in particular, not indeed to all and to each, but nevertheless to all kinds, without exception, the reprobate as well as the elect, of what sort or race they may be, to which he communicates his blessings; which are mentioned in Heb 6.4–5; 1 Cor 3.1–2.'

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

'Concerning the second point, touching the restraint of sin in the life of the individual and in society, the declares that according to Scripture and the Confession, there is such a restraint of sin. This is evident from the quoted Scripture passages and from the Belgic Confession, article 13 and 36, where it is taught that God through the general operations of His Spirit, without renewing the heart, restrains sin in its unhindered breaking forth, as a result of which human society has remained possible; while it is evident from the quoted declarations of Reformed writers of the period of florescence of Reformed theology that our Reformed fathers from of old have championed this view.'

Note of the editor: The following Scripture passages are referred to: Gn 6.3; Ps 81.11–12; Acts 7.42; Rom 1:24, 26, 28; 2 Thes 2.6, 7.

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

Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 2, ch. 3, 3: 'For in all ages there have been some persons who, from the mere dictates of nature, have devoted their whole lives to the pursuit of virtue. And though many errors might perhaps be discovered in their conduct, yet by their pursuit of virtue they afforded a proof that there was some degree of purity in their nature.... These examples, then, seem to teach us that we should not consider human nature to be totally corrupted; since, from its instinctive bias, some men have not only been eminent for noble actions, but have uniformly conducted themselves in a most virtuous manner through the whole course of their lives. But here we ought to remember that amidst this corruption of nature there is some room for Divine grace, not to purify it but internally to restrain its operations (we italicize—K.). For should the Lord permit the minds of all men to give up the reins to every lawless passion, there certainly would not be an individual in the world, whose actions would not evince all the crimes for which Paul condemns human nature in general, to be most truly applicable to him.... In his elect the Lord heals these maladies by a method which we shall hereafter describe. In others he restrains them, only to prevent their ebullitions so far as he sees to be necessary for the preservation of the universe.'

Van Mastricht, 2, p. 330: 'God however moderates the severity of this spiritual death and bondage: (a) internally by means of some remnants of the image of God and of

original righteousness ... to which things is added an internal restraining grace ... (b) Externally, through all kinds of means (“*hulpmiddelen*”) of State, Church, Family, and Schools, by which the freedom and dissoluteness of sin is checked and restrained, and to which even an incentive to practice what is honorable is added.’

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

Note: The Scripture passages quoted are: 2 Kgs 10.29–30; 2 Kgs 12.2 (compare 2 Chr 24.17–25); 2 Kgs 14.3 (compare 2 Chr 25.2 and vs. 14–16, 20, 27); Lk 6.33; Rom 2.14 (compare vs. 13. Also Rom 10.5 and Gal 3.12).

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

Ursinus, *Schatboek*; on Lord’s Day 3: ‘Concerning an unconverted person it is said that he is so corrupt that he is totally incapable of any good. To understand this one must know what kind of good and what sort of incapability is spoken of here. There is a threefold good: (1) Natural (good), as eating, drinking, walking, standing, sitting; (2) Civic (good), as buying, selling, doing justice, some knowledge or skill, and more of such, which promote our temporal welfare. (3) There is also a spiritual and supernatural good, which is absolutely necessary for inheriting eternal life. It consists in this that one turns to God from the heart and believes in Christ. The last is meant here; in the other an unconverted man can even far excel a regenerated person although he has these (as a common gift) from God. See 2 Cor 3.5; Jas 1.17; Ex 31.2; Prv 16.1.’

Van Mastricht 1, p. 458: ‘Reformed (scholars) acknowledge indeed that the unregenerate person, apart from saving grace, is able ... but they add to this that even these things are not done only through the exercise of the free will but through God’s common grace working in the unregenerate all the moral good which is in them or which is produced by them. For example, all the natural art which was in Bezalel, Ex 31.2–3, and all the moral good in those of whom it is said that they were enlightened by the Holy Spirit, tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, Heb 6.4–5.’

Van Mastricht, 2, p. 330: ‘... There is a natural good, for example, eating, drinking, reasoning; there is a civic good as polite and friendly association with the neighbor, and offending no one; there is a moral or ecclesiastical good, as attending worship diligently, saying prayers, refraining from gross misdeeds, Lk 18.11–12; and a spiritual good, for example, faith, hope, etc ... in the state of sin the free will is indeed able to do a thing that is a natural, civic, or moral good, but not a spiritual good, which accompanies salvation.’

We shall not pass in review the various criticisms made upon “the three points” by Hoeksema and his associates.¹⁸ These criticisms, together with their relative validity or

¹⁸ Cf. H. Hoeksema, *A Triple Breach*; H. Hoeksema, *Calvin, Berkhof and H. J. Kuyper*; and *The Standard Bearer*.

invalidity will appear in substance as we turn to a fuller discussion of the latest phase of the debate on common grace.

Common Grace—Second Article

3. The Latest Debate About Common Grace

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

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

The reconstruction effort is closely related to a broad movement in theology and philosophy which attempts to build up the traditional Reformed position while yet to an extent rebuilding it. The Philosophy of Sphere Sovereignty of Professors H. Dooyeweerd and D. H. Th. Vollenhoven represents a part of this movement. It seeks to appreciate the concrete approach that Kuyper has given to the problems of theology and philosophy without clinging to certain abstractions that he retained.¹ We cannot further speak of this movement except to refer briefly to an article by the Rev. S. G. De Graaf on “The Grace of God and the Structure of God’s Whole Creation.”² In much the same way that Hoeksema argues, De Graaf argues that there can be no attitude of favor on the part of God toward the reprobate inasmuch as they are children of wrath.³ Yet on the basis of such passages as Mt 5.45, he says, we must conclude that God loves His enemies.⁴ Of the difference between grace or favor on the one hand and love on the other, he says: “The difference between grace and favor on the one hand and mercy and patience on the other is to be defined by saying that God in His patience gives his good gifts (*weldaden*), but withholds Himself from those to whom He gives these gifts, while in His grace He gives Himself, His own communion, as is the case with those to whom He grants His covenant.”⁵

Of greater significance are the writings of Schilder. In his work on *Wat is de Hemel?* he seeks to offer a Christian philosophy of culture. The whole thrust of his thinking is an

¹ cf. “Kuyper’s *Wetenschapsleer*,” in *Philosophia Reformata*, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 193 ff; also Veenhof, *In Kuyper’s Lijn*.

² *Phil. Ref.*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 17 ff.

³ p. 18.

⁴ p. 19.

⁵ p. 20.

effort to proceed concretely. Accordingly he is critical of Kuyper's *Nebenzweck* of common grace, the provision for a history of civilization as such. He is also critical of what he thinks of as Kuyper's negative approach to the question of common grace. Culture is not to be based, he says, upon any foundation that we still have in common with the non-believer. Culture is rather to be based upon the original mandate given to man by God that he should subdue the earth. Thus we are brought back to the idea that man as office-bearer is called upon to glorify God in all he does. If therefore we speak of common grace at all; we should do so in connection with a "common curse."⁶ There is restraint both of the full blessing and of the full curse. Keeping both in mind we are truly progressive rather than reactionary. We then think eschatologically and have an open mind for the idea of the catastrophic. The popular notion of common grace as offering a neutral field of operation between Christians and non-Christians, Schilder rejects with vigor. It is not on the basis of one virtue in God, His patience, but on the basis of all His virtues that we must understand culture and history in general.⁷

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

Generally speaking it may be said that Hoeksema took some courage from the events we have so far related. He spoke with favor of the Philosophy of Sphere Sovereignty, but was displeased that its exponents did not, as he felt they should on their premises, deny common grace.⁸ He rejoiced to an extent in the work of Schilder and De Graaf. Yet he doubted (in 1936) that Schilder really wanted to maintain the antithesis.⁹ and that De Graaf really denied common grace.¹⁰

More hopeful, from the point of view of Hoeksema, was an article in *De Reformatie* by Dr. S. Greydanus. Greydanus argued about such gifts as those of rain and sunshine and asked the question whether, in view of the fact that the nonbeliever always misuses them and thereby adds to his punishment, they may be said to indicate a favor of God toward their recipients. He did not, in so many words, answer his question, but seemed to be very doubtful about the matter.¹¹

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

⁶ p. 287.

⁷ p. 289.

⁸ *The Standard Bearer*, 12, p. 176.

⁹ 12, p. 364.

¹⁰ 12, pp. 393-4.

¹¹ *Standard Bearer*, 14, p. 200.

Points” against Hoeksema, he, we can understand, was therefore much interested in Schilder’s views on common grace.

The debate that followed discussed only the first point^{12 13} The Synod evidently said, or meant to say, that there is in God a certain attitude of favor toward the non-elect. Zwier so interprets the Synod’s meaning.¹⁴ Schilder replied to Zwier that he was unable to accept the first of the “Three Points” as thus interpreted.¹⁵

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

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

With Zwier we believe that this criticism of Schilder’s is not to the point.¹⁶ For better or for worse, Synod meant to teach that God has a certain attitude of favor to all men as men. The use of the broad popular phrase “creatures in general” gives no justification for drawing such consequences as Schilder has drawn. Besides, the broad phrase itself expresses the fact that God loves all His creatures. And as for the idea that God loves all creatureliness as such, including the creatureliness of the devil, this is, we believe, intelligible only if we use it as a limiting concept. Schilder himself has warned us to think concretely. And thinking concretely implies the use of such universals as “creatureliness” as limiting concepts only.

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

The point of logic raised by Schilder is of a similar nature. Zwier replies that it is one thing to say that our Scripture exegesis must seek to be consistent, but quite another thing to say that our interpretation must accord with logic as that is generally taken. With this we must agree. If the second statement is not to be out of accord with the first, the logic referred to must be a genuinely Christian-theistic logic. It may perhaps be said that much of the abstract reasoning of Hoeksema comes from his failure to distinguish between Christian and non-Christian logic. We do not mean, of course, that the rules of the

¹² *De Reformatie*, May 12, 1939 and subsequent issues.

¹³ We need not discuss Schilder’s detailed criticism of the formulation of the Three Points in *De Reformatie* of May 19, 1939 and Aug. 18, 1939.

¹⁴ *De Reformatie*, Oct. 13, 1939.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Oct. 20, 1939.

¹⁶ *De Wachter*, Nov. 21, 1939; Jan. 30, 1940.

sylllogism are different for Christians and non-Christians. Hoeksema refers to the idea of insanity, saying that sin has not made us insane. We may agree if he means merely that the unbeliever can follow the technical processes of intellectual procedure as well as, or often better than, the believer. But when he says or assumes that God's revelation in Scripture may be expected to reveal nothing which will be apparently self-contradictory, we demur. He attempts to "harmonize" the revealed and the secret will of God, prayer and the counsel of God. His efforts on this score would not be accepted by unbelievers. He cannot solve the full-bucket difficulty, a difficulty which they think lies at the heart of the Christian religion. To them the whole idea of a God who is self-sufficient and all-glorious precludes the idea of anything taking place in history that should glorify Him. That, they argue, is to add water to a bucket that is already full. To say that no one resists the will of God, not even the murderer, is, for them, to say that. We simply believe in fatalism. Have we then the right and the courage to say that Christianity does not contradict the laws of logic. We do, by pointing out that it is God, the self-sufficient God, in whom is no darkness at all, who has made us His creatures. Then it appears natural that there should be in all that pertains to our relation to God (and what does not?) an element of mystery. As finite creatures we deal in all our contacts with an infinite and inexhaustible God. Schilder himself has, perhaps more than any other recent Reformed theologian, stressed the necessity of being open to the "catastrophic." The non-believer can allow for no such element. He seeks with Plato for a universal that is "rigidly universal" and as such essentially penetrable to the human mind. The non-believer admits mystery, too. In fact for him mystery is ultimate, enveloping God as well as man. His position therefore is rationalistic first and irrationalistic last. Unwilling to accept anything not essentially penetrable to the human mind, and thereby assuming the equality of the divine and human minds, he ends by facing a brute factual situation on the one hand and an empty universal on the other hand. Thus the non-believer is illogical. He destroys the foundations of true logic. He may be ever so skilful in the manipulation of syllogisms, but he must still be said to be illogical. On the other hand the Christian doctrine of God is the presupposition of the possibility of true logical procedure. The rules of formal logic must be followed in all our attempts at systematic exposition of God's revelation, whether general or special. But the syllogistic process must be followed in frank subordination to the notion of a self-sufficient God. We must here truly face the Absolute. We must think His thoughts after Him. We must think analogically, rather than univocally. To reason as though we can remove all the "logical difficulties" which will naturally appear to be contained in the Christian system of truth is to say, in effect, that on the question of logic the believer and the non-believer occupy neutral territory and to assign to the unbeliever a competence he does not in reality possess.

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

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

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

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

(A) Ps 145.9

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

There is here no evidence of God’s favorable attitude to any generality, says Schilder. In God’s attitude His whole being in all its attributes is always involved. Hence God’s justice must always be taken into consideration.¹⁷

With the last statement of Schilder we may well express agreement. We may add to it that in making up the balance all of the factors existing in man at any particular time in history must be taken into consideration. It is definitely a question of history before us. If we use no distinction of date at all we have the Arminian position, according to which God has the same attitude toward all men without qualification. If we use only one distinction, that between creatureliness and office, as Schilder does, and say that God has an attitude of favor to his creation as such, we make the anti-Christ and the demons an object of favor. Schilder, although criticizing the Synod for holding to a position that would lead to the idea of favor toward Satan, is virtually in the same position himself when he would interpret Ps 145 as referring merely to the metaphysical situation as such. Adding the further distinction of date enables us to approach somewhat more adequately, we believe, a full statement of the facts of the case.¹⁸ When history is finished God no longer has any kind of favor toward the reprobate. They still exist and God has pleasure in their existence, but not in the fact of their bare existence. God has pleasure in their historically defeated existence. His justice has prevailed over their unrighteous striving in

¹⁷ *De Reformatie*, Oct. 27, 1939.

¹⁸ In his exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism Schilder himself has greatly stressed the importance of dates in history, “*Het is overal foederaal historische dateering*” (p. 66).

the course of time. Therefore God no longer in any sense classifies them in a generality with the elect. It was only at an earlier date, before the consummation of their wicked striving was made complete, that God even in a sense classified them with the elect.

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

In a similar fashion in case of the non-elect there are "ups and downs" downward leading them to their particular destination. And the process is in both cases genuine. This not in spite of, but because of, the fact that the destiny of both classes is fixed. History has, we believe as Christians, genuine significance because God's counsel is back of it and is being realized through it. Thus there is genuine progress, and therefore genuine variation, in the relations of the same men to the same God just because God's unvarying counsel is back of history. Why then should there not be genuine significance in the measure of generality through which God leads each class to its particular destiny? Every historical generality is a stepping-stone toward the final particularism that comes at the climax of history.

(B) Mt 5.44–45; Lk 6.35–36

We pass on now to a brief notation on the other passages of Scripture cited by the Synod. We join the passages Mt 5.44–45 and Lk 6.35–36. Schilder sets aside what seems to be a common interpretation of these passages to the effect that we are to do good to the wicked in imitation of our Father in heaven who does good to them. Schilder says this common interpretation is illegitimate. From the presence of rain and sunshine as facts common to all we are not to conclude that there is a favorable attitude on the part of God toward His enemies. How then, says Schilder, can we expect to find God's attitude revealed in the facts of rain and sunshine?

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

Again, when Christ is said to be *χρηστός* to the "unthankful and evil" (Lk 6:35),, Schilder would limit this to the elect, but unconverted, sinner. He speaks again of the mere continuation of the metaphysical situation as all that is implied for the unbeliever. He warns us again that the "facts" as such are no justifiable ground for a conclusion with respect to the attitude of God. We reply that there is here again a direct statement about the attitude of God, in the light of which the facts are interpreted. All the facts of history manifest something of the attitude of God to men. If they did not, they would not be related to God and, therefore, be meaningless.

(C) Acts 14.16–17

The next passage is Acts 14:16, 17. It speaks of God not having left himself without a witness in times past, but giving gifts to men. Schilder points to the fact that Paul speaks of these gifts as being testimonies unto men of God's requirement upon them.¹ God is engaged in preparing judgment upon men, says Schilder. We are accordingly not justified in seeing a favorable attitude in the gifts of nature.

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

(D) 1 Tm 4.10

"God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of them that believe."

The word "Saviour" is by common consent taken to mean Preserver. Schilder again asserts that this refers merely to the continuation of the metaphysical situation. Zwier replies, we believe correctly, that God's preservation of the unrighteous is evidence of His favor toward them and that therefore there is some favor at least shown to the

¹ *De Reformatie*, Nov. 3, 1939.

unrighteous in the fact of his preservation in this world. God is the preserver of all men, especially of the righteous. The “especially” cannot fairly be translated by “namely.” “Especially” seems, therefore, to indicate some measure of favor, however small, to the unrighteous.

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

4. Suggestions For Further Discussion

We now make bold to submit a few remarks by way of suggesting the direction in which we may possibly hope for profitable discussion on the common grace question in the future. It is with hesitation and diffidence that we do so. And it is with the greatest of appreciation for the labors of such men as Kuyper, Bavinck, Hepp, Schilder, Hoeksema, Zwier, and others, that we say what we say.

A. The Danger Of Abstract Thinking

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

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

1. Kuyper

When we speak of Kuyper we may refer first to the booklet by C. Veenhof, entitled *In Kuyper’s Lijn*. Veenhof is concerned to show that the Philosophy of the Law Idea, developed by Drs. D. H. Th. Vollenhoven and H. Dooyeweerd, professors at the Free University of Amsterdam, is working along the lines suggested by Kuyper, the founder of that university. In the course of his proof he speaks of the stress Kuyper laid on the fact

that all the creation-ordinances are subject to the will of God.² These ordinances or laws admit of transgression by man, while yet they do not admit of abrogation.³ “With great clarity Kuyper saw the law-organism which controls the world.”⁴ Veenhof further points out that Kuyper was opposed to the idea of neutrality. For him the attitude of the heart, the center of man’s activity, was involved in all true scientific interpretation.⁵ The whole idea of a science that is based on regeneration, as this is set forth in his *Encyclopedia*, proves the correctness of Veenhof’s contention on this point. It is well to emphasize again that it is from Kuyper, more than from any one else in modern times, that we have learned to think concretely. Both on the question of the universal and on that of the particular, Kuyper has taught us that we must build on our own presuppositions. Yet it must be said that Kuyper has not always been able to live up to this high ideal.

Kuyper has not always been able to live up to his own conception of the universal. Dooyeweerd has shown this to be the case in his article on “Kuyper’s Wetenschapsleer.”⁶ Dooyeweerd shows that Kuyper has all too uncritically employed the modern philosophical statement of the problem between the universal and the particular. We shall give some of the evidence to prove that Dooyeweerd was not mistaken.

Kuyper speaks of facts and laws or particulars and universals. The former correspond to our perception and the latter to our ratiocination⁷, note Kuyper says that the whole of our ratiocinative process is exhausted by its concern for the universals.⁸ Here Platonism is in evidence. The ratiocinative process, argues Kuyper, deals with concepts only. That is to say it deals with universals only. If we form a concept of a tree, a lion or a star, he says, we have no knowledge other than that which tells us how such a tree or lion or star is related to other objects or how the parts of such a tree, lion, or star are related to one another.⁹ If this position were carried through consistently we should have the two worlds of Plato, the world of bare particulars and the world of bare universals standing in hopeless duality over against one another. If this position were carried through, our “systems” of interpretation would be “approximations” in the Platonic, rather than in the Christian, sense of the word, our limiting concepts would be Kantian rather than Calvinistic, and our “as if” patterned after the *Critique of Pure Reason* rather than after the *Institutes*. Kuyper, of course, does not carry through this sharp separation between ratiocination and perception. But he is able to escape the evil consequences suggested by no better means than that of inconsistency. Let us note the nature of this inconsistency.

Continuing his discussion of the relation of the intellectual process to the universals, he brings in two further notions. The universals themselves exist as a system. They are organically related to one another. Our ratiocinative process is adapted to penetrate this system of relations. And particularly our intellects are fitted to see through the higher relations. Here the gradational motif is injected in the process of describing the system of

² Veenhof, *Op. cit.*, p. 29.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴ *Idem.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 32 ff.

⁶ *Philosophia Reformata*, vol. 4., p. 193.

⁷ *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godegeleerdheid*, vol. 2, p. 21.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

relations. This again is evidence of a non-Christian type of abstraction. A system cannot, if we start abstractly, exist otherwise than as a hierarchy. In the second place, Kuyper ushers in the notion of the active as well as the passive intellect. "Our thinking is wholly and exclusively adapted to these (highest) relations, and these relations are the objectification of our thought."¹⁰ All this is still Platonic. It is more than that: it is Kantian. Kuyper himself feels that we would, by going further along this path, soon fall into subjectivism. We are saved from subjectivism, argues Kuyper, by the fact that there is such a thing as a gradual transition from one relation to another. The results of these gradually changing universals we observe for the first time in that which for ages no human eye has discerned.¹¹ We remark here that subjectivism can in no wise be avoided in this manner. Plato himself tried to avoid it thus and failed. He sought to make the universal overlap one another. There was only one way open to him for the purpose, namely, the was, of intermixture of the universals with what Adamson calls the "abstract essence of change." But to intermingle universals with ultimate change is, in effect, to deny the universality of the universals.

Kuyper, however, suddenly brings in the idea of an original subject, who has thought the universals and has given them being. When we as human beings think ourselves into the relations of the universe we are simply thinking God's thoughts after Him.¹² The universals could not exist unless God had thought them. This is the Christian position. But how it is to be deduced from what up to this time has virtually been a Platonic procedure, is not apparent. Kuyper argues that we must stress the "identity of our thinking consciousness with the world of relations so far as to maintain that without an original Subject, who has thought them, and possessed the power to bring the product of His thought into dominance in the cosmos, they would not exist."¹³ Here the very existence of the relations is made to depend upon fiat creation by God. But if fiat creation is to be their source, if the counsel of God is to be the source of the existence and validity of the relations, the Platonic procedure, to which Kuyper has clung in his discussion so far, must be dropped. Both Platonism in its final form and Christianity hold that the universals must have transition in them. But Platonism, not believing in temporal creation, ascribes this transition to the abstract idea of ultimate chance. On this basis the ideal of human knowledge must be that of identification of the subject's knowledge with objective universals. Yet it is a foregone conclusion that not even the first step toward the realization of that idea can be taken. The universals must be both abstractly unchangeable and abstractly changing. Christianity, on the other hand, believing in temporal creation, ascribes the transition in the universals to the counsel of God. There is no abstract staticism and therefore no abstract change. On this basis the idea of human knowledge is to think God's thoughts after Him analogically. Hence man's intellectual effort cannot be said to be exclusively concerned with the relations; the relations do not exist otherwise than in correlativity with the "facts." Every intellectual effort deals with facts in relations and with relations in facts. Thus the ideal of identification "of our thinking consciousness with the world of relations" must be entirely dropped. It is a remnant of the Platonic

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹¹ *Idem.*

¹² *Idem.*

¹³ *Idem.*

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

Kuyper has a weakness in the foundation of his epistemology. He did not start unequivocally from the presupposition of the ontological trinity. He has, to some extent, allowed himself to formulate his problems after the pattern of a modernized Platonism. In making this criticism we are aware of the fact that Kuyper himself sometimes joins perception and ratiocination closely. The strict analysis he has given, he holds, applies only if we deal with a “wholly elementary object.”¹⁴ But, we object, such a wholly elementary object does not exist. Hence the distinction between ratiocination and perception should have been made in the form of a limiting concept. But then the question would again arise as to whether this limiting concept were to be taken in the Christian or in the Platonic sense of the term. And there is evidence that indicates a lack of clarity in Kuyper’s thought as to the distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian notion of the limiting concept. At times he argues as though the idealist’s ideal of comprehensive knowledge is in itself a legitimate ideal for creatures to hold. If sin had not entered into the world, Kuyper says, the ideal of science reaching out toward the exhaustive interpretation of the whole of the cosmos, would be a legitimate idea.¹⁵ In accordance with this he also speaks of universality and necessity as being of the very essence of the knowledge of cosmic law.¹⁶ But all this is, for the moment at least, to forget that for Adam in Paradise, no less than for us, God was the incomprehensible God. This incomprehensible God reveals something of Himself in cosmic history. He does so voluntarily and to the exact extent that it pleases Him. In searching out the ways of God’s revelation, even perfect man should allow for what Schilder calls the catastrophic. He could not take for granted that the cosmos contains a set of thoughts, already fully expressed, of which man must simply seek to make a replica for himself. There is a qualitative, not merely a quantitative, difference between God and man. Kuyper has not made a clear distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian ideal of knowledge. His universals sometimes resemble those of Plato a bit too closely.

Corresponding to this lack of clarity on the question of universals is a lack of clarity with respect to facts. The abstract separation between perception and ratiocination, to which we have called attention, already leads us to expect that such should be the case. Facts seem, according to Kuyper, to have a nature that does not fit them well for apprehension by intellectual categories. Kuyper has a sort of *Ding an sich* very similar to that of Kant. Speaking of the knowledge process he says: “You behold the *morphe* in your perception; you follow the *anaphoroi* of the relations with your thought; but the *ousia* lies beyond your reach.”¹⁷ Individuality is said to be something that is inherently hostile to generalization, and as such obstructive of the progress of science. Where

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

individuality is most pronounced, there science meets with its greatest difficulty. At the climax of an argument on this point he says: "From a sharply drawn character it is scarcely possible to draw any conclusions."¹⁸

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

If facts were irrational and not comprehensively known by God, they would not be known in any degree by man. Throwing overboard the non-Christian procedure entirely, the Christian should frankly begin his scientific work on the presupposition of the coterminicity of the universal and the particular in the Godhead. With Warfield, paraphrasing Calvin, we would begin by saying: "... there is but one God; the Father, the Son, the Spirit is each this one God, the entire divine essence being in each; these three are three Persons, distinguished one from another by an incommunicable property."¹⁹ On the basis of this conception of the ontological trinity we must hold that the facts and the universals of the created universe exist in correlativity to one another. The ideal of science should be to describe this situation as far as it can. It should not seek in its intellectual effort to make contact with some abstract universal relations. Nor should it feel itself defeated to the extent that it cannot reduce individuality to abstract relations. Why should science consider itself foiled in its efforts when it finds that it cannot reduce the individuality of man to numerical relationships? Kuyper himself has taught us the idea of the sovereignty of spheres; but he has a sort of Kantian phenomenalism that keeps him from working out this idea consistently.

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

We have noted earlier that from a Christian point of view the most elementary description is done either on Christian or non-Christian presuppositions. Kuyper's own most basic views require us to hold to this. He has taught us the importance of stressing the difference in starting-point between those who do, and those who do not, work on the basis of regeneration. With the drag of his semi-Kantian phenomenalism upon him, however, he is unwilling to draw a straight line of demarcation between the Christian and

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁹ *Calvin and Calvinism*, p. 232.

the non-Christian methodology of science. In saying this we are not thinking of his distinction between what is, and what is not, strictly scientific. Says Kuyper: “To observe bacteria and microbes is in itself as little a matter of scientific interpretation as to observe horses and cows in a pasture.”²⁰ We may readily allow the validity of this point. Nor are we thinking of another distinction Kuyper makes. He speaks with the German philosophers of natural and spiritual sciences, the former dealing, broadly speaking, with the *ponderabilia* and the latter, broadly speaking, with intangibles. We may readily allow a certain validity to this distinction, too. But it is with Kuyper’s use of these distinctions that our difficulty begins. He seems to use these distinctions for the defence of his contention that there is an area of interpretation where the difference between those who build, and those who do not build, on the fact of regeneration, need not, and cannot, be made to count. His argument is somewhat as follows.

Kuyper shows how, because of the fact of regeneration, there must be a twofold development of science. Yet this twofold development could not, in the past, be clearly marked if for no other reason than that there is “a very broad territory where the difference between the two groups has no significance.”²¹ As a reason for this, Kuyper offers the fact that regeneration does not change our senses nor the appearance of the world about us. He therefore feels justified in concluding that the whole area of the more primitive observation, which limits itself to measuring, weighing, and counting is common to both. “The whole field of empirical research by means of our senses (aided or unaided) on observable objects falls beyond the principal difference that separates the two groups.”²² Kuyper does not want us to conclude from this, however, that the natural sciences as such are beyond dispute. He says the difference is excluded merely at the point where these sciences make their beginning. “Whether something weighs two or three milligrams, may be absolutely determined by any one able to weigh.”²³ We are to accept gratefully the fact that at the beginning of scientific interpretation in the natural sciences, there is a “common territory where the difference in starting-point and standpoint does not count.”²⁴

As a second area where the difference need not appear, Kuyper mentions the lower aspect of the spiritual sciences. Here too, says Kuyper, we deal with that which can be simply weighed and counted. Finally Kuyper speaks of a third territory that all have in common, namely, that of logic. “There is not a twofold but only one logic.”²⁵ This allows, he says, for formal interaction between the two groups of interpreters.

On the ground of these three common territories Kuyper makes the following generalization: “As a result all scientific research that deals with the *ὄρατά* only, or is carried on only by those subjective elements, which did not undergo a change, remains common to both. At the beginning of the road the tree of science is common to all.”²⁶

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 104.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

We call attention to two ambiguities in this argument. Kuyper has first led us to think of weighing and measuring as not being part of the scientific undertaking. Observation of microbes, even with the help of instruments, he says, is no more scientific in the strict sense of the term, than the observing of horses and cows. Yet Kuyper does include this weighing and measuring in the strictly scientific task when he says that it is this precisely which believers and non-believers have in common in their scientific endeavors. Which of these two positions are we to take as really representative of Kuyper's views? It would seem that we must take the second. If we do not take the second position, what is there left of the three territories that we are said to have in common? If then, we take the second position, the position that weighing and measuring is a part of the scientific procedure, we are face to face with the second ambiguity. Kuyper argues for the commonness of the territories on the ground of their interpretative insignificance. It is because of the externality of weighing and measuring, and it is because of the formality of logic, that the three territories are said to be common to believer and non-believer. We are to hold, according to Kuyper's argument, that, where sin has not changed the metaphysical situation, the difference between believer and unbeliever need not be brought to the fore. This is, in effect, to say that, to the extent that the objective situation has not changed, the subjective change need not be taken into account. To point out the ambiguity in the argument is, therefore, at the same time to point out its invalidity.

What do we mean when we say that the metaphysical situation has changed because of sin? What do we mean when we say that even after the Fall man is a rational and moral creature still? We surely do not mean to deny total depravity. Accordingly there is no sinner who, unless regenerated, does not actually seek to interpret himself and the universe without God. The natural man uses his logical powers to describe the facts of creation as though these facts existed apart from God. He has rejected the common mandate. It is therefore in conjunction with the sinner's subjective alienation from God, as a limiting concept merely, that we can speak of anything as not having been destroyed by sin. In the interpretative endeavor the "objective situation" can never be abstracted from the "subjective situation." If we do abstract it, we fall back on the Scholastic position. We may then say with Etienne Gilson, the Roman Catholic, that Aristotle by the use of natural reason can think of a God, "one first being, the supreme principle and cause of nature, the source of all intelligibility, of all order, and of all beauty, who eternally leads a life of happiness, because, being thought itself, it is an eternal contemplation of its own thought" who yet must be the God "precisely because there is no other" God.²⁷

No valid answer can be given the Scholastics by the device of reducing the area of commonness to ever smaller proportions. Any area of commonness, that is, any area of commonness without qualification however small, is a justification for larger areas of commonness, till at last there is but one common area. The only valid answer to the Roman Catholic is to say that in the whole of the area of interpretative endeavor the subjective difference makes its influence felt. Weighing and measuring and formal reasoning are but aspects of one unified act of interpretation. It is either the would-be autonomous man, who weighs and measures what he thinks of as brute or bare facts by the help of what he thinks of as abstract impersonal principles, or it is the believer,

²⁷ *Christianity and Philosophy*, pp. 35 f.

knowing himself to be a creature of God, who weighs and measures what he thinks of as God-created facts by what he thinks of as God-created laws. Looking at the matter thus allows for legitimate cooperation with non-Christian scientists; it allows for an “as if” cooperation. Looking at the matter thus allows for a larger “common” territory than Kuyper allows for, but this larger territory is common with a qualification. Looking at the matter thus allows us to do full justice to “antithesis,” which Kuyper has taught us to stress. It keeps us from falling into a sort of natural theology, patterned after Thomas Aquinas, that Kuyper has taught us to reject. If we are to hold to a doctrine of common grace that is true to Scripture, we shall need to build it up after we have cut ourselves clear of Scholasticism.

2. Bavinck

We turn now to the great work of Bavinck on Systematic theology, his *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*. We observe at once that he is much concerned to point out that there is only one principle, according to which we are to set forth man’s knowledge of God. He avows this in definite opposition to the scholastic position. There is a natural theology that is legitimate. It is such a theology as, standing upon the basis of faith and enlightened by Scripture, finds God in nature. But Rome’s natural theology, he argues, is illegitimate. Its natural theology is attained by the natural reason without reference to Scripture. Against such a position Bavinck firmly asserts that theology must be built upon the Scriptures only. There must be only one principle in theology. “Even if there is a knowledge of God through nature, this does not mean that there are two principles in dogmatics. Dogmatics has only one *principium externum*, namely, the Scriptures, and only one *principium internum*, namely, the believing reason.”²⁸

Bavinck has not always lived up to this conception. When he develops the principles which should control science²⁹, he adopts a moderate realism. He does this, to some extent at least, by accepting what he calls the good of empiricism and what he calls the good of rationalism, and dropping the evil of both. That is to say, the criticism he makes of rationalism might be made and has been made by non-Christian realists, and the criticism he makes of empiricism might be made and has been made by non-Christian rationalists. Against the rationalist he argues that all men are naturally realists³⁰, and that rationalism is bound to be stranded on the fact of plurality.³¹ Against the empiricist he argues that all science must begin with unproved assumptions that have not been derived from experience³², and that science, in the nature of the case, is interested in the “general, the necessary and the eternal, the logical, the idea.”³³ But, we object, the abstract principles of rationalism are not made concrete by bringing them into relation with the brute facts of empiricism, and the brute facts of empiricism are not made accessible by bringing them into relation with the abstract principles of rationalism.

²⁸ *Op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 74.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 214 ff.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 222.

³³ *Idem.*

When Bavinck gives the distinguishing marks of the realism that he thinks theology needs for its foundation, he says no more than that against empiricism it maintains a certain independence of the intellect, and that against rationalism it maintains a dependence of the intellect upon sensation.³⁴ Accordingly, he does not make a thorough break with Scholasticism. His criticism of Scholasticism is at points little more than a matter of degree. "The fault of Scholasticism, both Protestant and Catholic, lay only in this, that it had done too quickly with observation, and that it thought almost exclusively of the confession as taken up into the books of Heckled, Aristotle, and the Church fathers."³⁵ The net result is that the moderate realism of Bavinck is not a specifically Christian position, obtained by the only legitimate principle of theology of which he has spoken. Bavinck himself tells us that the only reason why we may hold our thought of reality about us to be correct in what it says is that back of our thought, and of the world about us, is the Logos.³⁶ But if this is true, no moderate realism based on a combination of rationalism and empiricism can afford a basis for theology. Bavinck has not kept this point in mind in the construction of the general principles of his epistemology.

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

Yet for all that, Bavinck sometimes speaks as though the concept of the incomprehensibility of God entertained by Christian theology and that entertained by pagan philosophy were virtually the same.³⁷ Greek philosophy, he says, has frequently taught the incomprehensibility of God.³⁸ This incomprehensibility, he says, was made the starting-point and foundation thought of Christian theology.³⁹ Scholastic theology at its best has made the same confession.⁴⁰ "The Reformation-theology has wrought no change

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 11, pp. 10 ff.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

in this.”⁴¹ When “this truth of the unknowability of God” was forgotten by theology, modern philosophy brought it to remembrance.⁴²

It may be contended by some that in all this Bavinck is simply recounting history; that he is merely stating what has been and not what ought to be. But this can scarcely be maintained. Bavinck certainly considers himself a follower of the Reformation theology. Moreover, when he sets forth the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God positively, he begins by saying: “To a remarkable degree this doctrine of the unknowability of God can be approved and accepted with gratitude.”⁴³ Scripture and the church have, as it were, says Bavinck, accepted the premises of agnosticism and have been, even more deeply than Kant or Spencer, impressed with the limitations of man and the greatness of God.⁴⁴ Bavinck then points out that the church has refused to accept the conclusions of agnosticism. By revelation man can truly know something of God.

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

After what has been said, we are not surprised at Bavinck’s manner of handling the “theistic proofs.” Having set them forth with fulness, he bewails the fact that they are spoken of as proofs. They should, he says, rather be thought of as testimonies. “Weak as proofs, they are strong as testimonies.”⁴⁵ They are not to be taken as arguments that compel the unbeliever to believe in God. Taken individually they can be attacked (apparently he means that they can be refuted) at every point, and tend to obstruct the spontaneity of faith. “Taken cumulatively they enable us to see Him as the divine being that must of necessity be thought by us, and must of necessity be thought of as existing, that is, the only, first, absolute cause of all creatures, that self-consciously and teleologically rules all things and that above all reveals Himself in conscience as the Holy one to whosoever believes”⁴⁶ By means of them the believer can give himself an account of his own religious and ethical consciousness. They are as weapons to the believer by which he may defend himself against the unbeliever who “in any case has no better weapons than he.”⁴⁷

In his little book on *The Certainty of Faith*, Bavinck speaks in a similar vein. The “proofs,” he says, enable the believer to defend himself against attack on the part of science “and show that there is as much and usually much more to say for the position of faith than for the position of unbelief.”⁴⁸ These proofs may be unable to persuade men to

⁴¹ *Idem.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴⁶ *Idem.*

⁴⁷ *Idem.*

⁴⁸ *De Zekerheid des Geloofs*, 1930, p. 64.

faith, he adds, yet faith may accept their service, inasmuch as faith could not exist if the unhistorical character of the Christian revelation could be established.⁴⁹

It appears anew from this treatment of the “proofs” that Bavinck has not altogether cut himself loose from non-Christian forms of reasoning. The proofs, as historically stated, are based upon the assumption that the non-Christian mode of reasoning is the only possible mode of reasoning. Would-be autonomous man sets for himself the ideal of universal comprehension in knowledge. Accordingly he speaks of a universal validity to which every rational being will readily agree. If he could establish this universal validity, every rational creature should be willing and able to accept his conclusions. Not being able by these “proofs” to establish universal validity for the existence of God, these proofs have somewhat less value, but are still probably, and to an extent, correct. Such is the usual procedure in handling these proofs. Bavinck’s position has failed to show that this procedure is basically mistaken. He virtually admits that the ideal of science is abstract universal validity, which every rational creature should be able and willing to accept. He finds the difference between scientific certainty and the certainty of faith in that the former demands universal acceptance while the latter does not. “Scientific certainty rests on grounds which are acceptable to all rational creatures, and whose validity can be shown to every creature gifted with rationality.”⁵⁰ Religious certainty rests on revelation. “In this respect then, scientific certainty is in reality more general and stronger than that which is obtained by faith.”⁵¹ On the other hand, Bavinck admits that scientific certainty depends upon future inquiry which may disprove that which has been thus far believed. “The certainty of faith must therefore be of a different nature from scientific certainty. For scientific certainty, however solid and dependable, always retains this character, that it rests on the reasoning of men and that it can be overthrown by later and better research.”⁵² In science we are satisfied with human certainty but in religion we need divine certainty.⁵³ Speaking of the proofs and their value he argues that they are limited in their application, inasmuch as only a few men are able to employ them. When he adds: “In addition to this they may at any moment be invalidated entirely or in part by further investigation and deeper reflection.”⁵⁴

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

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*; p. 65.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵¹ *Idem.*

⁵² *Idem.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

We cannot believe that the position of Bavinck on the theistic proofs is in line with the spirit of Calvin's *Institutes*. Calvin argues throughout his first book that men ought to believe in God, because there is, and has been from the beginning of time, an abundance of evidence of His existence and of His character. There is objective evidence in abundance and it is sufficiently clear. Men ought, if only they reasoned rightly, to come to the conclusion that God exists. That is to say, if the theistic proof is constructed as it ought to be constructed, it is objectively valid, whatever the attitude of those to whom it comes may be. To be constructed rightly, theistic proof ought to presuppose the ontological trinity and contend that, unless we may make this presupposition, all human predication is meaningless. The words "cause," "purpose," and "being," used as universals in the phenomenal world, could not be so used with meaning unless we may presuppose the self-contained God. If the matter is put this way one argument is as sound as the other. In fact, then, each argument involves the others. Nor is any one of the arguments then at any point vulnerable. And future research cannot change their validity.

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

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

We need only to do what Bavinck has elsewhere told us to do in the matter of natural theology. He tells us that man cannot understand nature aright unless he places himself squarely upon Scripture. "For that reason it is a wrong method if the Christian in his handling of the *theologia naturalis* does, as it were, without Scripture and the illumination of the Holy Spirit ... " The Christian must stand with both feet upon the bed-rock of special revelation in his study of nature. That is, we believe, the real position of Bavinck, but he has not been fully true to it.⁵⁵

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

⁵⁵ *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 1, p. 205.

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

The question to be considered here is that of the κοινὰ ἔννοιαι, the *notiones impressae*, the *cognitationes insitae*. It is but natural that Roman Catholic theology, which holds that the natural reason can discover certain truths about God, should hold that there are ideas about God that are wholly common to the believer and the non-believer. Gilson expresses this point of view when he argues that we can discover the same truths that Aristotle discovered, by the same reason unaided by special revelation. Gilson further argues that Calvin, in holding to an “impression of divinity” or “common notion” or “innate idea” or “religious aptitude” in man, and in saying that “experience” attests the fact that God has placed in all men an innate seed of religion, virtually holds to the same position as that to which the Roman Catholic holds. He thinks the Calvinist faces an antinomy in connection with his view on this point: “At first sight, it would seem that there could not be a better solution. But it is still true that this knowledge is confronted by the problem just as certainly as is the rational certitude which the Thomistic proofs of the existence of God claim to attain. Either it is a natural certitude, in which the right to criticize the Catholic position to suppress pure philosophy is lost; or it is a supernatural certitude, in which case it would become impossible to find a place for that natural knowledge of God, which is exactly what one was pretending to conserve.”⁵⁶ The question now is whether the innate knowledge of which Bavinck speaks is of such a nature as to be able to escape the dilemma before which Gilson places the Calvinistic position. We believe Gilson is fair enough in demanding that Reformed theology shall come to a self-conscious defense of its notion of natural theology in general. It cannot fairly limit itself to diminishing the area or reducing somewhat the value of the natural theology of Roman Catholic theology. As long as the natural theology of the Reformed theologian is still the same in kind as that of the Roman Catholic theologian, he will find it difficult to escape the dilemma with which Gilson confronts it.

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

To answer this question we do well to take careful note of a distinction of which we have spoken only in passing. It is the distinction between the psychological and the

⁵⁶ *Christianity and Philosophy*, p. 41.

epistemological. If there be such things as “common notions,” psychologically speaking, it does not follow that there are such things as “common notions,” epistemologically speaking. Bavinck points to the fact that God’s revelation is everywhere. That is to say, it is within man as well as in nature. “There is no atheistic world, there are no atheistic peoples, and there are no atheistic men.”⁵⁷ When Bavinck says that there are no atheistic peoples and no atheistic men, we must be careful to understand this psychologically and not epistemologically. All that may be meant, so far, is that God’s revelation is present in the activity of man’s mind as well as elsewhere. “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them.” The revelation of God about and within may take the form of re-interpretation on the part of man. Paul speaks of the invisible things of God as being clearly seen. Whether we take this to mean simply that they are clearly apparent, or whether we take this to mean that because clearly apparent they have been clearly observed, we are still in the field of the revelational. We have not yet reached the point of ethical reaction. When Adam was first created, he thought upon the works of God, and by thinking upon them interpreted them. This interpretation was still revelational. To be sure, this revelational interpretation was accompanied in his case with an attitude of belief. After the fall of man the same revelational interpretation continued. But after the fall this revelational interpretation was invariably accompanied by an attitude of hostility. Paul tells us that knowing God, having engaged in interpretative activity, psychologically speaking, the heathen yet glorified Him not as God.

If then we are to avoid falling into a Roman Catholic type of natural theology, we shall need to make a sharp distinction between that which is merely psychological, and that which is epistemological in man’s interpretative activity. For all the stress we need to place upon the invariable concomitancy of the merely psychological and the epistemological, we need to lay an equal stress upon the importance of the distinction. “Common notions” may be thought of as nothing more than revelation that comes to man through man. As an ethical subject man, after the fall, acts negatively with respect to this revelation. As made in the image of God no man can escape becoming the interpretative medium of God’s general revelation both in his intellectual (Rom 1:20) and in his moral consciousness (Rom 2:14–15). No matter which button of the radio he presses, he always hears the voice of God. Even when he presses the button of his own psychological self-conscious activity, through which as a last resort the sinner might hope to hear another voice, he still hears the voice of God. “If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.” It is in this sense that we must, at least, to begin with, understand the matter when we are told that there are no atheistic peoples and no atheistic men. Psychologically there are no atheistic men; epistemologically every sinner is atheistic. Has Bavinck kept this fact in mind?

Bavinck speaks of Cicero as saying that that on which all men agree, because of their common nature, cannot be wrong. Cicero no doubt meant that there is some basis of agreement between all men, epistemologically as well as psychologically. That is to say, for Cicero there was an area of common interpretation, however small, in which all men are epistemologically in agreement. It is on such notions as those of Cicero that Roman Catholic natural theology is built. Bavinck has not always kept this point in mind. When

he speaks of Cicero, he fails to make the distinction between mere psychological commonness and epistemological agreement. Moreover, he virtually contends that there is an epistemological as well as a mere psychological agreement when he adds that there is not so much difference of opinion among men about the existence as about the nature of God.⁵⁸ This distinction between the essence and the being of God fits in with Rome's natural theology. It does not fit in, we believe, with a Reformed conception of natural theology. To make a distinction between the bare that and the what is unintelligible in any field. We cannot intelligently speak of something and afterward determine what we have been speaking of. We may grow in clarity with respect to that of which we have been speaking, but we cannot speak of something that has no delineation whatsoever in our minds. Then, too, Paul tells us, in effect, that the voice of the true God, the only existent God, is everywhere present. He does not, to be sure, say that this God is present in the fulness of His revelation. Yet it is the true God, the God, not a God, that is everywhere to be heard, whatever button we may press. It is the what not merely the that, of God's existence that the heathen find impressed upon them. To this what they, willingly or not, give interpretative expression, thereby increasing the pressure of God's requirements upon their ethical powers of reaction.

We shall do well then to be careful with such notions as divinity *überhaupt*. That is in itself an empty concept. To say that there are no atheists, strictly speaking, because no one denies divinity *überhaupt*, is to prepare the ground for an easy descent into the natural theology of Rome.

We should rather say that there are no atheistic men because no man can deny the revelational activity of the true God within him. Atheists are those who kick against the pricks of the revelation of the true God within them. To be an atheist one need not deny divinity *überhaupt*.

Bavinck, however, seems to attribute too much value to belief in the existence of abstractions. In the same vein in which he reasons against the rationalists by the help of the empiricists he also argues against the innate ideas of the rationalists. A natural theology that is built upon the idea that man has within himself the information that he needs, he says, is utterly objectionable.⁵⁹ But this, he adds, is only one side of the story. "Every science presupposes general principles which exist in their own right. All knowledge rests upon faith. All proof presupposes, in the last analysis, an ἀρχὴ ἀποδείξεως. There are logical, mathematical, philosophical, ethical and thus also religious and theological principles, which are, to be sure, very general and abstract, but which are accepted by all men in all ages and which have a character of naturalness and necessity. The laws of thought are the same for all; the doctrine of numbers is everywhere the same; the distinction between good and bad is known to all; there is no people without religion and knowledge of God. This is not to be explained otherwise than by the acceptance of *principia per se nota*, κοινὰ ἔννοιαι *veritates aeternae*, which are imprinted naturally on the human spirit. In the case of religion we must always, whether we will or no, come back to the idea of a *semen religionis*, a *sensus divinitatis*, an *instinctus divinus*, a *cognitio insita*."⁶⁰ Scripture tells us, says Bavinck, that man is made

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁶⁰ *Idem*.

in the image of God, that in his νοῦς he has the capacity to see God in his works, and that the works of the law are written in his heart.⁶¹ Rightly understood, says Bavinck, the idea of κοινὰ ἔννοιαι means: “That man has both the *potentia* (*aptitudo, vis, facultas*) and the inclination (*habitus, dispositio*) so that in the course of normal development and in the midst of the environment in which God has given him life, he may of his own accord without compulsion, without scientific argumentation and proof, ἐμφύτως καὶ ἀδιδάκτως, arrive at some solid, certain undoubted knowledge of God.”⁶² In a case of normal development every man must come to such knowledge. “As a man, opening his eyes, sees the sun and in its light sees the objects of the world about him, so man must, in accordance with his nature, when he hears that there is a God, that there is a difference between good and evil, etc., give his consent to these truths. He cannot avoid it. He accepts these truths involuntarily, without force or proof because they stand in their own right.”⁶³

In all this there has been a wavering between a Christian and a non-Christian concept of natural theology. On the one hand Bavinck comes back to the point that the true God has not left himself without a witness anywhere, and has spoken to man even through the depth of his self-conscious activity. The last sentence in the whole section is “It is God himself, who has not left Himself without a witness to every man.” If the κοινὰ ἔννοιαι were consistently explained along this line, we should come to the distinction between the psychological and the epistemological. We should then argue that the God, the only true God, has spoken to man from the beginning and everywhere. There are then no atheists in the sense that no one has been able to suppress this revelation of the true God within him and round about him. On the other hand, Bavinck works with the distinction between the existence and the nature of God. In consonance with this distinction he then speaks about universal principles. He says that on the basis of the idea of κοινὰ ἔννοιαι every man when he hears that there is a god, and when he hears that there is a difference between good and evil, must give his assent to these truths. But how can Bavinck say that formal abstractions, such as the existence of a God and the idea of difference between good and evil as purely formal statement, are truths? They are in themselves the emptiest of forms and as such utterly meaningless. If they are to be spoken of as having content—and Bavinck speaks of them as such when he says they are truths—the question must be faced whence this content comes. If it comes from the revelation of God, if the revelation that there is a God comes from the God, if the idea of the that is to have its significance given it because it comes from the what of God’s revelation, then we can not say that all men by nature will accept it, and as a consequence have a certain amount of true information about God. Man by his sinful nature hates the revelation of God. Therefore every concrete expression that any sinner makes about God will have in it the poisoning effect of this hatred of God. His epistemological reaction will invariably be negative, and negative along the whole line of his interpretative endeavor. There are no general principles or truths about the true God—and that is the only God with whom any man actually deals—which he does not falsify. The very idea of the existence of abstract

⁶¹ *Idem.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

truths is a falsification of the knowledge of the true God that every sinner involuntarily finds within himself.

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

Common Grace—Third Article

5. Hepp

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

Hepp wants to build on what Bavinck and other Reformed theologians have done. In modern times Bavinck has come nearer than any one else to teaching a general testimony of the Spirit. But even he did not mention it by name. He only prepared the way for the idea.¹ When we come to the definitely constructive portion of Hepp's work, the argument he presents runs somewhat as follows. As the special testimony of the Spirit testifies within us to the truth of Scripture, so the general testimony of the Spirit testifies within us to truth in general.² The whole of the world about us is a manifestation of the truths of God. It is the Spirit's task to set forth the fulness of this revelation before the eyes of men. This may be called the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti externum*. This external testimony reveals to man; but to this must be added the internal testimony to assure men of the truth of this revelation. "Why? All revelation takes place by way of means. This is always true whether or not the revelation pertain to God or to created things. God never reveals Himself directly to us, but always through something that stands between Him and our ego. If not we should need to be able to look into the very essence of God, we should need to be fitted for a *visio Dei per essentiam*."³ Revelation as such cannot give us certainty. If we had nothing but revelation, says Hepp, we should be compelled to

¹ *Op. cit.*, 1, p. 98.

² *Ibid.*, p. 140.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

believe in the objects on their own account. We therefore rather say that the objects are but messengers Holy Spirit. Absolute certainty I, as a creature, can obtain only when the Holy Spirit, quite independently of the objects themselves, makes me believe that their revelation brings the truth to me. And that takes place when I receive the *testimonium generale internum*.⁴ This, says Hepp, is the essence of the testimony of the Spirit. It assures but does not reveal. It assures me of the truth of the revelation about me.

This general testimony, however, does not assure me of all truth. It assures me of central truths only.⁵ These several truths do not relate to one another as members of a hierarchy. They are relatively independent of one another.⁶ There are three groups of central truths, those pertaining to God, those pertaining to man, and those pertaining to the world.

In connection with the truths pertaining to God, Hepp then discusses the value of the theistic proofs. His thought here is very similar to that of Bavinck. These proofs, he argues, put into set formulas that which comes to us from the cosmos as a whole. They press with power upon our consciousness, but cannot give us certainty.⁷ General revelation, which is, as it were, concentrated in these proofs, would lead to a guess if it were not for the testimony of the Spirit.⁸ Hepp is most insistent that we shall keep the two concepts, revelation and assurance, rigidly apart. Even in paradise Adam could not have lived by revelation as such. Without the general testimony there would have been uncertainty. Now doubt is sin, and in paradise there was no sin. We must therefore hold that even in paradise there was, in addition to general revelation, the general internal testimony of the Spirit to that revelation.

The second group of general truths centers about man. How is man to be certain of his self-existence? Only by the general internal testimony of the Spirit. How does man know that he can depend on his senses, on the axioms of his thought, and on the norms of his moral and aesthetic appreciation? Only by the general internal testimony of the Spirit.⁹

The third group of central truths deals with the world. This world presents itself as working according to *prima principia*. How do I know that this is true? Only by the general internal testimony of the Spirit.¹⁰

Thus the general internal testimony of the Spirit may be said to be the foundation of all science, religion, morality, and art.¹¹

We come now to the most pivotal point of all. "From the marriage of the general testimony and revelation (here taken in its wide signification of God-revelation, man-revelation, and cosmos-revelation) faith is born. Wherever the internal testimony attests to the external testimony, man cannot withhold his assent. And faith always consists of

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁸ *Idem.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹¹ *Idem.*

giving assent by means of one's reason to some witness or other."¹² Hepp calls this faith *fides generalis*. He says that modern philosophy has, quite generally, allowed for this *fides generalis*.¹³ Yet, he adds, there is a difference, even a great difference, between the faith of modern philosophy and the general faith as we should hold to it.¹⁴ For the modern philosopher, faith is, he says, after all, second to knowledge. For Christianity, on the other hand, faith offers far greater certainty than does science. "As for certainty knowledge cannot stand in the shadow of the *fides generalis*. For this rests on higher than subjective and objective grounds, on a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, on the testimony of God in the heart of every man."¹⁵

Now it is because of this *fides generalis*, resulting from the marriage of revelation and the general testimony, that men accept the general truths with respect to God, man, and the world. "Taken generally mankind does not deny the central truths. By far the greater majority of men recognize a higher power above themselves and do not doubt the reality within and beyond themselves."¹⁶ Here we reach the climax of the whole matter. There are central truths to which the generality of mankind, because of the irresistible power of the Spirit's internal general testimony, must of necessity give their consent.

Our criticism of this position of Hepp will, quite naturally, be similar to that which we have made of Bavinck. As long as he is unwilling to argue along exclusively Christian lines, Hepp is unable to escape making concessions to a Roman type of natural theology. He makes many valuable negative criticisms against rationalism and empiricism. But he is not fully conscious, it seems, of the fact that even a negative criticism of non-Christian positions, must be undertaken from the presupposition of the Christian position. Hepp cannot effectively oppose the natural theology of Rome if he argues against it with the methods of a scholastic type of natural theology. He apparently has two methods of reasoning against false philosophies: one based on neutral premises, and, then, an additional one based on Christian premises.¹⁷

When Hepp deals with the "theistic proofs" he, like Bavinck, attributes a certain value to them even when they are constructed along non-Christian lines. Hepp says that Kant underestimated the value of these arguments. In his whole discussion of the proofs Hepp allows that an argument based upon would-be neutral ground, can have a certain validity. Of these proofs, constructed on a neutral and therefore non-Christian basis, Hepp says that they cry day and night that God exists.¹⁸ To this we reply that they cry day and night that God does not exist. For, as they have been constructed, they cry that a finite God exists. Nothing more could come from the procedure on which they have been constructed. They have been constructed on the assumption that we as human beings may make our start from the finite world, as from something that is ultimate. They take for granted that we already know from our study of the phenomenal world the meaning of such words as "cause" and "being" and "purpose," whether or not we have referred this

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 158 ff.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁵ *Idem.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

phenomenal world to God. To avoid a natural theology of the Roman sort, we shall need to come to something like a clear consciousness of the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian mode of argument with respect to the revelation of God in nature. God is, and has been from the beginning, revealed in nature and in man's own consciousness. We cannot say that the heavens probably declare the glory of God. We cannot allow that if rational argument is carried forth on true premises, it should come to any other conclusion than that the true God exists. Nor can we allow that the certainty with respect to God's existence would be any less if acquired by a ratiocinative process rather than by intuitions, as long as man was not a sinner. The testimony of the Spirit may well be conceived as originally controlling Adam's reasoning powers as well as his intuitive powers. On the other hand, when man has become a sinner, his intuitive powers are as sinful as his reasoning powers. There may be more area for error in a sorites than in an intuition, but the corruption of sin has penetrated to every activity of man.

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

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

If we take both the original human nature and the sinful human nature, and realize that everywhere both are active, we have done once for all with the natural theology of Rome. On the objective side we have done with it, inasmuch as we claim for the statement of the Christian position absolute validity. For science and philosophy, as well as for theology, we frankly take our basic presuppositions from Scripture. Scripture tells us that God, the God who has more fully revealed Himself in Scripture than in nature, is yet speaking to us in the created universe about us. Scripture says that from the beginning He has spoken there. It says that man has known this fact, and that by his efforts at perversion he has well-nigh succeeded in silencing the voice of revelation, but that deep down in his heart he is still aware of this revelation and will be held responsible for it. We must not lower these claims to the probability level. On the subjective side we have done with a Romanist type of natural theology, because we realize the sinful nature is

everywhere active. There are no *capita communissima*, on which believers and non-believers can agree without a difference. There are no central truths on which all agree. The disagreement is fundamental and goes to the heart of the matter.

Thus we are no longer face to face with the dilemma with which Gilson confronts the Calvinist. As long as we seek refuge from Romanism by having less Romanism we shall not escape the sword of Gilson. To withdraw to the inner fortress of central truths, and make even these merely probable in the objective field, and to withdraw to the psychologically primitive (intuitions, *beseffen*) in the subjective field, helps matters not at all. Gilson will find us still. Quite rightly he asserts that the attenuations of language are of no help in this matter. If we speak of the sense of deity and of the seed of religion, and mean by that some degree of common epistemological response on the part of believer and non-believer, however small the area of agreement, and however primitive the nature of the response, Gilson has a right to confront us with his dilemma. The escape from the dilemma lies, we believe, as suggested, in doing what Kuyper and Bavinck and Hepp have all at one place or another told us to do, namely, offer an interpretation of life in its totality on the basis of the principle Scripture offers. That principle is the ontological trinity. In answer to his challenge, we would tell Gilson that, unless he is willing with us to interpret nature and all things else in terms of the ontological trinity, he can get no meaning into human experience. The interpretations of the natural reason, made by the aid of abstract principles and brute facts can, in the nature of the case, lead with rationalism (Parmenides) into a universal validity that is empty of content, or with empiricism (Heraclitus) to a particularism that has no universality, or to a phenomenalism that is a compromise between these two positions and shares the weaknesses of both.

B. The Positive Line Of Concrete Thinking

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

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

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

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

Calvin lays great stress upon the incomprehensible will of God. This is particularly the case in his treatise on the predestination of God. In replying to Pighius and Georgius he falls back on this point again and again. In the first section of the book Calvin gives the doctrine of election “a slight touch.” But even in this “slight touch” he refers to Romans 9.20. Of it he says: “The apostle in this appeal adopts an axiom, or universal acknowledgment, which not only ought to be held fast by all godly minds, but deeply engraven in the breast of common sense; that the inscrutable judgment of God is deeper than can be penetrated by man.”¹⁹ When we must answer such as argue along the lines of Pighius, says Calvin, we ask whether there be “no justice of God, but that which is conceived of by us.” When men cannot see a reason for the works of God they are immediately “prepared to appoint a day for entering into judgment with Him.”²⁰ “What do you really think of God’s glorious Name? And will you vaunt that the apostle is devoid of all reason, because he does not drag God from His throne and set Him before you, to be questioned and examined.”²¹ Calvin steadfastly refuses to permit abstract universal ideas to rule God. We are to hold that the will of God, the will of the inscrutable God is “the highest rule of righteousness.”²² God’s will is to be set “above all other causes.”²³ Men who follow “their own natural sense and understanding” appeal to abstract justice, “because they presume to subject the tribunal of God to their own judgment.”²⁴ We should rather rest content with the Word of God. May we keep our ears open to it and shut them to the voice of strangers.²⁵

The problem Calvin is discussing is that of predestination. The objection raised against the doctrine of predestination is, of course, that it condemns secondary causes to insignificance. Pighius, says Calvin, “knows not how to make the least distinction between remote and proximate causes!”²⁶ Pighius urges the full-bucket difficulty against Calvin’s insistence that God’s counsel is the ultimate cause of whatsoever comes to pass.²⁷ Calvin in turn insists that it is quite legitimate to urge man’s sin as the proximate, and God’s counsel as the ultimate, cause of man’s final perdition.²⁸ Does he think he can offer an explanation of the relation between the ultimate and the proximate cause that will satisfy the demands of a logic, such as Pighius employs? Not for a moment. He calls on Pighius to forsake his logic with its phenomenal foundation. “Pighius, on the contrary, begins his building from the earth’s plain surface, without any foundation at all.”²⁹ Pighius would ask why God created such natures as he knew would sin. Pighius knows how to employ a well-turned syllogism. There is no escaping the force of his objection. If

¹⁹ *Calvin’s Calvinism, First Part, A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God*, translated by Henry Cole, p. 32.

²⁰ *Idem.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²² *Idem.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁴ *Idem.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

God is the ultimate cause back of whatsoever comes to pass, Pighius can, on his basis, rightly insist that God is the cause of sin. Calvin knew this. He attempts no answer by means of a non-Christian methodology. With Augustine he would throw man back into the consideration of what he is, and what is the capacity of his mind.³⁰ “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God.” This is a reason for man and “all that is due him.” That was Paul’s answer and Augustine’s answer. It is also Calvin’s answer: “Paul comparing, as he here does, man with God, shows that the counsel of God, in electing and reprobating men, is without doubt more profound and more deeply concealed than the human mind can penetrate. Wherefore, O man, consider (as the apostle adviseth thee) who and what thou art, and concede more to God than the measure and compass of thine own nature.”³¹

We are to remember, then, that on the question of the relation of God’s counsel to what takes place in time “the wisdom of Christ is too high and too deep to come within the compass of man’s understanding.”³² There is nothing “in the whole circle of spiritual doctrine which does not far surpass the capacity of man and confound its utmost reach.”³³ When such a subject as predestination is discussed “numberless unholy and absurd thoughts rush into the mind.”³⁴ How shall we meet these unholy thoughts and arguments in ourselves and in others? We shall not meet them by trying to defend such doctrines on the basis of a logic that assumes secondary causes to be ultimate causes. We shall not meet them on the basis of a logic that starts from brute facts, and handles them according to abstract universal principles. We shall meet them rather by offering the ontological trinity as our interpretative concept. This will at once lay us open to the charge of the full-bucket difficulty. We are not to be affrighted by the charge of holding the contradictory. “But I would repeat my being perfectly aware how much absurdity and irreconcilable contradiction these deep things seem to profane persons to carry with them.”³⁵ We shall meet this charge of contradiction by asserting that we are the true defenders of the meaning of second causes. History has meaning just because God’s counsel is back of it. Sin can be given as the reason for man’s destruction just because men were “fitted for destruction,” and faith can be given as a reason for man’s final glory just because believers were “afore prepared unto glory.” “Godly consciences”³⁶ need not be disturbed by the reasonings of rationalists, or irrationalists or rationalist-irrationalists. There is, in fact, a beautiful harmony between remote and proximate causes. The harmony exists—of that, faith is sure. Faith is reasonable—of that, faith is also sure. Faith alone is reasonable—of that, faith is once more sure. Faith abhors the really contradictory; to maintain the really contradictory is to deny God. Faith adores the apparently contradictory; to adore the apparently contradictory is to adore God as one’s creator and final interpreter.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

Says Calvin: "If, then, nothing can prevent a man from acknowledging that the first origin of his ruin was from Adam, and if each man finds the proximate cause of his ruin in himself, what can prevent our faith from acknowledging afar off, with all sobriety, and adoring, with all humility, that remote secret counsel of God by which the Fall of man was thus preordained? And what should prevent the same faith from beholding, at the same time, the proximate cause within; that the whole human race is individually bound by the guilt and desert of eternal death, as derived from the person of Adam; and that all are in themselves, therefore, subject to death and to death eternal? Pighius, therefore, has not sundered, shaken or altered (as he thought he had done) that pre-eminent and most beautiful symmetry with which these proximate and remote causes divinely harmonise!"³⁷ The "scholars of God," those who are "gifted, not with the spirit of this world, but with His own heavenly Spirit" may know the things freely given them by God³⁸; but they know them because they have learned to know their places as creatures before the incomprehensible God.

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

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

We have already observed that the invariable concomitant of confusing the two conceptions of mystery is the lowering of the claims for the objective validity of the Christian-theistic position. The theistic proofs are said to be objectively weak. They are said to be worth something but not a great deal. Our position as Christians is merely said to be objectively at least as good as the position of our enemies. The result will naturally be that we relieve the pressure of God's claims upon created man. We say to him that, as far as the objective evidence is concerned, he is living up to the requirements of the case if he merely arrives at the existence of a God, at a divinity *überhaupt*. At least he need not feel that he is falling below the mark, if he is doubtful that the true God exists. Now apply this to man's moral attitude toward God. Both parties to the debate on common grace should be willing to agree that Adam and Eve had the requirements of God's law written on their hearts. We need not concern ourselves here with the distinction between the "works of the law" and the "law." We are not speaking now of man's ethical reaction to God. We are speaking only of God's revelational relationship to man. And on that

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 96f.

point all should be equally anxious to maintain that God originally spoke plainly to man, both in the “book of nature” and in the “book of conscience.” Wherever man would turn he saw the living God and His requirements. Whether he reasoned about nature or whether he looked within, whether it was the starry heavens above or the moral law within, both were equally insistent and plain that God, the true God, stood before him.

It should also be recognized that man was, from the outset, confronted with positive, as well as with natural, revelation. Dr. Vos speaks of this as pre-redemptive special revelation³⁹ God walked and talked with man. Natural revelation must not be separated from this supernatural revelation. To separate the two is to deal with two abstractions instead of with one concrete situation. That is to say, natural revelation, whether objective or subjective, is in itself a limiting conception. It has never existed by itself so far as man is concerned. It cannot fairly be considered, therefore, as a fixed quantity, that can be dealt with in the same way at every stage of man’s moral life. Man was originally placed before God as a covenant personality.

It is no doubt with this in mind that Calvin speaks of sinners as being covenant-breakers.⁴⁰ The phrase has come into common usage among Reformed theologians. Common as the usage of the phrase may be, however, the point we have made perhaps needs stressing. All too easily do we think of the covenant relation as quite distinct and independent of natural revelation. The two should be joined together. To speak of man’s relation to God as being covenantal at every point is merely to say that man deals with the personal God everywhere. Every manipulation of any created fact is, as long as man is not a sinner, a covenant-affirming activity. Every manipulation of any fact, as soon as man is a sinner, is a covenant-breaking activity.

In this connection a word may be said about the question already touched upon as to whether any conclusions may be drawn about the attitude of God from observation of facts. In Schilder’s discussion of the proof texts adduced by the Christian Reformed Church Synod of 1924, he speaks from time to time about “facts as such.” From the “facts as such,” he warns, we are not to conclude any such thing as an attitude of God toward the reprobate. “Beware, that you do not separate the facts from faith.”⁴¹ The point comes up again and again. As over against a Romanising type of natural theology this warning of Schilder is no doubt in order. And we have observed that as Reformed theologians we have not yet outgrown Rome’s natural theology entirely. We have already criticized the idea of brute fact. But there is another side to the story.

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

Schilder tells us, further, that the attitude of God is revealed only to the extent that we know of the will of His eternal counsel. He speaks of this in connection with the story of

³⁹ *Notes on Biblical Theology of the Old Testament.*

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁴¹ *De Reformatie*, Nov. 10, 1939. See also *The Standard Bearer*, Vols. 15 and 16.

the sons of Eli. In God's final purpose he has determined to slay the sons of Eli. Yet Eli is told to tell his sons that God desires not their death. "The father Eli may, and must say to his sons: be converted, ye children of Eli, for Jehovah desires not your death; that is the revealed will, the command, which you are to obey. He hates sin. But in addition to this we are informed afterwards, that as far as the secret will of God is concerned, Jehovah did desire their death as just punishment; in part because of this they harden themselves against warning; inasmuch as wickedness is punishment as well as pollution. And in this hidden will it is that the attitude of God appears."⁴²

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

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

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

⁴² *De Reformatie*, Nov. 17, 1939.

to be controlled by our notion of the later. We think that the notion of the earlier must be stressed more than has been done heretofore.

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

But this favorable attitude of God to this early common perfect nature must be taken as correlative to the representative moral act of Adam. We may and must hold that every fact was revelational. Every fact was the bearer of a requirement. But, even as such, it was expressive of a favorable attitude of God to man. Without all this the ethical act of representation would have to take place in a void. At the same time, this original situation was an historically unfinished situation. It required further ethical action as its correlative. The continuance of the situation required, on the part of man, the representative affirmation of God as God. And this correlativity implied that the situation would, in any case, be changed. Whether Adam was to obey or to disobey, the situation would be changed. And thus God's attitude would be changed.

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

Accordingly we would not speak of God's love of creatureliness always and everywhere. Schilder uses this idea. He says that God greatly loves creatureliness everywhere, whether in the drunkard, the anti-Christ or the devil.⁴³ Creatureliness is then conceived of statically, as though it were something to be found anywhere and everywhere the same and always by itself. But creatureliness should be used as a limiting concept. It is never found in moral beings, whether men or angels, except in connection with an ethical reaction, positive or negative. We cannot intelligently speak of God's love of creatureliness in the devil. God's good pleasure pertains no doubt to the devil. But that is because the devil is frustrated in his opposition to God. God once upon a time loved the

⁴³ See Zwier's discussion in *De Wachter*, Nov. 21, 1939.

devil. But that was before the devil was the devil. We shall make no progress on the common grace problem with the help of abstractions.

We need not hesitate to affirm, then, that in the beginning God loved mankind in general. That was before mankind had sinned against God. A little later God hated mankind in general. That was after mankind had sinned against God. Is there any doubt that the elect, as well as the reprobate, were under the wrath of God? Calvin says that the whole human race is “individually bound by the guilt and desert of eternal death, as derived from the person of Adam,”⁴⁴ So the elect and the reprobate are under a common wrath. If there is meaning in this—and who denies it?—there may and must, with equal right, be said to be an earlier attitude of common favor. Indeed, the reality of the “common wrath” depends upon the fact of the earlier “common grace.” But after the common, in each case, comes the conditional. History is a process of differentiation. Accordingly, the idea of that which is common between the elect and the reprobate is always a limiting concept. It is a commonness for the time being. There lies back of it a divine as if. One syllogism, based on non-Christian assumptions, would call this dishonesty. Pighius knew how to turn such syllogisms; but Calvin knew how to answer them. Invariably he answered them by turning to the words of Paul, “Who art thou, O man?” He answered them by rejecting the whole of the non-Christian methodology, based on the ideas of brute fact and abstract universal. Pighius cannot shake the symmetry with which the proximate and remote causes divinely harmonize, even though he can easily prove that no man can comprehend their connection. Man has sinned against the true God, whom he knew for what He is. When man first sinned he did not know God as fully as we know Him now, but he did know God for what He is, as far as he knew Him at all. And it was mankind, not some individual elect or reprobate person, that sinned against God. Thus it was mankind in general which was under the favor of God, that came under the wrath of God.

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

If any progress is to be made in the discussion of this most perplexing aspect of the perplexing problem of common grace we shall need, in our humble opinion, to stress, as we have tried to do throughout, the idea of the earlier and the later, that is to say, the historical correlativity of universal and particular. All too frequently our difficulty is needlessly enhanced in that those who affirm, and those who deny, employ in the defence of their positions such arguments as are constructed out of the ideas of brute fact and abstract law. A rather typical argument employed is that expressed in the following words of Hepp: “Is there not a sort of grace in the hearing of the gospel by the non-elect? They hear that God has no pleasure in their death, but rather that they be converted and live. As time-believers the Word may bring them joy.” Here Hepp inserts a paraphrase of

⁴⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 91.

Hebrews 6.4, as proof that there may be a grace which is non-saving for the reprobate?⁴⁵ He then adds: "Let us not look at the lot of the non-elect in the congregation from the view-point of judgment only. Truly that judgment is a reality. But the enjoyments, which they sometimes have under the preaching of the gospel also have temporary reality, as a non-saving work brought about as they are by the Spirit."⁴⁶

Hepp here speaks as though it were already known who are and who are not elect. He speaks as though a preacher may approach a certain individual whom he knows to be reprobate, and tell him that God has no pleasure in his death. But this is to forget the difference between the earlier and the later. The general presentation comes to a generality. It comes to "sinners," differentiated, to be sure, as elect and reprobate in the mind of God, but yet, prior to their act of acceptance or rejection, regarded as a generality. To forget this is to move the calendar of God ahead.

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

The difficulties at this point are, we must believe, considerably reduced if we observe the ideas of the earlier and the later. Calvin does not hesitate to say of mankind that it was originally "placed in a way of salvation."⁴⁷ And while mankind in general was in a way of salvation, salvation was offered to all men. He recounts this as an historical fact. He argues with Pighius as to whether it was absolutely or conditionally offered, but he does not dispute the fact that it was offered to all men in Adam. "The truth of the matter is, that salvation is not offered to all men on any other ground than on the condition of their remaining in their original innocence."⁴⁸ From this fact that God did at the earliest point in history offer eternal life to all men, Calvin takes his departure. One who argues like Pighius is easily able to raise objections to this as being quite impossible. He will say: God, according to the doctrine of election, did not mean to save all men. Then what meaning has it to offer eternal life to all men? And how dare you say that God placed man in a way of salvation? But Calvin does not allow himself to be led astray by reasoning based on non-Christian assumptions. True reasoning, he says in effect, will rather maintain that the general offer has meaning and is possible because it has actually been made by God. And while it is true that this whole question of the universal offer of salvation is one of these things that can only "be fully understood or perceived by faith,"

⁴⁵ Hepp offers much valuable material on the question of common grace in a series of articles in which he seeks to prove that common grace is taught in Scripture (*Credo*, July 1, 1940 ff).

⁴⁶ *Credo*, July 1, 1940.

⁴⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁴⁸ *Idem*.

we yet see such harmony between ultimate and proximate causes on the frankly revelational basis as cannot be seen otherwise.

It is with this background that Calvin then attacks the question of Christ's command to preach the gospel to all men alike. Pighius drew from the universality of this command the conclusion that God must mean all men to be saved. Against this Calvin argues that the promise is not unconditional. Speaking of the promise of Jeremiah 31.33 to the effect that God will write His law in their hearts, he says: "Now a man must be utterly beside himself to assert that this promise is made to all men generally and indiscriminately."⁴⁹ It is evident that God by His counsel did not ordain all men to eternal life. Yet the fact of Christ's command remains. "It is quite manifest that all men, without difference or distinction, are outwardly called or invited to repentance and faith,"⁵⁰ Pighius sees a contradiction here. And on non-Christian presuppositions there would be a contradiction here. But with the Christian distinction between ultimate and proximate causes we hold, though we cannot intellectually penetrate the question exhaustively, that, instead, there is genuine harmony here. There are, we can show Pighius, no two ultimate wills in God contradicting one another. Yet we need the idea of two wills, that of command and that of secret counsel. We harmonize the two, as far as we can harmonize that which involves the incomprehensible God, by the ideas of correlativity and conditionality as these ideas are themselves determined in their meaning by the concept of God.

The universality of the gospel presentation or invitation or promise or command—they all come to the same thing, and Calvin is not afraid to use them indiscriminately—comes to mankind in general. It comes to sinful mankind, to mankind that has once before, when "placed in a way of salvation," been offered salvation. It comes to a generality that has once in common, in one moment, in one man, rejected the offer of eternal life through Adam. Mankind is now, to use words corresponding to the earlier stage, placed in a way of death. Meanwhile the fact of Christ's redemptive work, in promise or in fulfilment, has come into the picture. Christ has not died for all men. He has died only for His people. But His people are not yet His people except in the mind of God. They are still members of the sinful mass of mankind. It is with them where they are that contact is to be made. The offer or presentation is not to those who believe any more than to those who disbelieve. The offer comes to those who have so far neither believed nor disbelieved. It comes before that differentiation has taken place. It comes thus generally, so that differentiation may have meaning. Christ is to be a savor of life unto life to some and a savor of death unto death to others. Those who eventually disbelieve will be the more inexcusable.⁵¹

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

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁵¹ *Idem.*

rendered the more inexcusable by the gospel invitation, and have added to their condemnation by their second rejection of God.

Pighius objects that all this is to make of God a mocker. But Calvin introduces again his distinction between primary and secondary causes. Men “untaught of God” do not understand. They, he says in effect, use syllogisms “from the earth’s plain surface, without any foundation at all.” Believers, on the other hand, use syllogisms on the foundation of the ontological trinity. They know that all men have placed themselves in the way of death. “For the nature of the whole human race was corrupted in the person of Adam.”⁵² How such as are chosen by God to eternal life, who are by God’s secret counsel to be glorified, how, in short, the elect can yet, by historical representative disobedience, come under the wrath of God, they cannot understand. Must we say that the wrath of God under which they rest, according to the revealed will of God, does not tell us of the real attitude of God to them? Must we say that the real attitude of God to them is revealed only in God’s electing love? Must we say that the threat of eternal death to those that are the elect was meaningless because God willed, with His secret will, that they should finally be saved? The elect did actually disobey and they came actually under the wrath of God, while yet for all eternity they are under the favor of God. Pighius here, if he desires, can use his charge of two ultimate wills in God. He may argue that, if the doctrine of foreordination is to be carried through consistently, history is naught but a puppet dance. We hold, as we are told in Scripture to hold, that the disobedience of the elect was a real disobedience and that on account of it they came under the wrath of God. For men “taught of God” it is possible to see the harmony here between the attitude of wrath, which, in this sense, the elect share with the reprobate, and the eternal attitude of God’s favor to the elect only. They distinguish between primary and secondary causes. They hold to two wills in God. They know there is no conflict between these wills. They know this not because they have been able to penetrate intellectually the relationship between the two. They know it by faith, and they know it intellectually so far as to see that, unless we may hold that harmony rests in God, all human experience is a farce. They do not hesitate to say to those of the mind of Pighius that only Christianity is rational, though not rationally penetrable by the mind of man.

This mode of reasoning Calvin applies to the case of the reprobate. Their case is not inherently more difficult than the case of the elect. How can we understand that they were first taken into a generality with the elect and said by God to be good? Was not God’s attitude to them displayed in that instance? Of course in God’s mind there was a difference all the time. They were to him the children of wrath, even while they were pronounced good by Himself, in the earliest stage of their history. It was not some abstraction like creatureliness in them that was the object of God’s favor. As concrete beings, eventually to be haters of God but not yet in history haters of God, rather, as yet in Adam good before God, the reprobate are the objects of God’s favor. But all this was conditional. God gave them, as it were, a sample of what would be theirs if they obeyed representatively in Adam. It was, as it were, a “lend-lease” proposition. How could God offer eternal life to the reprobate in Adam, if He did not finally mean to give it to them? Pighius would urge that to say that He did would be to make of God a mocker. Calvin would answer that God did it, and that it is the exact equivalent of God’s threat of eternal

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

death to the elect, which was involved in the same probationary command. That exactly is history. The Moment has significance, and can have significance, only against the background of the counsel of God. Threats and promises are real and genuinely revelatory of the attitude of God, just because of the counsel of God that is back of history. Thus “the calumny is washed off at once.” We should not be surprised at the generality of the invitation to salvation. We should not argue that the general invitation reveals nothing of the attitude of God, on the ground that God’s particular will is back of all. “Wherefore, God is as much said to have pleasure in, and to will, this eternal life, as to have pleasure in the repentance; and He has pleasure in the latter, because He invites all men to it by His Word. Now all this is in perfect harmony with His secret and eternal counsel, by which He decreed to convert none but His own elect. None but God’s elect, therefore, ever do turn from their wickedness. And yet, the adorable God is not, on these accounts, to be considered variable or capable of change, because, as a Law-giver, He enlightens all men with the external doctrine of conditional life. In this primary manner He calls, or invites, all men unto eternal life. But, in the latter case, He brings unto eternal life those whom He willed according to His eternal purpose, regenerating by His Spirit, as an eternal Father, His own children only.”⁵³

We are, therefore, to steer clear of Platonic abstractions. We are not to use the general offer of the gospel as an abstract idea. Schilder holds that, as a general truth, we may say to the anti-Christ or the devil that whosoever believes will be saved. But to make such a statement to the anti-Christ or the devil as though it could involve them personally would be wholly meaningless. The anti-Christ and the devil are historically finished products. They are such as have finally disbelieved. The general gospel offer could make no point of contact with them. The conditional for them has passed. They have finally negated God and have been, or are being, frustrated by God; in their rejection of God they are epistemologically fully self-conscious. God loved the devil when the devil was an unfallen angel; God loved the anti-Christ and offered Him eternal life when he was in Adam; now that they have become the devil and the anti-Christ, God hates them exclusively. The general offer has meaning only with respect to those who are at an earlier stage of history. It has meaning with respect to the elect and the reprobate when they are, and to the extent that they are, members of an as yet undifferentiated generality.

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

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

The whole thrust of Calvin's thought is opposed to this. For him the general and the particular are coterminous in God. That is implied in the doctrine of the ontological trinity. And with this ontological trinity and the counsel of God as the background of history, it is possible to give genuine meaning to the general without doing despite to the particular. In fact the general is a means toward the realization of the particular. The very possibility of differentiation presupposes as its concomitant a correlative generality. God as the law-giver is working out His eternal plan. God has an attitude of favor toward the originally created good nature of man. The individual men are included in this generality. They are not contrasted with this generality as those that believe or disbelieve. It could not be said of this original promise that "the contents of this externally general message is particular and applies to the elect only."⁵⁴ Nor could we say that because this promise is conditional, "it is also particular and God in reality promises eternal life only to the elect."⁵⁵ Such, we are persuaded, is not Calvin's intention with his stress on the conditional character of the promise.

The burden of the whole matter lies in the fact that on any Platonic, or semi-Platonic, basis, the conditional can have no meaning. Only on a Christian, and more specifically only on a consistently Christian, basis can the conditional have meaning. Certain as we are that this is true, certain as we are that Christianity is objectively valid and that it is the only rational position for man to hold, we are as certain that we cannot exhaustively explain the relation of the infinite to the finite. To do so would be to exhaust the being of God. In his article on Predestination, Warfield says that because Calvin believed in the freedom of God, he did not believe in the liberty of man to seek exhaustive knowledge of God. Mystery, says Bavinck, is the heart of Dogmatics. But it is Christian, not Platonic, mystery that constitutes this heart. If, then, we think along the lines suggested by Calvin, we may think of the universal offer of salvation as an evidence of common grace. It is evidence of earlier rather than of lower grace. All common grace is earlier grace. Its commonness lies in its earliness. It pertains not merely to the lower dimensions of life. It pertains to all dimensions, and to these dimensions in the same way at all stages of history. It pertains to all the dimensions of life, but to all these dimensions ever decreasingly as the time of history goes on. At the very first stage of history there is much common grace. There is a common good nature under the common favor of God. But this creation-grace requires response. It cannot remain what it is. It is conditional. Differentiation must set in and does set in. It comes first in the form of a common rejection of God. Yet common grace continues; it is on a "lower" level now; it is long-suffering that men may be led to repentance. God still continues to present Himself for what He is, both in nature and in the work of redemption. The differentiation meanwhile proceeds. The elect are, generally speaking, differently conditioned from the non-elect. They are separated into a special people. In the New Testament period they have the influences of Christian surroundings brought to bear upon them. The non-elect are, generally speaking, conditioned in accordance with their desert; most of them never come within earshot of the external call of the gospel and have no Christian influence brought to bear upon them. Thus it becomes increasingly difficult to observe that which is common. We may be tempted to think of it as a merely formal something. We may, like

⁵⁴ H. Hoeksema, *Calvin, Berkhof, and H. J. Kuyper*, p. 32.

⁵⁵ *Idem*.

the impatient disciples, anticipate the course of history and deal with men as though they were already that which by God's eternal decree they one day will be. Yet God bids us bide our time and hold to the common, as correlative to the process of differentiation. Pighius would say that the universal offer of salvation must be taken as an unconditional promise that God will write His law on every heart, and we may be tempted to answer that the universal offer is formal and is, because conditional, after all only particular, but Scripture would have us use the notion of generality, as a limiting concept still. Common grace will diminish still more in the further course of history. With every conditional act the remaining significance of the conditional is reduced. God allows men to follow the path of their self-chosen rejection of Him more rapidly than ever toward the final consummation. God increases His attitude of wrath upon the reprobate as time goes on, until at the end of time, at the great consummation of history, their condition has caught up with their state. On the other hand God increases his attitude of favor upon the elect, until at last, at the consummation of history, their condition has caught up with their state. While in this world, though saved and perfect in Christ, they are yet, because of their old nature, under the displeasure of God.

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

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

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

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

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

crucify unto himself the Son of God afresh, but for the moment the voice of God drowns out his own. He is at the moment not at all himself; he is not yet fully himself.

It is thus that we finally come to some fruitful insight into the problem of civil righteousness or the works of non-regenerate men. It is not that in some lower dimension no differentiation, epistemological or psychological, needs to be made by believers. It is not that there is even a square foot of neutral territory. It is not that in the field of civics or justice, any more than in any other particular dimension, men, to the extent that they are epistemologically self-conscious, show any righteousness. The problem, as already suggested, faces us in every dimension. There are non-believers who go to church, there are those who give to the cause of missions. Nor are they hypocrites, properly speaking. The hypocrite is a person who is epistemologically self-conscious to a large degree. He “joins the church” for the sake of reward. He may very well do the works of the law externally. Dillinger often walked well-dressed in fashionable society. May not a criminal give many and fine Christmas presents today to those whom he plans to murder tomorrow? He does the works of the law. Schilder makes much of the fact that the works of the law may be thus externally performed. But the problem cannot be settled in this fashion. The very existence of the hypocrite requires us to go back of the hypocrite. To be able to act the hypocrite he must know the requirements of proper society thoroughly. How does he know the requirements of society? Because he has mingled in society and has had its requirements inscribed upon him as a demand. The very possibility of self-conscious hypocrisy presupposes an earlier undifferentiated state. It is from that undifferentiated stage that we must make our beginning.

Schilder insists that we are not to interpret Paul’s words in Romans 2.14 as though they meant that the heathen do the works of the law by their own nature.⁵⁶ This is in itself true enough. Yet it is equally true that the question of general revelation is of basic importance for an understanding of Paul’s words. The fact of general revelation may, and must, always be presupposed. Schilder himself allows for this possibility.⁵⁷ When seeking to explain the passage, he employs the idea of the remnants of the image of God and the idea of God’s general providence. Yet he holds that the first reason for the performance of the works of the law, on the part of the reprobate, must be found in their sinful nature.⁵⁸ The sinner, says Schilder, does the works of the law hypocritically. That is to say, Schilder would have us make a large degree of epistemological self-consciousness on the part of the non-believer the chief and primary point of departure. We shall get further in stating Paul’s meaning if we make a low stage of epistemological self-consciousness our starting point. Paul is not saying that we deal with a group of people that are master simulators, having been in contact with the highest requirements of the law of God, and a group that is able to “dress as well as the best.” On the contrary he is arguing that even those who have not had the special revelation of the oracles of God given to the Jews must yet be said to be sinners, that is, covenant-breakers. All men need the justice of God, for all are sinners. Yet there is no sin unless there be transgression and there is no transgression unless there be knowledge of the law. Having not the externally promulgated law, the heathen yet have enough knowledge of the law or will of God to

⁵⁶ *Heidelbergische Catechismus*, Deel 1, p. 87.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

render them without excuse. Do some think that the wrath of God is revealed upon the heathen unjustly on the ground that they have no knowledge of the will of God? Let them realize, says Paul in effect, that the revelation of God is present with all men everywhere. Let them know that even from the beginning of history this knowledge has been about all men everywhere. All men are responsible for the original positive revelation of God to mankind, as well as for the natural revelation that still surrounds them. Do some wonder whether that revelation of God has been persistent and insistent? Let them realize that that revelation is so close to all men as to be psychologically one with them. It is so close to them that, in spite of all their efforts to bury it, it speaks through their own moral consciousness. The law of God as a demand of God is written on their very hearts. The Westminster Confession does not hesitate to say that the law, not merely the works of the law but the law itself, was originally written on man's heart. And the reference given for that statement is Romans 2.14–15. To this is then added the fact that man originally had a true epistemological reaction to this revelation of God. Man was created in "knowledge, righteousness and true holiness." This original, true, epistemological reaction in paradise is in turn revelational and therefore further requisite for the sinner.

Sin has not been able to efface all this requisitional material from the consciousness of man. The very activity of his consciousness is a daily reminder to him of the will of God.

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

misgivings; those that hear the gospel may have such misgivings in a greater measure, as they taste the powers of the age to come.

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

In this way, too, we may perhaps be on the way to seeing a bit more clearly the relation between common grace and total depravity. If we stress the fact that common grace is earlier grace, it appears that it is something in connection with which total depravity shines forth in the fulness of its significance. Negatively, there is no possible toning down of the doctrine of total depravity; the attitude of favor spoken of is in no sense directed toward man's evil nature as such. It is directed toward the individual in so far as he is, epistemologically speaking, unconscious of the real significance of the path he is treading. And he is such an individual because he is a member of the mass of mankind which, in the providence of God, has not come to the climax of the process of differentiation. Positively, common grace is the necessary correlative to the doctrine of total depravity. Total depravity has two aspects, one of principle and one of degree. The first representative act of man was an act that resulted historically in the total depravity of the race. This act was performed against a mandate of God that involved mankind as a whole; without that "common mandate" it could not have been done; without that common mandate the "negative instance" would have been an operation in a void. Thus

mankind came under the common wrath of God. But the process of differentiation was not complete. This common wrath, too, was a stepping-stone to something further. The elect were to choose for God and the reprobate were each for himself to reaffirm their choice for Satan. The reprobate were to show historically the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Totally depraved in principle, they were to become more and more conformed in fact to the principle that controlled their hearts. They do this by way of rejecting the common call, the common grace of God. That is to say, they do it by way of rejecting God to whatever extent God reveals Himself to them. In the case of some this includes the gospel call, while in the case of most it does not. In every case, however, there is growth in wickedness on the part of those who have seen more of the common grace of God. So it appears that in every case of the historical process common grace is the correlative to total depravity.

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

Another parallel suggests itself. We are to regard the natural man as we regard nature. Or rather, we are to regard nature as we regard man. There is a parallelism between the two. They go through a similar history; they go together through the same history. They are aspects of the one course of events reaching toward the great climax at the end of the age. Both were originally created good. But it was a good that was on the move. Through the fall of man both came under the wrath of God. Nature as well as man is subject to vanity and corruption (Rom 8:19–22). But the vanity and corruption, which rest on man and nature by the curse of God, are also on the move. We must observe the “tendency” in both if we would describe either for what it is. Men ought, says Calvin, to be able to see the Creator’s munificence in creation.⁵⁹ Men ought, in the second place, to see God’s wrath upon nature. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18). “The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now” (Rom 8:22). Thus there is a downward tendency in creation. Men ought to conclude, argues Calvin, that history will end in judgment. When they do not see their own sins punished as they deserve to be punished, men ought to conclude that punishment is deferred, not that it is not coming. Thus there is a tendency toward a climax of wrath and a deferment of this climax in order that the climax may truly be a climax, the end of a process. On the other hand, there is a tendency toward glory. The “earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God” (Rom 8:19). In the “regeneration of all things” the vanity and the corruption will be swallowed up in victory. He that would describe

⁵⁹ *Institutes*, 1, 5, 1.

nature for what it actually is, must describe it as thus on the move. And so he that would describe man for what he actually is, must describe him as on the move. Applying this to the unbeliever, that lives under earshot of the gospel call, we have the following. He must be looked at (a) as having been a member of an original generality that was good, (b) as having become a member of a second generality which is wholly corrupt in principle and is on the way to a grand climax of destruction, (c) as having become a member of that generality in the midst of which the supernatural redemptive process is operative, and as a member of a generality that lives under the long-suffering of God, which would lead it to repentance, (d) as a member of a generality that is, in some cases, crucifying to itself the Son of God afresh, (e) as a member of a generality in which that process of crucifixion is still incomplete. All these generalities are presupposed in the meaning of each individual confrontation of the non-believer with the gospel; they are the correlative of the meaning of the conditional with which each one who hears the gospel is faced. All these generalities must be presupposed as still genuinely operative factors in any individual man. Not till all history is done may we drop any one of them. A fearless anthropomorphism based on the doctrine of the ontological trinity, rather than abstract reasoning on the basis of a metaphysical and epistemological correlativism, should control our concepts all along the line. A fearless anthropomorphism need not hesitate to say that the prodigal sometimes yearns for the father's house even when on the way to the swine-trough, and that the father still yearns for his son, the son that has broken "the law of his being."

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

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

well to the non-Christian as to the Christian interpretation. That the non-Christian may present a plausible view of nature is quite true. That it is impossible to convince any non-Christian of the truth of the Christian position, as long as he reasons on non-Christian assumptions, is also true. All looks yellow to the jaundiced eye. But for all this we would still maintain, and that, we believe, is essentially Calvin's view, that he who reads nature aright reads it as the Christian reads it.

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

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

John Calvin And John Dewey

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For purposes of orientation in the field of the philosophy of education we may conveniently begin with making a brief comparison between John Calvin and John Dewey. There is one thing that these two Johns seem to have in common: they both strive diligently to be consistent with themselves. Having adopted a certain principle of interpretation for the whole of life in general and for education in particular they have been more successful than many others in applying that principle deeply and widely. This makes them useful as guideposts. Each of them holds high his banner. The positions of others may therefore profitably be measured by those of Calvin and Dewey.

The two Johns are useful, moreover, because they go in opposite directions from each other. John Calvin looks in one direction while John Dewey looks in the opposite direction. They not only look in opposite directions, they cry out with all their power to men in general, and to teachers in particular, to follow them to their respective goals. Which one of these Johns will you follow?

Perhaps you will say that you need not follow either. Perhaps you incline more toward John Dewey than toward John Calvin but you think that the pragmatism or instrumentalism of John Dewey is too extreme. You therefore hold to an idealist position such as that of Ernest Hocking. Or perhaps you incline more toward John Calvin than toward John Dewey but you think that Calvinism is too extreme. You therefore hold to the position of another John, namely, that of John Wesley. You think that a general Christian or evangelical position is more balanced and more reasonable than an out and out Calvinism. You are, in short, a balanced and very sensible sort of person, one who does not like extremes and extremists.

The question now is whether you really are so well-balanced as you think that you are. Perhaps you are walking a tight-rope. You are swinging your arms violently, the left one in the direction of John Dewey and the right one in the direction of John Calvin. If such should be the case you do not make a particularly edifying spectacle of perfect balance. Nor are you particularly logical. You have not even asked yourself what your basic principle of education really is.

At least this much would seem to be plain. John Calvin takes the Scriptural doctrine of God as self-contained and self-sufficient as his final reference point in education as in all other things. He is not satisfied until all that man thinks, feels and does has its ultimate objective in God. In this world things are what they are, in the last analysis by virtue of the thinking and willing of God with respect to them. On the other hand John Dewey takes the non-Christian doctrine of man as self-contained and self-sufficient, as his final reference point in education as in all other things. Things are what they are, in the last analysis, by virtue of the thinking and willing of man with respect to them.

It would seem then, that the two Johns present to us a basically inescapable alternative. You will finally either go after John Calvin or after John Dewey. You may not be able to go as fast or as far as the man of your choice. If you are in this class you

may not be more balanced than they. More than likely you have less courage and less consistency than they.

Why not seek to explore the field of the philosophy of education with the figures of these two Johns before your eyes in order to learn where you may be going?

Nature And Scripture

The Infallible Word: A Symposium, by the members of the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary, pp. 255–293 (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Guardian Publishing Corporation, 1946).¹

We have been dealing, in this book, with the doctrine of Scripture. But Scripture claims to come to sinners. And sinners are such as have, through the fall of Adam, become “wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.” Man made himself “incapable of life” by his disobedience to God’s original revelation of himself in paradise. It is in order, then, that a discussion of the doctrine of Scripture should include an investigation of God’s revelation in nature. Moreover, Scripture does not claim to speak to man, even as fallen, in any other way than in conjunction with nature. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the two forms of revelation—revelation through nature and revelation in Scripture—be set in careful relationship to one another. Do the two forms of God’s revelation to sinners cover two distinct interests or dimensions of human life? Do they speak with different degrees of authority? Just what, we are bound to ask, is the relation between them?

It is well known that Reformed theology has a distinctive doctrine of Scripture. It is our purpose in this chapter to show that for this reason it has an equally distinctive doctrine of natural revelation. To accomplish this purpose we shall limit ourselves largely to the Westminster Standards. Dividing our discussion into two main parts, we shall first set forth positively the doctrine of natural theology that is found in these standards and then contrast this natural theology, with another natural theology, the natural theology that has its origin in Greek thought.

1. The Natural Theology Of The Confession

The distinctive character of the natural theology of the Westminster Confession may be most clearly brought to view if we show how intimately it is interwoven with the Confession’s doctrine of Scripture. And this may perhaps be most easily accomplished if it is noted that, just as the Confession’s doctrine of Scripture may be set forth under definite notions of its necessity, its authority, its sufficiency and its perspicuity, so the Confession’s doctrine of revelation in nature may be set forth under corresponding notions of necessity, authority, sufficiency and perspicuity.

A few general remarks must therefore first be made with respect to the concepts of necessity, authority, sufficiency and perspicuity as these pertain to the Confession’s doctrine of Scripture.

¹ Reprinted unchanged, both in second edition, Eerdmans, 1953, and in third edition, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1967.

According to the Confession, Scripture speaks to sinners in terms of a covenant. It tells us that man was originally placed on earth under the terms of the covenant of works. It informs us further that man broke this covenant of works and that God was pleased to make a second covenant with men that they might be saved. Thus Scripture may be said to be the written expression of God's covenantal relationship with man.

The four characteristics of Scripture enumerated above may now be regarded in relation to this general covenant concept. 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 knowledge of grace in nature. God has accordingly condescended to reveal it in Scripture.

The revelation of grace can be seen for what it is only if it be seen in its own light. The light of grace outshines in its brilliance the light of nature as the sun outshines the moon. The kind of God that speaks in Scripture can speak only on his own authority. So the authority of Scripture is as basic as its necessity.

To this necessity and authority there must be added the sufficiency or finality of Scripture. When the sun of grace has arisen on the horizon of the sinner, the "light of nature" shines only by reflected light. Even when there are some "circumstances concerning the worship of God, the government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence," they are to be so ordered "according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed." The light of Scripture is that superior light which lightens every other light. It is also the final light. God's covenant of grace is His final covenant with man. Its terms must be once for all and finally recorded "against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world."

To the necessity, authority and sufficiency of Scripture must finally be added its perspicuity. The distribution of God's grace depends in the last analysis upon His sovereign will, but it is mediated always through fully responsible image-bearers of God. God's being is wholly clear to himself and his revelation of himself to sinners is therefore also inherently clear. Not only the learned but also the unlearned "in a due use of the ordinary means" may "attain unto a sufficient understanding" of God's covenant of grace as revealed in Scripture.

With this general view of Scripture in mind, we turn to the question of God's revelation of himself in nature. The first point that calls for reflection here is the fact that it is, according to Scripture itself, the same God who reveals himself in nature and in grace. The God who reveals himself in nature may therefore be described as "infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection, all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, every where present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth."¹ It is, to be sure, from Scripture rather than from nature that this description of God is drawn. Yet it is this same God, to the extent that he is revealed at all, that is revealed in nature.

Contemplation of this fact seems at once to plunge us into great difficulty. Are we not told that nature reveals nothing of the grace of God? Does not the Confession insist that men cannot be saved except through the knowledge of God, "be they ever so diligent to

¹ *The Larger Catechism*, Q. 7.

frame their lives according to the light of nature; and the law of that religion they do profess”?² Saving grace is not manifest in nature; yet it is the God of saving grace who manifests himself by means of nature. How can these two be harmonized?

The answer to this problem must be found in the fact that God is “eternal, incomprehensible, most free, most absolute.” Any revelation that God gives of himself is therefore absolutely voluntary. Herein precisely lies the union of the various forms or God’s revelation with one another. God’s revelation in nature, together with God’s revelation in Scripture, form God’s one grand scheme of covenant revelation of himself to man. The two forms of revelation must therefore be seen as presupposing and supplementing one another. They are aspects of one general philosophy of history.

1. The Philosophy Of History

The philosophy of history that speaks to us from the various chapters of the Confession may be sketched with a few bold strokes. We are told that man could never have had any fruition of God through the revelation that came to him in nature as operating by itself. There was superadded to God’s revelation in nature another revelation, a supernaturally communicated positive revelation. Natural revelation, we are virtually told, was from the outset incorporated into the idea of a covenantal relationship of God with man. Thus every dimension of created existence, even the lowest, was enveloped in a form of exhaustively personal relationship between God and man. The “ateleological” no less than the “teleological,” the “mechanical” no less than the “spiritual” was covenantal in character.

Being from the outset covenantal in character, the natural revelation of God to man was meant to serve as the playground for the process of differentiation that was to take place in the course of time. The covenant made with Adam was conditional. There would be additional revelation of God in nature after the action of man with respect to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This additional revelation would be different from that which had preceded it. And the difference would depend definitely upon a self-conscious covenant act of man with respect to the positively communicated prohibition. We know something of the nature of this new and different revelation of God in nature consequent upon the covenant-breaking act of man. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man” (Rom 1:18).

Thus God’s covenant wrath is revealed in nature after the one all-decisive act of disobedience on the part of the first covenant head. But, together with God’s wrath, his grace is also manifest. When the wrath of God made manifest in nature would destroy all men, God makes covenant with Noah that day and night, winter and summer, should continue to the end of time (Gn 9:11). The rainbow, a natural phenomenon, is but an outstanding illustration of this fact. But all this is in itself incomplete. The covenant with Noah is but a limiting notion in relation to the covenant of saving grace. Through the new and better covenant, man will have true fruition of God. And this fact itself is to be mediated through nature. The prophets, and especially the great Prophet, foretell the future course of nature. The priests of God, and most of all the great High Priest of God, hear the answers to their prayers by means of nature. The kings under God, and most of

² *The Confession of Faith*, Chapter 10.

all the great King of Israel, make nature serve the purposes of redemption. The forces of nature are always at the beck and call of the power of differentiation that works toward redemption and reprobation. It is this idea of a supernatural-natural revelation that comes to such eloquent expression in the Old Testament, and particularly in the Psalms.

Here then is the picture of a well-integrated and unified philosophy of history in which revelation in nature and revelation in Scripture are mutually meaningless without one another and mutually fruitful when taken together.

To bring out the unity and therewith the meaning of this total picture more clearly, we turn now to note the necessity, the authority, the sufficiency and the perspicuity of natural revelation, as these correspond to the necessity, the authority, the sufficiency and the perspicuity of Scripture.

2. The Necessity Of Natural Revelation

Speaking first of the necessity of natural revelation we must recall that man was made a covenant personality. Scripture became necessary because of the covenant disobedience of Adam in paradise. This covenant disobedience took place in relation to the supernatural positive revelation that God had given with respect to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God chose one tree from among many and “arbitrarily” told man not to eat of it. It is in this connection that we must speak of the necessity of natural revelation. If the tree of the knowledge of good and evil had been naturally different from other trees it could not have served its unique purpose. That the commandment might appear as purely “arbitrary” the specially chosen tree had to be naturally like other trees. For the supernatural to appear as supernatural the natural had to appear as really natural. The supernatural could not be recognized for what it was unless the natural were also recognized for what it was. There had to be regularity if there was to be a genuine exception.

A further point needs to be noted. God did not give His prohibition so that man might be obedient merely with respect to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and that merely at one particular moment of time. He gave the prohibition so that man might learn to be self-consciously obedient in all that he did with respect to all things and throughout all time. Man was meant to glorify God in the “lower” as much as in the “higher” dimensions of life. Man’s act with respect to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was to be but an example to himself of what he should or should not do with respect to all other trees. But for an example to be really an example it must be exceptional. And for the exceptional to be the exceptional there is required that which is regular. Thus we come again to the notion of the necessity of natural revelation as the presupposition of the process of differentiation that history was meant to be.

So far we have spoken of the necessity of natural revelation as it existed before the fall. Carrying on this idea, it follows that we may also speak of the necessity of natural revelation after the fall. Here too the natural or regular has to appear as the presupposition of the exceptional. But the exceptional has now become redemptive. The natural must therefore appear as in need of redemption. After the fall it is not sufficient that the natural should appear as merely regular. The natural must now appear as under the curse of God. God’s covenant wrath rests securely and comprehensively upon man and upon all that man has mismanaged. Before the fall the natural as being the merely regular was the

presupposition of the supernatural as being pre-redemptively covenantal; after the fall the natural as under the covenant wrath of God is the presupposition of the supernatural as redemptive covenantal. Grace can be recognized as grace only in contrast with God's curse on nature.

Then too the idea of the supernatural as "example" is again in order here. Grace speaks to man of victory over sin. But the victory this time is to come through the obedience of the second Adam. The regeneration of all things must now be a gift before it can become a task. The natural must therefore by contrast reveal an unalleviated picture of folly and ruin. Nor would the Confession permit us to tone down the rigid character of the absolute contrast between the grace and the curse of God through the idea of "common 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 a paradise regained by means of common grace, they only manifest the "strong delusion" that falls as punishment of God upon those that abuse his natural revelation. Thus the natural as the regular appears as all the more in need of the gift of the grace of God.

Yet the gift is in order to the task. The example is also meant to be a sample. Christ walks indeed upon a cosmic road. Far as the curse is found, so far his grace is given. The Biblical miracles of healing point to the regeneration of all things. The healed souls of men require and will eventually receive healed bodies and a healed environment. Thus there is unity of concept for those who live by the Scriptural promise of comprehensive, though not universal, redemption. While they actually expect Christ to return visibly on the clouds of heaven, they thank God for every sunny day. They even thank God for his restraining and supporting general grace by means of which the unbeliever helps to display the majesty and power of God. To the believer the natural or regular with all its complexity always appears as the playground for the process of differentiation which leads ever onward to the fullness of the glory of God.

3. The Authority Of Natural Revelation

So far we have found that the Confession's conception of the necessity of Scripture requires a corresponding conception of the necessity of revelation in nature. It is not surprising, then, that the Confession's notion of the authority of Scripture requires a corresponding notion of the authority of revelation in nature. Here too it is well that we begin by studying the situation as it obtained before the entrance of sin.

In paradise, God communicated directly and positively with man in regard to the tree of life. This revelation was authoritative. Its whole content was that of a command requiring implicit obedience. This supernatural revelation was something exceptional. To be recognized for what it was in its exceptionality, a contrast was required between it and God's regular way of communication with man. Ordinarily man had to use his God-given powers of investigation to discover the workings of the processes of nature. Again, the voice of authority as it came to man in this exceptional manner was to be but illustrative of the fact that, in and through the things of nature, there spoke the self-same voice of God's command. Man was given permission by means of the direct voice of authority to control and subdue the powers of nature. As a hunter bears upon his back in clearly visible manner the number of his hunting license, so Adam bore indelibly upon his mind

the divine right of dealing with nature. And the divine right was at the same time the divine obligation. The mark of God's ownership was from the beginning writ large upon all the facts of the universe. Man was to cultivate the garden of the Lord and gladly pay tribute to the Lord of the manor.

Man's scientific procedure was accordingly to be marked by the attitude of obedience to God. He was to realize that he would find death in nature everywhere if he manipulated it otherwise than as being the direct bearer of the behests of God. The rational creature of God must naturally live by authority in all the activities of his personality. All these activities are inherently covenantal activities either of obedience or of disobedience.

Man was created as analogue of God; his thinking, his willing and his doing is therefore properly conceived as at every point analogical to the thinking, willing and doing of God. It is only after refusing to be analogous to God that man can think of setting a contrast between the attitude of reason to one type of revelation and the attitude of faith to another type of revelation.

By the idea of revelation, then, we are to mean not merely what comes to man through the facts surrounding him in his environment, but also that which comes to him by means of his own constitution as a covenant personality. The revelation that comes to man by way of his own rational and moral nature is no less objective to him than that which comes to him through the voice of trees and animals. Man's own psychological activity is no less revelational than the laws of physics about him. All created reality is inherently revelational of the nature and will of God. Even man's ethical reaction to God's revelation is still revelational. And as revelational of God, it is authoritative. The meaning of the Confession's doctrine of the authority of Scripture does not become clear to us till we see it against the background of the original and basically authoritative character of God's revelation in nature. Scripture speaks authoritatively to such as must naturally live by authority. God speaks with authority wherever and whenever he speaks.

At this point a word may be said about the revelation of God through conscience and its relation to Scripture. Conscience is man's consciousness speaking on matters of directly moral import. Every act of man's consciousness is moral in the most comprehensive sense of that term. Yet there is a difference between questions of right and wrong in a restricted sense and general questions of interpretation. Now if man's whole consciousness was originally created perfect, and as such authoritatively expressive of the will of God, that same consciousness is still revelational and authoritative after the entrance of sin to the extent that its voice is still the voice of God. The sinner's efforts, so far as they are done self-consciously from his point of view, seek to destroy or bury the voice of God that comes to him through nature, which includes his own consciousness. But this effort cannot be wholly successful at any point in history. The most depraved of men cannot wholly escape the voice of God. Their greatest wickedness is meaningless except upon the assumption that they have sinned against the authority of God. Thoughts and deeds of utmost perversity are themselves revelational, revelational, that is, in their very abnormality. The natural man accuses or else excuses himself only because his own utterly depraved consciousness continues to point back to the original natural state of affairs. The prodigal son can never forget the father's voice. It is the albatross forever about his neck.

4. The Sufficiency Of Natural Revelation

Proceeding now to speak of the sufficiency of natural revelation as corresponding to the sufficiency of Scripture, we recall that revelation in nature was never meant to function by itself. It was from the beginning insufficient without its supernatural concomitant. It was inherently a limiting notion. It was but the presupposition of historical action on the part of man as covenant personality with respect to supernaturally conveyed communication. But for that specific purpose it was wholly sufficient. It was historically sufficient.

After the fall of man natural revelation is still historically sufficient. It is sufficient for such as have in Adam brought the curse of God upon nature. It is sufficient to render them without excuse. Those who are in prison and cannot clearly see the light of the sun receive their due inasmuch as they have first abused that light. If nature groans in pain and travail because of man's abuse of it, this very fact—that is, the very curse of God on nature—should be instrumental anew in making men accuse or excuse themselves. Nature as it were yearns to be released from its imprisonment in order once more to be united to her Lord in fruitful union. When nature is abused by man it cries out to her creator for vengeance and through it for redemption.

It was in the mother promise that God gave the answer to nature's cry (Gn 3:15). In this promise there was a two-fold aspect. There was first the aspect of vengeance. He that should come was to bruise the head of the serpent, the one that led man in setting up nature as independent of the supernatural revelation of God. Thus nature was once more to be given the opportunity of serving as the proper field of exercise for the direct supernatural communication of God to man. But this time this service came at a more advanced point in history. Nature was now the bearer of God's curse as well as of his general mercy. The "good," that is, the believers, are, generally, hedged about by God. Yet they must not expect that always and in every respect this will be the case. They must learn to say with Job, be it after much trial, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Jb 13:15). The "evil," that is, the unbelievers, will generally be rewarded with the natural consequences of their deeds. But this too is not always and without qualification the case. The wicked sometimes prosper. Nature only shows tendencies. And tendencies point forward to the time when tendencies shall have become the rules without exception. The tendency itself is meaningless without the certainty of the climax. The present regularity of nature is therefore once again to be looked upon as a limiting notion. At every stage in history God's revelation in nature is sufficient for the purpose it was meant to serve, that of being the playground for the process of differentiation between those who would and those who would not serve God.

5. The Perspicuity Of Natural Revelation

Finally we turn to the perspicuity of nature which corresponds to the perspicuity of Scripture. We have stressed the fact that God's revelation in nature was from the outset of history meant to be taken conjointly with God's supernatural communication. This might seem to indicate that natural revelation is not inherently perspicuous. Then too it has been pointed out that back of both kinds of revelation is the incomprehensible God. And this fact again might, on first glance, seem to militate strongly against the claim that nature

clearly reveals God. Yet these very facts themselves are the best guarantee of the genuine perspicuity of natural revelation. The perspicuity of God's revelation in nature depends for its very meaning upon the fact that it is an aspect of the total and totally voluntary revelation of a God who is self-contained. God's incomprehensibility to man is due to the fact that he is exhaustively comprehensible to himself. God is light and in him is no darkness at all. As such he cannot deny himself. This God naturally has an all-comprehensive plan for the created universe. He has planned all the relationships between all the aspects of created being. He has planned the end from the beginning. All created reality therefore actually displays this plan. It is, in consequence, inherently rational.

It is quite true, of course, that created man is unable to penetrate to the very bottom of this inherently clear revelation. But this does not mean that on this account the revelation of God is not clear, even for him. Created man may see clearly what is revealed clearly even if he cannot see exhaustively. Man does not need to know exhaustively in order to know truly and certainly. When on the created level of existence man thinks God's thoughts after him, that is, when man thinks in self-conscious submission to the voluntary revelation of the self-sufficient God, he has therewith the only possible ground of certainty for his knowledge. When man thinks thus he thinks as a covenant creature should wish to think. That is to say, man normally thinks in analogical fashion. He realizes that God's thoughts are self-contained. He knows that his own interpretation of nature must therefore be a reinterpretation of what is already fully interpreted by God.

The concept of analogical thinking is of especial significance here. Soon we shall meet with a notion of analogy that is based upon the very denial of the concept of the incomprehensible God. It is therefore of the utmost import that the Confession's concept of analogical thinking be seen to be the direct implication of its doctrine of God.

One further point must here be noted. We have seen that since the fall of man God's curse rests upon nature. This has brought great complexity into the picture. All this, however, in no wise detracts from the historical and objective perspicuity of nature. Nature can and does reveal nothing but the one comprehensive plan of God. The psalmist does not say that the heavens possibly or probably declare the glory of God. Nor does the apostle assert that the wrath of God is probably revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Scripture takes the clarity of God's revelation for granted at every stage of human history. Even when man, as it were, takes out his own eyes, this act itself turns revelational in his wicked hands, testifying to him that his sin is a sin against the light that lighteth every man coming into the world. Even to the very bottom of the most complex historical situations, involving sin and all its consequences, God's revelation shines with unmistakable clarity. "If I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there" (Ps 139:8). Creatures have no private chambers.

Both the perspicuity of Scripture and the perspicuity of natural revelation, then, may be said to have their foundation in the doctrine of the God who "hideth himself," whose thoughts are higher than man's thoughts and whose ways are higher than man's ways. There is no discrepancy between the idea of mystery and that of perspicuity with respect either to revelation in Scripture or to revelation in nature. On the contrary the two ideas are involved in one another. The central unifying concept of the entire Confession is the doctrine of God and his one unified comprehensive plan for the world. The contention

consequently is that at no point is there any excuse for man's not seeing all things as happening according to this plan.

In considering man's acceptance of natural revelation, we again take our clue from the Confession and what it says about the acceptance of Scripture. Its teaching on man's acceptance of Scriptural revelation is in accord with its teaching on the necessity, authority, sufficiency and perspicuity of Scripture. The Scriptures as the finished product of God's supernatural and saving revelation to man have their own evidence in themselves. The God who speaks in Scripture cannot refer to anything that is not already authoritatively revelational of himself for the evidence of his own existence. There is no thing that does not exist by his creation.

All things take their meaning from him. Every witness to him is a "prejudiced" witness. For any fact to be a fact at all, it must be a revelational fact.

It is accordingly no easier for sinners to accept God's revelation in nature than to accept God's revelation in Scripture. They are no more ready of themselves to do the one than to do the other. From the point of view of the sinner, theism is as objectionable as is Christianity. Theism that is worthy of the name is Christian theism. Christ said that no man can come to the Father but by him. No one can become a theist unless he becomes a Christian. Any God that is not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not God but an idol.

It is therefore the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts that alone effects the required Copernican revolution and makes us both Christians and theists. Before the fall, man also needed the witness of the Holy Spirit: Even then the third person of the Holy Trinity was operative in and through the naturally revelational consciousness of man so that it might react fittingly and properly to the works of God's creation. But then that operation was so natural that man himself needed not at all or scarcely to be aware of its existence. When man fell, he denied the naturally revelatory character of every fact including that of his own consciousness. He assumed that he was autonomous; he assumed that his consciousness was not revelational of God but only of himself. He assumed himself to be non-created. He assumed that the work of interpretation, as by the force of his natural powers he was engaged in it, was an original instead of a derivative procedure. He would not think God's thoughts after him; he would instead think only his own original thoughts.

Now if anything is obvious from Scripture it is that man is not regarded as properly a judge of God's revelation to him. Man is said or assumed from the first page to the last to be a creature of God. God's consciousness is therefore taken to be naturally original as man's is naturally derivative. Man's natural attitude in all self-conscious activities was therefore meant to be that of obedience. It is to this deeper depth, deeper than the sinner's consciousness can ever reach by itself, that Scripture appeals when it says: "Come let us reason together." It appeals to covenant-breakers and argues with them about the unreasonableness of covenant-breaking. And it is only when the Holy Spirit gives man a new heart that he will accept the evidence of Scripture about itself and about nature for what it really is. The Holy Spirit's regenerating power enables man to place all things in true perspective.

Man the sinner, as Calvin puts it, through the testimony of the Spirit receives a new power of sight by which he can appreciate the new light that has been given in Scripture. The new light and the new power of sight imply one another. The one is fruitless for salvation without the other. It is by grace, then, by the gift of the Holy Spirit alone, that

sinners are able to observe the fact that all nature, including even their own negative attitude toward God, is revelational of God, the God of Scripture. The wrath of God is revealed, Paul says, on all those who keep down the truth. Man's sinful nature has become his second nature. This sinful nature of man must now be included in nature as a whole. And through it God is revealed. He is revealed as the just one, as the one who hates iniquity and punishes it. Yet he must also be seen as the one who does not yet punish to the full degree of their ill desert the wicked deeds of sinful men.

All this is simply to say that one must be a believing Christian to study nature in the proper frame of mind and with proper procedure. It is only the Christian consciousness that is ready and willing to regard all nature, including man's own interpretative reactions, as revelational of God. But this very fact requires that the Christian consciousness make a sharp distinction between what is revelational in this broad and basic sense and what is revelational in the restricted sense. When man had not sinned, he was naturally anxious constantly to seek contact with the supernatural positive revelation of God. But it is quite a different matter when we think of the redeemed sinner. He is restored to the right relationship. But he is restored in principle only. There is a drag upon him. His "old man" wants him to interpret nature apart from the supernatural revelation in which he operates. The only safeguard he has against this historical drag is to test his interpretations constantly by the principles of the written Word. And if theology succeeds in bringing forth ever more clearly the depth of the riches of the Biblical revelation of God in Scripture, the Christian philosopher or scientist will be glad to make use of this clearer and fuller interpretation in order that his own interpretation of nature may be all the fuller and clearer too, and thus more truly revelational of God. No subordination of philosophy or science to theology is intended here. The theologian is simply a specialist in the field of Biblical interpretation taken in the more restricted sense. The philosopher is directly subject to the Bible and must in the last analysis rest upon his own interpretation of the Word. But he may accept the help of those who are more constantly and more exclusively engaged in Biblical study than he himself can be.

2. The Natural Theology Of Greek Origin

With these main features of the idea of a natural revelation that is consistent with the concept of Biblical revelation as set forth in the Confession before us, we must look by way of contrast at another view of natural theology. This other view is characterized by the fact that it allows no place for analogical reasoning in the sense that we have described it. Instead of boldly offering the idea of the self-contained God as the presupposition of the intelligent interpretation of nature, it starts with the idea of the self-contained character of nature and then argues to a god who must at best be finite in character. Instead of starting with the wholly revelational character of the created universe, including the mind of man, this natural theology starts with the non-revelational character of the universe and ends with making it revelational of the mind of would-be autonomous man.

This sort of natural theology has had its origin in Greek speculation, and more particularly in the systems of Plato and Aristotle. With no lack of appreciation for the genius of these great Greek thinkers it must yet be maintained that they, with all men, inherited the sinfulness of Adam and, accordingly, had their reasons for not wishing to

hear the voice of God. With all men they assume that nature is self-sufficient and has its principles of interpretation within itself.

The pre-Socratics make a common monistic assumption to the effect that all things are at bottom one. They allow for no basic distinction between divine being and human being. With Heraclitus this assumption works itself out into the idea that all is flux. With Parmenides this same tendency works itself out into the idea that all is changeless. In both cases God is nature and nature is God.

The natural theologies of Plato and Aristotle are best viewed against this background. Neither of these men forsook the monistic assumption of their predecessors.

1. The Natural Theology Of Plato

As for Plato this may be observed first from the hard and fast distinction that he makes between the world of being that is wholly known and the world of non-being that is wholly unknown. For Plato any being that is really to exist must be eternal and changeless. Similarly any knowledge that really can be called knowledge must be changeless, comprehensive knowledge. It is in terms of these principles that Plato would explain the world of phenomena. This world is intermediate between the world of pure being that is wholly known and the world of pure non-being that is wholly unknown. The being that we see constitutes a sort of tension between pure being and pure non-being. So also the learning process constitutes a sort of tension between pure omniscience and pure ignorance.

Plato's view of the relation of sensation and conceptual thought corresponds to this basic division between the worlds of pure being and pure non-being. The senses are said to deceive us. It is only by means of the intellect as inherently divine that man can know true being. The real philosopher bewails his contact with the world of non-being. He knows he has fallen from his heavenly home. He knows that he is real only to the extent that he is divine. He seeks to draw away from all contact with non-being. He seeks for identification with the "wholly other" which, for the moment, he can speak of only in negative terms. When Socrates speaks of the Good he can only say what it is not.

The Ideal Table is never seen on land or sea. Piety must be defined as beyond anything that gods or men may say about it. True definition needs for its criterion an all-inclusive, supra-divine as well as supra-human, principle of continuity. Ultimate rationality is as much above God as above man.

The result is that for Plato, too, nature is revelational. But it is revelational as much of man as of God. To the extent that either of them is real, and known as real, he is wholly identical with the rational principle that is above both. On the other hand, as real and known in the rational principle, both are face to face with the world of non-being. And this world of non-being is as ultimate as the world of pure being. So God and man are wholly unknown to themselves. Thus both God and man are both wholly known and wholly unknown to themselves. Reality as known to man is a cross between abstract timeless formal logic and equally abstract chance. Yet in it all the ideal pure rationality as pure being dominates the scene.

It requires no argument to prove that on a Platonic basis there can be neither natural nor supernatural revelation such as the Confession holds before us. Natural revelation would be nothing more than man's own rational efforts to impose abstract rational unity

upon the world of non-being. Supernatural revelation would be nothing more than that same task to the extent that it has not yet been finished or to the extent that it can never be finished. Those who undertake to defend Platonism as a fit foundation for Christianity are engaged in a futile and worse than futile enterprise.

2. The Natural Theology Of Aristotle

As over against Plato, Aristotle contends that we must not look for rationality as a principle wholly beyond the things we see. Universals are to be found within particulars. All our troubles come from looking for the one apart from the other. We must, to be sure, think of pure form at the one end and of pure matter at the other end of our experience. But whatever we actually know consists of pure form and pure matter in correlativity with one another. Whenever we would speak of Socrates, we must not look for some exhaustive description of him by means of reference to an Idea that is “wholly beyond.” Socrates is numerically distinct from Callias because of pure potentiality or matter. Rational explanation must be satisfied with classification. The definition of Socrates is fully expressed in terms of the lowest species. Socrates as a numerical individual is but an instance of a class. Socrates may weigh two hundred pounds and Callias may weigh one hundred pounds. When I meet Socrates downtown he may knock me down; when I meet Callias there I may knock him down. But all this is “accidental.” None of the perceptual characteristics of Socrates, not even his snub-nosedness, belong to the Socrates that I define. By means of the primacy of my intellect I know Socrates as he is, forever the same, no matter what may “accidentally” happen to him. And what is true of Socrates is true of all other things.

Aristotle’s philosophy, then, as over against that of Plato, stresses the correlativity of abstract rationality and pure Chance. Aristotle takes Plato’s worlds of pure being and pure non-being and insists that they shall recognize a need of one another. Neither Plato nor Aristotle speaks of limiting concepts in the sense that modern philosophers use this term. Yet both Plato and Aristotle in effect use such limiting concepts and Aristotle more so than Plato. That is to say, the notion of God as transcendent is ever more clearly seen to be inconsistent with the accepted principle of interpretation.

It follows that the God of Aristotle is very difficult to handle. If he exists as a numerical unit, he exists as such because he is utterly potential or non-rational. For all individuation is by means of pure potentiality. Hence, if God exists, he exists or may exist in indefinite numbers. As Gilson says, Aristotle never escaped from simple polytheism.¹ On the other hand, Aristotle’s God is the very opposite of pure potentiality or pure materiality. He must have none of the limitations that spring from pure potentiality. He must therefore not be a numerical individual. He must be the highest genius. And as such he must be utterly devoid of content. He is to be described in wholly negative terms. He is not this and he is not that. When we speak of him in positive terms, we know that we speak metaphorically. God did not really create the world. He does not really control the world. He does not even really know the world.

¹ E. Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, tr. by A. H. C. Downes (New York, 1936.)

What then of God's revelation to man? The answer is plain. If he exists as a numerical individual, he must be revealed to himself by means of a principle beyond himself. He cannot reveal himself without utterly losing his individuality. But if he so reveals himself, if he is identified with abstract rationality, he needs once more to hide himself in pure existential particularity. If he does not so hide himself, he is revealed to no one, not even to himself. Such is the fruit of Aristotle's potential identification of the human intellect with the divine. Aristotle's natural theology is but the precursor of modern phenomenism. And the polytheism of post-Kantian anti-intellectualism is but the great-grandchild of the polytheism of Aristotle's intellectualism.

3. The Natural Theology Of Thomas Aquinas

It appears then that the natural theology of Aristotle is, if possible, still more hostile to the natural theology of the Confession than the natural theology of Plato could be. Yet the Roman Catholic Church has undertaken the task of harmonizing Aristotle's philosophic method with the Christian notion of God. Rome has sought to do so by means of its doctrine of analogy of being (*analogia entis*). Thomas Aquinas thinks it is possible to show that the mysteries of the Christian faith are not out of accord with the proper conclusions of reason. And by reason he means the form-matter scheme of Aristotle as we have spoken of it. These mysteries, he contends, may be above but cannot be said to be against reason.

Reasoning, according to Thomas, must be neither wholly univocal nor wholly equivocal; it must be analogical.² If with Aristotle he warns us against the definition-mongers, with Aristotle he also warns us against those who are no better than a plant.

First then, as over against those who reason univocally, Thomas insists that when we speak of God's essence our principal method must be that of "remotion," that is, of negation. "For the divine essence by its immensity surpasses every form to which our intellect reaches; and thus we cannot apprehend it by knowing what it is."³ Form without the idea of pure potentiality is empty. For all positive knowledge we require the idea of pure contingency. Nature requires that there be luck or chance. Nature includes the wholly non-rational as well as the wholly rational. If it were not for pure contingency we should be driven with Parmenides to define being in such a way as to make it virtually identical with non-being. We should be going 'round in circles of pure analysis.

Then as over against those who would reason equivocally, Thomas argues that, though we need the idea of pure contingency, we never meet it in actual experience. Generation, corruption and change must be kept within rational control. Our irrationalism must not go so deep as to endanger our rationalism. "For it is clear that primary matter is not subject to generation and corruption, as Aristotle proves."⁴ The matter that we meet

² By "univocal" Thomas means reasoning based on the idea of a complete identification of man with God while by "equivocal" reasoning he means reasoning based on the idea of the complete separation of man from God.

³ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Contra Gentiles*, Literally Translated by the English Dominican Fathers From the Latest Leonine Edition (London, 1924), Vol. 1, p. 33.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, Vol. 2. p. 229.

is not pure matter; it is “proper matter” that adjusts itself quite readily to reasonable ends. Potentiality and actuality belong to the same genus. The soul is not destroyed by the action of a contrary, “for nothing is contrary thereto, since by the possible intellect it is cognizant and receptive of all contraries.”⁵ Determinate predication presupposes the idea of a principle of continuity that is as extensive as potentiality itself. If we do not hold to this we have, Aristotle would say, given up rational inquiry itself; we are then no better than a plant.

In the system of Thomas, then, true knowledge demands that we hold pure univocation and pure equivocation in perfect balance with one another. Rationality must never be permitted to go off by itself and contingency must never be permitted to go off by itself. The result is a sort of pre-Kantian phenomenalism. “Now being is not becoming to form alone, nor to matter alone, but to the composite: for matter is merely in potentiality, while form is whereby a thing is, since it is act. Hence, it follows that the composite, properly speaking, is.”⁶

Thus the very notion of being is virtually reduced to that which is known to us. Thomas presents us with a sort of pre-Kantian deduction of the categories. There is to be no awareness of awareness without the idea of pure potentiality.⁷ On the other hand, the possibility of reaching reality at all requires a validity that is objective at least for us. The harmony is found in the idea of act. “The intellect in act and the intelligible in act are one, just as the sense in act and the sensible in act.”⁸ Erich Przywara contends that by the *analogia entis* concept Rome is in the fortunate position of standing with one foot in, and with one foot outside, the tangle of problems that confronts the natural reason of man.⁹ Our reply will be that the Thomistic procedure has but prepared the way for the modern forms of pure inhumanities. Thomas is not able to escape the dilemma that faced Aristotle. His God too exists and is unknown, or is known but does not exist. Thomas accords existence to God by means of pure potentiality, and inability by abstract rationality. The result is that God is virtually identified with nature as phenomenal reality to man.

The sharp distinction Thomas makes between the truths of reason and the mysteries of the faith may, at first sight, seem to militate against this conclusion. The two acts of believing and reasoning are said to be diverse. In consequence the objects to which these acts are directed are also said to be diverse. Reason deals with universals that appear in the particulars of sense; faith deals with the wholly unconditioned above sense. Only that which is exhaustively conceptualized is really known and only that which is wholly unknown can be the object of faith. It might seem that the two could never meet. But the Aristotelian form-matter scheme is made for just such emergencies. Harmony is effected by a sort of pre-Kantian limiting concept. In the hereafter, by the “light of glory,” we shall see the essence of God. If in this life we are the most miserable of men because faith and reason stand in contradiction to one another, in the hereafter potentiality will be actuality. We posit the idea of an intellect that is comprehensive enough to describe all

⁵ *Op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 222.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 98.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, Vol. 3, pp. 105ff.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 149.

⁹ Erich Przywara, *Polarity*, tr. by A. E. Bouquet (Oxford, 1935.)

particulars and a will controlling enough to make all facts fit the requirements of such an intellect. Thus all becoming will have become being; luck and chance themselves will be subject unto us. But then thunder breaks forth in heaven. Lest we should be swallowed up of God, lest the definition-mongers should have their way after all, Thomas once more brings in pure contingency. The light or the vision of God, he says, must still be distinguished from conceptual knowledge. The vision of God must be a sort of global insight, a sort of representative *Wesensschau*, by which we see intuitively the first principles of demonstration. If these first principles were themselves demonstrable, we should after all be going 'round in circles with Plato. Thus though the numerical infinite remains wholly unknowable; the infinite of global vision is wholly known.

It is by means of these principles, all summed up in the one idea of analogy as a cross between pure univocation and pure equivocation, that Thomas makes reasonable to the natural reason such mysteries of the faith as the trinity, the incarnation, the church and the sacraments. The living voice of the church is required inasmuch as all revelation of God to man is subject to historical relativity and psychological subjectivity. The necessity, the authority, the sufficiency and the perspicuity of both the revelation of God in nature and the revelation of God in Scripture are subordinate to this living voice, the voice of Aristotle speaking through the Pope. Herein lies the guarantee of certainty for the faithful. But lest these faithful should be compelled to go around in circles of pure analysis, this certainty is always counterbalanced by pure contingency. The certainties of the church, such as the sacraments, have an ideal operational efficiency on their own account. Yet all differentiation has its source in pure potentiality. The gifts of God are ideally efficient. The grace of God is irresistible. All men, inclusive of Esau, may therefore be saved. Yet all men may fall from grace. Thus univocity and equivocity always maintain their balance.

4. The Natural Theology of Pre-Kantian Modern Philosophy

The two types of natural theology, with their utterly diverse concepts of analogy, the one represented by the Confession and the other represented by Thomas Aquinas, now stand before us. In modern times there has been a fearful conflict between these two. Only a few words can now be said about this modern war.

It has been suggested that the natural theology of Thomas Aquinas, conceived after the form-matter scheme of Aristotle, was but the forerunner of modern phenomenism. The basic differentiation of Romanism is abstract impersonal form or logic and abstract or ultimate potentiality kept in correlativity with one another. The same may be said for modern phenomenism. It is this modern phenomenism that must now briefly engage our attention.

Only a brief remark can be allowed for the period preceding Kant. In this period there is, first, the line of rationalism coming to its climax in Leibniz and there is, second, the line of empiricism coming to a head in Hume.

The period as a whole may be said to be one of transition. It is the period when men begin to realize that their immanentistic principle of interpretation should lead them to deny the unconditioned altogether, while yet they are not fully prepared to do so. Their

reasoning is to all intents and purposes anti-metaphysical in the post-Kantian sense of the term, while yet they bring God as somehow self-existent into the picture all the time. Men were beginning to feel that it was time for an open declaration of independence from God while yet they dared not quite accept the consequence of such a step. It was not till Kant that modern philosophy became self-consciously anti-metaphysical.

The rationalistic view, exhibited at its highest and best by Leibniz, represents the idea of univocal reasoning in its first modern garb. By means of refined mathematical technique, Leibniz hopes to reach that for which the ancients strove in vain, namely, individuation by complete description. God stands for the idea of pure mathematics by means of which all reality may be described as seen at a glance. All historical facts are essentially reducible to the timeless equations of mathematical formulae. Such is the nature and consequence of his ontological proof for the existence of God. There could be no revelation of God to man on such a basis. How could God tell man anything that he was not able eventually to discover by means of the differential calculus? God becomes wholly revealed to man, but with the result that he is no longer God.

In opposition to the position of Leibniz, the rationalist, stands that of Hume, the skeptic. Concepts, he argued, are but faint replicas of sensations, and the laws of association by which we relate these concepts are psychological rather than logical in character. As Leibniz sought to be wholly univocal, so Hume sought to be wholly equivocal in his reasoning. As in the philosophy of Leibniz God lost his individuality in order to become wholly known, so in the philosophy of Hume God maintained his individuality but remained wholly unknown.

To be sure, neither Leibniz nor Hume was able to carry his position to its logical conclusion. Leibniz paid tribute to brute fact as Hume paid tribute to abstract logic. Leibniz maintained the necessity of finite facts and therefore of evil, lest his universal should be reduced to the blank identity of Parmenides, lest he should have all knowledge of a being that is interchangeable with non-being. Hume, on his part, virtually makes universal negative propositions covering all objective possibility. To make sure that no God such as is found in the Confession, a God who controls all things by the counsel of his will, would speak to him, Hume had virtually to assert that such a God cannot possibly exist and that there cannot at any point in the past or future be any evidence of the existence of such a God. So Leibniz, the rationalist, was an irrationalist and Hume, the irrationalist, was a rationalist. It is impossible to be the one without also being the other.

5. The Natural Theology of Pre-Kantian Apologists

It was Kant who told the world this fact in unmistakable terms. Before examining his phenomenology it is well that a word be said here as to what Christian apologists were doing during the period of rationalism and empiricism. The answer is that by and large Protestant apologists followed closely after the pattern set by Thomas Aquinas. With Thomas they walked the *via media* between abstract univocal and abstract equivocal reasoning.

Two outstanding instances may be mentioned in substantiation of this claim. Bishop Butler's *Analogy* is plainly patterned after the *analogia entis* concept already analyzed. And Paley in his *Natural Theology* follows in the footsteps of Butler. Both Butler and Paley depend for their positive argument upon pure univocism and for their negative argument upon pure equivocism. For both, God is known to man to the extent that with man he is subject to a specific unity and God is above man to the extent that he is wholly unknown.

By a "reasonable use of reason," that is, by a carefully balanced mixture of univocism and equivocism, Butler contends, it may be shown that Christianity is both like and unlike the "course and constitution of nature." The atonement of Christ is like that which we daily see, namely, the innocent suffering for the guilty. Yet the atonement is also wholly other than anything that appears in nature.¹

According to Paley God's providence is fully patent in the world, patent even in spite of poisonous reptiles and fleas. This is a happy world after all. Yet the God whose providence is so plain cannot be known except by way of negation. " 'Eternity' is a negative idea, clothed with a positive name... 'Self-existence' is another negative idea, namely, the negation of a preceding cause, as a progenitor, a maker, an author, a creator."¹

In view of what has been said it is not surprising that the supernatural theology of both Butler and Paley has basic similarities to that of Aquinas. Butler and Paley hold to an abstract Armenian sort of theology which, like the theology of Rome, deals with abstract possibilities and classes rather than with individuals. For Butler and for Paley, as for Thomas Aquinas, the objective atonement is an abstract form that is somehow present in and yet meaningless without the initiative taken by utterly independent individuals. Whatever there is of true Christianity in Rome, or in such positions as those of Butler and Paley, is there in spite of rather than because of the Aristotelian form-matter scheme that controls the formation of their natural theologies. A true Biblical or covenant theology could not be based upon such foundations as Butler and Paley laid.

6. The Natural Theology Of Kant

The field has now been narrowed down considerably. The natural theology of the Confession, derived as it was largely from the theology of Calvin, stands over against the natural theology as it has come from Aristotle through Rome into much of Protestant, even orthodox Protestant, thought. These two types of natural theology are striving for the mastery in our day.

The Aristotelian form of natural theology has, moreover, been greatly strengthened in our times by the critical philosophy of Kant. Indeed it may be asserted that the typical form of that natural theology which we have found to be inconsistent with the Confession is identical with some form of critical phenomenalism. The main concepts of this phenomenalism must therefore be analyzed.

¹ *The Works of Joseph Butler*, ed. by The Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone (Oxford, 1896), Vol. 1, p. 272.

¹ William Paley, *Natural Theology and Horae Paulinae* (Philadelphia, 1831), p. 289.

Kant's great contribution to philosophy consisted in stressing the activity of the experiencing subject. It is this point to which the idea of a Copernican revolution is usually applied. Kant argued that since it is the thinking subject that itself contributes the categories of universality and necessity, we must not think of these as covering any reality that exists or may exist wholly independent of the human mind. By using the law of non-contradiction we may and must indeed determine what is possible, but the possibility that we thus determine is subjective rather than objective. It is a possibility for us. To save rationality, Kant argues, we must shorten the battle-line and reduce its claims even in its own domain. Hereafter reason must claim to legislate only in that area that can always be checked by experience and even in this area it must ever be ready to receive the wholly new. The validity of universals is to be taken as frankly due to a motion and a vote; it is conventional and nothing more. Thus the invocation of Leibniz is to be saved by casting it into the sea of equivocation stirred up by Hume.

Again stressing the original activity of the thinking subject, Kant argued that it is impossible ever to find the entirely single thing of Hume. Like a sausage-grinder, the mind of man forms things into molds as it receives them. We never see either pork or beef; we see only sausages that, according to the butcher's word, contain both. Thus we always make facts as much as we find them. The only facts we know are instances of laws.

Kant's argument against the rationalists was like the argument of Aristotle against the "definition mongers" who wanted to know all things. His argument against Hume was like Aristotle's arguments against Protagoras, the skeptic, who went on speaking even when his principle allowed him to say nothing determinate. Science, Kant argued, does not need and could not exist with such objective universality as Leibniz desired, but it does need and actually has the subjective validity that the autonomous man supplies in the very act of interpretation. Kant argues, as it were, that Aristotle was right in seeking for universals in the particulars rather than above them, but that he did not have the courage of his convictions and did not go far enough. Science requires us to have done once and for all with all antecedent being, with all metaphysics except that which is immanentistic. Hereafter the notions of being, cause and purpose must stand for orderings we ourselves have made; they must never stand for anything that exists beyond the reach of our experience. Any God who wants to make himself known, it is now more clear than ever before, will have to do so by identifying himself exhaustively with his revelation. And any God who is so revealed, it is now more clear than ever before, will then have to be wholly hidden in pure possibility. Neither Plato nor Aristotle were entitled, by the methods of reasoning they employed, to reach the Unconditioned. The Unconditioned cannot be rationally related to man.

There is no doubt but that Kant was right in this claim. Plato and Aristotle no less than Kant assumed the autonomy of man. On such a basis man may reason univocally and reach a God who is virtually an extension of himself or he may reason equivocally and reach a God who has no contact with him at all. Nor will adding two zeros produce more than zero. The addition of pure pantheism to pure deism will not bring forth theism. It was Kant's great service to the Christian church to teach us this. No theistic proof, either of the *a priori* or of the *a posteriori* sort, based on Platonic Aristotelian assumptions could do anything but disprove the God of the Confession.

But if Kant has done so great a service, his service has of course been wholly negative. Orthodox apologists have all too often overlooked this fact. Did not Kant make room for faith? Did he not challenge the pride of the rationalist in its denial of a God whose thoughts are higher than man's thoughts? Is not the scientist who today works on the basis of his principles a very humble sort of person, satisfied with the single dimension of the phenomenal, leaving the whole realm of the noumenal to the ministers of religion? And does not Scripture itself ascribe to reason the power and right to interpret at least an area of reality, restricted though it be, in its own right? Surely the God of Scripture does not mean to dictate to the man who merely describes the facts as he sees them in the laboratory.

In all this there is profound confusion. Nor is this to be blamed primarily on Kant. Kant knew well enough what sort of Christianity is involved in the natural theology of his *Critique of Pure Reason*. His own statement of it is unmistakable and frank. To him the only Christianity that accords with the principles of his thought is a Christianity that is reduced from its historic uniqueness to a universal religion of reason. And modernist theologians working with his principles today make similar reductions of historic Christianity. We can but admire their consistency. The very idea of Kant's Copernican revolution was that the autonomous mind itself must assume the responsibility for making all factual differentiation and logical validation. To such a mind the God of Christianity cannot speak. Such a mind will hear no voice but its own. It is itself the light that lighteth every man that comes into the world. It is itself the sun; how can it receive light from without? If Plato and Aristotle virtually identified the mind of man with that of God, Kant virtually identified the mind of God with that of man. Such a mind describes all facts as it sees them, but it sees them invariably through colored lenses. The miracles of Scripture are always reduced to instances of laws and laws themselves are reduced to conventional and purely contingent regularities. Prophetic prediction that has come true is always reduced to pure coincidence in a world of chance. Conventional law and brute fact are the stock in trade of the Kantian philosopher and scientist. His phenomenal world is built up of these.

7. The Natural Theology Of Post-Kantian Phenomenalism

Working out the consequences of the Kantian position, Heinrich Rickert has stressed the fact that modern science has virtually abolished the distinction between the description and the explanation of facts. The facts which the scientist thinks he merely describes are such as have already been explained by his philosophical *confrères*.¹

Philosophers have so thoroughly canvassed the field of possibility that the scientist will never meet any facts that will not inevitably turn out to be instances of conventional, wholly man-made laws.

Modern phenomenism then, it must be stressed, is comprehensive in its sweep. It is a philosophy covering the whole of reality. It may be anti-metaphysical, but this is only to say that it is against such metaphysics of transcendence as the Confession presents.

¹ *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung* (Tübingen, 5. Aufl., 1929.)

Modern phenomenism cannot by its principle admit of any of the facts and doctrines of historic Christian theism.

Dialectical theology has, to be sure, made the attempt to combine the main *Critique* of Kant and the *Institutes* of Calvin. But the magnitude of its undertaking is itself the best instance in proof that such a thing cannot logically be done. Barth and Brunner have satisfied the requirements of Kant's criticism, but in so doing they have at the same time denied the God of Calvin.

Largely influenced by the phenomenism or existentialism of such men as Kierkegaard and Heidegger, Barth and Brunner have been consistently anti-metaphysical in the Kantian sense of the term. That is to say, they have insisted that God is wholly unknown as a numerical individual and that he is wholly identical with his revelation as a specific unity. In other words, the God of the Confession is for Barth and Brunner nothing but an idol. The God of the Confession claims to have revealed himself directly in nature and in Scripture. And all direct revelation, Barth and Brunner continually reassert, is paganism. Barth and Brunner are as certain as was Kant that the Unconditional cannot make himself known as such in the phenomenal world. They could not maintain such a position except upon the assumption of the idea of the autonomous man which legislates, at least negatively, for the whole field of possibility.

Dialectical theology then fits in well with the natural theology of the Aristotle-Thomas Aquinas-Kant tradition. In fact, it may be said to be nothing more than a natural theology cut after this pattern. It is as hostile to the natural as to the special revelation concepts of the Confession. And the same must also be said with respect to such modified forms of dialecticism as are offered by Reinhold Niebuhr, Richard Kroner, Paul Tillich, Nels Ferré and John Mackay.

Certain lines have now been drawn in the modern chaos. The modern chaos is not so chaotic as it may at first sight appear. There are at bottom only two positions. There is the position of the Confession. This position consists of a natural theology that serves as the proper foundation for the full theology of grace that is found in the Reformed Confessions alone. It consists of a natural theology whose fundamental meaning and significance is found in the very fact of its being the field of exercise for the historical differentiation of which the Reformed theology of grace is but the narrative. There is, on the other hand, the position of Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Kant. It consists of a natural theology that must, according to the force of its interpretative principle, reduce the historic process of differentiation, as told in the Confessions, to dialectical movements of a reason that is sufficient to itself.

Between these two there is and can be no peace. And the natural theology of the Confession, though unpopular now both within and beyond the church, cannot but be victorious at last. For all its vaunted defense of reason, the natural theology of Aristotle and his modern followers destroys reason. The autonomous man cannot forever flee back and forth between the arid mountains of timeless logic and the shoreless ocean of pure potentiality. He must at last be brought to bay. He cannot forever be permitted to speak of nothing that reveals itself exhaustively into nothing and yet pretend to convey meaning in his speech. The autonomous man has denied the existence of a rationality higher than itself that has legislated for all reality. In so doing it has itself legislated for all reality. Yet it also allows for pure potentiality that is beyond all rational power. It has undertaken to do, or rather claims already to have done, what it also says is inherently impossible of

accomplishment. On the other hand, the natural theology of the Confession, with its rejection of autonomous reason, has restored reason to its rightful place and validated its rightful claims. In recognizing the Sovereign God of grace, the God who is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, goodness, justice and truth, as its chief and ultimate principle of interpretation, the natural theology of the Confession has saved rationality itself. Without the self-contained God of the Confession, there would be no order in nature and no employment for reason.

We Are Not Ashamed Of Calvinism!

An Open Letter to the Editor of *Time* and *Life* Magazines

The following letter to *Time* magazine was first published in *Christian Opinion*, Vol. 4, No. 3. Although the articles in *Time* and *Life*, to which Dr. Van Til refers, appeared some time back, the general subject matter is of current and continuing interest. In an earlier issue of the *Guardian* we referred to the article by Professor Bouma and the replies by Professors Pauck and Haroutunian. The fact that magazines such as *Time* and *Life* give space frequently to the consideration of religious subjects indicates that there is a real interest among the reading public in the religious aspects of modern living. We are glad to have this evaluation of the usual popular attitude toward and treatment of such matters, from the pen of the well-known Westminster professor. We publish it by permission of *Christian Opinion*.

Dear *Time*:

In your issue of February 24, 1947 you published an article under your usual rubric called "Religion" on the subject *Calvinist Comeback?*

The writer of your article describes what he apparently thinks of as the essence of Calvinism in the following sentence: "Calvinism insisted on 1) the total depravity of man, 2) a God who, for His own good reasons, irrevocably divided all mankind into the Elect and the Damned, 3) strict 'blue laws.'" We who believe in Calvinism wouldn't put it that way.

The System Of Truth

Our contention is that any individual doctrine must be understood in relation to the system of which it is a part. Take, for instance, the so-called "five points of Calvinism," (a) total depravity, (b) unconditional election, (c) limited atonement, (d) irresistible grace, and (e) perseverance of the saints. Rightly or wrongly Calvinists hold that these five points are nothing but facets of the system called Protestantism. They feel that those who are most deeply devoted to the genius of Protestantism, with its doctrine of Scripture as authoritative for all the dimensions of life, ought to hold to these five points of doctrine. The Bible speaks of God first of all. It speaks of Him as the creator and director of the world. What is this but to say that by His plan God "controls whatsoever comes to pass?" What is this but to say that man is ultimately responsible to God and that God by His self-contained wisdom controls the final destinies of men. Calvinism is simply Protestantism come to its own.

The Essence Of Christianity

Furthermore Protestants believe that their system of constitutes the essence of Christianity. The genius of Protestantism is not best expressed by saying that it brought to light the doctrines of the infallible Scripture, justification by faith and the universal priesthood of all believers. Here too the individual doctrines depend for their meaning upon the relation they sustain to the system of which they are a part. And the Roman Catholic “system” is a hybrid system, a system part pagan and part Christian. The genius of Christianity cannot make itself felt without material reduction through any of the doctrines of Roman Catholicism.

Those who believe in Calvinism, then, believe that their system is, as the late B. B. Warfield put it, Christianity come to its own. They believe that they can make out their case for this contention first as over against those who are Protestants but not Calvinists and second as over against those who are Christians but not Protestants. Calvinist simply think of themselves as those who hold to the system of Christian theism and do so seriously at every point.

Calvinist Evangelism

Feeling as they do, Calvinists naturally do not hesitate to call upon men everywhere to accept their faith. And this call finds a particular urgency in what amounts to a confession of bankruptcy on the part of those who profess anything but Calvinism. The address of Professor Clarence Bouma of Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, published in *The Journal of Religion* for January, 1947, constitutes just such a call. The replies to Dr. Bouma by Professors Joseph Haroutunian and Wilhelm Pauck, that appeared together with the article by Dr. Bouma, seek to escape the challenge of Calvinism. But these replies do not really deal with the main point at issue as between Calvinism and its critics.

The God Of Calvinism

It is the claim of Calvinism that its God alone is the source of all light and truth. Science needs its “uniformity of nature”; there would be no such uniformity unless God really controls whatsoever comes to pass. Philosophy needs its ultimate principle of coherence; there would be no coherence in any sense for man except for his presupposition of the self-contained God. In every field of human interest and endeavor man is confronted with impenetrable darkness unless he first presupposes the God of Calvinism. Calvinists think they can establish such contentions as these. Accordingly they think they have a duty not merely with respect to the theology but also with respect to every other domain of human enterprises. Calvinists would ask men to accept their “world and life view” lest rationality itself should lose its footing in the quicksands of the irrational.

The article in *Life* of March 10, 1947, may help to illustrate the point. In it Paul Hutchinson, then the Managing Editor of *The Christian Century*, makes a report on “the

status of religion abroad.” Hutchinson speaks first of religion in its relation to its institutional expression. He speaks of “new stirrings of interest in religion.” Churchmen, he says, feel impelled to pass the “judgment of Religion” on questions of sociology and politics. At the same time there is less and less interest in the institutions of religion such as the church and the synagogue.

Hutchinson does, to be sure, speak of an intellectual renaissance but he mentions as its leaders such as are the enemies of Calvinism as a Christian life and world view. If there is anything that “Calvinist Karl Barth” finds distasteful and untrue it is Calvinism. And as for Reinhold Niebuhr and Jacques Maritain, the other two leaders of the “intellectual renaissance” referred to, these two worship anything but the God who by His counsel controls “whatsoever comes to pass.” The intellectual renaissance spoken of seems to thrive in a reality that is said to have no ultimate system at all.

“Man’s developing spiritual concern,” as Hutchinson sees it developing, appears to be a feeling after some sort of a something somewhere beyond the regular patterns of nature discovered by science. The god of this religion is for all practical purposes as indescribable as was the idea of the “boundless” to Anaximander.

No Hope In An Unknown God

Yet it is the belief in this unknown and unknowable god that is said everywhere to support respect for the moral law. “But religion becomes of new moment in an age threatened with social disintegration when it declares that unshakable moral standards exist, that human destinies hang on man’s attitude towards these standards and that it is the business of man and all his institutions to try to bring all the activities of life into conformity with these principles.” The great hope for the future of the world lies largely with the worship of this unknown and unknowable “god,” so they tell us. In the words of W. H. Auden, as “the subatomic gulfs confront our lives with the cold stare of their eternal silence,” we look in vain to politics, to science or to technics for any help. Our only hope is in religion.

But will this religion help? Is it anything more than a Platonic myth, a second best, to which man turns in desperation when his “rational” interpretations of the universe have failed? How can one expect any assistance, either, for his intellectual problems, from a God who by definition sustains no rational relation to the universe or to man? Why point to the world of “spiritual values,” if that world but reduplicates the problems of the present one? If Socrates should read the article in *Life* he would say to its author, “But, as I was saying, revered friend, the abundance of your wisdom makes you indolent.” To be sure, all the gods believe in the moral law. “For surely neither God nor man will ever venture to say that the doer of evil is not to be punished.... But they join issue about particulars.” The mere formal agreement about the validity of the moral law is in itself meaningless. There is no reason why anyone should obey the moral law unless what Calvinism says about this moral law is true. Calvinism holds that in everything that man confronts he is face to face with the requirement of glorifying his Creator, and his Judge. But if man cannot know that God is either his Creator or his Judge, he has the fullest intellectual and moral right to do as he pleases. To see the forces of religion of the sort we have heard about pitted against “communism” as an enemy is a pitiable spectacle no less from the logical than from the moral and religious point of view.

Yet the kind of god and the kind of religion that is composed of the vaguest of mixtures of the various deities of all the positive religions is logically the only alternative to Calvinism. Without the presupposition of the God of Calvinism man is confronted with and himself floats upon the ultimately irrational.

We Believe Calvinism

As I said at the outset then, Mr. Luce, the individual doctrines of Calvinism are intelligible only as parts of the system of the life and world view of which they constitute a part. We hold to this system not because we live in the "Bible Belt" or because we have never heard of Biblical Criticism and *The Critique of Pure Reason*. To be sure, we accepted our system of truth on the authority of parents and teachers who believed in the Bible as infallibly true. But we believe our system, if possible, more ardently than ever now that we know that those who reject it can find no alternative but pure irrationalism. We believe our system more ardently than ever too, when we see both the Roman Catholic and the Arminian apologists slip down the smooth decline into the cauldron of irrationalism as they seek to draw out those that are already swirling about in its midst. We admire the person of John Calvin. But we are not mere hero worshippers of the "ascetic heretic-burning" Reformer. We think Calvin taught what Scripture teaches. We have learned to believe what Scripture teaches not because we were wiser than other men but by the "testimony of the Holy Spirit." But now that we have believed, our eyes have been opened to the fact that our system is true or there is no truth. Why then should it be thought so strange to speak of a "Calvinistic Comeback?" Perhaps it is strange in view of the temper of the age. But are intelligent men to decide ultimate issues by a motion and a vote? Is it too much to expect that Wilhelm Pauck, Haroutunian, Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr and Jacques Maritain may become really self-critical and face the problems of reality, knowledge and ethics once again and afresh?

Christianity And Crisis Theology

The Presbyterian Guardian
1948
Volume 17, Pages 69ff

This brief study of Barthianism was prepared by Dr. Van Til for publication in *Cheng Yen Pao*, the official magazine of the China Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. We publish it by kind permission of the editors of that magazine. Dr. Van Til is professor of Apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary, and the author of the volume, *The New Modernism*, which is an extended appraisal of Barthianism.

In recent times it has become quite clear that Christianity and Modernism are two mutually exclusive religions. But a third party has appeared upon the scene. It is the Theology of Crisis. Its chief exponents, Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, were trained as Modernists. But they have been very critical of Modernism and its great theologians, Schleiermacher and Ritschl. Moreover, they claim the paternity of Luther and Calvin. Their language is frequently that of historic Protestantism. As a result, many orthodox Christians seem to think that the old gospel has found a new and powerful expression through their mouths. We believe that this is not the case. Without in the least presuming to judge the hearts of its exponents, we shall offer evidence to prove that the Theology of Crisis is but a new form of Modernism.

The Bible

Barth and Brunner refer to their position as being a theology of the Word. But both Barth and Brunner accept the results of negative or "higher" criticism. Both oppose the orthodox doctrine of the words of Scripture as being identical with revelation. The words of Scripture are said to become the words of God but not until they are accepted as such. Thus the theology of the Word is after all but a theology of experience, and not a theology of the Word at all. On this basic point we are back to the position of the old Modernism.¹

Revelation

Barth and Brnner also speak of their position as a theology of revelation. But they oppose the orthodox idea of a finished revelation. According to them revelation is always

¹ Cf. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* 1, 2, p. 590; 1, 1, p. 105; also Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*.

an act. And it is never an act until it is interaction between God and man. And to take his part in this interaction man must become more than man. Through the Holy Spirit man's act of accepting revelation becomes God's act of receiving His own Word. God can be known by God only. Thus we are back to the Modernist idea of God coming to self-consciousness in man and man coming to self-consciousness in God.²

God

Barth and Brunner speak much of the transcendent God. Yet they reject the orthodox doctrine of God. For them God is identified with His revelation. And as already noted revelation is in process of interaction of God with man made divine. Barth argues that God's transcendence means His freedom to become wholly identical with man and to take man up into complete identification with himself. For Brunner, God is virtually identical with what he calls the divine-human encounter. Both are vigorously opposed to the orthodox idea of God's self-contained intertrinitarian existence. Both virtually identify God's intertrinitarian activity with His works of creation, providence and redemption.

Thus we are back to the God of Schleiermacher and Ritschl, a god made in the image of man.³

Man

Barth and Brunner speak of man as having been created in the image of God and as having fallen into sin. But these ideas, they say, are not to be taken as orthodoxy takes them. The Genesis account is not to be taken as historical narrative. There was no historical Adam. There was no paradise. There was no fall.

The notion of a state of perfection is rather an ideal for the future. It intimates God's intention for man, and therefore by revelation as interaction is man's ideal for himself. But God's intention may be thwarted by man; which by the process of interaction means that man never lives up to his own ideal. So we are back again to the level of Modernism. In the evolutionary process man forms for himself high ideals but, because of the situation of which he is a part, he never fully lives up to them.⁴

Christ

Barth and Brunner want to interpret all things Christologically. And their Christ, they contend, is the Christ of the Scriptures. This claim, too, must be denied. Their Christ is not the Christ of the historic Christian creeds. He stands for the process of interaction between God and man. God is nothing but what He is toward man in Christ, and man is

² Barth, *K. D.*, 1, 1, pp. 313ff; Brunner, *Die Mystik und das Wort*, and *Revelation and Reason*.

³ *K. D.* 1, chapter on "The Freedom of God"; Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*.

⁴ Barth, *K. D.*, 3, 1; Brunner, *The Mediator*, p. 146; *Man in Revolt*, pp. 85f.

nothing but what he is in Christ toward God. Identification with Christ is God's ideal for man and through revelation as interaction, Christ is man's ideal for himself. He is the true Adam. So we are led back again to the old modernist notion of a Christ who is naught but an idealized man. A Christ who is a mixture of a God who does not exist apart from him and a man who does not exist apart from Him is not the Christ of the Scripture.⁵

Salvation

Barth and Brunner speak much of God's sovereign grace. By the sound of the words they use, one would even think they were Calvinists. For to them God's election is the source of man's salvation. But election, they say, must be understood Christologically. It is therefore a process. Creation itself is taken up into this process of election. A man does not really exist except in so far as he exists in Christ. Self-consciousness presupposes Christ-consciousness. All men are reprobate, but they are reprobate in Christ. Judas, says Barth, "is not against Jesus."⁶ He is not wholly for Jesus. Neither is any one else. All men are elect; they are elect as reprobate.¹ Judas represents the principle of evil that is found in all men and Peter represents the ideal perfection in Christ that is found in all men. Christ unites the reprobate and the elect; both are destined for participation in God's glory.^{2 3} Thus the sovereign grace of the Crisis theologians has been made quite acceptable to the natural man. It is but the auto-soterism of the old Modernism in a new dress.

The Church

Barth and Brunner speak of election as the heart of the church. But as they reject the orthodox doctrine of election so they also reject the orthodox doctrine of the church. For them the church is identical with the process of election as both are identical with the process they call Christ. All men are involved in this process. As vessels of wrath they are outside but as vessels of mercy they are inside the church. As Scripture itself is full of contradictory systems and is but a witness to the truth so no creed can be anything but an arrow pointing toward the truth. Thus we are back again to the level of the old Modernism with its notion of the church as a local improvement association.⁴

The Commandment

Barth and Brunner speak of interpreting ethics Christologically. There is no God apart from Christ as there is no man apart from Christ. In Christ the commanding God and

⁵ Barth, *K. D.*, 1, 2; Brunner, *The Mediator*.

⁶ *K. D.*, 3, 1, p. 508.

¹ *Idem.*, p. 526.

² *K. D.*, 2, 2, p. 460.

³ For Brunner, *Wahrheit als Begegnung*, p. 52.

⁴ Barth, *K. D.*, 2, 2; Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, p. 300; *Man in Revolt*, p. 78.

obedient man have coalesced. There is no other good but Christ and there are no other duties but those to Christ. Christ is the standard of good and evil. The disobedient disobey in Christ. God's judgment upon them is reconciliation in Christ. Men cannot know that they have sinned except in the light that they are forgiven in Christ; self-consciousness is identical with Christ consciousness. Thus ethics is identical with the process of election. As Esau all men disobey but as Jacobs all men obey in Christ. What God wills of us is the same as that which He wills for us and is doing within us. Thus we are back to the old Modernism according to which Christ is the impersonation of ideals which men have set for themselves in the course of the evolutionary process.⁵

The Last Things

Barth and Brunner deal constantly with the last things. But for them the last things have no connection with the calendar. They are not pre or post or a millenialists. There was no creation out of nothing. There was no historical Adam. God did not reveal Himself directly in nature and history. The Virgin birth, the death and the resurrection of Christ did not take place in history, but in super-history. And super-history is not measured by hours and days of ordinary history. There is no difference of date between the first and second coming of Christ. There is no difference of date between what Christ did, or rather does, for us and what he, through the Spirit, does within us. In Christ God has time for us; in Christ He is buried with us, with all men. In Christ our time becomes God's time; we, all men, are risen with Him. All revelation events are aspects of the one great Resurrection Event, of which God and man are the two correlative aspects. Thus we have virtually returned to the old Modernism, which reduces historic Christianity to a monistic process philosophy.⁶

Our conclusion must be that the gospel preached and taught by Barth and Brunner, though couched in orthodox sounding terminology, is still virtually identical with the gospel of the old Modernism. It is an emasculated gospel, a gospel without God, without Christ, without grace, a gospel to the liking of the natural man and withal a gospel of despair. It is a new Modernism more subtle and dangerous than the old.

⁵ Barth, *K. D.*, 3, 1; Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*.

⁶ Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*.

Calvinism And Art

Common Grace Does Not Solve All the Problems

The Presbyterian Guardian

1948

Volume 17, Page 272ff

Recently it was my privilege to be invited, with a few others, to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Rene D. Grove for a discussion of the relation of Calvinism to art. At the request of Mr. Grove, Dr. Leon Wencelius favored the group with a general introduction to the subject.

In the course of the afternoon Mr. Grove graciously permitted us to view a number of his paintings, among them the one pictured here. He said he was anxious to express his Protestant, and more particularly his Calvinistic convictions in his paintings. In the picture of the mother and child, for example, he had made the child rather than the mother the center of attraction. Moreover, he had placed a cross in the hand of the child, as though there were already a self-conscious awareness of the great mission before him.

Had he been at all successful, Mr. Grove asked, in conveying the Protestant rather than the Romanist view of the mother and child? And how could he bring out the specifically Reformed conception of life, in his future paintings?

A dreadful hush fell upon our little group. Here we were, Calvinists all of us, theologians some of us, anew reminded of Calvin's general view of art, furtively recalling Abraham Kuyper's famous lecture on Calvinism and Art, and yet apparently unable to answer a simple little question such as the one now proposed.

Mr. Grove assured us that he was not asking for help on the technique of painting. That was his business as an artist. Even this reassurance, however, did not help a great deal. In fact, it took away our last mask. None of us could now excuse ourselves by protesting absence of artistic gift. When we finally left, I felt that we had not been of much help to Mr. Grove. If the others who were there feel differently about this, they may, of course, express themselves. Will not some reader enlighten Mr. Grove?

Of course we told him something. We tried to save face. We told him about Common Grace. But his face did not light up at this. He seemed to know the phrase as well as we, and we seemed to know the proper meaning of the phrase as little as he.

Did "common grace" stand for the idea of an area of neutrality as between believer and unbeliever? If so, how should the Calvinist proclaim the message in this area. A neutral area would act like static to the messenger of God, as well as to the messenger of Satan. And was not Kuyper right when he claimed that it was the doctrine of predestination that really furnished the foundation for the liberation of art? The doctrine of predestination is but a specialized point of the general teaching that God by His plan controls whatsoever comes to pass. And this general principle of the all-comprehensive plan of God is required if any human effort is to have meaning at all. Moreover, the doctrine of predestination as based upon the idea of the all inclusive plan of God, implies that man is saved by grace and grace alone, and that when he is saved he is saved in the

whole of his being and with the whole of his world. Is it not this doctrine, the doctrine that forms the heart of saving rather than of common grace, that enables the believer, if he be an artist, to feel justified in giving full vent to the spontaneity of expression that is his gift from God?

Still further, to think of common grace as furnishing a sort of museum where the unbeliever and the believer may alike exhibit their wares to one another without at the same time dashing for one another's throats would be to deny the doctrine of total depravity. The unbeliever is not merely sometimes, but always and in his every endeavor a covenant breaker.

In flat contradiction to Kuyper's claim referred to above, we are told in an article in *Life*¹ that it was Romanticism that unshackled modern art. There we are informed, in effect, that it is modern irrationalism that has brought to light artistic spontaneity. This article agrees generally with the point of view adopted by several other interpreters of modern art and life in general. We mention F. T. C. Northrop in *The Meeting of East and West*, P. A. Sorokin in *The Crisis of Our Age*, and Paul Tillich in *The Protestant Era*, as examples.

Such writers frequently do not trouble to discuss in detail the relation of Calvinism to art. But the logic of their position would require them to say that Calvinism is—or was—art's chiefest foe. For Calvinism, in their minds, stands for determinism, for system hard and fast, for the dominance of abstract intellectualism, for the killing of all freedom, freedom of the human person in any field of his endeavor. It was not till modern times, these men would contend, when man finally had the courage to cut loose from all system, that art could give forth its witness unrepressed.

So then the covenant-breaker certainly seeks to preach his gospel, the gospel of liberation from God, through the medium of art. If we could have some *Screwtape Letters* written according to Reformed principles we would, no doubt, be forewarned of this. Even so, we know it well enough. Mr. Grove also knows it.

My guess then is that if you want to see his face light up, you will have to begin with special rather than with common grace. Of course, we did that, too, I suppose, by our assumptions. But we were far from clear on the matter.

I suppose that when you write your answer to Mr. Grove's question, you will start by pointing out (a) that man is saved by grace alone and (b) that when he is saved man is saved in the whole of his life and in the whole of his world. I suppose you will write him that only he who believes this can discover true spontaneity. Only he who believes will sense the facts of the universe for what they really are. Only he can portray sin as guilt against God and as pollution of His gifts. Only he knows redemption and what it does, may do, and will do to the face of a man, of society and of the world. Only he can safely engage in "abstraction" for his abstraction need not be false—false to true art as well as false to true religion.

I wonder if it is not after you have thus stressed the fact of the believer's responsibility to present his message everywhere and always, and the fact that the non-believer's hatred of God is expressed in art as well as in religion, that you will begin speaking of common grace. Perhaps you will use it then to help explain how even unbelievers in spite of their basic covenantal allegiance to Satan, do produce marvelous

¹ Nov. 22, 1948, p. 105.

works of art. Is it because of common grace that unbelievers are not always fully conscious of their own basic principle? Is it because they are not fully conscious of their own principles that they least express their hostility to ours? And is it when they seem least hostile to our principle of covenant obedience that they do their best work as artists? I suppose that you will add that in any case, even when unbelievers are most expressive in their hostility to God, their work may still be exceedingly beautiful, so completely self-frustrative are all the efforts of Satan and his servants in this world. The unbeliever must borrow, or rather steal, his capital from the believer. Thus do all the works of unbelieving artists always testify against the unbelief of their creators in lesser or in greater degree. My guess is that if you could show Mr. Grove that only the Calvinist knows the true principle of spontaneity or freedom in any field, that any other spontaneity or freedom is the liberty of flapping one's wings in a void, the freedom of painting disorder without the background of order, the freedom of painting order without spontaneity, then his face would at least begin to light up.

The Inspiration And Authority Of The Bible

By

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield
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New Jersey, 1887–1921

Edited by

Samuel G. Craig

With an Introduction by Cornelius Van Til

“The Scripture cannot be broken“

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Introduction

In the present volume there is offered to the public a reproduction of the major writings of the late, Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield on the doctrine of Scripture. In his day Dr. Warfield was perhaps the greatest defender of what is frequently called “the high Protestant doctrine of the Bible.” More particularly as one of the outstanding Reformed theologians of his day he was deeply concerned to defend the view of Scripture set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith. He was not concerned to defend the classical Reformed view of Scripture merely because it was found in the Confession to which, perhaps for other reasons, he had subscribed.¹ For him the classical doctrine of the infallible inspiration of Scripture was involved in the doctrine of divine sovereignty. God could not be sovereign in his disposition of rational human beings if he were not also sovereign in his revelation of himself to them. If God is sovereign in the realm of being, he is surely also sovereign in the realm of knowledge. Scripture is a factor in the redeeming work of God, a component part of the series of his redeeming acts, without which that series would be incomplete and so far inoperative for its main end.² As one deeply interested in the progress of the doctrine of God’s sovereign grace, Warfield put all his erudition to work for the vindication of an infallible Bible.

In his writings there is a discussion on the general problem of Scripture. There is also a very detailed and painstaking analysis of questions pertaining to textual and higher

¹ Cf. p. 419.

² Cf. p. 80.

criticism. Through it all there is the contention that the Bible is, in its *autographa*, the infallible Word of God.

It is not our purpose here to analyze or recapitulate that argument. The reader can see at a glance with what care and acumen it proceeds. It is our purpose rather to ask whether it is true, as is frequently asserted, that the day for such an argument has passed. There will always be room, it is said, for a critical analysis of the text of Scripture as there will always be room for a critical analysis of the text of *The Critique of Pure Reason*. But who today thinks that the original manuscripts of Scripture will ever be found? And who today thinks that, if they could be found, we should be in actual possession of the infallible Word of God? In any case, does not God come to man by free and living personal encounter even when he uses the words of the past? With such rhetorical questions many would dismiss Warfield's argument as wholly irrelevant to our present situation. It is perhaps not too much to say that, for many professing Christian theologians, the idea of a final and finished revelation from God to man about himself and his place in the universe has no serious significance today.

No doubt the first thing that those who still profess adherence to the traditional view of the Bible should do is to ask whether in stating the argument for their view they have done it in such a way as to challenge the best thought of our age. To challenge that thought requires of us that we should enter sympathetically into the problems of the modern theory of knowledge. Modern man asks how knowledge is possible. In answering this question he wants to be critical rather than dogmatic. He says he seeks to test all assumptions, not excluding his own.

Those who believe the Bible in the traditional sense have no cavil with this manner of stating the matter. Certainly Warfield would not have had. He was a profound as well as an erudite theologian. His many contributions in the field of doctrine and apologetics show him to have been a man fully abreast of the thought of his time. He was aware of the developments in post-Kantian philosophy as well as post-Kantian theology. Nor was he unmindful of the philosophical assumptions that underlie the factual studies of modern biblical research.

Since Warfield's day the matter of the philosophical presuppositions that underline the factual discussion of the data of knowledge has come to stand in the foreground of interest. Great emphasis is being placed upon the subject's contribution in the knowledge situation. Every fact, we are told, is taken as much as given. It is as useless to speak of facts by themselves as it is to speak of a noise in the woods a hundred miles from the woodman's house. In consequence the distinction so commonly made by Ritschlian theologians between judgments about pure facts and judgments about values is not so common as it was a generation ago. In a recent analysis of the question of religious knowledge in our day Alan Richardson says:

"The consequences of this false distinction between judgments of fact and judgments of value have proved a veritable *hereditas damnosa* in subsequent theological discussion. From it springs directly the false contrast between the 'simple Gospel' of Jesus and the 'theology' of the apostolic Church. The true Gospel is regarded as consisting in the simple facts about and teachings of the historical Jesus, who can thus be objectively portrayed by modern historical research, while the interpretations of St. Paul and the

other apostles may be discarded as representing values for them which are no longer values for us.”³

The Ritschlians were seeking to safeguard or reinstate the rightful place of objectivity in the gospel message. “They were trying to safeguard the objectivity of the facts themselves, as existing independently of the wishes of the believer. They thus placed great emphasis upon the historical character of the revelation, and they held that historical research, being scientific and independent of all value-judgments, could put an end to subjective speculation and free us from all the ‘accretions’ of traditional dogma.”⁴ Yet the Ritschlians themselves knew that “many able and well-disposed minds have looked at the historical facts and have found no revelation in them ...”⁵ Thus “the illusion of ‘objective’ or uninterpreted history is finally swept away. The facts of history cannot be disentangled from the principles of interpretation by which alone they can be presented to us as history, that is, as a coherent and connected series or order of events. Christian faith supplies the necessary principle of interpretation by which the facts of the biblical and Christian history can be rationally seen and understood.”⁶

It is this principle of the inseparability of the facts from the principle of interpretation by which they are observed that has been greatly stressed since Warfield’s time. We shall call this the new, the current, or modern principle. In contending for the relevance of Warfield’s argument for our day it is with this principle that we shall primarily need to be concerned. In it lies embedded the current form of the problem of objectivity in religious knowledge.

It is claimed that it is only by means of this principle that true objective knowledge of God and of his Christ can be obtained. For in it, the subjective itself has been taken into the objective. In the traditional view, we are told, the subject stood hostile over against the object. The object of knowledge itself was conceived in a static sort of way. In consequence the subject’s activity in relation to the object was discounted or disparaged. When the subject rebelled against this artificial and dictatorial sort of treatment its only recourse was to cut itself loose from all connection with the objective aspect of the gospel. The result was rationalism, materialism and secularism.

The contention is further made that only by the use of the principle of the interdependence of fact and interpretation can the uniqueness of the Christian revelation be maintained. Christianity is an historical religion. It stands or falls with the facts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. But the categories of orthodoxy could do no justice to the uniqueness of historical facts. According to the tenets of traditional belief, we are told, the facts of history are handled as roughly as Procrustes was accustomed to handling his guests. According to orthodoxy the whole of history is said to be but the expression in time of a static, changeless plan of God. God himself was conceived statically. He was eternally the same. There was no increment of being or wisdom in him. He was all-glorious. How then could anything that should take place in the course of history really add to his glory? Man’s chief end was said to be to glorify

³ *Christian Apologetics*, p. 148. London: The S. C. M. Press, 1947; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948.

⁴ *Idem.*, p. 149.

⁵ *Idem.*, p. 150.

⁶ *Idem.*, p. 150.

God while all that man might have done in the course of fulfilling this task had already been done, or could not be done. God was thought of as the first cause of man and his world, thus making all things in the world, including man, mechanically dependent upon him. Man was endowed with certain static qualities such as rationality and will which together were called the image of God. These qualities man could neither gain nor lose. Even though he was said to have fallen, and thus to have lost original knowledge, righteousness and holiness, this fall was pre-determined. And among those that had thus “fallen” there were some that were pre-determined to a changeless eternal life and others who were pre-determined to a changeless eternal death. Thus the whole of history, including even its purported miracles, was reduced to something static.

The form of revelation that went with this static conception of reality as a whole was naturally that of conveying to man in the form of intellectual propositions the content of this eternally changeless plan. The mind of man was not given any significant function in the realization of this plan. All man could do was to accept passively the set of propositions, together forming a system of doctrine, that was laid before him. No difference was made in orthodox theology between the revelation that took place in the events of history and the recording of that revelation in the Scripture. Even the minds of the prophets, who were called the special media of revelation, were thought of as being primarily passive in their reception of revelation.

But with the acceptance of the notion of the interdependence of the facts of history and their principle of interpretation, we are told, all that has changed. Revelation is now seen to be historical or eventual. The events are genuinely significant for it is their very individuality and reality that is presupposed even for the making of a “system of truth.” It is no longer some abstract static deity, who stands back of history from whom in some mysterious, wholly unintelligible way a set number of propositions drop till he decides it is enough, but it is the living God who gives himself in his revelation. When God thus actively gives himself then man spontaneously responds. He responds with love and adoration because it is through God giving himself that man is able to respond. Revelation thus becomes a process of interaction between God giving himself to man and man by God’s grace in return giving himself to God. God is what he is for man and man is what he is for God. It is this divine-human encounter in constant living form that is said to overcome the meaningless and artificial staticism of the traditional concept of Scripture.

In claiming true objectivity and uniqueness for itself the modern principle also claims certain other advantages. It claims to have solved the problem of authority and reason. Those who stress the need for authority and those who stress the need for reason are both in search of objectivity.

Those who advocate the idea of authority hold that reason cannot give objective certainty in knowledge. In particular it cannot give objective certainty in the religious field. Reason may assert things about God and about things beyond the experience of man but what it thus asserts cannot be said to be a part of knowledge by experience. By reason man cannot reach into the field of the divine. At least he cannot there speak with the same assurance that he is wont to employ with respect to the empirical realm.

Therefore if there is to be any certainty with respect to the unique historical facts of Christianity and, in particular, if there is to be any assurance with respect to the miraculous element in Scripture, this, it is often said, will have to be accepted on purely

non-rational grounds. Now this is precisely, it is said, what the traditional view wanted men to do. Men were required to believe the utterly non-rational and even the irrational, or meaningless. They were asked to believe in the self-existent and self-contained God. This God was said to be eternal and unchangeable. And then they were asked to believe in the causal creation of the universe at a certain time. This is to say they were asked to hold that this world and all that it contains were rationalistically related to and dependent upon God and at the same time they were asked to believe that this rational dependence of the universe upon God was effectuated by means of the arbitrary action of God's will. Thus they were asked to be both rationalists and irrationalists at the same time. But fundamentally it was irrationalism that prevailed. The believer was to accept blindly what was offered by absolute authority.

It is true that the Roman Catholics tried hard to soften down the bald antithesis between authority and reason by their doctrine of analogy of being. They did not have the courage of their conviction and therefore did not start with the Creator-creature distinction as basic to all their interpretation of doctrine. They started with the idea of being as such and introduced the distinction of Creator and creature as a secondary something. This did at first seem to produce the necessary rational connection between God and man. For it posited a principle of unity that reduced the Creator-creature distinction to a matter of gradation within one general being. And then corresponding to the principle of continuity thus brought into Christian thought from Plato and Aristotle, they did also hold to a measure of real individuality in history. They attributed a measure of freedom to man in independence of the plan of God. They even gave God a measure of freedom so that by his will he did not always need to follow the dictates of a rational eternally unchangeable nature.

“The distinction between the inner necessity of the very being of God and the free determination of His will is in Thomism a distinction of opposites. The element of necessity is understood as inherent to the relations within the Godhead. The causation of created being, on the other hand, is attributed to the will of God, who does not create of necessity (Qu. 19, a.3). In this latter sense God exercises ‘*liberum arbitrium*’

(a. 10). ‘The will of God has no cause’ (a.5). This arbitrary nature of divine freewill must needs be extended to the Ideas in God.”⁷

It is also true that Lutheran and Arminian theology to some extent followed Rome in both of these respects. But neither Lutheranism nor Arminianism had the courage of its convictions. They always fell back on the Scriptures as an infallible external authority. And this is also, though to a lesser degree, true of Rome.

So it remained true, we are told, that by and large orthodox Christians continued to believe in a non-rational concept of authority. The early Reformers seemed to have a more modern or dialectical view but then they were soon followed by those who made the belief in an infallible book the test of orthodoxy. But how can such a view of authority expect to yield the objectivity of which it was in search? Such an authority can, in the nature of the case, speak only of that which is beyond the reach of man. It must speak of that which has no intelligible relation to man. It speaks of a God who exists in such a form as to be wholly out of touch with the categories of man's own existence. It therefore speaks of what must be inherently meaningless for man.

⁷ Evgueny Lampert, *The Divine Realm*, London, 1944, p. 37.

In particular it must be noted that the traditional view of authority led to self-frustration. Nowhere is this more clearly the case than when it sought to deal with the facts of history. The notion of absolutely authoritative revelation with respect to the facts of history is a contradiction in terms.

But, we are told, now all that is changed. With the new principle we are no longer asked to talk about the inherently meaningless. When we are asked to believe the Word of the prophets we are not asked to think of some blank of which they are first supposed to have thought. We can now think of the facts of revelation as they appeared in history. Then we may use the insights of the prophets for the interpretation of these events. “Christians believe that the perspective of biblical faith enables us to see very clearly and without distortion the biblical facts as they really are: they see the facts clearly because they see their true meaning. On the other hand, when once the Christian meaning of the facts is denied, the facts themselves begin to disappear into the mists of doubt and vagueness.”⁸

In short we are asked to accept the expert authority of a great personality, not that of abstract system. We stand face to face with the great personality of Jesus Christ as the central figure of the category of revelation. We trust in him. The traditional view could not deal with genuine history because it reduced historical fact to mere logical connection in a timeless system. On the other hand, the system that was presented by the traditional view was, because of the very destruction of history it required, totally aloof from those whose experience is time-conditioned.⁹

The problem of reason too is said to be solved by the modern principle. Our reason is no longer asked to abdicate. It is not asked to accept blindly an abstract system of truth. Neither is our reason even required to admit that there is an area about which it has nothing to say. According to the traditional view there were two sources of revelation quite distinct from one another. “Natural theology, as distinct from revealed theology, consisted of those truths about the divine Being which could be discovered by the unaided powers of human reason. This kind of knowledge of God, it was held, was accessible to pagans as well as to Christians, and indeed, after the days of Albertus Magnus and St. Thomas Aquinas, it was generally conceded that Aristotle was the great master of this type of knowledge of God. But this natural knowledge of God, it was held, does not give to man all that he needs to know; it is not saving knowledge, and it cannot satisfy the craving of the human soul for that measure of truth which is beyond the natural capacity of the human mind. The full Christian knowledge of God and of His redemptive activity on man’s behalf, as expressed in such doctrines as those of the Incarnation and the Trinity, can be learnt only from revelation and is not ascertainable by the natural reason. Man is an *ens incompletum* and therefore stands in need of the divine grace.”¹⁰ Against this orthodox conception of the relation of faith to reason, says Richardson, the old liberal view argued that in revelation we had little more than the republication of what is essentially discoverable by reason. But this view “finds few

⁸ Alan Richardson: *Op. cit.*, p. 105.

⁹ Cf. Dorothy M. Emmet, *Philosophy and Faith*, London, 1936; William Temple, *Nature, Man and God*, London, 1935.

¹⁰ *Idem.*, pp. 110–111.

supporters amongst theologians of the front rank today.”¹¹ It is only with the full recognition of the value of the new principle that we have found the harmony between the “natural knowledge of man” and “special revelation.” It is no longer necessary to distinguish between the natural and the supernatural in revelation. There is rather general and special revelation. “The only kind of theory of the knowledge of God which will adequately embrace all the facts of man’s experience will be one which recognizes that there are two kinds of revelation or divine disclosure of truth. There is first general revelation, which pertains to the universal religious consciousness of mankind; and there is also special revelation, which is mediated through particular episodes at definite times and places in history. The broad distinction between general and special revelation is that the former is non-historical, in that its content is not communicated to mankind through particular historical situations but is quite independent of the accidents of time and place, whereas the latter is historical, that is, bound up with a certain series of historical persons and happenings through which it is communicated to mankind.”¹²

It is true of course that in matters of historical communication we cannot attain unto impartial and impersonal knowledge of facts. “The illusion of having attained an impartial scientific viewpoint is the inevitable penalty of embracing the rationalist theory of the nature of historical research; there are no such things as ‘absolute perspectives’ in existential matters; we see facts not as they are in themselves, but in the light of our own personal categories of belief and interpretation.”¹³

At last then there has come to us what is essentially a solution of the age-old problem of authority and reason. Authority no longer speaks of an abstraction; reason no longer refuses to accept the expert assertions about the “beyond.” The faith principle must be freely accepted in the interpretation of the whole of history. Christianity deals with the supernatural and the miraculous. It is in vain to follow the rationalists in their efforts to expunge all of the miraculous from the earliest documents of Christianity. Nor is it necessary to do so. In fact it is precisely the supernatural and the unique that we desire. History would not be history without it. But to hold to the historical element in religion and with it to true uniqueness, yes even to hold to the miraculous character of Christianity, is not to hold to what is out of relation with general human experience. “We must never deny to the philosophical activity of the mind its proper function of elucidating and unifying all our experience.”¹⁴ Our experience of religious truth, as of truth of historical fact in general, may indeed be doubted from a strict historical point of view. Christianity stands or falls with the idea of the resurrection of Christ under Pontius Pilate. “A Christianity without the belief in the resurrection of Christ as an historical event would be another Christianity than that which the world has hitherto known; ... ”¹⁵ But it is quite possible for historical research as such to doubt the fact of the resurrection. “What we find in the accounts of the resurrection of Jesus is obviously, from the modern historian’s point of view, full of difficulties, which there is no probability that any further

¹¹ *Idem.* p. 113.

¹² *Idem.* p. 113.

¹³ *Idem.*, p. 107.

¹⁴ Clement C. J. Webb, *The Historical Element in Religion*, London, 1935; p. 93.

¹⁵ *Idem.*, p. 100.

investigation at this distance of time could entirely remove.”¹⁶ “But the strictly religious interest in these events does not demand that the historian’s curiosity should be fully satisfied before faith is accorded to them.”¹⁷ Only a genuine experience of intercourse with a living historical person victorious over death can lie behind the creation of the Christian church. In this way we have not left the safe ground of experience in talking about the resurrection of Christ. We have used it as a “fact” that is required as a limit without which our experience of the church community is unintelligible.

If there is anything that is clearly implied in the preceding discussion, it is that the rejection of the Bible as the infallible Word of God is connected with the rejection of that of which the Bible claims to give infallible revelation. The rejection of the traditional view of Scripture involves the rejection of Christianity as orthodoxy holds to it. The argument about the Bible and its claim to infallibility is certainly no longer, if it ever was, exclusively an argument about “facts.” Nor is it characterized on the part of those who reject biblical infallibility by the older deistic and rationalistic effort to reduce the whole of life to an illustration of the law of non-contradiction. Pure factuality, that is pure non-rationality, is freely allowed a place in the philosophical principles of those who are engaged in biblical criticism.

To be sure, it is taken for granted that not much can be said today from the point of view of factual defense for the orthodox point of view. It is also customary to assert that the benefits of old liberalism must be conserved. Old liberalism is said to have been right in its rejection of orthodoxy and its literalism. But, it is argued, we must now go beyond old liberalism. It was rationalistic. It claimed to be able to give what was tantamount to an exhaustive explanation of reality. It too did not allow for genuine historical fact. It did not permit of newness in science or miracle in religion. We must now make room for both. We must substitute for a philosophy of static being the transcendental philosophy of pure act. Then we shall be able to save the insights of orthodoxy. For orthodoxy was not wholly wrong. Luther and Calvin knew that Christianity was unique, that it was historical and that it required the Holy Spirit’s testimony for men to accept it. They knew that it was not rationally defensible in the strict sense of the term. But all these insights were burdened down with the incompatible ideas of an infallible Bible and a fixed system of truth as revealed in that Bible. The salvation of men was made to depend upon their accidental acquaintance or non-acquaintance with, and their acceptance or non-acceptance of, a set of propositions about the nature of reality found in a certain book. Thus the Reformers were rationalists in their teaching of salvation by system and irrationalists in their willingness to permit this supposedly indispensable system of truth to be distributed by the winds of chance.

Rejecting both this rationalism and this irrationalism of orthodoxy, and rejecting also the remnants of rationalism found in old liberalism, we now at last have reached a category of revelation that is not mechanical but personal. In the Bible we now confront God as personal Creator—our Creator, not the cause of the universe.

Orthodoxy left the question as to how God and his world might be brought together unsolved. Its conception of causation led logically to his identification with the world. “To see in God the cause of the world or its prime mover means either to substitute the

¹⁶ *Idem.*, p. 103.

¹⁷ *Idem.*, p. 103.

idea of causality for its opposite and utterly deform it, or to make an attempt on God (and on the world!), by making Him wholly immanent in the world and dragging them both into a single monistic being—*vide* Aristotelianism!”¹⁸ “The existence of God is known by an act of madness, daring, and love: it is to throw the thread of life into the heavens in the certainty that it will take hold there without any guarantees of causality; it is a dumb, beseeching act; it is a prayer. *Sursum corda, sursum, sursum, sursum!*”¹⁹

Creation, then, is a mystery. But its mystery is “positively implied in the depths of our very existence: as such it becomes accessible to us; it illuminates and gives impetus to our thought and knowledge.... Created life, then, must be regarded as the other-being of this world in the relative. In creation divine life becomes other to its divine subject. In it take place, as it were, God’s mysterious self-alienation and return to Himself through His object which was still Himself, a losing of His self-sameness, self-negation and re-appropriation of Himself in the other. The very act of creation is an activity whereby this world exists, is ‘planned-out’ as a being other than the Creator. Creation is therefore the establishment of other existence or existence in the other.”²⁰

Still further, as orthodoxy interpreted the problem of origins in terms of impersonal physical causation so it interpreted the problem of sin in impersonal biological terms of inheritance. By the new principle every man virtually stands where orthodoxy claims that Adam and Eve stood, face to face with the claims of the personal God. Better than that, in terms of the new principle every man comes directly face to face with Christ and the necessity of choosing for or against him. The last vestiges of impersonalism have disappeared.

In view of all these claims it is apparent that the orthodox apologist cannot pacify the adherents of the new principle by making certain concessions. There are otherwise orthodox believers who are willing to concede that Scripture was not infallibly inspired. They seek to preserve the general historical trustworthiness of the Bible without maintaining its infallibility. Those who make such “minor concessions” will find, however, that the same objections that are raised against an infallible Bible will hold in large degree against a Bible that is essentially trustworthy in some more or less orthodox sense of the word. Those who recede from the high claim of Scriptural infallibility as maintained by Warfield to the position of maintaining the general trustworthiness of Scripture, do not in the least thereby shield themselves against the attack of the modern principle as outlined above. That principle attacks the very possibility of the existence in history of an existential system. And the orthodox advocates of the general trustworthiness of Scripture cannot afford to give up the claim of Scripture to provide such a system.

It is of importance to note that the current principle of Scripture is of a piece with modern philosophical and scientific procedure in general. The history of recent philosophy has been in the direction of “phenomenalism.” We are not now concerned about the internal differences among modern philosophers. What is of significance in the present discussion is that, by and large, the methodology of modern philosophy and science involves the idea of the wholly unique or the purely factual. Since Kant the idea

¹⁸ Evgueny Lampert: *The Divine Realm*, p. 42.

¹⁹ *Idem.*, p. 43.

²⁰ *Idem.*, p. 50.

of pure fact ordinarily stands for pure existential possibility. On this question German philosophy has gone its course till it has reached a position fitly exemplified by Heidegger's notion of reality temporalizing itself. The British-American point of view is expressed by Samuel Alexander's *Space Time and Deity* and by the works of John Dewey or Alfred North Whitehead. In France the philosophy of Bergson is typical. There is a general assumption that reality has an utterly non-rational aspect. Moreover, what is true of modern philosophy is, generally speaking, also true of modern science. Current scientific methodology also assumes absolute contingency in the sphere of fact.

So then the whole emphasis of the modern principle with respect to the Bible, insofar as that is expressed in willingness to accept the "supernatural" and the "miraculous" is in accord with the idea of general philosophy and science. Philosophy and science also accept the "miraculous" and the "unique," but they mean by the supernatural and the unique that which men have not yet rationalized, or that which may be forever unrationalizable, that is, the purely contingent. In fact emphasis should be laid upon the latter idea. Reality is assumed to have something ultimately mysterious in it. The God of modern thought is no less surrounded by mystery than is man. Events in history are therefore in part determined by that within them which is made up of the ultimately irrational.

On this assumption of modern thought there could be no infallible interpretation of historical fact, no existential system of truth in the orthodox sense of the term. The orthodox principle of continuity is taken to be impossible by an assumed doctrine of chance.

Corresponding to this general concept of factuality as ultimately non-rational is the idea of rational coherence as being merely a matter of perspective. If factuality is non-rational, it is to be expected that rationality will be merely "practical." That is to say rationality will not be that which the "rationalists" before Kant thought it was. Post-Kantian rationality is, broadly speaking, correlative to non-rational factuality. It does not pretend to reduce factuality itself to relations within an exhaustively rational system. If there is to be no individuation by complete description there can be no claim to a system that is exhaustive. A non-rational principle of individuation allows only for a *de facto* system.

We are now prepared to state the issue between the basic principle of interpretation of human life and experience that thus comes to expression in modern theology, philosophy and science and that which comes to expression in the idea of an infallible Bible as set forth by Warfield. That issue may be stated simply and comprehensively by saying that in the Christian view of things it is the self-contained God who is the final point of reference while in the case of the modern view it is the would-be self-contained man who is the final point of reference in all interpretation.

For the Christian, facts are what they are, in the last analysis, by virtue of the place they take in the plan of God. Idealist logicians have frequently stressed the idea that if facts are to be intelligible they must be integrally related to system. But idealist philosophers do not have any such system as their negative argument against the adherents of the "open universe" requires them to have. Together with the pragmatists they assume an utterly non-rational concept of pure fact. Thus there is in their view no individuation by complete description. There is a kernel of thingness in every concrete fact that utterly escapes all possibility of expression. "There always are, and always will

be, loose ends, 'bare' conjunctions not understood, in all our actual natural knowledge, just because it all starts from and refers to the historical and' individual, which analysis cannot exhaust."²¹ Taylor does not mean to say merely that God does and man does not have the ability to exhaust the meaning of individual facts. He is making an assertion about reality which, he assumes, is true for God as well as for man. Both God and man are, for Taylor, confronted with non-rational material.

So then only the orthodox Christians actually hold to that which idealist philosophers cannot hold while yet they recognize it to be the minimal requirement even for the distinguishing of facts from one another. And among orthodox Christians it is only they who hold with Warfield to the comprehensiveness of God's plan who do full justice to the Christian principle.

This does not mean that the orthodox position is tantamount to a return to pre-Kantian rationalism. Not even those rationalists were able to do altogether without "truths of fact" which, to the precise extent that they existed, detracted from the "rational" interpretation of the whole of reality that was the aim of a Leibniz or a Wolff. They did not make the God-man distinction fundamental in their thought. The orthodox Christian does. He claims for God complete control over all the facts and forces of the universe. Hence he claims for God exhaustive knowledge of all things. All the light of men is in relation to him who is the Light as candlelight is in relation to the sun. All interpretation on the part of man must, to be true, be reinterpretation of the interpretation of God by which facts are what they are.

That this is the case has never been so clear as it is now. All too frequently Christian theology and apologetics has not been consistent with its own principles. It has sought to prove the existence of God and the propriety or necessity of believing in the Bible as the Word of God by arguments that assumed the possibility of sound and true interpretation without God and without the Bible. Following the example of Aquinas such men as Bishop Butler and his many followers assumed that by "reason," quite apart from any reference to the Bible, it was possible to establish theism. Fearing to offend the unbeliever they thus failed to challenge his basic approach. Thus the full claim of Scripture about itself was not even presented. Virtually assuming that the candle of human reason derived its light exclusively from itself they set out to prove that there was another, an even greater light than the candle, namely, the sun.

The Aquinas-Butler type of argument assumed that there is an area of "fact" on the interpretation of which Christians and non-Christians agree. It virtually assumes a non-rational principle of individuation. It therefore concedes that since historical facts are "unique" nothing certain can be asserted of them. But this assumption, always untrue, has never before appeared so clearly false as today.

To be sure, there is a sense in which it must be said that all men have the facts "in common." Saint and sinner alike are face to face with God and the universe of God. But the sinner is like the man with colored glasses on his nose. Assuming the truth of Scripture we must hold that the facts speak plainly of God. Rom 1.20, Rom 2.14-15, etc. But all is yellow to the jaundiced eye. As he speaks of the facts the sinner reports them to himself and others as yellow every one. There are no exceptions to this. And it is the facts

²¹ A. E. Taylor: *The Faith of a Moralists*, London, 1931, Series 2, p. 172.

as reported to himself, that is as distorted by his own subjective condition, which he assumes to be the facts as they really are.

Failing to keep these things in mind, Thomas and Butler appeal to the sinner as though there were in his repertoire of “facts” some that he did not “see yellow.” Nor was this done merely for the sake of the argument. Thomas and Butler actually placed themselves on a common position with their opponents on certain “questions of fact.”

The compromising character of this position is obvious. It is compromising, in the first place with respect to the objective clarity of the evidence for the truth of Christian theism. The psalmist does not say that the heavens probably declare the glory of God, they surely and clearly do. Probability is not, or at least should not be, the guide of life. He who runs may read. Men ought, says Calvin following Paul, to believe in God, for each one is surrounded with a superabundance of evidence with respect to him. The whole universe is lit up by God. Scripture requires men to accept its interpretation of history as true without doubt. Doubt of this is as unreasonable as doubt with respect to the primacy of the light of the sun in relation to the light bulbs in our homes.

But according to Thomas and Butler men have done full justice by the evidence if they conclude that God probably exists. Worse than that, according to this position they are assumed to have done full justice by the evidence if they conclude that a God exists. And a God is a finite God, is no God, is an idol. How then can the Bible speak to men of the God on whom all things depend?

In presupposing a non-Christian philosophy of fact the Thomas-Butler type of argument naturally also presupposes a non-Christian principle of coherence, or rationality. The two go hand in hand. The law of non-contradiction employed positively or negatively is made the standard of what is possible or impossible. On this basis the Bible could not speak to man of any God whose revelation and whose very nature is not essentially penetrable to the intellect of man.

In the second place, the Thomas-Butler type of argument is compromising on the subjective side. It allows that the natural man has the plenary ability to interpret certain facts correctly even though he wears the colored spectacles of the covenantbreaker. As though covenant-breakers had no axe to grind. As though they were not anxious to keep from seeing the facts for what they really are.

The traditional argument of Thomas and of Butler was, moreover, not only compromising but also self-frustrative. More than ever before, men frankly assert that “facts” are taken as much as given. Thus they admit that they wear glasses. But these glasses are said to help rather than to hinder vision. Modern man assumes that seeing facts through the glasses of himself as ultimate he can really see these facts for what they are. For him it is the orthodox believer who wears the colored glasses of prejudice. Thus the Christian walks in the valley of those who more than ever before identify their false interpretations of the facts with the facts themselves.

The argument of Thomas or of Butler does not challenge men on this point. It virtually grants that they are right. But then, if men are virtually told that they are right in thus identifying their false interpretations of the facts with the facts themselves in certain instances, why should such men accept the Christian interpretation of other facts? Are not all facts within one universe? If men are virtually told that they are quite right in interpreting certain facts without God they have every logical right to continue their interpretation of all other facts without God.

From the side of the believer in the infallible Word of God the claim should be made that there are not because there cannot be other facts than God-interpreted facts. In practice, this means that, since sin has come into the world, God's interpretation of the facts must come in finished, written form and be comprehensive in character. God continues to reveal himself in the facts of the created world but the sinner needs to interpret every one of them in the light of Scripture. Every thought on every subject must become obedient to the requirement of God as he speaks in his Word. The Thomas-Butler argument fails to make this requirement and thus fatally compromises the claims of Scripture.

It has frequently been argued that this view of Scripture is impracticable. Christians differ among themselves in their interpretation of Scripture. And even Christ, says A. E. Taylor, if we grant his genuine humanity, would himself introduce a subjective element into the picture. Or, assuming he did not, and assuming we knew his words without doubt, those who would live by his words would in each instance insinuate a subjective element.

These objections, however, are not to the point. No one denies a subjective element in a restricted, sense. The real issue is whether God exists as self-contained, whether therefore the world runs according to his plan, and whether God has confronted those who would frustrate the realization of that plan with a self-contained interpretation of that plan. The fact that Christians individually and collectively can never do more than restate the given self-contained interpretation of that plan approximately does not correlativize that plan itself or the interpretation of that plan.

The self-contained circle of the ontological trinity is not broken up by the fact that there is an economical relation of this triune God with respect to man. No more is the self-contained character of Scripture broken up by the fact that there is an economy of transmission and acceptance of the word of God it contains. Such at least is, or ought to be, the contention of Christians if they would really challenge the modern principle. The Christian principle must present the full force and breadth of its claim. It is compelled to engage in an all-out war.

But if the Christian position has not always been consistent with itself the same holds true of the non-Christian position.

It has not been brought out clearly in the history of non-Christian philosophy till recent times that; from its point of view, all predication that is to be meaningful must have its reference point in man as ultimate. But that this is actually the case is now more plain than ever. This is the significance of Kant's "Copernican Revolution." It is only in our day that there can therefore be anything like a fully consistent presentation of one system of interpretation over against the other. For the first time in history the stage is set for a head-on collision. There is now a clear-cut antithesis between the two positions. It is of the utmost significance that we see what is meant by this antithesis. It does not mean that any one person fully exemplifies either system perfectly. But it does mean that to the extent that the two systems of interpretation are self-consistently expressed it will be an all-out global war between them. To illustrate this point we may refer to Paul's teaching on the new man and the old man in the Christian. It is the new man in Christ Jesus who is the true man. But this new man in every concrete instance finds that he has an old man within him which wars within his members and represses the working out of the principles of his true new man. Similarly it may be said that the non-believer has his new

man. It is that man which in the fall declared independence of God, seeking to be his own reference point. As such this new man is a covenant breaker. He is a covenant breaker always and everywhere. He is as much a covenant breaker when he is engaged in the work of the laboratory as he is when he is engaged in worshiping gods of wood or stone. But as in the new man of the Christian the new man of the unbeliever finds within himself an old man warring in his members against his will. It is the sense of deity, the knowledge of creaturehood and of responsibility to his Creator and Judge which, as did Conscience in Bunyan's *Holy War*, keeps speaking of King Shaddai to whom man really belongs. Now the covenant breaker never fully succeeds in this life in suppressing the old man that he has within him. He is never a finished product. That is the reason for his doing the relatively good though in his heart, in his new man, he is wholly evil. So then the situation is always mixed. In any one's statement of personal philosophy there will be remnants of his old man. In the case of the Christian this keeps him from being consistently Christian in his philosophy of life and in his practice. In the case of the non-believer this keeps him from being fully Satanic in his opposition to God. But however true it is that non-Christians are always much better in their statements of philosophy and in their lives than their own principle would lead us to expect and however true it is that Christians are always much worse in the statement of their philosophy and in their lives than their principle would lead us to expect, it is none the less also true that in principle there are two mutually exclusive systems, based upon two mutually exclusive principles of interpretation. And in our day the non-Christian principle of interpretation has come to a quite consistent form of expression. It has done so most of all by stressing the relativity of all knowledge in any field to man as its ultimate reference point. It would seem to follow from this that Christians ought not to be behind in stressing the fact that in their thinking all depends upon making God the final reference point in human predication. The Thomas-Butler type of argument confuses this basic issue.

Secondly, the issue at the present time is not whether man is himself involved in all that he knows, whether facts are taken as much as given. That man as the subject of his knowledge is to some extent taking as well as giving facts may be taken for granted by all. As such it is a quite formal matter. The question is whether in his taking of facts man assumes himself to be ultimate or to be created. Both Descartes and Calvin believed in some form of innateness of ideas, yet the former made man and the latter made God the final reference point in human thought.

The issue about the Bible is thus seen to involve the issue about the sovereign God of the Bible. It involves the idea of an existential system. The opposition between the two points of view is all comprehensive. There is no question of agreeing on an area or dimension of reality. Reason employed by a Christian always comes to other conclusions than reason employed by a non-Christian. There is no agreement on the faith principle that is employed. Each has his own conception of reason and his own conception of faith. The non-Christian conception of reason and the non-Christian principle of faith stand or fall together. The same is true of the relation between the Christian principles of reason and of faith. The one will always be in analogy with the other. If one starts with man as ultimate and therefore with his reason as virtually legislative for reality then the faith principle that is added to this in order to fill out the interpretation of man's religious as well as his scientific interests will be of such a sort as to allow only for such facts and such rationality as are also allowed by his reason. There will be occasion to develop this

point more fully when we are dealing more directly with the Romanist view of tradition. Romanism makes the effort to attach a Christian faith principle to a non-Christian principle of reason. The result is compromise with the non-Christian principle of the autonomous man.

On the surface it might seem that there is on the modern principle a great difference if not a contrast between the procedure of faith and that of reason. It will be said that in the field of science and philosophy man is merely following a method that involves no personal relationships at all. Science and philosophy is said to deal with the impersonalist factors of the material universe. It is said to deal merely with the subject-object relationships in a non-personal way. It is said to be non-existential. Then it is added—and in this the modern view is joined by those who claim to be critical of it in the realm of religion, the Romanists and the dialecticists in theology—that of course in natural things the impersonal method of human reason must be allowed to have full sway. Certainly no man is to be asked to make a *sacrificium intellectus*. Only orthodoxy requires us to make that. The “absurdity of Christianity” has no bearing on the facts of chemistry and biology.

Frequently, and in particular in the case of the Romanist, it may then be added that God will not require man to believe on faith something that is contrary to what he has already learned to know by his God-given reason. Appeal is made to the idea of man’s creation in the image of God. In doing so men virtually assert that the faith principle that is to be accepted must be adjusted to the principle of reason that is already at work in the so-called lower dimensions of life. Man is said to be created in the image of God, but the explanation is made that this does not mean that he has been causally produced by God. In other words the image idea is itself interpreted in terms that are out of accord with orthodox theology. In the case of Thomas Aquinas this takes the form of saying that as far as reason is concerned it is not possible to disprove that Aristotle was right about his conception of eternity for the world. That means that if creation is to be accepted it must be accepted by a non-rational principle of faith. Thus the faith principle is made to fit the non-Christian principle of reason used in the first place. The faith principle must then be made non-rational. It must be identified with the idea of accepting as an aspect of reality that which is non-rational.

Then if the harmony of the two is to be effected it can be done and is done by the notion of correlativity. The principle of faith then stands for belief in the unique as that comes to us in the facts of history. The principle of reason then stands for the notion of coherence as that comes to us primarily in science. The two may be combined and that which is believed in faith will be analogous to what is believed in science and in philosophy. There will be the same principle of continuity and the same principle of discontinuity in both faith and reason. The only difference will be one of degree. In the realm of faith there is more of discontinuity and less of continuity while in science there is more of continuity and less of discontinuity. Then too the seemingly sharp difference between the impersonal realm of science and the personal confrontation of religion will virtually disappear. The impersonal realm is not ultimately impersonal at all. How could it be if in science we also have “selective subjectivism?” It is true that those who hold to the modern principle continue to speak of the non-biased historian as imitating the method of science in its impersonalism. But there is no unbiased historian and there is no unbiased scientist. Both have the same fundamental bias. Both have the same

fundamental bias of making man ultimate. Therefore science is as personalist as is religion.

On the other hand the two of them are equally impersonal. A point of great importance to the modern approach is its claim that it for the first time has done full justice to religion as personal confrontation. The effort at this point is the same as that of personalist philosophy in general.²² But all non-orthodox personalisms are virtually impersonalist. This too is not difficult to perceive. They all want to start with man as ultimate in the realm of science and philosophy. They argue that if our beliefs are to be affirmed without reasons then there is no difference between Nazism and Christianity and no settlement but by force. If God himself put propositions into our minds he would have to appeal to our reason or we could not tell his truth from the devil's falsehood. But the assumption of this manner of putting things is that man himself as such must be the standard between the truth of God and the devil's falsehood. And unless he is willing to assert that he is himself directly the source and standard of law as an individual he must appeal to some abstract law above himself and other individuals. He must with Socrates demand a definition of holiness in itself apart from what gods or men have said about it. In the rational realm he will appeal to the law of non-contradiction. He will not accept as revelation from God that which he cannot order by means of the law of non-contradiction. But then he ought really to do away with the idea of speaking of God as personal and with speaking of Christ as his Lord whom he would obey. He can then listen to God if God can show him that what he says is in accord with the non-personal law of contradiction or the impersonal law of the good as man himself in any given situation interprets this.

The conclusion then is that both in religion and in science the modern temper is impersonalist in its conception of some abstract super-personal law and personalist in that in practice even this impersonal law is interpreted in terms of the standards that are within man himself apart from God. Thus there is no personal confrontation of man with either God or Christ. Both of these become impersonal ideals that man has set before himself. These depersonalizations may be hypostatized and then anew personalized. It is only then that they meet the demands of modern man and answer to the requirements that man has set for himself as his own ultimate standard of right and wrong, of truth and falsehood.

It will now be apparent in what way the argument between those who hold to the infallible Bible and those who hold to man as the final reference point will have to be carried on. It cannot be carried on in the traditional way that has been set for both the Romanist and the Protestant by Thomas Aquinas and his school. This method does indeed fit into a Romanist scheme of things. Of this more in the sequel. But, as already pointed out, it does not fit in with the Protestant view of Scripture and of theology.

We have now cleared the ground by pointing out that both the position of those who believe and that of those who do not believe in the ultimate authority of Scripture have to be brought to a measure of internal self-consistency if the argument between them is to be really fruitful.

There can be then no way of avoiding the fact that it is in the theology of Warfield, the Reformed Faith, that we have the most consistent defense of the idea of the

²² Cf. the writings of Borden P. Bowne, Knudson, E. S. Brightman and Flewelling.

infallibility of Scripture. This is not to lack appreciation of the Evangelicals or non-Reformed Protestants who hold *con amore* to the Bible as the infallible Word of God. But it is only in a theology such as that of Warfield, a theology in which the doctrine of salvation by the grace of the sovereign God has come to something like adequate expression that the doctrine of the Bible as the infallible Word of God can, with full consistency, be maintained. It is only on this basis that the modern idea of revelation as event without being at the same time in part man's own interpretation of event can be opposed at every point. If God is really self-contained and if he has really causally created this world and if he really controls it by his providence then the revelation of himself and about this world must be that of fully interpreted fact. All facts in the whole of created reality are then God-interpreted.

This is true no less of the things of nature than of the things of Scripture. Accordingly when man is confronted with the facts of nature and is called upon to give them a scientific interpretation he is no less engaged in the re-interpretation of that which has already been fully interpreted by God to himself than when he reads his Bible. This does not mean that God has exhaustively revealed the meaning of these facts to man. Man would not even be able to receive into his mind a full revelation of all that God has in his mind. Moreover it is true that the revelation of God in nature is "factual," rather than propositional. This is partly true even of Scripture. Just the same it is also true, and this is basic, that as man studies any of the factual revelation of either nature or Scripture he is required to do so in subordination to and in conformity with the propositional revelation given him in the way of direct communication by God. This was true even before the Fall. The revelation of God in the facts of nature has always required and been accompanied by revelation in propositional form given by supernatural positive communication. Natural and supernatural revelation are limiting concepts the one of the other.

Thus the work of scientists and philosophers is no less a re-interpretative enterprise than is that of theology. And only thus can a genuine unity of outlook be obtained. Then and then only is there an intelligible, and at the same time a consistently Christian, connection between general and special revelation. From the formal point of view it is to be appreciated that the modern principle has worked out what it believes so consistently as to have a unified concept of both the natural and the supernatural. We have seen how it is maintained that general and special revelation are both a piece with one another. This is no doubt true. Orthodox Christianity ought to maintain the same thing from its own point of view. But then in its case this unity of outlook comes from the fact that all human interpretation is regarded as re-interpretative of God's self-conscious interpretation.

It is in this way that the place of Scripture as the infallible Word of God can be seen to fit in with the idea of orthodox theology in general. The idea of Scripture must, as the Reformed theologians have pointed out so fully and clearly, be brought into connection with sin. But in order to see the precise connection between Scripture and sin it is first necessary to indicate that even prior to the entrance of sin man needed supernatural communication. Man as finite needs to be told directly by God about the ultimate direction of the course of history. He cannot deal as he ought, as a covenant keeping being, with anything that he deals with at all, unless he deals with it in the light of the destiny of the whole of the created realm of being. Each thing is what it is in relation to the final goal of history. Therefore if he is to deal with each thing as it ought to be dealt

with, that is, according to its “essence,” he must ever keep this destiny clearly in view. He has, to be sure, innate knowledge of God. But this innate knowledge is not a timeless principle within him from which he can logically deduce what will happen in the course of time. Neither is this innate knowledge a sort of potentiality that will naturally develop into an actual knowledge of God. Least of all is it a mere form that needs for its correlativity a filling that derives from the realm of brute fact. It is a God-given activity within man that needs to feed upon factual material which is itself the manifestation of the self-contained plan of God. It is therefore a limiting concept that needs over against itself another limiting concept, namely, that of factual material that can serve as grist for its mill.

But then when sin comes into the picture there is an ethical complication. Sinful man wants to suppress the truth of God that comes to him. His new man within him suppresses or seeks to suppress that which springs from the old man within him. The natural man is at enmity with God. He always seeks to make himself believe that he has not been confronted with God; his forms of worship are ways by which he makes himself believe that God is finite. Even when he says he needs and sorely needs a transcendent God, he will say that this transcendent God can only probably be known.²³ If he can make himself believe that the evidence is doubtful he has again found excuse for himself. In reality the evidence is perfectly clear. All men, says Calvin, following Paul’s *Romans* cannot help but know God. The objective facts are facts precisely and alone because they reveal God. And the only true thing that can be said about them is response about them to God. So it is not because the evidence is not clear but because man has taken out his spiritual eyes that he does not, and ethically cannot, see any of the facts of the world for what they really are.

This is not to say that man is a devil. Man is not a finished product. He is in principle opposed to God but his old man within keeps that principle from manifesting itself in full fruition in this life. In principle he is engaged in all-out war against God. Hence his need for redemption. And this redemption must be by God himself. Hence, the substitutionary atonement. Hence the death of Christ for those whom God has given him. The whole of man’s relationships as a finite personality were, in the first place, with God. So now redemption cannot be mediated by certain facts that are not themselves wholly related to and dependent upon the plan of God. Such facts would not be revelational of God’s grace at all; they would be revelational of nothing. More than that, and of special significance in this connection, the facts, as such, could not be revelational in themselves without the Word. The very idea of objective revelation to man required for its completion the idea of objective revelation to man by supernatural propositions about the facts that it records. In the idea of objective revelation to man the ideas of fact and interpretation of fact are therefore limiting concepts one of the other.

But we have to proceed further. Just as facts and word revelation require one another so the doctrine of inspiration of Scripture is once again the limiting concept that is required as supplementation to the idea of fact revelation given to us in word revelation. The issue here is not at all a question of the use of man’s natural abilities. The orthodox view does not hold that in receiving revelation from God man’s abilities need to be

²³ Cf. Dorothy M. Emmet—*The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking*, London, 1946; Harold A. Larrabee—*Reliable Knowledge*, New York, 1945.

suppressed. Warfield points out that God could and did freely use the various gifts of intellect and heart that he himself had given to men who were the special instruments of his revelation. The issue is therefore whether those who were called upon to be prophets or apostles needed the direction and illumination of the Spirit so as to guide them and keep them from error. And the answer is that only God can reveal God.

Thus we have the objective situation before us. If sinful man is to be saved he must be saved against his will. He hates God. God's work of salvation must be a work into territory that belongs to him by right but that has been usurped by King Diabolus. And the government illegitimately in control of man's soul controls all the means of entrance, through eye gate, ear gate and nose gate. So an entrance has to be forced. Concrete has to be built under water. And when God by grace makes friends within the enemy country these friends are still but creatures. They are as much as was Adam in need of supernatural word revelation. And they are, even so, often and always to an extent under the influence of the old man within them and so would even when redeemed never be able to interpret mere revelational facts correctly and fully. Hence the necessity of Scripture.

Protestants also claim that Scripture is perspicuous. This does not mean that it is exhaustively penetrable to men. When the Christian restates the content of Scriptural revelation in the form of a "system" such a system is based upon and therefore analogous to the "existential system" that God himself possesses. Being based upon God's revelation it is on the one hand, fully true and, on the other hand, at no point identical with the content of God's mind. Scripture is therefore perspicuous in the way that all of God's revelation of himself as the self-contained God is perspicuous. All things in the universe are perspicuous in that they can be nothing but speakers of God. The very essence of things is exhausted ultimately in what they are in relation to God. And God is wholly light, in him is no darkness at all. So in Scripture God's purpose for man in his relation to his environment in this world and in his relation to God who controls both him and his environment is so clear that he who runs may read it.

Scripture is further said to be sufficient. It is a finished revelation of God. It does not stand in a relation of correlativity to its acceptance as the word of God by man. It may be compared to the internal completeness of the ontological trinity. This trinity requires within itself the idea of the intercorrelativity of the three persons of the Godhead and the correlativity of the diversity represented by these three persons to the essence of God. As important therefore as it is to keep a clear distinction between the ontological and the economical trinity in the field of theology so important is it to make clear that the facts of God's revelation in general and of his special revelation are mutually dependent upon one another for their intelligibility and again the facts of Scripture are related by way of interdependence upon the work of the Holy Spirit in inspiration.

It is only if this interdependence is maintained that it is possible to indicate clearly that the work of the Church in collecting the canon or the acceptance of the revelation of Scripture as the word of God stands in a relation of one way dependence upon it. It is true that as far as the whole plan of God with history, and, in particular, with redemption, is concerned the revelation in Scripture requires the acceptance of that revelation by the Church and the individual for what it is. It is true further that for the acceptance of that revelation it is again upon the testimony of the Spirit that we must depend. And this testimony brings no direct personal information to the individual. It works within the

mind and heart of the individual the conviction that the Scriptures are the objective Word in the sense described. Still further it is of the utmost importance to stress that this testimony of the Spirit is in the heart of the believer as supernatural as is the work of inspiration of Scripture itself. If this were not the case the main point of our argument to the effect that in Christianity God is the final reference point of man would not be true. Even as the internal completeness of Scriptural revelation may be compared to the internal completeness of the ontological trinity, so the acceptance of this revelation as the part of man under the influence of the Holy Spirit may be compared to the work of the economical trinity. On the one hand creation and providence must be maintained as being an expression of the plan of God. Yet this work is not an emanation of the being but an expression of the will of God. And these two are not to be contrasted with one another in the way that we have seen Thomas Aquinas contrast them. And not being contrasted to one another they cannot be made correlative of one another. The ontological trinity is wholly complete within itself. The works of God within do not require the works of God without. The revelation of God in creation and providence is wholly voluntary. In the same way also the acceptance or the rejection of the revelation of God on the part of man must be kept distinct from revelation itself. To be sure, even the acceptance of revelation is itself revelational of God in the more comprehensive sense that all that happens in the universe happens in accord with the will of God. In this sense even the rejection of the will of God by man is revelational of God. For Satan is not some sort of principle of non-being that is somehow given some sort of power independent of God. He is a creature of God that has fallen into sin. And the entrance of sin is within the plan of God. It is on this basis only that one can maintain the sovereignty of grace. It is the God who is truly sovereign in all things who alone can be sovereign in giving or withholding grace.

On this basis alone is it possible to distinguish the orthodox position of the relation of objective revelation and subjective acceptance of this revelation from the modern view in which the two have become correlative to one another and even made into aspects of one process. It is said in the modern view that revelation and discovery are like the convex and the concave sides of the same disc. And there is not much that the Romanist or the Arminian views can offer in opposition to this. The modern view has substituted for the ontological trinity and the free creation of the world the idea of reality as a process. In this process God and man are aspects of the same reality. But the consistently orthodox position keeps God and the universe apart. The laws of the universe depend on God and do the bidding of God but they are not laws of the being of God. 80 the activity of the mind of created man depends upon God. It can function only in connection with a universe that is itself wholly dependent upon God. The two together must be revelational of the same God. Man must re-think God's revelation. So man is responsible for the revelation of God in the universe about him and within him. He is again responsible for the revelation of grace as it comes to him. His rejection of the original revelation of God did not take place except within the counsel of God; his renewed rejection of the revelation of the grace of God does not happen independently of his counsel. But in each case it is a genuine action on his part. The acceptance or the rejection of God's revelation is no more identical with revelation than are the laws of the created universe identical with the internal procession of the Son from the Father.

Finally a word must be said about the authority of Scripture. Here again our start may be made from the idea of the ontological trinity. The self-contained God is self-

determinate. He cannot refer to anything outside that which has proceeded from himself for corroboration of his words. Once more the conservative view stands squarely over against the modern view when this conservative view is set forth according to the principles of the Reformed Faith. For on this basis, as already emphasized a moment ago, the mind of man is itself in all of its activities dependent upon and functional within revelation. So also it is, as already made clear, with respect to the material that confronts it anywhere. All the facts are through and through revelational of the same God that has made the mind of man. If then appeal is made from the Bible to the facts of history or of nature outside the Bible recorded in some documents totally independent of the Bible it must be remembered that these facts themselves can be seen for what they are only if they are regarded in the light of the Bible. It is by the light of the flashlight that has derived its energy from the sun that we may in this way seek for an answer to the question whether there be a sun. This is not to disparage the light of reason. It is only to indicate its total dependence upon God. Nor is it to disparage the usefulness of arguments for the corroboration of the Scripture that comes from archaeology. It is only to say that such corroboration is not of independent power. It is not a testimony that has its source anywhere but in God himself. Here the facts and the principle of their interpretation are again seen to be involved in one another. Thus the modern and the orthodox positions stand directly over against one another ready for a head-on collision.

It is now apparent in what manner we would contend in our day for the philosophical relevance of Scripture. Such philosophical relevance cannot be established unless it be shown that all human predication is intelligible only on the presupposition of the truth of what the Bible teaches about God, man and the universe. If it be first granted that man can correctly interpret an aspect or dimension of reality while making man the final reference point then there is no justification for denying him the same competence in the field of religion. If the necessity for the belief in Scripture is established in terms of "experience" which is not itself interpreted in terms of Scripture it is not the necessity of Scripture that is established. The Scripture offers itself as the sun by which alone men can see their experience in its true setting. The facts of nature and history corroborate the Bible when it is made clear that they fit into no frame but that which Scripture offers.

If the non-believer works according to the principles of the new man within him and the Christian works according to the principles of the new man within him then there is no interpretative content of any sort on which they can agree. Then both maintain that their position is reasonable. Both maintain that it is according to reason and according to fact. Both bring the whole of reality in connection with their main principle of interpretation and their final reference points.

It might seem then that there can be no argument between them. It might seem that the orthodox view of authority is to be spread only by testimony and by prayer, not by argument. But this would militate directly against the very foundation of all Christian revelation, namely, to the effect that all things in the universe are nothing if not revelational of God. Christianity must claim that it alone is rational. It must not be satisfied to claim that God probably exists. The Bible does not say that God probably exists. Nor does it say that Christ probably rose from the dead. The Christian is bound to believe and hold that his system of doctrine is certainly true and that other systems are certainly false. And he must say this about a system of doctrine which involves the existence and sovereign action of a self-contained God whose ways are past finding out.

The method of argument that alone will fit these conditions may be compared to preaching. Romanist and Arminian theologians contend that since according to the Reformed Faith man is dead in trespasses and sin there is no use in appealing to him to repent. They contend that since the Bible does appeal to the natural man it implies that he has a certain ability to accept the revelation of God. They contend further that Scripture attributes a measure of true knowledge of God to the natural man. To all this the Reformed theologian answers by saying that the Bible nowhere makes appeal to the natural man as able to accept or as already to some extent having given a true, though not comprehensive and fully adequate, interpretation to the revelation of God. To be sure, the natural man knows God. He does not merely know that a god or that probably a god exists. By virtue of his old man within him he knows that he is a creature of God and responsible to God. But as far as his new man is concerned he does not know this. He will not own this. He represses it. His ethical hostility will never permit him to recognize the facts to be true which, deep, down in his heart, he knows in spite of himself to be true. It is this new man of the natural man that we must be concerned to oppose. And it is to his old man that we must make our appeal. Not as though there are after all certain good tendencies within this old man which, if sufficiently played upon, will assert themselves and reach the ascendancy. Not as though we can, after the fashion of a liberating army, appeal to the underground army of true patriots who really love their country. The true appeal may be compared to Christ's speaking to Lazarus. There was not some little life left in some part of his body to which Christ could make his appeal. Yet he made his appeal to Lazarus, not to a stone. So the natural man is made in the image of God. He has the knowledge of God. The appeal is made to what is suppressed. And then as it is the grace of God that must give man the ability to see the truth in preaching so it is also the Spirit of God that must give man the ability to accept the truth as it is presented to him in apologetical reasoning.

This reasoning will accordingly have to be by way of presupposition. Since there is no fact and no law on which the two parties to the argument agree they will have to place themselves upon one another's positions for the sake of argument. This does not mean that we are thus after all granting to the natural man the ability to reason correctly. He can follow a process of reasoning intellectually. He may even have a superior intellect. But of himself he always makes the wrong use of it. A saw may be ever so shiny and sharp, but if its set is wrong it will always cut on a slant. Hence, following Paul's example when he asks, "Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world," we also place ourselves on the ground of the opponent. We may first ask him to place himself on our ground. We can then show that if there is to be rationality at any point there must be rationality at the basis of all. But on his own basis he will understand this to mean that there can be nothing temporal and unique. He will claim that this is determinism.

We may then ask him to show how on his position there is genuine significance in the individual facts of history. He will answer that this is the case because his principle of coherence by which he unites these facts is not determinist but is itself correlative to the facts in their individuality. He will say that he begins by presupposing the genuine individuality of these facts and that this is a basic ingredient in his thought.

At this point it will be necessary to point out that on this basis individuality consists of non-rationality. By definition the individuality and reality of temporal things must then have nothing to do with an all-controlling plan of God. Creation is set over against

causation by God. In similar fashion the orthodox idea of providence is denied. The principle of discontinuity is not found within the plan but in opposition to the idea of a plan of God. To be sure, a plan of God may be accepted but then it will be accepted as a limiting concept in the modern critical sense of the term. And this limiting concept is the opposite of the idea of a plan as a constitutive concept. It is of the essence of the modern principle to say that the thingness of the thing, to the extent that this may be spoken of at all outside its relation to the human knower of that thing, is independent of any divine knowledge or activity. In other words all antecedent being is rigorously excluded from the idea of individuality.

This involves the view that all reality, as far as can ever be known by man, is of a piece. But even this cannot really be said. It can only be said that all the reality that man will know must be of one piece. At least reality must not be distinguished into uncreated and created reality in the way that orthodoxy does. But as far as there may be any sort of reality that is beyond the knowledge of the human mind it must have no qualities at all. It must be interchangeable with the idea of pure possibility. The only alternative to making God the source of the possible in the universe is to make pure possibility or chance ultimate and therefore the mother of all being.

The point just made should be stressed. The modern approach requires the notion of pure non-being. At least it needs the notion of being in which there is no rationality at all. Then this pure being must, as far as the world of power is concerned, be identified with creativity. This sort of view has found expression in the works of Alexander, Bergson, Whitehead and Dewey. But it is important for us to know that it is precisely from this same point that all modern theology must also begin if it is to be true to its principle. Fundamental to the idea of uniqueness in history or in any other dimension on this basis is the notion of pure Chance. When theologians speak of this they call it the Father.

This is only to say that for modern thought time is ultimate. If God is said to have consciousness it must be consciousness in time. He must himself be subject to the same conditions to which man is subject. But then it must be remembered that on this basis the idea of God is a personalization of a non-rational force. All non-orthodox views are essentially non-personalist. This is usually admitted in the field of science. But it is no less true in theology. There could be no harmony between science and theology on this basis if both did not share an ultimate impersonalism with respect to man's environment. Theology then becomes a matter of hypostatizing and personalizing forces that in reality are non-personal. Gilson says with respect to Aristotle that so far as he has a god that exists this god is plural and that so far as he has a god that is known this god is a principle. The same may be said for all non-Christian philosophy.

So then we may distinguish between two aspects of the idea of individuality on the non-orthodox basis. There is first this notion of pure possibility or force as hypostatized and personalized. But as such it is a limiting concept and out of reach of the actual knowledge of man. It is but a projection into the void of personal ideals that man has formed individually or collectively. From the orthodox point of view such a God is but an idol since he has proceeded from the mind of sinful man that is opposed to God.

This God then is as unknown to man and as unreachable by man as was the God of Plotinus. As it is the projection of an ideal on the part of man so the only way it can be reached by man is by way of his identification with it. And this is in reality the aim that is back of the method of non-orthodox theology and non-Christian philosophy or science.

The whole of the ethical struggle on this basis becomes one of lifting man into the same high idealized realm of being into which he has put his God. This is virtually how A. E. Taylor puts it when he says that the Greek and the Christian views of the ethical problem are the same, namely, that of escaping the limitations of finitude.

In the second place individuality is that which is such for man. That is, so much of this chance reality as has been brought within the categories of human logic must conform to the laws of this logic. It may be said that space and time are not categories of logic but institutions that precede all logical manipulation. But at some point in the activity of the mind of man the miracle of contact must take place between the logical function of the human mind and non-logical or non-rational existence. Every handling of factual material such as counting is in reality the making of a judgment about the nature of the whole of being.

Between these two individuals—the one that is wholly by itself and unknown and the one that is for man—there is therefore a wide difference. If Christ were to be thought of as the individual that is for us and therefore known he would have nothing unique about him. In fact on that basis there is nothing unique about human personality in general. It is then woven into the patterns of relationships that are impersonal. On the other hand if Christ is to be identified with the individual that is in itself and prior to all relationships with human knowledge then he is or it is wholly meaningless.

This then is the dilemma. If the individual is to be really individual it is unknown; if it is known it is no longer individual but an instance of a law.

One can see that it is this dilemma that faces the modern principle when it seeks to combine its concepts of science and of religion. In the former all is said to be impersonal and in the latter all is personal. Yet if there is to be any harmony between the two outlooks they must either be both personal or both impersonal. Both are personal in that both presuppose the human person as ultimate and both are impersonal as both surround this human person with an ultimate impersonal environment.

But for the moment our main point is to stress that the rejection of the orthodox principle of continuity requires the acceptance of a non-Christian principle of discontinuity. And this is a notion of individuality as wholly non-rational taken as a limit.

So Christ according to the modern principle becomes an ideal that man has set for himself.

Corresponding to this non-Christian principle of discontinuity is that of continuity. The rejection of the Christian principle of discontinuity between God and man requires the acceptance of a rationalistic principle of continuity. It cannot be stressed too much that the most irrationalist positions today are still rationalist. They are rationalist in the sense that negatively nothing can be accepted by them but what man can himself see through by means of the principle of non-contradiction. No matter how much men stress the fact that rationalism is out of date and however much they laugh at old Parmenides, it remains true that they do the same thing that he did and that Procrustes did before him. The only difference is that they use the principle of non-contradiction negatively while Parmenides used it positively as well as negatively. In consequence Christ stands for ideal rationality which is said to be present to but not fully expressed in the process of reality.

But perhaps we should say that as interpreted by the modern principle Christ is in part free and in part rational. He is then an hypostatization and impersonation of what man is himself, namely, a combination of pure irrational factuality and formal rationality.

When this principle of pure rationality is allowed to function freely all individuality disappears. But lest this should happen pure rationality is made correlative to pure irrationality. Neither is ever allowed to function by itself. The result is that there is an appearance of real freedom, or transcendence and also an appearance of coherence while in reality there is neither.

The dilemma that faces modern theology with respect to the person of Christ must also be applied to its conception of revelation. There has been a great movement away from rationalism of the pre-Kantian sort. This seems to make room for revelation. But it is the sort of revelation that is allowed also in modern science. It is the wholly different. As wholly different it is also wholly irrational. Then when it seems that the wholly irrational would control all things there appears an influx of the principle of rationality and this rationality would kill all miracle and all newness of any sort.

The net result is that there is nothing by way of revelation that is added to what man knows or can know by himself. Revelation is not higher than the highest in man and the coherence of that which is higher and is given by revelation to man is in reality but an extension of the coherence that is already in man.

It should be added that the problem here is the same as that which may be found throughout the whole field of science and philosophy. The problem is everywhere that of methodology. And the dilemma is always that of pure single thingness without meaning and abstract rationality without content.

So then it appears that the modern principle has neither uniqueness nor coherence to offer. It may speak of objective connection of contents between observed experiences. It may reject the orthodox idea of authority because there is then said to be no test between various claimants to authority. But it can itself point to no objective connections between any one fact and any other fact. It cannot show how one fact can be differentiated from any other fact. It cannot find any application for the law of contradiction. It cannot even furnish a footing on the basis of which it might make an intelligent negation of the Christian position. Yet it is required to do so if it is to live up to its standard of being critical. But then it is not critical. There is no real reflective inquiry here. There is no real analysis of the basic concepts underlying knowledge. There is a dogmatic exclusion of a certain position without having shown how there is a foundation for excluding anything. There is a rejection of the Christian position as involving us in meaningless mystery. But there is instead an acceptance of that which is empty of all content. If the Christian notion of mystery is rejected because it is not penetrable to the mind of man, it ought to be possible for man to penetrate the whole of reality. And if he cannot penetrate the whole of reality he ought to be able to give an intelligible reason as to why it is that he cannot. But this he cannot do. He merely appeals to the use of the law of non-contradiction. But he himself has to maintain, unless he is a rationalist in the Leibnizian sense of the term, that by this means it is not possible to establish the nature of reality. He must maintain that reality is prior to logic. But when he does this, then he has no reason to think that what he says in terms of logic will answer to what he himself says must be there in terms of fact. This is especially true inasmuch as he has by logic, by the law of contradiction,

first excluded as impossible the idea that things should have any logical relation in them apart from what is put in them for the first time by their connection with the human mind.

So then it appears that the only position that has any connection between rationality and factuality is the position that works in terms of the self-contained God. It is true that there is mystery between this God and his creature. But it is also true that the only alternative to this mystery is mystery that is behind and before and around all forms of rationality. The Christian concept of mystery is that which is involved in the idea of God as the self-contained being and his plan for the whole of the created universe. The non-Christian concept of mystery, as implied in the modern principle, is that which is involved in assuming that all reality is flux and that factuality is more basic than logic or plan. The Christian concept of mystery is rejected as involving that which is meaningless. It is said to be meaningless on no better basis than that man cannot see through it clearly. Then the non-Christian concept of mystery is accepted though it involves the acceptance of the idea of complete separation of being and knowledge. But on this basis the process of learning cannot be explained at all.

There are then two positions with respect to reality and knowledge. Applied to the question of the Bible it now appears that the infallible Bible is required if man is to have any knowledge and if his process of learning is to be intelligible. This does not mean that on the basis of Scripture it is exhaustively intelligible to man. Nothing is. And the all or nothing demand that underlies the modern principle is the source of the debacle that has come about. But man does not need to know all. He needs only to know that all reality is rationally controlled. It does not kill his spontaneity and his reason if he has to think God's thoughts after him. It does kill all this if it has to function in a vacuum. And this, precisely, is what the modern principle asks man to do.

Christians need not be worried about the fact that the *autographa* are lost.²⁴ On the other hand they must be deeply concerned to maintain that an infallible revelation has

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It is well known that Emil Brunner regards the orthodox view of the infallibility of the *autographa* of Scripture as not only useless but as idolatrous. In addition to that he thinks that textual criticism has made it utterly untenable. How completely meaningless it is, to speak with Warfield of a sort of "Bible-X" of which nothing can be really known and of which we must, none the less, assert that it is virtually the same as the Bible we now possess (*Revelation and Reason*, p. 274).

But is the orthodox view so useless? We have shown that unless it is true men are lost in the boundless and bottomless ocean of chance. Is it idolatrous? Without it men must make and do make themselves the source and goal of all intellectual and moral effort; the true God if he revealed himself at all could not but reveal himself infallibly. Are the known facts of textual criticism out of accord with the idea of an original perfect text? On the contrary the whole process of this criticism gets its meaning from the presupposition of such a text. Without this presupposition there is no more point to turning to Scripture than to the Upanishads for the Word of God. The existence of a perfect original text of Scripture is the presupposition of the possibility of the process of human learning. Without it there would be no criterion for man's knowledge.

Orthodox scholars therefore pursue the search for this text with enthusiasm. Each step they take in dealing with existing manuscripts removes some "difficulty." And should a

actually entered into history. This is precisely as necessary as is the idea of the sovereignty of God in theology. The existence of all things in the world are what they are by the plan of God. The knowledge of anything is by way of understanding the connection that it has with the plan of God. The sin of man is within the plan of God. Its removal is within the plan of God. The facts of redemption, the explanation of those facts, are together a part of the plan of God. Man's acceptance is within this plan of God. On the current principle one thing can be exactly identical with the other in the realm of pure blankness. Hence anything as well as any other thing might happen. And if one thing rather than another does happen they are again reduced to virtual identity, by being placed as interchangeable parts in a timeless system. Or rather they are made to differ by means of complete description by the mind of man. That is, they could be made to differ only if there were such minute description. But there cannot be and so there will always be substitution of one for the other. This itself expresses the idea that in matters of history one cannot be too absolutely sure. We may feel that there is enough certainty at the bottom of things but we cannot be sure of any particular thing. We cannot be sure of the identity of Christ. In fact, as Brunner says, the identity of Christ is theoretically subject to question in the field of pure history. According to the rationalist position of the modern principle there should be individuation by minute description and therefore identity of indiscernibles in Leibnitz' sense of the term. Yet according to the irrationalism of the same principle real individuality must be due to the non-rational. Therefore there must be real difference in that which is indiscernible. But then the principle of individuation practically employed is a combination of these two principles. Hence it is that *Urgeschichte* is said to be related to present history while yet it is also said not to be related. It is wholly other. Nothing can be said about it. Yet it becomes wholly identical ideally.

With this we might conclude this introduction to the biblical writings of Warfield. The whole issue may be further clarified, however, if note is taken of two forms of theological thought current in our day, namely, Romanism and dialecticism, which claim to have rejected the modern view without accepting the traditional Protestant position. Both of these viewpoints claim to have solved the problem of the relation of authority and reason. Is there then, after all, we ask, another alternative? Have we been too hasty in our insistence that one must either return to the infallible Bible or else forfeit the claim even to explain the possibility of science?

Lutheranism

Before turning to Romanism and dialecticism a word must be said in passing about orthodox Lutheranism. Its position on the relation of Scripture to reason is unique. It would challenge our main contention. It argues that it is in Lutheranism rather than in Calvinism that the Protestant doctrine of Scripture has found adequate expression and adherence. So far from really bowing to the infallible authority of Scripture the typically

few errors of detail remain unsolved in time to come this does not discourage them. They have every right to believe that they are on the right road and that the end of their way is near at hand. For those who do not hold to the orthodox view are at the mercy of a purely pragmatic and humanistic view of reality and truth.

Reformed theologian, we are told, constructs his system of theology according to the requirements of reason. “Reformed theology is, in its distinctive characteristics, a philosophical system. Reason could not ask for more.”²⁵ “Reformed theology insists that the Bible must be interpreted according to human reason, or according to rationalistic axioms.”²⁶ These charges against the Reformed Faith center on the latter’s effort to show the presence of coherent relationships between the various teachings of Scripture. “Calvin tells us, in his *Institutes*, that whatever does not agree, logically, with this central thought, is absurd and therefore false.”²⁷ Calvinism is said at all costs to seek for a “logically harmonious whole” while Lutheranism is primarily concerned to ask what Scripture teaches.

What is forgotten in this criticism of Reformed thinking is that the latter, when true to itself, does not seek for “system” in the way that a non-Christian does. Its contention is that a “system” in the Christian sense of the terms rests upon the presupposition that whatever Scripture teaches is true because Scripture teaches it. With every thought captive to the obedience of Christ the Reformed theologian seeks to order, as far as he can, the content of God’s special revelation. The Calvinist philosopher or scientist seeks to order the content of God’s general revelation in self-conscious subordination to the infallible authority of Scripture. Nothing could be more unacceptable from the point of view of reason as taken by Engelder and Mueller.

Moreover it is only if the Christian “system” be set over against the non-Christian system that unbelief can be effectively challenged. Reformed thinking claims that Christianity is reasonable. To make good its claim it shows that reason itself must be interpreted in terms of the truths of Scripture about it. It is reasonable for a creature of God to believe in God. It is unreasonable for a creature of God to set up itself as God requiring a system of interpretation in which man stands as the ultimate point of reference. Not having a system of theology and philosophy in which reason itself is interpreted in terms of exclusively biblical principles, Romanism and Arminianism cannot effectively challenge the reason of the natural man.

It is here too that orthodox Lutheranism fails. In spite of specific Scripture teaching to the contrary it assumes, as does Arminianism, that man can initiate action apart from the plan of God. This is a basic concession to the non-Christian conception of reason. For the essence of this conception is its autonomy.

It is this basic concession to the non-Christian assumption of human autonomy that makes it impossible for orthodox Lutheranism to appreciate fully the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian ideas of system. On the one hand it will therefore decry system and reason wherever it sees these in John Calvin as well as in John Dewey. In doing so it virtually presents Christianity as being irrational giving foothold, unwittingly, to the idea of autonomy that lurks underneath all irrationalism. On the other hand when it undertakes, in spite of this, to speak of “the absolute unity of the whole body of truth” and of “the perfect coherency of its elemental parts”²⁸ it appeals to reason in the non-Christian sense of the term. As though Christianity may be thought rational, at

²⁵ Th. Engelder: *Reason or Revelation?* St. Louis, 1941, p. 74.

²⁶ John Theodore Mueller: *Christian Dogmatics* St. Louis, 1934, p. 20.

²⁷ Engelder: *Op. Cit.*, p. 74.

²⁸ Mueller, *Op. Cit.*, p. 80.

least to some extent, by the “paramour of Satan.” “As the rational study of the book of nature points to its divine Creator, so the rational study of the book of revelation suggests that it is the work of a divine Author and that therefore it is more reasonable to believe than to disbelieve its claims (the scientific proof for the divine authority of Scripture).”²⁹ Failing to work out a truly biblical view of human reason orthodox Lutheranism is largely at the mercy of the cross currents of irrationalism and rationalism that constitute modern thought. Unable to put full biblical content into its own distinction between the ministerial and the magisterial use of reason orthodox Lutheranism fails to distinguish between what is objectively true and reasonable and what is subjectively acceptable to the natural man. The net result is that, for all its praiseworthy emphasis upon the fact that “Scripture cannot be broken” orthodox Lutheranism is subject to the criticism that has earlier been made on general evangelical or Arminian Protestantism, to the effect that it is insufficiently Protestant and therefore unable adequately to challenge the modern principle of interpretation that we have discussed.

The two positions to which we must now turn are those of the Roman Catholic church and of the Theology of Crisis. Each in its own way, these two positions oppose both the classical Protestant and the modern views of Scripture. Generally speaking, the Roman view stands closer to the traditional Protestant one and the dialectical view stands closer to the modern one. In fact, there is a deep antagonism between these two positions. One would surmise this antagonism to hinge on the question of antecedent being. Romanism claims to teach an existential system; Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, the two outstanding protagonists of the Theology of Crisis, are adherents of a modern critical epistemology and therefore abhor the idea of such a system. But the issue is not thus clearly drawn between them. Nor could it be. The reason is that Romanism itself suffers from the virus of the modern principle whose evil consequences it seeks to oppose.

Romanism

The church of Rome claims to be the true defender of authority. Its argument is that the traditional Protestant view of the right of “private judgment” as introduced by the early Reformers reaps its mature fruitage in the modern Protestant view of “religion without God.” But the issue between “the Church” and the fathers of the Reformation was not limited to a question of interpretation of the Scripture. Back of the difference with respect to private or church interpretation of the Scripture lay the difference on the doctrine of Scripture itself.

This difference can be signalized briefly by calling to mind again the gulf that separates a theology that does, and a theology that does not, take the distinction between the ontological and the economical trinity seriously. The former thinks in terms of an inner correlativity of personality and action within the Godhead. It makes this inner self-complete activity its controlling concept. It therefore employs a consistently Christian principle of continuity; it teaches an existential system. It therefore also employs a consistently Christian principle of discontinuity; it teaches man to think analogically. In contrast, the latter breaks up the internal completeness of the ontological trinity. It does so by positing man’s ability to make ultimate decisions. Therewith the idea of an

²⁹ *Idem.*, p. 123.

existential system is set aside. The God of Romanism does not determine whatsoever comes to pass. Space-time eventuation is set over against the plan of God. If the two are then to be brought together it must be by way of correlativity. Rationality and factuality are then abstractions unless joined in a process of correlativity.

It is in this way that Romanist theology, in positing man's "freedom" over against God, virtually throws overboard the biblical principles of continuity and of discontinuity and substitutes for them the non-Christian principles of continuity and of discontinuity. True, Romanism does not assert man's total independence of God. Accordingly its position is not consistently non-Christian. It seeks to build its theology in terms of two mutually exclusive principles. In practice this results in compromise. To the extent that it employs the Christian principle Rome should hold to the internal completeness of the ontological trinity, to an existential system and therefore also to an internally complete and self-authenticating revelation of God to sinful man in Scripture. To the extent that it employs a non-Christian principle it denies all these. Using both at the same time Romanism is like a Janus. It is like a Janus in its use of the principle of continuity. Against modern irrationalism it openly avows allegiance to the idea of transcendent being, the mystery of the trinity and a revelation of God that is not correlative to man. But then when going in this direction Rome seems to go much farther than does traditional Protestantism. It virtually holds to a principle of continuity that precedes or supersedes the Creator-creature distinction. In the clearest possible way Arthur O. Lovejoy points this out. He first quotes the following words from Thomas Aquinas: " 'Everyone desires the perfection of that which for its own sake he wills and loves: for the things we love for their own sakes, we wish ... to be multiplied as much as possible. But God wills and loves His essence for its own sake. Now that essence is not augmentable or multipliable in itself but can be multiplied only in its likeness, which is shared by many. God therefore wills things to be multiplied, inasmuch as he wills and loves his own perfection.... Moreover, God in willing himself wills all the things which are in himself; but all things in a certain manner pre-exist in God by their types (*rationes*). God, therefore, in willing himself wills other things.... Again, the will follows the understanding. But God in primarily understanding himself, understands all other things; therefore, once more, in willing himself primarily, he wills all other things.' " ³⁰ Then in reply to the argument of a Roman apologist who denies that Thomas really meant to teach the necessary creation of all possibles he adds: "Not only might the passage mean this; it can, in consistency with assumptions which Aquinas elsewhere accepts, mean nothing else. All possibles 'fall under an infinite understanding,' in Spinoza's phrase, and, indeed, belong to its essence; and therefore nothing less than the sum of all genuine possibles could be the object of the divine will, i.e., of the creative act." ³¹

According to the Thomistic principle of continuity then there should be not merely a theistic existential system but a Parmenidean type of changeless reality. But to save Christianity from modern irrationalism with a principle of continuity that is essentially Greek rather than Christian is to kill that which one seeks to save. Continuity in history is saved by reducing the facts of history to foci in a timeless logic. Thus to save is also to

³⁰ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, Cambridge, 1942, p. 73.

³¹ *Idem.*, p. 74.

kill. In this respect, therefore, the Romanist argument against irrationalism is in the same position as is the idealist philosophy of such men as Bradley and Bosanquet.

But then Rome is well aware of the monistic character of its principle of continuity or coherence. It therefore blames it on others, on Plato, on Descartes, or especially on Calvin. It hopes to escape the complete identification of man with God that is inherent in its concept of univocism by means of its principle of equivocism. It refers the creation of the world to the will of God. It speaks of the mystery of the trinity. It stresses the genuineness of historical fact and of the freedom of man. It does all this against the “rationalism” and “necessitarianism” of pantheistic philosophers and Calvinistic theologians. But as in its principle of continuity Romanism leads directly into monism, so, in its principle of discontinuity or equivocism, Romanism leads directly into modern existentialism and irrationalism. In noting this fact Lovejoy quotes from Thomas the following words: “ ‘Since good, understood to be such, is the proper object of the will, the will may fasten on any object conceived by the intellect in which the notion of good is fulfilled. Hence, though the being of anything, as such, is good, and its not-being is evil; still, the very not-being of a thing may become an object to the will, though not of necessity, by reason of some good which is attached to it; for it is good for a thing to be, even at the cost of the non-existence of something else. The only good, then, which the will by its constitution cannot wish not to be is the good whose non-existence would destroy the notion of good altogether. Such a good is none other than God. The will, then, by its constitution can will the non-existence of anything except God. But in God there is will according to the fullness of the power of willing, for in Him all things without exception exist in a perfect manner. He therefore can will the non-existence of any being except himself, and consequently does not of necessity will other things than himself.’ ”

³² Then he adds, “But the argument by which the great Schoolman seeks to evade the dangerous consequences of his other, and equally definitely affirmed, premise is plainly at variance with itself as well as with some of the most fundamental principles of his system. It asserts that the existence of anything, in so far as it is possible, is intrinsically a good; that the divine will always chooses the good; and yet that its perfection permits (or requires) it to will the nonexistence of some possible, and therefore good, things.”³³

Summing up then it must be maintained that the Thomistic principle of continuity is largely rationalistic and its principle of discontinuity is largely irrationalistic. When it defends the idea of the Bible as giving God’s interpretation to man it is defending what any non-Christian idealist philosopher might for the most part agree with, namely, the need of unity if man is to appreciate diversity. On the other hand when it defends the idea of the concrete historical character of God’s revelation through the living church in its authoritative teaching function it is defending what any non-Christian pragmatic philosopher might for the most part agree with, namely, a non-rational principle of individuation. The result of defending both principles at the same time as correlative of one another is the idea of a growing system enveloping both God and man, a system in which God grows less than man and man grows more than God.

³² Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 74, 75.

³³ *Idem.*, p. 75.

There is, then, no fundamental difference between the Roman and the modern principle of interpretation. The opposition of Rome to the modern principle springs from the elements of Christianity that are retained.

Turning more directly now to the Romanist view of Scripture it is convenient to look at two points. The one pertains to the question of the attributes of Scripture and the other pertains to the place of tradition and that of the church.

Roman dogmaticians are wont to think of the attributes of Scripture as these are set forth by Protestants as clearly exhibiting the rationalist character of traditional Protestantism. The argument at this point is virtually identical in nature with that employed by modern Protestantism. Christianity, it is said, is not the religion of a book.³⁴ The point is that if we think of Scripture as being the book of Christianity we think of it as an abstraction, as some sort of abstract universal. As such it would be purely formal. We cannot apply the attributes of necessity, clarity, sufficiency and authority to an abstraction. We can use such adjectives only if we supplement the Scriptures with the idea of tradition and with that of the living church.

The assumption of this argument is that God cannot give a finished, clear, self-authenticating revelation about the course of history as a whole. The “unwritten traditions” are said to have been “received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ himself, or from the Apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost dictating ...”³⁵ A great deal of research has been expended on the question of the meaning of these traditions.³⁶ The points of greatest importance for our purpose are as follows:

There is a distinction made between declarative and constitutive tradition. As the terms indicate it is only in the latter that we meet the idea of revelational content given by God in addition to Scripture. Bartmann contends that it is not so much the former as the latter to which Protestants object.³⁷ This is scarcely correct. The idea of constitutive tradition militates against the Protestant doctrine of Scripture’s sufficiency. But Rome does far more than maintain that there have been preserved some teachings of Christ or the Apostles not recorded in Scripture. For these by themselves might, on the Romanist principle, become a dead letter. It is in the claim of declarative tradition that the activist character of Rome’s concept of revelation is most clearly expressed.

Bartmann himself speaks of an objective content and an activity as equally contained in the idea of tradition (“*tr. activa simul et obiectiva.*”)³⁸ It is this present declarative activity that is of greatest importance. The Protestant is glad to make use of the works of great Bible expositors. He believes in the guidance of the Spirit in the church’s work of interpretation of Scripture. Protestant churches formulate their creeds and these creeds are said to give the best brief systematic exposition of Scripture. But only Rome, in its

³⁴ Bernhard Bartmann: *Lehrbuch der Dogmatik*, Freiburg in Breisgau, 1923, Erster Band, p. 28.

³⁵ Cf. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Vol. 2, p. 80.

³⁶ Cf. August Deneffe, S. J., *Der Traditionsbegriff*, Munster, 1931; Joseph Ranft, *Der Ursprung des katholischen Traditionsprinzips*, Wurzburg, 1931.

³⁷ Op. Cit., p. 34.

³⁸ Op. Cit., p. 28.

concept of the active and finally authoritative teaching function of the church virtually identifies its interpretation of revelation with revelation itself.

Scripture and tradition objectively considered are said to be the *regula fidei remota*, the church is the *regula fidei proxima*³⁹ The church received the Bible from God. According to its God-given charisma it explains this Scripture authoritatively. Scripture has its authority *in se* but the church has authority *quoad nos*. In its teaching function the church is infallible?⁴⁰ The church does not give authority to Scripture. That she has in herself through inspiration. But the church represents Scripture and its authority with men. When Calvin argues that the church is built upon the authority of the Bible rather than the Bible upon the authority of the church this is right, says Bartmann, when we speak of *auctoritas in se*, but not when we speak of *auctoritas quoad nos*.⁴¹

It is now no longer difficult to see that the Roman view of Scripture is the fruitage and expression of its general principle of interpretation. The reasons Rome gives for rejecting the idea of the sufficiency and direct authority of Scripture are, to all intents and purposes, the same as those given by the modern principle. The idea of a self-authenticating Scripture implies the idea of an exhaustive interpretation by God, in finished form, of the whole course of history. But for Rome no less than for the modern Protestant theologian such an interpretation is an abstraction and needs in practice to be made intelligible to man by means of the teaching function of the living church. Rome stands no doubt near to the top of the incline and modern Protestantism lies near to the bottom of the incline. Yet it is the same decline on which both are found.

Theology Of Crisis

Turning now to the Theology of Crisis we seem at first to be in an atmosphere of genuine Protestantism. Barth's consistent polemic against the Roman idea of *analogia entis* is well known. Both Barth and Brunner claim to teach a theology of the Word.

This claim is directed against the Roman conception of tradition and the Church.⁴² And the acceptance of the Word is said to be due to the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, the Theology of the Word sets itself in opposition to modern Protestantism. Turning away from Schleiermacher and Ritschl it stresses the transcendence of God. God is said to be wholly other than man. Brunner would speak of Revelation and Reason rather than of Reason and Revelation. We are asked to accept a theology of Luther and Calvin.

Yet even a cursory reading of the Crisis theologians reveals that Luther and Calvin are seen through the glasses of a modern critical epistemology. Accordingly we are asked

³⁹ Bartmann, Op. Cit., p. 37.

⁴⁰ *Idem.*, p. 38.

⁴¹ *Idem.*, p. 37.

⁴² Emil Brunner: *Revelation and Reason*, tr. by Olive Wyon, Philadelphia, 1946, pp. 127, 146.

to drop all metaphysics once and for all. When speaking of God's transcendence we are not to think of some being existing in self-contained form prior to his relation to man. God is identical with His revelation.⁴³ As identical with His revelation God is Lord. And "Lordship is freedom."⁴⁴ God has freedom to become wholly divorced from himself and then to return into himself. In the incarnation God is free for us. Christ is God for man and man for God. He stands for the process of revelation, or atonement that brings man into unity of being with God.

Without going into further details it is at once apparent that it is Luther and Calvin rather than Schleiermacher and Ritschl that really constitute the foe of the Crisis theologians. The very heart of a true Protestant theology is the self-contained character of God. But it is this heart that has been cut out of theology by both Barth and Brunner. For the internal correlativity of the three persons of the trinity as taught by orthodox theology they have substituted the correlativity between God and man.

In every major respect, then, the dialectical principle of interpretation is identical with that of the modern principle discussed above. There is the same assumption of the autonomous man as the ultimate reference point for predication. Hence there is the same sort of principle of discontinuity and the same sort of principle of continuity. There is, consequently, in effect, the same denial of all the affirmations of orthodoxy. We say in effect there is the same denial. For verbally the reverse is often true.

In noting the bearing of the general dialectical principle upon the problem of Scripture we may consider Brunner's latest and fullest discussion of the subject in his work on *Revelation and Reason*. It is clear throughout this book that the ramshackle dwelling of orthodoxy must be completely demolished if the new and permanent edifice of dialecticism is to stand. A Scripture that claims to speak of an antecedent God, a metaphysical Christ, requires us to make a *sacrificium intellectus* and therefore cannot be accepted. "Faith is aware of the higher rationality and the higher actuality of the truth of revelation, and is ready to maintain this; but it is also aware of the impossibility of asserting its validity within the sphere which the autonomous human reason has delimited for itself.... The truth of revelation is not in opposition to any truth of reason, nor to any fact that has been discovered by the use of reason. Genuine truths of faith are never in conflict with logic or with the sciences; they conflict only with the rationalistic or positivistic metaphysics, that is, with a reason that arrogates to itself the right to define the whole range of truth from the standpoint of man."⁴⁵ And this means in practice for Brunner that the Bible cannot teach anything about the "phenomenal world." According to the critical principles adopted in earlier works and assumed in the present one the phenomenal world is the world of impersonal forces. And revelation is said to deal with the world of "personal encounter." But orthodox theology speaks of God as creating the "phenomenal world." By creating orthodoxy means causing it to come into existence. It does not realize that the impersonal mechanical conception of causality within the universe can tell us nothing about a personal God beyond the universe.⁴⁶ Further, orthodoxy speaks of certain all-determining events that took place at the beginning of the

⁴³ Barth: *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, 1, 1, p. 313.

⁴⁴ *Idem.*, 1, 1, p. 323.

⁴⁵ Emil Brunner: *Revelation and Reason*, p. 213.

⁴⁶ *Idem.*, p. 286.

history of the “phenomenal” world. It thinks of God’s creation of man in his image, of man’s breaking the covenant that God had made with him, as being determinative of his own present personal relation to God. The Apostle Paul apparently thought that through one man, representing all his descendents, sin came into the world and passed upon all men.

But all this, Brunner argues or assumes, is but imaginary impersonation in a world of impersonal forces. If man is really to know himself as standing in personal relation to God, he must be rid of this attempt on the part of orthodox theology to reduce personalistic relations to impersonal physical and biological categories.

Moreover, what holds for the past holds, of course, also for the present and the future. How could the uniqueness of Christ and his work be maintained if he were identified with a man called Jesus of Nazareth? If the incarnation really meant the eternal Son’s entrance into, and even partial identification with, some individual man in his physico-biological existence as orthodoxy maintains, this would again be the reduction of the personal to the impersonal. Then as to the future, orthodoxy speaks of a judgment day, a last day. But how could a personal God mediate his judgments by way of impersonal forces in an impersonal environment?

The entire idea of thinking of Scriptural revelation as confronting man with an existential system must be cast aside. The ideas of system and that of personal encounter are mutually exclusive of one another.

Brunner thinks of the idea of system as being, in the nature of the case, non-historical. The orthodox view cannot, he says, do justice to the uniqueness of the historical. Thus orthodoxy kills the very idea of prophetic prediction. “Thus where, as in the orthodox view, revelation is identified with supernaturally communicated doctrinal truth, the difference between that which was foretold and its fulfillment can well be ignored. It is timeless; that is, it is a doctrine perfectly communicated in one form of revelation and imperfectly in another. This point of view leaves out of account the decisive element in the Biblical revelation, namely, its historical character.”⁴⁷

In presenting a non-historical system orthodoxy does despite to the freedom of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸ It leads to “a breach of the Second Commandment; it is the deification of a creature, bibliolatry.”⁴⁹ It “lacks a sense of community” and “does not allow for the necessary mediation between the word of the Bible and the modern man through the *viva vox ecclesiae*.”⁵⁰ With its “fatal confusion of revelation with the communication of theological truths in doctrinal form” orthodoxy tends toward moralism and legalism.⁵¹ In its direct identification of the words of the Bible with the Word of God orthodoxy interposes a curtain between the believer and his Christ.⁵² It does not permit the believer to become genuinely contemporary with Christ.⁵³

⁴⁷ Emil Brunner: *Revelation and Reason*, p. 98.

⁴⁸ *Idem.*, p. 145.

⁴⁹ *Idem.*, p. 120.

⁵⁰ *Idem.*, p. 145.

⁵¹ *Idem.*, p. 154.

⁵² *Idem.*, p. 145.

⁵³ *Idem.*, p. 170.

Substituting the idea of revelation as personal encounter for the orthodox one of system I may as a believer become as contemporary with Christ as was Peter.⁵⁴ “No longer must I first of all ask the Apostle whether Jesus is really Lord. I know it as well as the Apostle himself, and indeed I know it exactly as the Apostle knew it; namely, from the Lord Himself, who reveals it to me.”⁵⁵ Being thus contemporaneous with Christ the believer now shares in the grace and glory of God.⁵⁶ Being face to face with Christ as his contemporary also means having the true content of revelation. “We must say quite clearly: Christ is the Truth. He is the content; He is the ‘point’ of all preaching of the Church; but He is also really its content.”⁵⁷ The Scriptures want to point to him. They want to be as a telescope through which the Christ is drawn near to us and we to him.

In addition to killing the true conception of revelation as personal encounter, orthodoxy, says Brunner, has done almost irreparable damage to the very idea of faith. “All Christian faith is based, according to this theory, upon faith in the trustworthiness of the Biblical writers. The whole edifice of faith is built upon them, upon their absolute and complete inspiration. What a fearful caricature of what the Bible itself means by faith. And on what a quaking ground has the Church of the Reformation, in its ‘orthodox’ perversion, placed both itself and its message! We owe a profound debt of gratitude to the historical criticism that has made it quite impossible to maintain this position. This mistaken faith in the Bible has turned everything topsy-turvy! It bases our faith-relation to Jesus Christ upon our faith in the Apostles. It is impossible to describe the amount of harm and confusion that has been caused by this fatal perversion of the foundations of faith, both in the Church as a whole and in the hearts of individuals.”⁵⁸

Over against this orthodox idea of a “closed Bible” Brunner advocates the idea of the “open Bible.” “It is not faith on an assumption based on an authoritarian pre-conception, but it is faith founded upon our relation to the content of that which is proclaimed in the Scriptures, or rather to the Person Himself, God manifest in the flesh, who speaks to me, personally, in the Scriptures.”⁵⁹

Enough has now been said to indicate that Brunner shares with the modern principle its non-rational principle of individuation. Revelational events must be separated from anything like propositional revelation. The correlativity between being and interpretation within the Godhead as maintained by orthodox theology is rejected. It is to be expected then that Brunner will also share the modern rationalistic conception of coherence. One who rejects the internal correlativity between revelational fact and revelational word by implication asserts the correlativity between non-rational factuality and abstract non-personal logic.

Looking at Brunner’s principle of coherence or continuity what strikes us most is its pure formality. This is strictly in accord with a critical epistemology. And it is the only thing that fits in with the completely non-rational principle of individuality. Brunner says that the form and the content of revelation are fitted to one another. Now the content of

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Idem.*, p. 171.

⁵⁶ *Idem.*, p. 117.

⁵⁷ *Idem.*, p. 151.

⁵⁸ *Idem.*, p. 168.

⁵⁹ *Idem.*, p. 169.

revelation, as Brunner views the matter, is anything but systematic. Orthodoxy sought to harmonize the various teachings of the separate parts of Scripture in the interest of unity. But true unity includes all varieties of teaching. A true unity is such as not to kill the true uniqueness of history. And by uniqueness Brunner means, as we have seen, the non-rational. "Where the main concern is with unity of doctrine, historical differences continually cause painful embarrassment; but where the main concern is the unity of the divine purpose in saving history, historical differences are not only not embarrassing; they are necessary."⁶⁰

Having been liberated from the orthodox doctrine of an infallible Bible by higher criticism, Brunner feels that he is also liberated from all concern for internal consistency of the Bible's testimony to Christ. "For at some points the variety of the Apostolic doctrine, regarded purely from the theological and intellectual point of view, is an irreconcilable contradiction."⁶¹

The real unity of revelation lies beyond and above the unifying efforts of logic. "It is precisely the most contradictory elements that belong to one another, because only thus can the truth of the Christ, which lies beyond all these doctrines, be plainly perceived."⁶²

All this, however, seems to be purely negative. But this very negativity clearly brings out the pure formality of the principle of continuity employed. And being thus purely formal it is, in practice, correlative to the idea of pure contingency. The result is a form of transcendentalism. Accordingly, there can be no knowledge of anything transcendent. All reference to that which is transcendent must be in the way of ideals rather than in concepts.

All religious concepts are merely regulative not constitutive. Thus the whole of the realm of personal encounter between man and God is in the realm of the practical rather than the theoretical.

Yet we are not to think that there is no positive intellectual content in this theology of dialecticism. Since it so vigorously negates the orthodox view of reality which is based upon the Creator-creature distinction it naturally advocates a position which leads to man's absorption in God. Brunner's principle of continuity presupposes the virtual identity of man with God. It also self-consciously aims at the complete envelopment of the human subject by the divine Subject. Revelation and knowledge in this world, says Brunner, is always imperfect.⁶³ But we aim to reach the perfect revelation, when we shall know as we are known. "Knowledge and revelation are then one; moreover, we are drawn into the inner being of God, and it is He alone who moves us inwardly to know Him... What is meant is that I am so drawn toward God that I have 'utterly passed over into God,' I am 'poured over into the will of God,' so that I have a share in His innermost creative movement; but, we must note, it is I who share in this movement."⁶⁴

Of course, when Brunner's principle of continuity thus leads him to complete absorption of man in God he quickly brings in the correlative principle of discontinuity by saying: "I do not disappear; my living movement, even though it is derived from God

⁶⁰ *Idem.*, p. 197.

⁶¹ *Idem.*, p. 290.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Idem.*, p. 185.

⁶⁴ *Idem.*, p. 192.

alone, is still my movement. I have nothing of my own to say, yet through God's perfect revelation I have a share in what He is saying, and what He says is Reality. Thus I am what God says, what God thinks, and what He wills. The contrast between subject and object will completely disappear, but the fact of personal encounter, and thus of the nonidentity of God and myself, will remain. For I am in the truth and the truth is in me, as truth which is given to me and received by me, and this truth will be my very being, and my life."⁶⁵

This then is Brunner's Christ. "This truth will be no other than the God-man, Jesus Christ."⁶⁶ No Bible, in the orthodox sense, could possibly speak of such a Christ. The kind of Bible that fits with the dialectical principle is virtually the same as that which, as we have noted, fits with the modern principle. It is a Bible that "does not add to my knowledge."⁶⁷ It is a Bible that bears witness to a God who "does not 'instruct' or 'lecture' His people."⁶⁸ It is a Bible that contains high prophetic and apostolic perspectives from which, if we wish, we too may view reality.

If we accept the high perspective of prophets and apostles we too are prophets and apostles; we know precisely in the way they know. And though according to all our principles of knowledge the world of force is controlled by impersonal law yet we believe that somehow our ideal, our Christ, our virtual identification with God will be realized. "The personal truth of revelation, faith, and love includes within itself the impersonal truth connected with 'things,' and the impersonal truth connected with abstractions, but not vice versa. God Himself thinks, but He is not a thought. God has ideas, but He is not an idea. God has a plan, and He creates an order, but He is not a world order. God's Logos includes all the logos of reason within Himself, but He Himself is Person, the eternal Son."⁶⁹

The impasse that faces Brunner when he seeks somehow to combine his wholly impersonal realm of the phenomenal and his wholly personal realm of the noumenal is the same as that of the modern principle. We believe it is obvious that it is only in orthodoxy that there is really personal confrontation of God and man. God meets man in nature. God meets man in the Old Testament. God, the triune God, meets man everywhere. In introducing the idea of an impersonal environment for man in nature, in the Old Testament and even in the propositional revelation of the New Testament while yet maintaining that only in the dialectical principle does religion mean personal confrontation of man with God, Brunner is compelled to make the person of man the final reference point. In the last analysis every theology or philosophy is personalistic. Everything "impersonal" must be brought into relationship with an ultimate personal point of reference. Orthodoxy takes the self-contained ontological trinity to be this point of reference. The only alternative to this is to make man himself the final point of reference. Thus dialectical theology is not a theology of the Word; it knows of no God who could speak a word. The God and the Christ of dialectical theology, like the God and the Christ of the modern principle is a projection of man himself. Feuerbach has every

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

right to smile at this transcendence theology which is but undercover anthropology. It appears then that the Theology of Crisis works on the basis of a critical epistemology similar to that of Schleiermacher and his spiritual descendents and that it therefore holds a view of revelation and Scripture that is also similar to theirs.

The total picture that results from our brief general analysis then is as follows: The view of Scripture as so ably presented and defended by Warfield is held by orthodox Protestants alone. And among these orthodox Protestants it is only the followers of Calvin who have a theology that fully fits in with this idea of Scripture. Only a God who controls whatsoever comes to pass can offer to man His interpretation of the course of history in the form of an existential system. An evangelical, that is a virtually Arminian, theology makes concessions to the principle that controls a "theology of experience." In admitting and even maintaining a measure of autonomy for man, such evangelicalism is bound to admit that the non-Christian principles of continuity and of discontinuity have a measure of truth in them. And to the precise extent that evangelicalism makes these concessions in its theology does it weaken its own defense of the infallible Bible. Such evangelicals have done and are doing excellent detail work in the defense of Scripture but they lack the theology that can give coherence to their effort. Therefore they also lack the general apologetic methodology that can make their detail-work stand out in its real challenge against the principle of experience.

The Roman Catholic position goes much further along the road of Evangelicalism in the direction of an experience theology. It breaks openly with the idea of the Bible as a self-contained revelation. Its conception of tradition and the church leads directly in the direction of the modern view.

As for the theology of Experience we have seen that it is today divided into two main camps. Of these two it is the Theology of Crisis that seems to stand nearer to the orthodox view than does the other. Yet this is only appearance. In the case of both camps it is the experience of man himself, individually or collectively, that is the final reference point of all meaning.

This theology of Experience, as has been shown, now faces the abyss of the utterly meaningless. The principle of discontinuity is frankly irrational. It is embraced in the interest of the uniqueness of historical fact and revelation. But this uniqueness is purchased at the price of utter darkness. Then as to its principle of continuity this is purely formal and, therefore, without ability to come into contact with reality. It is embraced in the interest of flexibility. And indeed it is flexible. It comports with and even requires the idea of the utterly irrational for its correlative.

And in all this the theology of Experience is of a piece with modern science and modern philosophy. The prodigal is at the swine-trough but finds that he cannot as a rational creature feed himself with the husks that non-rational creatures eat.

It is in this situation that the present volume goes out, beseeching the prodigal to return to the father's house. In the father's house are many mansions. In it alone will the "son" find refuge and food. The presupposition of all intelligible meaning for man in the intellectual, the moral and the aesthetic spheres is the existence of the God of the Bible who, if he speaks at all in grace cannot, without denying himself, but speak in a self-contained infallible fashion. Only in a return to the Bible as infallibly inspired in its autography is there hope for science, for philosophy and for theology. Without returning to this Bible science and philosophy may flourish with borrowed capital as the prodigal

flourished for a while with his father's substance. But the prodigal had no self-sustaining principle. No man has till he accepts the Scripture that Warfield presents.

More New Modernism At Old Princeton

New Theology Professor is Adherent of Barthian Position
The Presbyterian Guardian
1949
Volume 18, Pages 166ff

The developments at Princeton Theological Seminary since its reorganization in 1929 no doubt continue to interest all those who love the Christian faith. These developments have been not merely in the direction of Lutheranism or Arminianism. They have not been merely in the way of unsoundness at one or another point of doctrine. They have rather been destructive of the foundation of the Christian faith itself. It is, to be sure, not the old liberalism that has invaded the ivy-covered halls. It is the new liberalism, the liberalism connected with the names of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, that has found an entrance there.

Fresh evidence of this appears in the recent appointment of the Rev. George S. Hendry, B.D., of Bridge of Allan, Stirlingshire, to the Charles Hodge Chair of Systematic Theology.

Charles Hodge was one of the greatest systematic theologians of modern times. The man about to occupy the chair named after him does not believe in systematic theology at all. He is not merely indifferent to systematic theology, but rejects it with vigour. He hails with enthusiasm the movement of thought associated with the names of Barth and Brunner, and says: "The principle feature of this new direction of thought by which it is most definitely distinguished from all philosophy and metaphysical speculation is that it cannot and does not seek to become a completed system."¹

Hendry does not merely disapprove of philosophical systems. Theological system is for him no better than philosophical system. Hendry does not merely mean that non-Christian systems are evil, Christian systems of theology are for him a contradiction in terms: Christianity and the idea of system, he asserts, are mutually exclusive. Hendry does not merely mean that systems which seek to be comprehensive are bad; for him every system must, in the nature of the case, seek to be comprehensive, and therefore bad.

The reason for rejecting system, argues Hendry, is that it is destructive of the idea of revelation. Revelation itself presents no system. "It is impossible to seek a unified, systematic conception of reality in view of the revelation of God."² Revelation does not even furnish the building blocks with which a system of theology might be built. "In Christian faith revelation bears its strict and essential meaning, a drawing back of the veil

¹ *God the Creator*, Nashville, 1938, p. 144.

² *Idem.*, p. 46.

to disclose something which could not otherwise be known to all. It is not a category or mode of viewing reality, but an event, single, unique, once for all.”³

What then will Professor Hendry teach? Will he tell his students that the Bible is merely the record of human experience? Not at all. He will assure them that the liberal view of the Bible, taken by itself, is quite wrong. He will even tell them that there is an element of truth in “dogmatic orthodoxy,” albeit in a perverted form.⁴ “Thus it is proper to say that the Bible is the Word of God.”⁵ But the “perverted form” of the “elements of truth” in a theology such as that of Hodge must be rejected. We must have no doctrines of verbal or plenary inspiration of Scripture. We must have no finished canon of Scripture. We must have no doctrine of a direct revelation of God in Scripture. “For the unity of Scripture is not that of logical consistency, inherent in the text and capable of being presented in the form of a Scriptural systematic. It is rather a unity of direction or perspective, because the unifying centre of Scripture is outside of Scripture itself; it stands at the ‘vanishing point of the Biblical perspectives.’”⁶ “The Scripture belongs to the realm of flesh and blood, and flesh and blood cannot reveal that Jesus is the Christ: ‘no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost’ (1 Cor 12.3).”⁷ The reality of the revelation of God is not contained in the Bible. “It is present in the Bible only as the centre round which the testimony of the Bible turns; it stands at the vanishing point of the Biblical perspectives.”⁸

Of two things we may be quite sure. The new incumbent of the chair of systematic theology in Princeton will in effect utterly reject the system of theology as taught by Hodge. He will also reject the view of Scripture as the source of that system of theology.

Of course this does not preclude the possibility of his claiming a kinship with his great predecessor. Dialectical theologians are wont to speak of themselves as working in the Reformed tradition. Hendry himself speaks as though his teaching and that of Calvin about the Holy Spirit and His internal testimony were identical in content.⁹ Nothing could be further from the truth. When Calvin speaks of the internal testimony of the Spirit to the truth of God’s Word, he does not lead us to the “vanishing point of the Biblical perspectives.” On the contrary according to Calvin the Spirit testifies to a direct and finished revelation of God that is contained in Scripture. The difference is basic. The theology of Calvin and of Hodge is truly a “theology of the Word.” The theology of Hendry, as well as of Barth and Brunner, is that of Mysticism. Hodge led his students into the fullness of the revelation of God and Christ as found in nature and Scripture. Hendry will lead his students to the vanishing point of all intelligent speech, peering into “Chaos and old Night.”

³ *Idem.*, p. 24f.

⁴ *Idem.*, p. 20.

⁵ “The Rediscovery of the Bible,” in *Reformation Old and New*, ed. by F. W. Camfield, London, 1947, p. 150.

⁶ “The Exposition of Holy Scripture” in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 43.

⁷ *Idem.*, p. 43.

⁸ *The Rediscovery of the Bible*, p. 154.

⁹ *Idem.*, p. 147.

Presuppositionalism

A Reply by Professor Cornelius Van Til, Ph.D.

The Bible Today

1949

Part One: Volume 42, Number 7. Pages 218–228

Part Two: Volume 42, Number 9. Pages 278–290

Though Professor Van Til's reply is lengthy, we hope to be able to include it all, word for word just as he has written it, in this and the next two issues. My comments are given in footnotes followed by my initial, "B." Dr. Van Til used no footnotes in this article. Ed.

Dear Dr. Buswell:

Allow me to thank you first for the courtesy extended in permitting me to make some remarks on your recent review of my booklet on *Common Grace*.¹ I shall try, as simply as I can, to state something of my theological beliefs and my method of defending them. In this way I can perhaps best reply to your charges that I do not hesitate to make declarations flatly contradictory to the Reformed Standards and the Bible.²

The Bible Is Infallible

My primary interest is now, as it always has been, to teach what the Bible contains as the infallible rule of faith and practice in the way of truths about God and his relation to man and the world. I believe in the infallible book, in the last analysis, because "of the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the word in my heart."³ Your readers may obtain a little pamphlet *Why I Believe in God* in which I have set forth my views in popular form, from Rev. Lewis Grotenhuis, Rt. 2, Phillipsburg, New Jersey.

¹ See *The Bible Today*, November, 1948.

² The reader will remember that the point at issue is not Professor Van Til's theology in general, but his denial that there is common ground of knowledge on which the believer may deal with the unbeliever. In connection with this denial he advances the doctrine of paradoxes, which he says, he accepts and embraces with great joy. I have not denied that with one side of his paradoxes he has always affirmed the Biblical truths of the Reformed faith, but it is the other side of the paradoxes to which exception has been taken. B.

³ In the words in quotation marks Professor Van Til has fallen into an error, by changing the plural to the singular. If I have only the work of the Spirit "in my heart" as an individual, I am led into subjectivism and mysticism. The words in the original (Westminster Confession, Chapter 1, paragraph 5) are "in our hearts." This gives the most important of the objective criteria, the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the true church. B.

The God Of The Bible Differs From All Other Gods

In speaking of the God of the Bible, it is, I believe, of the utmost importance that we speak of him first as he is in himself prior to his relation to the created world and man. Reformed theologians therefore distinguish between the ontological and the economical trinity, the former referring to the three persons of the Godhead in their internal relations to one another, the latter referring to the works of this triune God with respect to the created universe. With respect to the ontological trinity I try to follow Calvin in stressing that there is no subordination of essence as between the three persons. As Warfield points out when speaking of Calvin's doctrine of the trinity " ... the Father, the Son, the Spirit is each this one God, the entire divine essence being in each."⁴ In the syllabi to which you refer and with which you are familiar, I have spoken of the equal ultimacy of the one and the many or of unity and the diversity in the Godhead. I use this philosophical language in order the better to be able to contrast the Biblical idea of the trinity with philosophical theories that are based upon human experience as ultimate. When philosophers speak of the one and many problems they are simply seeking for unity in the diversity of human experience. In order to bring out that it is Christianity alone that has that for which men are looking but cannot find I use the terminology of philosophy, always making plain that my meaning is exclusively derived from the Bible as the word of God. "In the Bible alone do we hear of such a God. Such a God, to be known at all, cannot be known otherwise than by virtue of His own voluntary revelation. He must therefore be known for what He is, and known to the extent that He is known, by authority alone."⁵

Take now these two points together (a) that I have consistently stressed the necessity of asking what God is in himself prior to his relation to the created universe and (b) that I have consistently opposed all subordinationism within the self-contained trinity and it will appear why I have also consistently opposed correlativism between God and the universe and therefore correlativism between God and man. By correlativism I understand a mutually interdependent⁶ relationship like that of husband and wife or the convex and the concave side of a disk. I know of no more pointed way of opposing all forms of identity philosophy and all forms of dialectical philosophy and theology. I have also spoken of this self-contained triune as "our concrete universal." Judging merely by the sound of this term⁷ you charge me with holding Hegelianism. I specify clearly that

⁴ *Calvin and Calvinism*, p. 232.

⁵ *Common Grace*, p. 8.

⁶ But, the words "correlative" and "interdependent" are not synonyms. If God is our creator and we are His creatures, made in his image, therefore there is correlativism between God and man. To deny it is to deny creation. Furthermore, the decrees of God are eternal, His purpose to create is eternal, therefore God has always been correlative to the futurition of His creation. To deny that is to deny the doctrine of the eternal decree. B.

⁷ Not by the "sound" of the term, but by the universally recognized meaning of the words. This is a Hegelian term and it is used by our brother in such a way as to suggest the Hegelian meaning of the term. B.

my God is precisely that which the Hegelian says God is not and yet you insist that I am a Hegelian.

I have further said that in God, as He exists in Himself, apart from relation to the world, thought and being are coterminous. Are they not? Is God's consciousness not exhaustively aware of His being?⁸ Would you believe with Brightman that there is a "given" element in God? God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

God's Decree Controls All Things

I further hold that the self-sufficient triune God "from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass—" This is what I mean when I say that God is the ultimate cause back of all things. In this terminology I am merely reproducing Calvin's argument against Pighius in *The Eternal Predestination of God*⁹ ¹⁰ Calvin speaks of remote and proximate causes. I simply use the word ultimate instead of remote. I do not think there is any essential difference between Calvin's usage of the word remote and my usage of the word ultimate?

In various works Calvin has maintained the all-inclusiveness of the decree of God. This, Pighius had argued, was in effect to make God the author of sin. Calvin denies vigorously that he makes God the author of sin. "I have with equal constancy, asserted that the eternal death to which man rendered himself subject so proceeded from his own fault that God cannot, in any way, be considered the author of it."¹¹ Here Calvin makes

⁸ God's consciousness is completely aware of His being, but His being is not "coterminous," or identical in boundary, with His consciousness. God's eternal decree is in his consciousness, and includes complete and perfect consciousness of all that would ever come to pass. It included me, before the foundation of the world. If this is coterminous with His being we have nothing but extreme pantheism. B.

⁹ See Henry Cole, *Calvin's Calvinism*.

¹⁰ Professor Van Til is very fond of quoting "Henry Cole's '*Calvin's Calvinism*.'" This work is not to found in the New York Public Library or in the Union Library, both of which are among the most complete theological libraries in the world. It is listed in the index of the British Museum, Henry Cole being the translator, not the author. It was published in two parts in 1856 and 1857 by Wertheim and Macintosh in London. Part 1 is said to be "A treatise on the eternal predestination of God ... being a reply to the 'slandrous reports' ... of a certain worthless calumniator, etc." I have asked our librarian to see if we can secure a copy on inter-library loan from the Library of Congress. In the meantime I should suggest that if Professor Van Til wishes to establish his own Calvinism and to question the Calvinism of others, he should be able to prove his point by references to the *Institutes* and the commentaries which are available to us all. I must decline to comment on Professor Van Til's interpretation of Calvin's doctrine of cause in his argument with Pighius, until I can read the work for myself. I should like to point out that in *Calvin on Secret Providence* translated by James Lillie in 1840 and published by Robert Carter, N.Y.C., I find Calvin stating the case for secret providence very differently from the way in which Professor Van Til says he stated it in the Pighius argument. B.

¹¹ *Calvin's Calvinism*, p. 127.

the distinction between remote and proximate causes. As the proximate cause of sin man is guilty before God. “But now, removing as I do from God all the proximate cause of the act in the Fall of man, I thereby remove from Him also the blame of the act leaving man alone under the sin and the guilt.”¹² But Pighius argues that if man is the responsible cause of sin, then God’s eternal reprobation must logically be denied. He identifies Calvin’s conception of proximate cause with the cause, that is the only cause. To this Calvin replies again by means of his distinction between remote and proximate causes. There could be no responsible proximate cause unless there were also an all-comprehensive remote cause. He clinches his point by indicating that the doctrine of free grace cannot be maintained except upon the presupposition of a remote or ultimate cause back of the proximate cause. “If the wickedness of man be still urged as the cause of the difference between the elect and the non-elect, this wickedness might indeed be made to appear more powerful than grace of God which he shows toward the elect, if that solemn truth did not stand in the way of such an argument: ‘I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.’ ”¹³ Dealing with the blindness of sinners referred to Acts 28:25–26, Calvin says: “Some persons will here erroneously and ignorantly conclude that the cause and beginning of this obduracy in the Jews was their malicious wickedness. Just as if there were no deeper and more occult cause of the wickedness itself, namely, the original corruption of nature! And as they did not remain sunk in this corruption because, being reprobated by the secret counsel of God before they were born, they were left undelivered!”¹⁴ Speaking still further of the cause of the sinner’s blindness and of the Evangelist John’s exposition of the famous Isaiah passage on this subject Calvin says: “Now, most certainly John does not here give us to understand that the Jews were prevented from believing by their sinfulness. For though this be quite true in one sense, yet the cause of their not believing must be traced to a far higher source. The secret and eternal purpose and counseled of God must be viewed as the original cause of their blindness and unbelief.”¹⁵ Again he adds: “The unbelief of the world, therefore, ought not to astonish us, if even the wisest and most acute of men fail to believe. Hence, unless we should elude the plain and confessed meaning of the Evangelist, that few receive the Gospel, we must fully conclude that the cause is the will of God; and that the outward sound of that Gospel strikes the ear in vain until God is pleased to touch them by the heart within.”¹⁶

When therefore you object to my saying that “God is the ultimate cause back whatsoever comes to pass” you will also need to reject Calvin’s distinction between proximate and remote causes. I was simply reproducing Calvin’s argument against Pighius. With Pighius you will have to say that man’s deeds of wickedness are the cause, the only or final cause of his eternal state. And therewith you have, as Calvin points out, virtually denied the doctrine of the sovereign grace of God in the case of the elect. I do not think that you can show how Ephesians 1:11 which says that God “worketh all things

¹² *Idem.*, p. 128.

Idem., p. 80.

¹⁴ *Idem.*, p. 81.

¹⁵ *Idem.*, p. 81.

¹⁶ *Idem.*, p. 82.

after the counsel of his own will” is a “very different statement” from saying that God is the ultimate or remote cause back of all things, without falling into Arminianism.

I was much surprised when you objected to my simple reproduction of Calvin’s argument. I could not imagine that as a Calvinist you would hold with Pighius against Calvin. So I looked up your own discussion of freedom in “*Sin and Atonement.*” In your argument against determinism you assert: “We hold that there is a genuine and absolute freedom within certain areas of human life, a freedom for which God himself in his infinite foreknowledge holds man absolutely responsible.”¹⁷ Then, speaking of your own choice of becoming a violinist or a missionary you add: “There was a period of time when the discussion though foreknown of God was still indeterminate—”¹⁸ In opposing determinism you do not carefully distinguish between fatalism and Calvinism. You do not mention foreordination but only foreknowledge. You speak of man having “absolute freedom” in certain areas, and of the result as being “indeterminate” without saying that it was indeterminate only in the sense that you as a man did not know the outcome. Add all this to your peremptory rejection of my reproduction¹⁹ of Calvin’s argument and the question cannot be repressed to what extent you would hold to Calvin’s position rather than to that of Pighius.

Do you think Charles Hodge’s “great chapter distinguishing between necessity and certainty, showing that complete certainty is not dependent upon the idea of necessity” is out of agreement with Calvin’s doctrine of God as the remote cause of all things? If you can show it to be such why should you object to my statement that God’s decree is the ultimate though not the immediate cause of all things? Hodge says: “It may, however, be remarked that there is no difficulty attending the doctrine of foreordination which does not attach to that of foreknowledge. The latter supposes the certainty of free acts, and the former secures their certainty.”²⁰ Or again, “Being the cause of all things God knows everything by knowing Himself; all things possible, by the knowledge of his power, and all things actual by the knowledge of his own purposes.”²¹ Again, “The futurity of events, according to the Scriptures, depends on the foreordination of God who foreordains whatever comes to pass.”²²

¹⁷ p. 49.

¹⁸ *Idem.*, p. 50.

¹⁹ “Determinism” and “indeterminism” are well known scientific terms in the field of philosophical psychology. Neither term is identical with Calvinism or with fatalism. Determinism in psychology is practically identical with “mechanism” as found in materialistic philosophy. To deny determinism is not any sense to deny that God “worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.” Taking the plain and simple dictionary definition of the words, nothing which is quoted here from my writings can be construed as contrary to the great principles of Calvinism. I cannot be governed by Professor Van Til’s “reproduction” of Calvin’s argument until I see the obscure work to which he confines his references on this point. Calvin’s voluminous writings are abundantly available under available titles. B.

²⁰ *Systematic Theology 2*, p. 301.

²¹ *Idem.*, 1 p. 398.

²² *Idem.*, 1 p. 400.

Your readers must certainly have been amazed at hearing that I unequivocally teach that God is the author of sin. You assert: “To say that Calvin knew that his opponent could ‘rightly insist that God is the cause of sin,’ is a direct contradiction of the statement, based upon many scores of Scripture passages that ‘neither is God the author of sin.’ ”²³ What did I actually say? “If God is the ultimate cause back of whatsoever comes to pass, Pighius can, on his basis, rightly insist that God is the author of sin.”²⁴ First you misquote me. You quote me as saying: “on this basis” while I say “on his basis.”²⁵ Then in your reproduction of my argument you omit this allimportant phrase ‘on his basis.’ Omitting that phrase makes me say the exact opposite of what I actually said. Pighius denies the validity of the distinction between remote and proximate causes. Accordingly he holds that a proximate cause in Calvin’s sense of the term is no real cause and that the only real cause of sin on Calvin’s basis must be God. Is he logically inconsistent with his own assumption when he reasoned thus? He is not. Calvin does not say that he is. He points to no flaw in Pighius’s reasoning. Instead he points to the necessity of introducing the distinction between remote and proximate causes. Then and then only, Calvin argues, is it really possible to establish the exclusive responsibility of man for sin. For then, and then only, is the freedom of man really established and are secondary causes given a true foundation.

In this connection you further assert: “It is of course characteristic of the school of thought to which Dr. Van Til belongs to deny the possibility of any distinction between God’s permissive decrees and his compelling decrees.”²⁶ Was there any necessity for thus lumping me with a “school of thought” and asserting or suggesting that as a member of such a school I must hold so and so when as a matter of fact I do speak of the permission of God with respect to sin?²⁷ But I am anxious that what God permits be not set in contrast over against that which God foreordains. In that case the will of man would again be thought of as the final or ultimate cause of its own acts and therewith God’s grace be denied.²⁸ Are your “permissive decrees” in no sense “compelling decrees?” Would you deny the ultimate efficiency of God in order to make room for the entrance of sin? If you are not to make your distinction between permissive and

²³ p. 76.

²⁴ *Common Grace* p. 66.

²⁵ Professor Van Til is correct. There was a typographical error; “this” was erroneously given instead of “his.” But my argument was in no sense based upon this word, but rather upon the following sentence of Professor Van Til’s, “From the point of view of a non-Christian logic the Reformed Faith can be bowled over by means of a single syllogism.” That is, the “basis” of Pighius is specified by Van Til as secular logic, on which basis Pighius, says Professor Van Til, could “rightly insist that God is the author of sin.” Rejecting, as most of us do, Professor Van Til’s doctrine of “double truth,” we would say that if Pighius could rightly argue on the basis of secular logic to any given conclusion, then that conclusion must be held to be true unless, contrary to scripture, it is possible for God to lie. B.

²⁶ p. 46.

²⁷ See the Syllabus on *Introduction to Theology*, Vol. 2, p. 217.

²⁸ The reader may find Calvin’s evaluation of the idea of God’s permission of sin in *Calvin’s Calvinism* p. 244.

compelling decrees to fall into a virtual argument for an Arminian conception of the freedom of the will how can you avoid saying with Calvin that “whatsoever men do, they do according to the eternal will and secret purpose of God?”²⁹

The same school of thought to which I am supposed to belong is accustomed, you say, “to stop in the ninth chapter of Romans with the great and profound truth of the twentieth verse, ‘O man, who art thou that repliest against God’ ” without going on to the twenty-second verse in which Paul “so simply explains” why God brought Pharaoh into existence.³⁰ Well I am not of the habit of stopping with the twentieth verse any more than was Calvin. But neither do I think, that the twentieth verse gives a merely arbitrary statement about God while the twenty-second verse gives a more profound reason for God’s dealings with Pharaoh. In complete contrast with Calvin’s approach³¹ you assert, while speaking of the passages of Romans 9:20–21 and 9:22–23: “I do wish to emphasize very forcefully that the Apostle Paul does not stop with the first merely arbitrary answer. He goes forward to suggest a further and a much more profound analysis of God’s plan of redemption.”³² I do not think the will of God is an arbitrary reason. I believe with Calvin that God’s will “is and must be, the highest rule of all equity.”³³ I do not think that the explanation given in the twenty-second verse is offered as more profound or more ultimate than the point made in verse twenty. “Taking, then, an honest and sober review of the whole of this high and Divine matter,” says Calvin, “the plain and indubitable conclusion will be that the will of God is the one principal and all-high cause of all things in heaven and earth.”³⁴ Or again “But as the will of God is the surest rule of all righteousness, that will ought ever to be to us the principal reason, yea—if I may so speak—the reason of all reasons!”¹ But Calvin desires that his distinction between proximate and remote causes be always observed.² It is because his adversaries have failed to make this distinction which he considers so essential that they have done him grave injustice. “Our adversaries load us with illiberal and disgraceful calumny, when they cast it in our teeth that we make God the author of sin, by maintaining that His will is the cause of all things that are done.”³ Making the distinction between proximate and remote causes enables Calvin to do full justice to the longsuffering of God without giving up the decree of God as basic to whatsoever comes to pass.

²⁹ *Idem.*, p. 205.

³⁰ p. 46.

³¹ See *Calvin’s Calvinism* p. 246.

³² *What is God*, p. 53.

³³ *Op. Cit.*; p. 190.

³⁴ *Idem.* p. 246.

¹ *Idem.*, p. 247.

² The great Calvinist tradition in Holland and in America with which Professor Van Til has parted company, and the Westminster Confession (Chapter 3, Paragraph 1), uniformly agree that “neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.” If Calvin taught, contrary to this plain statement, what Professor Van Til says he taught in arguing against Pighius, surely that teaching could be found in some of Calvin’s works available to us in the great libraries of New York. B.

³ *Idem.*, p. 251.

Creation Out Of Nothing

On the question of creation I believe that it pleased God “for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom and goodness, in the beginning, to create, make of nothing, the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days and all very good.” This doctrine of creation fits in with the doctrine of ontological trinity. If God is fully self-contained then there was no sort of half existence and no sort of non-being that had any power against him. There was therefore no impersonal laws of logic that tell God what he can do and there is no sort of stuff that has as much even as refractory power over against God when he decided to create the world.

I have not merely held but have also frequently defended this doctrine. I have defended it not merely against those who openly reject it or assert it to be impossible on the basis of logic as was the case with Parmenides. I have defended it against those who have assumed the existence of some sort of limiting power next to God. I have in particular defended it against all forms of modern dialecticism whether Hegelian or Barthian.

For all that you charge me with holding to something like a Platonic realism. You first assert that I mean by “autonomous man” “man as an actually existing substantive entity.”⁴ As a matter of fact I have frequently explained that by the term “autonomous man” I mean the idea of a man who virtually denies his createdness. As created in paradise man was a distinct ontological entity over against God. As made perfect he recognized that God his creator was also his lawgiver. Of his own accord, according to the law of his own being as God had made him, he was therefore a covenant keeper. But with the entrance of sin man was no longer willing to obey the law of his maker. He becomes a covenant breaker. He sought to be a law unto himself, that is, he sought to be autonomous. Speaking of my meaning of the word autonomous you say: “I do not think he means eternal or uncreated.” But why can I not mean “uncreated” when I assert that I do? I do not say that all men openly assert that they are non-created. What I have asserted time and again is that men virtually assume or presuppose that they are non-created. If they do not assume or presuppose that they are created then what else are they doing than assuming or presupposing that they are not created and therefore are not responsible to their creator? Is this too broad and sweeping a statement to make about all sinners? The daily newspaper is unintelligible on any other basis. There are those who worship and serve the creature and there are those who worship and serve the Creator. This is the simple differentiation with which I am concerned. I try to call men back to the recognition of the fact that they are creatures of God by challenging their false assumptions of their non-createdness, their autonomy or ultimacy.

A word may here be said about the relation of the ontological trinity to temporal creation. You assert the following: “The doctrine of paradox comes its extreme expression in the words ...’we have, in our doctrines of the ontological trinity and temporal creation cut ourselves loose once and for all from correlativism between God and man.’”¹ Then you criticize my rejection of correlativism as though in rejecting it I were rejecting the idea man’s relatedness to and dependence upon God. Was there any

⁴ p. 56.

¹ p. 47.

need for giving my words such a construction? Even the sentence following upon the one you quote shows that I am arguing for the God of the Bible who is back of history, who has his plan for history against those who speak of a comprehensive reality which includes God and man in one whole. Does it follow that I reject the teaching which connects God necessarily with the world or makes him a principle within the world?

At this point I may say a brief word on your statement, “Van Til holds that holiness and truth are created by the will of God.”² But I have neither said nor implied any such thing anywhere. You refer to pp. 6, 7, 65, of *Common Grace*. On p. 6, I am arguing against Platonic realism. Does that make me a nominalist? If I reject one error must I hold to an opposite error? I find nothing on p. 7 that has any bearing on the subject unless in your mind it is the sentence, “Romanism and Arminianism have virtually allowed that God’s counsel need not always and everywhere be taken as our principle of individuation.” Perhaps you object to this because you hold that man has been created “to be the ultimate cause of the acts for which he is morally responsible.”³ Even so is there anything in what I say here or anywhere else that justifies you in saying that I hold that God’s will acts independently of his character? On p. 65 I quote Calvin to the effect that the will of God is “the highest rule of righteousness.” Do you disagree with Calvin? Do you want to bypass the will of God in order thus to reach God’s character?⁴ Is Calvin also a nominalist?

Sin And Its Implications

As far as I know my mind I hold sin to be that which the Confession and catechism say it is. This involves the historicity of the Genesis account.

I have defended that time and again, particularly against Barth, Brunner and Niebuhr. It involves, I believe, also the covenant theology. God dealt with every man that was to come into the world through Adam the first man as their representative. Even when they do not yet exist as historical individuals men are thought of by God and treated by God through Adam the first historically existent man. So in the passage you quote I speak of all men as existing in Adam their common representative. You yourself say, “I sinned in Adam specifically and precisely because he, an individual, represented me, —stood as the federal and representative head of all mankind in this original act of sin.”⁵ Do I say anything else? You say, “I sinned in Adam.” Did you then not in some sense exist in Adam? When I first say of sinners that in paradise “they do not yet exist” obviously I mean as “historical individuals.” When then I add in the next sentences, “yet they do exist. They exist in Adam as their common representative,” you speak of this as Platonic realism. I could say the same thing of your position not merely for as good a reason but for the same reason. You yourself quote Genesis 2:15–17 and then add: “—In this

² p. 53.

³ *What is God*, p. 38.

⁴ The distinction between the character of God and the will of God is by no means original with me. It is an important matter. I do hope that some of the readers will look back and review what I said on that point. There are extra copies available.

⁵ p. 57.

passage we see humanity in the image of God in ‘knowledge, righteousness, and holiness,’ given the opportunity of exercising free will.”⁶ Is this also Platonic realism?

You even go so far as to say: “The reader will remember that, for Van Til, Adam is not an individual but ‘mankind.’”⁷ You have not the least bit of justification⁸ for making such a charge. You admit that I believe in the infallibility of the Bible. How could I believe in that unless I believed the historicity of the Genesis story? You claim to be familiar with the contents of my class syllabi as well as with what I have published. The article on “Nature and Scripture” in *The Infallible Word* is utterly unintelligible without the assumption of the historicity of the story of Adam as an individual in paradise. How could I speak of Adam as representing man in paradise unless I thought of Adam as the first individual man that lived? I have defended the historicity of the Genesis account on more than one occasion, against Barth, against Hegel and against Niebuhr. Even in the little pamphlet on *Why I believe in God* I explained that in my infancy a “formula was read over me at my baptism which solemnly asserted that I had been conceived and born in sin, the idea being that my parents, like all men, had inherited sin from Adam, the first man and the representative of the human race,” adding a little further on that though later made acquainted with the arguments for evolution and higher criticism I had not in the least given up the faith of my childhood. As to *Common Grace* its whole argument is surcharged with the historicity of the story of the Bible.

Even in the immediate context of the words you quote I speak of the relation of the earlier and the later in history. “To set the problem before us as clearly as possible, we do well to think of it in connection with Adam in paradise. Would it be possible to maintain that only by the later revelation of God’s final purpose could anything be known of His attitude toward man? Then Adam would at the beginning have known nothing of God’s attitude toward him. No revelation of God’s final purpose had yet been made. The whole future, as far as Adam’s knowledge was concerned, was conditioned by his obedience or disobedience.”¹ From this point on he began speaking about man. “Man was created good.” Even so I continue to mention Adam as an historical individual, and speak of his “representative act of obedience or disobedience.” How could I speak of Adam as

⁶ *Sin and Atonement*, p. 23.

⁷ p. 59.

⁸

My “bit of justification” was in the precise words which Professor Van Til used on page 74 of his book, *Common Grace*, lines 5 to 3 up, “and it was mankind, not some individual ... that sinned against God.” If Professor Van Til did not intend to say that it was not an individual who sinned when Adam sinned, then he could easily retract his statement. As it is he merely emphasizes the other side of his paradox, which I have not denied.

The question, how he could believe the infallibility of the Bible, and still believe that Adam was, as he says, “not an individual,” is a question for him to answer. All I know is that he says he loves paradoxes and embraces them with joy, and he abundantly proves it.

The Calvinistic doctrine of original sin holds that an individual, Adam, represented all mankind. The notion that it was, as Professor Van Til says, “not some individual,” is generally as anti-Calvinistic realism of the Platonic variety. B.

¹ p. 71.

engaged in paradise in a representative act if were identifying him with mankind? Then on page 72 I go on to speak of the elect and the non-elect and of what they have in common. The argument is that in paradise, at the beginning of history Adam acted for all of them representatively. They have had things done with respect to them by their common representative. Adam in paradise at the beginning of history, when they did not themselves exist as historical individuals. On page 73 the argument goes on to the effect that the original situation was an historically unfinished situation. "Whether Adam (the Adam who existed historically in paradise) was to obey or disobey, the situation would be changed." Is it wrong after all this to say: "We need not hesitate to affirm, then, that in the beginning God loved mankind in general. That was before mankind had sinned against God. A little later God hated mankind in general. That was after mankind had sinned against God."² Is it wrong to say, "When man first sinned he did not know God as fully as we know Him now, but he did know God for what He is, as far as he knew Him at all. And it was mankind, not some individual elect or reprobate person that sinned against God?" Have not all men who appeared or will appear as historical individuals after Adam sinned in Adam their common representative in paradise?

Christ And His Work

My reason for stressing this matter is that together with all orthodox believers I have frequently argued, as you know, that the historicity of Christianity cannot be maintained unless the historicity of the Old Testament and in particular the historicity of the Genesis account be also maintained. But then, having been "deceptively mired in Hegelian idealistic pantheism" and holding to God as the "concrete universal" I should, to be consistent, you argue, also deny the uniqueness of Christ. "What becomes of the incarnation?"³ But I hold to temporal creation and to the incarnation in the orthodox sense of the term not because of an inconsistency but it is taught in Scripture. At the same time the doctrines of the self-sufficient God, of temporal creation and of the incarnation are not inconsistent with one another. They are all part of the one system of doctrine of Holy Writ.

For Whom Did Christ Die?

Charles Hodge with whose statement of the Reformed faith you say you agree "with great delight in almost every point" begins his chapter under the above title by indicating what is not involved in the question. He says (a) that it does not in the first place, concern "the nature of Christ's work," (b) that it does not concern "the value of Christ's satisfaction. That Augustinians admit to be infinite," (c) that it "does not concern the suitability of the atonement. What was suitable for one was suitable for all," (d) that it "does not concern the actual application of the redemption purchased by Christ. The parties to this controversy are agreed that some only, and not all of mankind are to be

² p. 74.

³ p. 49.

actually saved.”⁴ He concludes his introductory section by saying, “The simple question is, had the death of Christ a reference to the elect which it had not for other men? Did He come into the world to secure the salvation of those given to Him by the father, so that the other effects of his work are merely incidental to what was done for the attainment of that object.”⁵

He goes on to argue that God from eternity “determined to save one portion of the human race and not another.” He says that it seems to be contradictory to say “that the Father sent his Son to die for those whom he had predetermined not to save, as truly as, and the same sense that He gave Him up for those whom He had chosen to make the heirs of salvation.”⁶ He points to Ephesians 5:25 where Christ is said to have laid down his life for his Church. He points to John 15:13 where Christ is said to have laid down his life for his friends. He points to John 11:52 where the whole mission of Christ is summed up in the task of gathering together in one the children of God that are scattered abroad. Then he adds: “When mankind are divided into two classes, the Church and the world, the friends and the enemies of God, the sheep and the goats, whatever is affirmed distinctly of the one class is impliedly denied of the other.”⁷

Presuppositionalism Concluded

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You assert that my “unqualified”² statement that ‘Christ has not died for all men’ is intolerable.”³ But I was again simply reproducing Calvin’s argument against Pighius. Pighius had argued that one who believed in the doctrine of an election could not consistently also believe in the genuineness of the general offer of salvation to all men. Calvin replies that he believes in both. Moreover, he offers his distinction between remote and proximate cause as the reason why he can hold to both without contradiction. Christ has not died for all men, in the sense of intending actually to save them all. But the “special reference” of Christ’s work (as Charles Hodge calls it) with respect to the elect does not make void the general call to repentance. From the immediate context of the words you object to it appears that as Calvin argued against Pighius I am arguing against

⁴ *Systematic Theology 2* pp. 544, 545.

⁵ *Idem.*, p. 546.

⁶ *Idem.*, p. 548.

⁷ *Idem.*, p. 549.

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Prof. Van Til’s Reply continued from the April Issue.

We remind our readers again that according to the theory which we have called Presuppositionalism, there is no common ground in reason upon which we may deal with lost souls who are in a state of rejecting Christian presuppositions. We feel that this theory is very harmful to the cause of Christ and we regret that it is held by conscientious and sincere Christian persons like Prof. Van Til. With this issue we are printing the remainder of his reply in full. We trust that the reply itself, even without the footnotes, will be its own refutation. Ed.

² Yes, it was the “unqualified” statement to which I objected, I am glad Professor Van Til has now stated the qualifications as Hodge so ably sets them forth. B.

³ p. 47.

those who deny common grace for the genuineness of the general reference of Christ's work. My statement therefore is (a) not unqualified, (b) is part of an argument which defends rather than rejects the importance of what Hodge calls the "merely incidental" effects of Christ's work, (c) is designed to oppose the idea that the doctrines of Christianity which seem to unbelievers to be contradictory are really contradictory. If my position is intolerable to you that of Hodge must be also.

Apologetics

Coming now to a brief statement of the method of defense that I use for the propagation of what I believe and how it differs from the traditional method I may note first that you have not, for all the length of your article, anywhere given a connected picture of my argument. Yet you at once characterize it in contrast with your own as being "negative and universal." Without the least bit of qualification I am said to deny "that there is a common ground of reasoning between those who accept Christian presuppositions and engage in the spread of the Gospel, and those who do not accept Christian presuppositions and reject the Gospel."⁴ The facts are far otherwise.

I am, to be sure, opposed to the traditional method of apologetics as this has found its most fundamental expression in the *Summae* of Thomas Aquinas the Roman Catholic and in Bishop Butler the Arminian.⁵ I seek to oppose Roman Catholicism and Arminianism in Apologetics as I seek to oppose it in theology. Does that make my main thesis universally negative? I think there is a better and more truly biblical way of reasoning with and winning unbelievers than Romanist Arminian method permits.

To begin with then I take what the Bible says about God and his relation to the universe as unquestionably true on its own authority. The Bible requires men to believe that he exists apart from and above the world and that he by his plan controls whatever takes place in the world. Everything in the created universe therefore displays the fact that it is controlled by God, that it is what it is by virtue of the place that it occupies in the plan of God. The objective evidence for the existence of God and of the comprehensive governance of the world by God is therefore so plain that he who runs may read. Men cannot get away from this evidence. They see it round about them. They see it within them. Their own constitution so clearly evinces the facts of God's creation of them and control over them that there is no man who can possibly escape observing it. If he is self-conscious at all he is also God-conscious. No matter how men may try they cannot hide from themselves the fact of their own createdness. Whether men engage in inductive study with respect to the facts of nature about them or engage in analysis of their own self-consciousness they are always face to face with God their maker. Calvin stresses this matter greatly on the basis of Paul's teachings in Romans.

⁴p. 41.

⁵As I showed with abundant evidence in my review of Professor Van Til's *Common Grace*, it is not only Thomas and Butler, but Kuyper, Bavinck, and the old Princeton theologians, whom Van Til opposes in his negative thesis in regard to common ground. This should be kept in mind when the reader comes to references to Thomas and Butler in the following paragraphs. B.

In maintaining the essential clarity of all of the created universe as revelational of God's existence and his plan Calvin is nothing daunted even by the fact of sin and its consequences. If there has been any "obscuration" in the revelation situation on account of sin this sin is any case the fault of man. If in Adam, the first man, who acted for me representatively, I have scratched the mirror of God's general revelation round about and within me, I know at bottom that it is I who have scratched it. Men ought therefore, says Calvin, to conclude that when some individual sin is not punished immediately it will be punished later. Their consciences operate on this basis.

One thing should be particularly stressed in this connection. It is the fact that man today is sinful because of what happened at the beginning of history. "We are told that man could never have had any fruition of God through the revelation that came to him through nature as operating by itself. There was superadded to God's revelation in nature another revelation, a supernaturally communicated positive revelation. Natural revelation, we are virtually told, was from the outset incorporated into the idea of a covenant relationship of God with man. Thus every dimension of created existence, even the lowest, was enveloped in a form of exhaustively personal relationship between God and man. The 'ateleological' not less than the 'teleological', the 'mechanical' no less than the 'spiritual', was covenantal in character."⁶ Even in paradise therefore supernatural revelation was immediately conjoined with natural revelation. Revelation in and about man was therefore never meant to function by itself. "It was from the beginning insufficient without its supernatural concomitant. It was inherently a limiting notion."⁷

Having taken these two, revelation in the created universe, both within and about man, and revelation by way of supernatural positive communication as aspects of revelation as originally given to man, we can see that natural revelation is even after the fall perspicuous in character. "The perspicuity of God's revelation in nature depends for its very meaning upon the fact that it is an aspect of the total and totally voluntary revelation of a God who is self-contained."⁸ God has an all comprehensive plan for the universe. "He has planned all the relationships between all the aspects of created being. He has planned the end from the beginning. All created reality therefore actually displays this plan. It is, in consequence, inherently rational."⁹

At this point we may add the fact of Scriptural revelation. God has condescended to reveal himself and his plan in it to sinners. It is the same God who speaks in Scripture and in nature. But in Scripture he speaks of his grace to such as have broken his covenant, to such as have set aside his original revelation to them. And as the original revelation of God to man was clear so is the revelation of grace in Scripture. "The Scriptures as the finished product of God's supernatural and saving revelation to man have their own evidence in themselves."¹⁰

In all of us there is one thing that stands out. It is that man has no excuse whatsoever for not accepting the revelation of God whether in nature, including man and his surroundings, or in Scripture. God's revelation is always clear.

⁶ *The Infallible Word*, p. 267.

⁷ *Idem.*, p. 267.

⁸ *Idem.*, p. 269.

⁹ *Idem.*, p. 269.

¹⁰ *Idem.*, p. 271.

The first and most basic point on which my approach differs from the traditional one is therefore that: (a) I start more frankly from the Bible as the source from which as an absolutely authoritative revelation I take my whole interpretation of life. Roman Catholicism also appeals to Scripture but in practice makes its authority void. Its final approval is to the church and that is, in effect, to human experience. Even Arminianism rejects certain Scripture doctrines (e.g. election) because it cannot logically harmonize them with the general offer of salvation. (b) I stress the objective clarity of God's revelation of himself wherever it appears. Both Thomas Aquinas and Butler contend that men have done justice by the evidence if they conclude that God probably exists. "The argument for the existence of God and for the truth of Christianity is objectively valid. We should not tone down the validity of this argument to the probability level. The argument may be poorly stated, and may never be adequately stated. But in itself the argument is absolutely sound. Christianity is the only reasonable position to hold. It is not merely as reasonable as other positions, or a bit more reasonable than other positions; it alone is the natural and reasonable position for man to take. By stating the argument as clearly as we can, we may be the agents of the Holy Spirit in pressing the claims of God upon men. If we drop to the level of the merely probable truthfulness of Christian theism, we, to that extent, lower the claims of God upon men."¹¹ Accordingly I do not reject "the theistic proofs"¹² but merely insist on formulating them in such a way as not to compromise the doctrines of Scripture. "That is to say, if the Theistic proof is constructed as it ought to be constructed, it is objectively valid, whatever the attitude of those to whom it comes may be."¹³ (c) With Calvin I find the point of contact for the presentation of the Gospel to non-Christians in the fact that they are made in the image of God and as such have ineradicable sense of deity within them. Their own consciousness is inherently and exclusively revelational of God to themselves. No man can help knowing God for in knowing God he knows God.¹⁴ His self-consciousness is totally devoid of content unless, as Calvin puts it at the beginning of his *Institutes*, man knows himself as a creature before of God. There are "no atheistic men because no man can deny the revelational activity of the true God within him."¹⁵ Man's own interpretative activity, whether of the more or less extended type, whether in ratiocination or in intuition, is no doubt the most penetrating means by which the Holy Spirit presses the claims of God upon man."¹⁶

¹¹ *Common Grace*, p. 62.

¹² The theistic proofs, as Professor Van Til would reconstruct them, would not be recognizable as the same arguments which he so bitterly rejects in the writings of Kuyper, Bavinck and Hepp. B.

¹³ *Idem.*, p. 49.

¹⁴ I feel that anyone who carefully studies Book 1 of Calvin's *Institutes*, (and this reference is available to all within the reach of libraries) will see that Professor Van Til has misinterpreted Calvin's doctrine of the common knowledge of God among all men. A systematic understanding of Calvinism does not deny that there are some who, as the Scripture indicates, say in their hearts "There is no God," To declare that there are no atheists in the world is to contradict the Scripture and the obvious facts of the history of human literature. B.

¹⁵ *Common Grace*, p. 55.

¹⁶ *Idem.* p. 62.

Even man's negative ethical reaction to God's revelation within his own psychological constitution is revelational of God. His conscience troubles him when he disobeys; he knows deep down in his heart that he is disobeying his creator. There is no escape from God for any human being. Every human being is by virtue of his being made in the image of God accessible to God. And such he is accessible to one who without compromise presses upon him the claims of God. Every man has capacity to reason logically. He can intellectually understand what the Christian position claims to be. Conjoined with this is the moral sense that he knows he is doing wrong when he interprets human experience without reference to his creator. I am therefore in the fullest agreement with Professor Murray when, in the quotation you give of him, he speaks of the natural man as having an "apprehension of the truth of the gospel that is prior to faith and repentance." But I could not thus speak with assurance that the natural man could have any such apprehension of the truth of the gospel if I held with the traditional view of Apologetics that man's self-consciousness is something that is intelligible without reference to God-consciousness. If man's self-consciousness did not actually depend upon his God-consciousness there would be no meaning to Romans 1:20. Each man would live in a world by himself. No man could even have that intellectual cognition of the gospel which is the prerequisite of saving faith. In short if the universe were not what the Calvinist, following Paul, says it is, it would not be a universe. There would be no system of truth. And if the mind of man were not what Calvin, following Paul, says it is, it could not even intellectually follow an argument for the idea that the universe is a universe. All arguments for such a universe would come to him as outside that universe. Yet it is the very essence of the positions of Aquinas and Butler that human self-consciousness is intelligible without God-consciousness. Both make it their point of departure in reasoning with the non-believers that we must, at least in the area of things natural, stand on the ground of neutrality with them. And it is in the essence of all non-believing philosophy that self-consciousness is taken as intelligible by itself without reference to God. Moreover the very theology of Romanism and Arminianism, as already noted, requires a measure of subtraction of the self-consciousness of men from its creaturely place. (d) Implied in the previous points is the fact that I do not artificially separate induction from deduction, or reasoning about the facts of nature from reasoning in *a priori* analytical fashion about the nature of human-consciousness. I do not artificially abstract or separate them from one another. On the contrary I see induction and analytical reason as part of one process of interpretation. I would therefore engage in historical apologies. (I do not personally do a great deal of this because my colleagues in the other departments of the Seminary in which I teach are doing it better than I could do it.) Every bit of historical investigation, whether it be in the directly Biblical field, archaeology, or in general history, is bound to confirm the truth of the claims of the Christian position. But I would not talk endlessly about facts and more facts without ever challenging the non-believer's philosophy of fact. A really fruitful historical apologetic argues that every fact is and must be such as proves the truth of the Christian theistic position.

A fair presentation of my method of approach should certainly have included these basic elements that underlie everything else.¹⁷

¹⁷ See the syllabi on *Apologetics* and *Introduction to Theology* Vol. 1.

It is only in the light of this positive approach that my statement to the effect that epistemologically believers and non-believers have nothing in common can be seen for what it is. Even in *Common Grace* it is evident that by the sinner's epistemological reaction I mean his reaction as an ethically responsible creature of God. Does the sinner react properly to the revelation of God that surrounds him, that is within him and that comes to him from Scripture? As I have followed Calvin closely in stressing the fact that men ought to believe in God inasmuch as the evidence for his existence is abundantly plain, so I have also closely followed Calvin in saying that no sinner reacts properly to God's revelation. Is this too sweeping a statement? It is simply the doctrine of total depravity. All sinners are covenant breakers. They have an axe to grind. They do not want to keep God in remembrance. They keep under the knowledge of God that is within them. That is they try as best they can to keep under the knowledge for fear they should look into the face of their judge. And since God's face appears in every fact of the universe they oppose God's revelation everywhere. They do not want to see the facts of nature for what they are; they do not want to see themselves for what they are. Therefore they assume the non-createdness of themselves and of the facts and the laws of nature round about them. Even though they make great protestations of serving God they yet serve and worship the creature more than the Creator. They try to make themselves believe that God and man are aspects of one universe. They interpret all things immanentistically. Shall we in the interest of a point of contact admit that man can interpret anything correctly if he virtually leaves God out of the picture?¹⁸ Shall we who wish to prove that nothing can be explained without God first admit some things at least can be explained without him? On the contrary we shall show that all explanations without God are futile. Only when we do this do we appeal to that knowledge of God within men which they seek to suppress. This is what I mean by presupposing God for the possibility of intelligent predication.

You ask what person is consistent with his own principles. Well I have consistently argued that no one is and that least of all the non-Christian is. I have even argued in the very booklet that you review that if men were consistent¹⁹ they would be end products and that then there would be no more reasoning with them. However since sinners are not consistent, and have what is from their point of view an old man within them they can engage in science and in the general interpretation of the created universe and bring to light much truth. It is because the prodigal is not yet at the swine trough and therefore still has of the substance of the Father in his pockets that he can do that and discover that, which for the matter of it, is true and usable for the Christian. Why did you omit this all important element in what I teach?²⁰ In a booklet largely written in the defense of the

¹⁸ Professor Van Til implies a negative answer to this question, but this would mean that it is impossible for a non-Christian bank clerk to add up a column of figures correctly, or for an atheist like Bertrand Russell to make a contribution in the field of symbolic logic. B.

¹⁹ This is quite amazing. I understand that the angels are quite consistent in their reasoning, as they are not omniscient, but they are, I believe, always correct as far as they go. This, according to Professor Van Til, means that there is "no more reasoning with them!" B.

idea of “commonness” as between believers and unbelievers against those who deny it you find nothing but the opposite. If your contention is that I have said precisely the opposite of what I wanted to say you should in fairness at least have discussed the points just now discussed.

What the more particularly do I mean by saying that epistemologically the believer and the non-believer have nothing in common? I mean that every sinner looks through colored glasses. And these colored glasses are cemented to his face. He assumes that self-consciousness is intelligible without god-consciousness. He assumes that consciousness of facts is intelligible without God. And he interprets all the facts and all the laws that are presented to him in terms of these assumptions. This is not to forget that he also, according to the old man within him, knows that God exists. But as a covenant breaker he seeks to suppress this. And I am now speaking of him as the covenant breaker. Neither do I forget that no man is actually fully consistent in working according to these assumptions. The non-believer does not fully live up to the new man within him which in his case is the man who worships the creature above all else, any more than does the Christian fully live up to the new man within him, which in this case is the man who worships the Creator above all else. But as it is my duty to ask my fellow Christians as well as myself to suppress the old man within them, so it is my duty to ask non-believers to suppress not the old man but the new man within them.

The necessity for this can be observed every time there is some popular article on religion in one of the magazines. There was a questionnaire sent out recently by one of them asking a certain number of people whether they believed in God. By far the greater number of them said that they did. But from further questions asked it appeared that only a very small number believed in the God of the Bible, the Creator and Judge of men. Yet they said that they believed in God. From such an article it is apparent that every sinner has the sense of deity and therefore knows God as his Creator and Judge. But from such an article it is also apparent that every sinner seeks in one way or another to deny this. They are therefore without God in the world. They must, as Charles Hodge so well points out, be renewed unto knowledge (Col 3:10) as well as unto righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24).

Now neither Aquinas nor Butler makes any such distinctions as I have made. And in that they are but consistent. They do not make the Creator-Creature distinction absolutely fundamental in their own thinking. How then could they consistently ask others to do so?

The amazing doctrine of two natures in the lost man was not brought out in *Common Grace*. I had never heard of it until a conference with Professor Van Til subsequent to the publishing of my review. He has printed this strange opinion in his introduction to the new Warfield reprint, which I reviewed in *The Bible Today* for March 1949. Most Bible students will recognize that Professor Van Til’s notion of two natures in the lost man is contrary to Scriptural doctrine. The human individual must be treated as a unit, a person to whom the Word of God either comes, or does not come, a being who is either saved or lost.

Professor Van Til’s statement that his book was written “in the defense of the idea of ‘commonness’ as between believers and unbelievers against those who deny it,” can only be taken as another example of his paradoxes. Remember, he is not to be attacked by the logical law of contradiction. That law he repudiates with the other arm of the paradox. B.

It is of the essence of their theology to maintain that God has made man so that he has such freedom as to be able to initiate something that is beyond the counsel of God. For them the human self therefore is supposed to be able to think of itself as intelligible and of the facts and laws of the world as manipulable and therefore intelligible apart from their relationship to God. I have already pointed out that for this reason that traditional view of apologetics has no universe and has no real point of contact in the unbeliever.²¹ If either Romanism or Arminianism were right in their view of the self-consciousness of man there could be no apologetics for Christianity at all. There would be no all-comprehensive plan of God. This much being clear it can be seen that the Romanist and the Arminian will, in consistence with their own theology, not be able to challenge the natural man's false assumptions. The traditional apologist must somehow seek for a point of contact within the thinking of the natural man as this thinking has been carried on upon false assumptions. He cannot seek to stir up the old man in opposition against the new man in the non-Christian. He makes no use of such a distinction. He will allow for gradual differences within the natural man. He will even make a great deal of these. To him therefore the passages of Paul to the effect that every man knows God and that man is made in the image of God are interpreted so as to do injustice to other equally important teaching of the Scripture to the effect that the natural man knoweth not God. All this is compromising theology. It is no wonder that the Romanist and the Arminian will also follow a compromising apologetics.

The basic falseness of this apologetics appears in the virtual if not actual denial of the fact that the natural man makes false assumptions. Aquinas and Butler hold that the natural man, whom the Calvinist knows to be a covenant breaker and as such one who interprets God himself in terms of the universe, has some correct notions about God. I mean correct notions as to content not merely as to form. Any one who says "I believe in God," is formally correct in his statement, but the question is what does he mean by the word God. The traditional view assumes that the natural man has a certain measure of correct thought content when he sees the word God. In reality the natural man's "God" is always²² a finite God. It is his most effective tool for suppressing the sense of the true God that he cannot fully efface from the fibres of his heart.

The natural man's god is enveloped within a Reality that is greater than his god and himself. He always makes Reality, inclusive of all that exists, the All the final subject of

²¹ The foregoing sentences are of crucial importance for the understanding of Professor Van Til's philosophy. They go to show that with the false arm of his paradoxes he is inconsistent with the Scriptural doctrine of creation. He says that for man to exist in such a way as that the facts and laws of the world are manipulable and intelligible, apart from their relationship to God, would be "beyond the counsel of God." This can only mean that the counsel of God did not include a created world in which facts and laws would be actually intelligible and manipulable for sinners who deny the existence of God. That apparently is why he says traditional apologetics "has no universe." The creation of a world in which wicked unbelievers actually manipulate and intelligently understand the laws of physical destruction, is all a mistake of the older apologetics. And this is supposed to be Calvinism! B.

²² Not "always." The god of Spinoza is "infinitely infinite" but certainly is not the God of the Bible. B.

which he speaks. With Thales he will say All is water, with Anaximenes All is air. With others he may be a dualist or a pluralist or an atomist, a realist or a pragmatic. From the Christian point of view he still has a monistic assumption in that he makes Reality to be inclusive of God and himself. And there is not much that the traditional apologist can do about this. He has bound himself to confusion in apologetics as he has bound himself to error in theology. He must tie on to some small area of thought content that the believer and the unbeliever have in common without qualification when both are self-conscious with respect to their principle. This is tantamount to saying that those who interpret a fact as dependent upon God and those who interpret that same fact as not dependent upon God have yet said something identical about that fact.

All this is bound to lead to self-frustration on the part of the traditional apologist. Let us watch him for a moment. Think of him first as an inductivist. As such he will engage in “historical apologetics” and in the study of archaeology. In general he will deal with the “facts” of the universe in order to prove the existence of God. He cannot on his position challenge the assumption of the man he is trying to win. That man is ready for him. Think of the traditional apologist as throwing facts to his non-Christian friend as he might throw a ball. His friend receives each fact as he might a ball and throws it behind him in a bottomless pit. The apologist is exceedingly industrious. He shows the unbelieving friend all the evidence for theism. He shows all the evidence for Christianity, for instance, for the virgin birth and the resurrection of Christ. Let us think of his friend as absolutely tireless and increasingly polite. He will then receive all these facts and toss them behind him in the bottomless pit of pure possibility. “Is it not wonderful,” he will say, “what strange things do happen in Reality. You seem to be collector of oddities. As for myself I am more interested in the things that happen regularly. But then I shall certainly try hard to explain the facts you mention in accord with the laws that I have found working so far. Perhaps we should say that laws are merely statistical averages and that nothing can therefore be said about any particular event ahead of its appearance. Perhaps there are very unusual things in reality. But what does this prove for the truth of your view?”

You see that the unbeliever who does not work on the presupposition of creation and providence is perfectly consistent²³ with himself when he sees nothing to challenge his unbelief even in the fact of the resurrection of Christ. He may be surprised for a moment as a child that grows up is surprised at the strange things of life but when he has grown up he realizes that “such is life.” Sad to say the traditional Christian apologist has not even asked his unbelieving friend to see the facts for what they really are. He has not presented the facts at all. That is he has not presented the facts at all. That is he has not presented the facts as they are according to the Christian way of looking at them and the Christian way of looking at them is the true way of looking at them. Every fact in the universe is what it is by virtue of the place that it has in the plan of God. Man cannot comprehensively know that plan. But he does know that there is such a plan. He must

²³ The argument given above is based on agnosticism of Hume’s type, an agnosticism denying the principle of causality in nature. Professor Van Til forgets that the Apostle Paul considered the sheer facts of the created universe as sufficient evidence for theism, even for some wicked men who reject God. (Romans 1:20). B.

therefore present the facts of theism and of Christianity, of Christian theism, as proving Christian theism because they intelligible as facts in terms of it and in terms of it alone.

But this is also in effect to say that the Christian apologist should never seek to be an inductivist only. He should present his philosophy of fact with his facts. He does not need to handle less facts in doing so. He will handle the same facts but he will handle them as they ought to be handled.

Now look at the traditional apologist when he is not an inductivist but an *a priori* reasoner. He will first show his fellow worker, the inductivist, that he defeats his own purposes. He will show that he who does not challenge the assumptions of his non-Christian friends has placed himself on a decline which inevitably leads down from Locke through Berkeley to Hume, the skeptic. Then for his own foundation he will appeal to some internal ineffable principles, to some *a priori* like that of Plato or of Descartes. He will appeal to the law of contradiction either positively or negatively and boldly challenge the facts to meet the requirements of logic. Then he will add that the facts of Christianity pass the examination *summa cum laude*. Well, they do. And in passing the examination they invariably pass out of existence too. He can only prove the immortality of the soul if with Plato he is willing to prove also that man is divine. He can only prove the universe to have order if with the Stoics he is also willing to say that God is merely its principle of order. With the Hegelian idealists such as Bradley and Bosanquet or Royce he will prove all the facts of the Bible to be true by weaving them into aspects of a Universe that allows for them as well as for their opposites.

But usually the traditional apologist is neither a pure inductivist nor a pure a priorist. Of necessity he has to be both. When engaged in inductive argument about facts he will therefore talk about these facts as proving the existence of God. If anything exists at all, he will say, something absolute must exist. But when he thus talks about what must exist and when he refuses even to admit that non-believers have false assumptions about their musts, let alone being willing to challenge them on the subject, he has in reality granted that the non-believer's conception about the relation of human logic to facts is correct. It does not occur to him that on any but the Christian theistic basis there is no possible connection of logic with facts at all. When the non-Christian, not working on the foundation of creation and providence, talks about "musts" in relation to "facts" he is beating the air. His logic is merely the exercise of a revolving door in a void, moving nothing from nowhere into the void. But instead of pointing out this fact to the unbeliever the traditional apologist appeals to this non-believer as though by his immanentistic method he could very well interpret many things correctly.

That this traditionalist type of apologetics is particularly impotent in our day I have shown in my review of Dr. Richardson's and Dr. Carnell's books on Apologetics. Dr. Richardson is a modernist. But he says he holds to the uniqueness of the facts of Christianity. At the same time he holds that this holding to the uniqueness of Christianity and its facts is not inconsistent with holding to a form of coherence that is placed upon human experience as its foundation. Dr. Carnell is an orthodox believer. To an extent he has even tried to escape from the weakness of the traditional method of apologetic argument. But he merely rejects its inductivist form. By and large he falls back into traditional methodology. And just to that extent he has no valid argument against Richardson. To the extent that he admits the type of coherence which Richardson holds to be valid he has to give up the uniqueness of the events of Christianity as he himself holds

them. On the other hand, to the extent that he holds to the uniqueness of events the way Richardson holds to them, to that extent he has to give up the coherence to which he himself as an orthodox Christian should hold.²⁴

Your own handling of the question of the immutability of God exhibits exactly the same difficulty. You speak of the dynamical self-consistency of God as a concept that will make it quite easy to see how God's immutability can be consistent with the genuine significance of facts in the course of history. But to the extent that you explain how the immutability of God can be consistent with the actuality of historical change you explain it away. You go so far as to define that very immutability in terms of God's constancy of relationship to the created temporal universe. "God's immutability consists in his perfectly unified plan in dealing with the world, which he created, God's absoluteness is in his perfectly consistent relatedness."²⁵ Now if God's immutability is not first to be spoken of as an attribute that pertains to the character of God as he is in himself apart from his relation to the universe, then there is no problem any more because one of the factors of the problem has been denied. To the extent that you have explained you have also destroyed the fact to be explained. And to speak of self-consistency after first reducing the self to a relationship²⁶ is meaningless. On the other hand you do not really hold to the identity of the being of God in himself with his relationship to the world. That is also plain from your general discussion of God. But then if you are to speak to an unbeliever with respect to the God who is really self-contained and ask him to think of this God along the lines of his own procedure, without challenging the assumptions that underlie all that procedure, then he will simply say that such a God is so wholly beyond his experience that can make nothing of him and that such a God is therefore meaningless to him. To this you can on your method offer him no adequate answer.²⁷

The general conclusion then is that on the traditional method it is impossible to set one position clearly over against the other so that the two may be compared for what they

²⁴ See *The Westminster Theological Journal* November, 1948.

²⁵ *What is God?*, p. 32.

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The words "reducing the self to a relationship" are entirely inexcusable, and the following sentence is like saying "You are not really a thief," implying that one has been found in suspicious circumstances. Not one word or phrase which I have ever spoken or written has in any way implied or justified any inference that God is reduced to a relationship. Since I am a Calvinist and I do believe that God in all eternity has had a complete and perfect decree, including all things that come to pass, I declare as a Calvinist that God has always been in relationship,—if only in the relationship of futuration through his decree,—with the universe which He has now created. To deny this is to deny a most basic element in Calvinistic doctrine, the eternal decree of God. To speak of God as having relationship, is entirely different from saying that God is reduced to a relationship, and this Professor Van Til knows very well when he is on the other side of his paradoxes.

On the other hand, for Professor Van Til to speak of "the character of God as he is in himself apart from his relation to the universe" is to speak of the God of Aristotle and not of the God of the Bible. B.

²⁷ This remark means Paul's "answer" (Romans 1:20) was inadequate. B.

are. Certainly there can be no confrontation of two opposing positions if it cannot be pointed out on what they oppose each other. On the traditional basis of reasoning the unbeliever is not so much as given an opportunity of seeing with any adequacy how the position he is asked to accept differs from his own.²⁸

But all this comes from following the Roman Catholic, Thomas Aquinas, or the Arminian, Butler. If one follows Calvin there are no such problems. Then one begins with the fact that the world is what the Bible says it is. One then makes the claims of God upon men without apologies though always *suaviter in modo*. One knows that there is hidden underneath the surface display of every man a sense of deity. One therefore gives that sense of deity an opportunity to rise in rebellion against the oppression under which it suffers by the new man of the covenant breaker. One makes no deal with this new man. One shows that on his assumptions all things are meaningless. Science would be impossible; knowledge of anything in any field would be impossible. No fact could be distinguished from any other fact. No law could be said to be law with respect to facts. The whole manipulation of factual experience would be like the idling of a motor that is not in gear. Thus every fact—not some facts—every fact clearly and not probably proves the truth of Christian theism. If Christian theism is not true then nothing is true. Is the God of the Bible satisfied if his servants say anything less? And have I, following such a method, departed radically from the tradition of Kuyper and Bavinck?²⁹ On the contrary I have learned all this primarily from them. It is Kuyper's *Encyclopedia* that has, more than any other work in modern times, brought out the fact of the difference between the approach of the believer and the unbeliever. It is Bavinck's monumental work which set a natural theology frankly oriented to Scripture squarely over against that of Romanism which is based on neutral reason. It is Bavinck who taught me that the proofs for God as usually formulated on the traditional method prove a finite god. I have indeed had the temerity to maintain that those great Reformed theologians have in some points not been quite true to their own principles. But when I have done so I have usually tried to point out that when they did so and to the extent that they did so they had departed from Calvin.

Many other observations might be made. But your readers now know: (a) that on a very essential point you have misquoted me, (b) that you have misrepresented me, (c) that

²⁸ The foregoing paragraph is significant. If it is possible to point out to the unbeliever the way in which Christianity and the denial of Christianity oppose each other, the pointing out process must be on common ground intellectually, that is, epistemologically! B.

²⁹ In my review of Professor Van Til's *Common Grace*, I presented abundant evidence in direct quotations from him, showing that, in the point at issue between us, he has departed from Kuyper and Bavinck, and from the old Princeton tradition. Now he says that these great Calvinists were inconsistent and that he, Van Til, is the consistent Calvinist in the point of issue. It is certainly wiser to say that Kuyper, Bavinck, Hodge, and Warfield, are more competent judges of what Calvinism is, than Van Til, who has frankly departed from them in peculiar presuppositionalism. Professor Van Til cannot show from the available writings of Calvin that Calvin is on his side, or that Calvin differs from the greatest leaders of Holland and America in this question of common ground in Christian evidences. B.

you have nowhere enabled your readers to see what my argument really is, (d) that because of mere similarity of words you have pinned such heresies on me as I have been most concerned to oppose, (e) that you have not shown that I have in any material way departed from Reformed tradition and (f) that the reason why you have done this is apparently your own departure from the “tradition” of Calvin.³⁰

There are several points in your article that I have not dealt with directly. If you can give me still more space³¹ I shall be glad to deal with them also. Meanwhile allow me to thank you for your kind consideration in giving me as much space as you have.

Your brother in Christ,
Cornelius Van Til

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This is quite a list of charges. There was one misprint in one of my quotations; I marvel that there were not more. Those who know the difficulty of preparing a manuscript and having it published will understand. My comment on this passage however, was dictated to the dictaphone with Professor Van Til’s book open before me. My argument was not in any slightest way dependent upon the misprint. I did not personally do the proofreading, and I did not know of the misprint until I saw Professor Van Til’s manuscript. Of course I can see that from his point of view of paradox, the misprint made a difference. I can only state that it made not the slightest difference in my arguments, for I do not believe in double truth. See note 8 in April issue, page 222.

I do not see that I have in any way misrepresented Professor Van Til. I have made it clear that he believes in both sides of his paradoxes,—the orthodox side as well as the side in which he diverges from orthodoxy. I think my review has enabled readers to see Professor Van Til’s argument for what it is, and for its dangerous tendencies, perhaps better than he sees these tendencies himself.

As for similarity of words, I have no way of reading a book except to read the words in it. I have only the grammatico-historical method. Professor Van Til uses Hegelian words in a clearly Hegelian sense on one side of his paradoxes.

It is Professor Van Til who makes it clear that he has departed from the Reformed tradition. On the point at issue between us he clearly and emphatically lines up the greatest Calvinists of Holland and of America as his opponents. If I have in any way departed from the main principles of Calvinistic, or Scriptural, doctrine, I shall be glad to have it pointed out. But, again I must say that I cannot accept an inaccessible volume as the authority on Calvinism, when the *Institutes* and the commentaries are so readily available to us all. B.

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The Bible Today is by no means closed to discussion on the important point at issue.

May I say in closing that I trust that the readers realize this is a serious and important argument between Christian brethren who are personally the best of friends. At least no one can say that we Bible believing Christians are stagnant in our theology, or that there are no active currents of thought among us. B.

¹Van Til, C., & Sigward, E. H. (1997). *The works of Cornelius Van Til, 1895-1987* (electronic ed.). New York: Labels Army Co.