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Common Grace in the Reformed Faith: A Historical Study

David R. Hanson

Introduction—Common Grace a problem for us

It is not obvious that there are heat-producing tensions in this locus of theology. No English Christian at any rate will sleep the less soundly for hearing that it forms the subject for fresh discussion. But in fact Common Grace is the anchorage of all kinds of practical and cultural issues on the one hand, and on the other hand of theological and philosophical topics that are capable of rousing quite acrimonious controversy.

Academic theologians here have tended to overlook the question: not even the clash between Barth and Brunner in the 1930's (in which Barth contended against Common Grace) produced many repercussions in the British Isles. Today however, there exists a noticeable attraction to the subject at a shallow level. Too often the term's use, far from reflecting a serious grasp of the background to the theme of Common Grace, betrays a total ignorance of the problems at its heart. We owe to the term a real care in handling, such as is not apparent in phrases like 'the realm of Common Grace', and 'our gifts under Common Grace'.

In the last hundred years the pace in discussion over Common Grace has been set in Holland, not surprisingly—for the idea is specifically a Reformed or Calvinistic one. It centres on the relationship of Christians to the 'world in general' and since that has been subjected to dramatic change, we should not be surprised too much, if we find that the Common Grace motif has likewise changed. This background and history deserves our attention, for most of the previous development circumvented the English theological scene and the distinctions which have come to operate in those discussions need to be appreciated if we are to escape the repetition of the less profitable aspects of the story.

That a real problem exists is demonstrated simply by the fact that evangelical writers can be found who completely disallow a doctrine of Common Grace, though others avow that Common Grace does exist and that it evinces a redemptive love of God to all. It is clear that the Reformed teaching about Common Grace which evolved in order to strengthen the confession of a total fall into sin has still to tread warily if it is not to challenge the supremely Reformed doctrine of God's invincible redemptive grace. What is grace? What have we in common with unbelievers? These questions can never be absent in the argument. More specifically still, is it not the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ which brings a sword into human affairs and abolishes common-ness?

Grace?

Primarily we are dealing with God's grace. This is not only goodness or favour or love, but these exhibited where no claims upon them can be

made. It is forfeited love: it relates always to the lostness of man in sin. It is at the heart of the New Testament message and for that reason at the heart of the Reformation. The disappearance of the grace of God from Roman Catholic thinking made the break with Rome inevitable, and the reaction of Rome to the Reformation merely hardened its misunderstanding of grace.¹

Without grace the misery of man is unthinkable. The man who confesses the grace of God always knows something of that misery and cannot be surprised by Scripture which speaks of it as darkness, servility, ignorance and death. He remembers all the same the façade which it showed off—wisdom, wealth, self-determination, mastery of nature and so on. What does surprise him is this—that the world, lying as it does in the evil one, shows any trait which may be regarded as a virtue; and this too—that no end of benefits fall to the lot of those who remain defiers of the Cross. He is not disturbed by the discomfort which accrues to the godly man: he expects no less if he regards himself as a pilgrim. Luther's great hymn displays the true feelings of the Christian harried by the 'Ancient prince of Hell', but who will make a hymn out of the prosperity of the righteous? It is done, of course, in Psalm 73, but when we read of that prosperity it gives us little foundation for a theory of Common Grace. The singer indeed sees only the gulf between the redeemed and the lost when he perceives truly; and then, he tells us, the wearisome task of understanding their prosperity vanished in contemplating their destruction.

How shall we justify our interest in Common Grace?

The good received by men comes from the hand of God—there can be no doubt. We are taught it clearly in Scripture. But what of the good shown by men? Can there be any good in men who lie under God's wrath and in the power of Satan? Must we pass over all the catalogue of virtue in the pagan world, using Augustine's contemptuous 'glittering sins' to describe it? Is it despicable hypocrisy, as he teaches, that produces zeal for civic righteousness in unregenerate men? 'Calvin, in spite of his conviction of the majesty and spiritual character of the moral law, is more generous in his recognition of what is true and good, wherever it be found, than any other Reformer'.² His answer to Augustine at this point was unique—he discovered the doctrine of Common Grace;³ and it is with him we must begin.

It is useful first briefly to establish the status of his doctrine. He confesses no source for it beside Scripture, but it cannot be said that Scripture teaches a doctrine of Common Grace. It cannot be an article of faith and it makes a grotesque showing when it is used as pivotal statement in our (or Calvin's) theology. But it remains there as a useful dogmatic construct for the integration of our understanding of Scripture. It suffers repeatedly from heavy handed enthusiasm and we need to warn ourselves of the danger that Common Grace emerges as a barrier or boundary to the confession of Christ's lordship over His own people.

Common Grace in Calvin

For this section of my essay I am greatly indebted to a most careful doctoral study by H. Kuiper, dated 1928, and defended in the Free University of Amsterdam. In 'Calvin on Common Grace' he presents every passage in the 'Institutes' and the Commentaries which he deems to relate to the subject, and he subjects them to examination. Some 170 pages of Calvin are presented and since a proof 'that God bestows grace not only upon the elect but also upon all creatures' is superfluous in the light of the material from Calvin, a classification of the data is offered. Calvin makes no single reference which gives something like a comprehensive treatment of the whole subject. In addition there is a rich variety of terminology which is not technical and leads to apparent contradictions. Most surprising of all, perhaps Kuiper fails to find one instance of Calvin's use of the term *gratia communis*, and on only four occasions does he qualify that noun by the adjective *communis*. In two of these, Saving Grace is spoken of all the same! With *gratia specialis* we have to be just as careful, for it can refer to the birth of offspring, the endowment of some men with exceptional gifts and the adoption of Abraham's seed into the covenant. Later Reformed theology uses quite hard distinctions of terminology here, unlike Calvin.

The Kuiper classification is useful to follow. It distinguishes three categories in Calvin's Common Grace. They are:

1. Universal Common Grace which touches creatures as creatures,
2. General Common Grace which pertains to men as men,
3. Covenant Grace which extends to all who live in the covenant sphere.

Also, on the basis of distinctions made by Calvin, Kuiper finds in each category a 'special grace' which is furnished to only some, and not all the members of the category.

Examples of Calvin's comments may be given here to illustrate his concept of Common Grace.

1. *Universal Common Grace.* (Inst. I: 5. 6)

' . . . if the cause is sought, by which he was led once to create all these things, and is now moved to preserve them, we shall find that it is his goodness alone. But this being the sole cause, it ought still to be more than sufficient to draw us to his love, inasmuch as there is no creature, as the prophet declares, upon whom God's mercy (*eius misericordia*) has not been poured out'. Calvin refers this statement to Ps. 145: 9, 'The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made'. On Nahum 1: 5, Calvin comments that 'the earth could not stand a single moment unless supported by the goodness and grace (*gratia et bonitate*) of God'.

Thus all creatures participate in the blessing of preservation, but Kuiper finds one passage which speaks of a special blessing given within the creation for creatures as creatures. Under Ps. 104: 16-18 Calvin explains the 'trees of the Lord' as those of great height and surpassing beauty, 'for God's blessing is more conspicuous in them'.

2. *General Common Grace*

Calvin never grows tired of telling us that God shows paternal clemency to men in general, that he loves the human race and is concerned for its welfare. Thus all men must consider it a matter of grace that God has made them men and not animals. (Inst. III: 22.1) This life is a testimony of grace (Gen. 38: 7) 'the longer anyone lives in the world and daily experiences God's paternal care, it is certain that he is the more bountifully dealt with by the Lord'. Therefore what supports life is a gift of grace, and Calvin quotes Mt. 5: 44, 45 in frequent returns to this theme. 'Love your enemies . . . so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven: for he makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust'.

Just as these *natural blessings* are fruits of Common Grace to men, so is the *forbearance* which God shows in delaying his judgment—'in order that he may give all time to repent' (Commentary on II Pet. 3: 9).

The *light of intelligence* is also to be regarded as a divine grace and its power is discussed extensively in the Institutes at II: 2.12-15 though it is prefaced by an emphatic treatment of the corruption and weakening of reason. 'That common opinion that they have taken from Augustine pleases me: that the natural gifts were corrupted in man through sin, but that his supernatural gifts were stripped from him'. 'Something of understanding and judgment remains, yet we shall not call a mind whole and sound that is both weak and plunged in deep darkness'. Nevertheless 'when we so condemn human understanding for its perpetual blindness as to leave it no perception of any object whatever, we not only go against God's Word, but also run counter to the experience of common sense'.

Calvin finds 'one kind of understanding of earthly things; another of heavenly. The first class includes government, household management, all mechanical skills and the liberal arts.⁴ In the second are the knowledge of God and of his will, and the rule by which we conform our lives to it'. (II: 2.13)

'While men dispute about individual sections of the law, they agree on the general conception of equity.—The fact remains that some seed of *political order* has been implanted in all men'. (II: 2.13) 'Hardly anyone is found who does not manifest talent in some art' (2: 17). If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole foundation of truth, we shall not despise it wherever it shall appear. Shall we deny that the truth shone in the ancient jurists? 'Shall we say they are insane who developed medicine? Shall we consider (mathematics) the ravings of madmen?' (II: 2.14) If the Spirit

dwells only in believers, this refers 'to the Spirit of Sanctification. Nevertheless, he fills, moves and quickens all things by the power of the same Spirit. If the Lord has willed that we be helped in physics, dialectic, mathematics and other like disciplines by the work of the ungodly—let us own this assistance'. (II: 2.16)

Much more confined is man's understanding of heavenly things. 'Certainly I do not deny that one can read competent and apt statements about God here and there in the philosophers.—The Lord gave them a slight taste of His divinity—sometimes impelled them to make utterances by the confession of which they would themselves be corrected. But their seeing did not direct them to the truth, much less enable them to attain it'. (II: 2.18) Still here is the '*sensus divinitatis*' and a (defective) knowledge of the rule of life.

Undoubtedly Calvin recognises a *general revelation* of God in His works, and that this is a token of goodness. Thus, under Acts 17: 26, he says 'God comes to meet us and makes himself visible by such manifest signs that we can have no excuse for our ignorance'.

He discovers an *internal restraint of sin* in Common Grace. (Inst. II: 3.3 referred to Ps. 14: 3 and Rom. 3: 12). 'It ought to occur to us that amid this corruption of nature there is some place for God's grace: not such as to cleanse but to restrain it inwardly. For if the Lord gave loose rein to the mind of each man to run riot in his lusts, there would doubtless be no one who would not show in himself every evil thing for which Paul condemns all nature'.

Calvin remains convinced of the depths of depravity and the judgments of God. God examines motives and not deeds only. In a justice that reaches man's heart, all done without faith is sin.

An *external restraint of sin* operates also. Calvin's well-known expositions of the authority of magistrates (Inst. IV: 20) indicate their value. 'Civil government enables men to breath, eat, drink and be warmed, but also in enforcing law, curbs the insolence and licentiousness of the wicked and provides for general peace and safety'. In speaking of the right use of judicial proceedings Calvin states that the assistance of the magistrate is a sacred gift of God.

In view of the nature of these several patterns of General Common Grace, it would be surprising if Kuiper in his thesis were not able to identify many special gifts devolving upon the noble, the skilled, the learned, the man of the moment and of course upon certain definite groups of men. They need not be detailed.

3. *Covenant Common Grace*

In Calvin's deliverance on the Common Grace of God, Kuiper finds last the category of Covenant Common Grace. It is identified by Calvin himself as the grace of the covenant or the grace of adoption, the common grace of election and promiscuous grace. This last mentioned term, used

in Inst. II: 21.7, indicates an election, or common adoption in which some subjects were 'sons of Abraham according to the flesh'. He believed, too, that a certain covenant grace is granted to all who in the New Testament dispensation live in the covenant sphere, to all the believers and their children, to all who in any sense may be accounted members of the New Testament Church. Calvin intimates that adoption into the covenant holds a kind of middle place between the rejection of the human race and the election of a small number into salvation (II: 21.7). These men may be called God's own possession, the inheritance of the Lord. Kuiper notes that Calvin appears to make the covenant extend 'as widely as the external preaching of the Word'. (Comm. on Gen. 25: 23). Certainly Calvin regards the preaching of the Word as a sign of God's favour to any people—and its deprivation an extreme curse.

Special graces abound within this genre of Common Grace. All of these gifts bear a temporal character, says Kuiper. Among the ones cited by Calvin, those affecting Judas are of interest: his apostolic office (Inst. III: 22.7) and excellent gifts meet for that office, and the indulgence shown by Christ in concealing his name at the Last Supper (which gave an opportunity for him to come to repentance).

The *source of Common Grace* for Calvin is quite simply the fact that God is the 'fountain of all good'. He does good because He is good. Yet Christ is certainly related to the good which all men receive (Inst. I: 2.1). 'In this ruin of mankind no one now experiences God either as Father or as Author of salvation or favourable in any way, until Christ the Mediator comes forward to reconcile Him to us'. In the comment on Daniel 2: 40-43, Calvin writes that 'all the kingdoms of this world are founded on the power and beneficence of Christ'. On Eph. 1: 22 he says 'with this condition Christ was made Head of the Church—that He should have the administration of all things'. With regard to the material or temporal endowments of believers Calvin has no doubts that they spring from the Cross of Christ—'In Adam we were deprived of the inheritance of the whole world'. (Inst. III: 25.9) but 'The more man's dominion over the world is apparent, the more ought we to be affected with the sense of God's grace—as often as we eat food or enjoy other comforts—for Christ is the lawful Heir of heaven and earth, by whom the faithful recover what they lost in Adam'. (Comm. on Ps. 8: 8-10). Indeed, this argument is carried so far as to say that the godless have only illegitimate possession of their benefits. On I Tim. 4: 'properly speaking, God has assigned the whole world and all that is in the world, to His children exclusively—they are called the heirs. Therefore unbelievers steal and rob, as it were, the property of another'.

How is the wrath of God averted from sinners so that they may enjoy favours from Him despite their rejection of Christ? This is no small problem for the student of Common Grace. The idea that blessings, won for the elect by their Redeemer, spill over upon others, is advanced. That Christ's protection of the interests of his Church necessitates restraint and cultivation of the ungodly is also found in Calvin. Lastly emerges the thought that Christ in his work as the Eternal Word, through whom the

world is created and upheld (as the 'Mediator of Creation', Abraham Kuyper will say) furnishes all men and things with good gifts. Calvin asserts that this 'substratum' qualifies Christ most fittingly for his work as Redeemer, so that Common Grace here precedes, rather than follows, atonement.

The Purpose of Common Grace

Kuiper distinguishes in Calvin's mind these ends of Common Grace:
the welfare of mankind and creation
the advancement of Christ's church
the allurements of men to repentance
the exhibition of God's attributes
the discharge of all excuse from the wicked, and (in one case—
Gen. 20: 6) the mitigation of future judgment.

That Calvin appears to contradict himself should not surprise us in view of his copious output. However two points at issue have recurred to trouble all later writers on the subject. Calvin, in commenting on Jer. 33: 8, says that 'properly speaking,⁵ what God bestows on the ungodly, cannot be deemed a testimony of favour'. Clearly, however, Calvin does not deny that God is good to unrepentant men; he questions whether 'grace' is not a misleading description of the clemency which accompanies men as long as they live. Again, he teaches on the one hand that God loves the whole human race, wills the conversion of all and wishes all to be saved, but on the other, that He has devoted some men to eternal destruction. Kuiper acknowledges in this a real and not a seeming contradiction. Calvin systematically denies that God has a double will: we must not think it. But to our apprehension it is manifold. The contradiction is for Calvin a paradox of Scripture. Douma (*De Algemeene Genade*, 1967) distinguishes three suggested answers in Calvin—

1. There is a unity beyond our grasp (Kuiper's point).
2. 'In a certain sense' God shows wrath to the elect and grace to the reprobate.
3. God hates the sinners, but he loves them insofar as they are his handiwork, his creatures.

The extent of our attention to Calvin is well justified. If he discovered Common Grace (which Bavinck claims) certainly 'all the later theologians who have written on it, have borrowed largely from him'. In reaction against the Calvinist confession of grace, the Remonstrants (Arminians) claimed that Common Grace is sufficient to enable men to repent and believe. The Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619) reaffirmed the necessity for effectual, prevenient (saving) grace for these marks of regenerate life.

In America, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge and A. A. Hodge, his son, all maintain Calvin's teaching save for the omission by the latter pair of any reference to natural benefits in Common Grace. The elder Hodge is distinguished as the first theologian to have devoted a lengthy, connected discussion to the subject.

In Europe, the Dutchman Bavinck returns to the theme of Common Grace in the Calvinian idiom when it was all but forgotten. With his contemporary and friend, Abraham Kuyper, Common Grace assumes a new and unprecedented importance.

In Britain, Cunningham raised in an interesting way, the relationship of Christ to Common Grace—'Many blessings flow to mankind at large from the death of Christ, collaterally and incidentally in consequence of the relation in which men, viewed collectively, stand to each other'. The same problems renew their activity in this century.

Before we address ourselves to the chief lines of Kuyper's teaching on Common Grace, which introduce somewhat new thoughts, I intend to devote some time to the comparison of the Reformed apprehension of Common Grace with the world-view of Roman theology and to answer in the affirmative the question—Does it really advance us beyond the scholastic scheme of nature and grace?

Common Grace and Nature

Bavinck claims Calvin as the first to overcome the false nature/grace dichotomy of Roman Catholic thought. Luther failed, though he correctly drew up the force of grace against sin rather than nature, but the good in natural man found a place through his sharp heavenly/earthly demarcation rather than through grace. Zwingli understands sin more as pollution than guilt, and therefore understands grace as sanctifying more than pardoning; so God's saving activity diffuses to some extent among even pagan philosophers. How does Rome herself deal with 'nature knowledge', 'goodness', 'law'?

Certainly the medieval church developed careful answers to these problems but their origins lay back in Patristic times. One account of the development (H. van Til) stresses the Constantinian hey-day. Worldliness, rolling into the church, drove many towards monastic and ascetic ideals which were conceded a proper place in the Church. Society, now Christian, lay on two levels. The 'world' was merely the secular part remaining outside the ecclesiastical institution and not in any way antithetic to the church. Man's life in the world was neatly covered by a sacramental umbrella. Hebden Taylor speaks of three attitudes of the Fathers to classical culture and the Empire. Tertullian's 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?'—a rhetorical rejection of rhetoric; Justin Martyr's proselytising accommodation and finding implicit in the philosophers what is explicit in Christ; Basil's and Augustine's practical eclecticism—a spoiling of the Egyptians carried out under Christian customs control. Two scholastic motifs are anticipated in the Fathers: (1) Cultural pursuits are only ancillary to theology (Can one serve God in these fields?). This view derives from Aristotle's supremacy of metaphysical theology. (2) The body of the cultural product, somewhat blue-pencilled, is accepted with no demand for its reformation.

For Augustine however, 'a natural theology in the Aristotelian sense was radically excluded'⁶ yet Rome defends a natural knowledge of God by the natural light of reason. Berkouwer expounds this⁷ 'Its background is an anthropology which *lifts* the so-called rational soul *out* of the sin-depraved life of man, and by way of this non-corrupt reason considers man capable of true knowledge of God. It is true that Rome admits that sin has wounded human nature by the loss of special supernatural gifts, but the physical ability of reason was neither destroyed nor disturbed, so that reason can still reach God. Reason is rooted in the *soul* which is the *form* of the body. Therefore there is always a certain dependence on *matter*. Knowledge is dependent on the operation of the senses'. 'The transcendent value of causality makes natural knowledge of God possible'. Thus come in the classic theistic proofs. Because of the analogy of being,⁸ man, in his natural knowledge, is gripped by the world of created reality. Berkouwer asks if there is a real acknowledgment of a revelation of God in created reality. 'One is always amazed how little place this revelation idea gets in the exposition of natural theology'.

Calvin shows us another road, especially where the understanding of the *locus classicus* on 'natural theology' (Rom. 1: 20ff.) is concerned. There *is* a *sensus divinitatis*, and God *is* revealed in his works in such a way that man cannot miss that revelation. The representations God gives of Himself are clear enough, but in the idolatry of the heathen we see that 'their conceptions of Him are formed not according to the representations—but by the inventions of their own presumptuous imaginations'. (Inst. I: 4.1) Calvin speaks with Paul of blindness, vanity, sleep (which conceals from man a thousand things around him), and the Reformed Canons of Dort repeat his estimate of human ability. There remains after the fall a remnant of natural light 'whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things and of the difference between good and evil and shows some regard for virtue'. But 'he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil. Nay further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted and hinders in unrighteousness'. (Canons III and IV.1) General revelation does not imply natural theology, for it is read only rightly through the spectacles of redemptive grace.

Berkouwer discusses not only natural theology but also natural morality and natural law against the background of his subject—General Revelation. Particularly from examination of Rom. 2 (especially vv. 14, 15) natural morality has been defended. 'Doing the works of the law' is no problem for Rome. 'Natural law is founded in the reasonable nature of man, which simply cannot but strive for the good'.⁹ It is a copy of God's eternal law and explains why, irrespective of the Divine Revelation, there are norms which concern all. In other writers, natural law is discussed without a theistic foundation, but its validity is proclaimed. A striking example of this is the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' drafted by the U.N. in 1948. Hugo Grotius, the Arminian Jurist, speaks of natural law as so 'unchangeable that even God could not change it, even if he so desired'. In the Scholastic idea, the theistic basis is of no material

significance because the natural law is deduced from nature by the natural light of reason. It is 'the participation in the Eternal law by rational creatures' (Aquinas—*Summa Theol.*). It is not placed above man as a norm but in him as a reflection of the immanent logos.

In Calvin, natural law does play a part. Prof. J. Bohatec investigated it, together with the tension between this appreciation and the pessimism of original sin.¹⁰ But Calvin's starting point is never in anthropology, with some relative corruption. It is God's activity in history, the preservation and government of the world, the power of his law, which impresses. A 'certain civil virtue may originate, not from a central and religious inclination of the heart towards God, but from seeing the goodness and usefulness of God's orderings'¹¹. Certainly it is not man's goodness, but that of God's law and ordinance which Calvin observes. It is not deprivation of God's gifts which accounts for corruption either, for precisely *with* the gifts man shows it. Any natural righteousness depends on the common grace by which man can still notice something of God's law.

The Reformation under Calvin must be granted the honour of having ended the long attempt to wed an Aristotelian conception of human nature to the Biblical ground-motif of creation, fall, and redemption in Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Abraham Kuyper and Common Grace

If and when *The Christian Mind of Abraham Kuyper*¹² becomes the subject of serious consideration in England, it could produce a major upheaval of our own conceptions of Christianity and life. There will be some who question the desirability of this! That Kuyper demands much more attention, is clear from a few biographical details:

Son (b. 1837) of a clergyman; enthusiastic for critical liberalism in theological school; converted and re-directed in the historic (confessional) Reformed faith in his first parish; campaigner for Christian education; founder of the Free University of Amsterdam; member of Parliament; editor of two newspapers; church reformer; Prime Minister of the Netherlands. He is a figure of almost incomparable stature in modern times, unique in the Church and originator of much that remains vital in Dutch culture. He died in 1920.

More than most Christian statesmen, Kuyper realised the necessity of active engagement along the whole front of the cultural battlefield. The nineteenth century was, more clearly than anything else to him, a struggle for the soul of his nation, and in the conflict he had no tolerance for the spiritual withdrawal which Anabaptism and Pietism had engendered in the Christian mind. Kuyper in his day was acutely aware that the Christian mind was all but gone—and to its rebuilding his life was devoted. The believing people of the Netherlands had to be activated or their cultural milieu would fall into the hands of Antichristian powers. There was no thought in Kuyper that Christians might not be called to christianise their world.

The idea of antithesis appeared much earlier than Kuyper of course. Even with Augustine, we are told there increases a reserve towards Greek culture and science as his understanding of the radical character of the Christian faith grows. In the Calvinist stream of the Reformation this disenchantment returns, though Luther was able to declaim that 'Christ came—not to change anything outwardly—but that men be changed in their hearts!' At Geneva another understanding of the penetration of the Gospel prevailed—an awareness that every last particle of life, public or private; inward or outward; natural or spiritual, must be brought into subjection to God in Christ. One could not otherwise speak of Calvin's influence upon Arts, Commerce, Education, Politics—which an endless stream of research reveals. All authority is God's; the magistrate and the employer, the father and teacher must recognise it. The motto *Coram Deo* (before God's face) declares the call to do everything as the Lord delights to have it done. It is not the mind of Calvin to imagine that 'full-time Christian service' is anything but the duty of us all. The magistrate serves just as well as the presbyter but within a different sphere of norms. 'In our entire life we have dealings with God' he said—and showed by an impressive record of recommendations regarding social organisation: no fires without chimneys; no balconies without railings; drains; latrines; cheaper heating; controlled letting of rooms; dentistry and cloth manufacture.

Kuyper's slogan stands squarely under Calvin's inspiration: 'In the whole territory of human life, not an inch can be found, but Christ claims of it 'Mine!''. By this he understands no ecclesiastical hegemony. For Kuyper, culture must remain 'secular', by which he meant free from churchly or priestly domination. He could have agreed feelingly with the grievance expressed in the famous words 'New presbyter is but old priest writ large'. He will allow the elder his jurisdiction over Christians as they are called to live in the world in the status of members of the organised church, but the Christian has two other callings within society: to live in it as a member of the Body of Christ (over against the world and for the King) and to join with unbelievers in seeking the welfare of the whole society.

To Kuyper's credit he investigates in a creative, scholarly way the importance of Common Grace—which, far from disappearing under the strength of the antithesis between light and darkness, receives emphasis. His three-volume, 1700-page study on *De Gemeene Gratie* published first as a series of articles in one of his newspapers, *Heraut*, followed other series on Particular (saving) Grace and on Covenantal Grace, and presented us with his world view.

Common Grace restrains sin, and produces civil virtue, it channels the natural gifts of God's beneficence. Common Grace maintains in the sinner a *semen religionis*. If he speaks of natural theology, it is not the Roman kind—another way of knowing God truly, prior to the experience of his grace; it is the inevitable reaction of man to God's revelation—and this reaction is false. 'We are pagans by nature, and were rescued by the

same grace that can be their share also'. False religion shows a law of paganism, not of evolution. It is bound by norms and exhibits regularity in its apostasy—but Common Grace is there. Both Kuyper and Bavinck see in the founding of religions 'favourable influences on the life of peoples'.

Common Grace goes much further however.

The foundation of culture, and the promise of cultural triumph is for Kuyper Common Grace. (Calvin, we remember, saw it as intended that men might know God, but everywhere opposed, defiled and scorned.) Most characteristic of all in Kuyper's concept is the independent goal he sets for Common Grace, namely, 'to cause all the potential hidden in our race to manifest itself to the glory and praise of God's name'. The potential hidden in the material universe under our dominion shares in this denouement. A negative line of action is concerned to restrain sin, postpone the judgment of God, and preserve the creation. Kuyper seems to speculate at this point regarding the power of sin to threaten creation with non-being. 'If the Fall is found in the Decree (of predestination) then at once, not only particular grace but also common grace, *must* be incorporated as a mighty driving force in that same Decree. For if the Fall had not been followed by common grace as well, it would forever have withdrawn the continuation of the world from God's self-glorification'. Ultimately, says one writer of Kuyper's Common Grace, 'It is God's inexorably hostile disposition towards Satan'. Is that grace? In fact Kuyper almost invariably speaks of this grace as God's act, rather than his disposition towards men.

The second, positive line of action follows because God will not allow Satan to frustrate the unfolding of his created order. It discloses the panorama of cultural history, with man as instrument and co-worker. This history is the 'collective exhibition of the image of God in the human race' which produces at one and another point a 'fulness of time'—for the incarnation, for Pentecost. The grace which saves unto everlasting life uses Common Grace as a base for its operation. Adam's dominion of nature is restored by Common Grace for these ends. For Kuyper the fruits of culture have eternal significance since 'the glory and honour of the nations' are carried into the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21.26) and in some sense other than a crude literalism, the poor shall inherit an earth rich with the booty of cultural history. So it is that Special and Common Grace are intertwined, yet they aim at distinct goals and have separate foundations—the one is a supernatural realm of glory, the other is creaturehood. Christ rules over both but in distinct offices, as Mediator of Redemption and as Mediator of Creation. This dichotomous moment in Kuyper occasioned much debate. Does it restore a spiritualistic split in human life? Does it pave the way for a secular gospel that recognises and values the 'purely-human' as distinct from the 'Christian'? Does it not re-introduce the Thomist nature/grace schema, disguised by the idea of Christ as Mediator of Creation?

These questions are to some extent quieted by the Kuyperian doctrine of Special Grace, which can hardly be understood in a pietist, other-worldly sense. *Pro Rege—the Kingship of Christ*, another three-volume set, presents the conception of a Christian culture, as the service of gratitude owed by the redeemed to Christ. Here lies the warfare in which the believer engages in the world. Hence Kuyper's high valuation of the Christian University and the Calvinistic Anti-Revolutionary party. He elaborates a philosophy of life in which the power of redemption is demonstrated to impinge upon every facet of this world. His lectures at Princeton in 1898 on 'Calvinism' illustrate the fruit born of the Reformation in science, art, politics, as well as religion and there he specifically attacks the dualism between the concepts of creation and salvation. 'The object of the work of redemption extends itself to the redemption of the *world*, and to the organic reunion of all things in heaven and earth under Christ as their original head'. In the lectures he speaks of Common Grace and, interpreting it as a realm of life, suggests that scientific interest in this 'realm' though different in kind from theology is not a lower thing, but is liberated through the dogma of Common Grace. Nonetheless he puts forward the conviction that every science in a degree starts from faith and that therefore it is not faith and science, 'but two scientific systems, or elaborations, which are opposed to each other, each having its own faith'. Common Grace serves here, as elsewhere, to make the spiritual antithesis a possibility.

Since Kuyper—what?

In complete opposition to Kuyper's appreciation of culture, Common Grace and the struggle by Christ's subjects on behalf of their King, Karl Barth has made a radical attempt to show that there can be no revelation outside of Christ, no Common Grace, no Christian culture. His theology is far outside my understanding, and I only suggest that readers might care to consult Berkouwer for a critique of Barth which he has himself recommended.

Within the camp of confessional Reformed faith, 1924 saw a Synodical deliverance in the Christian Reformed Church in the United States on the subject of Common Grace. It enumerates 'Three Points of Common Grace', which I give here:

- A. concerning the first point, touching the favourable attitude of God to mankind in general and not only toward the elect, Synod declares that according to Scripture and Confession, it is certain that, in addition to the saving grace of God displayed to the elect unto eternal life, there is also a certain favour or grace (*een zekere gunst of genade*) of God which He shows to his creatures in general.
- B. Concerning the second point, touching the restraint of sin in the life of the individual and of society, Synod declares that according to Scripture and Confession there is such a restraint of sin.

C. Concerning the third point, touching the performance of so-called civic righteousness by the unregenerate, Synod declares that according to Scripture and Confession the unregenerate, although unable to do any saving good (Canons of Dort, III and IV, art. 4) can perform such civic good.

The accent in the first point should be noted: it refers to God's disposition.

In Holland, Kuyper and Calvin alike were criticised on the points of Common Grace and General Revelation by Klaas Schilder, a brilliant theologian of this century who, despite a strongly Biblical motif can be criticised for falling into speculation quite as much as Kuyper. Schilder begins his attack by espousing the equal ultimacy of God's election and reprobation, and therefrom deducing that God can have no attitude of favour to men who are 'vessels of wrath'. He finds a dual meaning in history, into which the Gospel comes in order to be a savour of death, just as much, and in the same manner as to be a savour of life. Love and wrath are from eternity, while he speaks of a general love of God directed towards men as his handiwork. 'He always loves his handiwork, also in Satan, also in Antichrist'. Culture depends on providence in this scheme: the restraint of sin (and indeed, the restraint of grace) is implicit in *time* itself, and in the present course of time we can only speak of Common Grace if we couple with it a common curse. Eating, drinking, and begetting may not be said to show grace—for either blessing or curse attaches to them. In culture we do not experience something *permitted* to man after the fall but we see a response, be it inadequate, to God's *command* for Adam.

Whence then does the 'good' in the unbeliever come? Schilder points to four factors—the law is profitable, after all; remnants of original gifts are found; God preserves the world in the structure of law; and, he maintains, time, the cessation of which will end all restraint of wrath (and of grace). Berkouwer¹³ points out that among the remnant gifts, Schilder adds to reason and will 'a sense of responsibility', and describes this acquisition as 'completely incomprehensible'. The suggestion has been made that Schilder's peculiar approach to the subject is explicable as a reaction in prophetic style to the optimism regarding culture, bred in part by Kuyper, and as a warning to weak and flaccid Christianity of the wrath of God.

The recurring problem in Common Grace, since Kuyper, is inevitably its relation to Christ and His Kingdom. It is not without reason that so many criticisms have been levelled at Kuyper for the polarity which his expressions establish between Common and Special Grace. Equally to be avoided, in view of the confession of the *Grace* of God in Christ, is the resurgence of any semblance of *Hubris* in the cultural endeavours of Christians. The most influential development of Kuyper's thinking on Common Grace, the Christian world-view and the antithesis in culture, by any account would appear to be the growth of the philosophical movement led by Prof. Hermann Dooyeweerd of the Free University of

Amsterdam. To him has fallen the task of constructing a philosophical method which can be called truly Christian, and in so doing, to identify some of the powerful philosophical motifs which have denatured the Christian world-view. Among them, the scholastic nature/grace dualism figures large. The humanist dualism of nature/freedom is also subjected to a radical criticism by Dooyeweerd. Common Grace inevitably plays a part in his expositions, and particularly as it is active in forming a picture of a two-realm world, does it come under his axe. An essay entitled 'The Secularisation of Science' written by Dooyeweerd in 1953, contains the following passage on Common Grace: 'Any theological speculation that attempts to introduce a dialectical tension between the creation and the re-creation in Christ Jesus, between the Word as Creator and the Word as Saviour, is anti-biblical! Neither is there a dualism between common grace and special grace, as if the realm of common grace were separate from the realm of Christ. There is no grace apart from Jesus Christ, the new Root of humanity. The entire domain of common grace is the domain of Jesus Christ. Common grace is nothing more than grace toward mankind taken as a whole, the humanity which is not yet liberated from its old, apostate root, but which is contemplated by God in its new Root, Jesus Christ. It belongs also to the domain of Christ, where the conflict appears between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. Common grace cannot be interpreted as being the realm of nature, in the Roman Catholic sense, as the autonomous preamble of the realm of grace. On the contrary, it is the sphere of the irreconcilable antithesis between the city of God and worldly city of the devil'. And at the end of his essay he deprecates the protracted discussion about whether science and philosophy also pertain to the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, or whether they belong instead to a domain of natural reason. This discussion need not go on, because 'there is no natural reason that is independent of the religious driving force which controls the heart of human existence'.

Dooyeweerd's pupil, Dr. Jan Dengerink, in his contributory essay to 'Philosophy and Christianity' dedicated to Prof. Dooyeweerd in 1965, describes the controlling and dominating perspective in his teacher's philosophy. Few philosophers receive such tributes: 'Redemption according to Dooyeweerd, does not introduce a wholly new order in human society. Redemption for him is rather re-creation, understood in this sense that the meaning-totality of the cosmos lies embedded in Jesus Christ according to His Human nature. This does not imply that Dooyeweerd rejects every radical and irreconcilable opposition in this world. To the contrary, his thought is based to a large extent on the recognition of such an opposition. However, this is then *not* an opposition between certain aspects of reality, between the realm of ideas and brute social reality, between law and force, between freedom and nature; but it *is* the antithesis of the radical No! of God against the rebellion of mankind fallen into sin, or grace in Christ against the destruction of the Kingdom of Satan, of creation's destiny against the apostasy of nature. But even this radical opposition is not of a permanent nature because it has been

conquered in Christ. There is re-creation and perfect redemption. Even sin remains subject to God's absolute Creator's will'.

If Common Grace teaches us anything, it is just this: that even sin remains subject to God's absolute Creator's will.

(Readers of Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer's recent widely publicised works will readily see how the ideas he puts forward interact with those discussed in this paper—Ed.).

NOTES

1. For a discussion of the supreme importance of the confessions of the grace of God in the Reformation, see G. C. Berkouwer, *The Conflict with Rome*.
2. H. Bavinck in an essay *Calvin and Common Grace*.
3. Bavinck, *De Algemeene Genade*.
4. He fails to mention—says the footnote in the S.C.M. edition of the Institutes—'The fine arts which however are admired by him'.
5. *proprie loquendo* is used on more than one occasion by Calvin, to indicate that his idea of Common Grace is only a construct, which has always to be corrected by more firmly established Scripture teaching.
6. Dooyeweerd *The Secularisation of Science* International Reformed Bulletin, July 1966.
7. Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, p. 67.
8. 'Being and existence are in God, just as well as in the creature'—H. Robbers, S.J.
9. Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, p. 201.
10. *Calvin und das Recht*, 1934.
11. Berkouwer *General Revelation*, p. 200.
12. This is the title of a paper in 'Papers of the 1967 Puritan and Reformed Studies Conference' to be published shortly by The Evangelical Magazine, Providence House, 3 Speke Road, S.W.11.
13. *General Revelation*, p. 182.

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