

## HERMAN BAVINCK'S "COMMON GRACE"

A TRANSLATION BY  
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### TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

One of the finest theological fruits of the Dutch Neo-Calvinist revival in the latter half of the nineteenth century was the rehabilitation and elaboration of the Reformed doctrine of common grace, which to a large extent had lain dormant since Calvin.<sup>1</sup> The chief agents of this renewed interest in common grace were Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) and Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). While Kuyper produced the most extensive treatment of the topic in his three-volume *De Gemeene Gratie* (1902-1904), Bavinck deserves the credit for first developing the doctrine in a way that laid a theological basis for the broad cultural programs and concerns of the revival. He first broached the subject in his *Catholicity of Christianity and Church* (1888). But that thematic seed germinated to produce a fuller treatment in his rectorial address at Kampen in December 1894, entitled "De Gemeene Genade" and translated below as "Common Grace."

In this address, as well as in his later article "Calvin and Common Grace,"<sup>2</sup> Bavinck traced the origin of the doctrine of common grace to

<sup>1</sup> See H. Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Smither Book, 1928). According to Susan E. Schreiner, the actual term "common grace" occurs in Calvin's writings only four times—in his commentaries on Amos 9:7, Colossians 1:20, Hebrews 1:5, and Romans 5:18 ("The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin" [Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1983], p. xi n. 3).

<sup>2</sup> Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace," in *Calvin and the Reformation* (London: F. H. Revell, 1909), pp. 99-130; the essay first appeared in the 1909 *Princeton Theological Review*.

Calvin and based it on Scripture. Calvin considered common grace an aspect of God's all-encompassing providence by which he maintains human life and culture as well as the rest of creation for his own purposes (*Inst.*, 2.2.3). Common grace maintains the goodness of creation in spite of humanity's radical depravity resulting from the fall. This grace is the source of all human virtue and accomplishment, even that of unbelievers who have not been regenerated by the salvific grace of God (*Inst.*, 2.2.12-17).

Thus the goodness still found in sinful humanity, which Calvin maintains we all experience (*Inst.*, 2.3.4), is ascribed not to humans but to the benevolence of God toward sinful humanity. For Calvin common grace served as a fundamental and crucial step in his argument against the Pelagian or semi-Pelagian Catholicism of his day.<sup>3</sup>

Bavinck builds on Calvin, and in "Common Grace" he develops his theme in conscious opposition to the revival of Aquinas signaled by the 1879 encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris*. He firmly rejects the Roman Catholic idea of grace as something "superadded" to the natural life. In accordance with the Reformed tradition, he insists that common grace sustains the creation order while special (salvific) grace redeems, restores, and transforms creation and culture.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, several scholars have argued that the idea that grace renews nature is the central theme in Bavinck's theology.<sup>5</sup>

Bavinck also analyzes the Anabaptist tradition, arguing that it rejects nature for an other-worldly supernatural grace. The Socinian or modernist tradition, on the other hand, rejects the supernatural and consequently deifies nature and culture. He holds that both Anabaptist and Socinian

<sup>3</sup> The Reformed creeds do not deal with common grace as such, but in several of their pronouncements on sin and virtue, on the loss of the *imago Dei*, and on the authority of the state, they give expression to views that presuppose common grace. See the Belgic Confession, arts. 13, 14, and 36; the Canons of Dordt, 2.5-6 and 4.4, 8-9; and the Westminster Confession, 5.6. In addition to the European Reformed Scholastics, Americans such as Jonathan Edwards and Charles and A. A. Hodge also dealt with the topic of common grace.

<sup>4</sup> Bavinck's essay remarkably anticipates H. Richard Niebuhr's famous typology in *Christ and Culture* (1951).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, J. Veenhof, *Revelatie en Inspiratie: De Openbarings- en Schriftbeschouwing van Herman Bavinck in vergelijking met die der ethische theologie* (Amsterdam: n.p., 1968), pp. 345-46; this passage has been translated by A. Wolters in *Veenhof on Nature and Grace in Bavinck* (Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies, 1977). See also E. P. Heideman, *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (Assen: Van Gorcom, 1959), p. 196.

traditions are historical consequences of the fundamentally unstable view of the relation of nature and grace in Roman Catholicism.

Of special interest today is the prescience with which Bavinck's analysis of culture and theology at the end of the nineteenth century anticipates developments in the twentieth. He expects the collapse of optimistic theological liberalism, an event fully realized only after the First World War with the advent of dialectical theologians. He notes that the optimistic hopes of modern secular culture are contradicted by human misery and failure. The rational gods of science and technology have failed to answer human need. In reaction, many turn to spiritism, theosophy, and Eastern religions. His description of the end of the nineteenth century uncannily foreshadows the end of the twentieth. "At the end of our century, the divinization and vilification of man and the adoration and denigration of nature are strangely mixed together."

Bavinck's view of common grace articulates a theological worldview that provides a basis for dealing with fundamental problems of the twentieth century. It enables us to acknowledge the importance of creation and human culture as good gifts of God that not only form the arena of his redemptive activity but are themselves subject to redemption. Bavinck contends that world flight is not a suitable Christian option. He affirms human responsibility for culture and creation in the context of the Creator's ultimate sovereignty and Christ's redemption of all things. Science and scholarship, art and politics, domestic and public life all have their basis in common grace. Such grace sustains the creation order even while all things await renewal by God's salvific grace in Christ.

## COMMON GRACE\*

by HERMAN BAVINCK

The Reformer of Geneva, whom the Reformed Churches honor as their spiritual father, continues in the popular imagination as a somber and severe figure, hostile, or at best indifferent, toward things pleasant and fair [cf. Phil 4:8]. Calvin evokes respect and admiration by his total dedication to the God who called him, by the majesty of his character, by his holy seriousness, by his indomitable will, and by his strict discipline; but love and affection he does not inspire. His sharply featured face with the pointed nose and the long, thin beard, his mobile, piercing eyes and commanding gaze, his lean figure, all bone and sinew—these do not attract but keep one at a respectful distance. The reproach is common that Calvin had no taste or stomach for things outside his particular calling. For him social pleasures were nonexistent. He never mentions domestic joys or woes in his letters. The beauties of nature left him cold. Art, poetry, and music seemed not to rouse his interest. Even innocent pleasures were somewhat suspect in his eyes. In a word, he was "a melancholy soul, a somber spirit."<sup>1</sup>

These same charges are laid against the followers of the Reformed faith. Calvin's spirit has left its mark upon all the Reformed Churches. The Huguenots in France, the Calvinists in Holland, the Puritans in England, and the Presbyterians in Scotland all appear in history as stalwart and vigorous men . . . but few would wish to join their company.

\*I am indebted to Professor Al Wolters for detailed comments on an earlier draft of this translation. Material in parentheses is Bavinck's; comment and references in square brackets are mine. —R. C. VAN LEEUWEN

<sup>1</sup> "Un esprit chagrin, un génie triste."

Their stiffness of face and character is not attractive, their bearing and manner unyielding and inflexible. "Strict" and "dour" have become the standard epithets for Calvinists. Even today complaints about the intractable descendants of Calvin are not infrequent.

Against this background, it is all the more striking that Calvin in his system accorded a place and worth to the natural life that find no counterparts in other conceptions of the Christian religion. It is true, of course, that in Calvin's personal life his deep sense of calling as a reformer left him little space for the ordinary, human side of life. Luther's individuality, on the other hand, expresses an aspect of the Christian personality that is gratifying to see and can be gratefully appreciated. Calvinism does not claim to be the only truth and the whole truth. But nonetheless, in the theology of Calvin, the relation of nature and grace is conceived of far more correctly and profoundly than in the theologies of Luther or Zwingli. In his teaching on common grace, Calvin has expressed a principle which is uncommonly fruitful, yet was subsequently misconceived and denigrated all too often.

Permit me then, to present to you the Reformed doctrine of *common grace*. I would like to show (1) how it is based upon the Scriptures, (2) that the Roman Catholic system has no place for it, (3) that this principle was discovered in the Reformation, notably by Calvin, and finally (4) that it remains of the greatest significance for us today.

## I

In his *Dogmatik der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche*, Schweizer makes the valid observation that the characteristic difference between the *foedus operum* [covenant of works] and the *foedus gratiae* [covenant of grace] lies not in the concept of revelation but in that of grace. It is true that he then proceeds to use these concepts in an invalid way. He identifies the *foedus operum* with natural religion and the *foedus gratiae* with supernatural religion, and then builds a three-stage developmental scheme of natural, legal, and moral religion. But Schweizer's initial observation remains valid. Revelation existed even prior to the fall. Creation itself is the first, rich revelation of God, the foundation and beginning of every subsequent revelation. The relation of God and man in the *status integritatis* [state of righteousness] is portrayed as personal fellowship. God speaks to the man (Gen. 1:28-30), gives him a commandment of which he can have no natural knowledge (Gen. 2:16), and grants him the woman as helpmate, as it were from his own hand (Gen. 2:22).

Thus the *foedus operum* rests upon revelation. This covenant is simply

the form of religion possessed by man who, while created in the image of God, has not yet received the highest form of religion. A religion always requires revelation as its foundation and correlate; there is no religion without revelation. The fall indeed brings change. But this change does not consist in God's beginning or ceasing to reveal himself. Revelation continues and God does not withdraw himself. He again seeks man out. But man is now afraid of the voice of God and flees from before his face (Gen. 3:8-9). The consciousness of guilt drives him from the presence of God. He knows of the penalty of death on the day of transgression (Gen. 2:17).

Revelation continues, but it changes in character and receives a different content. Now revelation comes to guilty man, who merits death, as a revelation of *grace*. Now when God—in spite of the transgression—calls man, searches him out, and sets enmity in place of the defunct friendship, a totally new element appears in his revelation—namely, his compassion and mercy. Life, work, food, clothing come to him no longer on the basis of an agreement or right granted in the covenant of works but through grace alone. Grace has become the source and fountainhead of all life and every blessing for mankind. It is the overflowing spring of all good (Gen. 3:8-24).

Yet this grace does not remain single and undivided. It differentiates itself into common and special grace. Cain is driven from God's presence because of fratricide (Gen. 4:14, 16). Yet he continues to live; grace is thus given to him in place of strict justice. Cain indeed becomes the father of a tribe which sets its mind to the task of subduing the earth and begins the development of human culture (Gen. 4:15-24). In contrast, the descendants of Seth preserve the knowledge and service of God (Gen. 4:25-5:32).

When the two groups intermingle and fill the earth with evil, the flood comes as a terrible but necessary judgment. From Noah a new mankind is born, milder in nature, less in might, and of shorter life. The new mankind also exists and lives only by the grace of God, which now takes the form of a covenant. In opposition to the unrighteousness that had evoked his wrath, God now, as it were, firmly grounds the being and life of the creation in a covenant with all of nature and with every living being. This life and being are no longer "natural." Rather, they are the fruit of a supernatural grace to which man no longer has a self-evident claim (Gen. 8:21, 22; 9:1-17).

Even the tribes that spring from Ham and Japheth now live by grace. And after Noah the unity of the human race is not restored but is completely broken by the confusion of tongues. Common and special

grace each flow on in their own channels. The economy of the divine forbearance and long-suffering begins (Rom. 3:25). The times of ignorance commence (Acts 17:30). God allows the nations to walk in their own ways (Acts 14:16), yet does not leave himself without witness (Acts 14:17). In him they move and have their being; he is not far from each one of them (Acts 17:27, 28). He reveals himself to them in the works of nature (Rom. 1:19). Every good and perfect gift, also among the nations, comes down from the Father of Lights (James 1:17). The Logos, who created and maintains all things, enlightens each man coming into the world (John 1:9). The Holy Spirit is the author of all life, of every power and every virtue (Gen. 6:17; 7:15; Pss. 33:6; 104:30; 139:2; Job 32:8; Eccl. 3:19).

There is thus a rich revelation of God even among the heathen—not only in nature but also in their heart and conscience, in their life and history, among their statesmen and artists, their philosophers and reformers. There exists no reason at all to denigrate or diminish this divine revelation. Nor is it to be limited to a so-called natural revelation. The traditions of paradise, the life of Cain and his descendents, and the covenant with Noah have a special, supernatural origin. The working of supernatural forces in the world of the heathen is neither impossible nor improbable. Furthermore, the revelation of God in nature and history is never a mere passive pouring forth of God's virtues but is always a positive act on the part of God. The Father of Jesus works always (John 5:17). His providence is a divine, eternal, omnipresent *power*.

For this reason, the specific difference between the religion of Israel and the religions of the world cannot lie in the concept of revelation. This difference cannot be expressed through the opposition of a *religio revelata* [revealed religion] and a *religio naturalis* [natural religion]. "Natural religion" is not a religion but a philosophy. All religions are positive: they rest upon real or supposed revelation. The true, material difference in question lies in *gratia*; *gratia specialis* [special grace] is something unknown to the heathen. Their religions are all products of the human will and are of a legal character. Even Buddhism fails to provide an exception. These religions are all by-products of and degenerations from the broken *foedus operum*. In them it is always up to man to accomplish his own redemption. Purification, asceticism, penance, sacrifice, the keeping of the law, contemplation, and the like are the way to salvation. But in the religion of Israel, the *gratia specialis*, the *foedus gratiae* appears as something marvelous and new, established by God with Abraham and his seed. Elohim, the God of creation and of nature, makes himself known to Israel as Yahweh, the God of the Covenant. This revelation, however, attaches to previous history and to the revelation of God already in

existence. It is not by happenstance that Abraham hails from the tribe of Shem. While among the offspring of Ham and Japheth the consciousness of God's holiness became increasingly weak, and they themselves sank more deeply into worldliness, the descendants of Shem preserved the knowledge and service of God longest and most purely. Among the Semites there have always been prophets of the Most High.

The religion of Israel was established upon the broad base of the original religion of mankind found in the households of Adam and Noah, of Seth and Shem. Consequently, those attributes of God that appear in creation—his omnipotence and omniscience, his eternity and omnipresence—are more prominent in the Old than in the New Testament. God's works in nature—his creation and providence, his maintenance and governance—are far more broadly portrayed by the prophets and psalmists than by the evangelists and apostles. The appreciation of nature and joy in the creaturely speak more loudly and strongly from the pages of the Old than from those of the New Testament. Still, these things, while an indispensable presupposition and necessary component, are not the heart of Israel's faith. That appears only when the God who is so transcendent approaches his people in a covenantal relation, when Elohim reveals himself as Yahweh. Creation and the making of the covenant are the two pillars upon which Israel's religion is founded. To these facts the prophets and psalmists return again and again.

This, then, is the marvelous and unique center of Israel's faith: the God who is Creator of heaven and earth is also the God of Israel, of a particular people, freely chosen by him out of his goodwill for an inheritance. It is as if in Israel the incarnation has already commenced. The Lord is greatly exalted. All the nations are before him as nothing. He deals with the host of heaven and the inhabitants of earth according to his good pleasure. Hegel did not miss the mark when he spoke of Israel's faith as the *Religion der Erhabenheit* [religion of the sublime]. But this high and exalted God condescends to the level of a poor and despised people and becomes like man in virtually every respect. Human speech, actions, and emotions are ascribed to him in almost naive fashion. Into his worship he assimilates preexistent forms of religion such as circumcision and sacrifice, temple and priesthood. So far does the divine condescend into the human that the boundaries between the religion of Israel and of her neighbours seem to be erased. And yet one sees another heart pulsing at the core of Israelite religion. While in other religions we find man seeking God, "if haply they might feel after him, and find him" [Acts 17:27, AV], here we see God seeking man and coming to him again and again with mercy: "I am the Lord your God!"



The essence of Israel's faith lies in the *foedus gratiae*, to which all else is made subservient. The attributes of God—his omnipotence and omniscience, his eternity and omnipresence—are never presented in the abstract but are always described from a religious-ethical point of view and employed to comfort—or to shame—his people. Elohim is Israel's God, and the Lord is his name. Israel's *shalom* and salvation are found in this God only. He is the one and only, the highest good for the pious of Israel, their shield and reward, their fountain and spring, their rock and refuge, their light and salvation [Ps. 27:1]. Besides him they desire naught else on earth [Ps. 73:25]. For him their soul longs, more than the hart for flowing streams [Ps. 42:1]. His law is their delight all the day long [Ps. 119:97], a light upon their path and a light for their feet [Ps. 119:105]. Their joy is to walk in his ways with a clean heart and a renewed spirit [Ps. 51:10]. Yahweh is their God, and they are his people. In essence, Israel's faith is already trinitarian. God is Elohim, greatly exalted, dwelling in eternity, holy, removed from every creature and all uncleanness. But he is also Yahweh, the God of the covenant, appearing in the "Malak Yahweh," and giving himself to Israel, choosing her by grace, rescuing her from Egypt, and purifying her through her sacrificial offerings. He is also, as Spirit, author of health and blessing, causing Israel to base her life in the covenant and to walk in his ways, and thus sanctifying her to be a kingdom of priests [Exod. 19:5-6].

In the course of history, the essence of Israel's faith becomes more manifest as it finds its goal and fulfillment in Christ. He is the ultimate content of the *foedus gratiae*. In him all the promises of God are "Yes and Amen." He is full of grace and truth, pure *gratia*; no new lawgiver and no new law, but Immanuel, God with us, Yahweh fully revealed and fully given. So perfectly is grace the content of New Testament religion that the attributes of God seen in nature and the creation become less prominent. They are not, however, denied but are rather everywhere presupposed, while in the foreground we find emphasized God's attributes of love, grace, and peace. In the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, the sinner finds his entire health and salvation. God's relation to nature retreats to give pride of place to the relationship between God and his church. The coherence between religious and national life is broken. Grace now, as it were, stands on its own feet, independent of all the forms to which it was bound under the economy granted to Israel. Christ is the wisdom, the righteousness, the sanctification, and the redemption that God has given to mankind [1 Cor. 1:30]. Salvation is not the work of man but a gift from the Father in the person of his beloved Son.

The gospel is pure grace. That is the core and the content of the Christian religion. Even the ordinary events in the history of Israel and in the life of Christ constitute a revelation—indeed, a special revelation—of this special grace. The suffering and death of Christ are perfectly natural events, showing no deviation from the laws of nature; and yet the cross is the very center of the Christian faith. The essence of Christianity and its distinguishing characteristic lie not in some supernatural form as such but in the content of the divine grace. This is that which no eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor the heart of man conceived [1 Cor. 2:9]. God has in Christ visited us with the intimate impulses of his compassion.

This *gratia specialis*, however, can be fully appreciated only when it is viewed in connection with its prevenient preparation from the time of earliest man onward. Christ is of Israel. The New Testament is the full-grown fruit of the old covenant. The portrait of Christ comes into sharp focus only against the tapestry of the Old Testament. And then we behold him clearly, full of grace and truth [cf. Exod. 34:6-7; John 1:14]. It is God himself, the Creator of heaven and earth, who in Christ fully reveals and gives himself to his people. But this grace, having fully appeared in Christ, is now intended for all men. Israel was chosen for the sake of all mankind. For a time the *gratia specialis* dug a channel for itself in Israel, only to flow out into the deep, wide sea of humankind, which had been maintained and preserved for it by the *gratia communis* [common grace]. Israel's election existed only to bring Christ into the world, as far as the flesh is concerned, so that the *gratia specialis* might be fully revealed, universal and superabundant. The stream of special grace swells and grows to overflow the banks of the nation Israel. It spreads itself across the face of the entire globe. This was the mystery of which Paul so often spoke with wonder and adoration, that the heathen are also fellow-heirs and members of the household of God [Eph. 3:6]. The two, special and common grace, separated for ages, once again combine. And thus united, they henceforth make their way together among the Christian peoples of the world. The wild olive tree is engrafted into the good olive tree. And in Abraham's seed all the families of the earth are blessed [Gen. 12:3].

## II

When the apostolic preaching made the good news of grace known to the gentiles, a whole new world of thought opened up before them. Here was a new philosophy taking its place alongside the philosophy

sprung from Greece. The desire quickly arose to conquer Christianity, with its strange and novel content, and to take it up in the service of the philosophically cultured consciousness. The gnosticism of the second century was an audacious attempt to introduce Christianity into the great world-process and to melt it down into a great system embracing all religions and philosophies. But disillusionment followed. In the midst of proud speculation, the gospel of grace was lost.

Nevertheless, men still continued to strain their powers of thought in an effort to lift faith up to the plane of *gnosis* and to prove or clarify the dogmas of trinity, incarnation, and atonement with the light of reason. These attempts continued long into the Middle Ages. Thus in the course of time speculative thought was more and more driven to the conclusion that these dogmas were incomprehensible mysteries beyond the reach of thought. Reason might well accomplish a part of the task of rising above the sensible and grasping a bit of the supernatural: the existence of God, the immortality of the soul—these things at least were deemed provable. But here too reason found her limit. Hence the distinction was made between the *articuli mixti* (matters known by faith and reason) and the *articuli puri* (matters known by faith alone), and between *theologia naturalis* [natural theology] and *revelata* [revealed (theology)]. In essence these distinctions already appear in the Church Fathers Irenaeus and Tertullian, Augustine and John of Damascus. They could be properly understood in the sense that the believer can discern in nature and history the hand of the very God that he had come to know as the Father of Jesus Christ. But in the course of Roman Catholic scholasticism, both before and after the Reformation, this distinction developed and acquired an entirely different meaning. Rome replaced the antithetical relation of sin and grace with the contrast between natural and supernatural religion. Upon this latter contrast she erected a system that conflicted with the principles of apostolic Christianity.

According to the viewpoint of Rome, there exist in the divine mind two conceptions of man and thus also a double moral law, two sorts of love, and a twofold destination or goal. God first created man as an earthly, sensuous, rational, and moral being *in puris naturalibus* [in a purely natural state]. To be sure, to this he added the divine image, the *donum superadditum* [superadded gift]; but this was soon lost through sin. Original sin thus consists entirely or almost entirely in the loss of the *donum superadditum* and in the reversion to the state of nature, *in puris naturalibus*. Apart from the harmful influence of his social environment, man is still born in a condition like that of Adam before the fall, and lacking the *donum superadditum*. For even concupiscence is not in

itself sin but only becomes such when desire escapes the hegemony of reason.

So conceived, this natural man is a true, good, and complete human being. He can possess a good and pure religion, the *religio naturalis* [natural religion]; he can have a good and complete ethic, and can practice genuine virtues. He is capable of an earthly life that is in all respects sinless and can dedicate himself to art and science, to business and industry, as well as accomplish his domestic, social, and political duties faithfully. In a word, we can conceive of a man existing entirely within the sphere of nature and who within these limits conforms completely to his ideal essence. It is of course true that Rome does not go so far as to say that such a man could exist entirely without religion. Man's idea of God is not purely arbitrary. It necessarily entails that man has a religion. But the religion in question is merely a natural religion, derived from God's self-revelation in nature and practiced by means of the powers naturally inherent in all men. So the natural man stands in a servant-master relationship to God and has no claim to a heavenly blessedness in the immediate presence of God. Most people, in fact, are far from attaining such a sinless, natural, earthly life; the power of sinful influences and example are too great for that. But conceived in the abstract, the ideal does not seem impossible. And should someone actually achieve such a virtuous natural life and fulfill his natural religious obligation, then on the other side of the grave there lies waiting for him, just as for children who die unbaptized, no veritable punishment but only a *poena damni* [punishment of the damned], a falling short of the highest good, which is supernatural blessedness.

There is, in the Catholic view, a second and higher ideal and goal which God has appointed for man. According to Rome's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, there exists another order of things that are supernatural in the strict, absolute sense of the term. These things not only transcend the ken of fallen humanity but also that of the sinless natural man. Indeed, they transcend even the knowledge of the angels, and thus can be known simply and solely through supernatural revelation. Into this supernatural order, God, in his sovereign freedom, determined to place man. He wished to raise him not just to the level of the natural knowledge of God based in nature but to a knowledge of God based on revelation. God appointed for man not just an earthly but a heavenly, supernatural blessedness. It was God's good pleasure to create man not for the position of servant but to make of him a son of God. But for this end, another, higher gift was necessary, since man's natural gifts were not sufficient to reach his highest goal. In addition to natural gifts, man had need of the

indwelling of the Spirit, of supernatural grace. Before the fall, this had been given him in the *donum superadditum*. But after the fall it was necessary for two reasons. First of all it was necessary in an accidental way, to support the natural gifts of man that had been more or less weakened by the fall. Second, it was necessary in an absolute sense to make man capable of attaining his supernatural destination. The preservation and distribution of this *gratia supernaturalis* [supernatural grace] on earth is entrusted to the church. Through the priest and the sacrament working *ex opere operato* [through the act of the sacrament itself], the church causes supernatural grace to be infused into a man, thus making him capable of good works flowing forth from the supernatural fountain of love. These good works make him worthy of the blessedness of heaven on the principle of *meritum ex condigno* [condign merit].

This juxtaposition of a natural and a supernatural order explains the remarkable phenomenon that Rome has always reared two types of children and has tailored Christianity more or less to suit all men without exception. If we for a moment think away the supernatural order that Rome has built up over the natural order, we find not much left besides pure rationalism, genuine Pelagianism, and unmitigated deism. The root of this Catholic system lies in Pelagianism. God was free to create the world or not to create. He might have made it one way or perhaps another way. According to his good pleasure, he could create people either with or without a supernatural knowledge of his being. His will is in no way bound by [Platonic?] ideas.

Accordingly, we can find as many grades and stages of goodness and virtue as it pleases God to make. Hierarchical order and arrangement constitute the central principle of the Roman system. Hierarchy among the angels, hierarchy in the knowledge of God, hierarchy in moral life, hierarchy in the church, and, on the other side of the grave, hierarchy in the *receptacula* [places of rest]. The highest is not for everyone. The natural man of 1 Cor. 2:14 is, according to Rome, not sinful man but man without the *donum superadditum*. This man is capable, through the exercising of his gifts, of completely attaining his natural destination. Hence the milder judgment that Rome pronounces over the heathen. But from this principle also flows, in the Christian sphere, the teaching of *fides implicita* [implicit faith], the concessions in morality, and the calculations of casuistry. Not all men stand on the same plain; moral and religious ideals are adjustable to the aptitude and receptivity of the individual. This principle also accounts for the sympathy that Catholic intellectuals bore toward the rationalistic and deistic theology of the previous century. In itself this theology may be deemed perfectly true and good. It is only

incomplete and in need of supplementation. And it is upon this rationalistic basis that Catholic apologetics seeks to erect the structure of the supernatural order. Roman Catholic dogmatics organizes itself according to this scheme. The *theologia naturalis* is the *praeambula fidei* [preamble of faith]. Next follow the *motiva credibilitatis* [motivations toward belief]. And upon them the *theologia supernaturalis* [supernatural theology] rises on high.

But Rome also rears another class of children. There exist idealistic, mystical people who are not content with the natural, who thirst for something higher and better. These reach up to the destination of a supernatural life, which God has made possible through the church. To reach this goal, the natural life is an unprofitable hinderance. It is not sinful per se but is nevertheless an impediment. Perfection is best and most certainly arrived at by the way of the three *consilia* [counsels]: poverty, obedience, and chastity. The origins of monasticism in many respects still remain obscure. But the spirit of this movement has come to permeate the whole Roman Catholic system. The supernatural is an order all its own, highly exalted above and cut off from natural life. He who would serve in the first order must needs, so far as possible, put to death the second. Monks are the Christians, the "religious" par excellence. They represent not the only, but certainly the highest, Christian ideal.

Therefore whatever in the realm of the natural is transferred to the realm of the supernatural must first be consecrated. The sign of the cross, holy water, anointing, exorcism, and ordination are so many means by which the confusion of the two realms is warded off and the supernatural is preserved in its separateness and purity. Not only persons but also inanimate objects such as churches, altars, bells, candles, chalices, habits, and the like are thus separated from the profane and brought over onto sacred terrain. All things within that realm belong to a higher order and prepare one for the *finis supernaturalis* [supernatural destination]. With the aid of these means—especially the *gratia infusa* [infused grace]—which are offered by the church, one can prepare himself for this highest destination. This goal can be pursued with either an intellectual or a mystical emphasis. Scholasticism and mysticism are branches of one trunk. They do not really stand over against one another. On the contrary, they mutually support one another, are based on the same principle, and frequently go together. Both are Roman Catholic in origin, character, and purpose. Catholic piety bears the character of "devotion"—that is, of total dedication of the whole man with all his powers to meditation and contemplation of the sacred, of the religious in the narrow sense. The counterpart of this dedication is the renunciation of the natural life.

Both of these character traits of Catholicism are quite evident. On the one hand there is the renunciation of the earthly and a total dedication to the heavenly that fill us with respect and admiration. Rome can justly lay claim to saints of the highest order. But on the other hand, there is an indulgence of the weaknesses of human nature that constitutes a slap in the face of Christian morality. Rome's hegemony was never so absolute and uncontested as in the Middle Ages. Rome had spread her wings over all. Yet it was not all gold that glittered. Underneath the form of Christianity there lay hidden a powerful natural life which was certainly no stranger to the world and the lust thereof [cf. 1 John 2:17 AV]. The natural had indeed been driven underground, but it was not renewed and sanctified. It was only a matter of time before it began powerfully to assert itself over against the Roman hierarchy. That time gradually came toward the end of the Middle Ages. Everywhere a state of spiritual agitation, a movement in quest of freedom, asserted itself. It expressed itself in unbelief and mockery of every sort, in worldliness and licentiousness, in renaissance and humanism. Rome had not solved its basic problem. Faith and reason, church and state, nature and grace stood in unreconciled opposition to one another. And the natural man threw the yoke of Rome from his neck.

### III

In the long run, it became apparent that even the religious man, the Christian, could not come to peace in Roman Catholicism. The Reformation experienced Rome's supernaturalism not merely as a burden upon thinking but as a burden upon the conscience, as a hindrance to salvation. The Reformation was not a political, social, or scientific movement. It was a religious-ethical movement, an action on the part of Christian faith itself. It was not Luther's intention to grasp assurance of salvation with one hand while continuing to cling to sin with the other. The Reformation was rather born of the conviction that good works could never provide the comfort of forgiveness, the experience and joy of being children of God, or the assurance of salvation and blessing. The doing of good works to merit blessing was quite appropriate for man created after the image of God in the *foedus operum*; but with the advent of sin, such merit became quite impossible. Now forgiveness, sonship, righteousness, and blessing are ours only if God grants them in his grace. Indeed, good works are possible only when we have been previously assured of our sonship by the gift of God's grace in Christ. A servant works for his reward; a child's life is based on thankfulness. Good works

presuppose faith and are the fruit of faith. Change the nature of the tree, and the good fruits follow naturally [cf. Luke 6:43-45].

Thus the Reformation based her position not on the *religio supernaturalis* but on the covenant of grace, the *foedus gratiae*. But having made that choice, the problem of the relation of nature and grace became even more difficult. There could be no talk of good works without faith. The image of God did belong to man's being, but it had been lost through sin. Now nothing good remained in fallen man; all his thoughts, words, and deeds were polluted by sin. The Reformers' condemnation of the natural man was much harsher than that of Rome. The "psychical man" ["unspiritual" or "natural," RSV] of 1 Corinthians 2:14 was conceived by them not *in puris naturalibus*, by nature unable to grasp the mysteries of the faith, but as a sinner who because of the darkening of his mind is unable to grasp spiritual realities. Luther raged against "reason" his whole life long as something that always "resisted God's laws" and was a "dark lantern." He scorned Aristotle, that "dead heathen, who possessed no knowledge but only darkness." With this the Formula of Concord agreed when it judged man's understanding, heart, and will as "utterly corrupt and dead"<sup>2</sup> in spiritual matters, capable of no more "than a stone, a tree trunk, or slime."<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, the Reformation could not deny the many good things accomplished by the natural man. The Lutherans could find no other way of dealing with this difficulty than by making a strict separation of the heavenly and the earthly, of the spiritual and the sensible, of "two hemispheres, of which one is lower, the other higher."<sup>4</sup> In the affairs of the natural life, man's reason and will remain free and capable of some good, but in spiritual matters they are utterly blind and powerless. The Roman Catholic dualism is here not really overcome, even though the opposition of natural and supernatural has been modified in an ethical direction.

Calvin's logical and systematic spirit was unable to rest content with such a dualism. On the one hand, he considered man's sin to be so serious and profound as to render human nature incapable of good, in whatever sphere. If sin had been left to itself, said he, then everything would have been corrupted and destroyed. On the other hand, he was unable to agree with Zwingli, who extended the sway of the *gratia specialis* far beyond

<sup>2</sup> "Prorsus corruptus atque mortuus."

<sup>3</sup> "Quam lapis, truncus aut limus."

<sup>4</sup> "Duo hemisphaeria, quorum unum inferius, alterum superius."



the borders of historic Christianity and allowed that it was working even in the world of the heathen. Whatever natural gifts and virtues might be conceded to man, he nonetheless missed the one thing essential: the knowledge of God in Christ his Son, the knowledge of God's fatherly love and compassion. Yet it would not do to deny the true, the good, and the beautiful that one can see in mankind outside of Christ. That would not only be in conflict with experience but would also entail a denial of God's gifts and hence constitute ingratitude toward him.

Thus it is that Calvin, in dependence upon and with an appeal to Scripture, comes to distinguish between general and special grace, between the working of the Spirit in all creation and the work of sanctification that belongs only to those who believe. God did not leave sin alone to do its destructive work. He had and, after the fall, continued to have a purpose for his creation; he interposed common grace between sin and the creation—a grace that, while it does not inwardly renew, nevertheless restrains and compels. All that is good and true has its origin in this grace, including the good we see in fallen man. The light still does shine in the darkness. The spirit of God makes its home and works in all the creation.

Consequently, traces of the image of God continue in mankind. Understanding and reason remain, and he possesses all sorts of natural gifts. In him dwells a feeling, a notion of the Godhead, a seed of religion. Reason is a precious gift of God and philosophy a *praeclarum Dei donum* [splendid gift of God]. Music too is God's gift. The arts and sciences are good, useful, and of great value. The state is an institution of God. The goods of life do not just serve to provide for man's needs in the strict sense; they also serve to make life pleasant. They are not purely *ad necessitatem* [for necessity]; they are also *ad oblectamentum* [for delight]. Men still have a sense of the truth and of right and wrong; we see the natural love that binds parents and children together. In the things which appertain to this earthly life, man can still accomplish much good. In spite of the extremely strict discipline that Calvin instituted in Geneva, he shows no hesitation in acknowledging these facts with gratitude. He does so without dragging his feet as if compelled against his will, without a choice in the matter. No, he eagerly grants it, second to none in expressing heartfelt gratitude. Had he not fully acknowledged these good and perfect gifts from the Father of Lights, he would have been in conflict with Scripture and guilty of gross ingratitude.

This has been the sound position of all true Reformed people as well. To be sure, they did not develop the thought of Calvin any further on this point. Zanchius, for example, does little more than copy out the chapter in Calvin's *Institutes*. Their works on dogmatics do not devote a

*locus* [section] to common grace. But in their teaching on the loss of the *imago Dei* [image of God], on the breaking of the covenant of works, on the virtues of the heathen, on the authority of worldly powers, and so on, the images used by Calvin all reappear. In this doctrine of *gratia communis* the Reformed maintained the particular and absolute character of the Christian religion on the one hand, while on the other they were second to none in appreciating all that God continued to give of beauty and worth to sinful men. Thereby they acknowledged both the seriousness of sin and the legitimacy of the natural. Thereby they were kept from Pelagianism as well as from pietism.

And yet they were unable to hinder the growth of the one-sided views that sprang up alongside the Reformation in the forms of Anabaptism and Socinianism. One must question whether these two movements are entitled to claim the name Protestant or Reformed for themselves. Formally, negatively, they obviously belonged to those who protested against Rome. But materially, in principle, and positively speaking, their dualism places them much closer to Rome than to the Reformers. They are children of the Middle Ages much more than of the new period that broke in with the Reformation. They are continuations of tendencies and directions that were long present in Roman Catholicism; their spiritual fathers are themselves children of Rome: both Laelius and Faustus Socinus were of Italian origin. Unbelief, indifferentism, and atheism had here, long before the Reformation, gained considerable ground. The Renaissance offered welcome weapons with which to attack church and Christianity; the mysteries of the faith, trinity, incarnation, and atonement had long since been subjected to cutting criticism. Laelius, of a prominent family that had distinguished itself especially in the area of jurisprudence, became known in Venice for such criticism. Later Faustus came totally under the influence of his uncle. Socinianism was far more an aristocratic intellectual movement than it was a popular religious phenomenon; thus it came especially to have influence among the Polish nobility that possessed humanistic education.

Similarly, Anabaptism shows clear affinities with religious movements and phenomena of the Middle Ages. Ritschl goes perhaps too far when he explains Anabaptism entirely with an appeal to the Middle Ages and views it as a revival of the Franciscan order. Yet it is still remarkable that a number of characteristics proper to Anabaptism are also found earlier among several orders. The literalistic interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, the injunction against oaths, chiliasm, the appeal to revelations, world-flight, and the like are not of the Reformation; they are derived from the Catholic Middle Ages.

Both the Socinians and the Anabaptists come into conflict with one aspect of the Catholic system. Just as the Nestorians and Monophysites of an earlier age drew opposite conclusions from the same principle, so also the Socinians and Anabaptists were driven to opposite positions on the basis of the same fundamental principle. Both rejected the possibility of harmonizing the natural and the supernatural; both proceed from the opposition of the human and the divine. The Socinians denigrate the *ordo supernaturalis* [supernatural order] while the Anabaptists do the same to the *ordo naturalis* [natural order]. The former criticize the central mysteries of the faith—the trinity, the incarnation, and the atonement; the latter set themselves in opposition to the natural order of affairs in family, state, and society as these are recognized by Rome.

The Socinians misconstrued the *gratia specialis* and retained nothing besides nature; the Anabaptists scorn the *gratia communis* and acknowledge nothing besides grace. Here, Christ is not really God; there he is not really man. The Socinians lost that which was unique to Christianity; they retained nothing besides the *religio naturalis*; mankind possesses the *imago Dei* which consists of lordship, and did not lose the image with the fall. Original sin does not exist; Christ has added nothing essentially new; those who keep his commandments earn immortality as their reward. Gradually, the *religio naturalis* comes entirely to dispossess the *religio supernaturalis*.

In contrast, the Anabaptists scorn the creation; Adam was of the earth, earthly; the natural order as such is unclean; but Christ, who brought his human nature down from heaven, infuses a new, spiritual, and divine substance into man at his rebirth. The born-again man, since he is wholly renewed and other, may have no intercourse with unbelievers. Consequently, the Anabaptists reject oaths, war, the magistracy, the death penalty, worldly dress and lifestyle, marriage with unbelievers, and infant baptism; the supernatural order thrusts aside the entire natural order.

Thus the one group was conformed to the world, while the other practiced world-flight. Both parties accused the Reformers of not going far enough. The Socinians were dissatisfied because the Reformers did not criticize Roman doctrine radically enough, while the Anabaptists felt cheated because they did not criticize Roman practice radically enough. And, at their extremes, these two movements repeatedly converged in an amazing commingling of rationalistic and supernaturalistic elements.

These two streams not only won a place for themselves beside the churches of the Reformation but also exercised a tremendous influence within the Reformed churches themselves. In Holland the Socinians won

ground through the Remonstrants, and in the person of Spinoza influenced English Deism, while in the figure of Descartes they influenced the rationalism of Germany and Holland. Socinianism was the cradle of rationalism as well as of supernaturalism.

Similarly, one can trace the effects of Anabaptism not only among the Mennonites but also in Labadism, Pietism, and in the Moravian Brethren on the Continent, and in the Independentists, the Baptists, and the Quakers and Methodists of England and America. In all these movements the doctrine of the *gratia communis* was either misconstrued or rejected. Even in the Reformed churches themselves the original, Reformed principle was frequently weakened on the one or the other side, or simply adulterated. Rationalism may have been conquered in name but in fact was far from having been overcome. Similarly, in pious circles, certain traits kept coming up which called to mind the old Anabaptism. The scorning of the letter of Scripture and the elevation of the inner light of the Holy Spirit; the preference for impromptu edifying discourses along with a denigration of the office of minister of the Word; the belittling of the objective ordinances of God for church and covenant, for the sacraments and offices; the preference for closed societies; the rejection of art, scholarship, science, culture, and all the goods of earthly life, and the spurning of the vocation that rests upon us in family, business, and the state—all these are fruits not of healthy Reformation but of the unsound Anabaptist tradition.

These trends were not, however, limited to Christian circles. Also among those who broke radically with Christianity we see essentially the same patterns and tendencies. Mankind never escapes unpunished when it rejects its destination in this life or the next. Not too many years ago man's health and weal were sought exclusively in the exploitation and domination of the earth. Secularization was the watchword of the century. The ties that bound man to eternity were to be broken; paradise was to be established for man on this earth. God and religion were, at least in the supernatural sense, the enemies of the human race. "The natural would become the super-divine."<sup>5</sup> Nature was God. Art, scholarship, science, and industry were deities to be worshiped and served. Culture made cultus superfluous. Humanity replaced Christianity, and hygiene abolished morality. The theater was an improvement on the church, and Lessing's *Nathan* a more-than-adequate substitute for the

<sup>5</sup> The printed text reads "Le surnaturel serait le surdivin," which appears to be an error for "Le naturel serait le surdivin."

Bible. The doctrine of the incarnation of God was inverted into the dogma of the deification of man.

The century has not yet come to an end. Everywhere one already finds contrasts. On the one hand we see distress and misery, and on the other a satiety and surfeit of culture. The great expectations that men held for this culture have collapsed. Hope has turned to despair and doubt. Optimism has capitulated to pessimism. Formerly men gushed on about the nobility of human nature and even marveled at the forms it took among the Hottentots and Fuegians. Today men are more inclined to speak, with a certain complacency, of *la bête humaine* [the human animal] that is present in the most civilized *Kultur Mensch*.

Nature, formerly praised for her beauty and revered as a temple, is now a somber stage filled with confusion and conflict; her raging elements and threatening powers place man's very life in danger. The world could not be worse; no work of a good and wise Supreme Being, it is the product of blind fate and arbitrary chance. Art and science, from which men once expected everything, now appear unspeakably poor and stand perplexed right where their aid and comfort was originally sought and most needed. Life and fortune appear as mysteries that no knowledge can unravel. Science has its limits; our knowledge is finite and limited to the empirical. Thus, what has value is not reason but imagination. Let passion replace thought! Feeling is all, intellect nothing. Power of will is vanity; activity should give way to peace and resignation. Contemplation is of more value than the life of action. In this way alone, perhaps the world of the unknown might yield her secrets to us. Not too many years ago, people laughed at miracles, angels, and everything supernatural; today men use any means possible—spiritism, Buddhism, hypnotism, theosophy—to get to the unknown land to which all go and none return. The mysterious, the dark, and the unknown exercise an incredible influence. Day by day pagan superstitions increase their sway among nonbelievers. Faith is scarcely cast off before superstition takes its place. The victory of rationalism was hardly complete before mysticism bid fair to steal its crown. Thus at the end of our century the divinization and vilification of man and the adoration and denigration of nature are strangely mixed together. All balance has gone awry, the harmony of life is broken.

#### IV

Here it is that the significance of the doctrine of common grace for our time becomes clear. At the bottom of every serious question lies the

self-same problem. The relation of faith and knowledge, of theology and philosophy, of authority and reason, of head and heart, of Christianity and humanity, of religion and culture, of heavenly and earthly vocation, of religion and morality, of the contemplative and the active life, of sabbath and workday, of church and state—all these and many other questions are determined by the problem of the relation between creation and re-creation, between the work of the Father and the work of the Son. Even the simple, common man finds himself caught up in this struggle whenever he senses the tension that exists between his earthly and heavenly calling.

No wonder, then, that such a delicate and complicated problem remains unresolved and that no one in this dispensation achieves a completely harmonious answer. Every person and every movement are guilty of a greater or lesser one-sidedness here. Life swings to and fro, again and again, between worldliness and world-flight. Head and heart painfully wrestle for supremacy. It has been said that in every human heart there dwells a bit of Jew and Greek. It would be a fine thing if already in this life we might walk as children of God, free and easy. There is something powerfully attractive about antinomianism. To do the good automatically, as if by instinct, without the categorical imperative of duty . . . that would certainly be more glorious than having to be continually reminded by the forbidding command of the limits within which we must walk. Why must the free flight of genius, of intuition, of spontaneity be perpetually crippled by the hobble of the law? What do law and grace, freedom and authority, have to do with one another? What communion exists between Romanticism and Classicism? And yet, time and time again, he who dreams the enticing dream of antinomianism in art and science, in religion and morality, awakens to the shock of disillusionment. Nature and grace are both necessary; neither of them can be denied or despised.

And yet it makes a great difference whether one conceives of this dualism as absolute or relative. With Rome it appears as absolute. The essence of revelation, of the Christian religion lies in the mystery. Not only can it not be comprehended, it *may* not be comprehended. Rome sees to it with great care that it remain a mystery—for Rome's very existence stands or falls thereby. The Vatican Council declared revelation to be an absolute necessity, since God in his infinite goodness has destined man for a supernatural end—namely, to partake of the heavenly blessings that are completely beyond man's power to grasp: "What no eye has seen, no ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived" [cf. 1 Cor. 2:9]. On the Roman position a complete and genuine reconciliation of

nature and grace is not possible. But the Reformation saw this relation differently, and sought the essence of special revelation not in the mystery, but in grace. The gospel of the Cross, the good news of God's grace in Christ, *that* is the mystery which is beyond the grasp of the natural man and comprehended only by the spiritual man.

According to the Reformation, that which is *supra naturam* [above nature] is not the metaphysical doctrine of Trinity, incarnation, and atonement per se but the *content* of all this—namely, grace. Not as if the Reformers wished to banish metaphysics from theology—the separation of the two proposed by Ritschl is practically speaking not even feasible. But the metaphysical doctrine taken in itself or for its own sake does not yet constitute the content or object of our Christian faith.

Not only Luther and Melancthon but Calvin too considered it idle speculation to inquire *quid sit Deus* [what God is]; for us the only point of importance is to know “how he is, and what pertains to his nature.”<sup>6</sup> The person of Christ, the fullness of his grace and truth, is what is new and peculiar to Christianity. The salvation of the church has no other ground than the person of Christ. These matters are, in the proper sense of the words, *supra naturam* and *supra rationem* [above reason] with respect to the natural, unspiritual man. What the heathen did not and could not know was the “assurance of the divine benevolence towards us”;<sup>7</sup> no human understanding could grasp “who the true God is and how he wishes to be toward us.”<sup>8</sup> It scandalized the Jews that Jesus received sinners and tax collectors. That God should forgive sinners freely, by grace, was foolishness to the Greeks and Romans, who saw virtue precisely as their own achievement.

Roman Catholicism posits the essence of Christianity in its revelation of truths that man could never have discovered on his own. Thus the dogmas of Trinity, incarnation, and atonement in particular had to be accepted even at the very least *fide implicita* [by implicit faith] in order to partake of the heavenly bliss. But the Reformed theologians attempted to show that all these supernatural truths were in essence known to Adam before the fall, that they were part of the content of the image of God, and consequently were “natural” in that they belonged to the being of man. They said that the Trinity was already known to the first man; the Son was mediator also before the fall, albeit not of atonement, but of

<sup>6</sup> “Qualis sit et quid eius naturae conveniat.”

<sup>7</sup> “Divinae erga nos benevolentiae certitudo.”

<sup>8</sup> “Quis sit verus Deus qualisve erga nos esse velit.”

communion. Furthermore, Adam, and even Christ himself, walked by faith and not by sight. Conversely, the Reformed taught that there was no point of religious or ethical doctrine after the fall that man could derive from nature pure and unadulterated. There is no *theologia naturalis* [natural theology]. Not only can sinful man not derive from nature the Trinity and incarnation, he cannot even come to know God in his oneness, his being, and his attributes. He also misconstrues God's revelation in nature and suppresses the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18).

Revelation after the fall did not therefore have the purpose of relating some supernatural truths to man, which otherwise would have remained unknown to him. Nor was it a supplement or completion of revelation before the fall. It was a change in that revelation. What good would the knowledge of all sorts of supernatural truths have done for sinful man in his state of guilt? What he needed to know was this: that the God against whom he had sinned was a God of grace. The change in God's revelation lay in this. After the fall, God's revelation takes another form on account of man's sinful state; it flows forth entirely from God's grace. In grace alone lies its principle, its *principium*. This principle of grace now begins to take over, as it were, or to control all the knowledge that man might have received from special revelation or from nature. This grace reveals to us not only Trinity, incarnation, and atonement but also the unity, the being, and the attributes of God. Grace again teaches us rightly to know God in his omniscience and omnipotence, in his omnipresence and eternity. Grace shines its true light upon man, revealing his origin and destination. Grace becomes the only principle for all our religious and ethical knowledge. And all this knowledge, which man before sin may have had from nature or from revelation, becomes soteriologically changed. It becomes concentrated in Christ and functions in the service of grace. He who was Elohim reveals himself and lets himself be known as Yahweh. The Son who had been the mediator of communion now becomes the mediator of atonement. The Holy Spirit had been an indwelling Spirit; now he becomes the Spirit of conviction and comfort. Faith, which as *fides generalis* [general faith] had already been present in Adam, now becomes a *fides specialis* [special faith], trust in God's grace in Christ, and thus the means of justification and the way of salvation.

Enmity against the gospel does not ultimately direct itself against the supernatural form of the evangel but against its material content. If man's intellect had not been darkened by sin, it would have had no difficulties with miracles per se. Miracle in itself is not in conflict with our nature or the nature of creation; it belongs, so to speak, to the being



of man. All men are by nature supernaturalists. Naturalism, like atheism, is an invention of philosophy, but it receives no support from human nature. As long as religion continues to be of man's essence, so long shall he be a supernaturalist, for there is no religion without supernaturalism. Every believer, of whatever stripe, though he be a naturalist with his head, remains a supernaturalist at heart. Whoever attempts to remove completely the supernatural from prayer, from communion with God, or from religion in general murders that which is noble and best in himself. Enmity toward God's revelation in Christ is thus, finally, always moral in character, and to that extent it is enmity alone—that is, sin and unbelief. Foolishness comes out of the heart of man (Mark 7:22). There is nothing more difficult for man than to be saved by grace and to live on gifts. It is this which far transcends the reason, the power, and the nature of man.

If the revelation in Christ is only a modification of the original revelation, than it naturally possesses only a temporary and transitory character. It is not absolutely but only accidentally necessary. It became necessary only because of sin, which is accidental and does not pertain to the essence of things. The *foedus gratiae*, in all its divisions, is destined to pass away. Various dispensations are already past history; those before and under the law have come and gone. But also the segment under which we live, and which we call the New Testament or Christian dispensation, will have its end. The Christian religion is temporal; as an *Erlösungsreligion* [religion of salvation] it will someday have completed its task. When the kingdom has fully come, Christ will hand it over to God the Father. The original order will be restored. But not naturally, as if nothing had ever happened, as if sin had never existed and the revelation of God's grace in Christ had never occurred. Christ gives more than sin stole; grace was made much more to abound. He does not simply restore us to the *status integritatis* [state of righteousness] of Adam; he makes us, by faith, participants of the *non posse peccare* [being unable to sin] (1 John 3:9) and of the *non posse mori* [being unable to die] (John 11:25). Adam does not again receive the place which he lost by sin. The first man was of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. Just as we have born the image of the earthy, so too after the resurrection shall we bear the image of the heavenly man (1 Cor. 15:45-49). A new song will be sung in heaven (Rev. 5:9, 10), but the original order of creation will remain, at least to the extent that all distinctions of nature and grace will once and for all be done away with. Dualism will cease. Grace does not remain outside or above or beside nature but rather permeates and wholly renews it. And thus nature, reborn by grace, will

be brought to its highest revelation. That situation will again return in which we serve God freely and happily, without compulsion or fear, simply out of love, and in harmony with our true nature. That is the genuine *religio naturalis* [natural religion]. In order to restore such religion, faith has for a time become a *religio Christiana*, *Erlösungsreligion* [Christian religion, a religion of salvation].

By means of this organic way of relating nature and grace, the Reformation in principle overcame the mechanical juxtaposition and dualistic worldview of the Catholic Church. And thereby, too, the significance of the cosmos increases greatly. It still represents that primary, original, and natural state that the Christian religion, the *foedus gratiae*, leads back to. While it is true that the world has been corrupted by sin, it nevertheless remains the work of the Father, the Creator of heaven and earth. Of his own will he maintains it by his covenant, and by his *gratia communis* he powerfully opposes the destructive might of sin. He fills the hearts of men with nourishment and joy and does not leave himself without a witness among them. He pours out upon them numberless gifts and benefits. Families, races, and peoples he binds together with natural love and affection. He allows societies and states to spring up that the citizens might live in peace and security. Wealth and well-being he grants them that the arts and sciences can prosper. And by his revelation in nature and history he ties their hearts and consciences to the invisible, supra-sensible world and awakens in them a sense of worship and virtue.

The entirety of the rich life of nature and society exists thanks to God's common grace. But why should he continue to preserve such a sinful world by a special action of his grace? Does he squander his gifts? Is he acting purposelessly? Is it not because natural life, in all its forms has value in his eyes in spite of sin's corruption? The love of family and kin, societal and political life, art and science are all in themselves objects of his divine good pleasure. He delights also in these works of his hands. They all together constitute, not in their mode of being but in their essence, the original order that God called into being at creation and that he still preserves and maintains, sin notwithstanding. Contempt for this divine order of creation is thus illegitimate; it flies in the face of experience and conflicts with Scripture. Here all separatism or asceticism is cut off at the roots. All world-flight is a repudiation of the first article of our Apostolic Creed. Christ indeed came to destroy the works of the devil. But more than that, he came to restore the works of the Father and so to renew man according to the image of him who first created man.

Hereby we have not denied the serious character of sin. Sin is certainly not a substance but a quality, not *materia* [matter] but *forma* [form]. Sin

is not the essence of things but rather cleaves to the essence; it is a *privatio* [privation], albeit *actuosa* [active], and to that extent accidental, having penetrated from the outside like death. Hence sin can be separated and removed from reality. The world is and remains susceptible of purification and redemption. Its essence can be rescued, and its original state can return. Even so, sin is a power, a principle, that has penetrated deeply into all forms of created life. The organism of the world itself has been affected. Left to itself, sin would have made desolate and destroyed all things. But God has interposed his grace and his covenant between sin and the world. By his common grace he restrains sin with its power to dissolve and destroy. Yet common grace is not enough. It compels but it does not change; it restrains but does not conquer. Unrighteousness breaks through its fences again and again. To save the world, nothing less was needed than the immeasurable greatness of the divine power, the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:19, 20). To save the world required nothing less than the fullness of his grace and the omnipotence of his love.

The Christian religion does not, therefore, have the task of creating a new supernatural order of things. It does not intend to institute a totally new, heavenly kingdom such as Rome intends in the church and the Anabaptists undertook at Munster. Christianity does not introduce a single substantial foreign element into the creation. It creates no new cosmos but rather makes the cosmos new. It restores what was corrupted by sin. It atones the guilty and cures what is sick; the wounded it heals. Jesus was anointed by the Father with the Holy Spirit to bring good tidings to the afflicted, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captive and the opening of prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and to comfort those who mourn (Isa. 61:1, 2). He makes the blind to see, the lame to walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised, and the gospel is preached to the poor (Matt. 11:5). Jesus was not a new lawgiver; he was not a statesman, poet, or philosopher. He was *Jesus*—that is, Savior. But he was that totally and perfectly, not in the narrow Roman Catholic, Lutheran, or Anabaptist sense but in the full, deep, and broad Reformed sense of the word. Christ did not come just to restore the religio-ethical life of man and to leave all the rest of life undisturbed, as if the rest of life had not been corrupted by sin and had no need of restoration. No, the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the communion of the Holy Spirit extend even as far as sin has corrupted. Everything that is sinful, guilty, unclean, and full of woe is, as such and for that very

reason, the object of the evangel of grace that is to be preached to every creature.

Therefore Christ has also a message for home and society, for art and science. Liberalism chose to limit its power and message to the heart and inner chamber, declaring that its kingdom was not of this world. But if the kingdom is not *of*, it is certainly *in* this world, and is intended for it. The word of God which comes to us in Christ is a word of liberation and restoration for the whole man, for his understanding and his will, for his body and his soul. Sin entered the *world*, and for just that reason, "God so loved the *world*. . . ." This word has often been seen as a burden too heavy to bear. Rome has made of it a yoke that oppresses and represses the natural. Nor are the Protestant churches blameless in this regard, for they have often turned the gospel into a new law. But that is mistaken. The gospel is not a law but good news! It came not to judge but to save. It is supernatural, because it has welled up from God's free, generous, and rich love. It does not kill but makes alive. It does not wound but heals. It is pure grace. And this grace does not cancel nature but establishes and restores it.

If then we stand in this grace, in this freedom with which Christ has made us free, we are to show our Christian faith first of all in the faithful performance of our earthly calling. Rome sees the highest Christian ideal fully realized only in the monk, who has left his natural calling to devote himself totally to spiritual things. This conception of the Christian life has also made deep inroads in our own Protestant circles. The ordinary man who honorably fulfills his daily calling before God hardly seems to count anymore; he does nothing, or so it is thought, for the kingdom of God. A student who studies hard and spends his time in a Christian manner may be good, but a person who dedicates a great part of his time to evangelism is better and more worthy. In the view of many today, to be a real Christian requires something extra, something out of the ordinary, some supernatural deed. Now this "something extra" for many people consists only in being a member of a host of Christian clubs or organizations. Whether they be regular members, officers, honorary members, inactive members, active members, or contributing members, in any case they are members. And so it is that the power and the worth of Christian faith is not appraised according to what a man does in his common calling but in what he accomplishes above and beyond it. People then seem to be Christians to the extent that they cease to be human and distinguish themselves in speech, dress, customs, and habits from the common man.

The Apostle Paul was of another mind when he admonished everyone

to remain in the vocation to which he had been called (1 Cor. 7:17-23). It is simply not the case that someone who becomes a Christian must drop his natural vocation and dedicate himself to the work of the kingdom in the narrower sense. This can indeed happen, but it is the exception rather than the rule. Contrary to the Methodist view, it is not true that such a change of calling is the inevitable fruit of genuine conversion. What we need in these momentous times is not in the first place something extraordinary but the faithful fulfilling of the various earthly vocations to which the Lord calls his people. No self-imposed worship, no changing the gospel into a new law, no "handle not, taste not, touch not," which are the commandments of men [cf. Col. 2:21-23]. What is needed, rather, is the practice of Christian virtues, which are the cement of society. Household sense, moderation, frugality, diligence, troth-keeping, honesty, orderliness, benevolence, and the like—these are the virtues that seem to decline day by day and that can in no way be replaced by extraordinary measures of state, church, or social organizations. These traits were especially stimulated by Calvinism, and by them it became great. By them, Calvinism caused people to flourish and nations to be born. Calvinism has been, in spite of and partly because of its rigorousness, the Reformation of the natural.

In this we see how Christianity is to relate itself to home and society and how the church is to relate to the state. All these organic spheres of human life arise out of creation; they exist by the *gratia communis*; they derive their authority and power not from the mercy of Christ but from the grace of God. Christ has been anointed, and he is the head of the church; indeed, all power has been given him in heaven and on earth, and all has been cast under his feet. But sovereignty in home, state, and society descend directly from God upon the creation. According to the strictest Roman Catholic theory, all sovereignty has been placed directly by God upon Christ, and thus upon the pope; the *potestas politica* [political power] is subject to the *potestas ecclesiae* [authority of the church]. According to the Remonstrants, God has given all power to the state, which thus stands over the church. But according to Reformed principles, God has accorded to state, home, and society the peculiar power and authority proper to each; beside them stands the church with its own government granted to it by Christ. Subjugation of the church by the state or of the state by the church are thus both condemned. They both need to respect one another and also to support and aid one another. Pressure from either one is excluded. The church may indeed desire that the government of the land be directed by Christian principles and profit from the revelation of God's grace, for state and society have also been

damaged by sin and need God's word to guide and direct, but here too grace does not nullify nature. Home, society, and state may well be reborn by the Spirit of Christ, but they exist and live by virtue of God's ordering of nature; they possess alongside the church their own independence. Christ came not to do away with the world and the various spheres of life but to restore and preserve them.

Ultimately the same holds for the relation of the Christian religion to the arts and sciences. These were first developed in the line of Cain. Like man, they are born and conceived in sin, but they are not of themselves sinful or unclean. They can be sanctified by the word and Spirit of Christ. The gospel is also a word of health and blessing in these powerful aspects of culture. The art, science, or scholarship that scorns the gospel thereby does itself the gravest damage and robs itself of the richest blessings. The art that turns its back on Christ and his cross loses the ideal and destroys itself in realism. And the science that does not acknowledge the word of God ends in agnosticism and is left viewing the origin, being, and destiny of things as insoluble riddles.

But here too re-creation is something different than creation. The arts and sciences have their *principium* not in the special grace of regeneration and conversion but in the natural gifts and talents that God in his common grace has also given to nonbelievers. Therefore Christian theologians of all times have also profited from pagan art and learning and have insisted upon a classical education for every man of learning, including the theologian. They were not blind to the dangers of such an education, and desired that it take place under Christian leadership. But they nevertheless maintained the right and independence of the arts and sciences, requiring only that they be sanctified by the Spirit of Christ. Scripture itself, they maintained, gave them freedom to this end. For Moses was reared in all the wisdom of Egypt, the children of Israel decorated the house of the Lord with the gold and silver of Egypt, Solomon used the services of Hiram to build the temple, Daniel was trained in the science of the Chaldeans, and the wisemen from the East laid their gifts at the feet of the baby in Bethlehem.

Theology itself as a science was not born apart from the gifts of the *gratia communis*. She does of course hold a unique place among the sciences. She has her own principle, object, and goal and derives these exclusively from the *gratia specialis*. But she would still not be theology in the scientific sense had she not availed herself of the thinking consciousness of man sanctified by faith and used it to penetrate revelation and understand its content. Theology first came into existence in the body of Christ when *gratia communis* and *gratia specialis* flowed together.

Consequently, theology accords to the other sciences their full due. Theology's honor is not that she sits enthroned above them as *Regina scientiarum* [Queen of the sciences] and waves her scepter over them but that she is permitted to serve them all with her gifts. Theology also can rule only by serving. She is strong when she is weak; she is greatest when she seeks to be least. She can be glorious when she seeks to know nothing save Christ and him crucified. Theology is ultimately nothing other than interpretation of the *gratia Dei* [grace of God] in the arena of science. Grace she ponders and grace she seeks to understand in its length and breadth, in its height and depth. In the middle of the human woe that life reveals all about us, and also in science, theology raises its doxology of the love of God shown forth in Jesus Christ our Lord. And she prophesies a glorious future in which all oppositions, including those between nature and grace, shall be reconciled, and all things, whether on earth or in heaven, shall again in Christ be one.