PROLEGOMENA AND THE DOCTRINES OF REVELATION, SCRIPTURE, AND GOD

AN INTRODUCTION TO SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

SECOND EDITION

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EDITED BY WILLIAM EDGAR

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Preface

The first “edition” of this syllabus appeared some thirty-five years ago. Its title then was: *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*. Since then much has happened in theology. Yet the old syllabus is now made available again in a practically unaltered form. The author has dealt with the main developments of recent theology in other writings.

The most important of these is that of neo-orthodoxy. Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* (*Kirchliche Dogmatik*) is its main monument. The writer has dealt with neo-orthodoxy in *The New Modernism* and in *Christianity and Barthianism*.

Barth’s theology was the basic background for The Confession of 1967. The writer dealt with this new confession in *The Confession of 1967: Its Theological Background and Ecumenical Significance*. The author believes that neo-orthodoxy is Christian in name only, not in fact.

While neo-orthodoxy was developing in Europe, a movement called New Evangelicalism was developing in America. New Evangelicalism sought to replace Fundamentalism in its statement and defense of the historic Protestant faith. The author dealt with new-evangelicalism as set forth by one of its chief exponents, Edward J. Carnell, in *The Case for Calvinism*. It is the author’s conviction that only the Reformed Faith gives an adequate statement of biblical revelation, and that therefore it alone, and not a general Protestant theology, is equipped to deal with neo-orthodoxy as the outstanding heresy of the day.

Meanwhile Professor Herman Hoeksema was preparing his work on *Reformed Dogmatics* (1966). Much good exegesis underlies Hoeksema’s work. However, the author cannot agree with his denial of common grace. The doctrine of common grace is, the author believes, based on sound biblical exegesis and forms an important element in a truly biblical theology and apologetic. In *Common Grace*, these convictions are set forth.

During the same thirty years a dogmatic work of many volumes, based on much exegesis and extensive historical knowledge appeared. It is Dr. G. C. Berkouwer’s *Theological Studies*. Dr. Berkouwer’s work is also contemporaneous in that he has, during this period, written extensively on the development both of Roman Catholic and of Barthian theology. During this period Berkouwer underwent a change of attitude toward both Roman

Catholicism and toward Barthian teaching. This change was in the direction of a toning down of opposition to both movements. Back of this change in relation to Roman Catholic and neo-orthodox theology is a change in his view of Scripture. This change in his view of Scripture is in the interest of doing greater justice than former Reformed theologians have done to the human element and, with it, the general historical character of scriptural revelation. The author has not been able to do adequate justice to Berkouwer's work; he has, however, taken note of it in various places and has devoted one small book to the subject. Its title is *The Sovereignty of Grace*.

The present syllabus has an apologetic intent running through it. A Reformed theology needs to be supplemented by a Reformed method of apologetics. This involves relating the historic Christian position to that of modern philosophy as well as theology. But modern philosophy and theology finds its most typical expression in the epistemology of Immanuel Kant and his recent followers.

In modern philosophy and theology even more obviously than in ancient philosophy, man is the final reference point in all predication. Robert G. Collingwood's philosophy illustrates this fact with remarkable clarity. Many existentialist philosophers and theologians as well as many process-philosophers and theologians refer to Collingwood's idea of the historical consciousness in justification for their method of thinking.

The author has dealt with the British-American background of the "historical consciousness" in a syllabus, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, and, more briefly, with the German background of the historical consciousness in *The Later Heidegger and Theology*.

The Christian faith as a whole, as a unit, must be set over against the non-Christian faith as a whole. Piecemeal apologetics is inadequate, especially for our time. A Christian totality picture requires a Christian view of the methodology of science and philosophy as well as a Christian view of theology. One cannot have a really Christian theology unless one also has a really Christian science and philosophy.

In trying to develop a Christian totality view, the writer has had much help from the *Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea* as set forth by professors D. H. Th. Vollenhoven and Herman Dooyeweerd of Amsterdam, and by professor H. G. Stoker of Potchefstroam. It was, in particular, Dr. Dooyeweerd's detailed analysis of the history of philosophy that was of

much help. However, Dr. Dooyeweerd finds it impossible to agree with the present writer in making the full biblical position the transcendental presupposition of the possibility of predication. Dooyeweerd says that I am bringing in the religious problem prematurely. I, on the other hand, am convinced that unless one offers at the outset the totality interpretation of all reality as given in Scripture as the presupposition of the possibility of asking any intelligent question, one has not really offered the Christian position for what it really is. My first criticism of Dooyeweerd's views appeared in the syllabus *Christianity in Conflict* (mimeographed), and Dooyeweerd's criticism of my views and my reply to his criticism appears in *Jerusalem and Athens*.

A perusal of these materials may help the interested reader to see why the present syllabus reappears with little change from its earlier form.

My indebtedness to such former Reformed theologians as Louis Berkhof and, back of him, Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper, is apparent throughout.

Chapter 1: The Idea and Value of Systematic Theology

A. The Idea of Systematic Theology

We are to be concerned in this work with theology as the orthodox believer in Christianity understands it. The orthodox view of Christianity finds its most consistent expression in the Reformed Faith. Fundamental to everything orthodox is the presupposition of the antecedent self-existence of God and of his infallible revelation of himself to man in the Bible. Systematic theology seeks to offer an ordered presentation of what the Bible teaches about God.

Theology, therefore, is not to be defined as the science of religion. It is true that even Reformed theologians have sometimes thus defined it. A. A. Hodge says: "Theology, in its most general sense, is the science of religion."[1] However, in view of what the term "religion" has come to mean in modern times, it would be unfortunate to confuse the issue between modern non-Christian and orthodox theology by speaking of theology as the science of religion. Religion, according to the modern definitions given of it (for example, in the "psychology of religion" literature), has nothing to do with the God of the Scriptures. Men say that they can best obtain the "native witness" of religion if they leave out of consideration altogether the question of its objective reference. But since Christianity claims to be the true religion, it follows that for it the objective reference is of prime importance. It is the God of the Scriptures about whom we wish to obtain knowledge.

It does not follow from this that it is about God alone that we wish to obtain knowledge. It only means that it is primarily of God that we speak. We wish to know all that God wishes us to know about anything. The Bible has much to say about the universe. But it is the business of science and philosophy to deal with this revelation. Indirectly even science and philosophy should be theological. The Scriptures are also full of information about our salvation and about many other things that concern us. But it will not do to say on this account that man is the center of

theology. All that the Scriptures say about man, and particularly all that they say about man's salvation, is after all for the glory of God. Our theology should be God centered because our life should be God centered.

Again, there is much in the Scriptures about Christ. After the entrance of sin into the world, Christ is the only way through whom God can be known. He is not only the one through whom we can more fully than otherwise know the Father; it is through him alone that we can come to the Father. Furthermore, Christ is God, so that when we know him we know God. In spite of all this it should always be remembered that Christ's work is a means to an end. Even if we think of the fact that Christ is the second person of the Trinity, we ought still to remember that it is the full Godhead with whom we ultimately have to do and about whom, in the last analysis, we wish to know. Hence, theology is primarily God centered rather than Christ centered.

It is well to point out the relation of systematic theology to the other theological disciplines. The name, "Systematic Theology" does not imply that the other theological disciplines do not do their work systematically. It means rather that systematics alone seeks to offer the truth about God as revealed in Scriptures as a whole, as a unified system.

Exegesis takes the Scriptures and analyzes each part of it in detail. Biblical theology takes the fruits of the exegesis and organizes them into various units and traces the revelation of God in Scripture in its historical development. It brings out the theology of each part of God's Word as it has been brought to us at different stages, by means of various authors. Systematic theology then uses the fruits of the labors of exegetical and biblical theology and brings them together into a concatenated system. Apologetics seeks to defend this system of biblical truth against false philosophy and false science. Practical theology seeks to show how to preach and teach this system of biblical truth, while church history traces the reception of this system of truth in the course of the centuries.

About the matter of theological encyclopedia there has been a great deal of debate among Reformed theologians. There is only one point in this debate that we are here concerned to mention. That is the question of the relation of systematic theology to apologetics. On this point Dr. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, and with him the "Princeton school" of theology, differ from Dr. Abraham Kuyper and Dr. Herman Bavinck and the "Dutch school" of theology.

The point of difference concerns chiefly the nature of apologetics. Warfield says that apologetics as a theological discipline has to establish the presuppositions of systematic theology such as the existence of God, the religious nature of man, and the truth of the historical revelation of God given us in the Scriptures. In contrast to this, Kuyper says that apologetics must seek only to defend that which is given it in systematics.[2] Warfield argues that if we were to follow Kuyper's method we would first be explicating the Christian system and afterwards we would be asking ourselves whether perchance we had been dealing with facts or with fancies. Kuyper argues that if we allow apologetics to establish the presuppositions of theology we have virtually attributed to the natural man the ability to understand the truth of Christianity and have thus denied the doctrine of total depravity.

We cannot and need not discuss this debate in detail. Kuyper's basic contention that we must always keep in mind the distinction between the regenerate and the unregenerate mind need not imply that apologetics must come after systematics and must be negative only. Apologetics can very well come first and presuppose in general the system of truth brought out in systematics. It is true that the best apologetics can be given only when the system of truth is well known. But it is also true that the system of truth is not well known except it be seen in its opposition to error. Systematic theology itself has been developed, to a large extent, in opposition to error. The two disciplines are therefore mutually dependent upon one another.

On the other hand, we hold that the basic contention of Kuyper with respect to Warfield's position is correct. Warfield often argues as though apologetics must use a method of approach to the natural man that the other disciplines need not and cannot use.[3] He reasons as though apologetics can establish the truth of Christianity as a whole by a method other than that of the other disciplines because it alone does not presuppose God. The other disciplines must wait, as it were, till apologetics has done its work, and receive from it the facts of God's existence, etc. This distinction between the method of apologetics and the method of the other disciplines we believe to be mistaken. All the disciplines must presuppose God but at the same time presupposition is the best proof. Apologetics takes particular pains to show that such is the case. This is its chief task. But in so doing it is no more neutral in its method than are the other disciplines. One of its main purposes is to show that neutrality is impossible and that no one, as a

matter of fact, is neutral. We conclude then that apologetics stands at the outer edge of the circle of systematic truth given us by systematics in order to defend it.

Some theologians prefer the name “dogmatic theology” while others prefer to speak of “systematic theology.” This is not a matter of great importance. The reason why some prefer the term dogmatics is that it seems better than the term systematics to express the idea that we deal in this discipline with the dogmas or the truths of the Church. This brings up the question of the relation of systematics to the confessions of the Church. Does systematics deal primarily with these confessions? Or should we say that systematics deals primarily with the dogmas or truths of Scripture? Basically, there is agreement among all leading Reformed theologians on this point. All agree that the dogmas of the Church have been derived from the Scripture. Hence it is true that ultimately systematics seeks to expound the system of truth as given in the Scriptures. It was not till after a great deal of work had been done on the Scriptures by systematic theologians that the Church was able to formulate its dogmas. The creeds of the Church are, as far as their content is concerned, no more than a systematic statement of the truth of Scripture. They are distinguished from the systematic statement of Scripture given by systematic theology (a) by their brevity, limiting themselves as they do to the most essential matters; and (b) by their authoritative character, since they have been officially accepted as standards by the councils of the Church.

Once these standards or dogmas of the Church have been accepted, it goes without saying that a theologian who writes a work on systematics will write it in accordance with the interpretation given in those standards. To say that this hampers his freedom is to say that he has not himself freely adopted these creeds as a member of the church. Moreover, to interpret in accordance with these standards does not mean that one ignores the Scriptures. It must be shown over and over again that the standards are based on the Scriptures. In addition to this, the systematic theologian has to go beyond the standards to see whether he can possibly find a more specific formulation of truths already spoken of in the standards, and whether he can find a formulation of truths of Scriptures not yet spoken of in the standards. In this way he may himself help in some small way the further implication of the church into the truth of Scripture. Creeds must be revised and

supplemented from time to time. But it is not until systematic theology has progressed beyond the creeds that the creeds themselves can be revised.

It is of the utmost importance to note how creeds must be revised. The creed of the United Presbyterian Church, adopted in 1925, affords an instructive example of how creeds ought not to be revised. This creed proposes to be a revision of the Westminster Confession. However, it tones down the specific and exact teachings of Scripture found in the Westminster Confession to vague generalities. This sort of creed revision is worse than useless; it is retrogressive. What the church needs is a more exact formulation of its doctrines against heresies as they appear in every new and changing form, and a fuller statement of biblical truth.

Warfield points out how it is true of any science that it seeks not less but more and more specific knowledge of its subject. He says: “In any progressive science, the amount of departure from accepted truth which is possible to the sound thinker becomes thus ever less and less, in proportion as investigation and study result in the progressive establishment of an ever increasing number of facts. The physician who would bring back today the medicine of Galen would be no more mad than the theologian who would revive the theology of Clement of Alexandria.”[4]

B. The Value of Systematic Theology

When we speak of the value of systematics, or, for that matter, of the value of any other theological discipline, we do not take the pragmatic position. The question of value is not the first question we should ask. The question of truth and of duty is primary. It is a God-given duty that we should take the content of Scripture and bring it together into a systematic whole. It is plain that we are required to know the revelation that God has given us. Yet we would not adequately know that revelation if we knew it only in its several parts without bringing these parts into relation to each other. It is only as a part of the whole of the revelation of God to us that each part of that revelation appears as it is really meant to appear. Our minds must think systematically. It is with our God-created minds, which must think systematically, that we must rework the content of revelation.

We may observe, however, that what is simply our plain God-given task is, at the same time most profitable for our spiritual life. Warfield says: “we

do not possess the separate truths of religion in the abstract; we possess them only in their relations, and we do not properly know any one of them nor can it have its full effect on our life … except as we know it in its relation to other truths, that is, as systematized. What we do not know, in this sense, systematically, we rob of half of its power on our conduct; unless indeed we are prepared to argue that a truth has effect on us in proportion as it is unknown. To which may be added that when we do not know a body of doctrine systematically, we are sure to misconceive the nature of more or fewer of its elements; and to fancy that that is true which a more systematic knowledge would show us to be false, so that our religious belief and therefore our religious life would become deformed and misshapen."[5]

The unity and organic character of our personality demands that we have unified knowledge as the basis of our action. If we do not pay attention to the whole of biblical truth as a system, we become doctrinally one-sided, and doctrinal one-sidedness is bound to issue in spiritual one-sidedness. As human beings we are naturally inclined to be one-sided. One tends to be intellectualistic, another tends to be emotional, and still another tends to be activistic. One tends to be only prophetic, another only priest, and a third only king. We should be all these at once and in harmony. A study of systematic theology will help us to keep and develop our spiritual balance. It enables us to avoid paying attention only to that which, by virtue of our temperament, appeals to us.

Moreover, what is beneficial for the individual believer is also beneficial for the minister and in consequence for the church as a whole. It is sometimes contended that ministers need not be trained in systematic theology if only they know their Bibles. But "Bible-trained" instead of systematically trained preachers frequently preach error. They may mean ever so well and be ever so true to the gospel on certain points; nevertheless, they often preach error. There are many "orthodox" preachers today whose study of Scripture has been so limited to what it says about soteriology that they could not protect the fold of God against heresies on the person of Christ. Ofttimes they themselves even entertain definitely heretical notions on the person of Christ, though perfectly unaware of the fact.

If we carry this idea one step further, we note that a study of systematic theology will help men to preach theologically. It will help to make men proclaim the whole counsel of God. Many ministers never touch the greater

part of the wealth of the revelation of God to man contained in Scripture. But systematics helps ministers to preach the whole counsel of God, and thus to make God central in their work.

The history of the church bears out the claim that God-centered preaching is most valuable to the church of Christ. When the ministry has most truly proclaimed the whole counsel of God, the church has flourished spiritually. Then, too, it is well-rounded preaching of this sort that has kept the church from worldliness. On the other hand, it has kept the church from an unhealthy other-worldliness. Well-rounded preaching teaches us to use the things of this world because they are the gifts of God, and it teaches us to possess them as not possessing them, inasmuch as they must be used in subordination to the one supreme purpose of man's existence, namely the glory of God.

It is but natural to expect that, if the church is strong because its ministry understands and preaches the whole counsel of God, then the church will be able to protect itself best against false teaching of every sort. Non-indoctrinated Christians will easily fall prey to the peddlers of Russellism, spiritualism and all of the other fifty-seven varieties of heresies with which our country abounds. One-text Christians simply have no weapons of defense against these people. They may be able to quote many Scripture texts which speak, for instance, of eternal punishment, but the Russellite will be able to quote texts which, by the sound of them and taken individually, seem to teach annihilation. The net result is, at best, a loss of spiritual power because of loss of conviction. Many times, such one-text Christians themselves fall prey to the seducer's voice.

We have already indicated that the best apologetic defense will invariably be made by him who knows the system of truth of Scripture best. The fight between Christianity and non-Christianity is, in modern times, no piece-meal affair. It is the life and death struggle between two mutually opposed life and world-views. The non-Christian attack often comes to us on matters of historical, or other, detail. It comes to us in the form of objections to certain teachings of Scripture, say, with respect to creation, etc. It may seem to be simply a matter of asking what the facts have been. Back of this detailed attack, however, is the constant assumption of the non-Christian metaphysics of the correlativity of God and man. He who has not been trained in systematic theology will often be at a loss as to how to meet these attacks. He may be quite proficient in warding off the attack as far as

details are concerned, but he will forever have to be afraid of new attacks as long as he has never removed the foundation from the enemy's position.

It should not be forgotten in this connection that the minister's duty is increasingly that of an apologist for Christianity. The general level of education is higher than it has ever been. Many young people hear of evolution in the high schools and in the colleges where their fathers never heard of it except as a far distant something. If the minister would be able to help his young people, he must be a good apologete, and he cannot be a good apologete unless he is a good systematic theologian.

In conclusion, we should observe that just as a thorough knowledge of the system of truth in Scripture is the best defense against heresy, so it is also the best help for the propagation of the truth. This is but the other side of the former point. As an army well organized is not so likely to be overcome by a surprise attack and is not so likely to be shattered as an army poorly organized, so also an army well organized is better able to attack the enemy than an army poorly organized. Each unit will have the support and the protection of the whole army as it goes on to the attack. The morale will be better. When the enemy comes with cannon, we must be able to put atomic bombs over against them. When the enemy attacks the foundations, we must be able to protect these foundations.

The church will have to return to its erstwhile emphasis upon its teaching function if it is to fulfill its God-given task of bringing the gospel to all men. Its present recourse to jerky evangelism as almost the only method of propaganda is itself an admission of paupery. It is remarkable that what the church, generally speaking, still does in the way of teaching is shot through with modernism. The propaganda of orthodoxy seems to be limited almost exclusively to evangelization in the narrow sense of the term. When this propaganda turns to teaching as a means, it all too frequently employs uncritically the conceptions of "reason" and "fact" as these are understood by those who make no profession of Christianity. The result is that there is no teaching of Christianity as a challenge to unbelief. Revivalists ought to make themselves unnecessary as quickly as possible. Orthodoxy must take over the teaching function of the church anew, and do it with a better knowledge of the requirements of that work than ever before.

It goes without saying that if all these benefits are to come to us as ministers and as a church, we must undertake our work in a spirit of deep

dependence upon God and in a spirit of prayer that he may use us as his instruments for his glory.

[1] A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 15.

[2] B. B. Warfield, *Studies in Theology*, p. 57, and especially his scheme on p. 74: A. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*.

[3] B. B. Warfield, article, "Apologetics," in *Studies in Theology*, N.Y. 1932.

[4] *Idem*., p. 78.

[5] *Idem*., p. 83.

Chapter 2: The Method of Systematic Theology

For the study of systematic theology the question of method is of basic importance. “If a man adopts a false method, he is like one who takes a wrong road which will never lead him to his destination.”[1] Moreover, the question of method is the all-important point for modern science and philosophy. If orthodox theology desires to appear relevant to the modern situation it must adopt a self-conscious position on its own and on modern methodology in general. It is, to be sure, the task of apologetics rather than that of systematics to defend the orthodox over against methodology. But if apologetics is to do its work properly it is important that systematics work out fully its own methodology. And it is the particular task of the section on introduction to deal with this question.

However, to find the proper method for the study of systematic theology we shall need to discuss, briefly, the question of methodology in general. It is only after it has been shown that Christian theism as a whole, in all its departments, has a methodology quite distinct from other general interpretations of reality, that the proper method to be followed in systematic theology will appear.

A. The Christian Theistic Method

The question of method is not a neutral something. Our presupposition of God as the absolute, self-conscious Being, who is the source of all finite being and knowledge, makes it imperative that we distinguish the Christian theistic method from all non-Christian methods.

We may use different names in order to bring out the distinctive characteristic of the Christian theistic method. We may speak of the method of Christian theism as being the method of implication. By that we bring out the fact that there is both an *a priori* and an *a posteriori* aspect to the method of Christian theism. The *a posteriori* element is represented in what Hodge speaks of as the gathering and arranging of the facts of Scripture. The *a priori* aspect appears in the fact that it is the facts of Scripture that we gather and not facts in general. Or, we may say that the *a priori* element lies

in the fact that we at least interpret all the facts with which we deal in the light of Scripture.

But it is not sufficient to say that our method must have an *a priori* as well as an *a posteriori* aspect. The idealist logicians will gladly admit that we are right in this contention. It has been the heart of the whole of idealist logic in recent times, as worked out by F. H. Bradley and B. Bosanquet, that every true logic must have an *a priori* and an *a posteriori* aspect. Nor have they let the matter go at that. They have not only made the general statement that every method must have an *a priori* as well as an *a posteriori* aspect, but they have also defined the nature of the *a priori* aspect of which they speak. They say that this *a priori* aspect of method is involved in the notion of eternality. Bosanquet stoutly maintains that, unless there is an eternal aspect to reality, we cannot know anything at all. Hence he has spoken of his method as the method of implication (*Implication and Linear Inference*, *Essentials of Logic*). It will be noted that this term "implication" is really borrowed from the *a priori* rather than from the *a posteriori* aspect of his method. It seems to put the idea of a whole, that is, a system of truth, ahead of the idea of new addition to truth. And this makes it all the more necessary to distinguish carefully between the method of idealism and the method of Christian theism. No idealist logician really has the right to derive the name of his method chiefly from the *a priori* aspect of his method, since in his method the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* elements are equally ultimate. For the idealist logicians, the term "eternity" really does not mean any more than a permanent aspect of temporal things. Bosanquet speaks of this when he says that reality is an eternal novelty. He says that, in the first place, it is an 'eternal novelty,' but he also says that, in the second place, it is an eternal 'novelty.'

From this discussion of idealist logic, it appears how intimately one's theory of being and one's theory of method are interrelated. It is because of Bosanquet's conviction that reality is a mixture of the temporal and the eternal that he believes in the equal ultimacy of the aspects of the *a posteriori* and the *a priori* in methodology.

Moreover, it appears also from this discussion of Bosanquet's position that we must distinguish our method most carefully from an idealist method by pointing out that the nature of our *a priori* element is different from the nature of the *a priori* element as the idealist conceives of it. The nature of our *a priori* element is clearly determined by our conception of God. Again,

the nature of our *a posteriori* differs from the idealist notion of the *a posteriori*. Our facts are created and controlled by God, while the facts of idealism are not.

1. God as the Principium Essendi of Knowledge

In order to bring out the nature of the *a priori* aspect of our method, we may discuss it in relation to what has in recent writings on theology been spoken of as the *principium essendi* of knowledge. In his monumental work on dogmatic theology De Gereformeerde Dogmatiek, Herman Bavinck has given a long discussion of the *principium essendi* of knowledge. What he means by this is the fact that without the concept of God as self-conscious, as self-existent, we could not know anything. We must now develop this idea more fully.

Before the world was, God existed from all eternity as a self-contained and self-sufficient being. From the Christian point of view, it is impossible to think of the non-existence of God. It is very well possible to think of the nonexistence of the world. In fact, we believe that the world once upon a time did not exist; it was created by God out of nothing.

Of course, we do not mean to suggest that it is possible, once we have been created, for us to comprehend the idea that the world once did not exist. To be able to comprehend that fact would be to comprehend God, inasmuch as it would mean that we were able to think ourselves away as creatures while yet we were thinking of God. Now, it is of the essence of our God concept that man cannot comprehend God. If God does actually exist as a self-contained and eternally self-conscious being, it is natural that we, his creatures, should not be able to comprehend, that is, understand him exhaustively.

It is particularly important, at this time when men once more swear by the concept of mystery, to see what is meant by this idea of the incomprehensibility of God. It does not mean that God is incomprehensible to himself. On the contrary, man’s inability to comprehend God is founded on the very fact that God is completely self-comprehensive. God is absolute rationality. He was and is the only self-contained whole, the system of absolute truth. God’s knowledge is, therefore, exclusively analytic, that is, self-dependent. There never were any facts existing independent of God which he had to investigate. God is the one and only ultimate Fact. In him,

i.e., with respect to his own Being, apart from the world, fact and interpretation of fact are coterminous.

To this we should add that the Trinity, as taught in the Scriptures, gives the most basic description possible of God as the *principium essendi* of knowledge for man. The whole problem of knowledge has constantly been that of bringing the one and the many together. When man looks about him and within him, he sees that there is a great variety of facts. The question that comes up at once is whether there is any unity in this variety, whether there is one principle in accordance with which all these many things appear and occur. All non-Christian thought, if it has utilized the idea of a supra-mundane existence at all, has used this supra-mundane existence as furnishing only the unity or the *a priori* aspect of knowledge, while it has maintained that the *a posteriori* aspect of knowledge is something that is furnished by the universe. In distinction to this, Christianity says that there once was no *a posteriori* aspect to knowledge at all. When God existed alone, there was no time universe, and there were no new facts arising. The only knowledge activity that existed was completed in the circuit of the mutually exhaustive personalities of the triune God. It is only with respect to man that we can speak of a relation of the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* elements of knowledge. Such a distinction cannot exist in God. The plurality of the Godhead cannot be compared with the arising of new facts as we see it in the created universe. The plurality of God is as eternal as the unity of God. Bosanquet's concept of knowledge as eternal novelty can never be applied to God. There is no novelty in God, and there can be no novelty for God.

2. Human Knowledge Analogical

We see then that the method of Christian theism must be distinguished most carefully from the method of idealism philosophy. With all its insistence on the fact that there must be an ultimate *a priori* aspect of knowledge, idealism at the same time insists that there is an equally ultimate *a posteriori* aspect to knowledge. This means that for idealist logic, just as for other non-Christian logic, the Christian concept of God is virtually discarded at the outset. It is taken for granted that the universe is just as ultimate as God. It is taken for granted that God must furnish the *a priori* aspect and the universe must furnish the *a posteriori* aspect of

knowledge. The equal ultimacy of the one and the many within the Godhead apart from the universe is denied.

The distinguishing characteristic between very non-Christian theory of knowledge on the one hand, and the Christian concept of knowledge on the other hand, is, therefore, that in all non-Christian theories men reason univocally, while in Christianity men reason analogically. By this distinction we mean that every non-Christian theory of method takes for granted, that time and eternity are aspects of one another, and that God and man must be thought of as being on the same plane. God and man must be thought of as correlative to one another. God and man work under a system of logic that is higher than both, and that exists in independence of both. The law of contradiction is thought of as existing somehow in independence of God and man or at least as operating in both God and man on the same level.

In contrast to this, Christianity holds that God existed alone before any time existence was brought forth. He existed as the self-conscious and self-consistent being. The law of contradiction, therefore, as we know it, is but the expression on a created level of the internal coherence of God's nature. Christians should therefore never appeal to the law of contradiction as something that, as such, determines what can or cannot be true. Parmenides serves as a warning of what happens to history if the law of contradiction is in this fashion made the ultimate standard of appeal in human thought. Parmenides concluded that to understand anything historical, it would have to be reduced to an element in a timeless system of categories. He therefore denied the reality and significance of all historical plurality. In modern times it is customary to use the law of contradiction negatively rather than positively as Parmenides did. On the surface this appears to leave room for historical factuality. But it does so only if this historical factuality be thought of as being unknowable or irrational.

Christians should employ the law of contradiction, whether positively or negatively, as a means by which to systematize the facts of revelation. Whether these facts are found in the universe at large or in the Scripture. The law of contradiction cannot be thought of as operating anywhere except against the background of the nature of God. Since, therefore, God created this world, it would be impossible that this created world should ever furnish an element of reality on a par with him. The concept of creation as entertained by Christians makes the idealist notion of logic once for all

impossible. The creation doctrine is implied in the God-concept of Christianity; deny the creation doctrine and you have denied the Christian concept of God. A created being or a created reality in general cannot furnish a novelty element that is to stand on a par with the element of permanency furnished by the Creator. If one believes in the creation doctrine at all, one has to say that the novelty element of the universe is subordinate to the eternal plan of God. Christians believe in two levels of existence, the level of God's existence as self-contained and the level of man's existence as derived from the level of God's existence. For this reason, Christians must also believe in two levels of knowledge, the level of God's knowledge which is absolutely comprehensive and self-contained, and the level of man's knowledge which is not comprehensive but is derivative and re-interpretative. Hence we say that as Christians we believe that man's knowledge is analogical of God's knowledge.

Note 1. An especially dangerous form in which the confusion between divine and human knowledge obtains today is in the recent discussions on the question of mystery. So, for instance, the late Professor Donald Mackenzie of Princeton has written a book *Christianity the Paradox of God*, in which he confuses the modern concept of the ultimate mysteriousness of the universe with the Christian concept of the incomprehensibility of God. Yet there is no more than a verbal similarity between the two. The church's doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God is based upon and is the logical consequence of God's absolute self-existence. It is just because God is an eternal and self-contained being while we are his temporal creatures that we cannot ever hope to comprehend his being. But this absolute incomprehensibility of God, just because it is based upon God's absolute rationality, is not inconsistent with the genuine rational character of our knowledge. On the contrary, our knowledge is rational because God is ultimately rational. At the same time, God is incomprehensible to us because he is ultimately rational. It is not because God is irrational that we cannot comprehend him; it is because God is rational, and in the nature of the case, ultimately rational, that we cannot comprehend him. It is not because God is darkness that he is incomprehensible to us, but it is because he is light, and, in the nature of the case, absolute light. God dwelleth in a light that no man can approach unto. We are not blind because of the light of God; it is only in God's light that we see light.

As man's existence is dependent upon an act of voluntary creation on the part of God, so man's knowledge depends upon an act of voluntary revelation of God to man. Even the voluntary creation of man is already a revelation of God to man. Thus every bit of knowledge on the part of man is derivative and reinterpretative. This is what we mean by saying that man's knowledge is analogical.

Romanism also speaks of human knowledge as being analogical. But Rome does not make the sharp distinction we have made between God as the original being and man as created being. It introduces this distinction after it has made many assertions about being in general. It follows that in the Romanist view human knowledge is not always and everywhere dependent upon a prior original act of God. In fact on the Romanist view human knowledge is never wholly derivative and reinterpretative. Rome therefore cannot really claim to think of human knowledge as analogical to God's knowledge.

That Romanism has no truly Christian concept of analogical knowledge appears most clearly from the fact that its position cannot be clearly distinguished from that of modern idealist thought. For evidence on this point one may turn, for instance, to Dorothy M. Emmet's discussion of analogy in her recent book *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking* (London, 1946). As is the case with modern philosophy, in general, Miss Emmet assumes that man is his own ultimate reference point. From a supposed area of that which is known she would reach out into the area of the unknown by the help of analogy. All the while she is keenly aware that by this method of analogy, based on the assumption of man's autonomy, man can interpret experience in a "practical" sense only. Reality is ultimately mysterious, but we trust somehow the unknown will be like the known. But the position of Romanism also starts from "reason" as ultimate in some respects. According to Rome, "reason" can, whether thinking of itself as created or assuming itself to be non-created, interpret nature truly up to a point. To be sure Rome also holds that reason is weak and must be supplemented if it is to know the mysteries of God. But it is precisely this also that causes the trouble. If a position such as that of Miss Emmet starts frankly from God as ultimate, the position of Romanism swings back and forth between these two. It is therefore in contradistinction from the positions represented by Miss Emmet and by Rome that the Reformed faith makes all human

knowledge to depend upon an original act of creation and revelation on the part of the self-existent God of Scripture.[2]

It is exceedingly dangerous to confuse the orthodox concept of the incomprehensibility of God with the ultimate mysteriousness of the universe as held by modern thought. Modern thought in general, and modern logic in particular, holds with Bosanquet that God is, at most, an aspect of Reality as a whole. Hence, God is himself surrounded by darkness or mystery, just as man is surrounded by darkness or mystery. In other words, modern thought believes in an ultimate irrationalism, while Christianity believes in an ultimate rationality. It is difficult to think of two types of thought that are more radically opposed to one another. It is the most fundamental antithesis conceivable in the field of knowledge. It is nothing short of astounding that orthodox theologians should fail to make this basic distinction between Christian and non-Christian thought. The very foundation of all Christian theology is removed if the concept of the ultimate rationality of God be given up. It is upon it alone that we hope to build anything like a systematic interpretation.

Note 2. We should observe that it is not possible to find a term with respect to method that avoids all difficulties. We can speak of our method as the method of implication only if we realize that after all, we mean something different by the term “implication” just as we mean something different by the term “induction” from what the non-Christian logician means by them. It is really only the Christian who can speak of implication, because no one but him really takes the idea of an absolute system seriously. Bosanquet says that man needs insight into an absolute system if he is to have knowledge at all, but he makes no provision for such a system. As Christians we say that we ourselves do not need an absolute system to have knowledge, but that God needs to have or to be an absolute system if we are to have knowledge.

Again, we may speak of our method as being transcendental, but if we do, we should once more observe that our meaning of that word is different from the Kantian, or modern, meaning. Kantian thought does not really find its final reference point in God. Modern thought in general does not really interpret reality in eternal categories. It seeks to interpret reality by a combination of eternal and temporal categories. For all non-Christian thought, as we have observed before, eternity is never anything more than a correlative of time. It is only the Christian who really interprets reality in

exclusively eternal categories because only he believes in God as self-sufficient and not dependent upon time reality.

B. The Theological Method

All analogical knowledge may be called theological knowledge. We can even, if we wish, identify the concept of analogical knowledge with the concept of theological knowledge. We cannot do without God any more when we wish to know about physics or psychology than when we wish to know about our soul's salvation. Not one single fact in this universe can be known truly by man without the existence of God. Even if man will not recognize God's existence, the fact of God's existence none the less accounts for whatever measure of knowledge man has about God. We can readily see that this must be so. The idea of creation is implied in the idea of the self-sufficient God. Now if every fact in this universe is created by God, and if the mind of man and whatever the mind of man knows is created by God, it goes without saying that the whole fabric of human knowledge would dash to pieces if God did not exist and if all finite existence were not revelational of God.

We emphasize this point, inasmuch as a quite common way of distinguishing between theology and the other sciences is to say that in the case of theology we must allow God to teach us, while in the case of other sciences we need only to open our eyes and look around. What needs to be done, therefore, is to point out that the difference between theology and other sciences does not lie in the fact that God is any less necessary for the one than for the other, but that the difference lies only in the degree of directness with which God is brought into the knowledge situation.

What is meant by saying that in the theological method we are more than otherwise directly concerned with God than in the analogical method in general, cannot be expressed with sufficient exactness by saying that in the case of theology we go to the Bible while in the case of the other sciences we go elsewhere. It is true that we are more directly concerned with the Bible when we deal with theology than when we deal with the other sciences, but it is not true that in the other sciences we are not at all concerned with the Bible. Even in the study of zoology or botany the Bible is involved. The Bible sheds its indispensable light on everything we as

Christians study. There is a philosophy of fact in the Bible that we use for the interpretation of every fact of our lives. A Christian can never go on an expedition with archaeologists who are sincerely looking for the body of Jesus. A Christian cannot go on an expedition with evolutionists expected that he may possibly find the "missing link" between man and animal. Yet it is true that in the study of matters of the laboratories and the field, the Bible is only indirectly concerned. We do not go to the Bible itself for the facts with which we deal. On the other hand, it is true of theology that it gets its facts about God almost exclusively from the Bible. We say almost exclusively, because we also learn about God from nature. Hence we must say that it is only a matter of emphasis. We do not limit ourselves entirely to the Bible when we study anything else.

Another way by which we sometimes try to bring out the difference between the method of theology and the method of the other sciences is by saying that in theology we deal with redemption, while in the other sciences we do not. But this is true, also, only as a matter of emphasis. In theology, we deal not only with the matter of redemption; we deal with the whole question of the universe as existing for the glory of God. And this is also the interest that we have in our study of anything else if we are really led by the Christian motif. Yet it is true that in theology we give more attention to the question of redemption and the question of man's direct relationship to God than we do in other sciences.

Failing to make clear the point just made, that for the Christian all interpretation of any fact of "nature" even by "reason" should be performed self-consciously as an act of re-interpretation of God's revelation, leads to a serious weakening of the Christian testimony. A typical example of such a weakening of the Christian testimony is found in Lewis Sherry Chafer's *Systematic Theology*. Though unabridged, this work has no discussion on Christian methodology as it relates to modern thought. Instead of making clear that "reason" in the case of the non-Christian is employed by such as assume themselves to be self-sufficient, while "reason" in the case of the Christian is employed by those who through regeneration have learned to think of themselves as creatures of God and of their task in life as keeping covenant with God, Chafer talks about theology drawing its material "from both revelation and reason." "Reason, as here considered," he then adds, "indicates the intellectual and moral faculties of man exercised in the pursuit of truth and apart from supernatural aid."[3] But "reason" thus

described is in practice the reason of the natural man. And the natural man suppresses the revelation round about and within him. His fundamental conclusions with respect to the universe and himself are those of a covenant-breaker instead of those of a covenant-keeper. These conclusions need not and cannot be supplemented by revelation; they must be reversed. Due to the fact that man cannot wholly suppress the truth, and due to the fact that God's long-suffering would lead him to repentance, the natural man brings to light some truths. It remains true even so that his "system" of interpretation needs reversal. Instead of indicating this fact, Chafer follows a position infected with the weaknesses of Rome.

Another form of the weakening of the Christian testimony spoken of is found when men virtually concede that an argument about facts of history, such as archaeology or miracles, between Christians and non-believers can be satisfactorily brought to a conclusion without bringing in the basic presuppositions of the Christian religion. From the Christian point of view, every fact of the space-time universe is created by God and is what it is by virtue of its place in the plan of God. It is therefore God's revelation of his plan that comes to partial expression in every fact of "nature" and history. Hence the Christian ought to make the claim that every fact positively reveals itself for what it is in relation to this plan.

On its basis Romanism cannot do this. Its *analogia entis* idea assumes that it is possible to speak of being and of rationality in general prior to the distinction of God's being and man's being or original thought and derivative thought. On such a basis it is consistent for Christians to speak with non-Christians about "facts" and a "rational universe" in general before bringing in the distinction of God the creator and man the creature. But then, on such a basis too, the sort of Christianity that is defended by the Christian is something that lives to some extent by the sufferance of the non-Christian.

The Arminian position is similar to that of the Romanist. Assuming with Romanism that many facts come to pass in history as the result of the decisions of man independently of the plan of God, it is consistent for the Arminian to argue with the non-believer about archaeology or miracles without bringing in the plan of God.

A recent example of the Arminian type of discussion on historical fact is found in C. S. Lewis' book, *Miracles* (New York, 1947). Lewis argues that "the grand miracle" is but the outstanding example of that which happens in

the world of historical being in general. “What we can understand, if the Christian doctrine is true, is that our own composite existence is not the sheer anomaly it might seem to be, but a faint image of the Divine Incarnation itself—the same theme in a very minor key.”[4] This is the sort of argument the natural man can accept on his own assumptions. The discussion is again about being in general. But the sad result is again that the Christianity thus supposedly proved true is one in which God is included with man in a universe whose laws of being and rationality both must obey.

We have said that the Romanist and the Arminian are consistent with their own positions if they debate question of historical fact with non-believers without bringing in the Christian presupposition of God and his plan. It is, however, quite inconsistent for those professing the Reformed faith to do so. Yet this is frequently done. A recent example is the work of Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian Philosophy of Education* (Grand Rapids, 1946). Speaking of archaeology in general Clark says: “Archaeology is extremely valuable and deserves support, but it does not prove that the Bible is true, much less does it prove the existence of God.”[5] The reason why archaeology is said not to prove the Bible to be true seems to be that, in the nature of the case, not in every instance in which the Bible speaks of facts that might come into the purview of archaeology can the Bible be shown to be true. “Because the Bible has been shown to be true in these hundred and one cases, as some unwary Christians like to state the general argument, it follows that the Bible is therefore true in a thousand other cases not yet tested. Obviously this does not follow …”[6] But surely the Reformed believer should stress with Calvin that every fact of history, here and now actually is a revelation of God. Hence any fact and every fact proves the existence of God and therefore the truth of Scriptures. If this is not the case, no fact ever will. Every fact proves the existence of God because without the presupposition of God and his counsel no fact has any distinguishable character at all. But to press this point—the point which Reformed thinking should be most concerned to stress—is to give up reasoning about facts of archaeology or of history in general on presuppositions supposedly common to both but in reality exclusive of the Christian faith. Reformed systematics and apologetics differs from Romanist and Arminian systematics and apologetics precisely because of the former’s claim that

every fact is expressive of the plan of God and no fact proves or disproves anything except upon the presupposition of that plan.

The defect of Clark's discussion of archaeology is typical of his whole conception of what can be proved by facts of history in general. And his view of history finds most striking expression in his idea of miracle. The Christian must admit, Clark says, that the pragmatist is essentially correct in his contention that historical facts of themselves do not constitute theism. The miracles of the Bible are clearly incompatible with the type of world uniformity assumed by the ordinary forms of idealism and materialism. "But they can find a queer though nor logically impossible place in pragmatism as well as in the uniformity of theism. The alleged events, instead of constituting Christian theism, stand themselves in need of philosophic interpretation."[7] Clark contends that the miracles of the Bible can find "queer though not logically impossible place in pragmatism as well as in the uniformity of theism." Such a contention fits in with the Romanist or Arminian idea according in which one can properly speak of being in general and rationality in general before speaking of God and his plan. It involves that even the resurrection of Christ might logically fit into the scheme of pragmatism. Thus it would have lost all evidential value. Accordingly Clark makes an absolute contrast between beginning with the facts and beginning with God. "In view of this pragmatic dealing with history, its positivistic denial of universal law, of metaphysics, of supernatural interpretation, it may be permitted by way of anticipation to suggest the conclusion that, instead of beginning with facts and later discovering God, unless a thinker begins with God he can never end with God, or get the facts either."[8] Now it is true that no Reformed person should begin with facts and later discover God, but it is equally true that no Reformed person should begin with God and later discover the facts. If facts are what they are because of the plan of God, that plan is in some measure apparent in these facts. The proper way to begin with facts is therefore to claim that unless they are what Christianity says they are they are unintelligible. No fact can logically fit into the pragmatist scheme and every fact fits logically into the Christian scheme. Thus, to speak of facts in general, including miracles, as possibly fitting into a pragmatic as well as into the Christian scheme is to weaken the Christian testimony in the way the Arminian or Romanist does. It assumes an irrationalist philosophy of fact.

Moreover, to say that facts, e.g. miracles, might possibly fit into a pragmatic scheme, is virtually to start from abstract logic apart from and above the nature of God. If the facts are irrationalistically conceived, logic must be non-theistically conceived. This is apparent by way of contrast. If the facts are theistically conceived they are what they are precisely because they are produced by the will of God, according to the nature of God. In that case it is the plan of God and nothing else that they display. But the "logic" of the pragmatist is abstract impersonal logic, logic which virtually asserts that the facts cannot possibly display the plan of God. Thus it is logic in the abstract that is made to determine what God can or cannot do. Parmenides used to appeal to such logic and conclude directly that creation out of nothing is impossible. Pragmatism appeals to the same sort of logic and concludes indirectly that creation out of nothing is impossible. For all its irrationalistic conclusions on the matter of being modern, pragmatism is as rationalistic as was Parmenides. Irrationalism is involved in rationalism and rationalism is involved in irrationalism.

The significance of all this for the question of analogy is this. There are two mutually exclusive methodologies. The one of the natural man assumes the ultimacy of the human mind. On this basis man, making himself the ultimate reference point, virtually reduces all reality to one level and denies the counsel of God as determinative of the possible and the impossible. Instead of the plan of God, it assumes an abstract notion of possibility or probability, of being and rationality. It may therefore be said to reason univocally. To be sure, the term analogy may even so be employed. This term then makes divine knowledge to be analogous to human knowledge.

On the other hand there is the Christian position. When consistently expressed it posits God's self-existence and plan, as well as self-contained self knowledge, as the presupposition of all created existence and knowledge. In that case, all facts show forth and thus prove the existence of God and his plan. In that case, too, all human knowledge should be self-consciously subordinated to that plan. Its task in systematics is to order as far as possible the facts of God's revelation. The "system" thus produced as, e.g., it finds expression in the Reformed confessions of faith, pretends to be an analogical system. At no point does such a system pretend to state, point for point, the identical content of the original system of the mind of God. If there were any point at which such a Christian system would claim to be exhaustively reproductive of the mind of God it would have to claim to be

reproductive of the whole mind of God. To claim for the Christian system identity with the divine system at any point is to break the relationship of dependence of human knowledge on the divine will. And when this dependence is broken man's knowledge is thought of as self-sufficient.

Between these two positions so clearly exclusive of one another there is the Romanist compromise. Arminianism is largely like Romanism. And when Reformed theologians engage in a debate with unbelievers, without challenging the presuppositions of these unbelievers, their procedure is also essentially Romanist in character.

Note 1. When we speak of the theological method, we refer to all the theological disciplines and not to systematic theology only. Then too, when we take systematic theology as a whole and divide it into its loci of theology proper, anthropology, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology, we cannot say that only in theology proper do we employ the theological method. The nearest that we can approach to bringing out the relation between the methods of the various sciences and theology and then once more between the various theological disciplines among themselves, is to think of several concentric circles. God is at the center of these concentric circles. The large outside circle contains the facts of all the sciences, save theology. The second and smaller circle contains all the theological disciplines: The third and still smaller circle deals with theology proper.

Note 2. We believe that, if we regard the whole question of method as we have in this chapter, much confusion can be avoided. The first and greatest confusion is that which makes the division between various kinds of method some other than the Christian theistic and the non-theistic. This confusion obtains in Hodge's chapter on method. He makes a general statement about the various kinds of method, as follows: "The two great comprehensive methods are the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*. One argues from cause to effect, the other from effect to cause."[9] But if, as we have seen, the very terms *a priori* and *a posteriori* mean something different to Christians from what they mean to non-Christians, it is plain that we must make our basic distinction that of the Christian theistic and the non-theistic method.

Then, too, if we have made this basic distinction, our criticisms of other methods will be more to the point. When Hodge continues to discuss various methods that have been used in the study of theology, he does not

seek to show that these various methods have often been no more than variations of the one non-theistic method. He merely gives a sort of historical survey of the various methods used. Then he criticizes each one of these on points of detail. He speaks of the speculative, the mystical, and the inductive methods. But what is of the utmost importance to note is that the main criticism of these methods is not on points of detail, but on the fact that they have not been analogical, and, more specifically, that they have not been theological. A rationalistic method, that is, a method in which the *a priori* predominates, is in itself no worse than an exclusively empirical or *a posteriori* method. Both are equally unacceptable if they do not have the Christian conception of the *a priori* and *a posteriori*. So, also, no combination of rational and empirical aspects will produce a method that is any better than either a rationalistic or an empirical method. If we add ever so many zeros to zero, we have zero still. Some of these methods may have a relatively higher value than others, since we believe in the relatively good in the midst of the absolutely evil, but none of them can be added to or subtracted from in order to obtain a method that is fitted to use for the purposes of theology.

[1] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 34

[2] For a position similar to Miss Emmet's and approaching Rome's, see A. E. Taylor's *The Faith of a Moralist*.

[3] Vol. 1, p. 49.

[4] p. 134.

[5] p. 34.

[6] p. 32.

[7] p. 37.

[8] p. 38.

[9] Vol. 2, p. 99.

Chapter 3: Christian Epistemology

A question closely related to that of method is that of the place and function of reason in theology. If the method employed by theology is the ordinary inductive method, it goes without saying that the human reason will be thought of as non-Christians generally think of it; that is, human reason will not be thought of as having been influenced by the fall of man in sin. There will be no recognition of the noetic effects of sin on man. Then, too, the human reason will be placed on a par with divine reason. Non-Christians think of reality as one whole, inclusive of God and man, and consequently they think of Reason as everywhere the same, whether in God or in man. Human reason is said or assumed to be potentially divine.

It is therefore of the utmost importance to point out that there is a distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian conception of the place of human reason.

There have been, generally speaking, two tendencies among orthodox theologians on this question of the function of reason in theology. In the first place, there have been those who have been so afraid of “reason” that they have assigned to it no place at all. On the other hand, there have been those who have been very anxious to prove that theology has a perfect right to consider itself a science. Both tendencies failed to distinguish between a Christian and a non-Christian use of reason.

In order to avoid these difficulties in some measure, we must attempt again to show that our conception of the place and function of human reason is directly involved in our conception of God. We must avoid the idea that human reason exists as a known and definable entity apart from God so that we may begin from it as from an ultimate starting point.

To make clear our position on the place of human reason in theology, it is necessary first to show that the place we accord to reason in connection with theology is basically the same as that which we accord to it in connection with the other sciences. As the theological method is but a specialized form of the Christian theistic method in general, so the place of reason in theology is determined primarily by our conception of Christian theistic epistemology in general.

In order to insert even a brief discussion of Christian epistemology, we must note in what way the Christian position differs from other positions on

the question of the object of knowledge and on the question of the subject of knowledge.

The questions that concern us about both the object and the subject of knowledge are as to whether they can have (a) their existence and (b) their meaning, independent of the existence of God. In other words, we must ask the that and the what about the denotation and the connotation of both the object and the subject of knowledge.

A. The Object of Knowledge

Fortunately, it is not difficult to see what the Christian theistic position is with respect to these questions. The doctrine of creation says that the whole spatio-temporal world owes its existence to the will of God. God created the universe *ex nihilo*. There was no externally existent matter out of which God created the world. Nor, on the other hand, did the world and God together spring into existence from the void. We cannot think of the non-existence of God. The universe, therefore, did not get its existence from any other source but from God.

What is true with respect to the existence of the whole space-time world is equally true with respect to the meaning of it. As the absolute and independent existence of God determines the derivative existence of the universe, so the absolute meaning that God has for himself implies that the meaning of every fact in the universe must be related to God. Scripture says constantly that the world has its whole meaning in the fact that it was created for the glory of God. This appears most beautifully in Revelation 4:11, where the redeemed creation joins in one grand Hallelujah chorus in praise of the Creator: “Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power: for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they are, and were created.” The Westminster Confession expresses this concept in the following words: “It pleased God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good.”[1] If we hold with Paul (Rom 11:36) that “him and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever,” we see clearly that the existence and meaning of every fact in this

universe must in the last analysis be related to the self-conscious and eternally self-subsistent God of the Scriptures.

Applying this to the question of man's knowledge of facts, it may be said that for the human mind to know any fact truly, it must presuppose the existence of God and his plan for the universe. If we wish to know the facts of this world, we must relate these facts to laws. That is, in every knowledge transaction, we must bring the particulars of our experience into relation with universals. So, for instance, we speak of the phenomena of physics as acting in accordance with the laws of gravitation. We may speak of this law of gravitation as a universal. In a similar way, if we study history instead of nature, that is, if we study the particulars of this world as they are related to one another in time as well as in space, we observe certain historical laws. But the most comprehensive interpretation that we can give of the facts by connecting the particulars and the universals that together constitute the universe leavens our knowledge at loose ends, unless we may presuppose God back of this world. It is of the greatest moment to make clear that the ultimate subject of our predication is not the Universe, Reality, or Being in general in which God is the universal, and historical facts are the particulars. If such were the case, God and the universe would be correlative to one another. And it is precisely in order to set off the Christian position against such correlativism that the equal ultimacy of the one and the many within the Godhead, prior to and independent of its relation to the created universe, must be presupposed. As Christians, we hold that in this universe we deal with a derivative one and many, which can be brought into fruitful relation with one another because, back of both, we have in God the original One and Many. If we are to have coherence in our experience, there must be a correspondence of our experience to the eternally coherent experience of God. Human knowledge ultimately rests upon the internal coherence within the Godhead; our knowledge rests upon the ontological Trinity as its presupposition.

On all these points the non-Christian takes the opposite position for granted without question. The non-Christian takes for granted that we can intelligently think of this universe as being self-existent and as having its meaning in itself. The non-Christian takes for granted that the world of our senses can be known truly, if at all, even if we do not know whether God exists. He speaks of the particulars and universals of this world as though

they were ultimate instead of derivative. He speaks as though the ultimacy of these facts and laws of the world can be taken for granted.

To be sure, some non-Christians hold that this world is not eternal. It would be in consonance with the current concept of evolution to hold that the world has somehow sprung into existence from the void. But all this does not qualify our contention that the non-Christian takes for granted the ultimacy of the universe. Even if he holds that the time-space world once did not exist, he at least takes for granted that it does not exist as a derivative from a self-existent God. This is the determining point. Non-Christians hold that whether the world ever came into existence or whether it always existed, in either case its existence and, therefore, its meaning, is independent of God.

Note: We should observe that idealism, ancient and modern, is included in the above discussion as well as any other type of non-Christian thought. Judging by the sound of words alone, it might seem as though idealism were willing to admit that this world must be thought of as depending on God. In reality, no form of idealism, even if it uses the term creation, will admit that which is to us most important of all, namely, that God is absolutely self-existent and absolutely self-conscious. Idealism will not admit that the one and the many are equally eternal and are harmonized in the church's conception of the Trinity. No idealist can admit the biblical doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Idealism includes the God and the universe of Christianity in what it calls the Universe or the Whole. God is then the *a priori* aspect of Reality, and no more.

B. The Subject of Knowledge

With respect to the question of the subject of knowledge, that is, the place of the activity of the human personality, it may be said that here too we hold that the existence and meaning of the human interpreter must be brought into a relation of subordination to God as the ultimate interpreter.

Before the world was, God existed alone. In him, existence and interpretation are co-extensive. The Spirit of God searches the deep things of God. It follows from this that any human interpreters would have to be derivative interpreters or re-interpreters..

The interpretation that man would give to anything in this world can therefore never be comprehensive and exhaustive. This much of truth there is in the recent emphasis on the part of the men of science on the mysteriousness of the facts of the universe. However, as Christians, we hold that the reason for the mysteriousness of the facts of this universe is not that given by scientists today. Science today, in consonance with non-Christian thought in general, holds that the facts of this universe are surrounded by an ultimate void, that is, by an ultimate irrationality. We, on the contrary, hold that God as absolute Light is back of the facts of the universe. We hold that the atom is mysterious for us, but not for God.

And this accounts for the basic difference between the Christian and the non-Christian position on the question of the validity of human knowledge. Modern science is basically agnostic, while Christianity is the very reverse of agnostic. In effect, non-Christian thought argues that, because man cannot comprehend something in its knowledge, to that extent his knowledge is not true. Christians say that we as creatures do not need to and should not expect to comprehend anything fully. God comprehends fully, and that is enough for us. God's full comprehension gives validity to our partial comprehension. The fact that we do not fully comprehend the atom should not make us grow desperate with respect to the truth of the atom. When a Christian sees the atom surrounded by mystery, he worships God; when the non-Christian scientist sees the atom surrounded by mystery, he worships the void.

As Christians, then, we believe that human knowledge of the world and of God is (a) not exhaustive and yet (b) true. We are created in God's image, and therefore our knowledge cannot be exhaustive; we are created in God's image, and therefore our knowledge is true.

But now we have yet to consider the second main difference between the Christian and non-Christian view of human reason. What we have so far considered dealt only with the metaphysics of the matter. Christians believe that man is the creature of God, while non-Christians do not. Hence Christians maintain while non-Christians deny that man must be a re-interpreter of God's interpretation. We must now add to this that, as Christians, we believe that the human mind as it exists today should not only be thought of as derivative, but should also be thought of as ethically depraved. In contrast to this, non-Christians think that the human mind is

ethically normal. Moreover, those who do not believe in the sinfulness of the human mind do not believe in its created character.

It is this difference that brings great complexity into the knowledge situation. It lifts the whole question of knowledge out of its supposedly intellectual or neutral atmosphere. The question of true knowledge becomes a matter of life and death. Clearly, if the Christian position is true, that is, if man's mind is ethically depraved, man will fall into eternal ruin unless he has true knowledge of God. On the other hand, granted the Christian position is wrong, it is a fact that Christians hold it to be right, and this is resented by the non-Christians. This then brings up the question of the possibility of argument between Christians and non-Christians.

Paul says that the "natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." The reason for this is that these things are "foolishness unto him." More than that, he cannot receive them "because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14). Speaking of the fall of man, and sin, the Westminster Confession embodies the Pauline teaching in the following words: "By this sin they fell from their original righteousness, and communion with God, and so became dead in sin (Eph: 2:1–3, 'And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins …'), and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of the soul and body."[2]

We need to recognize this complexity, and to see the problem it involves. It will not do to ignore the difference between Christians and non-Christians and speak of reason in general. Such a thing does not exist in practice. As dangerous as it is to speak of method in general without distinguishing clearly between the Christian theistic and the non-theistic method, so dangerous is it to speak of reason in general or of a "common consciousness" in general. We must therefore begin with:

(a) The Adamic consciousness, or, the reason of man as it existed before the fall of man. This reason was derivative. Its knowledge was, in the nature of the case, true, though not exhaustive. This reason was in covenant with God, instead of at enmity against God. It recognized the fact that its function was that of the interpretation of God's revelation. In paradise Adam had a true conception of the relation of the particulars to the universals of knowledge with respect to the created universe. He named the animals "according to their nature," that is, in accordance with the place God had given them in his universe. Then, too, Adam could converse truly about the meaning of the universe in general and about their own life in

particular with Eve. Thus the subject-object and the subject-subject relationship was normal. In paradise man's knowledge was self-consciously analogical; man wanted to know the facts of the universe in order to fulfill his task as a covenant-keeper.

(b) Then, secondly, we must think of the sinful consciousness, i.e., of the human reason as it became after the entrance of sin. Looked at from the point of view of its unredeemed character, we may speak of it as the unregenerate consciousness. This is the "natural man" "dead in trespasses and sin." The natural man wants to be something that he cannot be. He wants to be "as God," himself the judge of good and evil, himself the standard of truth. He sets himself as the ideal of comprehensive knowledge. When he sees that he will never reach this ideal he concludes that all reality is surrounded by darkness. As a child would say, "If I cannot do this, no one else can," so the "natural man" today says in effect that, since he cannot grasp knowledge comprehensively, God cannot either. The non-regenerate man takes for granted that the meaning of the space-time world is immanent in itself, and that man is the ultimate interpreter of this world, instead of its humble re-interpreter. The natural man wants to be creatively constructive instead of receptively reconstructive.

We are well aware of the fact that non-Christians have a great deal of knowledge about this world which is true as far as it goes. That is, there is a sense in which we can and must allow for the value of knowledge of non-Christians. This has always been a difficult point. It is often the one great source of confusion on the question of faith in its relation to reason. We should admit that we cannot give any wholly satisfactory account of the situation as it actually obtains. We cannot do that with respect to this question any more than we can with the respect to the question of how it is possible that God can give to those who are children of his wrath such natural blessings as rain and sunshine, or physical prosperity in general. All that we can do with this question as with many other questions in theology, is to hem it in order to keep out errors, and to say that truth lies within a certain territory.

In order to hem in our question we are persuaded that we must begin by emphasizing the absolute ethical antithesis in which the "natural man" stands to God. This implies that he knows nothing truly as he ought to know it. It means, therefore, that the "natural man" is not only basically mistaken in his notions about religion and God, but is as basically mistaken in his

notions about the atoms and the laws of gravitation. From this ultimate point of view the “natural man” knows nothing truly. He has chains about his neck and sees shadows only.

It is this point on which many theologians are vague. They maintain, to be sure, that the natural man cannot truly know God, but they will not maintain that the natural man cannot truly know the flowers of the field. Now it may seem as though it is straining at a gnat to insist on the point that the natural man does not even know the flowers truly, as long as it is maintained that he does not know God truly. The point is, however, that unless we maintain that the natural man does not know the flowers truly, we cannot logically maintain that he does not know God truly. All knowledge is inter-related. The created world is expressive of the nature of God. If one knows “nature” truly, one also knows nature’s God truly. Then, too, the mind of man is a unit. It cannot know one thing truly without knowing all things truly.

It will not do to say that the natural man knows nothing of God, though he knows many other things well. Nor is it even sufficient to say that the natural man does know of the existence of God but does not know anything about the character of God. The existence of God is the existence of the character. Hence Paul says that the heathen see “God’s everlasting power and divinity.” They see something of the character of God.

The difficulty with respect to the natural man’s knowledge of God may be somewhat alleviated if we remember that there are two senses in which we may speak of his having knowledge. The natural man has knowledge, true knowledge of God, in the sense that God through nature and man’s own consciousness impresses his presence on man’s attention. So definitely and inescapably has he done this and that, try as he may, man cannot escape knowing God. It is this point that Paul stresses in the first two chapters of Romans 1. Man has the sense of deity indelibly engraved upon him. He knows God and he knows himself and the world as God’s creation. This is objective revelation to him. Even to the extent that this revelation is in man, in his own constitution, and as such may be called “subjective” it is none the less objective to him as an ethically responsible creature, and he is bound to react as an ethical person to this objective revelation.

But it is this objective revelation both about and within him that the natural man seeks to suppress. Having made alliance with Satan, man makes a grand monistic assumption. Not merely in his conclusion but as

well in his method and starting point he takes for granted his own ultimacy. To the extent that he works according to this monistic assumption he misinterprets all things, flowers no less than God. Fortunately the natural man is never fully consistent while in this life. As the Christian sins against his will, so the natural man "sins against" his own essentially Satanic principle. As the Christian has the incubus of his "old man" weighing him down and therefore keeping him from realizing the "life of Christ" within him, so the natural man has the incubus of the sense of deity weighing him down and keeping him from realizing the life of Satan within him.

The actual situation is therefore always a mixture of truth with error. Being "without God in the world" the natural man yet knows God, and, in spite of himself, to some extent recognizes God. By virtue of their creation in God's image, by virtue of the ineradicable sense of deity within them and by virtue of God's restraining general grace, those who hate God, yet in a restricted sense know God, and do good.

What we should remember in this connection is that though we can do no more than hem in the territory in which the solution must be found, this is really all that we can do with respect to any problem that pertains to the relation between God and man. We cannot understand in the sense of comprehend how human action, which must by virtue of man's creation in the image of God be analogical action, can nevertheless have genuine significance. Similarly, we cannot understand, in the sense of comprehend, how human reasoning, which must be analogical reasoning, i.e., re-interpretation of God's interpretation, can nevertheless be genuine and significant interpretation. In fine, the temptation that constantly besets us is that we wish to comprehend how any activity on the part of man can have meaning. This we can never expect to do because God, by virtue of whom man must exist and by virtue of whom man must therefore be interpreted, is incomprehensible to man.

Human reason is not a simple linear extension of divine reasoning. The human activity or interpretation always runs alongside of and is subordinate to the main plan or purpose of God. If this be kept in mind, it will be seen that if, as Reformed theology has contended, both the doctrines of the absolute ethical antithesis of the natural man to God and of his relatively true knowledge and relatively good deeds must be maintained, we are not led into any inconsistency or self-contradiction. It is our contention all along the line that deeds and interpretations of wholly derivative creatures

have genuine meaning. The choice for evil on the part of Adam and Eve was a genuine choice, though we know that back of their choice is the plan of God. The rejection of Christ on the part of unbelievers has genuine significance so that men are punished for their unbelief even though they were born dead in trespasses and sins and therefore unable to discern and to do spiritually good. Surely then, it cannot be thought to be inconsistent if we also hold that he who is reprobate on account of some relative acts, that is, through the sin of Adam and the sin of himself as well as on account of the counsel of God or an absolute act back of all relative acts, shall yet be considered relatively good while he is on earth.

(c) After we have begun with the Adamic consciousness, and then turned to the regenerate consciousness, we must next consider the regenerate consciousness. The regenerate consciousness is the Adamic consciousness restored and supplemented, but restored and supplemented in principle or standing only.

In the first place, the regenerated consciousness is the Adamic consciousness restored. It recognizes afresh its own derivative character. It is able to do so only because God has regenerated it and thus made it confess its ethical depravity. God has quickened what was the natural man so that he now lives. The regenerate man can discern and do spiritually good because it is God who works in him both to will and to do. In the second place, the regenerated consciousness is the Adamic consciousness supplemented. Adam was in the position of *posse peccare*, while the restored are in the position of non *posse peccare*. “Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him; and he cannot sin because he is begotten of God” (1 Jn 1:8).

The regenerate consciousness is restored in principle but not in degree. The struggle of Romans 7 remains the struggle of every Christian till the day of his death. “If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn 1:8).

If we keep all these distinctions between the Adamic, the non-regenerate, and the regenerate consciousness in mind, we can approach the question as to the place of reason in theology.

In the first place, we can no longer figure with the Adamic consciousness as actually existing at the present time. We deal only with the non-regenerate and the regenerate consciousness. But the true meaning of the fallen and the regenerate consciousness cannot be maintained unless

back of both lies the history of Adam and his fall. This does not therefore mean that it is a matter of indifference whether or not we take the Genesis narrative with respect to Adam as historical. It is only if we do take this narrative as historical that a sound theology can be maintained. Adam's sin was the willful transgression of man to the known revelation of God. If we deny the historicity of the Genesis narrative we shall be compelled to reduce man's responsibility for sin so drastically that in reality nothing remains of it. Man's 'sinfulness' is then virtually identical with 'fate.' Accordingly such theologians as Otto Piper[3] and Nels F. S. Ferré[4] who reduce the Genesis narrative to the status of myth, find themselves compelled to deny also the historic Christian views of sin, of Christ, and of the atonement.

In the second place, we cannot speak of human reason in general, or of the human consciousness in general, except in the objective sense explained above. And as such we may call it a limiting concept in the Christian sense of the term. In other words, it is a concept that should never be employed to do duty by itself. All men have a sense of deity, but there is no man who has not at the same time also something else that at once colors his sense of deity. All men are either in covenant with Satan or in covenant with God. The former invariably seek to suppress and therefore always misinterpret the general sense of deity within them. The latter invariably seek to relate that general sense of deity to the revelation of God in Christ.

While therefore it is of the utmost consequence to recognize the fact of a "common consciousness" of God as the revelational pressure of God on man, it is of no less importance that, insofar as men are aware of their most basic alliances, they are wholly for or wholly against God at every point of interest to man.

In the third place, when we do definitely deal with the non-regenerate consciousness we must think of it as it is according to its adopted monistic assumption. Hence we cannot grant that it has any right to judge in matters of theology, or, for that matter, in anything else. The Scriptures nowhere appeal to the unregenerated reason as to a qualified judge. On the contrary, Scripture says over and over that the unregenerate reason is entirely unqualified to judge. When Scripture says: "Come, let us reason together," it usually speaks to the people of God, and, if it does speak to others, it never regards them as equal with God or as really competent to judge. The unregenerate man has knowledge of God, that is of the revelation of God

within him, the sense of deity which he seeks to suppress. Scripture does appeal to this sense of deity in man, but it does so and can do so only by denying that man, when acting on his adopted monistic assumption, has any ability or right to judge of what is true or false, right or wrong.

In the fourth place, though Scripture does not appeal to the natural man as to a competent judge and though it considers the natural man as blind to spiritual things, the Scriptures continue to hold man responsible for his blindness.

In the fifth place, Scripture teaches us to speak and preach to, as well as to reason with blind men, because God, in whose name we speak and reason, can cause the blind to see. Jesus told Lazarus while dead to arise and come forth from the grave. The prophet preached to the dead bones in the valley till they took on flesh. So our reasoning and our preaching is not in vain inasmuch as God in Christ reasons and preaches through us. Once we were blind; God reasoned with us, perhaps through some human agency, and we saw.

In the sixth place, when God has reasoned with us and changed our minds till our every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, we must use our minds, our intellect, our reason, our consciousness, in order to receive and re-interpret the revelation God has given of himself in Scripture. That is the proper place of reason in theology. There is no conflict between this reason and faith, since faith is the impelling power which urges reason to interpret aright.

Note 1. Dr. Herman Bavinck[5] and Professor Louis Berkhof[6] discuss the question taken up in this chapter under the heading “Principia of Dogmatics.” Under this heading they discuss such questions as the essence of religion, the seat of religion, the origin of religion, etc. In this discussion they bring out carefully and fully that God on his part must reveal himself to man, and that man must be created in the image of God in order to be able to receive this revelation. All this is admirable and highly necessary in itself. However, our limited time does not permit us to go into these questions fully. We have sought to give the main points of these extensive discussions by seeking to reduce them to the basic question of Christian epistemology.

Moreover, since we use Hodge as a reference work and seek to cover the ground in his first volume, we must pay particular attention to the manner

in which Hodge has discussed various questions. Accordingly, we now turn to a consideration of what Hodge says with respect to human reason.

[1] Chap. 4.

[2] Chapter 6:2.

[3] *God in History*, pp. 20, 58.

[4] *The Christian Faith*; *Evil and the Christian Faith*.

[5] Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Vol. 1.

[6] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 1941.

Chapter 4: Christian Epistemology (the Position of Charles Hodge)

In continuation of our discussion on the function of reason in theology we shall now bring the principles outlined in the preceding chapter to bear upon the position of Charles Hodge, one of the greatest of Reformed theologians.

A. The Usus Instrumentalis of Reason[1]

The first function of reason, says Hodge, is that of the reception of revelation. Revelation is addressed to rational beings. “Revelation is the communication of truth to the mind. But the communication of truth supposes the capacity to receive it. Revelations cannot be made to brutes or to idiots. Truths, to be received as objects of faith, must be intellectually apprehended.”[2]

Hodge is here contending against certain forms of irrationalism. He does so by virtually asserting what is in our day spoken of as the primacy of the intellect. The weakness of his position lies in the fact that he does not clearly distinguish between two views that are diametrically opposed to one another in epistemology, and yet both assert the primacy of the intellect.

There is first the Christian view. It has been best expressed by Reformed theologians. This view is based upon the Creator-creature distinction. The self-existent God is the original of which man is the derivative. Our very knowledge of ourselves, says Calvin, involves our knowledge of God as our original. Whatever is found in man, as God’s image-bearer, with the exception of that which results from sin, has its original in God. On the other hand, whatever is found in man’s constitution as God’s image-bearer exists and acts, when normal, as the derivative of the original in God. Speaking of the subject of the relation of the divine spirit to the human spirit Hodge himself says: “As power of some kind belongs to every substance, the power which belongs to spirit, to the substance of self, is that of thought, feeling, and volition. All this is given in the simplest form of consciousness. We are not more certain that we exist, than that we think,

feel, and will. We know ourselves only as thus thinking, feeling, willing, and we therefore are sure that these powers or faculties are the essential attributes of a spirit, and must belong to every spirit."[3]

As the various aspects of the human personality together constitute a unity, that unity as a whole is the analogue of the unity that constitutes the being or personality of God, it follows that there is no aspect of human personality that has any higher metaphysical standing than any other. This, of course, is not to deny that there is a primacy of economy. The will of man cannot function unless it knows in relation to what to function. Man must know the truth if he is to react with his will and feelings to it. But, though an important matter, this is not the basic point at issue.

The point may perhaps be illustrated with a comparison. In the case of God it is customary to distinguish between the ontological and the economical Trinity. Reformed theologians have maintained with vigor that the Son and the Spirit are ontologically, that is as to the ultimacy of their being, absolutely on a par with the Father. Equally insistent have they been that there is, for all that, an economical primacy of the Father over the other two persons of the Trinity. All the works of God with respect to the universe proceed from the triune God as a unity, while yet they indicate an economical primacy of the Father. In a similar way the aspects of human personality are, as to their being, on a par with one another. It could not be otherwise. In every aspect of his being man is equally near and equally distant from God. Speaking of man's moral nature in paradise Charles Hodge says: "There was neither rebellion of the sensuous part of his nature against the rational, nor was there any disproportion between them needing to be controlled or balanced by *ab extra* gifts or influence."[4] As the whole of created human personality was willingly subject to God, the primacy of the intellect over the will and the affections is naturally one of economy and not one of being. When the whole human being is gladly subject to its Creator and Lord, one aspect of this creature may be said to lead or to rule the others, but only in the sense that one subject rules over another subject for the sake of and in obedience to their common Master. It is this general idea that is expressed by Reformed theologians in the notion of the covenant.

Over against this Christian conception of the primacy of the intellect there is another which hails from the ancient philosophers. Like all men these philosophers were sinners, and like all men they therefore sought to

keep down the truth in unrighteousness. In briefly analyzing their position we shall follow what Calvin says about them.

In the entire first book of his *Institutes* he has frequent occasion to refer to them. He is glad to recognize their great natural intellectual powers. He argues again and again that formally and incidentally they have said many things that are true. Calvin is glad to allow that the philosophers have been able to do much that helps us in understanding the construction of the human mind. For all of that, he in no wise allows this fact to obscure his main contention that they are such as have in the whole of their personality and in every aspect of their activity refused to subject themselves to God as their Creator. They will not subject their intellect or their will or any power of the human mind to the authority of their creator. They are, as we might say today, covenant breakers.

The philosophers do not recognize the fall of man. Speaking of the philosophers, Calvin says: "The principle they set out with was that man could not be a rational animal unless he had a free choice of good and evil."[5] Thus they deny that man's will has been corrupted by sin. "They also imagined" Calvin then goes on to say, "that the distinction between virtue and vice was destroyed, if man did not of his own counsel arrange his life. So far well, had there been no change in man. This being unknown to them, it is not surprising that they throw everything into confusion."[6] The philosophers do not reckon with the fact that "at first every part of the soul was formed to rectitude" and that therefore there was then "soundness of mind and freedom of will to do the good" but that after the fall man has become equally corrupt in all aspects of his being.[7] Being "unacquainted with the corruption of nature, which is the punishment of revolt, (they) erroneously confound two states of man which are very different from one another."[8]

It is in the light of Calvin's stress on the fact that the philosophers do not reckon with the fall, that we can understand how he can and does agree with them to a considerable extent when they assert the primacy of the intellect as a matter of psychology as such, but utterly disagrees with them when in the same assertion they virtually maintain the sinlessness of that intellect.

"They tell us," says Calvin referring to the philosophers, "there is great repugnance between organic movements and the rational part of the soul. As if reason also were not at variance with herself, and herself and her councils sometimes conflicting with each other like hostile armies. But

since this disorder results from the deprivation of nature, it is erroneous to infer that there are two souls, because the faculties do not accord harmoniously as they ought."[9]

The assertion of the primacy of the intellect was for the philosophers, according to Calvin's exposition of it, identical with the assertion of the inherent sinlessness of the intellect. Not counting with the fact of the "depravation of nature" due to the fall, they virtually assert that the only sources of disturbance in man's make-up are his "organic movements." Man's intellect as such cannot go wrong.

Calvin thus refuses to blame God, the creator of the whole man, for the disturbances that are in the world and particularly in the soul of man. Originally, before the fall, the affections of man were no more a cause of disturbance than was the intellect. On the other hand, Calvin thus refuses to exempt any aspect of man from the effects of the fall. Once man has sinned, his intellect is disturbed no less than are his emotions, or his will. Calvin, in short, refuses to use even the psychologically true doctrine of the primacy of the intellect for the purpose of denying the fact of sin.

Moreover, according to Calvin, the primacy of the intellect as taught by the philosophers, in virtually denying the fact of sin, therewith in practice always denies the Creator-creature relationship. For man to ignore the fall is always tantamount to ignoring his creation. It is the proper part of the creature to subject himself to God; it is the part of the sinner to refuse such subjection.

In the case of the philosophers this denial of God as Creator is found in their false conceptions of deity. Ever bent upon keeping under the revelation of the true God about and within them, they identify God with the whole or with some aspect of his creation. "Mingled vanity and pride appear in this, that when miserable men do seek after God, instead of ascending higher than themselves as they ought to do, they measure him by their own carnal stupidity, and neglecting solid inquiry, fly off to indulge their curiosity in vain speculation. Hence they do not conceive of him in the character in which he is manifested, but imagine him to be whatever their own rashness has devised. This abyss standing open, they cannot move one footstep without rushing headlong to destruction. With such an idea of God, nothing which they may attempt to offer in the way of worship or obedience can have any value in his sight, because it is not him they worship, but, instead of him the dream and figment of their own heart."[10]

The philosophers' notion of the primacy of the intellect, then, implies the rejection of the doctrine of the fall. And in rejecting the fall this same doctrine of the primacy of the intellect implies the virtual identification of God with the created universe or with some principle in it. In fact it implies, at least according to the teaching of many of the philosophers, the idea of a rational principle in the universe, of which rational principle man is said to be a part or aspect. Such great philosophers as Plato and Aristotle do not think of God as the creator of the world. Accordingly they think of man's intellect as potentially identical with the divine intellect. In fact the difference between the divine and the human intellect is not put in terms of the creator and creature, but simply in terms of that which is to a greater or a smaller degree comprehensive.

It would seem to be clear then that it is of the utmost importance for the preservation of the doctrines of Scripture and the Confession of Faith, for the presentation of the basic doctrines of creation and of sin, to disown a concept of the primacy of the intellect such as we have outlined and such as Calvin opposed.

It is sometimes argued that unless one assert the primacy of the intellect one may justly follow any or every sort of emotion[11] But this would be true only on the non-Christian concept of the nature of man. Only on the non-Christian concept of man are the emotions inherently unruly. On the Christian concept of man the emotions or affections are not inherently unruly; they have become unruly only because of sin. But when sin has entered into the mind of man, the intellect is as unruly as are the affections. In that case the whole man refuses to subject itself to the rule of God. Again, when a saved sinner learns to control his passions the reason is not primarily that he has understood the meaning of the primacy of the intellect as a psychological truth, but the primary reason is that in the whole of His being he is born of God. The perfect man Jesus, therefore as Dr. Warfield so beautifully shows in his article, "On the Emotional Life of Our Lord," manifests the strongest emotions of love and of wrath and yet exhibits a perfect symmetry between all the aspects of his being, not because his intellect constantly knows how to keep his passions in check, but because as the sinless one the strongest emotions are naturally such as accord with the holy will of God. So we are commended by Calvin, says Warfield, "not indeed to eradicate our affections, seeking after that inhuman *apatheia*

commended by the Stoics, but to correct and subdue that obstinacy which pervades them, on account of the sin of Adam."[12]

Again, it is argued as though any one who maintains the primacy of the intellect, regardless of the question whether this be based on the foundation of the creation doctrine, will be saved from scepticism. No doubt it is true that the modern doctrines of the primacy of the emotions or of the primacy of the will are expressions of the basic scepticism of the modern man. But it is no less true that the doctrine of primacy of the intellect, such as Calvin opposed, is a direct denial of God as the transcendent self-existent being. Nor has such a primacy of the intellect been able to save men from scepticism; indeed the modern forms of irrationalism are but the children and grandchildren of the doctrine of the primacy of the intellect as it was taught by such men as Plato and Aristotle. If we wish to hold to Christianity as alone able to save from scepticism, we shall have to give up reasoning as though some notion of the primacy of the intellect, not necessarily based upon the creation doctrine, can save men from modern irrationalism.

It follows from what has been stated that the idea of the primacy of the intellect as it is based upon non-Christian foundations cannot be maintained without the denial of the doctrines of God as transcendent, of creation, the fall, and of the various doctrines implied in the work of redemption. And any measure of concession to this doctrine tends to tone down these several teachings of Scripture. At best there is a serious impoverishment and toning down of the glorious covenant conception of the Reformed Confessions. It is the glory of this conception that man is by nature, as made in the image of God, ready and willing to serve his God with all the strength of every aspect of his being. It is therefore also the glory of that covenant concept that the redeemed man, renewed in the image of God through Christ, and on the basis of the work of Christ, has all his powers renewed so that, in principle the disturbance that came through sin has been removed. As renewed in all the aspects of his being it is the glory of the Christian that he may seek to cultivate all his gifts without exception. He may cultivate his emotions as well as his intellect or his will. Not one aspect of his being is more acceptable in the sight of God than are the others. The whole man is acceptable and the whole man may dedicate himself to God. The Christian ideal even for the hereafter is not abstract contemplation, it is obedient contemplation; it is contemplation of God by the creature who would do nothing rather than fulfill the behest of his Creator. And it is contemplation

of one whose affections are set upon that object as the object of its utmost desires. If there be economical subordination there can be none in the realm of being. God is not some abstract impersonal intellectual principle, but the living God, the God in whom we may suppose therefore all the originals of those aspects of our being that we find in ourselves. Thus our God will be pleased with a strong intellect, a strong will, and strong emotions, and be pleased with all equally well because they are parts of his image-bearer. He will be pleased and equally pleased with them all because they are all renewed through Christ who is the express image of his substance.

The tenability of the argument of this section is not dependent upon the validity of the psychological distinctions used between intellect, emotion and will. Even if we employ the twofold distinction between intellect and will (including the emotional life under the will) the argument against the failure to distinguish between a Christian and a non-Christian conception of the primacy of the intellect still stands.[13]

B. Reason as the Judicium Contradictionis

The second point raised by Hodge is of even more direct significance for our purposes. He says that in addition to the *usus instrumentalis* of the intellect, "Christians concede to reason the *judicium contradictionis*, that is, the prerogative of deciding whether a thing is possible or impossible. If it is seen to be impossible, no authority and no amount or kind of evidence can impose the obligation to receive it as true."[14] The importance of this point for the whole of the theology of Hodge can be observed if it be noted that it is this conception of the function of reason that underlies all his refutation by such subjects as these: "Materialism contradicts the Facts of Consciousness"; "Materialism contradicts the 'Truths of Reason' "; "Materialism inconsistent with the 'Facts of Experience.' "[15]

With respect to this matter of the reason as the *judicium contradictionis*, we believe that it is in consonance with the genius of the theology Hodge is setting forth to introduce more clearly the distinctions we have spoken of above, namely, that between the regenerate and the unregenerate consciousness. That this is so can be more easily observed today than it could fifty years ago when Hodge wrote. It is today more evident than ever before that it is exactly on those most fundamental matters, such as

possibility and probability, that there is the greatest difference of opinion between theists and anti-theists. We may take, for example, the most fundamental matters which Hodge adduces in order to prove that to reason belongs the prerogative of *judicium contradictionis*. He gives us some examples of what reason would naturally regard as impossible so that revelation could not make us believe it. He says: “That is impossible which involves a contradiction; as, that a thing is and is not; that right is wrong and wrong right. It is impossible that He should require us to believe what contradicts any of the laws of belief which He has impressed upon our nature. It is impossible that one truth should contradict another. It is impossible, therefore, that God should reveal anything as true which contradicts any well authenticated truth, whether of intuition, experience, or previous revelation.”[16]

The first one of these points enumerated by Hodge strikes at the root of the whole contention, since it brings up directly the matter of predication itself. The question is as to what can and what cannot be intelligibly said about anything. Now when we take this question out of its limitation to physical objects, where it seems to have such an evident application, we find that there is no more fundamental difference between theism and anti-theism than on the matter of the basis of predication. Theism holds that all predication presupposes the existence of God as a self-conscious being, while anti-theism holds that predication is possible without any reference to God. This at once gives to the terms ‘is’ and ‘is not’ quite different connotations. For the anti-theist, these terms play against the background of bare possibility. Hence ‘is’ and ‘is not’ may very well be reversed. The anti-theist has, in effect, denied the very law of contradiction, inasmuch as the law of contradiction, to operate at all, must have its foundation in the nature of God. On the other hand, the anti-theist, from his standpoint, will not hesitate to say that the theist has denied the law of contradiction. For him, the belief in an absolute, self-conscious God is the rejection of the law of contradiction, inasmuch as such a belief does not permit man to test the revelation of God by the law of contradiction as standing above that revelation. The conception of an absolutely self-conscious God definitely limits the field of the possible to that which is determined by the plan of God. We saw that the logic of Bosanquet could not allow for affirmation unless there should be an equally ultimate negation. This position is involved in the metaphysical contention that reality must be both essentially

analytic and essentially synthetic. If, then, there is such a fundamentally exclusive difference of opinion on the question as to what the law of contradiction itself is between theists and nontheists, it is quite out of the question to speak of the law of contradiction as something that all men agree upon. All men do agree upon it as a formal principle; but the two classes of men differ on the question of its foundation and application.

A law of contradiction that is found to be operative in the created world in the sense that man's intellectual operations require its recognition, but that rests on God's nature, is something quite different from a law of contradiction that operates independently of God. In the former case the facts of the universe, if they are to be rationally intelligible, are not ultimately dependent upon the law of contradiction as man knows it, but upon God's internal coherence that lies behind the law of contradiction. Thus the facts of the universe can retain their novelty for man while they have not lost their rationality for God, and therefore also for man. In the latter case the rationality of the world does not depend upon God, but upon the principle of contradiction as an abstraction. In that case facts lose their novelty for man when he sees that they work according to the law of contradiction.

On the question of possibility, the same difference of opinion exists that we found on the matter of predication in general. For the theist, possibility has its source in God, while for the anti-theist, God has his source in possibility. Hence, what one will deem most possible, the other will consider altogether impossible.

The question is similar with respect to the matter of probability. For theism, God's plan is back of what is probable. For anti-theism, the probable is independent of God. Hence, what one thinks altogether probable, the other will think altogether improbable because altogether impossible.

The reason why these differences do not appear on the surface is that, as a matter of fact, all men are human beings who were created in the image of God. Even the non-regenerate therefore have in their sense of deity, though repressed by them, some remnant of the knowledge of God and consequently of the true source and meaning of possibility and probability. It is to this remnant of a truly theistic interpretation of experience that Hodge really appeals when he speaks of the laws of belief that God has implanted in human nature. It is, of course, not only quite legitimate, but

absolutely imperative to appeal to the "common consciousness" of men in this sense. But in order really to appeal to this "common consciousness" that is repressed by the sinner we must refuse to speak of a "common consciousness" that is not suppressed by the sinner.

The non-regenerate man seeks by all means to "keep under" this remnant of a true theistic interpretation that lingers in his mind. His real interpretative principle, now that he is a covenant-breaker, is that of himself as ultimate and of impersonal laws as ultimate. It is he himself as ultimate, by means of laws of logic that operate independently of God, who determines what is possible and probable. To the extent, then, that he proceeds self-consciously from his own principle of interpretation, he holds the very existence of God, and of the creation of the universe, to be not merely improbable, but impossible.[17] In doing so he sins, to be sure, against his better knowledge. He sins against that which is hidden deep down in his own consciousness. And it is well that we should appeal to this fact. But in order to appeal to this fact we must use all caution not to obscure this fact. And obscure it we do if we speak of the "common consciousness" of man without distinguishing clearly between what is hidden deep down in the mind of natural man as the revelation and knowledge of God within him and what, in rejecting God, he has virtually adopted as being his final interpretative principle.

It is natural that Romanists should appeal to "logic" as such, as an abstraction. It is also natural that Arminians should do so.[18] But it is out of accord with the genius of the Reformed Faith to do so. For in it alone is it made clear that God's nature and will are the foundation and standard of what is possible in the universe. While recognizing this fact at points, such men as Gordon Clark (*A Christian Philosophy of Education*, *The Primacy of the Intellect*, etc.) and Edward C. Carnell (*An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*) appeal constantly to the abstract principle of contradiction for the defense of the Christian position. In this they defeat their own purpose. For the only conclusive argument for Christianity is precisely the fact that only upon the presupposition of the truth of its teaching does logic or predication in general touch reality at all. Laying less stress on the need of an *a priori* for human experience, other Reformed men, none the less, continue to appeal to abstract logic. So Wilbur M. Smith speaks of the "very laws of logic" as compelling us (that is, all men) to accept the Christian doctrine of creation.[19] But the reverse is true. The more

consistently the non-Christian applies the law of contradiction, on his assumptions the more certainly will he reject the doctrine of creation. In his efforts to show the reasonableness of various Christian doctrines, J. Oliver Buswell, Jr. also appeals to abstract possibility as determined by the law of contradiction abstractly conceived, and each time defeats his own purpose.[20]

With this basic distinction between theism and anti-theism in mind, we may briefly consider the other matters that Hodge brings up in this connection. “It is impossible that God should do, approve, or command what is morally wrong.” This is, of course, objectively true. But anti-theism has a relativistic theory of morality, while theism has an absolutist theory of morality. Accordingly, the really important issues cannot be decided by any such thing as a general moral consciousness, as though agreement between Christians and non-Christians were more than incidental and formal.

It is natural that Romanists should appeal to a general moral law recognized by unbelievers as well as believers. It is natural also that Arminians, like C. S. Lewis (*Christian Behaviour*, *Broadcast Talks*, etc.) should appeal to the “cardinal virtues” common to Christian and non-Christian alike. Over against their method the Reformed theologian should carefully point out that the Christian and the non-Christian systems of morality stand diametrically opposed to one another on the question of goal, of standard, and of motive power. This contention cannot be disproved by an appeal to Paul in Romans 2:14–15. It is true that every sinner knows he sins against God, as it is true that every sinner knows God (Rom 1:19–20). But this knowledge the unbeliever suppresses by means of his own principle of ethics. And this principle is exclusively immanentistic.

Hodge says further that it is impossible that God should command anything that “contradicts any of the laws of belief which He has impressed upon our nature.” This too is objectively true, because theism is true, but as for the anti-theist, he does not believe that God has impressed any laws of belief upon our nature. Accordingly, a theist should say of an anti-theist that upon his basis anything is possible because our nature may change. In other words, there is upon anti-theistic basis no ground for any such thing as a definite nature which contains unchangeable laws. If laws do not change it is merely a matter of chance that they do not.

Still further, some of the proofs adduced by Hodge in order to establish reason as the *judicium contradictionis* themselves indicate the necessity of

introducing the distinction we have made. He tells us that, in the first place, the *judicium contradictionis* is true from the nature of the case. He says: "Faith includes an affirmation of the mind that a thing is true. But it is a contradiction to say that the mind can affirm that to be true which it sees cannot by possibility be true. We are consequently not only authorized; but required, to pronounce anathema on apostle or angel from heaven, who should call upon us to receive as a revelation from God anything absurd, or wicked, or inconsistent with the intellectual or moral nature with which He has endowed us."[21] Now the first statement is no doubt true as it stands. But we have seen that the Christian and the non-Christian have quite different ideas about the truth of what is possible. Many a materialist has been so firmly convinced of the truth of his position that he thought he would be involved in a contradiction if he should accept the bodily resurrection of Christ. This shows that the abstract statement made can have no indifferent application. In the second place, we have shown that the Christian and the non-Christian have opposite ideas about what is immoral or what is against our intellectual natures. Many idealists say outright that it is a contradiction in terms to say that one believes in an absolute God and also believes that the created universe adds to the glory of God. To them, this is as manifestly impossible and absurd as it would be to try to add water to a bucket that was already filled. Yet a Christian's contention is that this is not a self-contradiction, but something which is merely beyond our understanding. So again we conclude that the law abstractly stated has no application, while, if taken concretely, the difference between the regenerate and the non-regenerate consciousness is at once of the utmost importance.

The second reason adduced by Hodge is that Scripture itself tells us that we may not accept the religion of pagans, etc., because the religion of pagans involves absurdities and cannot be true. "Paul does the same thing when he calls upon us to pronounce even an angel accursed, who should teach another gospel."[22] But Scripture presupposes a theistic conception of what is possible or impossible and therefore of what is or is not absurd. Paul is, to be sure, speaking to all men, to the non-regenerate as well as to the regenerate, but he is not recognizing for a moment the identity of a theistic and an anti-theistic notion of absurdity. To do so would have involved him in flat contradiction with himself. The non-regenerate would, on such a basis, have to declare the true gospel anathema, while the regenerate would have to declare the false gospel anathema. This shows the utter

inapplicability of the law of contradiction abstractly stated. If non-regenerate men were told to apply the law of contradiction as they see it to the gospel as they see it, it would mean that they were told to reject the gospel.

C. Reason as Judge of the Evidences of a Revelation

The third and final legitimate use of reason, according to Hodge, is that it must judge of the evidences of any revelation that comes to it. Faith, he argues, is "an intelligent reception of the truth on adequate grounds"[23], and Scripture never demands faith "except on the ground of adequate evidence."[24]

On the surface at least this manner of statement again seems to assume that all men, regenerate and non-regenerate, agree on the nature of reason and evidence. But this is contrary to fact. The average philosopher and scientist today holds to a non-theistic conception of reason and therefore also to a non-theistic conception of evidence. Assuming the ultimacy of the human mind and of impersonal laws of logic he must and does reject that which is, objectively, the best of evidence for what revelation teaches, for example with respect to the existence of the transcendent God and his creation of the universe. Following Kant he simply asserts that evidence, to be intelligible, must not go beyond experience, and that to assert that a God exists who is not subject to the categories of space and time, is to assert that which is without meaning. If therefore we say to him that Revelation does not expect him to accept anything that is not credible according to his rules of evidence, this is, in effect, to ask him to reject the gospel.

It is accordingly necessary in our day, if we wish to bring out the truth for which Hodge is contending, to argue that only in theism can we find a true theory of reason and of evidence, and therefore true harmony between reason and revelation. To this must then be added that deep down in his heart even the natural man knows that theism is true and that he has concocted a false theory of reason and of evidence which he should reject.

At many points seeming to agree with the position just stated Carnell none the less falls back instantly upon the idea that reason, whether used by the Christian or by the non-Christian, is authorized "to canvass the evidence of a given authority."[25] "Bring on your revelations! Let them make peace

with the law of contradiction and the facts of history, and they will deserve a rational man's assent."[26] Similarly Wilbur M. Smith says he is greatly impressed by the fact "that the very kind of evidence which modern science, and even psychologists, are so insistent upon for determining the reality of any object under consideration is the kind of evidence that we have presented to us in the Gospels regarding the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, namely, the things that are seen with the human eye, touched with the human hand, and heard by the human ear."[27] But on the monistic assumption of the non-Christian it would be contradictory to believe in the resurrection of Jesus as the Son of God. The whole idea of God as transcendent is contradictory of the monism that underlies the unbeliever's views. Hence also he can allow no evidence to be genuine that pretends to prove the activity of the transcendent God of Christianity in human history.

[1] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 34ff.
[2] Vol. 1, p. 49.
[3] ., p. 378.
[4] Vol. 2, p. 99.
[5] 1, 15:8.
[6] *Ibid*.
[7] 1, 15:8.
[8] 1, 15:7.
[9] 1, 15:6.
[10] 1, 4:1.
[11] Vide, Gordon H. Clark, "The Primacy of the Intellect," in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol 5.
[12] *Biblical and Theological Studies*, p. 66.
[13] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 51 ff.
[14] 1, p. 51.
[15] Vol. 1, pp. 276–282.
[16] Vol. 1, p. 51.
[17] See e.g., E. Frank, *Philosophical Understanding and Religious Knowledge*.
[18] John Thomas, *Philosophic Foundations*; C. S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity*.
[19] *Therefore Stand*, p. 273ff.
[20] J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., *What Is God?*

[21] Vol. 1, p. 52.
[22] Vol. 1, p. 52.
[23] Vol. 1, p. 53.
[24] *Ibid*.
[25] E. J. Carnell, *An Introduction of Christian Apologetics*, p. 72.
[26] *Idem*., p. 178.
[27] W. M. Smith, *Therefore Stand*, p. 388.

Chapter 5: Christian Epistemology (the Positions of Herman Bavinck and Valentine Hepp)

Herman Bavinck has given to us the greatest and most comprehensive statement of Reformed systematic theology in modern times. In this chapter we wish to note something of the breadth and depth of Bavinck's presentation, and then point out where we believe he might have gone somewhat further than he has along the path that he has laid out for us. Then, after we have discussed the epistemology of Bavinck, we shall turn to that of Dr. Valentine Hepp, his successor in the chair of theology at the Free University of Amsterdam.

A. The Position of Herman Bavinck

Bavinck shows us that if we are to have a truly broad foundation for the concept of Christian dogmatics, we must begin with a discussion of the general principles of knowledge. He points out that the absolutely self-conscious God is the source of all human knowledge. "That there is in the creature any knowledge of God, is due to God only. He is knowable only because and insofar as He Himself wants to be known. Even man must reveal himself through his appearance, his words and his deeds if we are to know something about him. But, in the case of man, this fact is always relative. Frequently he reveals himself involuntarily and in spite of himself. He may manifest himself in characteristics and peculiarities which are unknown to himself. He may reveal himself falsely. But in God we find none of these limitations. He is, in the most absolute sense, *principium essendi* and *causa efficiens principalis* of our knowledge of him, because He is absolutely free, self-conscious and true. His self-knowledge, His self-consciousness is the *principium* of our knowledge of Him."[1] A little later, Bavinck again emphasizes this point when he says that the knowledge which God has of himself is "absolute, simple, and infinite, and in its absoluteness, incommunicable to any finite consciousness."[2] The distinction between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of man, he adds, is not merely quantitative, but also qualitative.[3] At an earlier point he

characterizes a true theologian by saying of him that he does not speculate about God as he exists in himself, inasmuch as knowledge of God as he exists in himself, apart from revelation, is wholly unattainable to man.[4]

Corresponding to this emphasis upon God's being the *principium essendi* of all true knowledge is the emphasis upon faith as the *principium internum* for the reception of the revelation of God. According to Bavinck apologetics cannot precede systematics. A true apologetics, he says, presupposes dogma.[5] There is in Christian dogmatics no place for reason as an agency by which, independently of the truth of Christianity, a natural theology may be established. The Roman Catholics are mistaken when they seek to work out a natural theology independently of Scriptures. There was a time, says Bavinck, when Reformed theologians also fell into this mistake. So, for instance, S. Van Til divided his work on theology into two parts, one dealing with natural and one with revealed theology.[6] But all this, says Bavinck, was due to false philosophical influences upon theology. He wants to return to the position of Calvin for whom Scripture was the eyeglass through which the Christian should read the book of nature.[7] "Originally natural theology did not serve the purpose of gradually leading up to revealed theology. In studying natural theology, theologians did not provisionally adopt the position of reason in order by reasoning and proof to climb up to the position of faith. On the contrary, the theologian stood upon the position of faith and in the attitude of faith looked upon nature, and thus with his Christian eye, and by means of Scripture, he would find traces of that God which from the Scriptures and through Christ he had learned to know as his heavenly Father."[8] To this he adds: "Even if there is a knowledge of God through nature, this does not mean that there are two principles in dogmatics. Dogmatics has only one *principium externum*, namely, the Scriptures, and only one *principium internum*, namely, the believing reason."[9]

1. Bavinck Criticizes Rationalism and Empiricism

Bavinck has himself not been fully consistent in the application of the principle here laid before us. This appears particularly in the section in which he deals with the principles of science.[10] In this section he develops what he thinks is an adequate epistemology for Christian dogmatics. Here it appears that he has not entirely escaped the influence of Thomas Aquinas in

formulating what he calls a “moderate realism.” He criticizes Hodge when the latter attempts to identify the method of systematics with the inductive method of “science.”[11] He points out that in Scripture we do not deal with brute facts, but with facts plus their interpretation. Yet he himself appeals to facts as though they were brute facts when it comes to the formulation of a theory of metaphysics. He does this in setting off rationalism and empiricism against one another.

Against rationalism and idealism Bavinck argues that all men are naturally realists and that all men are dependent on nature about them.[12] He goes on to point out that idealism leads to an impersonal abstraction, and then adds that the rock on which all idealism stands is plurality.[13] These criticisms of idealism are true as far as they go. Our only complaint is that Bavinck did not go far enough. The criticism he makes might have been made by a non-Christian realist. Bavinck does not tell us that the basis of his criticism is the presupposition of the self-existent God.

Against empiricism he argues that all science must begin with a set of unproved *a priori* assumptions that have not been derived from experience.[14] To this he adds that science is, in the nature of the case, interested in “the general, the necessary, and the eternal, the logical, the idea.”[15] Still further he quotes with approval the words of Thomas Aquinas which the latter in turn took from Aristotle: “*Minimum quod potest haberi de cognitione rerum altissimarum, desiderabilius est quam certissima cognitio, quae habetur de minimis rebus*.”[16]

The question that arises when we read this is, On what does Bavinck think the *a priori* principles of science rest? A non-Christian idealist might readily say what Bavinck said on this point. It is not enough for a Christian to point to the mere fact of the necessity of an *a priori* element in science. He must also show that unless that *a priori* be given the Christian-theistic basis, it is no true *a priori*.

Bavinck quotes with approval, as noted above, the words of Aquinas, to the effect that the slightest knowledge of higher things is worth more than certain knowledge with respect to lower things. Again we ask, is there no need of pointing out the difference between a Christian and an Aristotelian notion of gradation in the created universe? Surely the Christian, who believes in the doctrine of creation, cannot share the Greek depreciation of the things of the sense world. Depreciation of that sense world inevitably leads to a depreciation of many of the important facts of historic

Christianity which took place in the sense world. The Bible does not rule out every form of empiricism any more than it rules out every form of *a priori* reasoning. To be sure, in effect, it rules out the empiricism of Locke, but it also, in effect, rules out the rationalism of Leibniz.

2. Bavinck's Realism

After criticizing rationalism and empiricism, Bavinck goes on to construct a realism that he thinks is acceptable as a foundation for science. He argues that all science must begin with the common sense assumption of the real existence of the outer world and of the objectivity and truth of knowledge.[17] To this he then adds that man has within him the natural *a priori* principles spoken of above.[18] Bavinck refers with apparent approval to Leibniz's statement that nothing is in the intellect which was not previously found in sensation except the intellect itself, but turns again to St. Thomas, and then from St. Thomas to Voetius.[19] The last named, says Bavinck, shows that the intellect of man can find the universals in nature, by which he means that the intellect can find God in nature.[20]

We note again the failure to distinguish carefully a Christian from the non-Christian epistemology. When he gives the distinguishing marks of the realism he is setting forth, he says no more than that against empiricism it maintains a certain independence of the intellect, while over against rationalism it maintains that the intellect depends to an extent on sensation.[21] Bavinck does to an extent wish to correct Scholasticism, but this correction does not involve a rejection of its principle of commingling Aristotelianism with Christian principles. "The fault of Scholasticism," says Bavinck, "both Protestant and Catholic, lay only in this, that they had done too quickly with observation, and that it thought almost exclusively of the confession as taken up into the books of Euclid, Aristotle, and the Church fathers."[22] Against this position Bavinck once again reiterates the doctrine that all knowledge must begin from observation.[23] The net result of Bavinck's investigation is a moderate realism which seeks on the one hand to avoid the extremes of realism, but on the other hand to avoid the extremes of idealism. It is not a specifically Christian position based upon the presupposition of the existence of the God of Scripture that we have before us in the moderate realism of Bavinck. Yet he himself has told us again and again that dogmatics must live by one *principium* only. It is

difficult to see how dogmatics is to live by one principle if it is not the same principle that is to guide our thinking both in theology and in other science. If we are to be true to Bavinck's requirement that there shall be only one principle of interpretation for us, then we shall have to apply that principle when we work out an epistemology no less than when we are engaged in dogmatics proper.

3. Bavinck's Failure to Distinguish Christian from Non-Christian Certainty

Perhaps the weakest point in the argument of Bavinck lies in his failure to distinguish clearly the Christian from the non-Christian basis of the certainty of human knowledge. Bavinck himself gives us the clue as to where this certainty ought to be found for Christians. In a remarkable passage he declares that the only reason we have for thinking that our universal laws fit actual experience lies in the Logos, "who created reality beyond us and the laws of thought within us."[24] But if this is true, Bavinck should have distinguished clearly between the Christian and the non-Christian ground for certainty in knowledge. No non-Christian epistemology has ever offered the Creator Logos as the source of certainty of human knowledge. The idea of creation in the Christian sense of the term is not found in Greek speculation. Accordingly, the Greeks sought a foundation for the certainty of knowledge in uncritically assuming *a priori* principles resting upon nowhere in particular. And they maintained that true certainty in knowledge consisted in seeing these so-called "eternal principles." Yet Bavinck constantly speaks as though the Greeks were essentially correct in what they said with respect to the universals of human knowledge. We quote one passage: "The object of science is not the particular, but the universal, the logical, the idea. Greek philosophy saw this correctly."[25] The question is as to what the Greeks meant by universals. They meant self-existing, eternal, impersonal laws. The universals of Greek thought were not created by God and did not rest upon the nature of The Creator God. They existed in themselves. Accordingly, no amount of trimming can bring them into shape for Christian use. Thomas Aquinas trimmed Aristotle's principles down but did not reject the foundation on which they were built, and Bavinck has too largely followed Thomas in this respect. Accordingly, he tells us at one moment that our certainty lies in the

Logos of creation, but then forgets about this Logos in the course of his argumentation and makes certainty to exist merely in the fact that there are *a priori* principles regardless of the foundation of these principles.

4. Bavinck's Notion of Natural Reason

Under the same influence of St. Thomas, Bavinck offers what seems to us to be an inadequate notion of the so-called natural reason. He begins his discussion of this point by calling attention to Plato's illustration of the sun as symbolizing God as the true source of human knowledge. He tells us that we do not see things by looking directly into the sun, but by seeing them in the light of the sun. So our reason is not itself divine, but participates in the divine. God alone can know *per essentiam*; we know *per participationeum*. "This figure of the sun," says Bavinck, "led men to speak in a healthy fashion of the natural light of reason, by which nothing more was meant than the permanent capacity or power of the human spirit, by which man was enabled from the beginning of his observations to form the basic concepts and basic principles which should later lead him in all his observation and thought. The light of reason therefore, in the first place, resembles the *intellectus agens*, the power of abstraction that shines on objects and draws from them their intelligibility; and secondly, the fund of *koina ennoia* which our spirits, by virtue of their powers of abstraction, make their own. But in both senses we owe this light to God, and more particularly to the Logos …"[26]

In all this we meet again with the same ambiguity noted before. Bavinck is far from wishing to attribute to the natural reason any ability to devise its own principles of interpretation. He wishes our knowledge to rest in God. Why then, we ask, did he jeopardize what is most precious to him by reasoning as though what Thomas meant was essentially what he means? Thomas' notion of man's participation of man's knowledge in God's knowledge has not cut itself free from its monistic origin in Platonic Aristotelian thought. Either man is created by God, or he is not. If he is, then man's knowledge must be clearly distinguished from the Platonic notion of participation. For Plato, the human soul was really a part of the divine being, and, because of that fact, he thought of the *a priori* principles of knowledge as being directly found in the human mind. For a Christian position, the *a priori* of knowledge can be found in man only analogically.

Thomas uses the idea of analogy, but has not with any adequacy escaped the Greek participation idea. The proof of this lies in the fact that he gives to the natural reason, even of sinful man, plenary ability to prove the existence of God. To be able to do this, man should, even when a sinner, be willing to recognize the true source of reasoning within himself. But it is exactly this that no Protestant and, in particular, no Reformed theologian, can allow. Due to man's ethical depravity, man is unwilling to recognize himself as a creature. Accordingly, he assumes that the foundation of the validity of human reasoning lies in himself. It is due to Rome's low view of sin that it is able to make an easy compromise with Aristotle on the question of the foundation of reasoning.

In contrast to this, we would agree with Bavinck himself when he says that all depends upon the presuppositions from which science begins and the purpose with which it is pursued.[27] If this is true, Bavinck himself should have cut himself loose completely from Thomistic speculation. He should have begun boldly by setting off the consistent Christian position over against Greek speculation and over against the half-Christian, half-Greek speculation of Thomas.

B. The Position of Valentine Hepp

We shall now briefly consider Hepp's views on the general testimony of the Holy Spirit. In his book on this subject Hepp, as it were, takes up the discussion where Bavinck dropped it. We noted that one of the most pivotal points in the question of epistemology is the problem of the foundation of the *a priori* principles of reasoning that men use. We observed that Bavinck was not sufficiently clear in pointing out that for Christians, in distinction from non-Christians, the foundation of the principles of reasoning rests in God. Now Hepp apparently wishes to offer us a specifically Christian foundation for the certainty that we have in our knowledge. Hepp's entire book is a discussion of the question of epistemology. He wants to make it abundantly plain that for man there can be no certainty in knowledge except it be based upon the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti*.

In the volume we shall discuss, we are not specifically dealing with the testimony of the Spirit in the field of redemption. Hepp tells us that he plans to write a second volume on that subject. In the present volume we deal

with the general testimony of the Spirit. This makes it particularly important for our purposes.

1. Summary of Hepp's Historical Survey

Hepp's argument may first be summarized. At the outset, he discusses the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti Immanens*. By that, he means that in the ontological Trinity, God; in the person of the Spirit, returns upon himself as the all-sufficient being. On the basis of this conception of the immanent testimony of the Spirit he then turns to the *testimonium exeuns*. Quite apart from the work of salvation, argues Hepp, the Spirit's work is to make effective the work of the Logos in the created world, by bringing about order everywhere. "The Spirit brings the Word into the world and especially into man."[28] The fact that there is a truly effective thought relation between one subject of knowledge and other subject of knowledge, and that there is a truly effective relation between the subject and the object of knowledge is due to the operation of the Holy Spirit (1 Jn 5:6).[29]

After this general statement of the doctrine in its broad outline on the basis of Scripture exegesis, Hepp turns to a survey of the history of doctrine on the subject. There has been, he concludes, very little recognition of the existence of the general testimony of the Spirit, chiefly for two reasons. Men leaned too heavily on the concepts and methods of a non-Christian philosophy.[30] They were influenced a great deal by the non-Christian logos speculation. Philo sought to fuse Greek and biblical thought by means of the Logos idea which these two types of thinking were assumed to have in common.[31] Many theologians followed in his steps. In this Logos speculation there was no room either for the person or for the work of the Spirit. And even when, as in the case of Tertullian, theology turned its back on the notion of a Logos that was necessarily related to the universe, and substituted for it the idea of intratrinitarian filiation this did not mean, says Hepp, that Tertullian recognized with any fulness the distinctive work of the Spirit.

The second obstacle to the recognition of the specific work of the Spirit, says Hepp, was that, in all non-Christian philosophy, the autonomy of human knowledge was taught.[32] To quote: "The epistemology which was recognized among Christians assumed that man, as the subject of knowledge, is indeed dependent upon the object of knowledge, that is, the

world about him, but that with respect to the divine being, he is either wholly or partly sufficient to himself."[33] Even Augustine attributed certainty too much to the inherent make-up of man rather than to the specific work of the Spirit.[34] And in the case of Thomas Aquinas, we meet with too much of Aristotelian deism to expect a full recognition of the immanence of God and of the specific work of the Spirit.[35] There is a greater emphasis on the autonomy of man's thought in Thomas than there is in Augustine.[36] And the epistemology of Voetius and many Reformed theologians was very similar to that of Thomas.[37] They were unable to extricate themselves from the influence of modern philosophy which began with the assumption of the autonomy of the human spirit.[38]

Thus it was the Logos speculation and the notion of the autonomy of the human reason that kept theologians from doing justice to the testimony of the Holy Spirit as the source of certainty in knowledge.[39]

There were, to be sure, anticipations of the true notion with respect to the testimony of the Spirit. Of these, Hepp lists: (a) the notion of the *testimonium animae* of Tertullian.[40] Of this we need not speak further. (b) The efforts made to examine the relation of the divine spirit to the human spirit. Zwingli maintained that all truth wherever found was due to an activity on the part of the Holy Spirit.[41] It was on this basis that later Reformed theologians spoke of "universal human truth."[42] (c) In modern times an effort was made to enlarge the notion of the work of the Spirit.[43]

(d) Lastly, there was a recognition on the part of theologians, particularly on the part of Calvin, of the fact that the *autopistia* of Scripture required a subjective testimony of the Spirit as its correlative. This correlativity of the objective sufficiency of Scripture and the testimony of the Spirit should have led men to observe that a similar situation exists with respect to the knowledge situation in general. Hepp says: "If Calvin had gone one step further, he would have discovered that the *autopistia* of the first principles of reasoning depend upon a testimony of the Spirit."[44]

In modern times it has been Bavinck who has come nearer to a formulation of the doctrine of the general testimony of the Spirit than anyone else. Even he, however, did not specifically teach it.[45] Bavinck still continues to limit the real testimony of the Spirit by saying that it speaks of the truth of what is in Scripture only.

After giving this historical survey, Hepp seeks to show the theological and philosophical necessity for the general testimony of the Spirit.

This necessity lies, says Hepp, in the fact that salvation is reparation. Every saving work of the Spirit must have a foundation in creation. In the realm of salvation, the testimony of the Spirit gives us certainty with respect to the truth that is offered in Scripture. In a similar fashion, we stand in need of a general testimony of the Spirit to certify the truth that faces us in the world about us.[46] The Logos of creation has worked in the universe about us and within us, but it takes the testimony of the Spirit to bring the two into effective contact with one another.[47] And even the work of the Spirit in the universe about us needs an internal testimony of the Spirit within us for its proper recognition.[48] Thus we find in the general testimony of the Spirit the last ground of certainty with respect to knowledge even of natural things.[49]

From demonstrating the theological necessity of the general testimony of the Spirit, Hepp now turns to a demonstration of philosophical necessity. He speaks first of the different kinds of philosophical certainty between deductive and inductive logic, and notes that on the basis of neither inductive nor deductive logic as such can we arrive at certain knowledge. To have certainty we need immediate knowledge.[50] Hepp's discussion on these points is very similar in character to those of Bavinck with respect to empiricism and rationalism.

The question now is, says Hepp, as to what we must think of as the ground of our immediate certainty. Men seek certainty either in the subject of knowledge itself or in the object of knowledge.[51] It is impossible for men to avoid making a choice between these two.

Hepp then turns to a criticism of these two alleged grounds of certainty. He raises objections to seeking the ground of certainty in the subject on the ground that subjectivism always leads to scepticism. Then he adds: "Above all, however, to see the ground of certainty in the subject itself is in conflict with Christian principle. It leads, as we saw, to self-sufficiency of human thought. Just because we are creatures we cannot in any sense, no more on the question of certainty than on any other question, be sufficient to ourselves."[52] In a similar manner, Hepp finds that certainty cannot be found by subjecting the subject of knowledge to the laws of the object.[53] "Thus there is a serious lack found in the field of epistemology. There is here a missing link.… Neither the subject nor the object can afford us the last ground for certainty."[54]

If no ground for certainty is found in the creature it is reasonable that we should seek it in the Creator. Philosophy has to an extent been aware of this fact. Many idealist philosophers have recognized the necessity of the existence of God. They have virtually admitted that our certainty must rest on transcendent grounds.[55] The only solution for the problem is the notion of the general testimony of the Spirit.[56]

2. Hepp's Own Position

We come now to the more definitely constructive portion of Hepp's work. As the Spirit testifies to the truth of Scripture, truth presented to us in the field of salvation, so he testifies to truth in general in the world about us.[57] The whole of the world about us is a manifestation of the thoughts of God. The full revelation of the thought of God in the universe is the work of the external testimony of the Spirit. This external testimony cannot assure us of the truth of the revelation. The assurance of the truth of revelation is the work of the internal testimony of the Spirit. All revelation as such takes place through means, and is therefore not direct. Revelation, as such, cannot give us certainty. If we had nothing but revelation, says Hepp, "We should be compelled to believe in the objects on their own account. Thus the certainty would lie in the objects of knowledge themselves. And we have seen previously that this is not possible. We should therefore rather say that the objects are messengers of the Spirit. They bring me the witness of the Spirit. But absolute certainty I obtain only when the Holy Spirit, quite independently of the objects themselves makes me believe that their revelation brings truth to me. And that takes place when I receive the *testimonium generale Internum*."[58]

This, Hepp says, is the central point with respect to the general testimony of the Spirit. It assures but does not reveal. It assures us of the truth of the revelation about us.

A further question is whether the testimony assures us of all revelation about us. To this, Hepp gives a negative answer. He says the testimony assures us of central truths only. But this, he adds, is sufficient. Some truths are logically involved in others. The Spirit would do unnecessary work if he should assure us of truths that we can ourselves deduce. Even in deduction the Spirit is active, but this is a mediate, not an immediate activity. Hepp does not tell us what he means by this mediate activity of the Spirit.[59] Yet

he is very specific in saying that "The Spirit assures man of central truths only."[60]

Hepp further tells us that the several central truths to which the Spirit testifies do not exist as a hierarchy. They are no doubt related to one another, but as human beings we cannot see the relation. Thus the one testimony of the Spirit reaches several truths that are relatively independent of one another.[61]

The central truths to which the Spirit testifies may be divided into three groups: those that pertain to God, those that pertain to the world, and those that pertain to man.

Let us look at the Spirit's testimony with respect to God, as thought of by Hepp. Kant illustrates the impossibility of finding in the theistic proofs a rational defense of theism. "What alone can save us here," says Hepp, "is a principle which is higher than our intellect, and which compels me to hold that God exists. Hence: the internal general testimony of the Spirit. The so-called proofs for the existence of God are not useless. They teach us that nature around about us and within us testifies of God. They put into set formulas the speech which comes to us from the cosmos as a whole (cosmological proof), from the world of ideas (ontological proof), from the moral world (moral proof), from history (historical proof), from the adaptation of things (teleological proof), and testifies constantly that God reigns and that He is the Creator of the ends of the earth, who grows not weary nor faint. They press with power upon our consciousness. But—they cannot give us final certainty."[62] Without the testimony of the Spirit, even Adam and Eve in paradise would have lived in uncertainty and doubt. Doubt is sin and thus sin would have been inherent in creation itself. Still further, without the testimony of the Spirit, the heathen would have excuse, inasmuch as there would then be no ground for even a measure of certain knowledge about God.[63]

The second group of central truths centers about man. How is man to be certain of his self-existence? Only by the testimony of the Spirit.[64] How does he know that he can depend on his senses, on the axioms of his thought, and on the norms of his moral and aesthetic appreciation? Only by the testimony of the Spirit.[65]

The third group of central truths centers about the world as distinct from man. This world presents itself to me as really existing. How do I know that this testimony is true? Only because of the testimony of the Spirit.[66] The

Spirit makes us know the *prima principia* according to which the universe about us operates. It sets before us mathematical, arithmetical and geometrical principles, as, for instance, that the whole is greater than its parts, and that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points.

Summing up all the work of the testimony of the Spirit, Hepp says that it may of right be called the foundation stone of science, religion, morality, and art.[67]

Up to this point, Hepp has largely limited his discussion of the testimony of the Spirit to its relation to general revelation. He now adds a discussion of its relation to the subjective acceptance of the testimony. It is here that we come to a most pivotal question for a truly Christian epistemology. The question is whether the natural man, as well as the believer, can and does to any extent accept the truth of general revelation of which the Spirit seeks to assure him. And, if the natural man accepts to some extent the truth of general revelation how can this be harmonized with the doctrine of total depravity? Let us see what Hepp has to say on the question of man's subjective acceptance of the Spirit's testimony. We quote: "From the marriage of the general testimony and revelation (here taken in the broad sense of the general revelation about God man and the cosmos) faith is born. Where the internal testimony empowers the external testimony, man cannot refuse to accept." This faith may be called a *fides generalis*.[68] Modern philosophy has quite generally accepted the necessity of and even paid tribute to the idea of *fides generale*.[69] Knowledge cannot penetrate to the reality of things; only faith can do that.[70]

We must add, however, that Hepp does not wish to identify the *fides generale* as he teaches it, with the general faith of modern philosophers. He says that there is a great difference. This difference lies chiefly in the fact that for modern philosophers faith is, after all, secondary to knowledge, and does not give a sure foundation for certainty. In Christianity, on the other hand, faith offers far greater certainty than science.[71] General faith rests not merely on subjective and objective grounds as science does, but it rests upon the direct in-working of the Spirit. And the testimony of the Spirit comes to every man.[72]

It is apparently because of this fact that the testimony comes to all men and man cannot resist it that there is, generally speaking, an acceptance of the central truths of which we have been speaking. "With respect to the central truths which speak to us from creation as such, there is little doubt

among men. A few mistaken scientists, who insist on maintaining their mistaken starting point, insist that they doubt whether God or man or world exist. They owe such statements, not to experience but to their systems. But their number, though we hear much of them, is very small. Taken as a whole, mankind does not deny the central truth. The great majority of men recognize a higher power above them, and do not hesitate to accept the reality of the world and of man."[73] A little later Hepp adds that general faith and common sense or right reason always go hand in hand.[74] And the *fides generale* has just as great a certainty as the *fides speciale*.

We need not follow Hepp in the details of the following chapters of his book. There is one point that must still be mentioned, and that is that, according to Hepp, the fact of regeneration has no direct bearing on the question of the general testimony of the Spirit. As God causes his rain to descend upon the just and the unjust, so he also, without exception, puts men in possession of the general testimony.[75] The reason why sin has not affected the general testimony seems to lie chiefly, for Hepp, in the fact that this testimony is immediate.[76] "As an immediate operation of the Holy Spirit, the general testimony could not be harmed by sin."[77] Intuitive or immediate thought stands directly under the control of the general testimony of the Spirit. This is not the case with reflective inquiry.[78] But to the immediacy of the testimony there is added a further point. Sin cannot destroy man's rationality, and man's rationality belongs not merely to his nature, but to his very being.[79] Even Satan has certainty. The general testimony gives certainty and continues to do this no matter what happens.[80]

Summing up the character of the general testimony of the Spirit on the basis of all his previous discussion, Hepp tells us in Chapter 6 of his book that (1) the testimony is transcendent. It is transubjective and transobjective.[81] (2) It is immediate.[82] (3) It is irresistible.[83] (4) It is infallible.[84] (5) It is impenetrable.[85] (6) It is formal.[86] (7) It is central. Derivative truths must be logically derived from the central truths to which the Spirit testifies.[87] (8) It is individual, in that it comes to each person individually.[88] (9) Yet it is also universal. It is a generally human testimony. (10) It is constant.[89] (11) It is knowledgable.[90]

3. Evaluation of Hepp's Position

In making an evaluation of the work of Hepp, we should first express our admiration for the effort put forth to work out a consistent Christian epistemology. He has sought to carry forth the good work of Bavinck, and has succeeded to a considerable extent.

Yet there is, we believe, a weakness in Hepp's approach to the problem of a Christian epistemology. This weakness is similar in character to the one observed in the case of Bavinck. We noted in the case of Bavinck that in his negative criticism of empiricism and rationalism he took, to an extent at least, neutral ground with his opponents. The same thing holds true of Hepp. Hepp, like Bavinck, is averse to anything that savors of a positive construction of a natural theology independent of Scripture. With this we can heartily agree. Nevertheless, inasmuch as Hepp himself does not make fully clear that even the negative criticism of non-Christian points of view must self-consciously proceed at every instant from the presupposition of the truth of the Christian position, he cannot escape falling into the same error into which those who sought to construct a natural theology fell. Hepp has no sound argument against the building of a natural theology as long as he himself argues against a natural theology with the methods of a natural theology. By assuming to an extent, or up to a point, the basis of argument on which his opponents stand, he has assumed with the builders of a natural theology a non-Christian notion of the place of human reason.

It has been noted above that Hepp argues against empiricism much as Bavinck argues against it. After arguing on purely neutral ground first, he then adds, "But above all, this whole effort to find the last ground of certainty in the self is opposed to our Christian faith."[91] We are happy to note that Hepp brings in the Christian principle more quickly than Bavinck did. Even so, for Hepp, no less than for Bavinck, there are apparently two independent bases for argument against false philosophies. There is first the purely philosophical or neutral basis of argument. It is only after we have done what we can to show that a philosophical position is mistaken by argument on neutral ground that we show that the position is also opposed to Christianity. We turn then to a second type of argument, which is based on the Christian position. The result is frequently that there is really no argument at all on the basis of a truly Christian basis. The argumentation really takes place on the first foundation, and then there is added a statement that on such and such accounts the already largely refuted position is also, as a matter of fact, opposed to the Christian position. In

Hepp's case, this appears particularly in the chapter in which he compares his doctrine of the general testimony of the Spirit with Kant's notion of the categorical imperative. True, he does say that we as Christians have what Kant was unable to find, namely, certainty for our knowledge. To this extent there is argument. He even says there is a radical difference between Kant's position and his own. Yet, for all that, he seeks a measure of justification before the eyes of the scientific world by emphasizing the similarity between Kant's position and his own. He says: "If we are unscientific with our notion of the general testimony of the Spirit, then Kant is still more so. For not only did he seek the solution of the problem of certainty in the same direction as we, but he reached no solution. He allowed himself to be prejudiced against a revelation of God. That was bound to be detrimental to his position. For that reason, his categorical imperative is far less valuable than our general testimony of the Spirit. It does not give what it should give. It defeats itself."[92]

It would seem then that, according to Hepp, Kant's position was not seriously wrong from the bottom up. Hepp does not point out adequately that on Kant's basis there can be no science at all, either for the things of this life or for those of the next. If he had shown that Kant's foundation of reasoning is wrong inasmuch as it is based upon the assumption of the ultimacy of the human mind, and inasmuch as it has assumed the existence of brute fact, he could never have said that Kant sought the solution of the question of certainty in the same direction in which a Christian should seek it. Nor could he then have said that if we as Christians are unscientific, Kant was too. It ought to be plain that from the non-Christian point of view Kant was fully scientific while we as Christians are wholly unscientific with our presupposition of God. It is no wonder, than, that in the comparison that Hepp institutes between his own and Kant's position, we have little more than an enumeration of points on which Kant's conclusions differ from his.

In this connection, consider what Hepp says with respect to Kant's criticism of the "theistic proofs." It has been noted above that, according to Hepp, the proofs, as such, are not worthless. He says that Kant underestimated their validity. Here again Hepp fails to indicate a difference that exists between a truly theistic and a non-theistic method of proof. As the proofs were often stated at the time of Kant, they were not only useless, but worse than useless. Whatever psychological value they may have had, if followed out logically, they would have to lead to the notion of a finite God.

Nothing else could be obtained from them for the reason that they were usually built upon the presupposition of the ultimacy of the human mind and the ultimacy of the facts which the mind meets in the world. A god whose existence could be proved by the method in vogue at the time of Kant would be one who would always be face to face with independent human beings and with utterly uninterpreted facts. It is this that Hepp fails to observe. And because he fails to observe this he speaks of Kant's underestimation of the arguments. Hepp seems to grant in this connection that there is a neutral logic between Christians and non-Christians, according to which they can come to a measure of agreement with one another with respect to the existence of God.

It is from this point that we can also conveniently begin our proof of the assertion made that Hepp, in spite of himself, builds up something that resembles a natural theology. Hepp is anxious to safeguard the doctrine of the general testimony of the Spirit by his sharp separation between revelation and testimony. He insists, as noted before, that the testimony does not itself give content but testifies to the content of revelation. Thus Hepp, as just now noted in the case of his attitude toward the theistic proofs, has allowed that believers and non-believers have agreed to an extent at least on the content of general revelation. Nothing short of this is allowed once we admit that the theistic proofs, as historically advocated, have a certain truth content. Without in the least indicating a difference between a Christian and a non-Christian formulation of the theistic proofs, Hepp says of them that they press upon our consciousness powerfully. All that is lacking in them is that they cannot afford us absolute certainty. The great mistake made with respect to them, says Hepp, is that man did not distinguish between revelation and certainty. "These proofs do nothing but gather up the content of general revelation in order to bring it to us in ordered form through the lens of the human intellect. They belong to the general external testimony: they reveal. But just for that reason they do not assure."[93] The arguments themselves, he says, cry day and night that God exists. In connection with these arguments man needs a witness that he cannot resist, a witness who is to tell him that the revelation given to him here, as elsewhere, is true.[94]

Hepp feels that he avoids the mistake of those who wished to build a natural theology if only he adds the general testimony of the Spirit to the general revelation that is given. According to Hepp, those who wish to

build upon the sufficiency of the arguments by themselves without the testimony of the Spirit are building a natural theology. That mistake, he insists, ought by all means to be avoided. On the other hand, those who add the testimony of the Spirit to the revelation, as set before us in the arguments, are avoiding the effort to build a natural theology.[95]

According to Hepp, then, the theistic proofs as historically developed have nothing inherently wrong in them. All they need is supplementation. That this is his view appears doubly clear from what he says with respect to Adam. Even in the state of integrity, he says, there would have been legitimate room for doubt if there had been nothing but revelation without an accompanying testimony of the Spirit. On the basis of general revelation as such, without the testimony, argues Hepp, man could at most make a guess with respect to the existence of God.[96] Hepp gives no intimation that a theistic proof as Adam might have formulated it in the state of integrity would have been essentially different from the theistic proofs as they were historically formulated after the entrance of the fall of man. According to Hepp, uncertainty that men have, when they depend on these arguments as such, is due to the fact that they were never meant to do anything more than reveal; they were never meant to assure us of their truth.

There is in all this a very definite proof that Hepp himself has not avoided the mistake of reasoning as those reason who would build a natural theology. The historically formulated arguments would, we believe, prove, if they could prove anything, the existence of a finite God. We have already shown this to be the case. Instead of crying that God exists, as Hepp says they do, they cry that God, namely, the God of Christian theism, does not exist. Suppose then that we should follow Hepp's procedure, and add the testimony of the Spirit to the "revelation" that comes mediated by the theistic proofs. The result would be that the Spirit insists day and night that God does not exist. Yet, though this is true, it is taken for granted by Hepp that on the question of the content of general revelation as set forth by the theistic proofs, there is agreement between believers and non-behaviors. And this is of the essence of natural theology.

It is in line with this crypto-natural theology that Hepp asserts that the special testimony of the Spirit must never be for us the last ground of certainty for our knowledge. In criticizing Ramus, who wished to make the special testimony of the Spirit the foundation of scientific knowledge, he says "He forgets too much that there is a territory on which Christians and

non-Christians meet one another. We should not forget the doctrine of common grace in the field of science any more than elsewhere. We should therefore never concede that the special testimony is the foundation for all our knowledge. It is the general testimony that performs this function."[97]

We believe that there is a legitimate sense in which it is true that the general testimony underlies the special testimony. But it is equally true that no one would understand the true nature of the general testimony without the special testimony. It follows that no one truly understands the revelation of God in nature unless he first understands the revelation of God in Scripture. In this respect, then, the special testimony is prior to the general testimony. Even if, once a man becomes a Christian by virtue of the special testimony, he sees the general testimony as underlying the special testimony, it will not do to make the general statement without qualification that the general testimony underlies the special testimony.

Now if we take these two points together, the assumption that there is an agreement on revelational content and apparently also the possibility of an agreement on the general testimony of the Spirit between believers and nonbelievers, we virtually have a natural theology. It is from the union of the general revelation and the general testimony that, according to Hepp, faith is born, not saving faith, to be sure; but general faith, *fides generalis*.[98] This faith cannot be avoided. We quote: "Where the *testimonium internum* adds power to the *testimonium externum*, man cannot refuse assent. And faith is, at bottom, the acceptance by reason of a testimony of some form or another."[99] There is, says Hepp, a general recognition on the part of modern philosophy of the necessity of the *fides generalis*.[100] Men recognize that science, as such, cannot reach reality.

We have noted above that Hepp does not wish us to believe that there is no difference whatever between the notion of faith as accepted by modern thought and the general faith as he is setting it forth. Even so, however, the difference that Hepp signalizes is really no more than one of degree. He says that, for modern thought faith is less certain than knowledge; while for us, faith should be far more certain than knowledge.[101] In faith we deal with a direct, while in knowledge we deal with an indirect operation of the Spirit. Scientific certainty is, in part, due to the activity of man, while faith certainty is wholly due to God.[102] We cannot accept this distinction as Hepp makes it. In the state of rectitude there would be certainty about derived truth no less than about directly revealed truth, because the presence of

error is inconsistent with the very idea of rectitude. But we let this pass. Our main criticism is that Hepp sees no fundamental difference between the general faith concept of non-Christians and the response to God's revelation in nature on the part of Christians. This is as we should expect. If there is a general revelation concept on which both parties can agree, this can be only on account of the fact that they have already given common consent to this truth of this general revelation.

We have seen that, according to Hepp, the great mass of men do not deny the central truths of general revelation about God, man, and the world.[103] Good sound common sense and general faith, he says, go hand in hand. He does, to be sure, frequently insist that, as far as the reasoned efforts of men are concerned, there is much opposition to the truth. His point is that men, as it were, immediately and instinctively recognize the general truths of general revelation, but are led astray to a great extent when they give themselves a reasoned account of the matter. But this contention does not radically change matters. He himself says that truth is after all a matter of thought content.[104] And we have seen that Hepp himself does not limit the agreement between believers and non-believers to matters of intuition. In the theistic proofs we have placed before us a very definite truth content. And it is to this thought content that, according to Hepp, the Spirit testifies. Thus we are virtually back to the *capita communissima* of which theologians used to speak. And inasmuch as the testimony of the Spirit is irresistible, men cannot help but give their assent to these "general truths."

It will now be apparent that in the Christian epistemology set forth in an earlier chapter we have sought to approach the matter differently. We would follow Calvin in saying that, objectively, "the truth of general revelation, though obscured to some extent by sin, still reveals God with sufficient clearness to render man without excuse." We are thankful to Hepp for working out in detail the place of the work of the Holy Spirit in connection with the work of the Logos. But Hepp has made too sharp a separation between revelation and the work of the Spirit in accepting it. He has argued as though revelation could be taken as something virtually out of relation to the testimony of the Spirit with respect to it. Revelation is always testimony, or it is not revelation. It is always authoritative testimony, and as such requires obedience; it is a command at the same time that it is a testimony. Therefore it also has the full ground for certainty in itself.

Unfallen man in paradise could not help but see God in the works of his hands. In the derivative truths no less than in the immediate truths, God would appear to be present to man. Hepp says that even in paradise the changeable things were not a strong enough foundation on which to build belief in the unchangeable.[105] Over against this, we would insist that perfect man would naturally in all his reasoning assume that the unchangeable made the changeable intelligent. He would not appeal to the changeable as such in order to make it the foundation for the unchangeable. We cannot accept the distinction between immediate and derivative truth, as though the certainty of the former is greater than the latter, as though in the former the Spirit works immediately, while in the latter he works mediately. Whatever may be deduced from Scripture by good and necessary consequence is to be accepted as much as what can be shown to be directly commanded in Scripture, so also originally derivative truth was as valid as immediate truth.

Continuing in the same vein, we would also deny the distinction between central truths and peripheral truth, as Hepp makes it. Here, too, the analogy of the special testimony to the general is employed. Hepp contends that Reformed theologians have constantly limited the special testimony to certain central truths, such as the authority of Scripture, and the childship of the believer.[106] He refers in this connection to Bavinck. But though Bavinck tells us that the Spirit does not testify to any of the truths of salvation as *nuda facta*, and says that the testimony of the Spirit limits itself to the divinity of Scripture, he adds that this divinity applies to all the truth revealed in Scripture.[107] This amounts after all to saying that the Holy Spirit testifies to the system of truth revealed in Scripture. After all, that which is revealed to us of God is a system of truth. True, we cannot logically penetrate this system. But this does not mean that there are only certain loosely related individual truths to which the Spirit testifies. The Spirit testifies to the truth of God and his revelation as a whole.

Now if we thus bring the revelation of God and the testimony of the Spirit into close contact with one another, it follows that the relation of the testimony of the Spirit to the consciousness of man is different from what Hepp says it is. There is, in the first place, no such thing as a general testimony which simply says that truth is truth. To say that is virtually to say nothing. Purely formal predication is empty predication. The Spirit testifies, to be sure, to all men, but he testifies to men of the truth of God.

Thus there will be a different reception in the case of the believer and in the case of the unbeliever. And this difference of reception begins from the very outset of every reaction to the testimony of the Spirit.

The unbeliever hears this testimony, and because of the inherent evil of his heart, attempts to keep it down with all his might. He may not succeed completely, and as a matter of fact, cannot succeed completely in keeping this testimony down. And he may succeed least at the point of the immediate rather than at the point of the mediate activities of his consciousness. This much of truth there is in Hepp's contention that at the point of the immediate activity of man's consciousness the testimony is irresistible. We may even go further and say that in his mediate activity, both with respect to the intellect and with respect to the moral life, man cannot altogether keep under the testimony of the Spirit of God. Therefore, he knows God, and even recognizes God after a fashion and does the works of the law. He may build an altar to the unknown God simply because he recognizes that there is something w tong with the gods that he thinks he knows. And Satan, too, knows God. But all this does not imply that there are "general truths" on which Christians and non-Christians agree. Hepp himself, when he contends that the generality of men do not deny the general truths, says that practically all of them believe in some sort of higher being.[108] But it is not some sort of a higher being that the Christian thinks of when he looks to the heavens. He thinks of the Creator God. And so we might continue. The reaction to the most immediate testimony of the Spirit must express itself in thought activity. It is as expressed in thought activity that this reaction has come down to us. And the first self-conscious reaction to the immediate testimony already indicates that man is day and night seeking to keep under the testimony of the Spirit that presses upon him.

The testimony of the Spirit may therefore be said to be irresistible in the sense that no man can keep it from pressing itself upon him, but it is not irresistible in the sense that everybody must believe it. If we say that the testimony of the Spirit is irresistible, we should be prepared to say that all expressed belief is radically different from all unexpressed belief. All expressed belief on the part of the sinner is that there is no God. He may express his conviction that there is no God by saying that there is a finite god, as he does when he says that there is some sort of higher being, or

when he formulates his theistic proofs. For all that, in effect, he constantly says that there is no God.

The believer, on the other hand, has been convinced of the truth of the general testimony. He has found it irresistible, but he has found it irresistible because he has been born again by the special testimony of the Spirit. He sees the Creator God in nature because he sees the Redeemer God in Christ. Therefore, in his self-conscious reaction to all revelation, he reacts differently from the non-believer. For him the truths of mathematics, no less than the truths of salvation, have their foundation in God, rather than in some sort of reality that exists independently of God. He thinks analogically, while the non-believer thinks univocally at every point.

[1] Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 3rd edition, Vol, 1, p. 211.
[2] *Idem*., p. 213.
[3] p. 213.
[4] p. 101.
[5] p. 38.
[6] p. 95.
[7] p. 73.
[8] p. 74.
[9] p. 74.
[10] p. 214, etc.
[11] p. 81.
[12] p. 217.
[13] p. 218.
[14] p. 222.
[15] p. 222.
[16] p. 222: See also, Thomas, "*Summa Theol*.." 1 Qu., 1 art, 5 and 1.
[17] p. 224.
[18] p. 228.
[19] p. 227.
[20] p. 227.
[21] p. 228.
[22] p. 229.
[23] p. 229.
[24] p. 235.
[25] p. 232.

[26] p. 236.
[27] p. 250.
[28] Valentine Hepp, *Het Testimonium Spiritus Sancti, Eerste Deel, Het Testimonium Generale*, p. 43.
[29] Hepp, p. 43.
[30] p. 57.
[31] p. 60.
[32] p. 69.
[33] p. 69.
[34] p. 75.
[35] p. 77.
[36] p. 77.
[37] p. 78.
[38] p. 81.
[39] p. 83.
[40] p. 83.
[41] p. 86.
[42] p. 83.
[43] p. 90 ff.
[44] p. 99.
[45] p. 97.
[46] p. 110.
[47] p. 110.
[48] p. 112.
[49] p. 113.
[50] p. 122.
[51] p. 131.
[52] p. 133.
[53] p. 135.
[54] p. 136.
[55] p. 137.
[56] p. 137.
[57] p. 140.
[58] p. 148.
[59] p. 149.
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[61] p. 151.
[62] p. 153.
[63] p. 155.
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[67] p. 156.
[68] p. 157.
[69] p. 160.
[70] p. 160.
[71] p. 161.
[72] p. 161.
[73] p. 165.
[74] p. 165.
[75] p. 178.
[76] p. 201.
[77] p. 201.
[78] p. 206.
[79] p. 203.
[80] p. 203.
[81] pp. 183–185.
[82] p. 185.
[83] p. 188.
[84] p. 190.
[85] p. 191.
[86] p. 191.
[87] p. 192.
[88] p. 193.
[89] p. 197.
[90] p. 198.
[91] p. 133.
[92] p. 235.
[93] p. 153.
[94] p. 153.
[95] p. 153.
[96] p. 153.

[97] p. 99.
[98] p. 157.
[99] p. 157.
[100] p. 160.
[101] p. 161.
[102] p. 162.
[103] p. 165.
[104] p. 146.
[105] p. 154.
[106] p. 149.
[107] *Dogmatiek* Vol. 1, p. 640.
[108] p. 165.

Chapter 6: Christian Theistic Revelation

Coming now to a general discussion of the question of revelation, we shall follow the same method that we have followed in the preceding chapters. We shall first see what is meant by the concept “revelation” from the general Christian theistic point of view. Only after we have done this can we ascertain what we mean by “revelation” in theology.

When we seek to determine the nature of the Christian theistic concept of revelation we turn again to our concept of God.

A. Presuppositions of Revelation

It is our notion of God as an absolute and absolutely self-conscious being that gives a definite meaning to our concept of revelation. It will not do to speak of revelation in general without indicating carefully what is meant by it. There are numerous conceptions of revelation. After discussing several of them, Bavinck says that there is no unanimity on the concept of revelation among theologians and philosophers.[1] Many theologians who do not hold to the orthodox concept of revelation have nevertheless continued to use the term. Some of them are frankly naturalistic and still speak of revelation. Others do believe in some sort of supernaturalism, but not in the supernaturalism of Christianity. The terms “natural” and “supernatural” have for them no definite connotation.

All non-Christians are agreed that the Christian concept of revelation is mistaken. They do not say this in so many words. We wish that they did. That would prevent a great deal of confusion. The difficulty is that they claim, at least many of them, that their position is the really Christian one. Accordingly, we must begin by emphasizing that whatever else others may mean when they use the word “revelation,” what we mean is based upon and is implied in our concept of an absolute and absolutely self-conscious God. This God is the one who reveals himself to man.

Generally speaking the modern concept of revelation is monistic. It is largely based upon the Hegelian notion that God comes to self-consciousness in the universe. Thus revelation is virtually identified with

emanation. It will be seen at once that the Christian concept of revelation is the very opposite of this. God was already completely self-conscious before he created the world. He did not need to create the world in order to come to self-consciousness.

Another main presupposition of revelation is the creation of man in God's image. This is no more than a corollary from the notion of an absolutely self-conscious God. Man could not get his origin from any other source than from God if God was absolute before the creation of man. Then, too, man could not be otherwise created than in accordance with the image of God, since there were no ideas or patterns above or distinct from the nature of God according to which God could create him.

As indicated in an earlier connection, man's creation in God's image involves (a) the fact that man's ideal of knowledge should never be that of the comprehension of God, and (b) the fact that man's knowledge is nevertheless true.

What we have now spoken of as the presuppositions of revelation are nothing more than the presuppositions of a truly Christian theistic theory of knowledge. God had in himself all knowledge from all eternity. Nothing could be added to his store of knowledge in any process of time. In accordance with his plan, or, as we may say, in accordance with his interpretation, all finite things were made. Hence, all knowledge that any finite creature of God would ever have, whether of things that pertain directly to God or of things that pertain to objects in the created universe itself would, in the last analysis, have to rest upon the revelation of God.

In order to see the full significance of this, we shall have to work it out somewhat more fully.

B. The Whole Universe as Revelation of God

1. Versus Pantheism

Christians think of the whole of the created universe as a revelation of God. We hasten to add that there are many idealist or pantheist theologians who will use the same terminology, but who do not mean the same thing that Christians mean. We have already mentioned the fact that, to pantheists, revelation is God's coming to self-consciousness. They may

even speak of this as God coming to self-expression, or they may simply say that God expresses himself in the universe. When they use the last phrase, they use a phrase that Christians also use. For this reason, it is imperative to note that when Christians say that God expresses himself in his creation, they do not mean that he did not already exist as a completely self-expressed God from all eternity. On the contrary, they emphasize the fact that he was self-conscious, and therefore self-expressive and self-expressed before he ever created the universe.

We are aware of the fact that this position with respect to the revelation of God lays us open to the charge of an ultimate dualism. Just as we are open to the charge of dualism when we say that God was all-glorious from eternity and yet created a world that should glorify him, so we are open to the charge of dualism when we are careful to say that the universe is not something supplementary to God. We believe that God did not need to create the world; God did not need to reveal himself. Yet, when he did create the world and did reveal himself, this creation or revelation had genuine significance.

2. Versus Intellectualism

Besides distinguishing the Christian position clearly from that of pantheism we must also guard against all intellectualism. There have been many Christian theologians who think of revelation only as the communication of intellectually expressed thought content. They tend to think of revelation first of all as distinct from creation. They would say that in addition to creating the world for man, God also revealed himself to man. They think of creation and revelation as two concepts that are to be kept apart from the very outset. They think that this is particularly necessary in order to keep the Christian conception from being confused with the pantheistic conception.

We believe, however, that this is a mistake. Scripture constantly speaks of the whole universe as a revelation of the glory of God. The flowers of the field and the cattle on a thousand hills are a revelation of God. If the whole universe was created to show forth the glory of God, as the Scriptures constantly say that it was, then it could not do this unless it was a revelation of God.

The necessity of holding to the fact that the whole universe is a revelation of God will appear more fully when we come to the question of redemptive revelation. There we shall see that God not only communicated thought information to man, but also revealed himself by way of miracle in order to redeem the whole universe. Throughout Scripture the whole world is regarded as a unit. Together with man it is created for the glory of God. Together with man it is redeemed in principle. Together with man it will one day be fully glorified.

Of course, we do not deny that there is a necessity of distinguishing between creation as revelation in general and revelation in a more specified form. Perhaps the best way that we can do this is by analyzing carefully the whole field of creation in order to see in what respects man needed revelation in a more specified form than that which was laid down in creation itself.

C. The Various Fields of Revelation

Man might receive revelation (a) about nature, (b) about man, and (c) about God. He might, moreover, receive such revelation from three distinct sources, that is, from three distinct immediate sources, namely, from nature, from man, and from God. The matter may be schematically presented as follows. Man might receive revelation:

A. About nature:

1. From nature	i.e., through	physics
2. From self	i.e., through	psycho-physics
3. From God	i.e., through	theologico-physics

B. About man himself:

1. From nature	i.e., through	physico-psychology
2. From self	i.e., through	psychology proper
3. From God	i.e., through	theologico-psychology

C. About God:

1. From nature i.e., through natural theology
2. From self i.e., through rational theology
3. From God i.e., through theology proper

As it stands, this scheme contemplates the created universe and its relationship to God in stationary fashion. It therefore represents the object-object, the subject-object; and the subject-subject relation as it first came forth from the hand of God. Naturally we have to think of this whole affair as moving through history We cannot but think of what would have been the development of human knowledge if man had not fallen into sin. Yet we have no direct information on this subject. Our thought on this subject will always be more or less speculative. The very notion of what might have happened if sin had not come into the world should be used as a limiting concept in the Christian sense of the term. The value of this speculation lies in the fact that it enables us better to understand what the nature of human knowledge actually is now that sin has come into the world.

We must now say a word about each of the possibilities that is marked in the chart given above.

1. Revelation About Nature from Nature—Physics

When we study physics, we do not usually think of the fact that we are dealing with revelation. We study the individual objects in the physical universe. We try to see in accordance with what laws they work. We try to bring the particulars and the universals together. We deal, therefore, first of all with the object-object relation. But we also deal with the object-subject or the subject-object relation. It is the human mind or subject that seeks to get information about the objects of knowledge. We hold that God has so created the objects in relationship to one another that they exist not as particulars only, but that they exist as particulars that are related to universals. God has created not only the facts but also the laws of physical existence. And the two are meaningless except as correlatives of one another. Moreover, God has adapted the objects to the subjects of knowledge; that the laws of our minds and the laws of the facts come into fruitful contact with one another is due to God’s creative work and to God’s providence, by which all things are maintained in their existence and in their operation in relation to one another.

It is of particular significance to see clearly that the laws of mathematics are but modes of the created universe. They are not, as theologians have all too often held, existences that are independent of God. Many theologians have followed Plato in thinking of the laws of mathematics as somehow existing from all eternity alongside of God. And what holds true for the laws of mathematics holds equally true for the conception of time. Time is not a moving image of the abstract notion of eternity. It is God-created as a mode of finite existence.

Now since we think of nothing as having existence and meaning independently of God, it is impossible to think of the object and the subject standing in the fruitful relation to one another that they actually do unless God is back of them both. Hence, the knowledge that we have of the simplest objects of the physical universe is still based upon the revelational activity of God.

It is customary on the part of some orthodox theologians to depreciate the objects of sensation as a source of knowledge. They have become deeply convinced of the scepticism involved in historical empiricism. They would therefore substitute an *a priori* approach for that of the empiricist, thinking that thus they represent biblical thought.

Two points may be mentioned with respect to this. In the first place, to flee to the arms of an a priorism from those of empiricism is in itself no help at all. It is only if an *a priori* is self-consciously based upon the conception of the ontological Trinity rather than upon the work of Plato or some other non-Christian philosopher that it can safeguard against scepticism. The *a priori* of any non-Christian thinker will eventually lead to empiricism. It can keep from doing so only if it keeps within the field of purely formal predication. In the second place, if we do place the ontological Trinity at the foundation of all our predication then there is no need to fear any scepticism through the avenue of sense. Sensation does “deceive us” but so does ratiocination. We have the means for their corruption in both cases. The one without the other is meaningless. Both give us true knowledge on the right presupposition; both lead to scepticism on the wrong presupposition.

2. Revelation About Nature from Self—Psycho-Physics

What holds about our knowledge of physics holds also, *mutatis mutandis* of the knowledge that we obtain about nature by comparing it with ourselves. In fact the only way that we can have knowledge about nature is by a sort of anthropomorphism. When we study animal behavior, we speak of their activity in terms of intellect and will, etc. Similarly in our study of inanimate objects we use metaphorical language borrowed from our own experience. In particular we would note that Christ made use of parabolic language. When Christ spoke of the vine and the branches he did not hesitate to use that figure as symbolic of the relation of himself to the church. It is of great interest and of great importance to ask ourselves on what ground Christ was able to do this. Christ was not just a clever human being who saw interesting parallels to human experience in nature. Christ was the Logos of creation as well as the Logos of redemption. The things of nature were adapted by himself to the things of the Spirit. The lower was made for the higher. The lower did not just exist independently of the higher. And because all things are made by God, that is, through the eternal Logos of creation, we too can use symbolism and analogy and know that, though we must always look for the *tertium comparationis* in all symbolism, nevertheless it is at bottom true. Without a revelational foundation all symbolism and all art in general would fall to the ground. Even though a person does not recognize this fact, as is the case with artists that are not Christian, it remains true. Though they will not see Christ as the Logos of creation, he nevertheless upholds them in his providence.

Here again the importance of distinguishing a Christian from a non-Christian *a priori* is of basic importance. Suppose we took a non-Christian *a priori* such as that of Descartes. In such an *a priori* the human self takes itself to be an ultimate starting point. And suppose further that we should then seek to know the facts of nature in terms of man. The result would be anthropomorphism in the evil, sceptical sense of the term. Each man could and would, of necessity, wind the facts of ‘nature’ in a ball about himself as a core and the balls thus made would have as little contact with one another as we can observe between the particles of an exploded atom bomb. On the other hand, if we start, as Calvin started, by thinking of the mind of man and its *a priori* laws as created and controlled by God, then the facts of ‘nature’ have intelligence written in them. They are exclusively revelational of God and his plan. Then anthropomorphism, always unavoidably, leads to insight into greater truth instead of to the blind alley of scepticism.

3. Revelation About Nature from God—Theologico-Physics

We realize that the term “theologico-physics” is not in common use. Yet there can be no doubt but that there is a definite place for it in Christian thought. Here, in fact, is one good distinguishing mark between Christian and non-Christian thought in that the former believes in the possibility and actuality of revelation on the part of God with respect to physical events, while the other does not. In paradise there was theologico-physics when God revealed his will with respect to the tree of good and evil. Man could not know from nature itself nor from himself in relation to nature that the result of eating from the tree of good and evil would spell his death. Hence we may speak of this revelation as being positive instead of natural. It had to be a direct communication of thought content on the part of God to man. Then too we may speak of this revelation as supernatural in opposition to natural. It was a revelation that man could not obtain by ever so diligent an application of his thought activity to the phenomena of nature.

It is this revelation that Dr. Vos speaks of as pre-redemptive, special revelation. That is, it is this revelation in addition to other similar revelation that God might wish to give about matters other than those pertaining directly to physical events that Dr. Vos speaks of as special, pre-redemptive revelation. We do not use this term because we would reserve the term ‘special revelation’ in order to use it interchangeably with redemptive revelation. Moreover, all the revelation given in paradise was really general in the sense that it was given to all men.[2] It is of prime importance to observe that even in paradise man was never meant to study nature by means of observation and experiment without connection with positive super-natural thought communication given to him by God. Nature could not be observed for what it actually is except in relation to history, and history cannot be seen for what it is at any stage except it be viewed in relation to its final end. And only by direct supernatural revelation could man have an adequate notion of this end.

We would observe further that the concept of direct revelation of God with respect to physical events becomes very important after the entrance of sin into the world. God reveals to man that the ground is cursed because of the sin of man. It might of course be argued that man would be able to see this for himself, inasmuch as before the entrance of sin the world did not bring forth thorns and thistles, while after the entrance of sin it did. Yet God

has, as a matter of fact, revealed this truth. In fact, we may say that God has revealed by special revelation all the main things that we must know about the physical universe. God has begun in the first verse of Genesis with the theologico-physics of the utmost importance. The truth of creation man would originally be able to know of his own accord. Once sin did enter, however, man had to be told that he was a creature of God. Even if the tradition of creation did go on in the generations, this fact would still have to be specially revealed to man as the foundation of the redemptive work of God. The fact of creation is not an isolated fact. It is a foundation fact. It is the fact without which the whole of redemptive revelation would drop to the ground.

Note: The importance of holding to the truth of theologico-physics may be seen also in our day in the fact that would-be orthodox theologians cater to the modern spirit which makes a sharp separation between physics and religion. So Dr. Mackenzie in his book *Christianity the Paradox of God*, says that miracles in the Old Testament is not a scientific or a non-scientific, but a religious concept.[3] Again he says that the miracles of the Old Testament are not to be interpreted physically and historically, but theologically and redemptively. If we should apply this attitude to the resurrection of Christ, we should obtain a very interesting result. We could then do either of two things. We could say that the resurrection of Christ was an actual occurrence. Then we would have to say that this actual occurrence has no religious significance. This is virtually Karl Barth's position. For him the resurrection took place in history but as a fact of history it is nothing but a pointer (*binweis*) to the real resurrection which is above history. On the other hand, holding to Mackenzie's distinction, we might openly deny Christ's resurrection as an historical fact. This is virtually A. A. Bowman's position as set forth in his booklet *The Absurdity of Christianity*. Bowman says that the course of physical events has nothing to do with the Christian religion. When Christ spoke of coming into the world to bring life he did not mean that his mission had anything to do with our physical life. Our physical life has always run and will always run its natural course of metabolism.. Christ only meant that he came to bring a fulness of moral existence such as man had not known.

4. Revelation About Man Himself from Nature—Physico-Psychology

The revelation that man obtains about himself from nature is but the reverse of the revelation that he obtains from himself about nature. The foundation of both is solid in the conception of the Logos of creation. We learn much about our bodies from the study of the physical elements that exist independently of our bodies. We know that we are taken from the dust of the ground. Chemistry can be a helpful study for the understanding of the body of man. However, we do not, as Christians, forget that though the human body is made of the dust of the ground, it is, once it has been created in conjunction with the soul, made immortal. The lower serves the higher. It is in accordance with all non-Christian thought to deny, while it is in accordance with the genius of Christian thought to affirm the immortality of the body. It is of importance to note how basically different any Christian argument for human immortality must be from any non-Christian argument for immortality. Non-Christian thought will reason syllogistically from certain characteristics of the physical universe in general, and conclude from them that the human body must necessarily be subject to permanent death. The Christian cannot argue from certain characteristics of the physical universe as it exists since the entrance of sin, and conclude that the body cannot be resurrected. He knows that the earth is under the curse of God on account of the sin of man. He will not argue from the physical laws as they operate at present and conclude about the future of the body of man. The Christian must surely live by revelation at this point. And this is true not only now that sin has, as a matter of fact, actually entered into the world, but was true from the beginning. If man was to learn something truly about himself from his study about nature, this study of nature, as before noted, had to be carried on in revelation to the direct supernatural revelation that he received from God.

5. Revelation About Man from Himself—Psychology Proper

At this point, it is again necessary that we distinguish most carefully between the Christian theistic position and non-Christian thought. We can do so if we note first of all that the thought activity of man’s consciousness as it was originally in paradise was genuinely revelational in the sense that the whole of the created universe of God is revelational of God we deal here with the subject of human knowledge, that is, with the mind that knows. As we have seen, the relation of the human mind to objects of its

knowledge is founded on the Logos of creation. We ought to note in addition to this that man was created the only self-conscious re-interpreter in this universe. Man was to gather up in his consciousness all the meaning that God had deposited in the universe and be the reflector of it all. The revelation of God was deposited in the whole of creation, but it was in the mind of man alone that this revelation was to come to self-conscious re-interpretation. Man was to be God's re-interpreter, that is, God's prophet on earth.

We may perhaps clarify what is meant by the consciousness of man as being originally revelational if we say that man would naturally, by virtue of his thought activity, know and come to know ever more fully the true state of affairs about the universe in general and about himself in particular. He would, in the field of metaphysics, know and recognize the fact that he was a creature. Hence he would know, in the field of knowledge, that, in the nature of the case, he could be no more than are-interpreter. That is, he would recognize at once that the possibility of predication presupposed the existence of God as absolute.

In paradise, man made his self-consciousness the immediate but wholly derivative starting point while he made the self-consciousness of God the remote but wholly ultimate starting point of all his knowledge. Hence he saw that his knowledge was, though finite, yet true. Hence he did not set before himself the false ideal of absolute comprehension. Hence, too, he did not despair and conclude to irrationalism simply because he himself could not fully comprehend the whole of reality.

In opposition to this, the non-Christian interpretation of the human mind is based upon the presupposition that it is the ultimate and not merely the derivative starting point for man. Hence it has set before itself the ideal of comprehensive knowledge. This was done especially in the earlier stages of human thought. The Greek thinkers were as children who thought they could do everything. Even in modern times we have, in such systems as that of Leibniz, a striking manifestation of the pride, "hubris" of the sinner who wishes to be as God. In more recent times, however, men have become more sophisticated. They have given up the quest for certainty and the quest for comprehension, except as a limiting concept. In modern irrationalism, the prodigal has recognized that he is at the swine trough, but still refuses to return to the father's house. His "hubris" never forsakes him.

The importance of keeping the Christian theistic conception of the mind of man, as it was originally created by God, distinct from the non-Christian position we have spoken of in the preceding paragraph, can be seen from the various compromises that have recently been made by theologians.

Arminianism has been untrue to the biblical point of view with respect to this matter. We usually think of Arminianism first of all with respect to its denial of the biblical teaching of the sinner's ethical inability. However, back of the error of Arminianism at this point lies the error to which we are now calling attention, namely, that it starts with the human consciousness as an ultimate instead of as a derivative starting point. Arminianism has, in principle, denied the biblical concept of creation. This is its basic error and the source of all its other errors. So, for instance, Mackenzie in his article on Free Will in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* says that the trouble with Augustinianism and Calvinism is that it has started with the idea of an absolute God, and deduced the doctrine of decrees from it, while in reality we should start from experience and adjust the concept of the absoluteness of God's grace as best we can to it. It is this assumption of human experience as an ultimate starting point that has now led him into the further error of the acceptance of modern irrationalism in the form of paradox theology.

It is on the basis of the assumed ultimacy of the human consciousness too that the recent emphasis upon the religious *a priori* is built. It is thought that in man's religious consciousness we have an original something. Especially the writers of the psychology of religion school begin with this assumption of the ultimacy of the religious consciousness of man. They say that we must seek to ascertain its native witness, and that we can do so only if we do not think of it as standing necessarily in relationship to God. They say that the matter of objective reference is something quite indifferent to the idea of religion.

In the field of morals or ethics we find the same sort of situation. So, for instance, Newman Smyth, in his book *Christian Ethics*, takes for granted that the moral consciousness is the source of the ultimate ethical judgment. This is the case, too, in the great work of A. E. Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist*.

6. Revelation About Man from God—Theological Psychology

It has already been pointed out that to study nature or man a right Adam needed, even in paradise, to relate such studies to direct supernatural revelation of God. To speak separately of theological psychology is simply to stress this fact afresh. In studying himself man would, to be sure, engage in the study of himself, that is in introspection. But his introspection would never be to him a complete or ultimate source of information about himself. To know himself truly even through introspection man would have, in paradise, to relate this introspection to the supernatural thought communication that God would give him. God gave Adam such supernatural revelation by means of the probationary command. This command opened to him the vista of a final future either of weal or of woe, and thus shed great light upon the knowledge that he might obtain about himself through introspection. This command made Adam think of himself as an historical being, and as the one whose actions were of prime importance for the destiny of the race. Thus his introspection would to him become part of the concrete picture of which he actually was a part.

It is very plain indeed that every form of non-Christian thought must, in the nature of the case, oppose this sort of revelation concept. All who believe in God as an absolute self-conscious being can and must believe in such a revelation concept, while all who do not believe in God as self-conscious and absolute must deny such a revelation concept. We would warn again, however, against thinking that it is at this point alone that Christian and non-Christian concepts of revelation differ. They differ not only on the point as to whether or not God can and did reveal himself positively and supernaturally to man. They differ equally as much on the nature of the activity of man’s consciousness as created by God. The Christian, says that even at that point man’s thought is revelatory of the self-conscious God, while all non-Christian thought says that if human thought be revelatory of God, it is so only in the sense that God is coming to self-consciousness in man’s consciousness.

It need scarcely be pointed out that after the entrance of sin into the world this sort of revelation has become very prominent. After man fell into sin he could interpret nothing aright. Yet the thing that he most needed to interpret aright was the question of his own soul’s relation to God. Hence, if he was to know anything truly about this matter, it was necessary that God should reveal to him his own lost condition and the remedy for it. But of

this matter we shall speak more fully under the heading of special revelation.

7. Revelation About God from Nature—Natural Theology

Coming now to the knowledge that man in paradise would have of God, we must notice first of all that there man would be able to reason correctly from nature to nature's God. But the meaning of this fact should be taken in connection with what we have said when discussing the true theistic conception of physics. We may perhaps best bring out what we mean by saying that man could originally reason from nature to nature's God by contrasting it to what has usually been meant by that statement. In the first place, when men say that we can reason from nature to nature's God, they usually take for granted that nature as it exists today is normal, and that the human mind which contemplates it is normal. This is not true. Nature has had a veil cast over it on account of the sin of man, and the mind of man itself has been corrupted by sin. Accordingly, we must not, now that sin has entered into the world, separate natural theology from theological psychology. After sin has entered the world, no one of himself knows nature aright, and no one knows the soul of man aright. How then could man reason from nature to nature's God and get anything but a distorted notion of God? The sort of natural theology that the sinner, who does not recognize himself as a sinner, makes is portrayed to us in the first chapter of Romans.

In the second place, when men speak of reasoning from nature to nature's God they do not usually recognize the difference between thinking of nature and of man as a proximate and derivative starting point, and thinking of man as an ultimate starting point. It was this point that we sought to bring out under the headings of a Christian conception of physics and a Christian conception of psychology. Then man reasoned from nature to nature's God in paradise, he did not begin from nature as from something that was known to him independently of God in order thus to reason to God of whom he did not know. The phrase that we must reason from the known to the unknown is in itself formal and misleading. The question is as to what is known and what is unknown. As Christian theists, we could certainly never allow that the universe was originally known to man before God was known to him. The cosmos-consciousness, the self consciousness,

and the God-consciousness would naturally be simultaneous. To use a phrase which Hocking uses with an idealist instead of a Christian meaning, we may say that the God-consciousness would have to come in at the level of man's sensation if it was ever to come in at all. Man would at once with the first beginning of his mental activity see the true state of affairs as to the relation of God to the universe as something that was known to him in order afterwards to ascertain whether or not God exists. He would know that God is the Creator of the universe as soon as he knew anything about the universe itself.

8. Revelation About God from Man Himself—Rational Theology

It might be concluded from what has been said in the preceding paragraphs that man would learn very little indeed about God from nature if he could not know nature unless he knew God. Now we believe that, relatively speaking, man did not learn a great deal about God directly from nature. The reason for this is not, however, that he had to know God in order to know nature. The reason why man could not learn a great deal about God by a direct study of nature lies in the fact that nature is impersonal and not self-conscious. From the created universe as a whole, that is, from the combination of man and nature, man could learn a great deal about God. Nature cannot be studied fruitfully except in combination with man. Man is the re-interpreter of God's universe. Hence it was only as man could see the relation of all things in nature to himself that he could see what nature really revealed to him about God.

And now that we are considering this knowledge that man could obtain about God from the study of himself, we must observe again that in paradise man would naturally know the true state of affairs as to his subordination to God. He would never start from himself, or, as it is termed in modern times, from "experience" as from something that is known to himself whether or not God exists. He would not, as modern theology in general and modern psychology of religion in particular do, begin with the "native witness" of the "religious consciousness" in order to argue from it as from an independent something about the existence or the nature of God.

We may say here as we said in connection with the idea of natural theology, that there are two mistakes that are usually made with respect to the notion of rational theology. In the first place, it is taken for granted that

the religious consciousness, as it exists after the entrance of sin, is normal. In the second place, it is taken for granted that the consciousness of man in general, and therefore, the "religious consciousness" in particular, can be used as an ultimate starting point from which to begin an argument about the existence and the nature of God. In contrast to this, Adam in paradise actually was normal, and therefore did not think that he was ultimate. Hence he recognized that he could have no rational theology unless he had a true psychology; that is, he could learn nothing from himself about God unless he knew and recognized himself as a creature made in God's image.

Recognizing himself as such, however, and then studying nature and himself in this light, he could learn a great deal about God. We cannot and need not seek to discuss in detail what a rational theology would have been if sin had not entered into the world. But we do know that man was created in God's image. As such man's very existence is like that God. It is therefore always safe to say that God as man's original has, without the limitations of creaturehood and sin, that which is found in man. Shall he that planted the ear not hear? If even man may know, how much the more shall not God know? If even a child understands something, how much the more its father or its mother?

9. Revelation About God from God—Theology Proper

Coming now to what man would learn about God directly from God himself instead of indirectly from the study of nature and man, we may say that whatever was not involved in the concept of God as the presupposition of the universe as it was when it was created had to be directly revealed to man if he was to know it at all. We do not mean to suggest that there could be a mechanical addition to an inherently sufficient though finite knowledge of God. What God did actually reveal directly, and what God revealed naturally to man, together form one system of truth. God had one comprehensive plan with respect to the universe inclusive of his natural and his supernatural revelation. It is of great importance that the various aspects of revelation be regarded as implying one another. They are limiting concepts of one another. Yet though we cannot separate, even for man in *status integritatis*, between what might have been and what has actually come to pass, we must nevertheless hold that the idea of natural theology, together with rational theology, and the idea of theology proper, as we have

in this chapter distinguished between them, are to be kept distinct. If we keep them distinct at this place, it will help us when we come to the question of what can, now that sin has actually entered into the world, still be known of God by the process of natural and rational theology, and what must be reserved for theology proper. If the scholastics, with all their fine distinctions, had been careful to make the distinction we have just spoken of, they would not have fallen into the error of giving as much credit to natural and to rational theology as they did. Natural and rational theology were never meant to function, even in paradise, apart from theology proper.

[1] *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Vol. 1, p. 303.
[2] Cf. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*.
[3] Donald Mackenzie, *Christianity the Paradox of God*.

Chapter 7: Present General Revelation About Nature

In the preceding chapter we have sought to discuss the notion of revelation as it was in *status integritatis*. In contrast to that we must now turn to the notion of revelation as it exists after man has fallen into sin.

Attention has been called to the necessity of distinguishing between the non-regenerate and the regenerate consciousness. Accordingly, we cannot speak about general revelation and mean by that term that there is a certain revelation on which believers and unbelievers are agreed. The term “general revelation” should never mean to us that all men are agreed on its nature. We need only to think for a moment of general revelation as it has been thought of by the heathen and compare that with the conception of general revelation as it has been interpreted by the Christian church or by the Old Testament saints, in order to see that there is a great difference between the two. The believer sees in nature that which has been created by God and that which shows forth the glory of its Creator; the unbeliever sees in nature something that is altogether, or in some degree, independent of God.

For these reasons, it might seem that it were better to use the term “natural revelation” instead of “general revelation.” But here, too, we meet the same problems. So we may use either term. By using the term “general revelation” we emphasize the fact that this revelation is accessible to all men and valid for all men even though only believers interpret it truly. By the term “natural revelation” we indicate where this revelation may be found, that is, in the created universe.

We can conveniently follow the scheme outlined in the preceding chapter and study, first, the revelation about nature, then about man, and finally, about God. In this chapter, we study God’s present general revelation with respect to nature.

A. Revelation About Nature from Nature

It should be remembered that the universe has actually been created by God and is actually sustained by his providence. This precludes the

possibility of any non-Christian philosopher, however profound, offering a system of interpretation of the universe that would seem satisfactory even to himself. Naturally the sinner will try his best to find an exclusively immanentistic principle of interpretation. Yet he can never succeed in finding one that will do his work. It is as Job said: “But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. The deep saith, It is not in me; and the sea saith, It is not with me” (Jb 28:12–14). Or, again: “Whence cometh wisdom? And where is the place of understanding? Seeing it is hid from all living, and kept from the fowls of the air? Destruction and death say, We have heard a rumor thereof with our ears” (Jb 28:20–22).

The history of philosophy abundantly testifies to the fact that men have tried to interpret the universe immanentistically. At the same time, history testifies with equal clarity that no system of philosophy has ever been able to make its composer feel that he had reached a satisfactory solution of the problems of life. Modern pessimism and agnosticism are but the climax of the longfelt dissatisfaction in the ranks of the foremost thinkers of the world.

Moreover, what is true of the philosophies is also true of the religions of the world. They too have left their devices with a sense of dissatisfaction.

In the second place, we should observe that, because the universe is actually the creation of God, it continued to show forth something of the character of God even after the fall. It could not show the character of anyone or anything else but of God. Scripture says that God displays himself in the universe: “For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity …” (Rom 1:20) There are many places in which Scripture speaks of nature as revealing God. Speaking of this revelation, Calvin says:

> His essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought; but on each of his works his glory is engraven in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse. Hence, with perfect truth, the Psalmist exclaims, ‘He covereth himself with light as with a garment’ (Ps: 104:2), as if he had said that God for the first

> time was arrayed in visible attire when, in the creation of the world, he displayed those glorious banners on which, to whatever side we turn we behold his perfections visibly portrayed. In the same place, the Psalmist aptly compares the expanded heavens to his royal tent, and says, 'He layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters, maketh the clouds his chariot, and walketh upon the wings of the wind, sending forth the winds and lightnings as his swift messengers.' And because of the glory of his power and wisdom is more refulgent in the firmament, it is frequently designated as his palace.… For the same reason, the Psalmist attributes language to celestial objects, a language which all nations understand (Ps 19:1), the manifestation of the Godhead being too clear to escape the notice of any people, however obtuse.[1]

What Scripture therefore emphasizes is that even apart from special revelation, men ought to see that God is the Creator of the world.

One particular feature that ought to make men see that God is back of this universe, says Calvin, is the munificence with which man is surrounded. This is true with respect to nature in general and, in particular, with respect to the body of man as a part of nature. "To determine the connection of its parts, its symmetry and beauty, with the skill of a Gelen (*Lib. De Usu Partium*), requires singular acuteness: and yet all men acknowledge that the human body bears on its face such proofs of ingenious contrivance as are sufficient to proclaim the admirable wisdom of its Maker."[2] The body itself is admirably formed, and rain and sunshine supply it with an abundance of food. Paul speaks of this when he says: "And yet he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). Jesus himself uses the fact that God gives rain and sunshine to all men as evidence of a certain grace to all: "That ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (Mt 5:45).

The character of God, however, is not only displayed before all men in *bonam partem*, but also in *malum partem*. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom 1:18). It is true that this wrath of God is revealed on man's unrighteousness, that is, on something that is

internal in man rather than external in nature. Yet it is revealed on man as a physico-temporal being, and is such is visible to man. We are told in Genesis that God cursed the ground because of the sins of man. Thorns and thistles were seen that had not been seen before. In Romans 8 Paul says that the whole creation "groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." He adds that the creation shall one day be delivered from "the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:21–22).

Still further we must observe that this wrath of God upon the unrighteousness of man sometimes has revealed itself in the fact that God allowed man to drift into gross immorality and sin. Then men should have known God and kept him in remembrance, but actually turned away from him, then God "gave them up unto vile passions" (Rom 1:26). This must be kept in mind in order to realize what the actual situation was for the generations of men that were far removed in time from the beginning of creation. The situation became increasingly complex as time went on.

The greater complexity appears especially in the fact that the manifestations of God's wrath and of God's long suffering were not always evenly distributed. It cannot be said that God always in this life surrounds the relatively good man with prosperity and the relatively bad man with adversity. God does indeed in this world punish the "unrighteous" and reward the "righteous." On the other hand God sometimes afflicts the righteous and permits the unrighteous to flourish as the green bay tree. The story of Job's suffering is proof of God's affliction of the righteous, while Asaph's lament in Psalm 73 is eloquent proof that the saints of God have, throughout the ages, but especially in ancient times, struggled with the problem of the "unevenness" of the ways of God with man.

Finally, the matter of tradition must be considered. The tradition of the creation story and of man's residence in paradise was, no doubt, handed down in the generation of Cain as well as the generation of Seth. Moreover, the revelation of God's redemptive purpose came to Cain just as well as to Abel. With respect to the generations immediately following Cain, when Adam and Eve were still alive to tell the story to their grandchildren, even if Cain should studiously avoid telling it to them, we may hold that they "knew" the truth intellectually as fully as did the children of God. All this was carried forth to the nations. At the time of the flood the whole human race was once more brought into immediate contact with God's redemptive

revelation. The tradition of the flood, no less than the tradition of creation, no doubt lived on and on. This tradition was distorted, however, as time passed by. The creation myths and flood myths that have been discovered among the nations prove that the original story was greatly distorted. The result has been that those who came many generations after the time of Noah, and who lived far away from the pale of redemptive revelation as it appeared in Israel, did not have as clear a tradition as the earlier generations had had. This brought further complexity into the situation for them.

To the tradition that any generation would have about the creation story, and to contact with special revelation that they might have, must be added the tradition of the interpretation the generality of mankind had given to the physical universe. In vain does one look in the history of philosophy for the true creation concept. There have been many varieties of opinion among philosophers about the question of the origin of the universe, but they have all agreed in denying the truth. To be sure, there have been many who have used the term "creation." Those who have used the term "creation," however, have meant by it something different from what ought to be meant. They have thought of God either as enveloped in the universe or as removed from it so far that it really existed independently of him. To quote in this connection from Calvin:

> This far, indeed, we differ from each other, in that everyone appropriates to himself some peculiar error; but we are all alike in this, that we substitute monstrous fictions for the one living and true God … a disease not confined to obtuse and vulgar minds, but affecting the noblest, and those who in other respects are singular acute. How lavishly in this respect have the whole body of philosophers betrayed their stupidity and want of sense? To say nothing of the others whose absurdities are of a still grosser description, how completely does Plato, the soberest and most religious of them all, lose himself in his round globe. What must be the case with the rest when the leaders, who ought to have set an example, commit such blunders, and labour under such hallucinations? In like manner, when the government of the world places the doctrine of providence beyond dispute, the practical result is the same as if it were believed that all things were carried hither and thither at the caprice of chance; so prone are we to vanity and error. I am still referring to the most distinguished of the philosophers,

> and not to the common herd, whose madness in profaning the truth of God exceeds all bounds.
>
> Hence that immense flood of error with which the whole world is overflowed.… Like water gushing forth from a large and copius spring, immense crowds of gods have issued from the human mind, every man giving himself full license, and devising some peculiar form of divinity, to meet his own views.[3]

Since there was such a great variety of opinions, though all of them opposed to the true, many men concluded that it was hopeless to speculate upon the origin of the universe and of God back of the universe. Speaking of the Epicureans, Calvin says: "For when they saw that the wisest contradicted each other, they hesitated not to infer from their dissensions, and from the frivolous and absurd doctrines of each, that men foolishly, and to no purpose, brought torment upon themselves by searching for a God, there being none: and they thought this interference safe, because it was better at once to deny God altogether than to feign uncertain gods, and thereafter to engage in quarrels without end."[4]

In the midst of it all, each one of these philosophers tried to show that his interpretation was most rational. The Stoics "plumed themselves on their acuteness" and the Egyptians tried sedulously to show "that they were rational on this subject." The result of it all was that men, by the exercise of their ingenuity, discovered a certain plausibility for their theories. Calvin says: "And perhaps, at first glance, some show of probability might deceive the simple and the unwary …"[5]

Summing up what has been found, we have the following: First, negatively, there has been a sense of dissatisfaction in all the religions and philosophies of the world due to the fact that, in the nature of the case, they could never find an immanentistic interpretation of the universe that would be true. The satisfaction that men would find would always have to be basically false. Then, positively, we have enumerated the characteristics that mark the revelation of God in nature since the entrance of sin. There is on that one hand a process of obscuration of the original glory and munificence of creation due to the curse of God on the earth. There is on the other hand an additional revelation, a revelation of God in nature that man in paradise did not have, namely, the revelation of God's wrath. This should enable fallen man to learn more about God from nature than unfallen man could

learn. Yet even this additional revelation, when taken in conjunction with the revelation of God's glory and munificence, would tend to make the whole matter more complex than it originally was, and therefore, in a sense, also more obscure.

A further word must, however, be said about the "obscuration" spoken of above.. This "obscuration" in no wise subtracts from the fundamental perspicuity of God's revelation in nature. Even the "obscuration" of God's original glory, that came about through sin. With its resultant complexity, in no wise reduced the objective fact that nature means nothing to man except it be regarded as the revelation of God. The "obscuration" spoken of refers only to the original glory of God; it does not imply that after sin nature is any less revelatory of God than it was in paradise. We would think of a man in the midst of heathendom and remember the elements in the revelation at his disposal in order then to see what logical conclusions he ought to draw if he reasoned correctly.

In the first place, he ought to think of God as the creator of this world. In the second place, he ought to believe in the providence of God. In the third place, he ought to think of the presence of a certain non-saving grace of God. That this last point is true follows from the fact that it is logically involved in the creation idea. If God is the creator of the world, he existed in complete self sufficiency before the world was. There could be no evil in God; evil would have destroyed God's self-sufficiency. Accordingly, evil must have come in by the hand of man. Thus logic should have driven men to see the truth of the tradition of the original perfection and the fall of man, and the tradition should have corroborated the logic. To quote Calvin in this connection:

> Paul, accordingly, after reminding the Athenians that they 'might feel after God and find him,' immediately adds, that 'he is not far from every one of us' (Acts 17:27) every man having within himself undoubted evidence of the heavenly grace by which he lives and moves and has his being.[6]

In the fifth place, we believe men should even have concluded that somewhere in this world there had to be a manifestation of God's special grace. Nonsaving grace could not function without saving grace: "common" grace is not an end in itself, but only a means by which a field may be prepared for the operation of special grace. It is not a valid argument against

this contention to say that no one could in advance of its coming argue for the necessity of a gift of grace, since grace is a free gift. We do not say that men ought to have been able to argue in advance that grace should come. We say rather that the world did as a matter of fact exist in the way that it did by virtue of grace alone as soon as it fell into sin. Moreover, mankind as a whole was brought face to face with the fact of special grace at the time of Cain, and again at the time of Noah. Men ought to have seen that a sinful world cannot exist except by the presence of grace in it. Finally, in the sixth place, we may say that men ought to have concluded that the outcome of his failure to recognize the God whom he should serve would be his condemnation in eternal punishment. If they ought to know God as their creator and ought to know him as the one from whom they had revolted, they ought also to conclude that this creator would put sinners out of his presence forever. Speaking of the unevenness of the judgments of God in the world Calvin argues that men ought not to conclude from this that it is doubtful whether God really punishes the unjust and rewards the just. He says:

> Nay, an opposite inference should be drawn. When any one crime calls forth visible manifestations of his anger, it must be because he hates all crimes; and, on the other hand, his leaving many crimes unpunished, only proves that there is a judgment in reserve when the punishment now delayed shall be inflicted.[7]

We have brought the elements of God's revelation in nature as it is now in close relation to the fact of man's original perfection, as well as with whatever contact the world has had with the principle of redemption. These should never be mechanically separated. We should not think of someone now in the midst of a non-Christian country and imagine him looking up into the sky or round about him in nature in order to see what he can learn about God from such an observation, only afterwards to consider whether there is any other material to be taken into consideration. There is, as a matter of fact, other material to be taken into consideration, and that from the very outset. When we think of the responsibility of men who have only the light of nature, we must think of all the facts that have bearing on this situation. In the first place, there is the fact of the present revelation of God in nature. It is this which Paul emphasizes in the first chapter of Romans. But there is, in the second place, also the equally important fact that

mankind was originally represented in Adam. Paul teaches this in the very same epistle to the Romans, particularly in the fifth chapter. “Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12). Even in the first chapter Paul brings these two into contact with one another when he says that the invisible things of God have been known by man “since the creation of the world.” v. 20 These two should never be separated. Paul teaches both. Paul brings each into contact with one another, though he stresses one point in connection with one argument and, the other point in connection with another argument. Hence we should not think of the revelation of God in nature and seek to establish man’s responsibility from that alone, as though nothing else were to be taken into consideration. No concrete case exists in which man has no more than the revelation of God in nature. It is no doubt true that many have practically nothing else, inasmuch as in their case the tradition of man’s original estate has not reached them and no echo of the redemptive principle has penetrated to their vicinity. Yet it remains true that the race as a whole has once been in contact with the living God, and that it was created perfect. Man remains responsible for these facts. Back of this arrangement is the Creator, the sovereign God.

B. Revelation About Nature from Man: Psycho-Physics

Coming now to the question of revelation about nature from man, we can be brief. We saw in the preceding chapter that man ought to be enabled to obtain a deeper insight into the truth of nature round about him when he studies it in relation to himself. When nature is studied in relation to human personality and human personality in turn brought into true relation to God, the meaning of nature will stand out in its full bearing.

With the entrance of sin, however, man cut his study of himself loose from God, and therewith also cut his study of nature loose from himself. For this reason all the study of nature that man has made since the fall of man has been, in a basic sense, absolutely false. As far as an ultimate point of view is concerned, the sinner has been mistaken in his interpretation of the physical universe no less than in his interpretation of God. The physical world cannot be truly known when it is cut loose from God. We may say that the phenomena cannot be truly known without the noumena. It is not

enough to say that the phenomenal world can be wholly true of the phenomenal world be not set in relation to God.

It must be remembered, in this connection, that the wrath of God is revealed upon man even more specifically than upon nature. This fact anew works for “obscuration” and complexity in man’s study of nature. Even so it must be maintained that nature must be related to man and when thus related is better shown for what it is as a revelation of God. Men can read nature aright only when it is studied as the home of man who is made in the image of God.

Note: This point that the knowledge of “phenomena” is as basically mistaken from an ultimate point of view as the knowledge of God, if the phenomena are not brought into relation to God, has been greatly obscured in the history of Christian thought by a common distinction made between knowledge of natural things and knowledge of heavenly things. It is often presented as though Christians and non-Christians would then be different only in that the former, in addition to knowing earthly things also know heavenly things, while the latter know earthly things only. Even Calvin, though by his doctrine of “common grace” he was in a much better position to do justice to the knowledge of non-Christian science without succumbing to it than others were, did not bring out with sufficient clearness at all times that the natural man is as blind as a mole with respect to natural things as well as with respect to spiritual things. We say that he did not at all times bring out this point with sufficient clearness. He does sometimes, and we may even say usually, bring out that the natural man is spiritually blind with respect to everything. The mechanical separation between earthly things and heavenly things so often found has almost disappeared from Calvin’s writings. Yet on occasion when he is trying hard to bring specific content into the notion that the natural man has certain knowledge with respect to the universe which is good as far as it goes, he falls back on the old distinction without criticizing it. To quote: “The distinction is, that we have one kind of intelligence of earthly things, and another of heavenly things. By earthly things, I mean those which relate, not to God and his kingdom, to true righteousness and blessedness, but have some connection with the present life, and are, in a manner, confined within its boundaries. By heavenly things I mean the true knowledge of God, the method of true righteousness, and the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom.”[8]

When, however, this distinction, which Calvin in common with many others makes in this connection, is read in its context, it will be seen that Calvin by no means countenances the notion that the natural man does know even the physical world truly. This is clear (a) from the fact that Calvin speaks of all the knowledge of the natural man as vanity, and (b) from the fact that when he ascribes to the natural man a certain ability to know "inferior" or earthly things, in that same sense he also ascribes to him ability to know "superior objects." The distinction of the natural man is not primarily one of territory; his distinction is primarily that of a blurred and wholly unsatisfactory knowledge on the part of the non-regenerate man and the true knowledge of the regenerate man. He first speaks of Solomon's pronouncing all the studies of man as being vain. This includes everything. It includes inferior as well as superior objects. Then he adds: "Still however, man's efforts are not always so utterly fruitless as not to lead to some result, especially when his attention is directed to inferior objects. Nay, even with regard to superior objects, though he is more careless in investigating them, he makes some little progress. Here, however, his ability is more limited, and he is never made more sensible of his weakness than when he attempts to soar above the sphere of the present life."[9]

From this quotation we can see that what Calvin is really driving at is to point out that though all of the natural man's interpretations are from an ultimate point of view equally unsatisfactory, there is a sense in which he knows something about everything, about God as well as about the world, and that in this sense he knows more about the world than about God. This distinction is not only true, but important to make. Many non-Christians have been great scientists. Often non-Christians have a better knowledge of the things of this world than Christians have.

It is important to keep these things in mind, in view of the all too common practice on the part of Christian apologists to make a hard and fast distinction between the field of religion and the field of science. The assumption of this division is that as Christians we need only to claim that we know about heavenly things, and that scientists, whether Christians or non-Christians, know about earthly things. In this way, apologists hope to gain a free territory for religion. It is obvious, however, that such an attempt is foredoomed to failure. Non-Christian scientists cannot study the phenomenal world without some reference to the noumenal. And this is true when ministers secretly, if not openly, conceding their ability to speak on

ultimate matters, ask them whether science has discovered God. Nothing is so evident from the writings of scientists today as the fact that they are constantly making statements about and drawing conclusions about the noumenal world on the ground of their studies of the phenomenal world which they are first supposed to have undertaken without reference to the noumenal world. They are constantly speaking about the nature of Reality as a whole. On the other hand it is equally true that our religion is not confined to information about the noumenal world without reference to the phenomenal world. Christianity says something very definite about the phenomenal world, both as to its origin and as to its destiny. The only distinction that will really help us is the one that Calvin developed, namely, that from an ultimate point of view the natural man knows nothing truly, but that from a relative point of view he knows something about all things. He knows all things after a fashion, and his fashion is best when he deals with earthly things such as electricity, etc.

Paul assures us in Romans that all men know God. Calvin calls this knowledge the sense of deity. All men at bottom knew that theism is the only true interpretation of life. But it is precisely this knowledge which they do their best to repress in the actual self-conscious efforts that they make at interpreting human experience. And it is of these systems of their own interpretation that we speak when we say that men are as wrong in their interpretation of trees as in their interpretation of God.

C. Revelation About Nature from God—Theologico—Physics

Before the fall, it was through the direct positive revelation of God with respect to nature and himself that man learned the highest and final purposes with respect to both. It was through the direct positive revelation of God that man learned the fact that he should die if he ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree, with the implication that he should live forever with God if he would obey the voice of God. This highest revelation with respect to nature and man set all the other knowledge that man had of nature and himself into a new and more brilliant light. It made of nature the setting for the highest moral activities of God with respect to man. After the fall this signifies that man ought never to seek to interpret nature apart from God’s revelation in Scripture. God speaking in Scripture is now the equivalent of

God speaking supernaturally to man in paradise. If even in paradise man was meant to interpret nature in terms of self, and both in the light of the supernatural communication of God's thoughts with respect to the course of history as a whole, how much the more should man as sinner seek to understand nature in relation to self and to this self as interpreted in Scripture.

The idea of theologico-physics is naturally the object of great ridicule on the part of non-Christian scientists. To them the idea that one must interpret nature in terms of and in subordination to scriptural revelation is to give up scientific or rational inquiry altogether. Non-Christian investigators of nature are as successful as they are because they work with stolen capital.

Roman Catholicism has been unwilling to submit the study of nature to the light of Scripture in any consistently Christian way. The result has been either that there has been no harmony between Roman Catholic science and Roman Catholic theology or that the harmony has been accomplished at the price of the reduction of its theology to suit the naturalistic pattern of its science.

It is highly unfortunate that the Reformation principle has not been carried through with any great consistency in many Protestant circles. The scientific study of nature has all too frequently been carried on, even by avowedly Protestant scholars, as though they could stand on neutral ground with non-believers and simply study the facts of nature. It is then forgotten that in the study of nature the basic question is as to what the facts of nature are, or, to put it otherwise, what the facts are about the "facts." Every student of nature approaches the task of a description of nature and its facts in terms of the presuppositions of a philosophy of fact. The Christian can obtain his philosophy of fact from no other source than Scripture.

Note. That the Protestant principle so fully stated by Calvin is not generally employed by Fundamentalists is only too evident in much of the literature of today. A recent example is the book of Professor Bernard Ramm entitled *Problems in Christian Apologetics*. His thesis is "that the modern foe of Christianity is naturalism. Naturalism is the effort to explain the universe in terms of itself, i.e., with no recourse to such an idea as God, spirit, or teleology."[10] Naturalism, he says, denies the "spiritual interpretation of the world and man."[11] Yet, "there are philosophers and scientists—Carr, Jeans, Eddington, Millikan, Compton—who insist that modern science calls for a spiritual interpretation of nature."[12] But surely

the “spiritual” interpretations of nature given by men just mentioned is as exclusive of God as are the interpretations given by the “naturalists” in a narrower sense.

Failure to see this fact involves a compromise with the naturalistic principle. No Christian can escape facing the fact that many non-Christian scientists have discovered much truth about nature. If he does not explain this fact with Calvin by virtually saying that this is true in spite of their immanentistic view of life and because of the fact that they cannot help but work with the “borrowed” capital of Christianity, then he must grant that the naturalist is partially right. Speaking of the Christian, Ramm says, “He does not deny the naturalistic explanation completely.”[13], and that in spite of the fact that naturalism is said to explain nature without God. There is no escape from such compromise unless one makes the claim that only in terms of the God of the Scripture can science do its work.

[1] *Institutes*, Book 1, Chap. 5, 1.
[2] 1, 5, 2.
[3] 1, 5, 11, 12.
[4] 1, 5, 12.
[5] 1, 5, 12.
[6] 1, 5, 3.
[7] 2, 5, 77.
[8] *Institutes*, Bk. 2, Ch. 2, 13.
[9] 2, 2, 13.
[10] p. 54.
[11] p. 611.
[12] p. 681.
[13] p. 67.

Chapter 8: Present General Revelation About Man

A. Revelation About Man from Nature—Physico-Psychology

Coming now to the question of general revelation after the entrance of sin with respect to man and, more particularly, to what sinful man might learn about himself from nature, we need only to turn about what we have said with respect to what sinful man could learn about nature from the study of himself. Nature was, as a matter of fact, created for man and man for God. Man may, accordingly, even after the fall learn a good deal about himself from the study of nature. Both nature and himself are created and sustained by God. Both nature and himself are, because of the fall, subject to the curse of God. Both nature and himself are being influenced by the non-saving grace of God. Any really fruitful study of human life individually and collectively will, accordingly, need to be taken up as a part of the whole of cosmic history, as this cosmic history is studied in the light of God its creator and Christ its redeemer.

It is this that the sinner is unwilling to do. When man sinned, he tried to interpret all his relationships in an exclusively immanentistic fashion. Hence he also tried to draw conclusions about himself and especially about his future from the laws of nature, assuming that these laws of nature function as sufficient to themselves. The arguments of Socrates with respect to immortality are classic on this point. Socrates first tried to see if he was warranted in drawing the conclusion that his soul was immortal by his study of the rise and decay that he observed everywhere in nature. He saw that the body of man perished. Would the soul outlive the body? He took for granted that the body would never rise again. This he held because to him nature as it is now is normal. His conclusion was that he could not tell for certain. Then he tried to reason on the ground of the notion that the soul participated in the nature of the idea of life which, together with other ideas, he thought of as eternal. Unfortunately, however, he found that there is evil in the soul, and that this evil seems, therefore, also to have an eternal original. Hence the soul would, even when in the upper realm, still be at variance with

itself, and therefore could not be expected to stand. So here, too, there was nothing but uncertainty. And this uncertainty only increased when, in the third place, he tried to bring his eternal and his temporal worlds closer together again by thinking of them as having always existed together in unison with one another. In that case too there was no telling what might happen in the future.

This argument of Plato is typical of all non-Christian speculation as to what man may learn about himself from nature. The argument is immanentistic. Yet the fact that men have argued about immortality on the ground of their knowledge of the laws of nature shows that they have sensed something of the fact that there is a connection between nature and man, and that their fortunes go up and down together. Men ought to conclude from the wrath of God displayed in nature, and therefore upon the body of man as part of nature, that they live by grace. Instead of that, their actual conclusions have been that they need no grace and may look for an explanation of things within the universe itself. Yet, even so, they have not been satisfied with their own explanations, and by this fact testify that the only true explanation must be from above. In addition to that, in their explanation there have been elements of truth, inasmuch as they have recognized that somehow nature itself, and man as part of nature must be connected with the ideal world if there is to be knowledge with respect to either.

B. Revelation About Man from Man—Psychology Proper

On the question as to what the sinner should and does know about himself from a study of himself, we can do no better than to state first what Calvin has said on this matter, in order then to add some further remarks. Calvin's first book of the *Institutes* is the church's great classic on this question, as it is on the question of the knowledge of God that man should obtain from a study of nature.

The first point of importance to note is that Calvin, in the first chapter of his first book begins the whole discussion of his *Institutes* by bringing forward the conception of the close connection between man's knowledge of himself and of God. We quote the first lines of his book: "Our wisdom in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost

entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as those are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes, and gives birth to the other. For, in the first place, no man can survey himself without forthwith turning his thoughts toward God in whom he lives and moves; because it is perfectly obvious, that the endowments which we possess cannot possibly be from ourselves, nay, that our very being is nothing else than subsistence in God alone."

From this quotation, certain things are clear. Calvin never did start a chain of reasoning about man's nature and destiny by taking man by himself. He did not start with man as with an ultimate starting point. Calvin did start with a general *a priori* position. His position is as radically opposed to that of Descartes as it is to that of Hume. Most apologetic writers who have come after Calvin have allowed themselves to be influenced unduly by Cartesian philosophy on this matter. Calvin recognized fully that if man is to have true knowledge of himself he must regard God as original and himself as derivative. He did not place God and man as correlatives next to one another, but he recognized from the outset two levels of existence and two levels of interpretation, on the one hand the divine and eternal, and on the other hand the human or temporal. To him it is perfectly obvious that the endowments that we possess are not of ourselves, but of God. Hence he says that" not a particle of light, or wisdom, or justice, or power, or rectitude, or genuine truth, will anywhere be found, which does not flow from him: and of which he is not the cause …"[1]

It is this thought of Calvin, rooted as it is in the Scriptural doctrines of creation and providence, that we tried to express in the previous chapter by saying that originally man was able to see the true state of affairs with respect to his own thought. He saw himself as a re-interpreter of God's interpretation. But now the question is as to what remained of all this after the entrance of sin into the world. Of this Calvin speaks in the third chapter of his first book. We quote the first paragraph of this chapter: "That there exists in the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct some sense of Deity, we hold to be beyond dispute, since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead, the memory of which he constantly renews and occasionally enlarges, that all men being aware that there is a God, and that he is their

Maker, may be condemned by their own conscience when they neither worship him nor consecrate their lives to his service."

A little later he adds: "All men of sound judgment will therefore hold, that a sense of Deity is indelibly engraven on the human heart. And that this belief is naturally engendered in all, and thoroughly fixed as it were in our very bones, is strikingly attested by the contumacy of the wicked, who, though they struggle furiously, are unable to extricate themselves from the fear of God. Though Diagoras, and others of like stamp, make themselves merry with whatever has been believed in all ages concerning religion, and Dionysius scoffs at the judgment of heaven, it is but a Sardonian grin; for the worm of conscience, keener than burning steel, is gnawing within them."[2]

Still a little further, he adds: "Moreover, if all are born and live for the express purpose of learning to know God, and if the knowledge of God, in so far as it fails to produce this effect, is fleeting and vain, it is clear that all those who do not direct the whole thoughts and actions of their lives to this end fail to fulfil the law of their being."[3]

In the fourth chapter he speaks of the seed of religion (*semen religionis*) that is divinely sown in all.[4] Again in the fifth chapter, he brings the seed of religion that is sown in man into contact with the revelation of God in nature and then says with respect to them both: "His essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought; but on each of his works his glory is engraven in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as his excuse."[5]

The question Calvin is here asking himself is not, first of all what use men have actually made of the material that was within their reach. His primary purpose is to show what was available of the revelation of God to sinful man. He tells us what they should have known and should have done because of the revelation that God had given them. To quote again: "But herein appears the shameful ingratitude of man. Though they have in their own persons a factory where innumerable operations of God are carried on, and a magazine stored with treasures of inestimable value … instead of bursting forth into praise, as they are bound to do, they, on the contrary, are the more inflated and swelled with pride. They feel how wonderfully God is working in them, and their own experience tells them of the vast variety of his gifts which they owe to his liberality. Whether they will or not, they

cannot but know that these are proofs of his Godhead, and yet they inwardly suppress them."[6]

And because of this great and beautiful display of the Creator in his created universe, Calvin holds it to be the basest ingratitude when men suppress within themselves the knowledge that they should have of God, if they would only look within themselves. He says: "At this day, however, the earth sustains on her bosom many monster minds … minds which are not afraid to employ the seed of Deity deposited in human nature as a means of suppressing the name of God. Can anything be more detestable than this madness in man, who, finding God a hundred times both in his body and in his soul, makes his excellence in this respect a pretext for denying that there is a God."[7]

We have then, so far, the following: There is actually displayed in man as well as round about man, and even more definitely in man than round about man (a) the fact of God's creation of this world. (b) the fact of the providence of God over this world; and (c) the glory and munificence of God displayed in this world. All this was originally displayed in the world, and is still, even after sin's entrance, displayed in the world. Scripture on which this teaching is based in particular as it pertains to man in distinction from nature is found in such passages as John 1:9: "There was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world." Similarly, Romans 1:19: "Because that which may be known of God was manifest in them" (Rom 1:19). Man is and remains God's self-conscious creature. It was in the activity of the mind of man that God's revelation in the created universe originally found its highest climax. This is still the case. The created personality is the highest manifestation of the personality of God. Hence, in the very activity of his own personality, man is placed before the clearest manifestation of the truth with respect to himself, apart from redemptive revelation.

Moreover, in the activity of man's consciousness, man's mind is brought into the most immediate contact with the truth about himself. It is this which Calvin seeks to bring out by saying that man has a sense of Deity, and that there is within his very make-up the seed of religion. Calvin wants to say that before man has drawn any self-conscious conclusion, he has in himself an intuition of the truth. Theologians have spoken of this as innate (*insita*) knowledge in distinction from acquired knowledge. To be sure, the distinction is usually introduced in connection with the question as to what

man can know about God by analysis of himself, that is, in the discussion of rational theology; but it holds equally well with respect to man's first consciousness of himself.

Dr. Hepp has worked out the thought of Calvin by saying that in respect to the question in hand we must first think of the work of the Logos. It is through the Logos that God has created the world. Then we must think of the work of the Spirit as the active agent in displaying the work of the Logos. After that, we must introduce the general testimony of the Spirit which testifies to the spirit of man with respect to the truth of the general revelation. It is only after this that we arrive at the question of man's reaction to the revelation about and within him.

In the *sensus deitatis*, then, we find a welling up within the consciousness of man an immediate awareness of the fact that God is the creator and sustainer of this world. The question is as to whether it is also indicative of man's attitude with respect to revelation. We believe it to be in line with Calvin's best thought to say that he thinks of it as primarily revelatory. But there is no temporal precedence of the revelational over the reaction to revelation. As soon as man is conscious he is also self-conscious; and as soon as he is self-conscious he is a covenant breaker. Sinful man does all he can to keep down this thing which he so utterly dislikes. The recognition of its presence is, to be sure, involved. Man can never be confronted with the revelation of God without reacting to it. But his own reaction is here contemplated from the point that it too is revelatory of God to man. Using the terms subjective and objective instead of revelatory and reaction, we have the following: All of God's revelation to man through the human mind is psychologically subjective. But this fact does not reduce the objective character of the revelation of God to man. Besides, man's reaction to this psychologically subjective but none the less objective revelation is ethically subjective. Even so there is no reduction of the objectivity of God's revelation to man.

If we make clear that the *sensus deitatis* is primarily revelatory, we can approach a biblical evaluation of the question of intuitions. We may identify these intuitions with the sense of deity, and consider them as merely revelatory of God. If we regard them thus we can rightfully think of them as an involuntary welling up of truth within man in spite of his sinful nature. On the other hand, we may think of these intuitions as the first spontaneous moral and intellectual reactions of man to the revelation within and about

him. If we regard them thus, then we cannot regard them as inherently any less sinful than man's reasoning processes. In both cases, we deal with a psychological activity on the part of man, but this psychological activity, insofar as it is the activity of a creature of God, cannot help but display the Creator; while insofar as it is the activity of a sinner, it cannot help but display man's hatred of the Creator.

We should, however, be on our guard not to make too much of the distinction between unconscious or preconscious and self-conscious action. Scottish Realism (as also Hepp) and the theology based upon it, has made too much of this distinction. It has often spoken as though intuition were something quite different from and something more elemental than ratiocination. This, we believe, is not the case. There is a sense in which intuition is more to be trusted than reasoning inasmuch as it is more immediate and therefore does not offer as large an area for the encroachment of error as does ratiocination. In itself, however, reasoning is nothing but self-conscious intuition, and intuition is nothing but unconscious reasoning. Therefore the one is not inherently more or less valid than the other. That this is true can best be seen if we realize that before man had sinned there could not possibly be any distinction as to relative validity between intuition and reasoning. Both intuition and reasoning were then equally valid. On the other hand, we cannot say that reason was perverted by sin, while intuition was not. Reason, to be sure, because of its greater extensiveness, errs more often and more violently than does intuition. Yet, inherently, reason has not been affected by sin any worse than has intuition. There is not one spot in the personality of man that has not been vitiated by sin.

Just as in the case of nature, the revelation of God in man has been made more complex because of the wrath of God displayed against the sin of man. For, just as the personality of man is in itself the highest peak of the revelation of God in the created universe, so also the wrath of God reveals itself most intensely upon that which was highest. *Corruptio optima pessima est*. We are told particularly by Paul that the wrath of God was revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man. If the wrath of God came down like a shower upon the whole of creation, we may say that it poured down with a particular violence upon the soul of man that had sinned. The point at which there is the most glorious display of the evidence of God as creator and bountiful benefactor is, at the same

time, the point at which there is the most intensified concentration of the wrath of God. All of the wrath of God upon the whole creation is focused at this point. There where the water was deepest, it has also been troubled most deeply by the lash of the wrath of God.

It is impossible to say with exactitude and in detail in what ways the wrath of God appears on man himself. We can only suggest a few matters. In the first place, the fact that the body of man was weakened made of it a poor tool for the service of the soul of man. Man's knowledge of nature depends to a large extent upon the keenness of his sensations. Though we marvel that in his non-saving grace God has left to man such a large measure of ability in this respect, it is all too apparent that man is constantly making mistakes in his observations of the universe around him. Man's eye and ear and all his senses have been greatly weakened through the effects of sin. When we marvel at the genius of the few, we at the same time bewail the absence of the same power in the many. Even the great in this field have great weaknesses too.

As to the result of sin with respect to the soul proper, we may see something of this by comparing the knowledge of man with the knowledge of evil spirits. Scripture tells us that Satan and his hosts were created perfect. Satan originally tried to dethrone God and has tried this throughout the ages. Yet, in the nature of the case, he can never succeed in doing this. God would not be God if he could be dethroned. Accordingly, Satan's knowledge appears as false. He has made and continues to make logical deductions about reality that are untrue to reality. Satan managed to have Christ crucified in order to destroy him. Did he not know that by the crucifixion of Christ his own kingdom would be destroyed? So we see that though, on the one hand, Satan's power of ingenuity is great, he constantly frustrates himself in his purposes; he is constantly mistaken in his knowledge of reality.

In a similar way, the mind of man has been under the curse of God since the entrance of sin. The entrance of sin involved a false interpretation of reality. Man thought that he, though a creature, could actually become as God the creator. This was a serious miscalculation. It was but to be expected that when man once fell into sin his power of true interpretation would, from an absolute point of view, disappear altogether. No sinner can interpret reality aright. This is the first point to keep in mind in this connection. It will not do to separate the logical powers of man from his

moral powers and say that though man is morally unwilling to serve God, he can intellectually know God aright. It is true, of course, that when Cain left the face of the Lord, he in a sense knew God just as well as he knew him just before. It is true also that there is a sense in which Satan knows God now as well as he knew God before he fell, in a sense, Satan knows God better now than before. Did not God prove the truth of his statements to Satan thousands of times? But herein exactly lies the contradiction of Satan's personality that though he knows God he yet does not really know God. His very intellect is constantly devising schemes by which he thinks he may overthrow God, while he knows all too well that God cannot be overthrown. What else can this be but a manifestation of the wrath of God? Yes, it was the natural consequence of sin, but this is itself the wrath of God, that sin should be allowed to run its course.

In like manner, too, man's thought since the entrance of sin has been characterized by self-frustration. It is quite true that the sinner was able to accumulate a great deal of knowledge, after a fashion. Though his body as tool with which he had to obtain much of his knowledge was weakened, and though his logical powers themselves were weakened, as he sees with his own eyes constantly when he makes false conclusions about matters of fact in the physical world, yet, in spite of all this, man has been able to know a great deal. The laws of logic as God had created them in the universe were not broken by sin, but man's ability to use them rightly was weakened, and still it is true that in his logical interpretation man has, in the form of the matter, come very close to the truth. This is the first point to note when we say that man's knowledge has been characterized by self-frustration.

It has often been pointed out that the systems of interpretation of reality made by non-Christian philosophers are very similar in form to the system of truth as Christianity believes in it. We have no desire to obscure this fact. It is exactly what we should expect. As Satan himself must have become increasingly convinced that God is God in the sense that he is absolute, and therefore can never be dethroned, so also many philosophers who have like Plato, "lost themselves in their round globe," have increasingly felt that, unless there be an absolute God, there can be no interpretation of life. As a result of this negative conviction, the form of the natural man's interpretation of reality has often been very similar to the truth. Of this the idealist tradition in philosophy is the best proof. It is necessary indeed to

point out constantly that the idealist system of philosophy is formally much better than is the pragmatist system. Just as it is not at all a matter of indifference whether a man be a murderer or a respectable citizen, even though from the point of view of Christianity both will be lost forever unless brought to Christ, so it is not a matter of indifference whether a man have a high or a low form of non-Christian interpretation. It is true that a man who misses a train by a minute has missed it as well as the one who has missed it by an hour, yet we give a great deal more credit to the man who missed it only by a minute than to the man who missed it by an hour. We rejoice when men are "not far from the kingdom of heaven" even though they are not in the kingdom. But all this only brings out the more strikingly the fact that the sinner's knowledge frustrates itself. Knowing God as well as he does, that is, coming-in the form of his interpretation so near to the truth, he yet refuses to accept the truth in its full significance. It is of this self-frustration that Paul speaks particularly in Romans 1:18–21: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness: because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested it to them. For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse: because that, knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither gave thanks; but became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened."Rom 1:18–21

We shall not attempt to give an exegesis of this most difficult passage. It may suffice to call attention to the following matters. In the first place we observe that Paul says that men do actually in some sense see the truth. We do not do justice to this passage by merely saying that all men or most men believe in a_ god or believe that God probably exists. Paul says that the revelation of the only existing God is so clearly imprinted upon man himself and upon his environment that no matter how hard he tries he cannot suppress this fact. As psychologically active self-conscious creatures they must see something of the truth. They hold down the truth, to be sure, but it is the truth that they hold down. Nor is it that this truth is objectively placed before them only in nature and in the make-up of man. It is, to be sure, on this that Paul does lay the emphasis. But knowledge is also in man in the sense that his subjective reaction to that which he sees show s some

acquaintance with the truth. The invisible things of God are perceived (*kathoratai*). Knowing God (*knontes ton theon*), they have not glorified God. In the second place, it is primarily in this fact that men know and do not live up to what they know that Paul sees the greatest folly. Though they knew God, yet they glorified him not. They hold down the truth that is in them as well as round about them. It is in this immediate connection that Paul speaks of the revelation of God's wrath. He says that God's wrath is displayed on men just because they hold down the truth in unrighteousness. It is true that God's wrath is displayed on whatever form unrighteousness may take, but it is specifically mentioned here that God displays his wrath because men hold down the truth.

If we keep these things in mind, we shall be the better able to see what Scripture teaches with respect to the knowledge that man should find by the study of himself. As far as the intellectual aspect of the matter is concerned, we have now the following factors: In the first place, the body of man is, since the entrance of sin, in a weakened condition. In the second place, the functions of the soul are weakened. In the third place, and in spite of this, the invisible things of God, that is the nature of God, his power and divinity, are still displayed in man as well as round about him, in the fact of the self-conscious activity of his person, in his own negative moral reaction to the revelation about and within him, in his sense of dissatisfaction with all non-theistic interpretations, and in a measure of involuntary recognition of the truth of the theistic interpretation as the true interpretation of the origin of the world. In spite of all this, man has not accepted for himself what he himself must admit to be the true interpretation of the origin of the world. In this respect man's knowledge is characterized by the same folly that marks Satan's knowledge of God. The first act of man's antitheistic interpretation consisted in the attempt on his part to be something that he knew he could not be. It is this folly that man has carried on through the ages, and it is this that still makes sin so foolish. And it is upon this foolishness that Paul says that the wrath of God is revealed.

This revelation is (a) partly objective to man in the narrow sense of being outside his person, as is the case with revelation in nature (b) partly subjective to man in the narrow sense of consisting of his psychological constitution, and (c) partly subjective in the sense of consisting of his own involuntary ethical approval or disapproval (conscience). Over against that which is thus objective (1. outside man, 2. within man psychologically, 3.

within man as involuntary ethical relation) we call that “subjective” which gives expression self-consciously, even if not with full consistency, to what that sinner as sinner does with that which comes to him objectively. As sinner, he seeks to suppress the objective revelation of God within him.

It is difficult to know just what Paul means by this revelation of God’s wrath on the folly of man. We may sense something of his meaning, it would seem, if we think again of a man far removed in time from Adam. He would have before him the endless repetition of the folly of man’s interpretations.

He would have before him those things of which Calvin speaks when he says that the Epicureans concluded from the diversity of interpretations given by philosophers that no interpretation could be true. The folly of man has devised all manner of seemingly plausible interpretations. This fact in itself would complicate matters for anyone who came long after Adam. And this would constitute a manifestation of God’s wrath.

Here we should again bring in the fact of the non-saving grace of God. In the case of Satan, the folly of his interpretation appears very clear. In the case of the sinner, however, we have a mixed situation. Through God’s nonsaving grace, the wrath of God on the sinner has been mitigated in this life. This appears along the whole line of man’s interests. It appears along the line of man’s physical life. Man is given an abundance of food and drink. It is shown in the fact that man’s body, though weakened, is even so, particularly in some instances, a usable tool for the soul of man. It is shown in the fact that man’s mind is not fully and exclusively bent upon evil. Though basically man is at enmity against God so that he is prone to hate God and his neighbor, this enmity against God does not come to full expression in this life. He is not a finished product.

We can readily see that all these matters, taken together, produce a very complex situation. There are three main things to be taken into consideration. In the first place, we must think of what was the original situation in paradise and what remained of this after the fall of man. In the second place, we must think of the wrath of God and the great complexity that this introduced into the situation. In the third place we must think of non-saving grace and, especially, of the great civilization that has flourished by it as a means.

Under the first head, we have the fact that man’s rationality is, as a matter of fact, a creation of God. When man tries to make of himself an

ultimate instead of a proximate starting point in knowledge, he somehow feels that he is doing something that he cannot do and that he ought not to try to do. Under the second head, we have the fact that man's mind is, as a matter of fact, now that sin has entered into it, abnormal. When man acts as though his mind were normal, he frustrates himself, and he senses something of this self-frustration. He somehow feels that his ideal of absolute comprehension in knowledge is a false ideal. Under the third head, we have the fact that, in spite of the fact that man has tried to set himself up as a metaphysically ultimate starting point, and in spite of the fact that he considers his mind to be normal, he has been able to do as much as he has. He ought to recognize the fact, says Calvin, that he lives by grace.

The highest point of revelation outside of Scripture as it is found after the entrance of sin is just this point, that, together with the objective clarity of all these matters comes the fact that men, in some sense, at bottom recognize them to be true. The truth, as it were, penetrates into men's minds against their will and in spite of themselves. The whole matter is admirably summed up in the statement of Ovid: "*Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*" (I see the better and approve, the worse I follow).

That this is the case appears even more clearly if we consider for a moment what man ought to learn from the study of his own moral consciousness. Here too the first fact is that his consciousness is as a matter of fact a derivative and not an ultimate moral standard. And the sinner somehow feels that if he sets himself up as God, judging good and evil, there is something wrong. He feels that he needs a moral absolute outside himself. The second fact is that man is abnormal in his moral judgments. Of this fact, too, the sinner has some consciousness. He admits that wrong moral action is common among men. He feels something of the fact that if moral evil be thought of as being ultimate in the universe, there is no morality possible at all. In the third place, he feels something of the fact that all the morality there is in this world must somehow exist by virtue of the ultimate victory of the Good which exists in metaphysical priority to evil. He senses something of the fact that if he is to have life, he must somehow participate in the nature of the "ideal world." All these things he sees and thus knows the truth after a fashion. In spite of all this, man sins, and thus sins against better knowledge, Paul says on this point: "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Rom 1:32).

Note here that what Paul speaks of in Romans as the revelation of God in nature and man, both as to his intellectual and his moral aspects, is fully corroborated in other portions of Scripture. We mention only a few passages especially in connection with the results of sin on the mind of man.

We are not here concerned with the blindness of the natural man as such, but only with that blindness as it illustrates the nature of the light against which it had sinned. If a man is only to be pitied, we suppose that he has not had any great opportunities, but if a man is condemned and is called a fool, it must be that he has had great opportunities. Hence the fact itself that Scripture speaks of man as a fool shows that Scripture considers the light that he had as being very great.

According to the Psalmist the fool saith in his heart that there is no God. Ps 14 Jeremiah says that every man is brutish in his knowledge (Jer 10:14). In the New Testament, Jesus says to the scribes and Pharisees, who had sinned against the revelation that they had, that they were fools and blind. Paul says to the Ephesians: “See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise” (Eph 5:15). Peter speaks of silencing the ignorance of foolish men (1 Pt 2:15).

C. Revelation About Man from God—Theologico-Psychology

With respect to the revelation that man might obtain about himself directly from God, we have to remember the following points: In the first place, it is a fact that man in paradise did get such information, and that it was to him of the highest significance. This revelation pertained particularly to the highest reaches of development that God had in store for man. The tradition of this naturally carried on, and man was responsible for it. In the second place, this revelation was originally given as a supplement to the revelation that God had directly deposited in nature and in man. Together they brought to Adam the knowledge of the whole plan of God with respect to man. From reflection on the created universe as such, therefore, man could not have learned the full plan for him, especially as it pertained to his future. In fact it would have been impossible for man in paradise to study nature out of relation to the special supernatural communication of God with respect to it. Revelation in nature is but a limiting concept, a concept incomplete without its correlative as found in supernatural communication.

After the entrance of sin, the supernatural revelation of God to man ceased. It was only through the tradition of it that it lived on at all. This tradition was undoubtedly very clear at first. Cain knew it as well as Abel. But, because the natural man is at enmity against God, he perverted this tradition rapidly. Accordingly, the generations that came thousands of years later had nothing but a greatly obscured tradition, if they had any tradition at all. The obscuration due to sin was, in this instance, much greater than it was in the case of the revelation in nature and in man. This point will come up again when we deal with the necessity of special revelation. We discuss it at this point for the purpose of bringing before our minds as complete as possible a picture of the totality of revelation with which the natural man is brought into contact. In the w hole of this picture, it is not to be forgotten that even originally man required more than nature and his consciousness could give him if he was to know about his entire destiny and interpret nature and himself correctly in terms of this destiny.

In the history of philosophy, we can see something of the way in which this revelation from God to man about himself has been used. The myth conception of Plato’s philosophy is very instructive on this point. As Paul Elmer More has pointed out, Plato sought to solve the problems of life first of all by philosophy and, if he failed there, he would turn to mythology and theology as a second best. This shows that what was once of the highest moment to man is now relegated to something of less significance. That which once was received as bearing the greatest possible authority, inasmuch as it bore the direct impress of God, is now relegated to something that is uncertain, and may be accepted or rejected, as one sees best. The reason for this is that man, in his speculations about himself and his own future, has bound himself more closely to the universe than to God. In the arguments for immortality as conducted by Socrates, the greatest importance is attached to what can be ascertained to be laws working in the universe. This is so when the question is asked, in an empirical fashion, as to what can be known of the future of the human soul. It is no less true when Plato appeals to the ideal world, and, in that sense, shows that there must be a higher interpretation if man’s problems are to be solved at all. He looks upon this ideal world as one consisting of impersonal principles. Even when Plato binds the soul to the ideal world, he does not bind the soul to God.

It is true, as is sometimes pointed out, that Plato did finally give up his other arguments, and did finally say that the immortality of the soul depended upon the will of God. It should be remembered, however, that Plato's God was not the God whom we as Christians can believe in. Plato's God was himself dependent upon the Ideas. It is this fact that takes all theism out of the statement of Plato that the immortality of the soul depends upon the will of God. Moreover, the God in whom Plato believes is himself limited by evil that exists in independence of himself. This fact proves that Plato's God is really an exclusively immanentistic God. Thus, in the last analysis, the soul of man is bound up with the earth rather than with God, if by God we mean the true God.

For this reason, too, speculations of Plato about the future of the human soul do not bring the soul before the judgment seat of an absolute God. There is, to be sure, a difference made—in the literature not only of Plato, but of other non-Christian writers—between the more wicked and the less wicked. This difference is, however, one that pertains to the distance that one can get away from certain circumstances that are inevitable in the universe. And what is most significant is the fact that the utopias of man do not center about the personal God, but are descriptive of improved conditions which may, in the last analysis, be quite independent of God.

The Platonic myth further points to the fact that, though relegated to a lower place, the idea of a revelation from above is not altogether cast aside. It shows once more that man has not been able to solve his problems when he has bound up his soul with the universe, and, in particular, with the universe as it has fallen into sin. So, also, in the Eygptian literature we have a considerable emphasis upon the fact of a future judgment. In this future judgment the gods play an important part. Men have felt something of the fact that righteousness and justice must in the end prevail. As far as their immanentistic principles are concerned, they have not made provision for the ultimate triumph of righteousness. They have made evil as original and therefore as ultimate as the good. On this basis, there is logically no reason to expect that the good will be ultimately victorious over the evil. In spite of this, men have dreamed dreams in which all unrighteousness should be put down. The fact that they still dream such dreams is in itself significant. The evolutionary optimism, the socialistic dreams of pragmatic philosophers, indicate what the books of the dead did in the case of the Egyptians with equal logical validity, but also with equal significance from the point of

view of the meaning of human life. Even in modern times when the immanentistic principle has been more fearlessly and more consistently applied than in ancient times, men cannot find final rest within the universe alone. Unless man may study himself in the light of God, there is no hope for him.

That even Reformed philosophers and theologians do not always make full use of the riches found in Calvin's *Institutes* may be briefly pointed out by a reference to the work of Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian Philosophy of Education*. He says that the position of the atheist and pantheist in actually or virtually denying that there is a creator is untenable. If a discoverer of an uninhabited island were to search its confines for a particular form of animal life he might fail to find it. "He could not be sure, however, that the particular animal had never lived on the island, because, even though the search had been diligent, still tomorrow the remains might be discovered. Similarly, it is clear that no finite amount of searching could rationally lead one to deny the existence of God. During the time of the atheist's investigation of this earth, it just might be that God was hiding on the other side of the moon, and if some rocket should take the atheist to the moon, there is no reason to hold that God might not go over to Jupiter—for the express purpose of inconveniencing the atheist."[8] But a God who can thus escape to the moon or to Jupiter is not inconveniencing the atheist at all. On the contrary, he shows himself to be so finite, so insignificant, that the atheist can cover the whole earth without being confronted by him. This is the exact reverse of the teaching of Calvin, based on Paul, that God is divinity and power, being always and everywhere so obviously present that he who says there is no God is a fool. The foolishness of the denial of the creator lies precisely in the fact that this creator confronts man in every fact so that no fact has any meaning for man except it be seen as God's creation.

In his book *Notes on the Doctrine of God*, Carl F. F. Henry follows an approach similar to that of Clark. Though admitting in a note[9] that from a biblical point of view the "fool" is entitled to no comfort, he starts out his first chapter under the heading, "Giving the Fool Some Comfort," with the following words: "The case £or the existence of God is not so obvious that it cannot be doubted …"[10] In the note referred to this is said to be a "temporary acceptance of his approach" presumably for pedagogical purposes. In the text this "temporary acceptance" turns out to be a

permanent acceptance of the validity of the non-believer's immanentistic method at least in the "phenomenal" realm of experience. Henry is careful not to introduce his God so as to inconvenience the scientist even at the outset of his career. The scientist is not to be molested though he works with an exclusively immanentistic method.

[1] 1, 2, 2.
[2] 1, 3, 3.
[3] 1, 3, 3.
[4] 1, 4, 1.
[5] 1, 5, 1.
[6] 1, 5, 4.
[7] 1, 5, 4.
[8] p. 44.
[9] p. 72.
[10] p. 23.

Chapter 9: Present General Revelation About God

We must now bring together all that we have said so far concerning revelation about nature and revelation about man in order to see that all this is also revelation about God. It has been pointed out that we cannot know nature truly, and man truly, unless we know God truly. It was, we saw, due to the fact that nature and man are actually created and sustained by God that man could have any knowledge about either of these two. It was because the wrath of God is actually revealed in nature and on man that man has been able to see anything of the fact that he lives by the mercy of God and that a judgment awaits him. Accordingly, it must now be added, as Calvin points out so fully on the basis of Paul's words, that God is displayed before men in the works of his hands.

This means that God, not some sort of God or some higher principle, but God, the true God, is displayed before men. That is the fact of the matter, whether men recognize it or not. Paul does mention the power of God in particular as the attribute that comes most prominently to the foreground, but he also says that men have the divinity (*Theiotes*) displayed before them. This does not mean that God is as fully displayed in nature as he is in the gospel of Christ. Yet we should remember that God is simple. God cannot be cut up into several attributes that are kept distinct from one another. When man knew God in paradise he knew God, not merely part of God. God had not yet revealed to man as much of his Being and purpose as he was later going to reveal, but he had revealed himself as far as there was any revelation at all.

It is necessary to keep this point in mind clearly, inasmuch as all too much has been made of the difference between the mere existence of God and the nature of God. All too often it has been argued that on the basis of nature or by natural theology man should be able to establish the existence of a God, while it is only by Christ and through grace that we can know anything more fully about the nature of this God. Now it is true that we have the fullest revelation of the nature of God in Christ. On the other hand, it is also true that when man was created in paradise, he knew not merely of the existence of God, but he knew the nature of God as far as it had been

revealed to him. It is for the loss of this actual knowledge of the nature of God that man, when he became a sinner, must be held responsible. If this is not done, men will be looked upon merely as unfortunates who have not had the good fortune of having had the right information about God: Man has once had the right information. He needed not to know about God comprehensively to know him truly. He needed only to walk with God, and trust in his promises.

A. Revelation About God from Nature—Natural Theology

In thinking of the revelation about God from nature, we do well to think first of the fact that man did originally think analogically about nature, and in thinking analogically was able to know God truly, as far as God had revealed himself to man. When he thought thus about nature, he thought about God as he is, that is as the self-sufficient and self-consistent rational Being. It is as such that God really revealed himself to man, and it is as such that man really thought of God. God continued to reveal himself in nature as the self-sufficient and self-subsistent rational God even after man became a sinner. If therefore men would only reason analogically they should be able to reason from nature to nature's God. But sinners until saved by grace do not reason analogically. They reason univocally.[1] And because they reason univocally about nature they conclude that no god exists or that a god exists but never that the true God exists. It has been a basic misunderstanding of Scripture and of Calvin's interpretation of Scripture to say that even by reasoning univocally with respect to nature man should be able to come to the knowledge of God's existence. It is true that men have claimed to be able to establish only the existence of God, and not his essence by "natural theology." But even this was saying too much. By univocal reasoning, one can never find the truth about God, either as to his existence or as to his being. By univocal reasoning, one can, in the nature of the case, find an immanent God only. Hepp overlooks this when he says that the "theistic proofs" have a certain validity. By univocal reasoning, one can, at most, find a God that is an extension of the universe. Univocal reasoning starts with the assumption that man and the universe are entities from which, as ultimate starting point, we can reason to God. We believer, however, that not even Adam in paradise could do this. He could

only do what Calvin speaks of in the first paragraph of the *Institutes*, namely, (a) think of God and himself simultaneously, and (b) think of God as ultimate and of himself as derivative.

It would at first glance seem as though Scripture itself begins by reasoning from the created universe as something existing independently of God, to the existence and character of God. When Scripture asks whether it be reasonable to think that he that hath planted the ear should not hear, it might seem as though it is starting from the creature as an independent something in order to reason from it to the creator. But this is not the case. The absurdity of thinking of God as not hearing lies in the very fact that God has planted the ear of man, that is, that he is the original and that man is the derivative. The argument is, therefore, that it is unreasonable not to presuppose in God the originals of those things that we see in us. Thus, when we reason from nature to nature's God, by way of eminence, we must take this eminence seriously. We must take it so seriously that we take it absolutely. That means that God was self-sufficient before he created the world, and that he is self-sufficient still. Accordingly, we must think of ourselves as proximate, as well as of God as ultimate. We must negate ourselves as ultimates or as correlatives and think of ourselves as derivatives. We must not argue as though we can already know a great deal about nature by itself but that, inasmuch as we cannot know all that ought to be known about it, there must be one who knows infinitely more than we do. We must rather reason that unless God exists as ultimate, as self-subsistent, we could not even know anything; we could not even reason that God must exist, nor could we even ask a question about God.

In order to do this, in order to negate himself as ultimate and as correlative: the natural man must first negate himself as normal. This he will not and cannot do. Paul speaks of this inability when he says: "Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom 8:7). But the fact that man cannot do what he ought to do does not make the "ought" any less important, and it is with this "ought" that we now deal.

God has continued to reveal himself in nature even after the entrance of sin. Men ought, therefore, to know him. Men ought to reason analogically from nature to nature's God. Men ought, therefore, to use the cosmological argument analogically in order thus to conclude that God is the creator of this universe. Men ought to realize that nature could not exist as something

independent. They ought to sense that if anything intelligible is to be said about nature, it must be in relation to the absolute system of truth, which is God. Hence, they ought at once to see nature as the creation of God. Men ought also to use the ontological argument analogically. Men ought to realize that the word “being” cannot be intelligently applied to anything unless it be applied to God without limitation. They ought not, as is usually done in the case of the ontological argument, first assume that the word “being” can be intelligibly applied to this universe in order then and thereafter to conclude that it must also be applied in an unlimited way to a still higher being than ourselves or this world. The better theologians of the church have constantly sensed the fact that the theistic argument must not be used univocally. They have sensed something of the fact that all the theistic arguments should really be taken together and reduced to the one argument of the possibility of human predication. Intelligent predication about anything with respect to nature or with respect to man were impossible unless God existed as the ultimate reference point of it all. God, as self-sufficient, as the One in whom the One and the Many are equally ultimate, is the One in whom the persons of the Trinity are interchangeably exhaustive, is the presupposition for the intelligent use of words with respect to anything in this universe, whether it be the trees of the garden or the angels in heaven.

Accordingly, men ought to reason that the order of nature is due to the providence of God. This providence is actually displayed there. Men ought to reason that natural laws cannot exist in themselves. They ought to reason that the conception of law could never have been applied by the mind of man to the phenomena of nature unless there were a God who is in himself absolute order or absolute system, and who has therefore implanted order upon his creation.

Still further, men ought to reason that the disorder that is found in nature is unnatural. The disorder of nature cannot be part of the originally constituted state of affairs with respect to nature. The God of order would create an orderly universe, if he created one at all. To create a disorderly universe would be to deny himself as a God of order. The disorder of the universe must, therefore, have come into nature by the wilful disobedience of man. Nature itself, not being moral, could not sin. Hence, nature must have been cursed because of the sin of man. Nature must be suffering under the wrath of God, and therefore it must be true that God is a righteous God

who executeth judgment upon unrighteousness. Moreover, seeing that it is an absolute God, a sovereign God alone who actually reveals himself, this God may possibly defer the punishment of the iniquity of men. Men ought to conclude from the "unevenness" of the ways of God, not that he actually is "uneven," unstable, or arbitrary, but that he will "even out" things hereafter.

Again, because men ought to conclude that the sin of man is the source of the curse of God upon nature, they ought also to conclude that it is by the grace of God that they live at all, and that nature is not fallen into complete disorder. That winter and summer follow one another is actually a matter of God's grace to man, as the covenant with Noah shows. This, men ought to see. The facts are there before them, and they ought to see the facts. Hence they ought to glorify the creator.

As a matter of fact, men have not reasoned and interpreted as they ought to have reasoned and interpreted. They have reasoned univocally instead of analogically. They have used an immanentistic principle of interpretation for the universe as a whole. They have not been willing to admit that it is by the human mind that disorder and misinterpretation have come into the world. They have not negated themselves as normal. Hence, they have also not negated themselves as ultimate. Yet they have sensed through it all that they have, with their exclusively immanentistic principle, not been able to interpret reality satisfactorily. They have shown, therefore, a desire for something different. They have recognized that if no interpretation on the part of a self-sufficient God is given them, there is no rest for the mind of man. On the other hand, in the interpretations that they have actually given, they have shown great similarity of form to the truth. In the idealistic tradition philosophy has verbally recognized the need of a timeless absolute. In the higher religions of the world, outside Christianity, men have also glimpsed something of the fact that it is in something above this world that the soul of man must find its peace. So modernism is today constantly seeking that which is above the mechanical and the material. And though this is in itself misinterpretation, it nevertheless shows that men are constantly seeking something or someone beyond the universe. It is remarkable how many scientists have said that they have discovered God in nature. It is, to be sure, not the true God that they discover, because they, generally speaking, use the univocal method of reasoning; but the fact remains that men seek a God. All of this is eloquent testimony that God is,

as a matter of fact, revealed in nature and in the mind of man, and that, therefore, men ought to know him.

B. Revelation About God from Man—Rational Theology

Moreover, all men everywhere, deep down in their hearts know that the world is created by God. At bottom they know that by all their attempts at explanation of nature they are suppressing within themselves the testimony of the real creator of the universe. The more self-conscious men become with respect to the real meaning of their own position the more clearly do they realize that their systems are escape-mechanisms by which sinners seek to hide the truth from themselves.

What we have just said with respect to the revelation about God from nature applies also, *mutatis mutandis*, to the revelation about God from man.

Here in particular the point that Calvin stresses, namely, that man must think of himself as derivative and as in contact with God, is of importance. The knowledge of God and of ourselves is most important to us. All other knowledge centers about our knowledge of God and of ourselves. If we are correct in our interpretation of knowledge here, we shall be correct everywhere; if we are mistaken here, we shall be mistaken everywhere.

At this point, then, we may say that men ought to reason analogically about themselves. They ought to reason analogically about their being (ontological argument), about the cause of their being (cosmological arguments), and about the purpose of their being (teleological argument. Men ought to see themselves concretely for what they are. They cannot in any true sense define or describe themselves except in terms of their derivation from and responsibility to God. They ought to see that the words being, cause and purpose have no possible meaning when applied to themselves, except in relation to God as their creator and judge.

Accordingly they ought also to attribute disorder to man, not to God. If error were as fundamental as the truth, if negation were as fundamental as affirmation, it would mean that there would be no truth at all. The least bit of rationality anywhere presupposes absolute rationality in God. To this we may add also that the least bit of irrationality anywhere presupposes absolute rationality in God. No irrationality could have meaning except in

contrast to rationality. Yet if irrationality were contrasted merely to finite rationality, it would not be really contrasted to rationality at all. Finite irrationality as well as finite rationality needs absolute rationality as its presupposition.

Thus we see that the very least bit of rational interpretation, as well as the possibility of error, presupposes God. This applies both to the intellectual and to the moral realm. That man can to any extent interpret the universe aright, and that he does by nature the "things of the law" are equally significant as evidences of the existence of God. The second point, pertaining to morality, Paul speaks of in Romans 2:14 as follows: "For when the Gentiles which have no law, do by nature the things of the law, these, having no law, are a law unto themselves; in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them."

As sinners, these Gentiles seek to keep down the testimony of the Spirit of God within and about them. Even so, as in the case of knowledge (Rom 1:20) so in the case of morality, (Rom 2:14–15) he cannot wholly keep the Spirit's testimony from being effective. There is an incidental and involuntary conformity to some of the requirements of the law in their moral reactions.

Here too we should carefully distinguish between what is merely revelatory and what is indicative of the sinner's self-conscious ethical reaction. Paul does not here say that the law is written in the hearts of men. It is true that they have the law written in their hearts. Their own make-up as image-bearers of God tells them, as it were, in the imperative voice, that they must act as such. All of God's revelation to man is law to man. But here we deal with man's response as an ethical being to this revelation of God. All men, says Paul, to some extent, do the works of the law. He says that they have the works of the law written in their hearts. Without a true motive, without a true purpose, they may still do that which externally appears to be acts of obedience to God's law. God continues to press his demands upon man, and man is good "after a fashion" just as he "knows after a fashion."

Order, when viewed from the point of view of the passage of time, is purpose. Men should therefore also have used the teleological argument analogically. It is in connection with the rational and moral activity of the

mind of man that the concept of purpose comes out most strikingly. So then man should see that all things in this universe, and, in particular, all things in the mind and moral activity of man, would be at loose ends if it were not for God and his purpose with respect to them. Here we may note again the difference between a univocal and an analogical argument. Suppose we begin with man as a moral being, taking for granted that we know to a large extent, if not fully, what purpose means in his case, in order then to conclude that there must be a God to conserve the purposes or values of man. That would be univocal instead of analogical reason. It would be to make God the derivative of man instead of man the derivative of God. We would be thinking of a god who is but an extension of man, with the result that all things would still be at loose ends. Thus we would defeat the very purpose we had in mind, that is, of showing the necessity of thinking of God when we think of human purpose. It is true, of course, that there is a sense in which we know what purpose means in the case of man, when we do not so plainly know it in the case of God. When we purpose to go to a certain city, we mean that we intend to exert ourselves physically in order to get there. But this only indicates that in this sense we are more immediate to ourselves than to God. Yet, from an ultimate point of view, God is nearer than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.

Thus we are led on to the idea of a judgment. Calvin speaks of this in particular. He says that men ought not to conclude from the fact that some men are not immediately punished for their unrighteousness, that there is no God who judges. They ought rather to conclude, he says, that God will punish in the future the wrong which he leaves unpunished now. Translating this in the terminology we have employed, we may say that there must be a comprehensive purpose with history if there is purpose anywhere in history. Without a comprehensive purpose, every act of purpose on the part of man would be set in a void. And if there must be absolute purpose, it goes without saying that all the evil must one day be abolished. All unrighteousness will one day have to be punished. God will accomplish his purpose with the universe, or he would not be God. Even the devil must be subordinate to the purpose of God. The devil’s actions are therefore actions that carry in them their own frustration. Satan must, in spite of all his efforts to the contrary, serve the glory of God. Just as his thoughts are self-frustrative, so his actions are self-frustrative. So also man’s actions, if they are not in accordance with the will of God, will be like the devil’s actions in

this character of self-frustration. Thus men are a law unto themselves. They condemn themselves, and, to an extent, they excuse themselves. God has shown the wisdom of man to be foolishness and will finally condemn all purposive thought and action not centered on him at the time of the judgment day.

Thus we see that, both with respect to nature and respect to man himself, men should have known God as Creator, as Preserver, and as Judge. They should have known his divinity. They should have known him as the Absolute One. They should have known him as the one through whom alone all human predication, applied either to nature or to man, has meaning. They should have known him as the presupposition of the intelligibility of the universe. They should have known him as such in his self-testimony, the self-testimony of the Spirit with respect to nature and man.

Instead of knowing him as such, men sought to interpret the universe by an exclusively immanentistic principle. Paul says: “For that they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen” (Rom 1:25). Both deistic and pantheistic types of philosophy are immanentistic. Both try to worship the creature rather than the creator. Yet, as we have seen before, men have recognized something of the insufficiency of the immanentistic principle. They have demanded a Beyond. The nations have been incorrigibly religious. The *sensus deitatis* has been deeply ingrained in men, says Calvin, and the seed of religion has been so fixed in their being that they have tried in vain to remove the knowledge of God from their hearts.

On the other hand, the nature of the God whom they have formed for themselves, though often brought down to the level of four-footed beasts and creeping things, has, in the higher instances, been similar in form to the conception of the true God. Plato does, to be sure, “lose himself in his globe” so that his idea of God is, from the Christian point of view utterly false, yet, on the other hand, it is most remarkable that his God is as noble as he is. Both the basic differences and the formal similarities between the gods of the nations and the God of truth are evidence of the truth that God revealed himself to men. Both are given that men might be without excuse.

C. Revelation About God from God—Theology Proper

Originally in paradise God gave, as we say, in addition to the revelation of himself that appeared in nature and in man, a positive thought communication of himself. God walked and talked with man. Here was true theophany. We may think of this theophany as given to man for the purpose of communicating to him a more intimate knowledge of God. It is true that it was by way of this positive revelation that God also communicated to man his will and purpose for man with respect to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Yet in this very fact God revealed himself to man and made himself known in such a way as man could not have known him from the study of the created universe alone. We cannot artificially separate the knowledge of God that man received or could receive by his reflection on man and the created universe in general, and the knowledge of God that man received from God by direct communication. The revelation from the created universe did place man face to face with God and not merely with the idea of the existence of God. Yet it was through the revelation by direct communication that God's purpose and plans with respect to the universe appeared more fully still. And, by revealing his purposes and plans more fully, God also revealed himself more fully. And it is only in relation to this fuller revelation of God that the facts of nature and man could appear in their proper light.

This direct revelation to man stopped after the entrance of sin insofar as it was an original loving communication. God did often speak directly to man after the entrance of sin, but it was always either in judgment on sin or in mercy for the purpose of the removal of sin. Thus God spoke to Cain and Abel in order to reveal to them the way of sacrifice, the way of redemption. Then, again, he spoke to Cain afterwards by way of judgment on his rejection of the sacrifice. In both cases, we may say that there is a new revelation of the plans and purposes of God. The revelation as it was originally given, that is, a loving self-communication of God to his creature as creature, could not be continued. If God was to continue his communication with his creature, it was either to be by condemnation or by atonement.

So then, we must single out this original communication of God to man and say that after the entrance of sin only the tradition of it remained. Man was, of course, responsible for this tradition. To this tradition must be added the fact that God has from time to time spoken to individuals that were in close connection with the line of the redemptive work of God, of his

judgment on them and on all those who hate the Israel of God. In the third place, we must add the fact that some men have actually heard the revelation of mercy as given in the Old Testament times to Israel as a people, and in New Testament times to the Church. Yet, for all that, it remains a fact that the actual communication of God with man as man has ceased since the entrance of sin into the world. This has complicated the question of the revelation of God to man. There is a sense in which we may even say that it has obscured the revelation of God to man. The fact that sin is not immediately punished in the way that it deserves has made it plausible to think that God is not the holy God that he at the first revealed himself as being. Yet no theory of life other than the fully theistic one can ever be more than merely plausible. There is no intelligibility in any phenomena of the universe without the presupposition of God's all-encompassing plan. And it is this objective clarity, or perspicuity of God's revelation, of whatever kind that revelation may be, natural or supernatural, general or special, that must be stressed at all costs.

Moreover, the complexity of the revelation of God in history could not appear at the outset of history. It was the result of the covenant-keeping or covenant-breaking activity of man. So then, while on the one hand the complexity of the situation betokened an obscuration of the original simplicity of the revelation of God to man, on the other hand this complexity, in the nature of the case, appeared at a point in history that began to indicate its actual tendency toward the final judgment day. The result is that the "obscuration" that was the natural consequence of sin has for its correlative an "enlightenment" of the plan of God. The two must be taken in conjunction with one another if either is to be understood for what it really is.

The fact that men have made for themselves altars for the "unknown god" shows definitely that men have felt a lack in the gods that are made with men's hands and according to men's imaginations. The idols of wood and stone and the ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty which men have deified, alike reveal their own insufficiency. They are incomplete and powerless to realize that which men wish to have realized, that is, the happiness of man. Then too, the ideals of goodness and beauty and truth have been in form very similar to the Christian idea of God. Thus, negatively and positively, men have testified to the truth of the existence of

God. They have shown again and again that their attitude is foolish, in that all their interpretation and action is self-frustrative.

The conclusion of the matter is that, with the Preacher, we must say: “Behold, this have I found, that God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions” (Eccl 7:29).

[1] As indicated at the outset of this work, we speak of all forms of reasoning in which man is assumed to be the final or ultimate reference point of predication as univocal reasoning. In contrast to this we speak of the form of reasoning employed by the Christian who recognizes that God is the ultimate reference point of predication as analogical reasoning.

Chapter 10: Special Revelation

From our discussion of general revelation as it was originally and as it became after the entrance of sin into the world, we can now turn to the question of special revelation. It was necessary to discuss original revelation separately, in order to understand the idea of revelation in general, and to note its indispensability for man. It was necessary to discuss present general revelation separately in order to see that, though the originally given revelation remained displayed before and in man to a large extent, this in no instance by itself produced in man the knowledge of God that he needs. If we take the two together, we can understand what is meant by the insufficiency of general revelation, and therefore what is meant by:

A. The Necessity of Special Revelation

This necessity does not lie in any defect in the general revelation that God gave to man when he created him. When we speak of the insufficiency of general revelation we do not wish to suggest that this revelation is as such insufficient for its purpose. It has been noted how all creation, including man's own psychological constitution, is inherently revelatory of God. This revelation was so clear and unavoidable that man was always confronted with the face of God. But in sinning, man; as it were, took out his own eyes, so that he could no longer see God in his general revelation. Moreover, through this act of sell-immolation man not only made himself helpless but also guilty and polluted before God! It is therefore to the condition of man as a sinner, not to man as finite, that the idea of the necessity of a special or saving revelation must be attached.

Arminian theologians do not do justice to the distinction between the sinfulness and the finitude of man when they speak of special revelation in distinction from general revelation. In discussing general revelation they do not include man's own reaction as part of that revelation. They tend to think of man as originally standing in a state of equilibrium before the revelation of God that was around but not within him. On this position man might reject the revelation of God without sinning against and ruining his own

nature. Man would have some excuse for thinking that God might possibly not exist. Even if the revelation surrounding him was calculated to make him think that in all probability God does exist, yet the intelligibility of his own nature to himself apart from the idea of revelation would logically justify him in holding that God might not exist.

Thus there is on the basis of the Arminian view of man an inherent and original lack of clarity or insufficiency in general revelation. On this basis, general revelation was not even historically sufficient, i.e. wholly adequate for the purpose for which it was given. God did not do his work well at the outset of his dealings with man.

On this view God was really morally obliged to give man a saving revelation of himself. Since man had fallen into the ravine of sin at least partly because God's warning signals had not been clear it was naturally to be expected that he should later make good. On the other hand, if we include the original subjective condition of man in the very concept of revelation, we see that man was originally in possession of the truth and of a true reaction to the truth. It is this that is the basis for a proper concept of a point of contact for the gospel in the mind of the natural man. Man's condition after the entrance of sin is, therefore, not that of a poor innocent man, but that of a criminal who has committed high treason. Thus the necessity for a special revelation lies primarily in the subjective rebellion of man. The special revelation that must be given to man, if he is to be saved, must consist not only of the "objective" work of Christ in his death and resurrection, but also result in a subjective change from this state of rebellion to a state of obedience. The work of the Holy Spirit in granting regeneration to God's people is therefore implied in the work of Christ. The presentation of an objective revelation, that is, a revelation outside of man alone, would in itself be worse than useless. Arminianism again fails to realize this fact. And the Butler type of apologetics as advocated by J. Oliver Buswell also fails to realize this fact.

It is indeed true that nature does not reveal God's grace to man. This objective insufficiency of present general revelation is plainly taught by Paul. The whole argument of the first few chapters of Romans establishes the fact that all "righteousness" which is of men, whether among Jews or Gentiles, places all under the condemnation of God and that in general revelation there is no remedy for this condition. Men are lost without Christ —and he is not revealed in nature. The whole point may be summed up in

the words of Peter when he says: “And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). But we should remember that the objective insufficiency of present general revelation is due to the sin of man. It is true that nature does not reveal grace to us, but it is also true that man, as he was originally created, did not need grace. Even if the water supply in a city is quite sufficient for the normal needs of its citizens it may not be sufficient if all those citizens take to burning their houses down simultaneously. The original revelation of God to man was quite sufficient for his creatures who loved him, but it was not enough for creatures who became sinners, and who, therefore, burned beneath his wrath.

In consequence of his sin, then, man needs both new or additional revelation—a revelation of grace—and renewed power by which to perceive that new revelation and to understand and accept the revelation of God in nature for what it really is. He needs, as Warfield has put it, both new light and new power of sight.

Note: It will be observed that the reason for the distinction between sin and finitude made above is more apparent in our day than ever before. Modernism, largely following the philosophical principles of Kant, thinks that all the revelation that is mediated in and through history, whether round about or within man, is of necessity something less than the voice of a self-sufficient God. Man’s finitude is therefore his chief excuse for his sin.

Similarly the new form Modernism of the dialectical theologians, still patterning its thought after the critical principles of Kant, finds that natural revelation is, as such, a mere “chaos of voices.” In this theology too man’s finitude and his sinfulness are virtually identified. Sören Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher from whom the dialectical theologians Karl Barth and Emil Brunner received their chief inspiration, says, “nothing is more readily evident than that the greatest attainable certainty with respect to anything historical is merely an approximation.”[1] Basing his approach on Kantian principles of knowledge he argues that no knowledge of any such object as the self-existent God of orthodox Christianity is available for man. He takes away the foundation not only of biblical but also of general or natural revelation. He rejects the very presuppositions on which any orthodox view must be based, namely, the temporal creation of the universe, God’s providential control over the universe, and man’s creation in the image of God.

It follows that both on the basis of Modernism and on that of Dialecticism God really owes man a saving revelation of himself. And the compromising position of the Arminian easily carries him away by this confusion.

The necessity of special revelation appears not only with respect to man's failure to know and react to spiritual things right, but also with respect to his inability to interpret "natural" things aright. Calvin brings out this point fully when, after laboring to show that God is marvelously revealed in his creation he inserts a chapter on "The Need of Scripture, as a Guide and Teacher, in coming to God as a Creator." He begins this chapter[2] by saying:

> Therefore, though the effulgence which is presented to every eye, both in the heavens and on the earth, leaves the ingratitude of man without excuse, since God, in order to bring the whole human race under the same condemnation, holds forth to all, without exception, a mirror of his Deity in his works, another and better help must be given to guide us properly to God as a Creator.

No one, on the basis of present general revelation alone, actually knows God aright as the Creator. It is not as though man by himself and on the basis of natural revelation alone can truly know God as the creator, but that he cannot truly know God as Savior. Man ought, to be sure, from nature to know God as creator, seeing that nature clearly displays the creator. But since man has become a sinner, he has become a willing slave of sin (*ethelodoulos*)[3] He therefore never reads the "book of nature" aright even with respect to "natural" things. He may, to be sure, by virtue of the sense of deity within him, give involuntary, adventitious interpretations of natural revelation that are, so far forth, correct. In this sense every man knows God and knows himself to be a creature of God (Rom 1:19). But to the extent that he interprets nature according to his own adopted principles, he does not speak the truth on any subject.

Romanism, Arminianism and traditional apologetics, whether of the empiricist school of Butler, Buswell, or of the *a priori* type,[4] fail to do justice to this point so greatly stressed by Calvin. They attribute to the natural man not only the ability to make formally correct statements about "nature" or themselves, but also to mean by these statements what the Christian means by them.

Yet the willing disobedience on the part of man is itself the greatest damage done to God's creation, it is this that must be repaired. This cannot be done unless creation is really seen as God's creation and man is really seen as the creature of God. It is only if man is the creature of God that he can be saved by God. Salvation means that man, the sinner, must be brought back to the knowledge of himself as the creature of God and therefore, to the knowledge of God as the Creator. Being a sinner, man will not read nature aright unless he does it in the light of Scripture. "If true religion is to beam upon us, our principle must be, that it is necessary to begin with heavenly teaching, and that it is impossible for any man to obtain even the minutest portion of right and sound doctrine without being a disciple of Scripture."[5]

Note: We should accordingly avoid the error of separating too sharply between science and religion as is often done. The world of natural and historical fact with which science deals cannot be truly interpreted by anyone who is not a Christian, any more than can the world of spiritual things. Every statement about the physical universe implies, in the last analysis, some view about the "spiritual" realm. Scientists frequently say that in their statements they will limit themselves to the phenomenal world. But every assertion they make about the "phenomenal" world involves an attitude toward the "noumenal" world. Even the mere assumption that anything can intelligently be asserted about the phenomenal world by itself presupposes its independence of God, and as such is in effect a denial of him.

It is plain, too, that Christianity says something very definite about the physical universe and that what it says about the physical universe must be true if what it says about "spiritual" things is to be true. This is particularly the case with respect to miracles. Miracles are events that relate to natural laws. If these natural laws are not themselves the creation of God, but only products of chance, the meaning of the term "miracles" has changed. In that case, they would no longer be miracles in the biblical sense of the term. A miracle in a chance universe is a contradiction in terms.

The failure to observe this fact leads men to think that science and Scripture are agreed on the concept of miracles. So, for instance, Dr. Albertus Pieters, when speaking on "Science and the Bible" says: "The question of miracles lies outside the subject we propose to discuss in this paper, for the reason that modern science and the Bible are obviously

entirely in harmony on that subject. The only thing that science can say about a real miracle, like the Virgin Birth or Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, is that it is impossible under the laws of nature; and this statement is made by the Christian with no less emphasis than by the scientist."[6] Here it is forgotten that, though both the modern scientist and the Christian speak of and believe in natural law, they do not both mean the same thing by that term. The Christian thinks of natural law as God's mode of operation of the facts in the created universe. God temporarily sets aside these laws, when he works miraculously. In contrast to this the scientist today conceives of natural law as a method of operation of the facts of the universe that somehow exists in its own right and by its own power. A "miracle" occurring in relation to this would be no more than once chance fact occurring in relation to other chance facts. In short, there is nothing but formal agreement between the scientist and the Christian on the question of miracle. The failure to see this has resulted in great damage. And all this has come about only because men have not clearly seen that special revelation is necessary to teach us the truth about creation as well as about salvation. In this way we arrive at false notions of salvation itself.

The fully biblical or Reformed view of the necessity of special revelation may be signalized in that it does full justice to the presuppositions of biblical theism. These presuppositions are the existence of the ontological Trinity, the temporal creation of the universe *ex nihilo* and man's creation in the image of God. Full acceptance on these presuppositions requires us to think of the whole created universe as clearly revelatory of God. The very being of any created "fact" whether man, "nature," or "history," is exhausted in its revelatory character. There can be no other facts than such as speak clearly of God and therefore of God's claims upon man. Every fact speaks of God and speaks of him in the imperative as well as in the declarative voice.

Even the curse of God that fell upon the created universe did not basically change this radically revelatory character of the universe. Man ought always to regard the universe as revelatory of God; there is no excuse whatsoever for his not doing so.

Now it is this basically and exclusively revelatory character of all the facts of the universe that is either openly or covertly denied by both rationalist and irrationalist, forms of heresy. Both hold to a non-Christian view of possibility. Both hold that it is at least possible that the facts of the

universe can be something other than revelatory of God. And this is, in effect to posit chance as equally ultimate with God. And positing chance as equally ultimate with God is virtually the same as denying the existence of God. To say that the evidence, when fully and fairly considered, merely shows that God probably exists, is tantamount to saying that he does not at all exist. The God of Christianity is the God whose counsel or plan is the source of possibility. The word possibility has no possible meaning except upon the presupposition of the existence of the self-contained ontological Trinity as the source of it.

It should be noted, too, that in presupposing chance, rationalism is as irrationalistic as is irrationalism. Rationalism is secretly while irrationalism is frankly and openly addicted to a philosophy of chance. Both rationalism and irrationalism are therefore committed to a form of empiricism that is utterly out of accord with Christian theism. Though both are committed to a supposedly neutral attitude, an attitude that is willing to find in the facts whatsoever there is to be found. It is a foregone conclusion that they will never find Christian theism there. Having presupposed chance back of the facts it is chance and nothing but chance that they Can find in the facts.

And this leads to the obvious observation that irrationalists no less than rationalists are rationalistic, both have adopted their ultimate positions not after but before they have investigated the facts. No-human being can escape making an assumption about the nature of possibility at the outset of his investigation. All men have *a priori* assumptions in terms of which they approach the facts that confront them. The Christian frankly admits that his *a priori* is the assumption of the existence of the ontological Trinity, the temporal fiat creation of the universe, and man’s creation in the image of God. The non-Christian has a different sort of *a priori*. Every non-Christian has an *a priori*. And the *a priori* of every non-Christian is different, radically different, from that of the Christian.

It is not now our purpose to work out the significance of this fact of the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian *a priori* for Christian apologetics. (That significance is obviously fundamental failure on the part of Christian apologists to make the distinction between the two kinds of *a priori* spells failure to make contact with the non-believer. It spells failure to set forth the difference between the two positions clearly and therefore spells failure to challenge the unbeliever with the truth of the Christian position.)

Our purpose here is to show that it is quite impossible to maintain the biblical doctrine of the necessity of special revelation as being due to sin rather than to finitude on either a Romanist or a dialectical view of general revelation. Both of these views hold to the irrationalist position that the facts of the created universe only probably reveal the existence of God. Both hold to this irrationalist position because both have also assumed the non-Christian *a priori* position that man can determine the nature of the possible in the realm of being by means of the law of non-contradiction. The reason why both hold to probabilism is that they cannot exhaustively square the biblical view of revelation with the principle of logical consistency. That is to say, both hold to the non-Christian view that unless man can understand God exhaustively by means of logical relations one cannot really be sure of having the truth about God in any sense.

There is, of course, a great difference between Romanism and dialecticism. Immanuel Kant marks the dividing line between them. Building upon a Kantian type of epistemology. Dialecticism has done away with every type of traditional transcendence. For it the very essence of God is exhausted in "his" relationship to man just as the very essence of man is exhausted in his relationship to God. On this basis there is really no justification for speaking of even the probable existence of God. For on this basis the very idea of knowledge presupposes that no intelligible proposition can be made about an "antecedent being."

Accordingly, if the idea of a transcendent God is to be maintained at all it must be done in the form of a "practical" idea, in the form of a "limiting concept" ˆ *la* Kant. And this implies pure mysticism. The "existentialism" of Kierkegaard that lies at the basis of dialecticism in theology makes a complete contrast between knowledge by way of logical and propositional statement and "indirect communication." The former pertains to the relative and the latter to the absolute. The absolute or eternal cannot communicate itself to man in propositional form.

How then can the eternal communicate itself to man? By identification only. Man is in one sense already eternal. But he must become more comprehensibly eternal. Man posits an absolute or eternal Self. With this posited Self he has non-propositional or mystical communication. The "indirect communication" of Kierkegaard is in reality the direct communication of the human self with its own idealized eternal Self. Thus the entire idea of special or saving revelation is in effect reduced to a

monistic idea of man's identification with God, with a god which is nothing but a projection on the part of man.

Now Romanism does not go nearly so far as this. It does hold to the possibility of true propositional knowledge about God as an antecedent being. Even so, Romanism is so largely monistic in its philosophy of being that it cannot do justice to the Christian idea of revelation. Following Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas talks about being as such before making the distinction between the divine and created being. And this is fatal to Christian theology. It constitutes an attack on the basic distinction between God as self-contained and man as his creature. Being as such is a pure abstraction. Hegel was quite right in maintaining that it can be interchanged with non-being. To attempt to say one word about it is to attempt to make Reality as a whole, inclusive of God and man, the final subject of predication. It is, in effect, to deny that created reality is what it is, as exclusively revelational of what God is in himself to himself. It is, in effect, also to deny that all of man's knowledge is true to the extent that it is a restatement by man of the revelation of God. Conversely, it is to maintain, in effect, that man is able to make true predication about reality without *a priori* self-consciously, revelational activity on the part of God. To talk about being as such is to talk about possibility as such. And to talk about possibility as such is to assume the idea of logic as such. And to assume the idea of logic such is to assume the idea of consciousness as such. And to assume the idea of consciousness as such is to deny the fundamental distinction between the self-contained consciousness of God and the dependent consciousness of man. In other words it is to assume that man can employ the laws of logic and by means of them legislate for reality.

Romanism then is rationalistic in that it defends the non-Christian idea of man's ability to make true propositions about being or reality in general. With this rationalistic notion of human knowledge it is to be expected that Romanism holds to a largely irrationalistic notion of faith. Any one attempting to make predication about Reality as a whole without first introducing the distinction between the self-contained God and created man is bound to admit sooner or later that he is confronted with ultimate mystery. Yet he has already by implication made a universal negative proposition about that aspect of reality about which, on his own admission, he can really say nothing at all. He has, in effect, said that the mysterious aspect of reality is mysterious to "God" as well as to man. He has virtually

made God subject to “possibility” instead of” possibility” subject to God. “God” and man may then cooperate in an effort to subdue this realm of possibility by means of abstract logic, but it will be of no avail. If all reality is not plainly divided into two parts at the outset of one’s predication, the one part being God himself, whose being is coterminous with his knowledge and whose knowledge is coterminous with his being; and the other part being the created universe, the nature of which is exhaustively determined by God’s plan or providence, then there is no escape from the idea of the mysterious as ultimate.

If then God is none the less said to “reveal” to man in special supernatural revelation the “mysteries” of redemption, this revelation is again mystical, that is, irrational. How can God reveal to man that which he himself does not know and can never know?

We conclude then that a theology that seeks alliance with a philosophy based upon the “ancient mind,” in this case that of Aristotle, is in no position to challenge a theology that seeks alliance with the modern mind, in this case that of Kant. Romanism is too deeply undermined by both the irrationalism and the rationalism of the “ancient mind” to be able effectively to oppose the irrationalism and rationalism of the modern mind.

The distinction between the approach of the “ancient” and the “modern” mind is not fundamental. The “objectivism” of the ancient mind is only gradationally distinct from the “subjectivism” of the modern mind. There is no true transcendence in Platonism, Aristotelianism, or Stoicism any more than there is in modern existentialism and dialecticism.

The only distinction that will set off the Christian approach to knowledge and reality and therefore also the Christian doctrine of revelation from the non-Christian views is that between the fully Protestant or Reformed view that does, and the general non-Christian view, whether ancient or modern, whether rationalist or irrationalist, that does not make the Creator-creature distinction basic to its thought. There are those who serve and worship God and there are those who serve and worship man. Calvin most adequately represents the former and modern existentialism and pragmatism most adequately represent the latter. Thomas Aquinas seeks to combine the two positions.

B. The Names Used to Indicate Special Revelation

After discussing the necessity of special revelation we now turn to the study of that revelation itself. We must seek to ascertain what Scripture itself says about the meaning of revelation. We can do this best by turning first to a brief discussion of the names by which revelation announces itself and, secondly, to a discussion of the-manner in which this revelation comes to us.

The names used in the Old Testament are:

(Galah)	Discover, be discovered; e.g., Genesis 35:7
(Ra'ah)	See, be seen, appear; e.g., Genesis 12:7
(Yadah)	Make known, instruct; e.g., Numbers 12:6

The names used in the New Testament are:

Epiphaino	Appear; e.g., Luke 1:79
Emphanizo	Make visible; e.g., Matthew 27:53
Gnorizo	Make known; e.g., Luke 2:15; Romans 27:53
Deloo	Make known; e.g., 1 Peter 1:11; 2 Peter 1:14
Deiknuo	Show; e.g., John 5:20
Laleo	Speak; e.g., Hebrews 1:1; 2:2; 5:5

The terms most frequently used are "*apokaluptein*" and "*faneroun*"(α)ποκαλυ̱πτω-φανερο̱ω). Etymologically, "*apokaluptein*" indicates the removal of a covering under which something was hidden, while "*faneroun*" signifies the making known of something that was unknown. The former takes away the hindrances which kept something from being manifest, while the latter manifests the matter itself. The former is always used with the objective aspect of the "special principle," while the latter applies to both the objective and the subjective aspect. By "special principle" we mean the totality of the work of redemption. This work is

done both for us and within us. It has, therefore, an objective and a subjective aspect.

We see from these names and from their use that Scripture presents revelation as covering both the objective and the subjective aspects that we have spoken of under the heading of the necessity of special revelation. They speak both of the new light that must be given the sinner and also of the new power of sight that he needs. These two are constantly taken in conjunction with one another.

C. The Modes of Special Revelation

With these things in mind, we may now turn to an examination of the way in which special revelation has come to man. By studying the modes of manners in which revelation has come to man, we shall learn more fully about the meaning of that revelation itself. It places the question of the meaning of revelation in a concrete setting.

In the main, we may speak of three modes of special revelation. In the first place, there is theophany. In paradise God walked and talked with man. Man needs God near to himself. Even in the state of sin man has realized something of the need of a god who is near him. In fact, the sinner has brought God too near to him; he has identified the creator with the creature. In idolatry we have an expression on the part of the sinner which points to his need of a god who is near.

In the second place, there is prophecy. In paradise man knew himself to be a re-interpreter of God’s interpretation. When sin entered into the world man sought to be his own ultimate interpreter. Hence in special revelation God had to reappear to him as his ultimate interpreter and he himself has constantly felt that there is something lacking in all his interpretations of the universe. He has felt something of the need of an ultimate interpreter. Hence, we have false prophecy or divination as a caricature of true prophecy.

In the third place, if man had not sinned God would have maintained him in paradise and wrought out for him a future glory. When sin came in God no longer wrought for but against man. Hence if man was to be saved God had to reveal to man by way of miracle the fact that God was working in the universe for the salvation of the universe.

True interpretation (prophecy) presupposes the supernatural redemptive work of God in miracle. God's Word explains God's saving deeds. And the two together give significance to God's dwelling with man (theophany). The natural man has felt that there is something wrong with the powers of the universe, just as he has felt that there is something wrong with his interpretation of the universe. Hence he has sought miracles and has imitated the true miracles by false ones.

Right here we may bring in the question of the relation of special revelation to general revelation. We have noted the deep antithesis between true theophany, true prophecy, and true miracle on the one hand, and false theophany, false prophecy, and false miracle on the other hand. This sets special revelation in antithesis to the falsifications of general revelation. We must also note, however, that in these very caricatures of the true, we have a point of contact for the true. In false theophanies, prophecies, and miracles, we have an indication of man's deepest needs. Christianity stands, to be sure, in an antithetical relation to the religions of the world, but it also offers itself as the fulfillment of that of which the nations have unwittingly had some faint desire. (We have emphasized the fact that the heathen not only see displayed before them the revelation of God in nature, but that they themselves also have a sense of deity. It is therefore upon the concept (a) of an original general revelation clearly perceived, (b) or a present general revelation apparent to man, especially in his sense of deity and therefore unwillingly recognized by him, and (c) of a certain admission on the part of the sinner that his own gods do not meet the needs of his intellect, his emotions or his will that special revelation must build.)

What Reformed theologians have meant by a point of contact should be carefully distinguished from what is often expressed in the words of Matthew Arnold, "The Bible finds men." Matthew Arnold thought that man, in himself, knows what he needs and what he wants. His idea was that the Bible satisfies a need of man about which he knew before ever he read the Bible. This is the opposite of what orthodox theology means when it says that in the desires of men for the "supernatural" we have an indication of man's need for God, and that God satisfies this need. Orthodox theology holds that the natural man does not really know what he needs. He does not know that he is dead in trespasses and sins and therefore subject to the wrath of God. How then could he say that Christ, who came to bring escape from eternal death, satisfies him? Suppose that a jailer were to go through

one of the fashionable suburbs and cry out on its streets that he is offering release from jail for all its residents. As long as he would confine himself to the streets he might be thought of as having escaped from an insane asylum. If, however, he were to knock at every door, and in all seriousness say to the occupants of every house that he had come to bring them the great good news that they could now go free from jail, they would do all they could to have this jailer put in jail. So also when preachers of Christianity come to offer escape from the wrath to come, their message falls on deaf ears because men do not think that this offer answers their need at all.

It is true that things are not quite as simple in life as our analogy would seem to suggest. Christianity offers something for this life as well as escape from the wrath to come. For this reason men feel somewhat attracted to it even though they do not feel themselves under the curse of God. Yet, in the main, the analogy holds. The main thing Christ came to do for men is to bring them escape from eternal death and to reinstate them to the favor of God. On this point, men do not know their need; they have only a vague sense of lack. However, seeing that the gospel not only makes an external offer, but also includes the work of the Holy Spirit with his regenerating power, men, through the gospel itself, see the need of escape from eternal death. When they see this they also see that Christ has supplied their need. Then Christ finds them, but then they have first become new creatures before they have realized this fact. To use an illustration from medical science, we may suppose that a man feels that there is something wrong with him, not thinking that it is serious at all. He goes to see his doctor because his appetite is somewhat low and his energy is waning. The doctor, to the man’s great surprise, tells him that he is a child of death because a fatal disease is rapidly eating him away. At the same time the doctor tells him there is a medicine that will cure him. The patient did not see that the medicine of the doctor met his need because he did not know how great his need was until he met this doctor.

Though we must be careful in the use of analogies we may say that through general revelation and the reaction to it the sinner as the patient shows some sense of need. He is something like the patient who knew that there was something wrong with him, and who was to that extent willing to have the doctor analyze him. The world is, as a matter of fact, under the curse of God and, in their suppressed sense of deity, men have knowledge of this fact, as they have of the fact that God is the creator of the universe.

It might be argued that, for safety's sake, we should avoid altogether this matter of a point of contact. The danger that the orthodox view will be identified with such views as those of Matthew Arnold is common in our day. Why not, it will be asked, emphasize the truth that man does not know his basic need and let it go at that? To this we must reply that we must be faithful to the teaching of Scripture no matter how dangerous it may seem to us to be. We need not be wiser than Scripture.

However, we are not indifferent to the danger that mistaken views should become widespread. The view, so well expressed in Arnold's words, is common in our time. As a matter of fact it is the most common view today. J. Harry Cotton in *The Christian Experience of God* recently presented this view to the Orient under the auspices of the Board of Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America. Taking for granted the truth of the evolutionary concept of the origin of man he says that all men come into the world as a bundle of warring instincts. These instincts must be organized. Our personal desires must be integrated. Christ has come to be our liberator. He has come to show us how to integrate our personalities. It is thus that Cotton presents Christianity to the Orient. Add to this the fact that even orthodox Arminian theology has, in its concept of the plenary ability of the sinner to accept or reject the gospel, really taught that the natural man knows what his basic needs are, and it becomes very clear that the danger facing us is indeed very great. Arminianism has made an easy alliance with evolutionism.

The new Modernist or dialectical view of man is not very different. Barth has stressed the idea, especially in his latest writings,[7] that the gospel is not to be concerned about a "point of contact" with the general consciousness of man. The first commandment rather than the law of non-contradiction is to be the axiom of theology. All rationality must be ignored; even God himself dies and is buried. But over against this principle of discontinuity Barth has his principle of continuity which allows for the potential salvation of all men. The position of such men as Brunner (*Divine-Human Encounter*), Reinhold Niebuhr (*The Nature and Destiny of Man*) and many others (*The Christian Answer*), is very similar to that of Barth. The best way to face this enemy is to make plain first of all the biblical teaching that man, as sinner, does not know his basic need. Then, in the second place, we must point out that though such is the case, man, because he is as a matter of fact God's creature, and inasmuch as he is under God's

wrath, has never been able to find complete satisfaction in any interpretation of life which leaves these basic facts out of consideration. Even in their positive constructions based upon this sense of lack, men have been able, by virtue of non-saving grace, to approach a formal similarity to the truth of Christianity, it is to this negative sense of need and to this positive construction that Paul appealed in his missionary sermons. He shows their sense of need by pointing to the fact that, in addition to the gods they worship (as they think, knowingly), they have also an altar to the unknown God. Then, as to the positive aspect, he tells them that their poets have been right in holding that we are the offspring of God, even though he at once corrects the false content they have put into this notion. As image-bearers of God, men always remain accessible to God.

Let us now take up each of these modes of revelation separately to see how they have operated in the history of redemption. In doing so, we shall speak of the “special principle” or “redemptive principle” as including that which has been done for our salvation by Christ in the objective sphere, and what has been done for our salvation within us by the Holy Spirit on the basis of Christ’s work.

1. Theophany (Angelophany, Christophany)

After the entrance of sin God could no longer walk and talk with man in the familiar way in which he had walked and talked with him before the fall. But through the “special principle” of which Christ is the center, this became possible and actual again. Christ is the Immanuel.

We must be careful here not to understand this work by which he brought God near to us in a metaphysical sense. It is a common mistake of modern theology to mix the categories of the ethical and the metaphysical. Man was a creature in paradise, man remained a creature after he fell into sin, man remains a creature when he is redeemed, and man will remain a creature when he goes to heaven. His metaphysical status cannot, in the nature of the case, be changed. The transformations that take place are ethical.

Barthianism, though it seems to be strongly opposed to modern theology, confuses the metaphysical and the ethical. It constantly speaks as though man is to be condemned simply because he is temporal. Instead of providing a deep concept of sin this makes room for a more superficial

concept of sin. A man who is by virtue of creation under the judgment of God will not feel and should not feel that he is responsible for sin. It is only he who knows that man has been made perfect but has fallen into disobedience against God, who will feel guilty for his sin.

John speaks of Christ as the Immanuel when he exultantly declares: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father), full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). This dwelling of God with man reached its climax, as far as the present age is concerned, in Christ’s appearance in the flesh, and will reach its highest climax when “the tabernacle of God shall dwell with men” (Rv 21:3).

Here again we should beware of the error so common today which maintains that it was in the incarnation of Christ that God for the first time came to dwell with men. This heresy appears in a more and in a less extreme form.

In the more extreme form it denies or ignores that man originally lived in paradise so that God actually walked and talked with him. This is the case with modernism and also with Barthianism. They have taken for granted the truth of the evolutionary origin of man. They therefore do not speak of the fall as an historical event, as of an event that is actually of basic significance for the race of man. So for instance Cotton, in the book referred to, says: “The story of the first sin is psychologically true.”[8] The implication of this statement is that it is a matter of indifference whether it is historically true. According to Barthianism too there can be no individual occurrences in history that are determinative for all time.

In the less extreme form the heresy stops short of ignoring or denying the fall of man, but practically ignores the Old Testament and its record of the gradual development of the actual tabernacling of God with man. It speaks as though there was really no revelation of God in the world till Christ came in person. But to say this is to insult Christ, inasmuch as he was present in the old dispensation in the form of his servants, and, as far as the theophanies are concerned, in the angel of Jehovah, etc.

In the Old Testament God graciously ordered the formation of the tabernacle so that he might dwell in the Holy of Holiest in the midst of his people. It was after he had made a covenant with man, it was after he had made himself known to man in his redemptive promise and right after he had given the law as the revelation of his will, that he ordered the tabernacle

to be made. It was to this specially chosen people that God revealed his oracles, and therefore it was in the midst of this specially chosen people that he deigned to dwell.

Here again Barthianism has forsaken the path of orthodox theology. Barth says that there is not any one people in distinction from others to whom God has given revelational content. As far as content is concerned we may go to Moses, to Plato, or anywhere else.[9] Barth identifies the term "Jews" as used by Paul with the term "righteous man," that is, with "good" moral and religious people wherever they may be found.[10]

In contradistinction we maintain that God dwelt especially between the cherubim in the Holy of Holies. He also revealed his glory in many inanimate things, such as clouds of fire, etc., which are but signs to indicate the presence of God with his people.

Besides revealing himself symbolically in inanimate things, God appeared to his people by way of self-conscious creatures. This is especially the case with angels. Angels have a definite function to perform in the economy of redemption. According to Acts 7:53 and Galatians 3:19, they "ordained the law." Especially after the exile they came forth as the media of revelation. Dn 8:13, Dn 9:11, Dn 10:5, Zec 1:7, Zec 6:5 In the New Testament they function at nearly every critical point in the revelation of God to man. It is especially noteworthy that they perform an important function when Christ is about to become flesh, when the tabernacle of God is to dwell with men on earth in the person of Christ himself. Finally they shall also play an important role in connection with the second coming of Christ, that is, when the tabernacle of God shall permanently dwell with men.

Among these angels there is one who differs from them all. It is the "angel of the Lord." He is not a creature. He is identified with God. This angel appeared unto Hagar: "And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me" (Gen 16:13)? Here Hagar speaks of the angel of the Lord and calls him God. Again when the angel of the Lord spake to Jacob he said, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar …" (Gen 31:13)

The significance of the Angel of the Lord as indicating theophany appears most strikingly of all in the fact that the Lord speaks of "the Name" and of "the Face" just as he speaks of the angel and says that his name is

put into the sanctuary. Says Dr. Vos: “The place, where His ‘name’ is, is called His habitation.” “Jehovah causes His Name to dwell there.”Dt 12:15, Dt 11:21, Dt 14:23–24, Dt 16:2, Dt 16:6, Dt 16:11, Dt 26:2[11]

The Angel of Jehovah can, therefore, be none other than the second person of the Trinity who will soon come into the flesh. Soon he in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily, Col 1:19, Col 2:9 will dwell with men on earth.

Of course the incarnation of Christ is the climax as far as the history of redemption in the form of theophany is concerned. We cannot here discuss at length the full meaning of the incarnation. Suffice it to call attention to the following facts in connection with the concept of revelation that we are now considering. The incarnation was not a revelation of God in man in the sense that God has in Christ become identical with men. The distinction between Creator and creature has not been changed in the least by the incarnation of Christ.

The divine nature of Christ was divine before the incarnation and remained divine after the incarnation. It is true that the divine and the human natures of Christ were brought into an indissoluble union in the person of Christ, but this does not make the human divine nor does it make the divine human. The revelation of God in Christ is, therefore, not one of metaphysical transfusion; the revelation of God in Christ, even in the very fact of his incarnation, revealed the Father to us in greater fulness than he had ever been revealed before. John tells us that the only begotten of the Father hath declared the Father to us. But this “declaring of the Father” should not be interpreted as referring to the fact of the incarnation alone. The fact of the incarnation should not be separated from the death of Christ. The death of Christ, in turn, must not be separated from the interpretation that he himself and the apostles after him have given of it. God can come near to man only if man is redeemed by God, and only if man takes the redemption of himself by God on God’s own terms.

2. Prophecy

For this reason prophecy must be taken in immediate conjunction with theophany. In prophecy we deal with the interpretation that God has given to the sinner. We saw that in paradise man was a true prophet. He knew the truth. When sin came into man’s heart he became a prophet without a

mantle. All his interpretation of things was basically false. True, by virtue of nonsaving grace man still had the remnants of prophecy in him. That is, he was able to give interpretation which was true to a certain extent, but this was true in spite of his own principles. If man was to know truly—if man was above all to see what his sinful relation to God was—and if there was to be any hope of the removal of sin, God had to insert a stream of true interpretation into the midst of the false. This true interpretation was fully given in Christ, who is the great Prophet, who is the Truth.

However, long before Christ came into the world in person, he was in the world as the true Prophet by way of those prophets that he sent before him. Nor did the insertion of true prophecy begin for the first time with those men who were called prophets. True prophetic interpretation came into the world with man, and man could not live without it. When sin came it would have destroyed true prophecy. Then God gave the mother promise. In it we have true interpretation or prophecy. In it man was told what the nature of sin is in all its fulness. In it man was also told about the removal of sin. Thus redemption came in as soon as sin came in. The world could not have existed for the fraction of a second without the true interpretation of God.

So then God not only walked with man again after the entrance of sin, but also talked with man. God communicated his will to man. Originally God talked with man and man would himself, of his own accord, make known the communication of God to his fellowman; his thought was receptively reconstructive. By sin man tried to be creatively constructive. Even though men sought communications from the gods after the entrance of sin they never sought communication from the true God in order to make that communication determinative in their lives. They always continued to think of themselves as the judges who could do as they pleased with the information that came to them! They did not recognize the fact that true revelation or true prophetic interpretation must, in the nature of the case, always come with absolute authority.

It is true that all false religions have been “religions of authority.” It is thus that Sabatier spoke of them in order to contrast them to “religions of the spirit.” This authority that other religions have spoken of, however, is of a different nature from the authority of Christianity. The authority of the religions other than Christianity is at most a refuge to which men flee as to a second best. It is something which they accept when they have exhausted themselves in interpreting reality without God. The authority spoken of in

false religions is at best that of the expert, more sensitive and more accomplished than others but himself in need of higher help.

What really ought to be done, therefore, is to set the religion of Christianity over against the other religions in order to say that only Christianity is the religion of authority. At the same time it should be made clear that only Christianity is the religion of the Spirit. The acceptance of the true authority comes by the conviction of the Spirit. All other religions are religions of the human spirit as it has fallen into sin. Christianity is the only religion that is given by the revelation mediated through the divine Spirit.

The difference in attitude between those who accept the revelation of prophecy and those who do not accept it is best indicated in the term "servant" that is applied to those who accept the revelation. John begins the book of Revelation by saying: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants …" These servants are receptive. Their own interpretation is a reinterpretation of God's interpretation.

To these servants God has revealed himself from time to time. There have been several stages through which this development of God's revelation has come. When we speak of stages, we may, if we wish, speak of progressive revelation. However, we should distinguish the meaning of that term from the meaning usually given to it today. As taken today it usually signifies the notion that the human spirit has gradually, by its own unaided efforts, worked more deeply into the nature of reality. Over against this, the idea of progressive revelation as we have now spoken of it means that God progressively reveals more of himself and his redemptive plan for man. This progressive revelation was effected through the mediation of the human agencies that God chose as his servants in order through them to make his revelation known to others.

There have been only two main stages or dispensations: that is the dispensation of the Old and the dispensation of the New Testament. In the Old Testament times there were several forms in which the revelation came. God sometimes let his will be known through the lot. Then again God spoke through the Urim and Thummim. Many times he spoke through dreams. God even spoke through dreams to some that did not belong to his people. In Genesis 20 we have the story of Abimelech who received a revelation from God through a dream. The baker and the butler of Pharaoh received true revelations from God through dreams. Gen 40 When Gideon

came into the camp of the Midianites he found that one man told another a dream about the destruction that was to come (Jgs 7:3).

A somewhat higher medium of revelation than those just mentioned was the vision. This was perhaps the most common medium of revelation in the case of the prophets. Hence the prophets were often called Seers. Many times these seers were in a high state of emotional excitement when they received their revelations. It became customary to think of a prophet as being in a high state of emotion, as the story with respect to Saul clearly indicates. 1 Sm 10:5ff:

A still higher mode of prophetic revelation was that of direct spiritual communication by the Spirit to the prophets. This communication must be clearly distinguished from the illumination that believers are given in order that they may be able to understand the revelation that comes to them. Believers today are not given a new revelation; they do not need a new revelation.

All these modes of prophecy were the beginnings of the work of the Great Prophet upon whom the Spirit would dwell without measure, who was himself the Word become flesh and who declared the Father unto us. It is important to note that all individual revelations given during Old Testament times by all the ways that we have spoken of are not to be considered as standing by themselves. In the first place they are to be regarded as parts of the great body of true interpretation that comes to its climax in the prophetic work of Christ. Every bit of prophecy given in the Old Testament has its meaning in relation to Christ and as a part of the revelation of Christ. In the second place, every bit of individual revelation must be taken in conjunction with the true theophany and the true miracles that were given. Just as in the case of the person of Christ we must not separate his prophetic work from his work as Priest and as King, so also the prophecies given in the Old Testament must be connected with the revelation of God in miracle and in theophany.

It is of special importance to keep all these matters related to one another in order to see what the real distinction is between true prophecy and false prophecy. We have noted that idolatry is the caricature of true theophany and that divination or mantic is the caricature of true prophecy. False prophecy came in forms similar to the forms of true prophecy. False prophets arose who said they had had dreams and visions of the Lord. These false prophets demanded a hearing, and said that they were entitled to

it just as well as were the others. Thus the problem became very acute for those who listened.

The test given by the true prophets according to which their prophecy should be distinguished from false prophecy is that of its organic relationship with all true prophecy and its organic relationship with true theophany and true miracle. As far as the immediate appearance of the matter was concerned it was not always possible to distinguish clearly the true from the false. Yet if any item of prophecy was compared with prophecy insofar as it had previously been given, it would help to distinguish the true from the false. Then too emphasis is placed upon the fact that false prophets may be distinguished from true in that the words of true prophets come true, "And if thou say in thine heart, how shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken; the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously, thou shalt not be afraid of him" (Dt 18:21–22). Corresponding to this, there is the statement of Jeremiah 28:9: "The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him." On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that this test of fulfillment is not in itself a complete test. The possibility that the predictions of false prophets should come true in certain instances is readily granted in Scripture. "If there arise in the midst of thee a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and he give thee a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee in saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them, thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or unto that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him" (Dt 13:1–4). Here we see (a) that the future fulfillment of false prophecy is granted as a possibility, (b) that this occurs under the permissive plan of God and is allowed with the purpose of testing his people, and (c) that God's people have in the "commandments" and the "voice" of God by virtue of which they had already been brought into contact with God, a sufficient safeguard against such apparently true but really false prophecy.

Then, further, individual prophecies are not only brought into relation to the body of true prophecy, but they are also brought into relation to true theophany. The true theophany of God had been given especially in the tabernacle and temple service. True prophets lived their lives in conjunction with this true theophany. Their own lives usually demonstrated the fact that God truly lived with his Spirit in them. Hence many of the true prophets speak of the wickedness of the false prophets as an indication of the falsity of their prophecy.

Again it should be noted that this is not a complete test. It is not a complete test, inasmuch as it cannot be proved that every false prophet lived a morally bad life. Hananiah is said to have prophesied and made the people to trust a lie, but we are not told that he led a bad life (Jer 28:15). On the other hand, the old prophet who lied to the young prophet in order to make him disobey the Lord, nevertheless did afterwards himself receive a true revelation of the Lord. 1 Kgs 13 But these considerations do not change the fact that in the lives and in the close association with the central theophany of God the true prophets could as a rule be distinguished from the false.

In all these cases, and particularly in this case, it should be remembered that these tests would increase in clarity as time went on. As time went on, the body of prophecy became larger and the theophany became more clearly visible.

Finally, we should observe that individual prophecies were brought into relation to the body of miracle. This has already appeared to some extent in the fact that the fulfillment of prophecy often implies the occurrence of a miracle. Yet we must make a separate point of the matter. It is not true that the only purpose of miracles is the corroboration of prophecy or true interpretation. We shall speak of this more fully when we discuss the notion of miracle itself. Yet it is true that they are among other things given as proofs of the truth of prophecy. The prophets refer to the miracles that they do as evidence for the truth of their words. Isaiah gave to Hezekiah a sign by which he might know that the words of the Lord with respect to his healing should come true in the miracle of causing the sundial to work backward instead of forward at a certain time (2 Kgs 20:11). But again, this too would in itself be incomplete because, as we have seen, some false prophets were able to give wonders and signs by which they sought to prove the truth of their prophecies.

All of this shows clearly that prophecy must be considered as a body. Each individual prophecy must be interpreted in relation to the whole body of prophecy of which Christ is the center. This whole body of prophecy must then be taken into relation to the whole body of theophany and the whole body of miracle. If this is done, and only if this is done, can the meaning of any of these matters be fully understood. If this is done, and only if this is done, can the corroborative value of miracle in relation to prophecy and of prophecy in relation to miracle and the relation of both to theophany, be fully understood. All these are mutually corroborative. Their value as being mutually corroborative increases in proportion that it is seen that they are mutually dependent upon one another for their meaning. Prophecy without miracle is an abstraction, and miracle without prophecy is an abstraction, as both are abstractions unless related to theophany.

3. Miracle as a Mode of Revelation

We can now be brief in our discussion of miracle as a mode of revelation. We have already seen that it is involved in the very notion of prophecy and theophany.

God not only walked with man and talked with man, but God also wrought for man. When man fell into sin, he not merely needed new information, but he needed to be changed. Things had to be done for him in the objective sphere, and things had to be done for him in the subjective sphere. He needed not only to be told that Christ would come, but that Christ had actually to come. Christ had to come because of the sin of man. The central miracle of Christianity, as it is in the person and work of Christ, is necessary not because man is man, but because man is a sinner. It is only because of the fact that this miracle was going to come in accordance with the grace and counsel of God that man could have true interpretation of prophecy at all. Thus the theophany itself is essentially miraculous.

If this point be kept in mind we shall be saved from much false intellectualism. Intellectualism in the church has often made an easy compromise with the Socratic dictum that knowledge is virtue. Men often speak as though the only thing that the sinner needs is true information. This, as has been pointed out before, is not the case. Man needs true interpretation, but he also needs to be made a new creature.

That this is so may also be observed from the very nature of sin. Sin is not only misinformation; it is also a power of perversion in the soul. And this appears all the more fully from the fact that the results of sin are seen in nature as well as in man. Nature cannot be suffering from lack of information. Yet it is suffering from the consequences of sin in man. It is under the curse of God.

In miracle God destroys the power of sin upon the soul of man, upon the body of man, and upon nature as the home of man. By miracle God actually reveals his redeeming work in process of fulfillment. Sin brought every sphere of human life in subjection to misery and death; by miracle God brings all these spheres of life back to health. Through the central miracle of the person and work of Christ, the human soul is brought into favor with the living God. Hence in performing his miracles Christ constantly points out that they are symbolical of what he came to do for the souls of men.

But with the cure of the soul belongs the cure of the body. Christ healed the bodies of men not only to illustrate the healing of man's souls; he also healed the bodies for the sake of making for the healed soul of man a healed habitation in which to live. In addition to this Christ also performed nature miracles. He healed the storm to save the men on the ship, but the healing of the storm was at the same time indicative of the fact that a healed soul in a healed body needs a healed nature in which to live. It was thus in paradise. There a healthy soul lived in a healthy body in a healthy home. It will be thus in paradise regained. In the "regeneration of all things" all things will be renewed through the miraculous power of Christ. While he was on earth Christ gave us an earnest of the future in all these respects. He even sent before his own coming in the flesh, not only a true and new interpretation, not only a new habitation with his people in the tabernacle and temple, but he also sent before himself the miracle-working power that he would himself manifest more fully when he came.

As the miracles were to be revelatory of his own nature and the glory of God when he himself performed them, so were they to be revelatory of the glory of God already in the Old Testament. Then Elijah on Mount Carmel prayed for fire to come down to devour his sacrifice, he not only prayed that God would corroborate the truth of his words, but he also prayed that by the miracle it might appear that God was great, that he was the only God that could cause the fire to burn… "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel …" (1 Kgs 18:36) This

glory of God had been primarily displayed in the fact that God had with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm redeemed his people. God had saved his people by one miraculous act after another. A whole *cyclus* of miracles clusters about Israel's redemption from Egypt which is the first comprehensive expression of the redemption of the sinner through Christ. A whole *cyclus* of miracles clusters about the entrance of Israel into the promised land. The enemies of Israel are driven out not so much by the strength of Israel's armies as by the miraculous strength of the Lord. Again and again the Lord shows his people that it is his miraculous saving power that is alone sufficient to save his people from destruction.

All of this at the same time that it displays the glory of the saving power of God also corroborates the truth of the salvation that he has sworn he would give to his people. When God speaks we must accept the truth at his word. When God acts, we must see the fact that he acts in these acts themselves. Yet the words corroborate the deeds and the deeds corroborate the words. Together they give forth such an eloquent testimony of the grace, the power and the truth of God, that men should marvel. In true theophany God has shown himself to be the One without whose presence man cannot live. Paradise is paradise only because God is there. In true prophecy God has shown that without his interpretation man is lost; even the interpretation that man gives of things on the basis of non-saving grace helps him not at all for eternity. In his revelation through miracles God has shown that without his saving power the soul of man, the body of man, and nature too would continue to lie in the ruin in which the sin of man had cast it.

It is in this way that we can see how special revelation supplies that which man could not receive from present general revelation. Man should have known God from nature as Creator, as Provider, and as Judge. Yet man needed the revelation of God's grace to himself, and man needed to have this brought home to him irresistibly. God could not dwell with the sinner as a sinner; man was without God's presence; he was without God in the world (Eph 2:12). Through special revelation, God actually comes to live with men and thus makes real life possible. The life he lived without God was not real life. It was, to be sure, to the extent that it had elements of good in it, a gift of God's non-saving grace, but it would end in eternal ruin. Man also needed the true interpretation. He was without God and therefore without an interpreter in the world. His own interpretation, to be sure, did not link up with God and would, therefore, in the end lead to ruin. Now

God, in special revelation, actually brings the true interpretation into the possession of the souls of those whom he has chosen. It is by virtue of this true interpretation that man can now interpret truly. This interpretation will eventually lead them face to face with God, when they shall see no more in a glass darkly, but directly in him in whose light we see the light. Finally, the power of God by which man should be able to reach the goal that God had set for him was absent from the sinner. He was not merely without God's power in the world; God's power was directed against him. In special revelation, God came down in power for the salvation of man. God Almighty no longer merely displayed his power to destroy, but even more so his power to save. Yea, even by virtue of non-saving grace, it was God's power that kept man from falling in complete destruction at once. Yet this power was not for man's eternal benefit. God's power to save for eternity came with special revelation only.

This threefold revelation developed gradually and slowly in the Old Testament times in anticipation of the fulfillment of the New Testament day. In Christ all this was fulfilled. It only remains for the fulness of the benefits wrought by Christ to be brought out in fulness of degree as well as in fulness of principle. When this is done, the new heavens and the new earth will have been brought in and paradise regained.

[1] *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 25.
[2] *Institutes*1, 6.
[3] Calvin's *Institutes*, 2, 2.
[4] Gordon H. Clark, Edward Carnell.
[5] *Institutes*, 1, 6:2.
[6] *The Evangelical Student*, April-October, 1933, p. 4.
[7] see *Kirchliche Dogmatic*.
[8] p. 96.
[9] *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 60.
[10] Cf. also *Brunner Revelation and Reason*.
[11] Cf. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*.

Chapter 11: Scripture

In our discussion of special revelation we have dealt with the disruptive power of sin. If redemption had not come into the world at the moment of sin's entrance the world would have been in ruin. Once the world lay in sin it would have to be upheld by the everlasting arms of God's redemptive mercy or it would have fallen to pieces. By saying this we do not wish to convey the idea that grace, either saving grace or "common" grace, had to take the place of providence. We mean that the purpose God actually had in mind with the course of history could not be accomplished without redemptive grace. It is this fact of God's final purpose that accounts for the necessity of saving grace and "common" grace alike. In the second place, we saw that this redemptive revelation of God had to be as comprehensive as the sweep of sin. Redemption must, in the nature of the case, be for the whole world. This does not mean that it must save every individual sinner in the world. It does mean, however, that the created universe which has been created as a unit must also be saved as a unit. In the third place, we saw that this saving revelation of God must, in the nature of the case, testify of itself. All the testimony with respect to it must, in the last analysis, be founded upon the self-testimony of God.

Bearing these points in mind, we shall be able to see why it was necessary for Scripture to come as the form or scheme of this special revelation. The special revelation of God to man came not only by way of intellectual information. It came both as word and as deed. In theophany and in miracle, we have facts of revelation rather than words. But these facts needed to be explained by God himself. Sinful man cannot and will not explain them truly. Sinful man would be sure to misinterpret them. He would regard them as mere accidental occurrences. Men sometimes believe the resurrection of Christ as an historical fact, and then fit this fact into a pragmatic conception of history. According to a pragmatic philosophy of history anything may happen and nothing will have any particular and universal meaning. On the other hand word revelation without fact revelation would hover in the air and not reach reality. Special revelation needed actually to dip into this sinful world with redemptive power. Hence special revelation could not come to man in the form of a book dropped from heaven. Revelation had to be historically mediated. We are not certain

that there is not an element of truth in the charge sometimes lodged against "fundamentalists" that they have a mechanical conception of Scripture. Instead of a mechanical view of Scripture, orthodox Christians should have an organic view of special revelation as a whole and of Scripture in particular.

If we thus connect the doctrine of Scripture with special revelation as a whole, we can understand at once what the Protestant Church has meant by the four main attributes of Scripture.

A. Attributes of Scripture

1. Necessity

In the first place there is the attribute of necessity. This necessity must be regarded from the point of view of the intense struggle between God and Satan for the soul of man. We have seen how man as sinner is an ally of Satan in that he basically hates God, whatever may appear on the surface as the fruit of non-saving grace. Hence, when God inserted the special principle.[1] in the sinful world, this special principle came into an enemy's territory. Not as though the race of man belongs rightfully to Satan. Rightfully this world and the race of men belong to God. Yet Satan had usurped this world and the hearts of men had been alienated from God. Accordingly Satan and his servants would deck to destroy the special principle whenever and wherever it would appear. This process of hatred of the redemptive work of God reached its climax as far as the person of Christ is concerned when Satan opposed him in every possible way. Naturally Satan would seek to prevent the special principle from performing its world-wide mission. If an authoritative interpretation were not given to the redemptive facts, if the interpretation were left to men, it is certain that the redemptive revelation of God would not be able to reach the ends of the earth and maintain itself to the end of time. Even granted that many to whom the revelation came were sympathetic to it by virtue of the fact that they had been redeemed, there would always be others who would pervert the truth. Moreover, not even the redeemed can know fully and infallibly the meaning of the redemptive work of God in all its wide significance. Accordingly the Protestant churches have contended that the

inscripturation of the content of the special revelation of God was necessary in order that this special revelation (1) might remain through the ages, (2) might reach all mankind, (3) might be offered to men objectively, and (4) might have the testimony of its truthfulness within itself.

2. Authority

The second attribute of Scripture the Reformers spoke of is that of authority. This authority is involved in the idea of necessity. Scripture is necessary because an authoritative revelation is necessary. We have seen that the sinner will not of himself recognize that he is abnormal in his interpretation of life. Hence he also refuses to recognize that God is the ultimate while he himself should be nothing but the immediate starting point in the knowledge situation. The sinner seeks to be autonomous. He will, therefore, seek to set himself up as a judge over that which presents itself to him as revelation. Now if the revelation of God came to men in such a way as to recognize the sinner as autonomous and able to judge about the truth of revelation of himself, it is certain that the sinner would never escape his position of autonomy. There would then be no one to challenge it. God himself would be strengthening man in his self-conceit. Accordingly we find that revelation comes to the sinner with a claim of absolute authority over man. It asks man to submit his thought captive-to it in obedience. Thus the concepts of necessity and authority are involved in one another. There would be no necessity for anything but for an authoritative revelation while, on the other hand, there was an absolute necessity for an authoritative revelation.

3. Perspicuity

The third attribute of Scripture is perspicuity. If there were any necessity for human interpreters to intervene between Scripture and those to whom Scripture comes, that is, to mankind in general, there would still be an opportunity for Satan to insert his false interpretation. In this way, too, the authority of Scripture would fall away. If there is necessity for an authoritative revelation, then there is also necessity for a perspicuous revelation. We should see exactly what is meant by the perspicuity of Scripture. It means that no human interpreter needs come between the Scriptures and those to whom it comes. It is opposed to clericalism. This

does not mean that men who place themselves with us under the Scriptures, and who are ordained of God for the preaching of the Word, cannot be of service to us in the better understanding of Scripture. The perspicuity of Scripture is perfectly consistent with the Protestant teaching with respect to the task of the preachers of the Word, but it is directed against the Roman Catholic notion that no ordinary member of the Church may interpret Scripture for himself directly. The doctrine should therefore be definitely maintained against Romanism.

Perspicuity does not mean that every portion is equally easy to be understood. It means that with ordinary intelligence any person can obtain, without the intervention of priests, the main point of the things he needs to know.

“Fundamentalism” has sometimes abused this doctrine. Under the slogan of going back to the Bible, it often ignores the great insight into the truth of the Bible that the Church has already obtained in the generations past. This insight has been deposited in the creeds of the church. He who ignores the creeds under the slogan of going to the Bible does despite to the Spirit who has led the church into all truth.

4. Sufficiency

The fourth attribute of Scripture is sufficiency. This is involved in the necessity, authority and perspicuity of Scripture. Man’s interpretation was not partly but wholly bankrupt. If any part of it would have to be added to the interpretation of God in order to bring matters to completion, there would be no authoritative revelation. Sufficiency is therefore necessary, as perspicuity is necessary, in order that no admixture of human interpretation would be required in connection with the special revelation of God. The Reformers thought of this attribute particularly in opposition to all manner of sectarianism, as they thought of perspicuity chiefly in opposition to clericalism, as they thought of necessity in opposition to rationalism, and as they thought of authority in opposition to autonomy. All these matters overlap and are involved in one another, and it is well to see that they do. The four attributes of Scripture are equally important because, if we did not have them all, we would have none. The whole matter centers about an absolutely true interpretation that came into a world full of false interpretation.

B. The Modern Opposition to Scriptural Authority

The importance of the Protestant doctrine of Scripture may be learned from the type of criticism launched against it by idealist philosophers. We take A. E. Taylor' s book, *The Faith of a Moralist* as an example. When Taylor discusses "The Meaning and Place of Authority" he tells us that the basic reason for the rejection of the conception of biblical authority is that Christianity deals with historical phenomenon. "In any true account of the concrete and individual reality, one must somewhere come upon something of which it can only be said, 'Why this thing should be so, or even just what it is, is more than I can tell, but at all costs it must be recognized that here the thing is.' If this is all we mean by 'irrationality,' we may safely say that historical individuality is the great supreme irrational from which thought can never succeed in getting free."[2] Taylor has taken for granted that historical reality exists in independence of God. He argues in effect that each bit of concrete historical reality is independent of the rationality of God. In contrast to this, theism maintains that every bit of historical reality is what it is because of the prior rationality of God. Taylor makes the mistake of identifying "irrationality" for us with irrationality for God.

This brings us to the most pivotal question of the relation of the constructive activity of the human mind to historical fact. The burden of all the arguments against the conception of an absolute revelation which Taylor adduces is that the reception of revelation always requires a subjective element. He tells us that it is impossible to make any intelligible statement "whether about the natural or the supernatural, which shall have as its content the simply objective and given, with no element whatever of the subjective and constructed."[3] In order to clinch this argument completely, he introduces the question of the authority of our Lord. He points to the church's belief that the soul and the body of Christ are "in the fullest sense of the word" creatures.

Still further he reminds us that Christ did many things that are done by creatures only: Christ grew in wisdom and grace with God and man, Christ prayed and felt forsaken. Accordingly, Taylor says, "Then a Christian speaks of the adequacy of the Lord's human experience of the supernatural, he must not, I take it, forget that the adequacy meant is still relative to the conditions of creatureliness inseparable from genuine humanity."[4] That Taylor himself considers this to be the basis of all his objections to the

orthodox conception of revelation is plain from the fact that, after giving several of the arguments that are usually brought forward in favor of and against the conception of absolute authority, he says: “But the point on which I am personally most concerned 10 insist is a different one. It is that in immediate apprehension of the supernatural, as in immediate apprehension of the natural, we are dealing with concrete, individual, historical experiences which resist complete intellectual analysis at the same time that they demand it. In both cases, no man can communicate what he sees in its totality and individuality.”[5]

It ought to be apparent, from the great emphasis Taylor lays upon this point, and from the momentous conclusions that follow if his point is granted that we must be very careful here to note the exact implications of this thought. We have seen that, according to Taylor, the object of knowledge is assumed as existing apart from God. In consonance with this and in correspondence with this, Taylor now assumes that the subject of knowledge also exists apart from God and that it does its interpretative activity in total independence of God. Taylor takes for granted that man is an ultimate interpreter instead of a derived re-interpreter. He tells us that if there is any interpretative element entering into the reception of the meaning of any objective reality, it has therewith lost its absoluteness. He tells us that the interpretative element is subjective. It prevents us from coming into contact with the absolutely given. Here, exactly, Christian theism takes issue. It holds that truth, though interpreted and reinterpreted, is still absolute. According to it, there is no absolutely given for God, either beyond or within God’s nature. E. S. Brightman has labored in two recent books, *The Problem of God* and *The Finding of God*, to harmonize theism with the idea that there is a given for God. It goes without saying that the biblical conception of the absolute self-consciousness of God is flatly opposed to any such idea. An attempt to introduce the given into the bosom of the Godhead is nothing less than an attempt to introduce the pagan notion of an original evil universe into Christian thought. For God, the object and the subject of knowledge are coterminous as far as his own person is concerned. Hence there can be no conception of a vague irrationality enveloping the historical for God. For God, history has no surd. But for the same reason human thought must, in the nature of the case, be reinterpretative. When the human being thinks normally his interpretation does not introduce an element of subjectivity which vitiates the

absoluteness of the truth with which he comes into contact. On the contrary, when man thinks normally he must be in contact with absolute truth.

In another connection we have called attention to the fact that antitheistic thought takes for granted that, for any act to be truly personal it must be unipersonal. That is, any personal action must be surrounded by a completely impersonal universe. Even the most personalistic of anti-theistic philosophies such as that of Borden P. Bowne, make this assumption. But Christian theism holds that every finite person is surrounded by a completely personalistic atmosphere because, even if the world immediately around him be impersonal, this impersonal world derives its meaning from its creator. Similarly, in this connection, we see once more that Taylor takes for granted that human interpretation must be ultimate interpretation. If man gives any interpretation of any fact, that interpretation need not and really cannot rest upon and presuppose a prior and ultimate interpretation by God. Taylor holds that if man inserts any interpretative element, the whole matter of interpretation becomes, *ipso facto*, a cooperative affair between God and man. In contrast to this, Christian theism holds that God's ultimate interpretation and man's finite re-interpretation could not function except for God's prior and absolute interpretation.

If we note this great difference between Christian theism and the position of Taylor we shall be clear in our minds as to what to answer to the various detailed objections that Taylor brings against the orthodox conception of absolute authority. Taylor thinks that he has found the really natural and truly scientific attitude to the whole question of authority by saying that religious authority should not be considered as being absolute but as that of the experience. Jesus was the greatest religious expert that ever lived. Accordingly, we ought to attach great weight to his words. Yet, as noted above, we should always be sensible to the fact that his experience of the supernatural was to an extent subjective and constructive, and to that extent was not absolute. If this position of Taylor is taken with respect to Jesus, it is but to be expected that the Bible will not fare any better. In the case of the Bible, it is much easier than in the case of Christ to make the theory of expert authority seem plausible because the Bible has come to us through many mediaries, and requires interpretation over and over again. With respect to the Bible, then, Taylor brings forth the usual objections, such as, that the text is corrupt, that there are ambiguous statements, that there are

known errors, that even if all this were not so and there were not many and various interpretations of the one authority, the question would still be as to which Bible would have to be accepted. He says, “Moreover, before we can so much as know what Bible it is to which we are appealing, since the Bible itself never enumerates its own component parts, we have to go to an extra-Biblical authority to learn what books are part of the infallible Bible, and what are not. (So far the ‘Fundamentalists’ apparently have shirked the question of what is the authority which fixes the canon of Scripture, but it is a question which they must be prepared to face … with curious consequences for Fundamentalism.)”[6]

From the enumeration of these various objections, it is plain that the one foundation of them all is that which we have discussed above, namely, that according to Taylor there can be no authority which is absolute, if the one who receives the message of authority is, in any way, constructive in the reception of it. He holds that, for absolute authority to exist at all, one must first think of experience as standing in sharp metaphysical opposition to. Accordingly, he represents his own view as overcoming this antithesis. He says: “Or to put it rather differently, what I would suggest is that authority and experience do not stand over against one another in sharp and irreconcilable opposition: authority is the self-assertion of the reality of an experience which contains more than any individual experient has succeeded in analyzing out and extricating for himself.” But we have already observed that it is Taylor, and not the Christian theist, who has set up a false antithesis to begin with. It was he who set up the interpretative activity of the human mind as something independent of the interpretative activity of the divine mind. And if one starts with such a false assumption it is but to be expected that one cannot think of the absolute authority of God over man unless man’s mental activity be put to a complete standstill. On the other hand, the Christian theistic conception which underlies and forms the foundation of the notion of absolute biblical authority does not entertain a false antithesis to begin with. The very foundation of the concept of biblical authority is that because of God’s absolute self-consciousness man’s self-conscious activity is always derivative, and man’s reconstructive activity operates in the field of God’s original constructive activity. Hence absolute authority was man’s daily meat and drink when his mind was normal. It was only because of the entrance of sin into the heart of man that it was necessary for this authority of God to come to man in an externally

mediated form. This externally mediated form was necessary because of an ethical and not because of a metaphysical separation between God and man. It was necessary that the ethical alienation should be removed in order that the original metaphysical relation be able to function normally again.

In our defense of the concept of biblical authority, then, it is of the utmost importance that it be brought into relationship with the theistic position that is presupposed by it. So much the argument of Taylor should clearly teach us. It is not till we have shown that the anti-theistic assumption of Taylor, i.e., of the independence of man from God, is the source of all the opposition to the idea of biblical authority, that we have dealt with these objections in any thorough way. This does not mean that it is of no value to show that particular objections themselves in each case rest upon misunderstanding. But it does mean that the deepest misunderstanding upon which all the objections rest is that of the assumed correlativity of God and man with which antitheistic thought starts upon its way. It is true, in part at least, that Fundamentalism has not always been conscious of this fact. It has sometimes limited its discussion of biblical authority to a statement and defense of details, without bringing these details into relation to the big issues of metaphysics and epistemology underlying them. But if Taylor's criticism is in a measure justified when we think of Fundamentalism, it is not justified when the historic confessions are taken into consideration. In these confessions the doctrine of biblical authority is not separated from the theistic interpretation of reality as a whole. The whole argument about biblical authority would be given a better setting if, on the side of the orthodox, it were constantly realized that we cannot defend Christianity without defending theism, and if, on the side of the opponents of Christianity, it were realized that in dispensing with Christianity they must also be prepared to dispense with theism. And the orthodox will not see the relation between the biblical concept of authority in particular and Christianity in general to the position of theism as a whole, so long as they themselves, as is the case with the Roman Catholics and the Arminians, entertain any of the essentially antitheistic notions about the independence of human thought.

From this discussion of the position of Taylor we can learn that the objections raised by men against an unequivocal submission of man's consciousness to the Scriptures rests upon an assumed non-theistic metaphysical foundation. Once we are clearly convinced of the justification

of biblical theism, we need make no apology for the Christian conception of the submission of man's consciousness to the Scriptures.

C. The Roman Catholic Position

Rome here, as elsewhere, stands half-way between the naturalist and the Christian point of view. For this reason too Rome, instead of being the strongest bulwark against Modernism, as is often thought, cannot really offer any strong opposition to Modernism at all.

Instead of seeking infallible interpretation where, according to the genius of Christianity it belongs, namely, in the Scriptures, Rome seeks it in a human being who interprets Scripture. Rome believes in Scripture, but also believes in tradition and in the final interpretative power of the Pope with respect to both Scripture and tradition.

We can profitably see what the Roman position is by noting what Bellmarin, the great Roman controversialist, says with respect to the Protestant doctrine, in his work, *Controversus Christianae Fidei Adversus Haereticos*. He seeks to prove that Scripture does not need to be and is not what the Protestants say it is.

His arguments may be tabulated as follows: 1. Tradition has preserved the true religion from Adam to Moses; if then, the Church has existed without Scripture in the past, it can do so now. The necessity of Scripture is not absolute, in the sense that from then beginning no one can be saved without it. In the beginning of redemptive history Scripture would have been anachronous. It goes without saying that the whole of Scripture could not be given till the whole of the redemptive process was complete.

2. Before Christ, only the Jews had the Scripture; yet there were others who had the knowledge of the true God. Genesis 14:18: "And Meichizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine; and he was priest of God most high." Reply: The stream of the special principle grew narrower as time went on; in the earlier times there would naturally be individuals scattered here and there who had a true knowledge of God from the original tradition of paradise. We have emphasized that the tradition, as such, was at first as well-known among those who were not the people of God as among those who were the people of God. But a valid argument for the sufficiency of tradition at that time is not a valid argument for the sufficiency of tradition

after the organism of special revelation is complete and the tradition of paradise has practically died out. To argue as Rome argues would be to say that because the sacrifices of the Old dispensation were sufficient for the needs of the people of Israel they are sufficient for us now. 3. The Jews themselves attached more importance to tradition than to Scripture. Reply: This is true, but it is true because the majority of the Jews understood not "the end," that is, the purpose, of Old Testament revelation; they took that which was preparatory and prophetic for something permanent. It is because Rome makes the same mistake that it can argue as it does. 4. Missionaries have converted tribes of heathen to Christianity, while as yet there was no written language among them and therefore no Scripture. Reply: The work of true missionaries is based upon Scripture, and not independent of Scripture. 5. If God had meant the church to have a Bible in the way that Protestants say that he did, the individual apostles would not have sent letters about, some of which have been lost. God has spoken to men from the beginning of time, and continues to do so now in the person of the Pope. Reply: An architect building a great cathedral may do some other things in passing. So also John tells us that Jesus did and said many things which were not recorded, but this does not detract from the authority of that which was recorded. Similarly, even if some books were lost, they were lost by the providence of God, and not considered to be a necessary part of the canon.

In general, we may remark that Rome destroys the organic nature of the "special principle." Rome's attitude, consistently carried out, would shatter the special principle. It would not require man's subordination to the absolute interpretation of God.

Most devastating to the "special principle" does the position of Rome appear to be if it is noted that, with it, the centrality and the finality of the prophetic office of Christ is attacked. Just as in the case of the Mass, the centrality and sufficiency of the high priestly office of Christ is attacked, so, in the case of the claim to absolute interpretative power on the part of the Pope, the sufficiency of the prophetic office of Christ is attacked. The written word is the complement of the incarnate Word. In Ephesians 2:20, Paul calls the testimony of the apostles and prophets the foundation (*themelion*) on which the Church is built. The apostles and prophets together stand for the Scripture as a whole.

In Luke 16 Jesus himself teaches the sufficiency of the revelation given in Scripture to the “rich man” by making Abraham answer each objection that he offers on the ground that the revelation given him had not been sufficient, by saying: “They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.” So also Jesus constantly refers to the Scriptures alone as they which testify of him.

The implication is that the Jews by their tradition had obscured this testimony which they should have clearly seen in the Old Testament. Jn 5:39, Jn 5:45, Jn 5:47

John also says that many things were written with the specific purpose that men through them as a sufficient source of truth should believe on Christ (Jn 9:31). So then when Rome says that it has gathered up these traditions in order the better to instruct the church, it has sought to be wiser than John, the Christ instructed apostle. Of course, no harm were done if it were clearly maintained that no traditions can, in any sense of the term, stand on an equality with Scripture; but this is not what Rome is interested in doing.

D. Objections of False Mysticism

Similar to the objections of outright non-Christian philosophy and to the objections of Rome against the Protestant doctrine of Scripture, are the objections of all manner of mysticisms.

In many forms of mysticism there is the same opposition to the idea of an absolutely self-conscious God speaking to man and communicating his once-for-all authoritative interpretation to man that we found in Taylor. This point is of particular importance in our day. If we recall that such a prominent mystic as Rufus Jones was one of the main collaborators in the formulation of the book, *Rethinking Missions*, it is evident that the danger threatening the church from this source is far from imaginary.

The position of such mystics as Rufus Jones, Evelyn Underhill, etc., is basically the same as that of idealist philosophers. For that reason, the argument that we have advanced in the case of A. E. Taylor is applicable also to them. Some mystics, however, think it worthwhile to claim biblical ground for their position. For this reason we must now briefly discuss their arguments on this point. These arguments may be tabulated as follows: 1.

There are revelations of the Spirit now as well as formerly; there is no reason to think that God should have revealed himself at one time, and then stopped revealing himself.

Reply: Galatians 1:8, 9 tells us that if an angel from heaven came in order to add to the completed revelation given by the apostles and prophets, he should be anathema (Gal 1:8–9). Nor does Paul mean merely that nothing against the spirit of the gospel that he preached should be allowed. His meaning evidently is that the Galatians had an infallible criterion by which to judge those that sought to bring in another gospel. That which was not apostolic should be tested by that which was. By adding new revelation, mysticism rejects this test of Paul. We have a perfect right to say that a certain writing or a certain thought is in accord with the spirit of the Scripture, but we have not, unless prepared to set aside the authority of Paul, the right to say that a certain non-apostolic writing is to be put on the level with apostolic writing as a revelation of God.

2. On the basis of 2 Corinthians 3:6, “Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Cor 3:6) the contention is made that the Bible was never meant to be taken as a book that should be interpreted literally. To interpret the Bible literally, it is said, is to oppose true spiritual progress.

Reply: We admit that it is possible to use the Scriptures mechanically. But to do so is an abuse of Scripture. The “letter” as spoken of by Paul, refers not to Scripture as a whole, but refers to “the ministration of condemnation,” that is, to the old dispensation in which there was a great emphasis upon the keeping of the precepts of God externally. What Paul speaks of here is the same thing that he speaks of in Romans 8:15, “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15). True spirituality is perfectly consistent with literal obedience to the will of God; but the full flower of spirituality could not be found in the Old Testament times, when the emphasis of revelation was rather upon the condemnation for sin than upon the forgiveness of sin through Christ, and when the revelation of God was not as fully given as it is in the New Testament.

3. It is said that the Scripture speaks in general terms only, while Christians need individual revelation for individual situations.

Reply: Individual Christians do not need individual revelation; individual Christians need only the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their study of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit himself has in the Scriptures deposited all the revelation that the believer needs. He has promised that he will lead the church collectively and the individual privately into a deeper and fuller understanding of the meaning of revelation he has given. We may be certain that one who first insults the Holy Spirit by failing to study carefully the revelation of God in Scripture, or by ignoring the fact that the Scriptures are given as a sufficient revelation, will not obtain any special revelation. What Buchmanism speaks of as guidance virtually amounts to revelation. Buchmanism actually claims to receive information about details of life by the direct method of approach to God, rather than by way of the Word.

4. On the basis of Joel 3:1, 2; Acts 2; and Jeremiah 31:31, it is maintained that in the new dispensation the gift of prophecy is given to each believer. Reply: The antithesis between the old and the new dispensations here spoken of is not that between a smaller or greater number of those who shall receive revelations, but is that of a difference between a dispensation in which the general illuminating work of the Spirit was limited to a few and a dispensation in which that general illuminating work of the Spirit is freely bestowed on all classes of men.

5. On the basis of 1 John 2:27 in which the Apostle speaks of the anointing of the Holy One by which the believers know all things so that they need no one to teach them anything, it is contended that the revelation of God has not been closed.

Reply: John does not speak here of individual believers in comparison with the church as a whole, but he speaks of the church as a whole in comparison with the world. Of this church he says that it has the treasury of truth in the Scripture, so that it need not get its interpretation about anything from the wisdom of this world.

6. On the basis of Luke 17:21 which says that the kingdom of God is within believers, the conclusion is drawn that Scripture is unnecessary. Reply: The contrary is proved from the first part of the text: “Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” This shows that Christ refers to false Christs who were to come and perform false miracles. By this external show they would likely lead many astray. Accordingly, Christ warns men not to be led away by external show.

They are rather to realize that the kingdom of God is an internal power within us. The question is therefore not one of revelation at all, but of power.

From these objections that have been made against the orthodox Protestant view of the nature of Scripture, we see how important it is to instruct the churches in an understanding of the doctrine of Scripture. All the various isms, such as Russellism, Spiritism, etc., seek, each in its own way, to undermine the sufficiency and authority of Scripture. They usually come with a great show of faithfulness to the Scripture. Then too they will often appeal to the more difficult passages of Scripture and give a plausible explanation of them in order thus to make men think that they are really very much interested in Scripture interpretation.

Against these heresies we must clearly see that the Protestant principle, which says that Scripture must be interpreted in analogy with Scripture itself, is of basic importance. This rule is itself involved in the characteristics of Scripture as sufficient, perspicuous, authoritative, and absolutely necessary.

Scripture needs no additional revelations. All interpretation must be subordinated to Scripture as a whole; the darker places must be interpreted in the light of the more easily understood.

It is not sufficient, then, to instruct the church in certain portions of Scripture, or to make them memorize a great deal of Scripture. In addition to this, they must possess a doctrine of Scripture as a whole. It is only if men see clearly that Scripture is what the orthodox doctrine says it in that they will, by the grace of God, be safeguarded against every wind of doctrine that so easily besets us.

Unfortunately many Fundamentalist ministers are, to a large extent, themselves to blame for this deflection of the membership of the churches into all manner of false doctrines. With all the good intentions that they have, they all too commonly teach Scripture in a piecemeal fashion. And, in particular, many of them occupy themselves to such an extent with the more obscure passages of Scripture that they cultivate in their hearers a wrong sense of proportion. It is not uncommon to find an ardent and well-meaning youth, of less than twenty, interested greatly in the details of the “signs of the times,” while he has no reasonable knowledge of the main doctrines of Scripture, to say nothing of the catechisms of the church, in which the system of doctrine of the Scripture is set forth.

[1] By the “special principle” is meant everything that God has done for the redemption of his people (a) objectively, through the work of Christ, and (b) subjectively through the application of this work of Christ by the Holy Spirit.
[2] 2, p. 212.
[3] 2, p. 229.
[4] 2, p. 230.
[5] 2, p. 224.
[6] 2, p. 209.

Chapter 12: The Inspiration of Scripture

It has been our aim to bring the whole doctrine of Scripture into organic relation to the person and work of Christ. We have also sought to show that the whole of Christianity is to be organically related to theism. It is of particular importance to note that the inspiration of Scripture is not a doctrine that stands by itself, but is nothing else than the logical climax of the concept of Scripture as a part of the whole of Christian theism. It is only if we see it as such that we shall see the importance of holding to it. As sinners, we need an absolutely authoritative revelation of God. The least bit of insertion of false interpretation would break the interpretation of God as authoritative interpretation.

Many well-meaning orthodox Christians are today willing to compromise on the doctrine of Scripture inspiration. They think it is unnecessarily encumbering to the orthodox position to load it down with the doctrine of the plenary inspiration of Scripture. Moreover, they hold that for all practical purposes it is enough to say that the Bible is substantially true. But the Bible claims nothing less than absolute inspiration for itself, and it is nothing less than this that we need in order to oppose the inroads of the modern unbelief in general.

Before proceeding to the development of the scriptural doctrine of inspiration, it may be w ell to refer briefly at this point to the charge of circular reasoning implied in such a method. It is said that we cannot fairly go first to Scripture to see what it says about inspiration and then say that the Scripture is true because it is inspired.

In order to avoid this charge of circular reasoning, orthodox theology has often offered the following: In the first place, it is proved by ordinary historical evidence that Christ actually arose from the dead and that he performed miracles. This is said to prove his divinity. Secondly, it is noted that this divine person has testified to the Old Testament as the Word of God and that he himself promised the gift of the Holy Spirit who should lead the apostles into the truth and thus be qualified as authors of the New Testament.

Historical apologetics is absolutely necessary and indispensable to point out that Christ arose from the grave, etc. But as long as historical apologetics works on a supposedly neutral basis it defeats its own purpose.

For in that case-it virtually grants the validity of the metaphysical assumptions of the unbeliever. So in this case, a pragmatist may accept the resurrection of Christ as a fact without accepting the conclusion that Christ is the Son of God. And on his assumptions he is not illogical in doing so. On the contrary, if his basic metaphysical assumption to the effect that all reality is subject to chance is right, he is only consistent if he refuses to conclude from the fact of Christ's resurrection that he is divine in the orthodox sense of the term. Now, though he is wrong in his metaphysical assumption, and though, rightly interpreted, the resurrection of Christ assuredly proves the divinity of Christ, we must attack him in his philosophy of fact, as well as on the question of the actuality of the facts themselves. For on his own metaphysical assumptions the resurrection of Christ would not prove his divinity at all.

In addition to showing that Christ actually arose from the grave and that the facts recorded in the Scripture are as they are recorded as being, insofar as this can be ascertained by historical research, we must show that the philosophy of fact as held to by Christian theism is the only philosophy that can account for the facts. And these two things must be done in conjunction with one another. Historical apologetics becomes genuinely fruitful only if it is conjoined with philosophical apologetics. And the two together will have to begin with Scripture, and argue that unless what Scripture says about itself and all things else of which it speaks is true, nothing is true. Unless God as an absolutely self-conscious person exists, no facts have any meaning. This holds not only for the resurrection of Christ, but for any other fact as well.

If this is done, it will be seen that redemption must have come into the world as soon as sin came into the world, because the world, to exist at all, must exist as a theistic world. This redemptive process could originate with no one but God. Accordingly only God himself can testify to the revelation that he has given of himself. Special revelation must, in the nature of the case, be self-testified. Christ did, to be sure, appeal from himself to the testimony of John the Baptist, etc., but, in the last analysis, this was not an appeal to someone else, because John the Baptist and all other prophets were nothing but the emissaries of Christ. With these things in mind, we need not apologize for going to Scripture in order to see what it says about inspiration, in order then to say that the Scriptures are true because they are inspired. The existence of God is the presupposition of all human

predication and the idea of biblical self-testimony is involved in this presupposition.

The only alternative to “circular reasoning” as engaged in by Christians, no matter on what point they speak, is that of reasoning on the basis of isolated facts and isolated minds, with the result that there is no possibility of reasoning at all. Unless as sinners we have an absolutely inspired Bible, we have no absolute God interpreting reality for us, and unless we have an absolute God interpreting reality for us, there is no true interpretation at all.

This is not to deny that there is a true interpretation up to a point by those who do not self-consciously build upon the self-conscious God of Scripture as their ultimate reference point. Non-believers often speak the truth in spite of themselves. But we are not now concerned with what men do in spite of themselves. We are concerned to indicate that the absolute distinction between true and false must be maintained when a self-consciously adopted monotheistic and a self-consciously adopted theistic point of view confront one another.

We may now first show what the Scripture says about personal revelation, then what it says about scriptural revelation, in order to see that plenary inspiration is involved in these two.

A. The Orthodox Doctrine of Inspiration

1. With Respect to Personal Inspiration

Full and complete investigation of this subject has been made by conservative scholars, especially by Dr. B. B. Warfield.[1] We can only touch on the high spots in the argument.[2]

a. The prophets considered themselves but mouthpieces of Jehovah. Exodus 7:1 says that Aaron was to be Moses’ prophet by transmitting Moses’ words to Pharaoh. Deuteronomy 18:18, a classic text, speaks of the great prophet to come as the one in whose mouth God will put his words.

b. Prophets, so far from speaking only as they were inspired, in Schleiermacher’s sense of being urged by their own desire, were sometimes forced to speak Jehovah’s word against their will. In Numbers 22:38, Baalam says, “Have I now any power at all to speak anything? The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.”Cf. Is 6, Jer 1, Ez 1–3

c. The prophets sometimes make a clear distinction between times when the Lord did and when he did not speak to them. Thus they set the thought of their own heart in opposition to what Jehovah revealed to them. In Numbers 16:28, Moses feels certain that he will be justified and Korah with his followers destroyed, because Moses had not done any of the works in connection with Israel's journey of his "own mind."[3] False prophets are they that speak the things of their own heart. Jer 14:4, Jer 23:16, Jer 23:26, Jer 29:9.

d. Sometimes the prophets did not themselves understand what the meaning of their prophecy was Daniel says of the prophecies given by himself, "O, my Lord. That shall be the issue of these things." The answer given is "God thy way, Daniel, for the words are shut up till the time of the end."Dn 12:8–9 The New Testament echo to this is found in 1 Peter 1:10, 11, where the apostle says that the prophets: having been used of God as revelatory agents, would turn about and seek by their own efforts to understand those things but now spoken by themselves.

From the New Testament it is not so immediately clear that Schleiermacher's view of inspiration is unbiblical. But this difference between the Old and the New Testaments finds its sufficient explanation in the fact that the New Testament, organs of revelation were more deeply led into the "mystery of godliness" than were the Old Testament organs of revelation, so that the operation or the Spirit could often limit itself to the negative one of protection from error. The apostles are, however, just as fully aware of the fact that their words are words of the Lord, as were the prophets. (1 Cor 2:13: "Which words we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth"; 1 Thess. 2:13: "And for this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when ye received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also worketh in you that believe."1 Cor 2:13, 1 Thes 2:13)

And, if possible, more important still is the fact that Christ promised to his apostles the gift of the Holy Spirit. Mt 10:19–20, Mk 13:11, Lk 12:11–12, Jn 14:26

2. With Respect to Scriptural Inspiration

Those who hold the modern view might still persist, however, in objecting that the consciousness of the prophets and apostles of speaking Jehovah's word was limited to the spoken word and did not extend to written revelation. But the biblical evidence is again opposed to the modern view as just stated. It would not serve the purpose of the "special principle" at all if the Holy Spirit did not extend his guidance to the written revelation. We may cite the following points:

A. For the Old Testament

1. The Old Testament organs of revelation are commanded to write their revelation; e.g., Exodus 17:14: "Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua; for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven" (Ex 17:14). This does not by itself prove the point, but it does indicate that the Lord wanted his message preserved in writing.

2. We cannot distinguish everywhere between personal and scriptural revelation. It is sometimes impossible to distinguish between (a) the word of the prophet, (b) the written word of the prophet, and (c) the word of Jehovah Isaiah in Isaiah 34:16 calls his prophecy (written prophecy) the "book of the, Lord.… Seek ye out of the book of the Lord."

3. The Old Testament canon was called "*Hai Graphae*" or "*Ta Hiera Grammata*" or "*He Graphe*."

(a) As such, it was recognized and considered authoritative by Christ. Christ considers the Old Testament to be an expression of God's counsel. An appeal to the Old Testament was the end of all argument.

(b) The Old Testament was clearly considered to be a unit, the product of one primary author.

(1) This primary author is sometimes directly named, e.g., Matthew 15:4, "For God said, Honour thy father and thy mother …" Hebrews 1:1, "God having of old time spoken" and Hebrews 3:7, "Wherefore, the Holy Ghost saith …"

(2) Different formulas, such as "It is written …" Matthew 4:4, "The Scripture saith …" Romans 4:3, Galatians 4:30, are interchanged with appeal to either the primary or the secondary authors.

(3) Paul personifies Scripture by quoting Jehovah's words to Pharaoh, Exodus 9:6, in the formula, "For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh …"

Romans 9:1. So also in Galatians 3:8, “and the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand unto Abraham.”

(4) A particularly important passage is found in 2 Timothy 3:16, “*Pasa graphe theopneustos kai ophelimos pros didaskalian, pros elegmon, pros epanorthosin, pros paideian ten en dikaiosune*.” On this passage we quote from B. B. Warfield, as follows: “There is room for some difference of opinion as to the exact construction of this declaration. Shall we render ‘Every Scripture’ or ‘All Scripture’? Shall we render, ‘Every (or ‘all’) Scripture is God-breathed and ‘therefore profitable’ or ‘Every (or ‘all’) Scripture being God-breathed, is as well profitable’? No doubt both questions are interesting, but for the main matter now engaging our attention, they are both indifferent. Whether Paul, looking back at the sacred Scriptures he had just mentioned, makes the assertion he is about to add, of them distributively, of all their parts, or collectively of their entire mass, is of no moment; to say that every part of these Scriptures is God-breathed, and to say that the whole of these sacred Scriptures is God-breathed, is for the main matter, all one. Nor is the difference great between saying that they are in all their parts, or in their whole extent, God-breathed, and therefore profitable, and saying that they are in all their parts, or in their whole extent, because God-breathed as well profitable. In both cases these sacred Scriptures are declared to owe their value to their Divine origin; and in both cases this their Divine origin is energetically asserted of their entire fabric. On the whole, the preferable construction would seem to be Every Scripture, seeing that it is God-breathed is as well profitable.’ In that case, what the Apostle asserts is that the sacred Scriptures, in their every several passage—for it is just ‘passage of Scripture’ which ‘Scripture’ in this distributive use of it signifies—is the product of the creative breath of God, and, because of this its Divine origination, is of supreme value for all holy purposes.”[4]

(5) Another important passage is found in 1 Peter 1:19–21. The “prophetic word” of which Peter speaks is in all likelihood to be taken as referring to the whole of the Old Testament, “inasmuch as the entirety of Scripture is elsewhere conceived and spaken of as prophetic.” Of this word of prophecy, it is asserted that its source lay in God. Men were “borne by God” when they wrote it. Warfield says:

> Here is as direct an assertion of the Divine origin of Scripture as that of 2 Tim 3:16. But there is more here than a simple assertion of the Divine origin of Scripture. We are advanced somewhat in our understanding of how God has produced the Scriptures. It was through the instrumentality of men who ‘spake from him.’ More specifically, it was through an operation of the Holy Ghost on these men which is described as ‘bearing’ them. The men who spoke from God are here declared, therefore, to have been taken up by the Holy Spirit and brought by his power to the goal of his choosing. The things which they spoke under this operation of the Spirit were therefore his things, not theirs.

(6) Finally, we would note briefly how Jesus thought of the Old Testament. In John 10 we are told that the Jews wanted to stone Jesus. They charged him with blasphemy because he had made himself as God. In reply to them, Jesus simply appeals to the Old Testament. He says, “Is it not written in your law, I said, ye are gods” (Jn 10:34)? The passage Jesus quotes is found in Psalm 82:6. This proves that the term “law” was, for Jesus’ purpose, identical with Scripture as a whole. And of this Law, or Scripture, Jesus then says that it cannot be broken. It is therefore the final court of appeal. Any passage of Scripture must, according to Jesus, be thought of as having “irrefragable authority.” Warfield says: “What we have here is, therefore, the strongest possible assertion of the indefectible authority of Scripture; precisely what is true of Scripture is that it ‘cannot be broken.’ ”

Speaking of Jesus’ arguments with his Jewish opponents, Warfield says: “Everywhere, to him and to them alike, an appeal to Scripture is an appeal to an indefectible authority whose determination is final; both He and they make their appeal indifferently to every part of Scripture, to every element in Scripture, to its most incidental clauses as well as to its most fundamental principles, and to the very form of its expression.”

B. For the New Testament

1. The New Testament organs of revelation are equally conscious of the inspiration of their writings as were the Old Testament organs of revelation.

To their writings they ascribe the same authority that they ascribe to their spoken words: e.g., Colossians 4:16.

2. In 2 Peter 3:15, Paul's epistles are placed on the level of the Old Testament Scripture. He compares them with "the other scriptures."

3. So also Paul himself sets up his epistles as a standard of truth. In 1 Corinthians 14:37 we read: "If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet or spiritual let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord."

3. With Respect to Verbal Inspiration

We must finally prove that the modern theory of inspiration which seeks to breakup the unity of Scripture by limiting the concept of inspiration either in extension or in intension, is mistaken because the *auctor primarius* (God) in addition to (a) identifying his revelation with the revelation of his chosen organs, the prophets and apostles, (b) identifying his and their revelations by speech with his and their revelations by writing has (c) even identified his revelation with the very words of his prophets and apostles, we speak of this as plenary inspiration.

Verbal inspiration[5] is a necessity of the consistent activity of the special principle. Only the Spirit could give the correct interpretation of the facts of redemption. Now, since authoritative interpretation of thought can come through expression in language only, it follows that this expression must itself be completely accurate. If it were not, there would be no authoritative communication of the thought or meaning of special revelation.[6] All that is meant by "verbal inspiration" is that inspiration extends to the words as well as to the thought.

Scripture evidence for verbal inspiration may be briefly tabulated as follows:

a. Moses constantly speaks of verbal revelations given him from Jehovah: e.g., Exodus 3:4, 5:1. And this is characteristic of the prophets in general. Jeremiah 1:9: "Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth." Similarly Ezekiel 3:4, 10, 11 is told to receive and speak the words of Jehovah.

b. In the New Testament (a) Paul says: "Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacher, but which the Spirit teacheth;

comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor 2:13). (b) In Hebrews, there are many quotations from the Old Testament: 1:5; 2:12, 13; 3:7; 4:4, 5, 7; 8:10; 10:15–17 which are cited, not as words of some individual writer, but as words of God. (c) In three instances, an argument is based directly upon a single word, John 10:35: "If he called them gods …" Matthew 22:43–45: "How then doth David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying the Lord said unto my Lord …" Galatians 3:16: "Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ." In this last passage, the argument is based upon the difference between a singular and a plural.

It should be noted in this connection that what Scripture teaches about inspiration, in the nature of the case, applies to the *autographa* only. This at once brings up an exceedingly important practical problem. The *autographa* have been lost. The most that textual criticism has done is to approach the accuracy of the *autographa*. So then the question that is asked is whether it is of any practical significance to insist that the *autographa* were absolutely inspired. Is it not true that for all practical purposes we have to do without them? Is it not therefore just as well not to speak about the *autographa*, and only to say that the Bible is generally trustworthy? It is thus that many well-meaning orthodox men speak today.

We should distinguish carefully at this point. We may perhaps illustrate the difference between a doctrine of scriptural inspiration that holds to this notion of general trustworthiness and the doctrine of Scripture which holds to the infallible inspiration of the *autographa*, though it recognizes the fact that the *autographa* are not in our possession, by thinking of a river that sometimes overflows its banks. Suppose that we are seeking to cross such a river while the flood has gone so high as to cover the bridge. As far as the surface appearance is concerned, we cannot see whether there is a bridge. We have to drive in the water even while we are driving on the bridge. Yet, if there were no bridge, we should certainly not be able to cross that river. We can drive with comparative ease in water that is a few inches deep as long as we have a solid bottom under the water. What the idea of general trustworthiness without infallible inspiration does in effect is to say that it really makes no difference whether there is a solid bottom under us, inasmuch as we have to drive through water in any case. But we have seen that man needs absolutely authoritative interpretation. Hence, if the *autographa* were not infallibly inspired, it would mean that at some point

human interpretation would stand above divine interpretation. It would mean that man were, after all, not certain that the facts and the interpretations given to the facts in Scripture are true.

Summing up then we note that: (a) the human subject was created by God so that it could, by virtue of that fact, be and originally was the perfect medium of the revelation of God; (b) even after the entrance of sin, the human subject remained metaphysically accessible to God so that God could, by virtue of that fact, insert an area of perfect interpretation into the world of false interpretation; (c) God actually did insert such an infallible interpretation, or there would be no true interpretation at all; (d) we are actually crossing the river of life on this bridge of infallible interpretation, even though it be covered (1) objectively, by the loss of the *autographa*, and (2) subjectively, by the inability of any sinner to interpret the truth perfectly to himself.

B. Forms of Inspiration

In this connection, we may briefly mention what are usually called the various forms of inspiration:

1. Lyrical Inspiration. In lyrical inspiration, such as we find especially in the Psalms, the personality of the secondary author stands forward distinctly. In the Psalms and similar portions of Scripture, we have the subjective reaction from the body of the redeemed to the objective and subjective acts of redemption. In it, the voice of the bride responds to the voice of the bridegroom. It is to be expected that here the activity of the secondary author will be very pronounced. But it is to be noticed that this in no wise reduces the distinction between Shakespeare and David. Shakespeare can give most beautiful expression to the most individual, and therefore to the most basically human emotions, singing of its joys and sorrows, but he works within the field of the general principle only. David, the singer of Israel, sings the songs of the redeemed. That is, he works within the field of the special principle. His joys and sorrows fluctuate with his individual, and therefore with his people’s, measure of salvation received and to be received of the covenant God. David is therefore inspired by the Spirit of creation and regeneration and special revelation, while

Shakespeare cannot even do justice to the work of creation, because he does not recognize man's sin against God.

2. Chokmatical Inspiration. This often expresses itself in poetry, but may also do so in prose. It is didactical in character. The didactic writers of Scripture gave expression to the wisdom of God. They sing of the wisdom of God displayed in creation and in redemption. There is great similarity between the wisdom literature of Scripture and the wisdom literature of the pagan world. But here also the difference is fundamental. The wise man of Israel, as he speaks in Proverbs, in Job, etc., presupposes absolute Wisdom. The wise man does not claim to have a ready solution, e.g., for the problem of evil, but when he comes to the end of his reflections, he feels with certainty that in Wisdom the solution is found. Failure to find ready solutions does not drive the wise man to pessimism, but to greater faith in Wisdom. This in itself indicates the difference between theism and anti-theism, a difference which sets the wisdom literature of Scripture in opposition to the wisdom literature of paganism. Add to this the fact that the Wisdom of Scripture is finally identified with Christ as the incarnate Word (1 Cor 1:20) and we see that the wisdom literature of Scripture is based upon the presupposition of the second person of the Trinity as the Logos of creation and Christ as the Logos of redemption. Still further, add to this the fact that, subjectively, "the fear of the Lord" is the beginning of wisdom, so that only those that are regenerate can be truly wise, and the picture of the wisdom literature of Scripture reveals such lineaments as are seen nowhere else. In view of these considerations we can also understand that the *auctor primarius*, the Holy Spirit, is using the writers of Scripture wisdom literature for the insertion of the special principle into the general principle, and the very gradualness with which he does it is but evidence of the hand of the great Physician knowing the critical position of his patient.

3. Prophetical Inspiration. In prophetical inspiration, the secondary authors are often more passive than in lyrical and chokmatic inspiration. In all forms of inspiration, a higher personality, even a personality from above comes to and speaks through the secondary authors, but in the case of prophecy this fact is more clearly apparent than elsewhere. Jeremiah 20 and Ezekiel 3 seemed at times even to be antithetical with respect to the *auctor primarius*. The prophet's personality is an instrument of the Holy Spirit. But even so there is great variety. The Holy Spirit chose various instruments for various purposes, and these various instruments were at hand by the

preparation of providence and the Spirit of creation. Accordingly, the Holy Spirit utilized, e.g., the keen judgment, the political knowledge and insight, the enthusiasm of genius, of peculiarly gifted spirits, for all these were his own to use by virtue of creation. But through them all the Holy Spirit speaks. Their theme is again the creative-redemptive One, such an One as was not spoken of elsewhere.

From another viewpoint, we may say that prophetic inspiration is epical instead of lyrical inspiration. Epic poets do not so much reveal their own persons as picture the panoramic movement of events. So the prophets interpret to us, the history of the kingdom of God. Of the past, they speak in the historical books, but always with the purpose of revealing the progress of God's kingdom. Of the present, they speak in order to make kings and potentates conform their plans to God's. Of the future they speak showing the culmination of history as the realization of the counsel of God through the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. They picture particularly the struggle of the special principle as it seeks to insert itself into the general principle, and the great opposition it meets with on the part of the general principle. The prophet himself stands in the midst of the drama. All history he divides, true Semite that he is, into two parts, the *factum* and the *fiens*.

4. The inspiration of Christ is univocal in character because he was himself divine. Yet we must not off-hand identify Christ's human consciousness with his divine consciousness. He tells us that the words he speaks have been received (Jn 14:10–24). This accords with his acceptance of human nature, and that in its weakened condition. He grew in wisdom, through the reading of Scripture, etc. In order that he might be the true and great Prophet, the Spirit of God was given to him without measure (Jn 3:34). Jesus' finite consciousness offers no opposition, in the form of error, to the work of the Spirit. So also he is not dependent upon the many means used by other prophets. The universal, the generally human significance of his prophecy is not refracted through a greatly limited individuality. Christ was the Prophet, the source of other prophets, and received centrally, by the *inspiratio unionis*, that which others passed on to the periphery of the special principle.

5. The inspiration of the apostles can best be understood if we first recall (a) that the Holy Spirit was now poured out upon the church, (b) that the inspiration of the apostles terminated upon their official position and service

as apostles, and (c) that the incarnation of Christ was now an accomplished fact. These facts explain to a large extent the differences between prophets and apostles on the matter of inspiration. Only for exceptional matters, such as the visions of revelation and material unknown to Paul because he had not from the beginning been an apostle, do they make appeal to special communication given them. For the rest, they speak of things they have seen and their hands have handled in a very ordinary fashion. In 1 Corinthians 11:23, e.g., Paul makes a distinction between what he had directly received from the Lord and what he knew by the regular process of apostolic inspiration (Cf. 1 Cor 7:10). The descent of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the people of God as the *principium formans* of the church, would naturally also change the mode of the inspiration of the organs of special revelation. The Spirit worked more internally now than he did in the Old Testament dispensation. Similarly, the apostolic office was less aphoristic than the prophetic office. The prophets might be called prophets even while not prophesying, yet, strictly speaking their office lay in the acts of prophesying itself. They spoke when driven by the Spirit. The apostles, on the other hand, have a steady office; they speak because they are apostles and are inspired because they are apostles, instead of *vice versa*. Accordingly, those abrupt assumptions of the prophets into the Spirit's service are not seen in the case of the apostles. Then, lastly, with respect to the center of the special principle, the incarnation of Christ, the prophets and apostles assume different attitudes. With the former it was a matter of imagination and vision; with the latter, a matter of simple memory. Thus the apostles speak more concretely than did the prophets. The work of the Spirit could largely be limited to a bringing into remembrance, or guiding the memory from the corroding results of sin (Jn 14:26). Only when they spoke of the things that should come did they receive visions, or when they had to explain the significance of the facts of redemption would they be guided by the Spirit into the depths of God, (1 Cor 2:10–12) but for the facts of redemption, the work could be limited to guidance of the memory.

Now in view of the fact that apostolic inspiration differs so little in form from that of the ordinary historian, and especially resembles the inspiration of a sympathetic, i.e., a Christian historian, it is again significant to note that the difference is fundamental. The work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of the believer through which he receives affinity to the special principle is called enlightenment. But this enlightenment is never perfect on

this earth. The apostles themselves do not ascribe their inspiration to the fact that they in their own lives have reached perfect affinity to the special principle. Rather the contrary they include themselves among those that remain sinful to the end. Their enlightenment could accordingly not be the *causa sufficiens* for the absolute authority with which their apostolic message is clothed. Only a special inspiration equal to that of the prophets could explain apostolic authority.

In view of all this the orthodox believer may say that he believes in an organic view of inspiration. The organism of the special principle is organically inserted into the organism of the general principle. The charge of mechanism drops herewith. The amanuensis view which some believers have held to in the past, and perhaps hold to now, has been accepted in only one of the many Reformed confessions, (*Consensus Helvetica*, 1675) which confession was accepted by only a few cantons in Switzerland against the liberalizing movement of the Saumur school of theology. And even those that did accept this view for a while soon rejected it again. It scarcely seems fair on the part of unbelieving scholars to charge the church today with any dictation view of inspiration. Insofar as the insertion of the special principle required a suppression of certain activities of the organs of revelation, we are not ashamed to hold that such suppression took place. To the extent, however, that such was not necessary, because of the advancement of the history of redemption, and because of the increased affinity for and understanding of the special principle, such suppression was diminished until, in the case of the apostles, it is scarcely discernible.

C. Scriptural Inspiration and Phenomena Outside of Scripture

A word needs to be said, in conclusion, about the idea of an infallible Bible in relation to phenomena outside the Bible. Our doctrine of Scripture is involved in the Christian theistic system. The Christian theistic system itself has “difficulties.” It has insuperable difficulties if one begins with the assumptions of non-Christian thought. It appears after careful consideration however that unless we may accept the Christian theistic position there is no hope for any rational interpretation of life. For this reason we hold to the Christian theistic position not with apology, but with a deep conviction of its truth, even though we cannot understand in a comprehensive way all that

is involved in it. Similarly with respect to the difficulties of the phenomena of Scripture itself, and with respect to the difficulties that come up when we interpret Scripture in relation to phenomena outside of itself. We do not claim that we can "solve" all these difficulties. Many of them have been solved. Many more will, doubtless, be solved in the future. But we do not expect that all of them will be solved in this life. Yet we hold on to Scripture fearlessly, inasmuch as there is nothing but chance if we do not.

These difficulties themselves cannot here be discussed in detail. That is for works of biblical criticism, of Christian philosophy, biology, etc., to do. We only classify them roughly here.

1. Difficulties on account of biblical criticism. These difficulties pertain in part to the phenomena of Scripture itself, and in part to phenomena found in non-scriptural material. It is the work of both the Old and the New Testament departments in an orthodox seminary, in addition to working out the exegesis of the Scriptures, to defend it against the attacks of negative criticism. We only remark that the spirit of criticism is negative. That is, the ordinary Bible criticism takes for granted the non-theistic position with respect to evolution, etc. It, therefore, cannot see that a perfect interpretation can come in and has come into the world in the lowly form of the person of Christ, and the lowly form of the Scripture.

2. The second main class of phenomena is that of historic science in general and evolution in particular. Here, too, we must refer to discussion on evidences and to apologetics as the fields in which it is shown that the evolutionary position is not proved, but assumed to be true, while the whole non-Christian philosophy of history leads to the destruction of human predication.

3. In the third place, the content of Scripture is contrasted in spots with the content of religion and morality taught outside of Scripture. A good illustration of this type of criticism is found in the *jus talionis* taught in the Old Testament. The whole Old Testament is often rejected on the ground that its ethics are not as high as are the ethics in many other writings. This point falls particularly to Christian ethics to discuss. It may be shown that the Old and the New Testament are basically one in their teaching, the only difference being that in the New Testament we have a fuller development of that which is taught in the Old Testament. Both held before man an absolute ideal. Both say that man, since he became a sinner, has basically a false interpretation of life, and is morally at enmity against God. Both say that, in

Christ alone, and in the interpretation of Christ in the Scripture, we have the only true interpretation for man. In all the most important matters, the two Testaments are as one, while, together, they stand opposed to all other literature. The whole Scripture not only presents something that is the highest in life, but also something that is incomparably the highest.

The doctrine of infallible inspiration must therefore be unequivocally taught. Now that creed revision is in the air, it is necessary that people see once again the truth of this simple but basic Protestant doctrine.

[1] Cf. *The Authority, and Inspiration of Scripture*.

[2] Cf. also Bannerman: *Inspiration of the Scriptures*, L. Boettner: *The Inspiration of the Scriptures*, W. Lee: *The Inspiration of the Scripture*, McIntosh: *Is Christ Infallible and the Bible True?*, Patton: *Inspiration of the Scriptures*, McGregor: *The Revelation and the Record*, pp. 79–117, Given: *Revelation, Inspiration on the Canon*, pp. 104–202, J. Orr: *Revelation and Inspiration*, pp. 155–218, Ladd: *The Doctrine of Sacred Scripture*, Vol. 1, Sanday: *Inspiration*, Girardeau: *Discussions of Theological Questions*, pp. 273–302.

[3] Cf. also, 1 Kgs 12:33, Neh 6:8.

[4] *The Authority and Inspiration of Scripture*.

[5] Verbal inspiration is not to be identified with a mechanical view of the organs of revelation. Verbal inspiration is in consonance with an organic view of the relation of the divine Spirit to the human organs of revelation. The Holy Spirit used the various persons through whom he conveyed his revelation, without suppression of the characteristics of their personality.

[6] Cf. J. Orr: “Thought of necessity takes shape and is expressed in words. If there is inspiration at all, it must penetrate words as well as thought, must mould the expression, and make the language employed the living medium of the idea to be conveyed.”*Revelation and Inspiration*, p. 209.

Chapter 13: The Incomprehensibility of God

The subject of discussion in what has preceded has been what is usually spoken of as the prolegomena of theology. There follows now a consideration of theology proper, that is, of the doctrine of God. The Westminster Shorter Catechism definition of God is very familiar. “God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.” The remaining chapters may be said to be in the nature of an effort to ascertain as clearly as possible the meaning of this definition and its present day significance.

But the question will at once be asked how it is possible that man should say anything at all about a God who is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in all his perfections. This question becomes all the more pressing if the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith are added to those quoted from the Catechism. “There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.”[1]

The modern man, brought up on the phenomenal-noumenal distinction of Immanuel Kant will at once assert that it is quite meaningless to speak of such a God. Such a God, he says, is beyond human experience. He is unknowable. No predication whatsoever can be made about him in terms that the human mind can fathom.

Modern theology, beginning with Schleiermacher and including Karl Barth, has allowed the legitimacy of Kant’s criticism of the traditional doctrine of God. In order therefore to save anything at all of the idea of a transcendent God it speaks of the idea of such a god as being a practical rather than a theoretical concept. The Modern idea of God is a limiting or border rather than a constitutive concept. It holds that man can know nothing of a “most absolute” God. He can only posit such a god as moral

necessity. Modern theology is irrationalist. When it speaks of the primacy of faith it means by faith the irrational acceptance of that of which nothing can be known rationally.[2]

Orthodox theology is, in consequence, obliged to give itself a clear account of its doctrine of God. For one thing is certain, namely, that all orthodox or traditional theology does claim to be able to have theoretical knowledge of God. Roman Catholic and Protestant theology are in agreement in maintaining that the idea of God is not merely a limiting but is rather a constitutive concept.

In defense of their view, both the Romanist and the Protestant appeal to the idea of revelation. The reason why God can be known and is known by man, says that traditional theologian, is because God has revealed himself. But the modern theologian replies that this does not help matters in the least For any revelation that came from God would have to come to man in such forms as man would understand. Any revelation from an absolute God, one who is infinite in his self-contained perfections, would have to come to man mediated through the categories of the human mind. If God told man that he was eternal this would mean no more to man than that he is of very long endurance in the process of time. And a god who is very old is not the eternal God of orthodox theology at all.

At this point Thomas Aquinas and his modern followers such as Przwara, Gilson, Maritain, Sheen and others, step back. There is nothing they can say by way of effective reply to the modern view of God. And why? Because of the defective nature of their concept of revelation. The Romanist view of revelation is defective primarily in that it does not include the human mind itself within its purview. It is only if the Creator-creature distinction is taken seriously that the human mind can be seen as inherently revelational of God. But Romanism does not take the creation doctrine seriously. It detracts from this doctrine by its idea of the freedom of man This idea of freedom amounts to a measure of independence over against God. And to the extent that man is independent of God he is no longer revelatory of God. Moreover, if man is made to some extent independent of God, to that extent God is made dependent upon man Or rather, to that extent both God and man are dependent upon one another and upon the Universe. If man is made partly independent of God, his ultimate reference point is no longer exclusively found in God.

It will now be apparent why the Romanist has no effective answer to the modern theologian. The modern theologian, with the modern philosopher and the modern scientist, makes the universe or reality as a whole his final or ultimate subject of predication. He includes his god and himself within a common universe. Then he makes assertions about the nature of this universe. He does so by means of the laws of logic that he finds operative in his mind. Without the least bit of justification he assumes that reality must answer to the nature of these laws. With Parmenides of old he assumes that what man can intelligently say about reality is true, and only that is true. That is to say, only that is real which man can reduce to a network of logical relations.

With Parmenides this led to the denial of the reality of creation out of nothing and of the reality of time. In this he was consistent. In distinction from Parmenides, and ancient philosophy in general, the modern philosopher does assert the reality of time and change. But in asserting the reality of time and change he also asserts or assumes the ultimacy of time and change. And so the creation idea is again excluded. The rationalism of Parmenides is merely supplemented by the irrationalism of the idea of chance. The idea of chance is merely the recognition of the failure of man to reduce all things to logical relations. In other words, the irrationalism of modern thought is not radically opposed to the rationalism of ancient thought. On the contrary, modern irrationalism is its natural outgrowth!

It is modern irrationalism that the traditional theologian was trying to answer. But he cannot answer this if he himself is something of a rationalist. And this is the case with the Roman theologian. He has allowed that the human mind is right in maintaining that it cannot be said to know unless it can understand exhaustively Aquinas takes the method of Aristotle as being essentially right in the field of philosophy. Now while Aristotle may be said to be more empiricist than was Plato, it remains true that he held to essentially the same ideal of knowledge that Plato had. He says specifically and repeatedly that knowledge is of universals and of universals only. That is to say, only such knowledge can be said to be scientific knowledge as enables man to reduce facts to logical relations. Therefore knowledge properly speaking is only of species.

Working with this Aristotelian idea of knowledge, Aquinas asserts that man cannot know what God is, but only what he is not. As far as knowledge of God is concerned, the primary relation according to Thomas is that of

negation. When he says that reason (by an Aristotelian method) can prove that God exists, this is pointless inasmuch as he adds that it cannot say what God is. And if he tones this contrast down sometimes by saying that man by reason can know something of the general characteristics of God, this is merely inconsistency. Every man must and does say something about the nature of God. He is clearly consistent with his starting point in Aristotelian logic only when he asserts that man can say nothing of the nature of God. Aristotle himself was not illogical when he concluded that such a god as he could allow for in his system was one who had not created the world and knew nothing of the world. His conception of cause was basically as immanentistic as is that of Kant. And it is therefore logically as little possible to reach the transcendent God of Christianity by means of the logic of Aristotle as it is to reach this God by the logic of Kant. (It is this that Wilbur Smith has overlooked in his book *Therefore Stand*. It is this that is overlooked by the traditional method of apologetics in general. It is this which Gordon H. Clark overlooks in his article, "The Primacy of the Intellect," in *The Westminster Theological Journal*.) Failing to make the distinction between a primacy of the intellect that is based upon the Creator-creature distinction and a primacy of the intellect that is not based upon the Creator-creature distinction as is the case with the Greeks, Clark argues that it is the primacy of the intellect that saves from scepticism. But the primacy of the intellect as the Greeks held it has historically and logically led to the scepticism of the modern irrationalist. It is Christianity alone that saves from scepticism.

As the result of holding to what is essentially a rationalist view of human reason Aquinas held to what is virtually an irrationalist view of revelation. If it is said that man by reason can say nothing positive about God, his view of revelation will be that of an irrational assertion that can make no connection with the system of thought that man knows by reason. In other words, the relation between reason and faith as the Romanist holds it has so far catered to the rationalist-irrationalist scheme of non-Christian thought that it cannot meet its claim that there is no knowledge possible of an absolute God.

What is true of the Romanist is also true of the Arminian. He too has attributed to man a measure of ultimacy. He too has thereby reduced the doctrine of the internal self-contained infinity of the perfections of God. He too has to an extent enveloped his god with himself in a universe of logic

and of fact that is above both. He too, therefore, has no answer to make to the modern theologian.

It is only in Reformed theology, then, that the doctrine of revelation is held in all the depth and breadth of its significance. This is done because the doctrine of God, as quoted from the Confession and Catechism is held uncompromisingly. Holding this doctrine without qualification implies taking the creation doctrine seriously. And taking the creation doctrine seriously involves thinking of man in his whole constitutional make-up as himself revelational of God. Being himself exhaustively revelational of God he is in all his activities dependent upon God. The constitution of his mind therefore interposes no obstruction to any form of revelation that might come to it. Being itself revelational, the mind of man is made for the reception of revelation. If human reason in all of its manipulations is itself in the first place wholly dependent upon a prior revelational activity of God and upon a constant maintaining revelational activity of God, then a supernatural revelational activity will not come to it as something strange. On the contrary it is only on the assumption that even from the outset of history the human mind never operated except in conjunction with a supernatural positive revelation of God that the original creative revelational character of the human mind be maintained. The Genesis narrative informs us that from the outset God walked and talked with man in the garden. The human reason therefore never functioned properly and could not function properly except in self-conscious relationship to this supernatural revelation. All things about man and within him were creationally revelational of God. Every fact was what it was by virtue of the place that it would occupy in the plan of God for the whole course of history. So then the mind of man could not presume with Parmenides to legislate by means of logic about the nature of reality. The human mind by its gift of logic was supposed merely to order the facts of reality, both with respect to God and with respect to the created universe, including himself, in self-conscious subordination to supernatural positive word-revelation.

The only change that the fact of sin brought into the picture was therefore the fact that it made man unwilling to be thus obedient to God as manifested to him. This disobedient attitude is exhibited in the case of Parmenides and in the case of every man. Only by the work of Christ in history and by the work of the Spirit in regeneration can men take again the attitude that Adam took in the beginning.

Thus the Reformed Christian has an effective answer for the modern man. His answer is that the capacities of the human mind would have no opportunity for their exercise except upon the presupposition that the most absolute God does exist and that all things in this world are revelational of him. We grant that it is only by the frank acceptance of the Scriptures as the infallible revelation of God that man can know this. But this only show s that unless one thus accepts the Scripture there is no place for the exercise of reason. The most absolute God of the Confession can only be presupposed. He cannot be proved to exist in the way that the idea of proof is taken by the Romanist-Arminian apologetics. But so far from this fact being unfortunate, it is the one thing that saves the idea of the reasonableness of the Christian religion.

The significance of what has been said for the concept of incomprehensibility may now be intimated. In the first place what is meant by the idea that God is incomprehensible can be noted with any clarity only if it is seen to be involved in the doctrine of the self-contained perfections of God. And it is only in Reformed theology that this doctrine is held without compromise. While then it is true that the incomprehensibility of God is taught by Romanist and Arminian theologians it is not true that it is taught by them with consistency and with any true recognition of its full significance. In particular it is only in Reformed theology that this doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God can be set off sharply over against the modern idea of the incomprehensibility of Reality.

This modern view is based on the assumption that man is the ultimate reference point in his own predication. Then, therefore, man cannot know everything, it follows that nothing can be known. All things being related, all things must be exhaustively known or nothing can be known. And only Reformed theology clearly sets off the Christian position over against all forms of the non-Christian view because it alone makes God the ultimate reference point in all predication.

Such being the case, it is only Reformed theology that does full justice to the idea of revelation in all its comprehensiveness and depth of meaning. It is only if the doctrine of revelation is taken thus seriously that the knowledge of God is assured. Man may be certain that he knows God. More than that, man cannot help but know God. Man’s predicament is not, as Henry at one point with the Romanist concedes to “the fool,” that he cannot be certain whether God exists and can be known. Man’s predicament is not,

as Carnell grants to modern theologians, as to whether man is immortal. It is only too surely fixed (*in visceribus*) in the mind of man that God does exist and that man is to meet him in judgment. The sinner's problem from his point of view is to cast doubt upon this evidence, to make it appear as though the evidence were not clear. With the rich man who lifted up his eyes in torment, it is the effort of every man to put the blame for his failure to serve God upon the elusive character of the evidence for God's existence. If he could rightly say that God has to be diligently searched for, that he might possibly be hidden in some remote corner of the earth, or moon or Jupiter, then he would have an excuse for his ignorance. Following Paul, the Reformed theologian, and he alone, will stress the inescapable character of the revelation of God.

Thus it is clear that the incomprehensibility of God presupposes the revelation of God in all its comprehensiveness. One could not talk about God at all except in terms of his revelation to man. Without the presupposition of God's revelation to man there could be no predication of God at all. God would be not incomprehensible, but inapprehensible. That is, no predication could be made of him or of anything else. Failing to make the presupposition of the self-contained character of God and the doctrines of creation and revelation fundamental in their thinking, the Romanist and Arminian are unable to distinguish clearly between the Christian notion of the incomprehensibility of God and the non-Christian notion of the incomprehensibility of Reality.

On fully Christian presuppositions, then, the apprehensibility or knowability of God is assumed in any discussion about the comprehensibility or incomprehensibility of God. This is so much the case that it is not even possible to speak of any area of existence as totally inapprehensible. This has been pointed out in the "Report of the Committee Elected by the Fourteenth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to the Study of the Incomprehensibility of God, Etc." This report shows that when Calvin speaks of the essence or of the secret counsel of God as being incomprehensible that this is not to be taken as though no predication whatsoever can be made about it.[3] Even when Calvin uses the word inapprehensible with respect to the essence of God this cannot imply the idea of complete ignorance. For when God tells us about his attributes he is telling us about himself. Every bit of his revelation shows man something of the nature of the essence of God. If we speak therefore of the

incomprehensibility of God, what is meant is that God's revelation to man is never exhaustively understood by man. As by his revelation to man God says something about himself, so that man knows something about everything that exists, so it is equally true that there is nothing that man knows exhaustively.

It is as impossible for man to know himself or any of the objects of the universe about him exhaustively as it is impossible for man to know God exhaustively. For man must know himself or anything else in the created universe in relation to the self-contained God. Unless he can know God exhaustively he cannot know anything else exhaustively.

It is only if these two points be taken together, the fact that man knows something about everything, including the very essence of God, and on the other hand that he does not know anything exhaustively, that the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God can be seen for what it is.

In the first place, it is possible in this way to see that the knowledge of God and the knowledge of man coincide at every point in the sense that always and everywhere man confronts that which is already fully known or interpreted by God. The point of reference cannot but be the same for man as for God. There is no fact that man meets in any of his investigation where the face of God does not confront him. On the other hand in this way it is possible to see that the knowledge of God and the knowledge of man coincide at no point in the sense that in his awareness of meaning of anything, in his mental grasp or understanding of anything, man is at each point dependent upon a prior act of unchangeable understanding and revelation on the part of God. The form of the revelation of God to man must come to man in accordance with his creaturely limitations God's thought with respect to anything is a unit. Yet it pertains to a multiplicity of objects. But man can think of that unit as involving a number of items only in the form of succession. So Scripture speaks of God as though he were thinking his thoughts step by step. All revelation is anthropomorphic. Then God reveals himself to man he reveals something of the fulness of his being. In God's mind any bit of information that he gives to man is set in the fulness of his one supreme act of self-affirmation.

This is true with respect to every bit of revelation that God gives to man. Accordingly, the fact that man is given more and ever more revelation of God does not tend to reduce the incomprehensibility of God. For man any new revelational proposition will enrich in meaning any previous given

revelational proposition. But even this enrichment does not imply that there is any coincidence, that is, identity of content between what God has in his mind and what man has in his mind. If there is no identity of content in the first proposition that God gives to man there can be no identity of content attained by means of any number of additional propositions of revelation that God gives to man. And there could be identity of content on the first proposition only if there were no first proposition. That is to say, if there could be an identity of content there would be and always has been an identity of content. There could and would be an identity of content only if the mind of man were identical with the mind of God. It is only on the assumption that the human mind is not the mind of a creature but is itself the mind of the Creator that one can talk consistently of identity of content between the mind of man and the mind of God.

In the second place, it is only if we keep the presupposition of the self-contained God and therefore of the all-comprehensiveness of revelation with the consequence that man knows something about everything but knows nothing comprehensively that we can see the importance of the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God for covenant theology. Covenant theology is Reformed theology. As such it implies the exhaustively personal relationship of man to God. Man never deals with the essence of God as such. He always deals with God. God has self-consciously placed himself before man. It is only in the Reformed faith that one can speak of the divine-human confrontation as over against impersonal views of reality. Emil Brunner speaks as though it is orthodox or traditional theology that is largely impersonalist in its views of the relation of God to man. He speaks of orthodox theology as having turned God into an object of knowledge and of having therewith depersonalized God. This is also the position of Barth and of the so-called existential theology now taught by George Hendry and others. Yet it is only in the traditional conception of Reformed Theology that a full personalistic relationship is maintained If one does not hold to the traditional doctrine of creation it is not possible to maintain personalism in the full sense of the term. It is taken for granted by such men as Barth, Brunner, Hendry, Piper, Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr, Ferré, and Homrighausen that the non-personalist procedure of modern science is quite correct in its handling of nature and history. In this they follow the assumption of Kant that man is his own ultimate reference point. But on a truly Christian basis anything whatsoever is revelatory of the personal

revelational activity of God. It is only on such a basis that false staticism can be destroyed. There is false staticism involved in all non-Christian forms of thought. If one allows that anywhere at all man deals with facts or laws that are not based upon the self-conscious, everlasting self-affirmation of God, one is to that extent bound to a static or fatalistic view of reality. There can be nothing new on a non-Christian basis. On the other hand all things are new on a non-Christian basis. And dialectical theology, based on an existential philosophy for all its emphasis on the once-for-all-ness of Christianity, is bound to a meaningless staticism at the same time that it is joined to a meaningless flux.

If theology is to escape false staticism involved in rationalism and false flux theology involved in irrationalism, it will have to affirm with the Reformed faith that God's personal activity confronts man everywhere. Therefore obedience to God's revelation is the proper attitude for man whether he is active in the laboratory or in the house of prayer.

In the third place, the same stress on the revelation of God understood, but never understood exhaustively by man, will save us from making the false distinction between the essence and the content of God's knowledge as being incomprehensible bit by bit, and the mode of God's knowing as always being incomprehensible. Whatever knowledge man has of the being, and the secret counsel of God, or of anything else that we may distinguish with respect to God and His works comes to man as the result of the self-conscious revelational activity of God. God's mode of knowing himself is what it is because God's being is what it is. More than that, there can be no knowledge of anything about God unless there is knowledge of the mode of the knowledge of God. For it is God knowing himself that is God. And God is God knowing himself, God is God's self-affirmation. God is God's eternal self-affirmation. God is pure act. It is in the pure act of his eternal self-affirmation that God stands before man in every bit of revelation that he vouchsafes to give to man. Therefore the only way that knowledge of God's mode of knowledge can be denied is by denying knowledge of God. The only way the incomprehensibility of God's mode of knowledge can be affirmed is by affirming also the incomprehensibility of God's being and of anything that God reveals to man.

In the fourth place, it may be observed that it is only by stressing the comprehensiveness and the inexhaustible character of the idea of revelation that the process of learning can have meaning and history have genuine

significance. If man is made the final reference point in predication, knowledge cannot get under way, and if it could get under way it could not move forward. That is to say, in all non-Christian forms of epistemology there is first the idea that to be understood a fact must be understood exhaustively. It must be reducible to a part of a system of timeless logic. But man himself and the facts of his experience are subject to change. How is he ever to find within himself an *a priori* resting point? He himself is on the move. The futile effort of Descartes stands out from the efforts of other non-Christian thinkers not because it is essentially different but only because it is more consistent. Every effort of man to find one spot that he can exhaustively understand either in the world of fact about him or in the world of experience within, is doomed to failure. If we do not with Calvin presuppose the self-contained God back of the self-conscious act of the knowing mind of man, we are doomed to be lost in an endless and bottomless flux.

But granted that man could get started on the way to learning by experience on a non-Christian basis he could add nothing new to what he already knows. There would be nothing new. If it was known it would be no longer new. As long as it was new it would be unknown. Thus the old dilemma that either man must know everything and he need ask no questions, or he knows nothing and therefore cannot ask questions, remains unsolved except on the basis of the Reformed Faith. To affirm the incomprehensibility of God is in the interest of saving men from scepticism. By presupposing the God of eternal self-affirmation man can get on the way to learning because he knows God when he first appears upon the scene. He has knowledge of self for what he really is. He also can add to his knowledge since the new facts that he learns about are already known and not new to God. Therefore they are related to what man already knows in true coherence. In setting out a series of propositions about the revelation of God, as the church has done in its confessions, the Christian may rest assured that he has “the system of truth” while yet he may add to his knowledge of that system. All his knowledge is analogical of God. God is the original knower and man is the derivative re-knower. Man knows in subordination to God; he knows as the covenant-keeper. If he is not a covenant keeper he will set the false ideal of knowing even as God knows, by complete coincidence with the contents of the mind of God, and end up by knowing that what he calls knowledge is no true knowledge at all, and

that what he calls false submission to authority is the true knowledge of God and of man.

Reference has been made in this chapter to a report by a committee of an assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It will help for the understanding of what has been said above if something be added here about the controversy in connection with which the report referred to was written.

The contention of this chapter is that those who hold the Reformed faith should naturally also hold to the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God as outlined above. The controversy referred to centered about the ordination of Gordon H. Clark into a Reformed church. Dr. Clark understood the incomprehensibility of God in a way which, as the present writer thinks, would be in accord with the Romanist or Arminian view of it, and out of accord with the Reformed view of it.[4] Realizing that the foundations of the Reformed faith were involved, a number of men registered a Complaint against the presbytery which ordained Dr. Clark. Dr. Clark and four others replied to this Complaint in The Answer. And the report referred to before was the result of the work of a committee appointed by the Fourteenth General Assembly to investigate the justice of the complaint against the ordination of Dr. Clark.

Our interest here is solely doctrinal. The Complaint set forth is essentially the same view as that of this chapter. The Answer charged the Complaint with teaching views that involve scepticism. “Man can grasp only an analogy of the truth itself.”[5] This charge could scarcely have been made except for the failure to see how the revelation of God was everywhere presupposed in the Complaint. And the failure to see how everywhere the revelation of God is presupposed in the Complaint can scarcely be explained except for the fact that the signers of the Answer confused a Romanist-Arminian view of the incomprehensibility of God with that taught in the Reformed confessions. And a Romanist Arminian view of the incomprehensibility of God is marked by the fact that it is a confusion between Christian and non-Christian elements.

That the Answer teaches a view of the incomprehensibility of God which is more like the Romanist-Arminian than the Reformed view may be seen from a consideration of the elements that are said to be involved in it. After rejecting the “sceptical” view of the Complaint, the Answer says: “On the other hand Dr. Clark contends that the doctrine of the incomprehensibility

of God as set forth in Scripture and in the Confession of Faith includes the following points: (1) The essence of God's being is incomprehensible to man except as God reveals truths concerning his own nature. (2) The manner of God's knowing, an eternal intuition, is impossible for man. (3) Man can never know exhaustively and completely God's knowledge of any truth in all its relationships and implications and since each of these implications in turn has other infinite implications, these must ever, even in heaven, remain inexhaustible for man. (4) But, Dr. Clark maintains, the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God does not mean that a proposition, e.g., two times two are four, has one meaning for man and a qualitatively different meaning for God, or that some truth is conceptual and other truth is non-conceptual in nature."[6]

On the first point we may observe that without revelation one cannot speak of God at all. Without revelation God is not merely incomprehensible, but inapprehensible, and no predication could be made of him at all. Dr. Clark seems not to agree with this obviously basic presupposition. He seems to hold that man may obtain a certain amount of information about God apart from revelation. Presumably this knowledge is to be obtained by "reason" operating independently of revelation. This interpretation is in accord with the position taken by Dr. Clark in other writings. In dealing with a choice of life and world views Dr. Clark asserts: "Still it remains true that no demonstration of God is possible, our belief is a voluntary choice. But if one must choose without a strict proof, none the less it is possible to have sane reasons of some sort to justify the choice. Ultimately these reasons reduce to the principle of consistency. A postulate must be chosen such that it makes possible a harmony or a system in all our thoughts, words, and actions."[7] The assumption of this passage and of the book from which it is taken is that revelation comes to a man who has already interpreted himself to the extent of being able apart from revelation to choose correctly between various claims to revelation. In accord with this idea that man has within himself certain *a priori* principles by which he can reduce revelational content into a system penetrable by human logic. Dr. Clark thinks that Christians can solve certain "paradoxes" of faith. He thinks there is no mystery in the question of the relation of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The mystery is rather that the church has so long thought of it as a mystery[8]

It appears, then, that Dr. Clark would appeal to certain broad *a priori* principles of reasoning apart from revelation in order by them to choose between "revelations." And this entails the idea that by means of these principles certain predication can be made about the nature of "God" apart from revelation. Dr. Clark appeals to Presbyterian tradition when he defends his *a priorism*. He says that "to repudiate all appeal to the *a priori* truths of reason is intolerable."

This position, as already noted, is similar to that of Romanism. Aquinas taught that reason can, apart from revelation, make certain assertions about the existence and (in spite of the blanket assertion that man can say only what God is not) even about the nature of God. But if anything can be said about the nature of God apart from revelation then everything can be said about it and there would be no need for revelation at all.

Dr. Clark asserts in the first point that God is incomprehensible except when he reveals himself. When and where God reveals himself that revelation is comprehensible. Man can handle this revelation so that its contents "makes possible a harmony or a system in all our thoughts, words, and actions." If this were true then one bit of revelation would enable man to predict all other bits of revelation. If not, then the content of the human mind would not "coincide" in Clark's sense of the term with the revelation given by God. Thus revelation would again be superfluous except for the purpose of initiating the activity of reason.

As to the second point, as has been indicated, we reply that if one does not know anything of God's mode of knowing then one can know nothing of God's being. If an "eternal intuition" as a mode of knowing has no analogue in the consciousness of man, in his sense of deity or in the synoptic vision of a sorites, then how can there be any knowledge of the eternal "being" of God? And if there can be an identify of content (coincidence) between the mind of God and the mind of man when God reveals something about his "nature" why is there not identity of content if God reveals to us something about the mode of his knowledge?

Dr. Clark argues that the complainants would need to be omniscient in order to be able to make their negations. "If the complainants cannot know what God means, how can they know God does not mean this or that."[9] Again: "He who says a given paradox cannot be solved, logically implies that he has examined every verse in Scripture, that he has exhausted every implication of every verse, and that there is in all this no hint of a

solution."[10] If this mode of reasoning were correct it would also require omniscience to be able to assert that God's mode of knowing as an "eternal intuition" is entirely different from man's mode of knowing. But so far from being correct this mode of reasoning again demonstrates how an appeal to *a priori* principles of reason apart from revelation destroys all predication. Dr. Clark himself being witness, on his position one must be omniscient in order to be able to make intelligible assertions about either similarity or dissimilarity. Lacking omniscience, scepticism would claim its own. But this proves afresh that if finite human beings are to be able to make any predication that has meaning they must reject every form of *a priori* reasoning and base themselves upon the revelation of God from the start. Then, and then only, can they know the truth without knowing all the truth.

The third point must be taken in relation to the preceding. From the first two points we learn that: (a) some true assertion may be made about reality by principles of reason apart from revelation. (b) When God has revealed some thing to man this something is no longer incomprehensible. It can be woven into our system of logically penetrable relations. That is the significance of the I "except" of the first point, i.e., that God is incomprehensible except when he reveals himself. (c) The manner of knowing in God is unknown to man while yet man must know the manner of this knowing exhaustively in order to know that it is unknown.

The third point seems to speak of such things as God has revealed to man and which therefore are said not to be incomprehensible. (Or does it speak of the incomprehensible nature of God that has not been revealed? We cannot be entirely sure.)

Let us take the divine sovereignty and human responsibility, one of the "paradoxes" of scriptural revelation which Dr. Clark has "solved." What does it mean for Dr. Clark when he has solved this paradox? The Answer says that it does not mean that no problems remain for him. "The one problem that Dr. Clark thinks he has solved is the anti-Christian allegation that sovereignty and responsibility are contradictories."[11] But how can Dr. Clark refute the allegation mentioned? He seeks to do it by a method of "consistency" that the non-Christian admits as being valid. He self-consciously appeals to *a priori* principles of reason apart from revelation. He spurns a method of apologetics which claims that no significant predication is possible except upon the presupposition of the Christian concept of revelation. But how can we show to a non-Christian that on his

own theory of predication divine sovereignty and human responsibility as taught in Scripture are not contradictories? One can show this only by reducing these concepts in such a way as shall make them exhaustively penetrable to the intellect of man. On Dr. Clark's method one must know exhaustively even what one does not know in order to know what one does know. Thus to make the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility appear as not contradictory or logically tenable one must wipe out the idea of the dependence of the human mind upon the revelation or previous interpretation of the divine mind. One must solve the paradox by denying divine sovereignty.

On this basis, then, Dr. Clark has no right to speak, as he does in the third point, about certain implications of a revelational proposition being anything less than exhaustively and completely known. He has granted the validity of a non-revelational *a priori*. Having granted this he is hopelessly involved in the coils of the non-Christian view of predication. On this non-Christian view of predication he must know everything or he knows nothing. The first proposition he makes is as unintelligible as the last. His lack is not his inability to catch up with an infinite number of implications of propositions. His lack is that he cannot know one proposition unless he knows all propositions exhaustively. If he knows one proposition he would know all, and revelation would be unnecessary.

The fourth point now becomes clear. The Reformed faith teaches that the reference point for any proposition is the same for God and for man. It holds that this identity of reference point can be maintained only on the presupposition that all human predication is analogical re-interpretation of God's pre-interpretation. Thus the incomprehensibility of God must be taught with respect to any revelational proposition. If it is not so taught there is no identity of reference point between one mind and another mind. Rejecting this fully Christian approach, Dr. Clark seeks not only for an identity of reference point between the divine and the human mind, but an identity of content between theme is natural that he should do this. It is involved in any non-Christian methodology. In any such method man is the ultimate reference point. What it says is rational or consistent, is real, and nothing else is real. But asserting a qualitative difference between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of man the Complaint was merely asserting the Creator-creature relationship and the idea of the basic significance of revelation for all predication. Dr. Clark rejects this and

assumes, in agreement with non-Christians, that there can be no identity of reference point unless there is also identity of content.

That two times two are four is a well known fact. God knows it. Man knows it. On Dr. Clark's principles there must be identity of content between the divine and the human minds on such a proposition. If not, he argues, there would be scepticism. Yet in point three it is asserted that any truth has an infinite number of relationships and implications that man can never exhaustively know. In point two it is said that God knows what he knows by an eternal intuition, and that man can know nothing of the nature of such a manner of knowing God therefore knows by an unknowable (to man) eternal intuition the infinite relationships and implications (also unknowable to man) of the proposition that two times two are four. At the same time it is asserted that truth is "not independent of God."[12]

It is this view of things that is substituted for that of the Complaint. The Complaint is said to teach that "the first proposition itself, viz., two times two are four, in its narrowest and minimal significance, is qualitatively different for God."[13] To this it is added: "But if they cannot state clearly what this qualitative difference is, how can such an unknown quality be made a test of orthodoxy."[14]

Suppose now that the complainants Should try to "state clearly" in Dr. Clark's sense the qualitative difference between the divine and the human knowledge of the proposition that two times two are four. They would have to first deny their basic contention with respect to the Christian concept of revelation. For to "state clearly" can mean nothing but to "explain exhaustively" unless one presupposes the doctrine of revelation. It is precisely because they are concerned to defend the Christian doctrine of revelation as basic to all intelligible human predication that they refuse to make any attempt at "stating clearly" any Christian doctrine, or the relation of any one Christian doctrine to any other Christian doctrine. They will not attempt to "solve" the "paradoxes" involved in the relationship of the self-contained God to his dependent creatures. It is their contention that without stating clearly, i.e., exhaustively, man can yet truly know the meaning of a proposition.

On the other hand it is apparent that Dr. Clark's own effort at "stating clearly" is anything but successful. He is bound by his method to explain exhaustively. Unless he has done so he has no right, on his basis, to assume even the identity of reference point between man's knowledge and God's.

And if he did explain exhaustively there would be no difference between God and man. There would not even be a difference between God's manner of knowing and man's manner of knowing. Thus all revelation would disappear. But Dr. Clark says there is an infinity of relations and implications about any proposition that man makes. And man cannot understand this infinity of relationships. Thus man does not understand at all. For to understand without understanding is, on Dr. Clark's basis, impossible altogether.

Though Dr. Clark rejects what seems to be the Christian method of knowledge he does not, of course, wish to accept the non-Christian method. "Dr. Clark," The Answer says, "holds the usual form of intellectualism, that truth is indeed independent of man, though not independent of God …"[15] But if truth is really thought of as dependent upon God then we are back to the Christian method. Then we cannot at the same time maintain the exact identity of content as between the mind of man and the mind of God. For the truth then comes to man exclusively by revelation as noted above. It is God, by an eternal intuition knowing himself, who reveals himself. Man has no approach to the knowledge of the nature of God—on which truth is admittedly dependent—except by the self-conscious activity of God as expressed in revelation. And this revelation is a revelation about the manner of God's knowing or it is not a revelation about God at all. God's nature is self-conscious activity. Only on this basis is there an identity of reference point. On this basis man may know the proposition that two times two are four as part of the "system" of knowledge that is God's. Thus only is there identity of reference point between man's knowledge and God's knowledge. Only thus can man know truly without knowing exhaustively.

We cannot further discuss the controversy pertaining to the views of Dr. Clark. It has shown afresh how any attempt that aims at identity of content between the mind of man and the mind of God overreaches itself and ends in scepticism. The need for stressing the incomprehensibility of God is the need for stressing the fact that it is Christianity alone, as expressed fully in the Reformed faith, that saves from scepticism.

It is a matter of regret that there is not space to include by quotation and discussion the report of the committee referred to above. In it the biblical foundation of the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God is fully discussed. We can merely refer to it. We have in this chapter taken this for

granted, and have reasoned from the general doctrines of God, of creation, and of revelation.

[1] C. 2.

[2] cf. e.g., George S. Hendry, *God the Creator*.

[3] p. 4.

[4] The Complaint was not limited to the question of the incomprehensibility of God. But the other doctrines involved do not directly concern us now.

[5] p. 9.

[6] p. 9.

[7] *A Christian Philosophy of Education*, p. 49.

[8] cf. *The Evangelical Quarterly*.

[9] The Answer, p. 22.

[10] *Idem*. p. 38.

[11] p. 36.

[12] The Answer, p. 19.

[13] The Answer, p. 21.

[14] *Ibid*.

[15] p. 19.

Chapter 14: The Apologetic Import of the Incomprehensibility of God

In addition to what has been said in the previous chapter, some further attention must be given to the presentation of the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God to “the modern man.”

The modern man is in the first place a rationalist. All non-Christians are rationalists. As descendants of Adam, their covenant-breaking representative, (Rom 5:12) every man refuses to submit his mind in the way of obedience to the mind of God. He undertakes to interpret the nature of reality in terms of himself as the final reference point. But to be a rationalist man must also be an irrationalist. Man obviously cannot legislate by logic for reality. Unwilling to admit that God has determined the laws of reality, man, by implication, attributes all power to chance. As a rationalist he says that only that is possible which he can logically grasp in exhaustive fashion. As an irrationalist he says that since he cannot logically grasp the whole of reality, and really cannot legislate for existence by logic at all, it is chance that rules supreme.

It is to this rationalist-irrationalist man that the gospel comes with its doctrine of creation and revelation, its doctrine of redemption through grace in Christ. It is quite impossible to challenge the modern man with the gospel of Christ unless this gospel of Christ be set in its widest possible setting. It is that which the Reformed faith tries to do.

As it tries to do this it must not make compromise with Romanism and Arminianism. To the extent that it does so it loses its power. For Romanism and Arminianism are partly rationalist-irrationalist themselves. Is well then that we set off the full Reformed view of the incomprehensibility of God against the modern rationalist-irrationalist view that has obtained since the time of Kant.

In the Christian doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God, the Creator-creature distinction is made fundamental. In the non-Christian view this is not the case. The non-Christian view is monistic. Not as though the mere form of words by which we assert the ultimacy of the Creator-creature distinction is sufficient to distinguish clearly between the Christian and the non-Christian forms of the incomprehensibility of God. There are more than

enough of non-Christian systems of philosophy, notably the idealist, that also speak of making this distinction basic. But none of these systems mean by this distinction that which the orthodox Christian means by it. For the latter this distinction implies that the triune God, as he has from all eternity existed apart from any relationship to the universe of space and time, is wholly sufficient to himself in his being and knowledge. It implies therefore that God is wholly knowable and wholly known to himself. God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

The orthodox idea of the Creator-creature distinction involves further the idea that the world of space and time has been brought into existence by the forth-putting of God's power, by creation out of nothing, by the mere exercise of his will, and not as a necessity of his being. Thus there is no power of any sort operative in the course of the history of the world as man knows it, that is not without any qualification under the control and direction of God. Even that which man accomplishes through his created freedom, through the exercise of his will, is accomplished in subordination to and in accordance with the ultimate will of God. In particular the evil done by man in thwarting the revealed will of God for his behavior is not done against the all controlling will or decree of God. We may, if we wish, in connection with the entrance of sin and evil into the world, speak of the permissive will of God in order to stress man's undoubted responsibility for sin, but this distinction may never lead to subversion of the clear teaching of Scripture on the all-controlling if ultimate and mysterious power of God. The moment a Christian theologian admits that anything happens in the whole course of history, whether by devil, or man, or power of nature, without the will of God, that moment the foundations of a Christian theology are shaken. For to admit that anything happens outside the will of God is to admit the pagan notion of chance. God by his plan controls whatsoever comes to pass.

It is this assertion of the knowledge of God as naturally and inherently comprehensive of his own being and as all comprehensive of all created being by virtue of his omnipotence over it that the modern man charges with being rationalistic. He who on the basis of the Scripture dares to assert the omnipotence and therefore the omniscience of God without any qualification, is certain to meet with the charge of being a determinist and a rationalist. And included in this charge of determinism and rationalism is that of destroying the foundation of human freedom and responsibility, of

making God the author of sin, etc. The average reader of the New York Times or the Evening Bulletin knows little of Calvinism except its doctrine of election by which, it is said, Calvinism designs men to everlasting perdition no matter what they do.

What is the Christian theologian to do about this charge? Is he to tone down the all-determining character of God's plan in order at least part way to meet the critics? Is he to preserve so much of it as is necessary for the idea of order in the universe and then counterbalance it with a measure of indeterminism in order to save face with the defender of human freedom and morality? This is the policy of the Romanist and of the Arminian. It is also the policy of some Reformed theologians. So for instance J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., in dealing with the relation of God to the morality of man speaks of the "free, undetermined acts of moral agents,"[1] and of the moral choices of human beings as those "in which we are ourselves the ultimate cause."[2] In flat contradistinction from Calvin, Buswell refuses to speak of God as the ultimate cause of all things. In answering Pighius and other critics who said that to speak of God as the ultimate cause of all things is to reduce both human rationality and morality to nonsense, Calvin replied that the exact reverse was true. He argued in effect that unless God be thought of as the ultimate cause of all things, there is no significance or meaning to the thoughts and acts of man. Unless there be back of the thoughts and deeds of man the all-inclusive and therefore also all-controlling plan of God, human thought and human action happens in a void.

Rejecting this approach Buswell follows the policy of the Romanist and the Arminian. When called upon to meet the charge of determinism he does what Thomas Aquinas and the Arminian theologians did, namely, steer a middle course between determinism and indeterminism, between realism and nominalism. "I do not think that every act of the will of God is determined by the nature of God, nor that everything in the nature of God is controlled by the will of God."[3] What is the reason for thus holding that some things are not determined by the nature of God and that others are not determined by the will of God? The answer is given as follows: "If, on the one hand, the will of God is completely determined by the nature of God, then God is not free in his saving work and God's redemptive program is not a matter of grace, but a matter of necessity. If, on the other hand, all wisdom, holiness, righteousness, goodness, and truth in the nature of God are completely determined by the will of God, then the moral law in every

aspect is a matter of mere power, then God's redemptive program is purely arbitrary, and there is no ontological reason for the sacrifice of the Son of God. God might just as well have arbitrarily accepted the offering of Cain as the offering of Abel, and God might just as well have arbitrarily decreed redemptive value through the robbery of Barabbas as through the sacrificial death of his Son."[4]

With respect to this approach, the following observations are in order:

1. A sharp antithesis is made between the nature and the will of God. To be "completely determined by the nature of God" is for Buswell identical in meaning with the idea of impersonal fate. To be free, God's own will must be relieved from complete determination by the nature of God. And since the redemptive program of God for man is sovereign and gracious, this program must not be "completely controlled by the nature of God." We are to think of God's will and of his work of grace in redemption as partially rather than completely controlled by the nature of God. To be completely controlled by God's nature, God's will and its acts in saving grace would not be "free"; but to be partially controlled, God's will and its acts would be free and gracious. But until an answer is forthcoming as to what extent the will of God may be controlled by the nature of God without losing its freedom the distinction is meaningless. And the answer to this question of the extent of the relation of freedom and necessity cannot be answered till the one who replies has reached omniscience.

2. It may be replied that Buswell does not partially separate, but at some points wholly separates the freedom of the will of God from the necessity of the nature of God. Does he not say that "not every act of the will of God is determined by the nature of God"? That seems to indicate that he thinks of some acts of the will of God as having no relation whatever to the nature of God. The question in this quotation seems to be one not of complete or partial determination, but of any or no determination.

But if the will of God is free in some of its actions because these actions are not at all determined by the nature of God, what then of the other actions of the will of God? Are they not at all free because they are determined by the nature of God? If so, how can man know which actions of God's will are and which are not free? And is the will of God then a unity because it is the expression of the personality of God? It is such questions as these that one must answer if one interprets the nature of God in terms of determinism and realism, and the will of God in terms of

indeterminism and nominalism. This can be done consistently only by one who does not make the Creator-creature distinction basic to his thought.

The initial and basic error of Buswell lies in seeking the freedom of the will of God at any point either partially or wholly by way of contrast with the nature of God. The freedom of God is the freedom of God. And what is God apart from his nature? God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. God as the Spirit is the self-contained personal God. His personality is nothing apart from his nature. God is free not in spite of but because of the necessity of his nature. God's necessary self-existence constitutes his freedom. It is only by emphasizing this fact that we can escape being thrown back and forth upon the horns of the realist-nominalist, or determinist-indeterminist dilemma.

3. It may be asked further whether in asserting that some acts of the will of God are not determined by the nature of God. Buswell has met the charge of determinism as made by the non-Christian who believes in chance. If everything happens because God wills that it should happen, says the reader of the *New York Times* or the *Evening Bulletin*, then if I am saved I am saved, and if I am not saved there is nothing that I can do about it. To him it makes no difference whether it is said that it is God's will, rather than his nature, that determines man and his universe.

Buswell seeks to protect the freedom of the will of man from determination of it by the will of God. And he thus obliges the would-be defender of human freedom. The method he follows is naturally the same in the case of defending the freedom of the will of man against the all-determining power of the will of God as that employed in defending the freedom of the will of God against the all-determining power of the nature of God. It is again a matter of making them partially though not wholly dependent on the will of God. Note the following words: "God of his mere good pleasure chose to endow man with freedom of actions so that, as created by God man's actions are not entirely determined from without, but in some respects (though not in all respects) God has given to man the privilege of being an ultimate cause somewhat similar to a creative cause. There are many things in human life, of course, which are not subject to human volition. We might even admit that ninety-nine per cent of all our actions are determined by forces outside of ourselves. Nevertheless, our moral choices are choices in which we are ourselves the ultimate cause."[5]

In the first part of this passage Buswell speaks of “man’s actions” in general In the latter part of the passage he speaks of man’s moral actions as a separate group of actions. Presumably the first phrase includes the latter. Human actions in general would seem to include the narrower class of moral actions. Of all human actions, including moral actions, it is said that they are “not entirely determined from without.” They are therefore partially determined from without. In the latter part of the quotation it is said that we might even admit that in ninety-nine per cent of all our actions we are determined by forces outside of ourselves. And it is added that in the remaining one per cent of our actions “we are ourselves the ultimate cause.” In the first part of the quotation man’s actions without distinction are said to be partially determined from without and partially by ourselves. In the last part of the quotation some actions (ninety-nine per cent) are determined from the outside and some actions (one per cent) are determined exclusively by ourselves.

Would the indeterminist reader of the *Evening Bulletin* now be satisfied? He might catch at the brief sentence in which it is said without qualification that our moral choices are choices in which we are ourselves the ultimate cause. He would say that this does away with the Calvinist notion of election, of God determining whether I shall “will” or not “will” to be saved. If it does not mean this, then what is meant by my being the ultimate cause of my action? And he will be comforted by the words of Buswell pertaining to human faith in its relation to election in the immediate context of the passage already quoted. Buswell says: “The ground of our salvation is the mere good pleasure of our gracious Lord. He is under no compulsion whatever to save any of the rebellious race of Adam, but of his mere good pleasure and sovereign grace he has elected to save those who, he foreknew, would put their faith and trust in the crucified and risen Savior. All who will believe will be saved because God in his sovereign grace elects to save them. All who will not believe will be lost because they will not believe.”[6] Here election seems to be made dependent upon foreseen faith. God elects only those who he knew would put their faith in Christ. The reader of the Bulletin will not be able to distinguish this from the ordinary Arminian way of stating the matter. And he will rejoice in this concession to indeterminism.

The indeterminist may seek further comfort from the fact that according to Buswell God’s foreknowledge is made independent of his

predetermination of all things in the universe. He speaks of the foreknowledge of God as including the "undetermined, free acts of moral creatures."[7]

The indeterminist, however, will not be satisfied. Nothing can satisfy him that does not ascribe to man the sort of freedom that consistent orthodox Christian theology ascribes to God. Even to ascribe so much freedom to man as Romanism or Arminianism ascribes to God is not sufficient in his eyes. For the God of Romanism and of Arminianism is partly (perhaps one per cent) determined in his choices. And the indeterminist wants to be free without any limitations.

It is true, of course, that there are many inconsistent non-Christian indeterminists and irrationalists. But those who wish to hold to indeterminism consistently must reject every type of control over man. Modern existentialism comes near to holding such a consistent indeterminism. When Heidegger speaks of reality as exhaustively temporal, as being reality unto the end or unto death, he is aiming to suggest the idea of utter indeterminacy. So then all the concessions Buswell is willing to make, when he contrasts the will of God with the nature of God and again ascribes ultimacy to the will of man as over against the will of God, will not help in the least to remove the charge of determinism.

And what is true with respect to the charge of determinism is therefore also true with respect to the charge of rationalism. The indeterminist will point out that Buswell would have to be omniscient in order to make his position intelligible and that we all should have to be omniscient in order to understand him. We are said to be free in our moral choices. Which are these moral choices? How do we distinguish between them and the non-moral choices? Where is the border-line? Surely our moral choices are influenced by things that happen about us without our control. There is the whole question of "natural evil" and its influence on our choices. Heredity and environment have great influence on our moral choices and there is no possibility of pointing to one choice in which we are not influenced at all. If Buswell wants to fall back on his own distinction to the effect that all our choices are partially determined and partially free, then the question of degree comes up which can never be settled without benefit of omniscience.

It is to be noted that on his presuppositions the indeterminist and irrationalist is right in pressing his point. He is not merely pointing out the internal inconsistencies in a position which seeks to build up its structures

partly in terms of the God of Christianity and partly in terms of would-be ultimate man. He is after the destruction of the Christian position itself. Working on his monistic assumption he must hold that unless man can exhaustively reduce all factual historical existence to changeless logical relations there is that which is utterly undetermined and unknowable. This argument has been stated in great detail by Kierkegaard against Hegel. Kierkegaard speaks of Hegel's "System" and ridicules it. By seeking to show by logical manipulation how all reality must be what it is, argues Kierkegaard, Hegel kills all uniqueness and all genuine newness in history. Genuine historical uniqueness, argues Kierkegaard, is unpredictable. It cannot be systematized by logic.

The assumption back of Kierkegaard's position is the common monistic one. He takes for granted that unless man can himself place all factual existence into logical categories there is no existential system at all. To be sure, Kierkegaard says that there is an existential system in "God," but this is a meaningless assertion on his part, since on his basis man can know nothing of such a God. Such a "God" is for him an article of faith in the Kantian sense of faith, namely, as a practical rather than a theoretical notion.

But if, from Kierkegaard's point of view, Hegel is to be called a rationalist, how much the more the orthodox Christian. It is the orthodox Christian, to the extent that he is consistent with his own principles and he alone, that holds to the idea of all reality being exhaustively determined by the will of God and therefore exhaustively known by the mind of God. Hegel does not believe in such a God at all. He does not believe in the idea of God as a constitutive concept. For him the idea of a god is a limiting concept. And this makes all the world of difference. The modern idea of the limiting concept is based on the monist assumption that unless man can himself logicize reality, that is to show how all factual existence is reducible to loci in a network of logical relations, to that extent reality is irrational. And so the very rationalism of Hegel is the expression of utter scepticism and irrationalism.

Kierkegaard should have directed his shafts at Calvin rather than at Hegel. It is Calvin rather than Hegel who believes that there actually is a system of reality and knowledge. Calvin does and Hegel does not believe that there is a self-contained ontological Trinity who exhaustively knows

himself by virtue of the nature of his existence and who exhaustively knows the universe by virtue of the fact that he determines all that happens in it.

We may therefore imagine Hegel and Kierkegaard as standing together as irrationalists and indeterminists against Calvin the rationalist and determinist. They will say to Calvin that since it is impossible for him to know the mind of his God exhaustively by his own admission and assertion, therefore he ought with them to become an irrationalist. Calvin would reply, "I can understand why you should say so. You are on your assumptions quite consistent in saying so. For if all reality is of one piece, as you assume, then the human mind and the divine mind are also of one piece. The divine mind does not then know anything more and the divine will does not then control anything more than does the human mind and the human will. There is then no point in appealing to the divine mind as knowing that which the human mind does not know, and there is then no sense to speaking of the divine mind as revealing anything to the human mind. There is then either no mystery at all, either to the divine or to the human mind, or there is mystery to both the divine and the human mind. And since there obviously is mystery to the human mind, I conclude that there is mystery also to the divine mind. I conclude, in short, that reality is ultimately mysterious. But then, you see, I work on the presupposition of God as being the Creator and controller of man. I begin with making this distinction. I have frankly accepted this distinction on the authority of Scripture. And it will seem reasonable to you that on my assumption it is reasonable that I should do so. If man is to know about this divine mind which stands above him as his creator and therefore as his lawgiver, he will be dependent on this divine mind for a voluntary revelation of itself. The voluntary character of this revelation appears not only if and when this god speaks to man in a directly personal way; it appears no less in every fact of the created universe. For the created universe itself owes its existence to a voluntary act of God. It is intelligible only if seen as such."

"If then every fact that confronts me is revelational of the personal and voluntary activity of the self-contained God, it follows that when I try to think God's thoughts after him, that is to say, when by means of the gift of logical manipulation which this Creator has given to me. I try to make a "system" of my own, my system will be at no point a direct replica of the divine system, but will at every point be analogical of the system of God. It can at no point be a direct replica, because to say so would be to wipe out

the very foundation on which I am working. To say so would also mean that man is after all not the creature of God, but has in his mind just what God has in his mind Man could then reduce all factual existence to logical relations, he could then predict all future eventuation in history. On the other hand, since the human mind is created by God and is therefore in itself naturally revelational of God, the mind may be sure that its system is true and corresponds on a finite scale to the system of God. That is what we mean by saying that it is analogical to God's system. It is dependent upon God's system, and by being dependent upon God's system it is of necessity a true system. I hold therefore that it is possible for the human being to have what you call an existential system. But I also hold that the human mind, in all the propositions that it makes by means of its logical faculties, is confronted with facts that are what they are in the last analysis because of the existential system that is God's. Therefore when God tells me something that pertains directly to his own being apart from the world. I may repeat on the level of my experience the words that he has spoken. When he, for instance, tells me that he has existed from all eternity before the foundation of the world, I may repeat his words and say 'God is eternal,' but it is evident that God has, and I have not, grasped fully what God means. God knows himself exhaustively, and I know him truly but not exhaustively. Moreover, what holds true of things that God tells me about himself holds true of everything God tells me about myself or the world. Even of the things that I observe with my senses, with respect to the things that you are accustomed to speaking of as belonging to the realm of science or to the realm of the phenomenal world, it remains true on my presuppositions that I do not comprehend them exhaustively. All the facts of the phenomenal world are incomprehensible to me precisely because they are what they are by virtue of the voluntary action of the will of God with respect to them. They are what they are, they occupy a place in the scheme of things spatio-temporal, because God by his plan and by the execution of his plan in the works of creation and providence, makes them what they are. They are in the last analysis as incomprehensible to me as is God himself. My idea of the incomprehensibility of God, therefore presupposes his true knowability. And his true knowability is based on the fact that I am his creature and that all things created are made by him. I could therefore not even assert the incomprehensibility of God unless I presupposed the knowability of God. I cannot assert the knowability of

anything in the phenomenal world unless I presuppose the knowability of God. It is therefore upon the idea that all phenomenal reality, whether within the mind of man or surrounding it, is what it is because of the result of the activity of the will of God as revelational of his character. Upon this I base the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God.

"In my doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God I am, therefore, not siding with you, Mr. Kierkegaard, as over against Hegel. On the contrary, from my point of view you are both irrationalists. Both of you deny the knowability of God, and both of you should, if you were consistent, deny the knowability of anything. You cannot make intelligible to me how anything can be known unless you presuppose my God who knows all because he controls all. My notion of the incomprehensibility of God is, therefore, as the poles apart from what is today called modern irrationalism. And from your point of view, my doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God must be hopelessly determinist and rationalist. The doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God as I hold it presupposes that God is wholly known to himself and that he wholly knows his created world. It presupposes further that man, as created by God in his image does and cannot help but know God. Even you, Mr. Hegel, will have to admit that you are as averse to such rationalism, to such *alte Metaphysik*, as is Mr. Kierkegaard."

"I do not therefore intend to make any concessions to either of you. I can make no concessions that would satisfy you unless I were willing to sacrifice my entire position on the knowability of God. If I made any concessions to you they would have to be to the effect that in my system I do not have a genuine though finite or analogical replica of the existential system of God. That is to say, I should have to renounce the genuine knowability of anything at all. I should have to be utterly sceptical. I submit that unless you interpret reality in terms of the God of the Scripture by whom all things consist and are what they are, you cannot even make intelligible to yourself your own position. So I am really asserting the incomprehensibility of God in order to avoid the destruction of the possibility of predication in any field whatsoever."

Returning now to Buswell's position, it is plain that together with the positions of Romans and Arminianism it makes the fatal mistake of trying to appease the foes of the Christian faith by making such concessions as shake the foundation of the Christian faith—foundation of knowledge—

without any prospect of winning its opponents. It is not reasonable to expect to win the opponents to the Christian position if we do not carefully set off the Christian position from that of its opponents.

In what has been said so far, stress was laid upon the idea that God controls and therefore knows all things. It is because of this claim that Christianity is frequently charged with rationalism. To this must be added that man does not know and cannot ever expect to know God or anything else exhaustively. He never has and never can expect to have in his mind exactly the same thought content that God has in his mind. As a creature of God man never knows God "adequately." He knows *pro mensura humana*. This contention is not contrary to but rather involved in the first contention with respect to the all-comprehensiveness of God's knowledge. If we hold to the first, we must also hold to the second. For if we hold to the first, then and then only have we thought of the human mind as really derivative and wholly dependent at every point on the mind of God and its prior activity. Romanists and Arminians do not hold to the first and therefore they do not hold to the second. They do not hold to the first because to hold to the first would be to deny that the human mind has ultimacy, and this no Romanist or Arminian is willing to do. Holding to the ultimacy of the human mind in some respect, the Romanist and the Arminian can then also maintain, and even must, to be consistent, maintain that the relation between the divine and the human mind is similar to that of a teacher to a pupil. The teacher knows many things that the pupil does not know. Yet the teacher tells the pupil what he knows and there is no reason at all why the pupil should not eventually know as much as the teacher. Nor is there any reason why the pupil should not understand a single proposition made by the teacher as well as the teacher himself. The teacher may understand some of the implications of a proposition that he has made to the pupil, while the pupil does not understand these implications at a certain time. But when the teacher adds new propositions to the first one, these implications will gradually become clear to the pupil as well as to the teacher. There is only a gradational difference between the two. The teacher and what the teacher knows are incomprehensible to the pupil until the teacher reveals what he knows to the pupil. The possibility of the pupil's understanding the teacher in what he says rests upon the fact that both are operating under the same conditions and limitations. The teacher does not know everything because he does not control everything. Particularly he does not control the pupil's

mind. The teacher therefore cannot predict the future because the future is not wholly under his control.. He cannot be sure that the laws of logic by means of which he makes predictions fit wholly into the facts of the universe about which he is making assertions. So there is mystery for him in the same way that there is mystery for the pupil. Both the teacher and the pupil look up to impersonal laws of logic that are independent of them both, as neither of them controls the facts of reality by means of his power.

It is true that Romanism and Arminianism will not put the matter as plainly as this. They want to maintain the Creator-creature relationship, but, in the last analysis, their teaching with respect to the ultimacy or autonomy of the human mind accounts for their compromise with the non-Christian view of the relation between God and man as illustrated by the teacher-pupil relationship. According to all non-Christian thought, man is potentially divine. Man is not really dependent upon God. Man is not created by God. The world is not under the providential control of God. So the mind of man may eventually know all things.

Even if with modern idealism the knowledge of all things by man is held to be a mere limiting concept so that man may never at any given time expect to know all things, it remains true that God and man are on this view essentially subject to the same limitations. The reason why according to modern idealism man can never expect to know all things at any given time is that God cannot either. The reason lies in the fact that the rationalistic ideal of comprehensive knowledge is counterbalanced with the irrationalistic assumption that reality is never exhaustively knowable to any mind.

Thus the two positions, the Christian and the non-Christian, stand squarely over against one another. Affirming the primacy of the Creator-creature relationship, the Christian position, consistently expressed in the Reformed faith, maintains that man does not at any point have in his mind exactly the same thought content that God has in his mind. When his God makes a revelational proposition to him such as that he, God, is eternal, man in repeating this proposition says that God is eternal. The reference point is the same but the content is not Being subject to no conditions, himself the source of all conditions for man. God at once sees the significance of such a proposition in all the depth of its meaning God know s the meaning of this proposition in all the fulness of its significance because he knows it in relationship to all other propositions that he will

make or will not make to man. If God had made all the revelations propositions that he will ever make to man about himself, even then man could not have the same thought content in his mind that God has in his mind unless he were himself divine. Man can never experience the experience of God. An endless number of added propositions does not change the matter in the least. Added revelation has in the past enriched and no doubt will hereafter enrich the fulness of meaning that man possesses when he responds to this revelation in his confession and adoration, but added revelation cannot wipe out the difference between the experience of the self-contained ontological Trinity and the experience of the created man. When man says that God is eternal he can, because of his own limitations, think of God only as being very old. He can think of eternity only in terms of endless years.

In saying this we are not for a moment slipping into modern irrationalism. We do not speak vaguely of the oceanic depths of God, that is reality, and of the impossibility of emptying out this depth by means of the teacups of our understanding. Nor do we with Thomas Aquinas assert that our knowledge of God is by remotion only. To speak of the infinity of reality and of its unfathomability by the understanding, in short, to be an irrationalist, is quite consistent with being a rationalist For the essence of rationalism springs from the idea of the ultimacy or autonomy of the mind of man. And on this basis irrationalism is in agreement with rationalism. The only difference between the two is that irrationalism is sophisticated or worn-out rationalism; it is rationalism that knows it is lost in the forests of irrationalism. But irrationalism, though knowing that enlarging ever so much the clearing it has made in the woods of the “bad infinite” will always find more wilds to conquer, is not a rejection of the principle of rationalism.

In contrast with this the Christian position with respect to man’s not knowing at any point just what God knows is based upon the presupposition of the self-contained God of Scripture. And this presupposition is the death of both rationalism and irrationalism. It is the death of both because it alone maintains the full dependence of the mind of man upon the mind of God.

So then when man says that God is eternal he is saying something positive about the being of God even though, as far as his own conceptualization is concerned, he cannot think of this eternity otherwise than in terms of the passage of years. He is saying something positive because of the fact that all the facts of the universe, and especially the facts

of his own experience, are a positive revelation of the nature or character of God. It is this fact of the priority of the positive relation of God to the world in the way of creation and providence, in the way of man's creation in the image of God, that saves from scepticism. The Christian idea of human knowledge as analogical of God's knowledge is therefore the only position in which man, who cannot control or know anything in the ultimate comprehensive sense of the term, can nevertheless be assured that his knowledge is true.

To say therefore that the human mind can know even one proposition in its minimal significance with the same depth of meaning with which God knows that proposition is an attack on the Creator-creature relationship and therewith an attack on the heart of Christianity. And unless we maintain the incomprehensibility of God as involved in and correlative to the idea of the all-controlling power and knowledge of God, we shall fall into the Romanist and Arminian heresy of making the mind of man at some points as ultimate as is the mind of God.

To intimate more fully the present day significance of the incomprehensibility of God, it is well to observe the consequences of not teaching it clearly.

One of the current foes of historic Christianity is the irrational, sin of such men as Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. While speaking much of the "wholly other" God and of his qualitative distinctiveness as over against man, they deny the revelational character of all created reality. Thus their teaching with respect to the incomprehensibility of God is cut loose from its basis in the positive revelational activity of God, whether in nature or in grace. The result is that they really make the Universe or Reality at large the final object of predication and are at one with modern post-Kantian science and philosophy in their worship of chance.

In order to oppose this irrational sin of modern nominalism whether it be in the garb of positivistic science, voluntaristic philosophy, or dialectical theology, some Reformed thinkers fall into the error of employing what amounts to realistic and rationalistic non-Christian *a priori*. Thus they seek to cure irrational, sin by means of rationalism We have seen this to be the case with Dr. Clark.

Generally speaking, the procedure is as follows: It is shown how all forms of emotionalism and voluntarism, all forms of pure empiricism and positivism lead straight into the blind alley of scepticism. The common

idealist method of refutation of empiricism is employed. This argument is to the effect that any experience of anything and any assertion on the part of man about anything presupposes the existence of a timeless absolute. Without such a timeless absolute all would be flux and nothing could be said about anything. There must be absolute truth if there is to be even the possibility of error. The sceptic therefore always refutes himself out of his own mouth; he must stand upon truth in order to have emplacement for the guns with which he attacks the truth. He must stand upon the thing he would destroy.

The question now is whether man can know anything positive about such a timeless absolute. If he cannot, the formal refutation of all forms of scepticism will do no good. I may be able to show that logically scepticism is self-contradictory and self-refuting. This is a negative procedure. On what positive foundation have I made my refutation of scepticism? If I cannot indicate such a positive foundation, the sceptic can reply to me that I cannot show how my logical operations have any bearing on the facts of experience at all. For all we can say to the contrary, man may then be in the unfortunate position of being able to show by the laws of logic that his experience is meaningless, but no more I If a rowboat on an ocean of infinite expanse and depth could speak, it might say to the ocean that it is very fluid indeed, and without any solidity, but the ocean would reply that it carries the rowboat, and not the rowboat the ocean.

The idealist argument is powerless over against such a reply. For the idealist position assumes, as noted, that the mind of man is potentially divine. This implies that the mind of man has no right of recourse to a mind that is higher than itself l Even if the mind of the god of idealism be said to be much greater than the mind of man, yet even this mind of God is surrounded by facts over which it has no control. Unless we presuppose the doctrine of temporal creation and of the complete control of all things in the universe by the providence of God, God is confronted by that about which he cannot legislate by means of his thought. In particular, since on the idealist assumption man is not created by God, the mind of man can initiate that which is new and unpredictable by God. God will wonder and hope that the laws of logic will somehow control reality, but he cannot assure the fact that they will. These laws are then independent of his nature.

It is therefore only if the Christian presupposition of the all-controlling plan of God is made that there is any effective argument against scepticism.

It is therefore all important that in seeking to refute scepticism and oppose irrationalism. Reformed theologians make careful distinction between the sort of *a priori* that is involved in the idealist position that does not and the sort of *a priori* that is involved in the Christian position that does base itself upon the Creator-creature distinction.

It goes without saying that Romanists and Arminians will not clearly make this distinction, or at least will not make it count in their argument with pragmatism. Since both affirm the ultimacy of the human mind at some point they, by implication, believe in a god who is himself confronted by that over which he has no control. Therefore not all that man meets in the world by way of facts of nature or of history will be exclusively revelational of the plan of God. Together with the non-Christian, who entirely rejects or ignores the Creator-creature difference, the Romanist and the Arminian is bound to appeal to abstract laws of logic when he seeks to refute scepticism and to prove the truth of the Christian revelation to the natural man.

But the essentially scholastic or Romanist procedure on the matter of the application of some abstract system of logic to the facts of experience is followed even by some Reformed theologians. This is done particularly in the field of apologetics. We therefore touch on the matter very briefly here.

In apologetics Christian theologians seek to make the Christian faith appear reasonable to the unbeliever. They want to win the unbeliever to an acceptance of the faith. The unbeliever wants to understand the doctrine that he is asked to accept. And he wants to be sure that Christianity is in accord with fact. He wants to know that the facts about which Christianity speaks actually happened and that they have for him the significance that Christianity says they have.

A moment’s consideration will reveal the fact that it is impossible for the Christian to satisfy the unbeliever on these matters. Christian apologists try to do so with respect to facts such as miracles by stressing the merely denotative instead of the connotative definition of them. Dr. Clark does this in order to show that if they are thus regarded, the scientist, working with his own recognized methods, cannot claim them to be impossible. There is, he says, in all observation of a scientific sort, always a margin of error. There is the threshold beyond which no investigation can go. There is therefore always room for the exceptional. Thus the scientist himself must allow for the possibility of miracle. It becomes then a matter of mere

historical investigation whether the alleged miracles of Christianity have actually occurred.

It is obvious that on this basis the non-believer, even the pragmatist, may allow for the possibility of miracle. But with Clark himself we then reply that miracles of the sort the pragmatist can allow for are merely strange events and have therefore lost all their significance as part of the Christian system of truth.

Moreover, what is true with respect to miracles is also true with respect to all the facts that form a part of the Christian teaching, whether these facts be natural or supernatural. The non-Christian scientist and philosopher can allow for the possibility of such facts, and of such facts only as they are free from all alliance with their Christian connotation. To say with Clark that in dealing with miracles we are primarily concerned with their denotative definition, that is with the question whether they actually happened, rather than with their connotative definition, that is, the question of their significance in the Christian system, and then to admit that a pragmatist can readily admit on his own basis the fact of the resurrection of Christ, is to say that as Christians we are arguing for what we ourselves say is meaningless. It is, moreover, to admit the legitimacy of the non-believer's theory of what is possible and what is impossible and therewith admitting that the facts, as Christian theology sees them, could never have happened.

It ought to be observed that the only way a Christian can satisfy the nonbeliever with respect to the possibility and actuality of the facts of Christian theism is if these facts have been wholly reduced to parts of a logical system that the human mind can fathom. The unbeliever allows to be possible only that which he can reduce to logical relations of a system that he can exhaustively penetrate. Parmenides may stand as a model of what happens to Christian teaching if the demands of the logic of the non-Christian must be satisfied. To be, is to be known or knowable, was the motto of Parmenides. That is to say, for anything to exist it had to be exhaustively knowable by means of the principles of logic. Applying this doctrine to the question of creation out of nothing, he came to the conclusion that such a fact was impossible. Parmenides was not inconsistent. He was right. On the assumption which he made, namely, that there is no qualitative difference between the divine and the human mind, nothing can be admitted to be a fact that has meaning unless it forms part of

a timeless logical system. And this is to say that there can be nothing that is temporal.

If it be thought that this is but one form, and that an extreme form, of non-Christian thought, and that there are other forms which do allow for factual existence that is not thus amenable to human logic, we reply that if such facts are allowed, they are then classed as meaningless. To the extent that facts are said to have meaning on any non-Christian view, they must form a part of a logically controllable system. Parmenides applied the law of contradiction positively and directly and came to the conclusion that creation out of nothing is impossible. Modern post-Kantian thought applies the law of contradiction negatively and comes to the conclusion that it is meaningless to speak of the transcendent God of Christianity and of his action with respect to the world in the way that orthodox theology does. If we are to continue to use the terms.

God, creation, fall, and atonement, we must do so by using them not as constitutive notions but as limiting notions. They are meaningless as constitutive notions. Such is the argument of the modern man. So then it remains true that whether we take the ancient or the modern mind it is the same story. It is the mind of the creature that has absolutised itself after the fall and has therefore made itself the final reference point of all predication. And therewith it has set itself up as the determiner of the possible and the impossible. It swings the logician’s postulate into the void and boldly asserts that nothing can come into existence but what will answer to the laws of the realm.

With these facts in mind we understand readily how fatal a procedure it is from the Christian point of view to try to satisfy the demands of the natural man with respect to the possibility and actuality of facts. The Christian cannot afford ever to talk about facts as such without claiming at the same time that they are and must be what Christianity says they are. The discussion about facts cannot even begin until the problem of their *a priori* possibility is settled. And it is fatal for the Christian apologist to accept the non-Christian test of possibility. If he is allowed his facts by sufferance of the non-Christian, then these facts are no longer his facts, but the non-Christian’s facts.

The question of the incomprehensibility of God is of particular importance in connection with the relation of Scripture authority and reason. As noted in an earlier chapter, human reason was never meant to

function by itself without relationship to authoritative supernatural revelation. Even in paradise, before man fell, man's reason was meant merely to order, as far as that is possible for a creature, the revelation that was given to him in the facts of nature surrounding him, in the facts of his own constitution, and his reasoning was to be subject to the supernatural revelation of God. But if supernatural revelation was necessary even before the fall in order that man might interpret aright any fact, how much the more was such a supernatural revelation necessary after the fall. And this supernatural revelation that was necessary after the fall had to be of a redemptive character. The men to whom this revelation would come would be hostile to it unless they were made receptive by the very redemption that came to them for acceptance by them. Thus the Holy Spirit had to give to man the power to believe the revelation that was to redeem him. Scripture therefore says that the natural man does not know himself for what he really is unless he has been redeemed. How then can Christians without compromising their own position appeal to the natural man as though he did know what he is and as though he did understand the facts of the universe for what they are in terms of a philosophy of life which leaves God out altogether? Especially how can Reformed theologians, who have taught the doctrine of total depravity and who have set aside as heretical the Arminian and Romanist teachings with respect to human ultimacy and autonomy, turn about and appeal to human autonomy itself for an acceptance of Christian teaching? Yet this is what is constantly done today. It is done when the possibility of such a supernatural revelation is established in terms of a philosophy of the unbeliever. One or two instances may suffice to prove the point.

In his book *Reasoning Faith,* T. C. Hammond argues for the possibility of the prophetic revelation in terms of an idealist personalist philosophy based on modern Kantian epistemology. "But if the Universal Reason struggles to express itself in the order imposed from without on our perceptive faculties, and also finds expression in our subjective reactions, then the welling up of consciousness is also a discovery, and it is also a revelation."[8] This is true in the realm of nature. It is also true in the realm of morals. In both cases the individual is confronted with an objective moral order. "And having reached this point, can we not assume what ordinary experience seems at least to corroborate, that here also the inventors, or rather the original discoverers, are few, while the recorders are many? Let

only ibis be conceded, and place has been found for the prophets of humanity within the same circle of thought that gives us the pioneers in world progress. And here at last we reach, not indeed the book, but the possibility of the book which a less intensive study had ruled out."[9]

But the "possibility of the book" cannot logically be granted at all by those whose final reference point is human self as already interpreted without the book. If the possibility and the actuality of the book are granted by those to whom Hammond appeals, namely to the idealist personalist school of modern philosophers, then the words of this book are held to be words that have no scientific standing in the world of science.

By denying that it is possible to establish the possibility of the book in terms of those who do not interpret in terms of the book, it is not in the least our intention to turn to Barth and in his way to start with the actuality of the book. For Barth and Brunner in starting with the actuality of the book, instead of first establishing its possibility, make of the words of the book something which need in turn to be tested by a test that is within man himself. The book, says Brunner, does not present to us a consistent life and world view. We must find the Word of God in the words and back of the words of the book.[10] The rejection of the method used for the establishment of the possibility of the book used by modernist theologians and idealist philosophers is, in the case of Barth and Brunner, but undercover rationalism.

Over against both the rationalism rejected by Barth and Brunner, and the irrationalism affirmed by them, the Reformed Faith has set the idea that we must begin with the actuality of the book. We must not pretend that we have established the possibility of the book and the necessity of it in terms of a philosophy that we did not get from the book. We have as Christians indeed learned with Calvin to interpret ourselves in terms of the book, and that on the authority of the book, and then we have looked to the book for the interpretation of the meaning of the facts. We do not speak of the denotative definition of the facts of the Christian revelation. We know nothing but such facts as are what the book, the authoritative revelation of God, says they are. And we challenge unbelievers by saying that unless the facts are what the Bible says they are, they have no meaning at all.

Carl F. H. Henry follows a method similar to that of Hammond. He points out that science itself must admit that there is much in "nature" that is beyond the reach of the human eye. This fact, he says, opens the door to

the supernatural realm of law.[11] “For it is surely permissible that the same evidence at least, on which ‘beyond seeing’ the scientist fixes in order to establish a system of nature, may be evaluated also ‘beyond seeing’ in the direction of evidence for theism.”[12] Thus the sluice gate is open to a “spiritual realm.” And thus “it is at least possible that the comfort which the Psalmist’s fool derives from modern philosophic biases may be turned into a periodic discomfort. The case for theism is not at the moment established, but neither, for that matter, is it disproved.”[13] Henry finds comfort in the fact, while his “fool” is supposed to find discomfort in the fact, that such great men as Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, the Stoic, Plotinus, Descartes, Berkeley, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Royce, Hocking, Bowne, and Brightman have all found it necessary to interpret life in terms of a supernatural world in some sense beyond the world that they saw or see. We believe that the “fool” has more justification than has Henry. For if such men as Stoics and Plotinus have any legitimate grounds for holding the utterly monistic systems that they hold, then the Christian has no ground at all for the “dualistic” Creator-creature distinction that he makes. And surely these men were not basically illogical in their reasoning. Starting with the assumption of human autonomy there was logically nothing else that they could do than conclude that reality is all of one piece and that there is no God in the Christian sense of the term.

It is no wonder that Henry has no way of connecting the Bible and its authority to a philosophic method that is so directly contrary to the teaching of the Bible. He says that the “biblical case for theism moves independently of the philosophic arguments for the existence of God.”[14] Yet the self-disclosure of God is also said to remove the “uncertainty surrounding the so-called ‘theistic proofs.’ ”[15] But if the Bible removes the uncertainty of the theistic proofs, then the Bible and the philosophic proof cannot be independent of one another. And granted they are not really independent of one another, then the question is, what does the Bible say about the proofs? The Bible may truly be said to remove the uncertainty with respect to a proof for monism. For the Bible clearly teaches that such a proof is wrong. And Henry is right when on the following page he says that the Bible does not dethrone reason “for that premise would make it impossible for any one to think anything—even this very sentence.”[16] The instrumental use of reason is denied by no one.

And the Bible is also anything but uncertain in requiring man to submit his reason to the authority of God. The teaching of the Scripture is that when man thus makes his reason subject to the authority of the Scripture he thinks things in their true relations, and that when he does not subject his reason to the authority of Scripture he thinks wrongly.

It is clear that Henry is confusing instead of clarifying the issue between the Christian and the non-Christian position with respect to the authority of the revelation of God. The only way one can put the issue clearly and simply is by pointing out the fact that either one thinks in terms of the authority of Scripture, making reason and all its activities subject to this authority, or else one acts and thinks on one's own ultimate authority. And the reason for the failure to make this issue clear in Henry's case, as in Hammond's case, is the attempt to make the Christian position acceptable to the reason of the natural man without challenging the basic assumption of that natural man, namely, his much cherished and never forsaken autonomy.

Reference has already been made to the work of Carnell when he argues that the Bible should appeal for belief to the reason of the "rational man." "When one comes averring to be from God, it surely is a man's duty to demand a proof that this is so."[17] "Bring on your revelations! Let them make peace with the law of contradiction and the facts of history, and they will deserve a rational man's assent."[18] And the Christian apologist is presented as glad to have his revelation take the test set by autonomous reason so that he may have a valuable diploma. "A careful examination of the Bible reveals that it passes these stringent examinations *summa cum laude*."[19] The fact of the matter is that not a single doctrine or fact of Scripture has ever passed the test to which Carnell would so willingly subject them. And that in spite of the fact that every one of them has been frequently subjected to it both by the advocates and by the destroyers of Christianity. Every fact that would pass the test would be put on the shelf as irrational and meaningless from a scientific point of view. And every doctrine that would be accepted would be such an one as would kill every bit of the transcendence of God.

One further instance of a Reformed theologian trying to meet the rationalist demand of the natural man may be mentioned. It need not surprise us that it is by the one whom we have seen also trying to meet the irrationalist demands of the same natural man. We saw that when J. Oliver

Buswell Jr. was trying to defend the Christian religion against the charge of rationalism and determinism he knew of nothing else to do but to tone down the all-controlling power of God to some extent by asserting with the Arminian that man has ultimate determinative power at some points of his experience. Thus he introduces some irrationalism into the Christian teaching. In similar fashion when he seeks to defend the Christian religion against the charge of irrationalism he knows of nothing else that he can do but to insert some rationalism into Christian teaching. The Scripture and the Reformed Confession based upon it plainly teach that God is unchangeable in himself. From the point of view of the non-Christian this cannot be maintained unless we are also willing to maintain that God is inactive in relation to the world. If God at one time had not created the world and if at another time he has created the world, he cannot, says the unbeliever, be said to be unchangeable. And what is said about the unchangeableness of God may be said of all the other attributes of God. The orthodox doctrine with respect to them may be asserted if at the same time it is granted that such a God is meaningless as far as human experience is concerned.

To this charge of the unbeliever, Dr. Buswell has no better reply than to reduce one of the horns of the dilemma. By the same *a priori* method by which Dr. Clark seeks to solve the "paradox" of God's sovereignty and human responsibility, Dr. Buswell solves the "paradox" of the immutability of God and his activities with respect to the world. He "resolves" it by reducing the immutability of God as he exists within himself to an "immutability" or consistency of relationship of activity in time. "God's immutability consists in his perfectly unified plan in dealing with the world, which he created."[20] This definition no doubt satisfies the unbeliever, but it satisfies him because it virtually concedes his charge that nothing intelligible can be said about the self-contained God of the Reformed Faith.

Enough has been said in this and the preceding chapters to indicate the great necessity of maintaining the full biblical meaning of the incomprehensibility of God over against modern rationalism and irrationalism. It is doctrinally important; it is also apologetically important. If we cater to the Romanist view of reason in the doctrinal realm we shall also do it in the apologetical realm. If we cater to the Romanist view of reason in the apologetical realm we shall also do it in the doctrinal. The result is failure to challenge modern man with the full gospel.

[1] *What Is God?* p. 40.

[2] *Idem*., p. 50.
[3] *Idem*., p. 146.
[4] *Idem*., p. 47.
[5] *Idem*., p. 50.
[6] *Idem*., p. 52.
[7] *Idem*., p. 39.
[8] p. 69.
[9] p. 70.
[10] *Die Christlichiche Lehre Van Godd*.
[11] *Notes on the Doctrine of God*, p. 27.
[12] p. 28.
[13] p. 29.
[14] p. 64.
[15] *Ibid*.
[16] p. 65.
[17] *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* p. 268 ff.
[18] *Idem*., p. 178.
[19] *Idem*., p. 178.
[20] *What is God?*, p. 32.

Chapter 15: Innate and Acquired Knowledge of God

A brief chapter must now be added about *Cognitio Dei Insita* and *Cognitio Dei Acquisita*. We can be brief on this point, inasmuch as it is essentially the same point that was discussed when we set forth the principles of Christian epistemology. It is essentially the question of natural theology. In discussing this point, we may again begin with Bavinck's repeated assertion that there has never been and cannot be a natural theology. "In one word," says Bavinck, "there is not one religious or ethical truth which is recognized *ubique*, *semper et ab omnibus*; we cannot speak of a natural theology any more than we can speak of natural jurisprudence or a natural morality."[1] If we start from this point, we cannot go far wrong in our evaluation of innate knowledge of God. It does not mean that Christians and non-Christians are agreed on a certain thought-content with respect to God. They may, to be sure, be agreed in their formal statement of what they say about God. They may both say that they believe in a supreme being. But this does not imply that they have placed the same connotation in the word "supreme." What it does mean, then, is no more than the fact that God's general revelation within man persists in cropping up in spite of all that the sinner can do to keep it under. It is in spite of himself that man must recognize something of the revelation of God within him. This is his sense of religion.

Perhaps a homely illustration will help us to understand something of the matter. Suppose a boy has the measles. They are first internal, and the boy feels uncomfortable. He feels that there is something wrong with him; he feels "cranky." In short, he is abnormal. He insists, however, that he is feeling fine; that he is quite normal. Then the measles begin to appear on the skin, and he can see them for himself; yet he insists that there is nothing wrong with him. At last he reluctantly admits that he is not top-notch, and that he is not interested in football for the afternoon.

In some such way the natural man feels that there is something wrong with his interpretations of life. Involuntarily there surges up within his consciousness the pressure of the testimony of the Spirit to the existence of God. He does his best to suppress this testimony; he seeks psychological

explanation for it; if highly sophisticated and educated, he may succeed to a large extent in searing his conscience with a hot iron. If not highly sophisticated, he may express agreement with the idea that there is a God in a formal fashion; he may do the works of the law, and so seek to ease his conscience. But he will always be "persecuted" with the testimony of the Spirit to the revelation of God within him.

If we look at the matter in this way we are prepared to distinguish carefully between the Christian notion of innate knowledge and the innate ideas of Descartes or the remembrance theory of Plato. Descartes followed the idealist line of thought in maintaining that man has knowledge within himself. His position is contrary to the Christian position in that it does not recognize that all knowledge of man presupposes revelation. With Plato, Descartes assumes that man can, to a large extent, obtain knowledge by simply eliciting what is in himself, apart from God.

What holds of Descartes the rationalist, holds also for the empiricists. Though they opposed the innate ideas of Descartes, they were no more ready to recognize the true place of revelation than was Descartes. For them the mind of man was a *tabula rasa*. But the mind of man as created by God cannot be a *tabula rasa*. Then Adam first appeared, he at once reacted ethically to the testimony of the Spirit within and beyond him. And fallen man cannot refrain from reacting ethically to that testimony. Accordingly we cannot say that the innate knowledge of God in man is the merely formal ability, the capacity or potentiality, in view of man's creation as an intellectual being, to recognize revelation if and when it comes. There can be no finite human consciousness that is not stirred to its depths by the revelational content within itself as well as about itself. Thus the innate knowledge deals with a thought content, and not with a mere formality. The finite human consciousness is itself revelational of God.

But the important point, we would note again, is that this thought-content is, at bottom, involuntary. It springs up within man in spite of himself. It is for this reason that it appears most clearly at the intuitional or non-ratiocinative level of man's consciousness.

Putting the matter this way is not to say that the church's doctrine of innate knowledge is a cross between rationalism and empiricism. The church's doctrine is equally opposed to both of these systems of philosophy because neither of them has any place for the Christian doctrine of revelation. It is with reluctance that we must again point out that this has

not been clearly brought to the fore in Bavinck's discussion of the matter. He is, to be sure, critical of both empiricism and rationalism, but he does not make fully clear that a Christian philosophy builds on a different foundation entirely from that of either empiricism or rationalism. He tells us that there can be no such thing as natural theology. But a natural theology is unavoidable if we grant to either empiricism or rationalism that they are not altogether wrong in their fundamental assumptions. One who has said, as Bavinck has said, that there can be no such thing as natural theology, should not say what he says in the following words: "The truths of mathematics, of logic, the basic principles of ethics, law and religion are accepted by all as unquestionably true."[2] Bavinck speaks of "*principia per se nota, koinai ennoai, veritas eternae*" which are imprinted in the soul of man.[3] But Bavinck himself tells us that all depends upon understanding these *koinai ennoai* correctly. Yet, for all that, his own description is not wholly satisfactory. He opposes vigorously the claim that man should have well formulated notions of deity in himself without revelation. Then he goes on to say with respect to the innate knowledge of man: "But it indicates that man has both the *potentia* (*aptitudo, vix, facultas*) and the *inclinatio* (*habitus, dispositio*) by which in a normal process of development and in the midst of the surroundings in which God gave him life, to come to a certain undoubtable knowledge of God quite apart from the process of scientific reasoning or proof, *emphutoos kai adidaktoos*."[4]

Just what does Bavinck mean with these words? It is somewhat difficult to determine. To make the present passage consistent with the insistence that there can be no natural theology, we have to interpret it as meaning that man, even though a sinner without saving grace, is bound, in spite of himself, to recognize something of the revelation of God within him. There are, however, two other interpretations suggested by the context. One is that suggested by the earlier quotation given, to the effect that there is everywhere among men a certain recognition, in the sense of acceptance, of certain primary principles. But such an interpretation would lead us directly to a natural theology in which believers and non-believers are fully agreed on certain natural truths. Then there is another interpretation suggested by the fact that Bavinck seems at certain places to mean, by the innate knowledge, no more than a mere capacity for knowledge. He suggests this when he says that, just as a man who opens his eyes cannot help but see the light of the sun about him, so also he must, when he hears that there is a

God and that there is a difference between good and evil, assent to the truth of these matters.[5] The difficulty with thinking in this manner of innate knowledge of God is that it is purely meaningless. To say that there is a God, and that there is a difference between good and evil is to say nothing as to the contents of these terms. Moreover, Scripture clearly teaches that it is not a mere matter of form, but very definitely a matter of content. The heathen, according to Paul, deal with a certain thought-content that comes up in them. But the natural man's principles of interpretation to an extent agree with it. We then speak of general principles on which Christians and non-Christians are agreed. But in doing so, we have done despite to the scriptural teaching of total depravity. And we have lost all possibility of argument with the non-believer, inasmuch as he can then insist that we follow him to the logical conclusion involved in his position that principles rest in themselves instead of in God, namely, to the doctrine of a finite god. We should therefore rather speak of the innate knowledge of God in man as the revelational thought-content that arises with his self-consciousness, inasmuch as his own constitution is revelational of God. Calvin virtually asserts that consciousness of self and consciousness of God are involved in one another.

It is only if we have a correct view of the innate knowledge of God that we can also have a proper view of the value of the ontological argument for the existence of God. We then substitute the idea that the God of Scripture is the presupposition of all true interpretation for the Cartesian idea that man can begin from himself as an ultimate starting point.

This leads us now to reflect briefly on the *Cognitio Dei Acquisita*. And we again begin with Bavinck's statement that the revelation of God precedes both the innate and acquired knowledge of God.[6] "It is therefore," he says, "a mistaken method when a Christian in dealing with natural theology seeks to do without the light of Scripture and the illumination of the Spirit in order to deal with it neutrally in order afterwards to turn to revealed theology."[7] "Even the Christian would not be able to read nature aright if it were not for the light of Scripture."[8]

If we follow this lead of Bavinck we cannot go far wrong. We have then to distinguish carefully between the acquired knowledge of God on the part of the Christian and the acquired knowledge on the part of the non-Christian. In both cases we limit ourselves, as is customary, to the knowledge of God learned from nature. The Christian knows that he would

interpret nature wrongly, due to the sin that is within him, unless he be enlightened by Scripture and guided by the Holy Spirit. Strictly speaking, he should therefore not refer to two sources with respect to his general interpretation of life. If he says, “Scripture and reason convince me that this or that is true,” he should mean by this that his reason, as it looks at everything in the light of Scripture, has convinced him. If, therefore, he appeals to the unbeliever on the ground that nature itself reveals God, he should do this in such a manner as to make it appear in the end that he is interpreting nature in the light of Scripture.

The innate and the acquired knowledge of God may, accordingly, be said to be correlative to one another. Neither of them is intelligent by itself. To say that innate knowledge is intelligible by itself is to fall back upon a Cartesian or Platonic basis. To say that the acquired knowledge is intelligible by itself is to fall back upon a non-Christian empiricism. They are mutually interdependent.

But even this is not enough. Roman Catholicism prides itself on the fact that it seeks a balanced position between innate and acquired knowledge. In its concept of analogy it has virtually made these two correlative to one another. What Rome has failed to do, however, is to presuppose the Christian doctrine of God, of creation, and therefore of revelation. It is only if we follow Calvin in making human self-consciousness to depend upon God-consciousness that we have the true foundation for both the innate and the acquired knowledge of God. Only if first we presuppose God and therefore think of all created reality, including the self-consciousness of man, as revelational of God can we think truly of both innate and acquired knowledge. We may then think of them as limiting concepts the one of the other.

On the other hand, the acquired knowledge of God on the part of the nonbeliever will be a continual falsification of that which he unwillingly had to recognize within himself of the revelation of God. This does not mean that externally and formally this falsification must appear. On the contrary, it is quite possible, and in civilized communities even likely, that the non-Christhan will give a formal assent to the intellectual argument for the existence of God. So also it is even likely that he will do the works of the law, that is, show external similarity in his behavior to that of the Christian. And all this is in itself a gift of God’s restraining grace. But all this does not the least detract from the fact that all of the sinner’s self-

conscious reaction, that is, the reaction that proceeds self-consciously from the corrupted ego, to the revelation of God within and about him, whether intellectual or moral, is a falsification of that revelation. Formal assent to the intellectual argument for Christianity, and pharisaical punctiliousness in living up to the form of the law, are in themselves perhaps the most diabolical falsification of the truth.

It is in this light that the so-called empirical proofs for the existence of God should be judged. As frequently agreed to by those who do not pretend to be Christians, though they live under the pale of gospel influence, they mean no more than that men accept a finite God. Even should they be stated truly, that is, should they be stated in such a manner as to make God the presupposition of the possibility of predication in every sphere of life, and men would formally assent to such a statement, it would simply mean that they must unwillingly and in spite of themselves recognize something of the truth of the revelation of God within themselves. A man who would give intellectual assent to such a statement and not accept the gospel of salvation through the blood of the cross would thereby merely indicate that the process of falsification of the truth has, in his case, assumed diabolical proportions.

We shall not, in this connection, discuss Bavinck's view on the "theistic proofs." We have had what amounts to Bavinck's position before us when we evaluated the work of Dr. Hepp. We only remark that Bavinck's discussion of the proofs is not carried on upon that high level to which he himself has led us when he made plain that there could be only one principle of theology, and that there could be, therefore, no natural theology, in the accepted sense of the term. So, with respect to the teleological proof, Bavinck says that it would have some value even if it should leave unsettled the question of the unity or the plurality of the Godhead. He says that in any case it would have proved the necessity of the idea of intelligence for an interpretation of the world.[9] With this we cannot agree. We hold this to be out of accord with Bavinck's own theology. If the question of the unity or plurality is not settled, the question of intelligibility in and beyond the universe is not settled. Or, rather, it is then settled unfavorably for Christianity. A plurality of gods is, for all practical purposes, equal to no god. He who is a polytheist is an irrationalist; he has no right to claim the rationality of one absolute God as the principle of his interpretation of life. And a similar line of argument holds for the other so-called theistic proofs.

They must either be stated in a truly Christian-theistic fashion, or they involve the doctrine of a finite god; and a finite god is no God.

Accordingly, we would not say that these arguments, as they have been historically formulated even by non-Christians, are valid to a point. We do not hesitate to affirm that they are invalid. If they were valid, Christianity would not be true. Accordingly, too, we would not say that, though they are weak as proofs, they are strong as witnesses.[10] If they were strong as witnesses, they would be strong to witness that Christianity is not true. There is no essential difference between witnessing and proving. Nor would we say that they are of a good deal of value for the believer, even if they do not as such convince the unbeliever.[11] Bavinck says that these proofs place weapons in the hands of the Christian by which he can parry the attacks of the non-believer, who at any rate has no better weapons than he.[12] Here again we would distinguish between a Christian and a non-Christian use of the proofs. If the Christian forms the proofs theistically correctly, they are, to be sure, a weapon in his hand with which he may confirm himself and ward off the attack of the enemy. But then this defense and confirmation is on the ground that he has the truth and that his opponents trust in a lie. It cannot be said that at least the enemy has no better weapons; it must then be said that the enemy has wooden guns, while the believer has true guns. If theistically stated, the arguments do nothing but give the content of the revelation of God to man, and argue that it is the only reasonable thing to do for a human being to accept this revelation.

It is of great importance in our day to clarify to ourselves this matter of innate and acquired knowledge. In addition to the traditional enemies of the orthodox position, namely, the rationalists and the empiricists which we have discussed, there is at the present time the irrationalism of Barth and his school. Barth claims to be an enemy of “natural theology.” We might therefore seem to find a friend in him. Yet the reverse is the case. Barth falls into the acceptance of a natural theology in spite of himself, and thus aligns himself with the foes of the Reformed Faith.

It is a well-known fact that Barth separates theology sharply from the other sciences. In the field of the other sciences he thinks there is no difference between a Christian and a non-Christian. This is fatal for anyone who thinks he is really opposing a natural theology. It means that Barth is prepared to interpret great areas of human life without the revelation of God, and that is to have a natural theology. All knowledge is in the last

analysis, a unit. If we claim that we are independent in our knowledge, and think we can do without God at any point, we may as well assert that we are ready to do without him at every point.

Thus Barth and the modern irrationalists in general stand side by side with the rationalists and the empiricists of the present and the past in common opposition to the Reformed Faith. A consistent position is the need of the hour. It requires that we set the Reformed Faith in its fulness before ourselves and before those whom we seek to win to the faith.

[1] Vol. 2, p. 47.
[2] 2, p. 34; see also p. 47.
[3] p. 47.
[4] p. 48.
[5] p. 49.
[6] p. 82.
[7] p. 52.
[8] p. 52.
[9] p. 64.
[10] Bavinck, 2, p. 73.
[11] Bavinck, 2, p. 73.
[12] p. 73.

Chapter 16: The Names and Incommunicable Attributes of God

A. The Names of God

In consonance with what has been said about the revelation of God we may now turn to a consideration of his names. These names must, in the nature of the case, be given to us by God himself. It is not man's idea of God with which we deal, but it is God's idea of himself that stands before us in his names.

The names that God gives us of himself are not mere marks of denotation; there is none other beside himself from whom he need be distinguished. The names of God reveal to us something of the nature or essence of God. They cannot reveal this nature fully, but they nevertheless are expressive of something of that nature. If they were not, they would have no meaning at all.

This sets off the orthodox position squarely from the modern position. The modern position assumes that man is his own ultimate starting point for the interpretation of life. He therefore feels that it is he himself who gives names to that which he calls "god." It is taken for granted that there has been no revelation on the part of God anywhere.

The standing argument against the possibility of God's naming himself is that which we have discussed when we spoke of the position of A. E. Taylor in respect to revelation. It is said that in any revelation of God that would come to us there would have to be a subjective element. We ourselves should have to receive such a revelation into our own minds. Thus God would be limited by our interpretation. Each one of us would have a slightly different conception of God from all others. But this is not true if the Christian concept of revelation is true. This revelation guarantees the identity of reference point between all men who speak to one another. And it guarantees essential identity of content as between the minds of those who accept this revelation as they seek to interpret it. To speak of the limitation of God is to deny his absoluteness and therewith to deny God himself. If we were to speak of God's limitation, we should have to speak

of self-limitation, and we should have to begin with his self-limitation at the creation of the world. The result would be a hiding of God instead of a revealing of him. Pantheism has constantly sought to wedge itself into the church by this avenue. Since Modernism is ready to enter into the church via the old pantheistic doctrines, that is the more reason not to yield an inch on this point. The Bible uses anthropomorphic names of God constantly, but nowhere presents a limited deity.

There is a history in the revelation of God's names. This we should expect. Especially should we expect this in connection with the development of the "special principle," the principle of redemption. As God's plans and purposes of salvation were increasingly realized and made plain to his people, he revealed more of himself to man. This process of God's naming himself in itself a part of the process of the "special principle."

By God's names, in general, we may signify: (a) the appellatives by which God tells us to address him, or *nomina propria*; (b) the attributes, or perfections of God that are ascribed to any or all of the three persons of the Trinity.

1. Nomina Propria in the Old Testament

a. *El, Elohim*, *Eljon*. This name would naturally come first in the history of names. It signifies the One who is first, having priority and therefore absolute power. The name generally appears in plural. This is not an indication of polytheism. It is rather an indication which points toward the doctrine of the Trinity, revealed more fully at a later stage of revelation.

Eljon from *Alah*, to go up (corresponding to the Greek *Hupeistos*), indicates God as the high and exalted One, Gen 14:18 where Melchizedek uses it.

It should be noted that these names are sometimes used of idols, and of man. In this respect they are not proper names. They are proper names of God in distinction from his attributes.

b. *Adonai* indicates God as the Ruler to whom everything is subject and whom man is therefore bound to obey. In earlier times it was the usual name by which God was addressed.

c. *Shaddai* or *El-Shaddai*. The meaning of this can perhaps be ascertained best from Genesis 17:1. Abraham was about to resort to natural

means in order through them to obtain the promises that seemed impossible of fulfillment. Then the Lord appeared to Abraham saying, “I am El-Shaddai,” i.e., I am able to make all the powers of creation subserve the realization of the “special principle.” God is a God of nature establishing His work of grace. To his people, God’s greatness becomes a source of comfort and assurance.

d. The name Jehovah gradually replaced *Adonai* in the mouths of God’s people. It is the name of God as covenant God. All true religion is covenant religion, and is based upon this name of God as the One unchangeable in his attitude of saving grace to his people. In it God gives himself to his people. No more than he can deny himself can his covenant promise to his people fail. It is truly the proper name of God in the Old Testament.

The Jews realized God’s high exaltation to such an extent that they interpreted Leviticus 24:11, 16, where mention is made of blasphemy against the name, as signifying that the name “Jehovah” might not be used by them at all. They substituted either *Elohim* or *Adonai*.

Jehovah Tsebhaoth likely refers to God as the God of the angelic host. Proof: (a) the name is often brought into connection with the angels; 1 Sm 4:4, 2 Sm 6:2 etc: (b) the angels are presented as a host that surrounds God’s throne; Gen 28:12, 1 Kgs 22:19 etc: (c) the name does not have a war-like flavor, but expresses the glory of God as King. Dt 33:2, 1 Kgs 22:19, Ps 24:10, Is 6:3, Is 24:23, Zec 14:16

2. Nomina Propria in the New Testament

a. In the New Testament *Theos* takes the place of *Elohim* in the Old Testament. *Hupeistos theos*, Mark 5:7, etc., takes the place of *Eljon*. *Pantokratoor* and *Theos Pantokratoor*, God all-powerful, replaces *El-Shaddai*. It is the same God, transcendent in power and majesty over all creation, establishing his salvation among men, that we meet in both the Old and New Testaments. The latter idea comes to expression in the constant use of *Theos* in connection with possessive pronouns. In Christ God is the possession of the covenant people.

b. *Kurios*, Lord, refers to both God and Christ. In general it continues to emphasize the Old Testament idea of Jehovah, with added emphasis on Christ’s authority.

c. Father; to understand the usage of the name Father, when applied to God in the New Testament it should be remembered (a) that the idea was given in the Old Testament, so that there is no real difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament on this matter; and (b) that it is in accordance with the later stage of development of the special principle that this name should come to the foreground. It is true that in the Old Testament the name is used with special reference to Israel as a theocracy, so that the individual and ethical meaning of the term is not brought forward; but since the theocracy is one of the stages of the revelation of the special principle, proper inference leads us to hold, in this case as in others, that the Old Testament contains essentially the same thing as the New Testament. The former is less developed than the latter. On the other hand, the New Testament does not countenance a "universal fatherhood of God." It does speak of God as the Father of all men in the sense of being their Creator; in this sense, we can speak of a universal fatherhood. But this is a metaphysical concept. Ethically, no man of God is regarded as a child of God unless God's image in him is renewed in Christ. Col 3:10, Eph 4:24

B. The Attributes of God

We come to a discussion of the attributes of God. The problem that faces us at the outset is that of the relation of the virtues or attributes of God to his Being. In dealing with distinctions in the Godhead, we must needs be careful not to do despite to the simplicity of his Being. We cannot divide up the Godhead. But if this is true, must we then conclude that the distinctions we make are made by merely us, and have only subjective value?

There is only one possible answer to this difficulty. Each attribute of God is coterminous with God. God is light, God is love, God is righteousness, God is holiness. Yet God himself has in his revelation instructed us to make distinctions with respect to his Being. These distinctions help us to understand something of the weak and the richness of his Being.[1]

If we think of the relation of the attributes of God to his being in this manner, we are at once in a position to contrast the Christian to the non-Christian position. The difference is once again that of thinking abstractly and of thinking concretely of God. If one thinks abstractly one obtains a negative, empty essence. This essence is then contrasted to positive

thought-content which is said, in the nature of the case, to delimit the essence. Thus a non-Christian notion of incomprehensibility is combined with a non-Christian notion of positive knowledge, and the result is a split in the Godhead as well as the destruction of human knowledge.

It is well, therefore, that we keep in mind the distinction between an orthodox and an unorthodox conception of the way of eminence and the way of negation by which men have spoken of God. The orthodox notion begins with God as the concrete self-existent being. Thus God is not named according to what is found in the creature, except God has first named the creature according to what is in himself. The only reason why it appears as though God is named according to what is found in the creature is that, as creatures, we must psychologically begin with ourselves in our knowledge of anything. We are ourselves the proximate starting point of all our knowledge. In contrast to this, however, we should think of God as the ultimate starting point of our knowledge, God is the archetype, while we are the ectypes. God's knowledge is archetypal and ours ectypal.

If we realize this fact that God is the original and man is the derivative, we may safely apply the way of eminence and the way of negation. We need not fear that we shall reach an empty concept or that our knowledge will be subjective. Our attempts to say something about God then have back of them the original fact that God has said something about himself.

On the other hand, if we do not keep clearly before us this fact of the self-existent God, who has self-consciously and by an act of self-determination revealed himself, then we shall invariably be led by the way of negation into an abstract notion of the essence of God, and by the way of eminence into uncertainty and delimitation of God. Our reflection on the knowledge of God should always begin with the positive self-revelation of God. The way of negation is the way by which creatures, made in the image of God, realizing that their position is a derivative one, reach up to their original. As made in the image of God, these creatures have received a positive revelation of God. It was only after the entrance of sin that man could think of himself as no longer the creature of God. And it was then that he invented the abstract rather than the concrete way of negation. That abstract way of negation is a convenient tool for the sinner by which to remove the positive attributes of God from making direct demands upon him. Man made himself believe that when he spoke of the righteousness of

God he was merely ascribing something of his own feelings to a being who in reality lives above all such distinctions.

It was only in the field of special revelation that men began again to think concretely of God. It is in the Old and the New Testaments that God speaks out fully and freely his requirements with respect to man and man knows that these requirements are real expressions of the being of God.

In this connection we may remark that Barth has followed the abstract rather than the concrete way of negation in his doctrine of God. The reason for this seems to us to lie in the fact that he has first accepted the abstract rather than the concrete way of affirmation with respect to man's knowledge of the world. It has been noted before that, for Barth, there is no difference between the Christian and the non-Christian when it comes to knowledge of the things of this world. In true Kantian fashion he claims for man an independent knowledge of the phenomenal world. For Barth, man's knowledge of the phenomenal world is not based upon a prior positive revelation of God. The only thing that remains for him, when he turns to the question of man's knowledge of God, is to follow the abstract way of negation. If man claims to know anything independently of God he has equated the level of his own thought with the level of God's thought. If man claims to have the ultimate unifying principle for the interpretation of the phenomenal world within himself apart from God, he has therewith assumed that he has about him ultimate uninterpreted facts. And if these facts are brute facts for him as an ultimate interpreter, they are also brute facts for God as another ultimate interpreter. And this also amounts to saying that there is really no ultimate interpreter at all. It means that each interpreter is really a brute fact who somehow is the focus-point of a rational principle that somehow seems to run through brute facts. In other words, we are before an alternative that cannot be avoided. We may presuppose God as the only and therefore absolutely self-conscious personal principle of interpretation. In that case man cannot interpret anything aright unless his interpretation be thought of as a reinterpretation of God's interpretation. This Barth is unwilling to do. He wants to maintain independence for man at some point. By doing so he cannot escape the only choice that remains. That only choice is to reduce God to an empty essence, a mere impersonal principle.

We are well aware of the fact that Barth describes positive attributes to God. He seems to out-Calvin Calvin in his insistence on the sovereignty of

God. But this does not change the fact that if he were true to his own principle of interpretation he could not ascribe really positive attributes to God. He would have to end up in silence. Barth may say ever so often that God must reveal himself. This is in itself true. But Barth does not really allow God to reveal himself. He sets obstacles in the way of God's revelation in the form of independently conceived human thought. The result is that, according to Barth, we may not rely on anything that has been spoken to man in Scripture as on the word of God. The words of Scripture, argues Barth, are, after all, but human words. The revelation of God cannot speak in them as such. But the only reason he can say this is that he has not made the human mind absolutely subject in its interpretation to the divine mind. He has attributed to the human mind absolute power over against the divine mind. If the human mind were made subject to God by virtue of creation, there is no further reason why it should not be a vehicle by which God can speak to man directly.

Romanist theology also follows the abstract rather than the concrete way of negation and immanence. The "rationalistic" approach of Aquinas is similar to the "irrationalist" approach of Barth. Both have their roots in the notion that man is, in a measure, autonomous. Both Aquinas and Barth hold that man can interpret the phenomenal world aright without referring to God. Both therefore say that man can know only what God is not. They use the way of negation before they use the way of eminence. Then when they use the way of eminence they can do no more, logically, than introduce a finite God, a God who is like man. Thus the *analogia entis* doctrine of the Romanist and the *analogia fidei* are not very different from one another, Romanism does, in spite of its Aristotelianism, allow for a transcendent God and therefore is "orthodox." Barth, because of his Kantianism allows for no transcendent God at all, and therefore is unorthodox. But because of its abstract use of the ways of negation and eminence, Romanism cannot offer much resistance to Barthianism.

If we have caught the difference between the orthodox and the non-orthodox notion of the way of eminence and negation, we are then in a position to deal briefly with the individual attributes of God. For it is really the same problem that meets us in the case of each individual attribute. We must speak of God anthropomorphically. The Scripture speaks of God in that way. In fact there is no other way for us to speak of God. On the other

hand we must be alert to the danger that we should forget that God is the original and that we are the derivatives.

The church has jealously guarded the originality of God. In its thinking it has therefore quite rightly made the incommunicable attributes of God to precede the communicable. And it has hastened to add that no attributes can, as such, be communicated to man. Nothing can exist in man just as it exists in God. Therefore God is incomprehensible in all that he reveals with respect to himself. Everything with respect to God is on the plane of the absolute, while everything with respect to man is derivative. On the other hand, we have in man a copy, something of that which God has revealed with respect to himself. Man's being is analogical of God's being. If, therefore, we speak first of the so-called communicable attributes of God, it is merely for the purpose of stressing the originality of God. The incommunicable attributes of God are those attributes with respect to which we seem to find the least analogy in ourselves, and of which Scripture therefore speaks largely by way of negation. On the other hand, the so-called communicable attributes of God are those of which we seem to have most analogy in ourselves and of which the Scriptures therefore speak more positively.

C. The Incommunicable Attributes of God

1. The Aseity or Independence of God

First and foremost among the attributes, we therefore mention the independence or self-existence of God (*autarkia*, *omnisufficientia*). Everything we have said about God so far has laid stress upon the self-contained character of God. "He is *ipsa per se bonitas sanctitas, sapientia, vita, veritas*, etc."[2] God is *a se*; His creatures are *ab alio*. "In this aseity of God, thought of not merely as being by itself but as the fulness of being, all other virtues are included; they are but the setting forth of the fulness of God's being."[3]

God cannot be said to be *causa sui*, if by *causa* is meant the source of production. God is not self-produced because he is not produced at all. On the other hand God may be said to be *causa sui*, if by *causa* is meant the reason for and meaning of his existence. He is self-contained rationality.

His rationality is not something he possesses, but is something with which his being is coterminous. For this reason we should be careful when we say that God is the being than whom none higher can be thought. If we take the highest being of which we can think, in the sense of have a concept of, and attribute to it actual existence, we do not have the biblical notion of God. God is not the reality that corresponds to the highest concept that man, considered as an independent being, can think. Man cannot think an absolute self-contained being; that is, he cannot have a concept of it in the ordinary sense of the term. God is infinitely higher than the highest being of which man can form a concept.

It is true that we can think of a being higher than we can conceive or make a concept of. And we may use the word "concept" of God in this broader and looser fashion. In fact, it is in this broader and looser fashion that we must speak when we speak of our concept of God. By it we simply mean that notion or idea which we have, by an analogical process of reasoning, sought to fashion for ourselves, of the being of God. When we speak of our concept or notion or God, we should be fully aware that by that concept we have an analogical reproduction of the notion that God has of himself. Our notions or concepts are finite replicas of God's notions.

Perhaps we can clarify this whole matter by contrasting the scholastic procedure, with respect to finding knowledge of God, to that which we have here advocated as being the consistently Christian procedure. To do this, we may conveniently turn to the work of a modern Catholic philosopher. We take the work of P. Coffey on Ontology, in order to see what he says with respect to the being-of God. We quote a portion of his chapter, "Being and Its Primary Determinations."

"The notion of being, spontaneously reached by the human mind, is found on reflection to be the simplest of all notions, defying every attempt at analysis into simpler notions. It is involved in every other concept which we can form of any object of thought whatsoever. Without it we could have no concept of anything."

"It is thus the first of all notions in the logical order, i.e., in the process of rational thought."

"It is also the first of all notions in the chronological order, the first which the human mind forms in the order of time. Not, of course, that we remember having formed it before any other more determinate notions.

But the child's awakening intellectual activity must have proceeded from the simplest, easiest, most superficial of all concepts, to fuller, clearer, and more determinate concepts, i.e., from the vague and confused notion of 'being' or 'thing' to notions of definite modes of being, or kinds of thing."

"This direct notion of being is likewise the most indeterminate of all notions; though not of course entirely indeterminate. An object of thought, to be conceivable or intelligible at all by our finite minds, must be rendered definite in some manner and degree; and even this widest notion of 'being' is rendered intelligible only by being conceived as positive and as contrasting with absolute non-being or nothingness."[4]

"According to the Hegelian philosophy, 'pure thought' can apparently think 'pure being,' i.e., being in absolute indeterminateness, being as not even differentiated from 'pure not-being' or absolute nothingness. And this absolutely indeterminate confusion (we may not call it a 'synthesis' or 'unity') of something and nothing, of being and non-being, of positive and negative, of affirmation and denial, would be conceived by our finite minds as the objective correlative of, and at the same time as absolutely identical with, its subjective correlative which is 'pure thought.' Well, it is with the human mind and its objects, and how it thinks those objects, that we are concerned at present; not with speculations involving the gratuitous assumption of a Being that would transcend all duality of subject and object, all determinateness of knowing and being, all distinction of thought and thing. We believe that the human mind can establish the existence of a Supreme Being whose mode of Thought and Existence transcends all human comprehension, but it can do so only as the culminating achievement of all its speculation. And the transcendent being it thus reaches has nothing in common with the monistic ideal-real being of Hegel's philosophy. In endeavoring to set out from the high *a priori* ground of such an intangible conception, the Hegelian philosophy starts at the wrong end."

"Further, the notion of being is the most abstract of all notions, poorest in intension as it is widest in extension. We derive it from the data of our experience, and the process by which we reach it is a process of abstraction. We lay aside all the differences whereby things are distinguished from one another; we do not consider these differences; we prescind or abstract from them mentally, and retain for consideration only what is common to all of

them. This common element forms the explicit content of our notion of being."

"It must be noted, however, that we do not positively exclude the differences from the object of our concept; we cannot do this, for the simple reason that the differences too are 'being,' inasmuch as they too are modes of being. Our attitude towards them is negative; we merely abstain from considering them explicitly, though they remain in our concept implicitly. The separation effected is only mental, subjective, notional, formal, negative; not objective, not real, not positive. Hence the process by which we narrow down the concept of being to the more comprehensive concept of this or that generic or specific mode of being, does not add to the former concept anything really new, or distinct from, or extraneous to it; but rather brings out explicitly something that was implicit in the latter. The composition of being with its modes is, therefore, only logical composition, not real."

"On the other hand, it would seem that when we abstract a generic mode of being from the specific modes subordinate to the former, we positively exclude the differentiating characteristics of the species; and that, conversely, when we narrow down the genus to a subordinate species we do so by addition a differentiating mode which was not contained even implicitly in the generic concept. Thus, for example, the differentiating concept 'rational' is not contained even implicitly in the generic concept 'animal': it is added on *ab extra* to the latter[5] in order to reach the specific concept of 'rational animal' or 'man' so that in abstracting the generic from the subordinate specific concept we prescind objectively and really from the differentiating concept, by positively excluding this latter. This kind of abstraction is called objective, real, positive; and the composition of such generic and differentiating modes of being is technically known as metaphysical composition. The different modes of being, which the mind can distinguish at different levels of abstraction in any specific concept—such as 'rational,' 'sentient,' 'living,' 'corporeal,' in the concept of 'man'—are likewise known as 'metaphysical grades' of being."

"It has been questioned whether this latter kind of abstraction is always used in relating generic, specific, and differential modes of being. At first sight it would not appear to be a quite satisfactory account of the process in cases where the generic notion exhibits a mode of being which can be embodied only in one or other of a number of alternative specific modes by

means of *differentiae* not found in any things lying outside the genus itself. The generic notion of plane rectilinear figure does not, of course, include explicitly its species ‘triangle,’ ‘quadrilateral,’ ‘pentagon,’ etc.; nor does it include even implicitly any definite one of them. But the concept of each of the differentiating characters, e.g., the *differentia* ‘threesidedness’ is unintelligible except as a mode of a ‘plane rectilinear figure.’[6] This, however, is only accidental, i.e., due to the special objects considered;[7] and even here there persists this difference that whereas what differentiates the species of plane rectilinear figures is not explicitly and formally plane-rectilinearity, that which differentiates finite from infinite being, or substantial from accidental being, is itself also formally and explicitly being. But there are other cases in which the abstraction is manifestly objective. Thus, for example, the differentiating concept ‘rational’ does not even implicitly elude the generic concept ‘animal,’ for the former concept may be found realized in beings other than animals; and the differentiating concept ‘living’ does not even implicitly include the concept ‘corporeal,’ for it may be found realized in incorporeal beings.”

“Since the notion of being is so simple that it cannot be analyzed into simpler notions which might serve as its genus and *differentia*, it cannot strictly speaking be defined. We can only describe it by considering it from various points of view and comparing it with the various modes in which we find it realized. This is what we have been attempting so far. Considering its fundamental relation to existence we might say that ‘Being is that which exists or is at least capable of existing’; *Ens est id quod existit vel saltera existere potest*. Or, that which is not absolute nothingness: ‘*Ens est id quod non est nihil absolutum*.’ Or, considering its relation to our minds, we might say that ‘Being is whatever is thinkable, whatever can be an object of thought.’ ”

“The notion of being is so universal that it transcends all actual and conceivable determinate modes of being: it embraces infinite being and all modes of finite being. In other words it is not itself a generic, but a transcendental notion. Wider than all, even the widest and highest genera, it is not itself a genus. A genus is determinable into its species by the addition of differences which lie outside the concept of the genus itself; being, as we have seen, is not in this way determinable into its modes.”[8]

It is not our purpose to analyze this passage of Coffey in detail. We note merely that the whole approach of Coffey is abstract. He himself says that

the notion of being is obtained by abstraction. If this path is followed out to the end, one is bound to land at the point of pure abstract being. But Coffey is unwilling to land there. He ways that the notion of being is the most indeterminate yet is "not of course entirely indeterminate." He wants to contrast the notion of being to that of absolute non-being. He feels that Hegel's identification of them is utterly unjustifiable. Yet we are bound to maintain that Coffey is headed straight for the purely indeterminate of Hegel. It is only by a happy inconsistency that being and non-being are not interchangeable terms for him. Coffey gets as near to the abyss of absolute non-being as he dares when he says: "*Ens est id quod non est nihil absolutum*."

When one thus begins with the abstract notion of the analogy of being, God and man are bound to come out of this vague sort of being as correlatives to one another. The various modes of being become, in that case, mutually analogical. Coffey speaks of higher and lower modes of being, and speaks accordingly also of more and less being. He cannot find a real creation doctrine on his basic assumption. One must choose between saying that God is a self-contained being and that human beings are created analogues of him while he is the original and not the analogue of them, and saying that there is a vague general being that divides itself by the process of limitation into various modes. In the former case, we have the truly Christian, and in the second case we have what is really the pagan notion of being. The Aristotelian notion of the analogy of being cannot be harmonized with the Creator-creature idea of Scripture.

The self-existence of God can be maintained only if we start concretely with the notion of God as the fulness of self-contained being; the process of abstraction has always led men astray.

2. The Immutability of God

The immutability of God is involved in his aseity. God is "unchangeable in his existence and essence; as he is in his thought and will, in all his purposes and decrees."[9] He is called the Jehovah who changes not, (Mal 3:6) and with him there is no shadow that is cast by turning.

We are again to be on the alert lest we confuse Christian with non-Christian thought on the question of the immutability of God. The church's doctrine is not to be confused with the *aidios ousia akinytos* of Aristotle.

Bavinck does not bring out this point as it should be brought out. He even tends to minimize the difference between the church's doctrine and that of pagan thought.[10] However, Bavinck himself tells us that for Augustine the immutability of God was the direct consequence of the self-contained fulness of the divine being.[11] But surely in the case of Aristotle the immutability of the divine being was due to its emptiness and internal immobility. No greater contrast is thinkable than that between the unmoved *noesis noeeseoos'/it of Aristotle and the Christian God.*

This appears particularly from the fact that the Bible does not hesitate to attribute all manner of activity to God. God creates the world; he keeps his eye on it constantly, not merely on the world in general, but even on the minutest details. But throughout all this activity with respect to the created universe, he himself is said to remain unchanged. Is 41:4, Is 43:10, Is 46:4, Is 48:12, Dt 32:39, Jn 8:58, Heb 13:8. Herein exactly lies the glory of the Christian doctrine of God, that the unchangeable one is the one in control of the change of the universe. If he were the abstract one of Aristotle, he would be nothing but the correlative of the universe, and would therefore have no control over it.

Bavinck points out that the immutability of God has had its enemies.

These enemies have been found among those whose thinking has been informed by pagan philosophy such as that of Heraclitus. Dorner, for instance, sought to harmonize the unchangeability of God with the fact of his active concern for the things of the universe by saying that God is immutable merely in the ethical aspect of his being. God is always love and is always holy. On the other hand, God changed when he actually created the world and when, in the person of the Son, he became flesh.[12] Bavinck insists, and rightly so, that all these efforts are foredoomed to failure. The Scriptures speak anthropomorphically of God, and could not do otherwise, but for all that, God, in himself, is immutable. "There is change round about him; there is change in the relation of things to him; but there is no change in God himself."[13] It has been noted in Chapter 14 that Buswell defines the immutability merely as a permanence of relationship of God to the world.

3. The Infinity of God

The infinity of God is also involved in his aseity. By the infinity of God is meant the boundless fulness of his being. God is limitless in his

existence, and therefore in his attributes. God is concrete self-existence.

We are again compelled to describe this attribute chiefly by way of negation. But it is again of the utmost significance that we use the way of negation correctly. We may seek to apply the way of negation to two of the major aspects of the created world, in order thus to approach something of the notion of God's infinity We compare God's infinity in relation to time and space. We therefore speak of God as being eternal and as being omnipresent.

In both cases, we must needs be very careful to avoid the bad infinite that results if we follow a process of abstraction. Yet it is very easy when we walk the way of negation to fall into abstraction. The way of negation is all too often identified with the way of abstraction. We are then told that we should simply take the notions of time and of space, and subtract such characteristics as succession or continuity from them in order to reach the notions of eternity and omnipresence. But when we follow this advice we land at the very opposite pole from that of the fulness of the being of God. We then come to pure emptiness.

Accordingly, we need the indescribable fulness of the being of God as the presupposition of our notions of time and space. Then we subtract from these notions the limitations that pertain to them by virtue of the fact that they are created by God. If we do this, we walk theistically on the way of negation. The way of negation is then, at the same time, the way of affirmation. God then appears so full and rich in his being that we cannot even make negations with respect to him without the presupposition of the fulness of his being.

The notion of the infinity of God brings out with special force the fact that man's predication with respect to him should not be independent, predication. Independent predication on the part of man implies the delimitation of God and, therefore, the finitization of God. Thus the abstract way of negation, which assumes the ability of man to engage in independent predication, frustrates itself; it seeks an eternal world, and ends up by finding one which is nothing but a negative counterpart of the spatio-temporal universe. Such a being may be either deistically or pantheistically conceived. In both cases, the difference between Creator and creature is really ignored.

Accordingly, we begin our thought about the infinity of God by insisting that the fulness of the being of God is back of the active fulness and variety

in the spatio-temporal world. Scripture leads us in this respect. It has no hesitation in speaking anthropomorphically of God. It ascribes all manner of activity to him. Of this activity we cannot think otherwise than spatially and temporally. So we are face to face with the choice either of thinking of God as altogether like unto ourselves, or of thinking ourselves the finite analogues of the fulness of his being. As we cannot do the first without wiping out the difference between Creator and creature, we are compelled to do the latter.

Thinking of the infinity of God in relation to time in this manner, we therefore think of that fulness of internal activity of which the movement in the temporally conditioned universe is a created replica. God is self-determinatively internally active. God is the self-predicator God is life in himself. Plato's god had the idea of life standing above him; the Christian God knows no definitory principles over against himself. And because he is thus life and internal activity, the God of Christianity, unlike the god of Aristotle, could become the self-Contained source of the created universe. Aristotle's god was not the active source of the world about us. For both Plato and Aristotle, time has some sort of reality independent of the creative fiat of God.

Thus we have, as Christians, a distinct philosophy of history. All that has happened in the past, all that happens in the present, and all that will happen in the future, rests for its presupposition upon the self-sufficient internal activity of the self-predicating and therefore non-delimited being. The movements of history are not determinative of the self-sufficient activity of God; when God created the world by the determination of his will there was no change in himself. When the second person of the Trinity became incarnate there was no change in God. God gave the world existence alongside of himself. He could do so just because he is the self-contained infinite being. Thus the doctrine of the infinity of God, so far from leading us into pantheism, is the best possible safeguard against it. Any attempt to safe-guard the doctrine of God against pantheism by subtracting from the self-contained internal activity of God is foredoomed to failure. It is here that Arminianism, which insists that the historical is not fully dependent upon the self-contained internal activity of God, though it wishes to protect Christian doctrine from the dangers of pantheism, yet leads eventually into pantheism. Then Arminianism speaks of God it speaks of him by the abstract way of negation. It cannot do otherwise if it is to remain faithful to

its principle of giving to created man a certain ultimate predicative power over against God. Accordingly Arminianism has little resistance to offer to such modern idealistic systems of philosophy as that of A. E. Taylor, and of others, for whom time reality is something which God himself has not fully explored.

Buswell defines time as the "mere empty possibility of relationship in sequence, and time in the literal sense is infinite."[14] But on Christian principles there is no such thing as an "empty possibility of relationship in sequence." All possibility of sequence depends upon the counsel of God. Buswell's position here is of a piece with the fact that he, with the Romanist and the Arminian, attributes a measure of autonomy to man and therefore also attempts to make Christian teaching accord with the principles of interpretation of the natural man. In defining the eternity of God, as well as in defining the immutability of God. Buswell therefore does not speak of the self-contained God at all. "When we say God is eternal, we mean that there never was or shall be any possibility of any relationship in sequence independent of God. God is self-existent from infinite time past to infinite time future."[15] Speaking of immutability he says: "We have here no unrelatedness, no immovability, no indifference, no absoluteness in any mathematical sense, but we have perfect consistency, perfectly complete relatedness at every point in the temporal process."[16]

We should note in this connection that, on the question of the eternity of God, Karl Barth and his school also stand with those who virtually attribute independent predicative and, therefore, delimiting powers to created man, and independent existence to created forces in general. Karl Barth follows the abstract way of negation throughout when he deals with the doctrine of God. And in particular does he follow the way of abstraction when he discusses the eternity of God.

Barth says that there are three kinds of time. There is our ordinary calendar time, the time in which we daily move and have our being. But this is not to be identified, says Barth, with time as created by God. Creation time is therefore a second sort of time. This creation time, however, is hidden from us. In our daily life we know nothing but our own calendar time. Accordingly, if God is to speak to us and reveal himself to us, he will have to break through this ordinary time of ours. Therefore there must be a third sort of time, namely, a revelation time.[17]

Why does Barth feel compelled to speak of three kinds of time? The chief reason seems to lie in his idea that if we did not make these distinctions we should be obliged to claim that we can solve the difficult questions of the meaning of the present, the question of the beginning and the end of time, and the relation of time to eternity.[18] Here, we believe, lies the source of Barth's error. If we begin all our thinking by presupposing the self-predicating God, we need not claim and cannot claim that we shall, for instance, understand, that is, conceptualize, the relation of time to eternity. In fact, we then know in advance that we cannot understand that relation. We are bound to speak of God in temporal language. And we know that time categories, when applied to God, must be thought of as merely analogous of the full richness of his internal being.

In contrast to this Barth, basing his thought on the abstract principles of a non-Christian logic, insists that the God of our thinking must be reduced to the proportions of what man can comprehend. And then when he recognizes that man cannot think through the whole of reality, he thinks of God as that remnant of reality that somehow is supposed to lie beyond the reach of man's interpretative powers. Thus does Barth's rationalism lead him into irrationalism. To the extent that Barth is consistent with his own principle of interpretation, the eternity of his God must turn out to be an empty concept. It is only because of the fact that he is often happily inconsistent that he ascribes internal fulness to God's being.

The sad consequence of thinking abstractly of the eternity of God appears most strikingly in the case of Barth's theology. The result of Barth's abstract mode of thought is that he virtually denies historic Christianity. Ostensibly opposed to the ideationalism of idealistic philosophies. Barth falls into idealism himself. The work of Christ, according to Barth, does not take place in our ordinary time. It is not because of the infinite value of the work of Christ done for us on the cross of Calvary, it is not because of the actual physical resurrection with the same body with which he died on the cross that Christ has redeemed his people. It is rather because of something that is said to have happened in "revelation time" of which the things that happen on calendar time are pointers that Christ is said to be our Savior. For Barth, nothing that happens in our time can have infinite value. Our time is but a shadowy reality, something in the nature of Plato's moving image of eternity. It has a quasi-independent existence, but it is not a fit theatre for the activity of God.

Thus the basic contrast between a Christian and a non-Christian notion of eternity of God stands before us. He who thinks of the infinity of God concretely as the internal fulness of the activity of God, also thinks of this world as really existing and as being a significant theatre for the transient activity of God. For him there was a real Adam whose acts in history had real significance. There is a real redemption wrought out in calendar time for the salvation of man. On the other hand, he who thinks of the eternity of God abstractly, and therefore immanentistically, reduces God to an empty inactive principle, and makes of the facts of history either a wholly or a partially independent theatre for the activity of independently existing man.

We can now be brief in our discussion of the infinity of God with respect to space. We again begin with the internal fulness of the being of God as the positive foundation of the created world and, therefore, of its spatial aspect. It is this self-existent being who has created the world by an act of his will, and who can and must therefore be present to all, space with the fulness of his being in order that it may exist at all. When we have thus begun by placing a positive foundation under our notions of spatial relations, we do not absolutize these relations in order then to draw from them negative conclusions with respect to the infinity of God. We may absolutize space either positively or negatively. If we absolutize it positively, we identify God directly with his creation and think of him materially or mechanically. If we absolutize it negatively, we tend to identify God with his creation indirectly, and think of his omnipresence as being some ethereal impersonal principle which is the abstract counterpart of the determinate spatial relations with which we have daily contact. It is this negative absolutizing of space that appears ofttimes in orthodox garb. It is the result of the abstract use of the way of negation spoken of above. Men say that God is not circumscribed by space, they say he is not spatial at all but spiritual. Yet in saying these things, they do not mean what orthodox theology means When we say that God is not circumscribed by space. We may mean either of two things If we have presupposed the creation of this world by God, space cannot, circumscribe God, because its very existence from moment to moment depends upon the continued substraining power of God who, by an act of his own internally existent being originally created space. If, on the other hand, we have not presupposed the creation of the world by God, and say that God is not circumscribed by space, we can mean merely that God is, for us, some vague indefinite something that we cannot reach with our

delimiting powers. Needless to say, Christianity holds to the former notion of the infinity of God with respect to space.

4. The Unity of God

By the unity of God we mean that God is one God, and that he is not composed of parts. We therefore speak of unity of singularity and of unity of simplicity. Singularity and simplicity are involved in one another. We have in the case of God absolute numerical identity and, therefore, internal qualitative sufficiency.

Absolute numerical identity should be opposed to specific or generic unity. God is complete self-consciousness. If he were not, he would not be One Lord, and the words of Deuteronomy “Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord” would not be strictly true (Dt 6:4). There would then be some vague undefined subject or substance not exhaustively predicated it is therefore because of the fulness of the concrete self-existence of God that he is simple.

> In maintaining the unity of simplicity of God on the basis of biblical teaching, the church is face to face with more enemies on every side. It is not only he who professes polytheism that opposes the simplicity of God. All who in any manner separate the ideas or universals in the Godhead from the subject or person of God are opposed to the Christian doctrine of the simplicity of God. And all such as with Greek philosophy begin the interpretation of reality with the assumption of the ultimacy of the human mind, separate the being of God from the ideas. If one begins with the assumption of the ultimacy of man one impersonalizes the ultimate foundation of predication. God is then demoted to a position of finitude. If there is to be unity it must then be sought by the process of abstraction from an ultimately existing plurality. Such a unity will be an empty and lifeless unity. It is such a unity as we find in the philosophy of Plato or Aristotle. Aristotle’s “God” is a principle, not a person.
>
> When discussing the aseity of God we quoted from Coffey, a Roman Catholic theologian in order to show that, if one begins his thinking with an abstract notion of being, one cannot come to the notion of the self-existence of God. In the present connection, we wish to quote a passage from another Roman Catholic theologian,

namely, Etienne Gilson, in order to show that, as in the case of the aseity of God, so in the case of the simplicity of God, Roman Catholic theology is not fully true to the Christian position.

We quote from Gilson on the question of the relation of the God of Aristotle to the God of Christianity.

When we speak of Aristotle's god for the purpose of comparison with the Christian God, we refer of course to the unmoved mover, separate, pure act, thought of thought, set forth in a celebrated text of the Physics (8, 6). How this text is to be taken we shall have to consider later on; for the moment I would simply observe that the first unmoved mover is very far from occupying in Aristotle's world the unique place reserved for the God of the Bible in the Judeo-Christian world. Returning to the problem of the cause of movements in Metaphysics (12, 7–8) Aristotle begins by glancing back to the conclusions previously established in the Physics: 'It is clear, then, from what has been said, that there is a substance which is eternal and immovable, and separate from sensible things It has been shown also that this substance cannot have any magnitude, but is without parts and indivisible. But it is also clear that it is impassive and unalterable; for all the other kinds of change are posterior to change of place. It is clear, then, why this first mover has these attributes.' Well, and what more could we ask? An immaterial, separate, eternal and immutable substance—is this not precisely the God of Christianity? Perhaps—but read, read the next sentence: 'We must not ignore the question whether we have to suppose one such substance or more than one, and, if the latter, how many?' Then at once he plunges into astronomical calculations in order to determine whether, under the first mover, we ought not to admit forty-nine, or perhaps even fifty-five other movers, all separate, eternal and unmoved. Thus although the first unmoved mover stands alone in being first, he is not alone in being an unmoved mover, that is to say a divinity. And were there but only two, that would be enough to prove that 'in spite of the supremacy of the first Thought, the mind of the philosopher is still profoundly impregnated with polytheism.' In short, Greek thought, even in its most eminent representatives, did not attain to that essential truth which is struck out at one blow, and without a shadow

of proof, by the great, words of the Bible, "*Audi Israel, Dominus Deus noster Dominus unus est*' " (Deut. 6:4).[19]

What strikes us in this passage from Gilson is the fact that he begins by stressing the great difference between the Aristotelian and the Christian concept of God. Not only in this passage, but elsewhere in the book from which we have quoted, Gilson contrasts the Christian position from other positions by referring to Deuteronomy 6:4; "In order to know what God is, Moses turns to God Be asks His name, and straightway comes the answer '*Ego sum qui sum, Ait: sic dices filiis israel; qui est misit me ad vos*.' (Ex 3:14) No hint of metaphysics, but God speaks, *causa finita est*, and Exodus lays down the principle from which henceforth the whole of Christian philosophy will be suspended. From this moment it is understood once and for all that the proper name of God is Being and that, according to the word of St. Ephrem, taken up later again by St. Bonaventura, this name denotes His very essence Now to say that the word being designates the essence of God, is to say that in God alone essence and existence are identical. That is why St. Thomas Aquinas, referring expressly to this text of Exodus, will declare that among all divine names there is one that is eminently proper to God. Namely, *qui est*, precisely because this *qui est* signifies nothing other than being itself. *Non significat forman aliquam sed ipsum esse*. In this principle lies an inexhaustible metaphysical fecundity; all the studies that here follow will be merely studies of its results. There is but one God, and this God is Being, that is the corner-stone of all Christian philosophy, and it was not Plato, it was not even Aristotle, it was Moses who put it in position."[20]

All of this leads us to have high expectations. It would seem that we might reasonably expect to find in the thought of Gilson a consistent effort to work out a Christian philosophy and theology. One who has really seen the truth that in God being and essence are coterminous should seek to interpret all reality in the light of the presupposition of the self-contained God. Gilson does not do this. He would not be a good follower of St. Thomas if he did. Gilson insists that, though Aristotle and the Greeks did not find a true notion of God, this was not due to any false principle of reasoning. "For my part," he says, "I see no contradiction between the principles laid down by the Greek thinkers of the classical period and the conclusions which the Christian thinkers drew out of them. It would seem,

on the contrary, that from the moment these conclusions were deduced, they presented themselves as evidently contained in the principles, so that it then becomes a question how those who discovered the principles could so wholly fail to appreciate the necessary consequences there implied. My own view of the matter is this: that Plato and Aristotle missed the full meaning of the ideas they were the first to define, because they failed to explore the problem of being to that point where, transcending the plane of intelligibility, it touches that of existence. The questions they put were the right ones, for the problem they had in hand was certainly the problem of being; and for that reason their formulae remain good. The thinkers of the thirteenth century, seeing there the reflection of their own minds, welcomed them not merely without difficulty, but with joy, for they found themselves able to read the truths they contained, although neither Plato, nor even Aristotle, had ever been able to decipher them.

And so it came about, at one and the same time, that Greek metaphysics made decisive progress, and that the progress was realized under the impulsion of the Christian revelation. The religious side of Plato's thought was not revealed in its full power till the time of Plotinus in the third century A. D., that of Aristotle's thought one might say without undue paradox, not till its exposition by Aquinas in the thirteenth. Substituting rather the name of Augustine for that of Plotinus, and bearing in mind in any case that Plotinus himself was not altogether ignorant of Christianity, we can conclude that if mediaeval thought succeeded in bringing Greek thought to its point of perfection, it was at once because Greek thought was already true, and because Christian thought, in virtue of its very Christianity, had the power of making it still more so. When they raised the problem of the origin of being, Plato and Aristotle were on the right road; and it is precisely because they were on the right road that to go further along it was a progress. In their march toward the truth, they stopped short at the threshold of the doctrine of essence and existence conceived as really identical in God and really distinct in everything else. There we have the fundamental verity of the Thomist Philosophy and also, we may say, of all Christian philosophy whatsoever for those of its representatives who think it proper to contest the formula agree at bottom in recognizing the truth. Plato and Aristotle were building a magnificent arch, all the stones of which converged upon this keystone; but it was due to the Bible that the keystone was put in position, and it was the Christians who actually put it there.

History ought never to forget either what it owes to the Greek tradition on the one side, or what it owes to the Divine Pedagogue on the other. His lessons carry with them a luminous evidence such as we do not remember always to have been vouchsafed."[21]

Our comment on all this must needs be brief. The main point would seem to be-this: In saying that the principles of reasoning as employed by Plato and Aristotle are essentially right, Gilson has been untrue to Deuteronomy 6:4, in accordance with which, as he has told us, he wishes to build his theology. If, in God, being and essence are really coterminous, we have before us an absolute personality. There is then no distinction between absoluteness and personality.

God does not merely have personality, but is absolute personality. This implies that he is the absolute originator of any being that may exist beside himself.

And this in turn implies that the mind of man must, in its interpretative activity, think God's thoughts after him. Or we may turn this about. We may begin with the notion of a really created mind. Such a mind will, if it reasons according to the principle of its createdness, come to the conclusion that God exists as the one in whom essence and being are coterminous.

In contrast to this, we may take the position of the Greeks. Here too it makes little difference at which end we begin. We may begin with the vague notion of being. Then God is not presupposed as forming a cotermineity of essence and existence. In that case there may be and is existence next to God that is not created by him. Thus man's mind is not a created mind. Thus there are ultimates next to God. And if there are ultimates next to God, God's being and essence are not coterminous. On the other hand we may begin with the assumption of the Greeks to the effect that the mind of man is not a created mind. If it is not a created mind, its interpretation does not, in the last analysis, depend upon the mind of God. This non-created mind is then a brute fact for the divine mind, and this implies that the divine mind is not coterminous with its own being.

It appears that for all his laudable effort to work out a Christian philosophy Gilson has been unable to do so. He cannot do justice to the unity or simplicity of God. Thus Roman Catholicism cannot furnish a truly effective antidote to the upsurge of finite deities that envelops us today. Roman Catholic writers are accustomed to blaming the Reformation principle for the modern helter-skelter in the religious world Fulton J.

Sheen, for instance, has written the book *Religion Without God* in which he reviews the many gods of liberal theologians, and then seeks to trace a connection between this confusion and the original Reformation theology. As a matter of fact, it is Roman Catholic theology, with its failure really to think of the being and essence of God as coterminous that is allied to Modernism and polytheism.

In this connection we may again call attention to Barth and his school. His nominalistic notion of God is, in effect, a denial of the simplicity of God. If God's rationality is coterminous with his essence, he cannot deny himself. If God's essence is coterminous with his being there can be and must be in this created universe a rational expression of his plan. In that case the mind of man is made in the image of God and is, as such a fit instrument for the conveyance of the truth of God to man. This mind of man, once it has become sinful, needs the cleansing of regeneration in order to become the medium of God's self-expression, but it is not inherently unfit to be such a medium as Barth claims it is.

[1] Bavinck, 2, p. 111.
[2] Bavinck, 2, p. 139.
[3] Bavinck, 2 p. 740.
[4] *Logic*, 1., pp. 204–206.
[5] Cf. Scotus, *Summa Theologica*, ed. by Montefortino (Rome, 1900), 1, p. 106 *Ad tertium*.
[6] Cf. *Logic*, 1, pp. 119, 120.
[7] Cf. Scotus, *op. cit*., 1, pp. 104, 129; also Urraburu, *Ontologia*, Disp. 3, Cap. 3, Art. 3, p. 155.
[8] P. Coffey: *Ontology, or the Theory of Being*, pp. 32–36.
[9] Bavinck, 2, p. 141.
[10] 1, p. 142.
[11] 2, p. 142.
[12] Bavinck, 2, p. 144.
[13] Bavinck, 2, p. 147.
[14] *What Is God?*, p. 25.
[15] *What Is God?*, p. 26.
[16] *Idem*., p. 33.
[17] *Kirchliche Dogmatik* 1, 2, p. 52.
[18] *Idem*., p. 54.
[19] Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, 1936, p. 45.

[20] *Idem*., p. 51.
[21] *Idem*., p. 82ff.

Chapter 17: The Trinity of God

We turn from our consideration of the incommunicable attributes of God to that of his triunity. The fact that God exists as concrete self-sufficient being appears clearly in the doctrine of the Trinity. Here the God who is numerically and not merely specifically one when compared with any other form of being, now appears to have within himself a distinction of specific and numerical existence. We speak of the essence of God in contrast to the three persons of the Godhead. We speak of God as a person; yet we speak also of three persons in the Godhead. As we say that each of the attributes of God is to be identified with the being of God, while yet we are justified in making a distinction between them, so we say that each of the persons of the Trinity is exhaustive of divinity itself, while yet there is a genuine distinction between the persons. Unity and plurality are equally ultimate in the Godhead. The persons of the Godhead are mutually exhaustive of one another, and therefore of the essence of the Godhead. God is a one-conscious being, and yet he is also a tri-conscious being.

Scripture teaches the doctrine of the triunity of God. It is well that we first summarize the evidence that it offers.

As to the Old Testament, there have been two extreme tendencies that we do well to avoid. There have been those who have sought a complete system of theology in the Old Testament. They have accordingly maintained that the doctrine of the Trinity is clearly taught here. On the other hand there have been those who deny that the Scripture teaches one unified system of doctrine. They have maintained that there is no evidence of the Trinity in the Old Testament.[1] In contrast with both of these extreme positions, we regard Scripture as the record of God's revelation organically mediated to man. We expect the doctrine of the Trinity to be taught in the Old Testament but to be much more clearly taught in the New Testament.

As to the use of "Elohim" in the creation narrative, we can at most say that it is congruent with the doctrine of the Trinity as later revealed. The evidence on which we depend is rather that of differentiations made between the persons of the Trinity at later stages of revelation.

A. The Teaching of the Trinity in the Old Testament

1. We may perhaps think of Genesis 19:24 as an indication of the differentiation in the Godhead. Here we read: “Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah, brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven.” Here the angel of Jehovah, who was on earth, rained brimstone and fire from the Lord who is in heaven.

2. In Genesis 16:13, Hagar addresses the angel of Jehovah as “Thou God seest me.”

The angel of Jehovah is at one time identified with God, and at another time distinguished from God in Exodus 23:20–21 we read: “Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions; for my name is in him.” Here the angel is identified with Jehovah’s name. On the other hand, in Exodus 33, the Lord says he will send the angel with Israel, but will not go himself. Here the angel is clearly distinguished from God.

3. A still further differentiation in the Trinity seems to be indicated in such passages as:

a. Psalm 33:6: “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth” (Ps 33:6).

b. In Proverbs 3:12–31: “Wisdom” is personified, and distinguished from the Creator (Prv 3:12–31).

c. Isaiah 48:16: “Come ye near unto me, hear ye this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; for the time that it was, here I am; and now the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me” (Is 48:16). Isaiah 63:10: “But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit; therefore, he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.” In these texts, the Spirit is spoken of as a distinct person (Is 63:10).

d. Psalm 45:6, 7: “Thy throne, oh God, is for ever and ever; the scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Ps 45:6–7). (quoted in Hebrews 1:8–9)

e. Psalm 110:1: “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Ps 110:1).

f. Isaiah 61:1: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (Is 61:1).

B. The Teaching of the Trinity in the New Testament

These texts are by no means exhaustive. They only indicate that there are, as Professor Berkhof says, at least clear indications of all three of the persons of the Trinity in the Old Testament.[2]

As to the New Testament, we enumerate briefly the Scripture passages in which the Trinity is taught, as quoted in the Westminster Confession.

1. Matthew 3:16, 17: “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ ” (Mt 3:16–17)

2. Matthew 28:19: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Mt 28:19).

3. 2 Corinthians 13:14: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen” (2 Cor 13:14). (See Ephesians 2:18)

4. John 1:14, 18: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we behold his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.” “No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”Jn 1:14, Jn 1:18 (See Hebrews 1:6, Colossians 1:15–17)

5. John 15:26: “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testily of me” (Jn 15:26). Galatians 4:6: “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, *Abba*, Father” (Gal 4:6).

C. Doctrinal Statement

On the basis of these and other Scripture passages, the Westminster Confession[3] says: “In the unity of the Godhead, there be three persons of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the

Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son."

In explanation of this, A. A. Hodge says:[4] "Having before shown that there is but one living and true God, and that his essential properties embrace all perfections, this section asserts in addition:

"First, That Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are equally that one God, and that the indivisible divine essence and all divine perfections and prerogatives, belong to each in the same sense and degree."

"Second, That these titles, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are not different names of the same person in different relations, but of different persons." "Third, That these three divine persons are distinguished from one another by certain personal properties and are revealed in a certain order of substance and of operation."

The entire section that Dr. Hodge devotes to the discussion of the abovementioned three[5] is extremely valuable.

D. The History of the Doctrine

The full statement of biblical truth on the doctrine of the Trinity is the fruit of a long and laborious process of Scripture interpretation. A knowledge of this history is particularly helpful in order to note the types of heresy against which the doctrine has been formulated. A few of the high points in this development may be mentioned.[6]

The Trinity is of the utmost practical significance to us. After discussing various attributes of God, Calvin says: "But there is another special mark by which he designates himself, for the purpose of giving a more intimate knowledge of his nature. While he proclaims his unity, he distinctly sets it before us as existing in three persons. These, we must hold, unless the bare and empty name of Deity merely is to flutter in our brain without any genuine knowledge."[7] Calvin does not merely mean that God has, as a matter of fact revealed himself as Trinity. This is true, but he also seems to say that God cannot exist otherwise than in trinitarian fashion. To quote Warfield: "According to Calvin, then, it would seem, there can be no such thing as a monadistic God; the idea of multiformity enters into the very notion of God."[8] By saying that God's essence is simple and that the three

persons are equal to one another as to their divinity, the Church has set itself in opposition to all forms of non-Christian thought. The Trinity is not a speculative doctrine of little significance. Every type of heresy is, in the last analysis, an attack upon the Trinity. Bavinck says: “The essence of Christianity, the absolute self-revelation of God in the person of Christ, and the absolute self-communication of God in the Holy Spirit, could only be maintained if they have their foundation and principle in the ontological trinity.”[9] Bavinck speaks of the ontological Trinity. This is important. All non-Christian thought would have us think of God as one aspect of the universe as a whole. In one way or another, all heresies bring in space-time existence as the other aspect of the universe as a whole. This is clearly characteristic of present day heresies. Here, in fact, lies the bond of connection between ancient and modern heresies. For this reason, the Church has emphasized the fact that the ontological Trinity, that is, the Trinity as it exists in itself, apart from its relation to the created universe, is self-complete, involving as it does the equal ultimacy of unity and plurality. But it was a long and arduous road by which the church reached its high doctrine of the Trinity.

The first period of the history of the doctrine of the Trinity, A.D. 1–325, was characterized by the effort to show that the Christ of history is the second person of the Godhead. Then Christians worshiped Christ as God they were charged with polytheism. Men were willing to identify Christ with the Logos of the gnostics. They were willing to think of Christ as a sort of being midway between God and man. It was only in this way, they thought, that they could find the unity between the eternal and the temporal that they needed. Greek thought spoke of God as the absolutely other than this world, as the silent abyss; and of the Logos as the means of self-expression for God in the universe. Naturally, this type of speculation was opposed to the idea of the self-contained being of God.

The apostolic fathers of the first and second centuries had already begun the fight against Ebionitism and Docetism. They did not go far beyond direct Scripture statements in their discussion of the Trinity. Little equipped were they to show that with this self-revelation of God they possessed the only defensible philosophical system of truth.

In the second century the apologists, especially Justin Martyr, brought out the divinity of Christ more clearly. “But,” Bavinck says, “the immanent relation between Father and Son is not yet clear in the case of Justin

Martyr."[10] "It still seems as though the Son was generated in the interest of the creation of the world. It is still presented as though God in himself is the hidden God, in contrast to the Son as the revealed God. Similarly, there is very little in Justin Martyr about the divine nature of the Spirit and his onotolgical relation to the Son and the Father."[11]

1. Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen

Irenaeus made a great advance by opposing the gnostic concept of God and of the Logos Bavinck says: "The Logos was as it were relieved of his twofold nature and placed on the divine side."[12] Though not always consistent with himself, Irenaeus opposed the idea of the hidden God (*buthos*) as contrasted to the Son. This was a great advance. It showed that God did not in any wise need the universe as a medium of self-expression; he was self-expressed in the Trinity.

Tertullian supplements Irenaeus by insisting that, though the Son and the Spirit are a unit with the Father, the Godhead is not only unity, but also Trinity. Irenaeus had not emphasized this side of the matter sufficiently. With respect to Tertullian, Bavinck says: "In spite of the fact that he does not always fully transcend subordinationism, and does not sufficiently distinguish between the ontological, the cosmological and the soteriological in the doctrine of the Trinity, he has furnished the concepts and the words which the doctrine of the Trinity required for its formulation. He has substituted filiation for the Logos-speculation, and in this way separated the ontological Trinity from cosmological speculation. And he has been the first who has tried to derive the Trinity of persons, not from the person of the Father, but from the essence of God."[13]

Origen also fell into the error of subordinationism. He stressed the unity of the Son with the Father, but in order to maintain the diversity that he knew was needed, he made a distinction between the essence of the Father and the essence of the Son. The Father was once more, in the Greek fashion, thought of as the most ultimate being, as much higher than the Son as the Son is higher than the world.

2. Arianism

Hodge points out that many followers of Origen, such as Dionysius of Alexandria, and especially Arius, taught a doctrine much lower than that of Origen. According to Arius, Christ was created not from the substance of God, "but *ek ouk ontoon*, and therefore was not *homoousios* with the Father."[14]

3. Sabellianism

Another unsatisfactory form of statement of the doctrine of the Trinity is that which usually is spoken of as Sabellianism. Sabellianism is commonly contrasted with Arianism by saying that Arianism taught the diversity of persons in the Trinity without sufficiently stressing the unity of essence, while Sabellianism taught the unity of the essence without sufficiently stressing the diversity of the persons. This is true, but does not clearly strike at the root of the matter. It is a distinction similar to that which says that while pantheism stresses the immanence of God and deism stresses the transcendence of God, theism stresses both. The point is that the Church could not merely unite Arianism and Sabellianism in order to get at the truth. It had to reject both because they were at bottom reducible to the same heresy, that of uniting the temporal in a correlative union with the eternal. This is the case with all the subordinationist speculation that is summed up in the name "Arianism." But Sabellianism, too, seeks to have the temporal world furnish the plurality as a supplement to the eternal world which furnished the unity of reality as a whole.

4. The Nicene Creed

When the Nicene Council met to state and defend the true doctrine of the Trinity it rejected Arianism by stating that Christ is "*homoousion to patri*" and Sabellianism, by stating that the persons were persons in the ontological Trinity, and not merely economical manifestations with respect to the world. They differ not as "*allo kai allo*," but as "*allos kai allos*." In rejecting these two heresies the council rejected two forms of one heresy, the one basic heresy with respect to the Trinity, i.e., the mixing of the temporal with the eternal in ultimate union. In order to oppose these two forms of the one heresy it was not only necessary to maintain the two points mentioned against the Arians and the Sabellians but also to emphasize that the internal relation of the persons in the Godhead is prior to and

independent of the relation of the Godhead to the created universe. Charles Hodge says: “As the essence of the Godhead is common to the several persons, they have a common intelligence, will and power. There are not in God three intelligences, three wills, three efficiencies. The three are one God, and, therefore, have one mind and will. This intimate union was expressed in the Greek Church by the word *perichooresis*, which the Latin words ‘*inexistentia*,’ ‘*inhabitatio*’ and ‘*intercommunio*,’ were used to explain.”[15]

5. Constantinople, 381

In the Nicene Creed all the elements of the true Scripture doctrine are present. What has taken place since that is not without importance, however. If the true doctrine was to be maintained it had to be continually restated and refined. So it had to be made more plain than it had been made that the Holy Spirit as well as the Son is a person co-substantial with the Father and the Son. Athanasius and Augustine did much to make more clear that all three of the persons are co-ordinate. And an important point in this connection was to show that the Holy Spirit proceeds not only from the Father but also from the Son (*filioque*). It is only if the Spirit proceeds from both that the inter-communion of the persons of the Trinity is eternally complete. The Western Church more clearly than the Eastern saw that the co-ordination of the persons and their exclusively internal intercommunication could not be expressed without the *filioque* clause. As the generation of the Son by the Father had to be an eternal generation, so the proceeding of the Spirit had to be an eternal proceeding from both the Father and the Son. Hodge says: “The most obvious deficiency in the Nicene Creed is the omission of any definite statement concerning the Holy Spirit; the Constantinople Council added the words: ‘We believe in the Holy Ghost’ of the Nicene Creed, the words: ‘Who is the Lord and giver of life, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.’ ” (The *filioque* clause was finally adopted by the Synod of Toledo in 589.)

6. Chalcedon, 451

All the heresies with respect to the Trinity may be reduced to the one great heresy of mixing the eternal and the temporal. Therefore the heresies

of Nestorianism and Eutychianism which were set aside at the council of Chalcedon were no more than modified forms of opposition to the Church's doctrine of the Trinity. Of the Chalcedon Creed, Dr. Schaff says: "While the first Council of Nicea had established the eternal, pre-existent Godhead of Christ, the Symbol of the fourth ecumenical council relates to the incarnate Logos, as he walked upon earth, and sits on the right hand of the Father. It is directed against the errors of Nestorius and Eutychas, who agreed with the Nicene Creed as opposed to Arianism, but put the Godhead of Christ in a false relation to his humanity."[16]

As to the form of statement of the Chalcedon doctrine, the words of Schaff may be quoted: "The orthodox doctrine maintains, against Eutychianism, the distinction of nature even after the act of incarnation, without confusion or conversion (*asygchytoos*, *inconfuse*, and *atreptoos*, *immutabiliter*), yet, on the other hand, without division or separation (*adiariretoos*, *indivise*, and *achoristoos*, *inseparabiliter*), so that the divine will ever remain divine, and the human ever human, and yet the two have continually one common life, and interpenetrate each other, like the persons of the Trinity."[17]

7. The Westminster Confession

Here we may also add the words of the Westminster Confession: "The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man."[18] From these statements it appears that the one main concern of the Church has been to keep God and man in the proper relation to one another without confusing them. God exists as triune. He is therefore self-complete. Yet he created the world. This world has meaning not in spite of, but because of, the self-completeness of the ontological Trinity. This God is the foundation of the created universe and therefore is far above it. If he were defined only as the negation of the

universe, without first being thought of as its foundation, we would have an absolute otherness of God. But this "absolute otherness" would in the end become an aspect of reality as a whole, when brought into relation with the temporal universe at all. Any doctrine that denies God's providence (as deism does) or his providence and creation (as Greek thought did) must in the end become a confusion or the eternal and the temporal. Deism and pantheism are no more than two forms of the one basic error of confusion of the eternal and the temporal.

So also when sin came into the world, and the second person of the Trinity assumed a human nature, the eternal and the temporal were not confused. Nestorianism was again the deistic form of opposition to the true doctrine, and Eutychianism was the directly pantheistic form.

8. Modern Antitrinitarianism

We cannot do more than indicate in a word that the modern heresies in theology have their origin in or can be traced back to a false conception of the Trinity, the self-contained God of Scripture. In modern times as in ancient times, men have mixed the eternal and the temporal.

One striking instance of this is seen in the opposition to Calvin's formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Calvin was strongly interested in asserting the consubstantiality of the three persons of the Godhead. To quote from Warfield: "In his assertion of the '*autotheotes*' of the Son, Calvin, then was so far from supposing that he was enunciating a novelty, that he was able to quote the Nicene Fathers themselves as asserting it 'in so many words.' And yet, in his assertion of it, he marks an epoch in the history of the doctrine of the Trinity. Not that men had not before believed in the self-existence of the Son as He is God: but that the current modes of stating the doctrine of the Trinity left a door open for the entrance of defective modes of conceiving the deity of the Son, to close which there was needed some such sharp assertion of His '*autotheotes*.' "[19] Warfield adds: "Tertullian, Augustine, and Calvin are the three men to whom the Church owes most for the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. It was no wonder that Calvin's statements were hotly opposed. Not to mention the Roman Catholics, who debated among themselves about Calvin's doctrines, or the Lutherans whose objections were to points of detail, we briefly note the Arminian objections. In contrast to the Lutherans, the Arminians had

‘distinct tendency to the proper subordinationism of the Origenists.’ ”[20] Arminius himself, though he denies the “*autotheotes*” of the Son, “fairly saves his orthodoxy.” “The gravitation of Arminianism was, however, downward; and we find already taught by Episcopius, no longer a certain subordination in order among the persons of the Trinity in the interests of the Nicene doctrine of ‘eternal generation’ and ‘procession,’ but rather a generation and procession in the interests of a subordination in nature among the persons of the Trinity.”[21]

“Curcellaeus taught no more than a ‘Specific unity’ of the divine Persons.”[22] George Bull himself was less extreme than Curcellaeus. But after Bull came Samuel Clarke, who was willing to admit that the Son may have been begotten of the essence of the Father “though he wished to be allowed that it was equally possible that He may have been made out of nothing.”[23]

The Arminian opposition to the true doctrine only prepared the soil for more radical departures. The idealist philosophers have identified the Trinity with the principle of thesis, antithesis and synthesis in reality as a whole. Influenced by these philosophers many theologians have gone far astray from the faith. Unitarianism is nothing but a new form of the old error of mixing the eternal and the temporal. Modernism is the happy heir of all heresies and basic to all its heresies is the denial of the consubstantiality of the Son and the Spirit with the Father; Or rather, its error is even deeper than that, since the Father himself is for Modernism no more than an aspect of reality. If ever there was need for re-affirming and teaching the true doctrine of the Trinity, it is now.

There is as much misunderstanding about Barth’s view of the Trinity as there is with respect to his notion of the transcendence of God. Barth’s Kantian principle of the “freedom of God” does not allow any room whatsoever for anything like the traditional doctrine of the self-contained ontological Trinity. In this case, as in others, he uses the words of orthodoxy but rejects it meaning. All of the incommunicable attributes of God are correlativized by Barth. His activism requires him to do so. So also the ontological Trinity is correlativized.

It appears, then, that in setting forth its doctrine of the Trinity the Church prepared itself for its life and death struggle with the world. In stating its doctrine of the Trinity the Church affirmed its unswerving faith in a self-contained, mysterious God. It is this self-contained, mysterious being who

has deigned to reveal himself to man. He has revealed himself as necessarily existing as he exists. Therefore we may say that God exists necessarily as a trinitarian God. When Scripture ascribes certain works specifically to the Father, others specifically to the Son, and still others specifically to the Holy Spirit, we are compelled to presuppose a genuine distinction within the Godhead back of that ascription. On the other hand, the work ascribed to any of the persons is the work of one absolute person. Bavinck has pointed out that, in the doctrine of the Trinity, we have the heart of the Christian religion.[24] We are always in danger, he says, of turning in the direction of Sabellianism by allowing the absolute unity of the being of God to do despite to the genuine personal distinctions in the Godhead, or of turning to Arianism by allowing the distinctions of the persons in the Godhead to do despite to the absolute unity of the being of God.[25]

How shall we avoid this danger? The answer would seem to be that we can best avoid this danger if we (a) clearly set forth the doctrine and see that in it we have a doctrine of God that is the diametrical opposite from that of modern philosophy and theology and (b) offer this triune God without apology as the only possible presupposition for the possibility of predication.

The chief difficulty in performing either of these tasks seems to lie in the fact that we all too readily begin our reasoning at the wrong end. We begin by assuming that we can reason about the triune God without having first presupposed him. We reason univocally instead of analogically.

If we reason thus univocally we cannot help falling into either of two errors. We either maintain that the Trinity can be shown to the non-Christian man to be a rational doctrine upon his own assumptions, or we maintain that the Trinity is a mystery in the sense that it is irrational. Let us look for a moment at these errors.

It is sometimes asserted that we can prove to men that we are not asserting anything that they ought to consider irrational, inasmuch as we say that God is one in essence and three in person. We therefore claim that we have not asserted unity and trinity of exactly the same thing.

Yet this is not the whole truth of the matter. We do assert that God, that is, the whole Godhead, is one person. We have noted how each attribute is coextensive with the being of God. We are compelled to maintain this in order to avoid the notion of an uninterpreted being of some sort. In other

words, we are bound to maintain the identity of the attributes of God with the being of God in order to avoid the specter of brute fact. In a similar manner we have noted how theologians insist that each of the persons of the Godhead is co-terminous with the being of the Godhead. But all this is not to say that the distinctions of the attributes are merely nominal. Nor is it to say that the distinctions of the persons are merely nominal. We need both the absolute cotermineity of each attribute and each person with the whole being of God, and the genuine significance of the distinctions of the attributes and the persons. “Each person,” says Bavinck, “is equal to the whole essence of God and coterminous with both other persons and with all three,”[26] (“Elk persoon is daarom gelyk aan het gansche wezen en evenveel als de beide andere of als alle drie saam”). Over against all other beings, that is, over against created beings, we must therefore hold that God’s being presents an absolute numerical identity. And even within the ontological Trinity we must maintain that God is numerically one. He is one person. When we say that we believe in a personal God, we do not merely mean that we believe in a God to whom the adjective “personality” may be attached. God is not an essence that has personality; He is absolute personality. Yet, within the being of the one person we are permitted and compelled by Scripture to make the distinction between a specific or generic type of being, and three personal subsistences.

As Christians we say that this is a mystery that is beyond our comprehension. It surely is. God himself in the totality of his existence, is above our comprehension. At the same time, this mysterious God is mysterious because he is, within himself, wholly rational. It is not as though we can first, apart from Scripture, determine the fact that there must be a triune God if there is to be rationality. If we are Christians, all our interpretation is in terms of this God of whom we speak. It is he who has first revealed himself in his creation before we could know anything of him. But if there is one thing that seems clear from Scripture it is that there are no brute uninterpreted facts. In God is being considered apart from his relation to the world, being and consciousness are coterminous. And because this is so, the facts of the world are created facts, facts brought into existence as the result of a fully self-conscious act on the part of God. So then, though we cannot tell why the Godhead should exist tri-personally, we can understand something of the fact, after we are told that God exists as a triune being, that the unity and the plurality of this world has back of it a

God in whom unity and the plurality are equally ultimate. Thus we may say that this world, in some of its aspects at least, shows analogy to the Trinity. This world is made by God and, therefore, to the extent that it is capable of doing so, it may be thought of as revealing God as he exists. And God exists as a triune being.

To the non-Christian, however, all this must seem irrational. He has begun his process of thought by assuming that man is ultimate. On this assumption he can at best allow for a species of personality that is higher than himself. He can never allow for absolute personality. If he did he would himself no longer be ultimate. When he speculates on the question of being, it must appear to him as a universal that stands in contrast to every form of personality. For him, the essence of God can be nothing but an empty *Buthos* that is a counterpart to personality. In this sense, the non-Christian thinker will frequently be ready to admit mystery and the super-rational. This type of irrationality does no injury to his pride. It does not assault his assumed independence. Therefore it is this type of irrational that the non-Christian calls the "super-rational." It is the not-yet, though possibly-to-be-rationalized. On the other hand, what the Christian calls the "super-rational" or that which is above reason to man but quite acceptable and even indispensable to man, the non-Christian must call and does call "irrational" in the objectionable sense of the term. The notion of a personality that is at the same time absolute, the notion of a consciousness that is not set over against but is co-terminous with absolute being is, to the non-Christian, contradictory. He says that such a notion claims to say something while it says nothing. To say that God is one person and at the same time to say that he exists as three persons, he will say, is not merely to contradict yourself verbally, but is to say that all predication is analytic. It is to assert that being is already fully complete; that it cannot be added to. All the difficulties that Parmenides faced are thus said to face the Christian believer.

Thus we are face to face with a dilemma. The Christian maintains that only on the basis of the God of the Bible, whom we surely cannot fathom in his being, but who has told us that in him unity and diversity are equally ultimate, is there any possibility of predication. On the other hand, the non-Christian says that with belief in such God there is no possibility of predication. There is no possible way of softening this dilemma. Nor should we wish to tone it down. If we say that we can explain the doctrine of the

Trinity to the satisfaction of the natural man by reducing the objectionable irrational element to his own non-objectionable irrational. We are in fact setting up an irrational that is objectionable from the Christian point of view. Christians and non-Christians cannot pool or trade their mysteries as long as they are true to their positions. It remains therefore to argue as to whose super-rational is really objectionable. To do this, we must place ourselves upon one another's positions for argument's sake. And if this is done, the Christian must hold that the non-Christian worships brute fact, while he himself, though gladly admitting that he cannot exhaustively interpret facts, may turn to God because for God there are no brute facts.

The Roman Catholic Church at first blush seems to avoid the error of seeking to reduce the doctrine of the Trinity to such proportions as to make it unobjectionable to the natural man. It is very insistent that the doctrine of Trinity is a mystery totally beyond the reach of human reason. Yet, if we look more closely, we observe that Rome has pooled the Christian and the non-Christian conceptions of rationality. It claims that in the phenomenal world there is no different between the Christian and the non-Christian principle of interpretation. It holds that by reason (that is, non-regenerated reason), man may interpret correctly many aspects of the created world. And it then adds that there is an area beyond the reach of reason. And that it is this area, called the area of faith, in which we are told to believe in the Trinity. But this is to identify the Christian and the non-Christian notions of mystery. And, as for the charge of contradiction involved in the belief in the Trinity. Rome resorts to a non-Christian notion of the union of unity and plurality in order to remove, that charge. We have noted before that Roman Catholic theology begins its thinking with the abstract notion of being. And non-Christian thinkers do not object to this abstract notion of being. If therefore Rome identifies the essence of God with this abstract notion of being and adds the personality of God to this abstract being, there is very little to which any non-Christian thinker could object.

We do not say that Rome does not often present a better doctrine of the Trinity than we have here outlined. Our only contention is that, according to the genius of its method, it is not entitled to a better doctrine. Rome has made a compromise with non-Christian thought at the essential point of methodology, and it is fatal to the development of sound doctrine so to do.

Summing up what has been said about the Trinity and setting it into relation to what was said in the previous chapter about the incommunicable

attributes of God, we may assert that for a consistent Christian theology the principle of individuation lies within the Godhead. God has, from all eternity, completely identified himself as the only self-existent fact. He identified himself without the need of other facts from which he needed to be distinguished. There was no universal being of which he was a particular instance. There was no mind independent of absolute being that could exercise itself within God himself. There is a deep and rich differentiation in the personal relationship between the three persons of the Trinity. The persons of the Godhead are mutually exhaustive of one another, and, therefore, of the divine essence.

For all non-Christian speculation, on the other hand, the principle of individuation lies somewhere else than in the self-contained deity. Rationalists may find this principle of individuation in some eternal impersonal reason, and empiricists may find it in the "space-time continuum," but both agree in finding it somewhere else than where Christianity finds it. Only Christianity finds it in the absolute personality of God.

It is with this background that we may now turn to a consideration of the communicable attributes of God. If the principle of individuation is really to be found in the absolute personality of God, man is the created image-bearer of God. God communicates to man a being similar to his own. That communication is then not a participation in the eternal being of God, but is the finite replication of the divine being. It is only before the background of the fulness of the being of God as so far discussed that we can do justice to the communicable attributes.

[1] A. Kuyper: *Dictaten Dogmatiek De Deo, Pars Altera*, pp. 52–55.
[2] *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 1.
[3] Chap. 2, Sec. 3.
[4] *Commentary on the Confession of Faith*, p. 84.
[5] *Commentary on the Confession of Faith*, pp. 84–89.
[6] see Shedd's *History of Doctrine*; and Ph. Schaff's *Creeds of Christendom*.
[7] *Institutes*, Bk. 1, chap. 13, Sec. 2.
[8] *Calvin and Calvinism*, p. 191.
[9] *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Vol. 2, p. 301.
[10] *Dog.*, 2, p. 284.
[11] Bavinck, 2, p. 285.
[12] *Op. cit.*, p. 287.

[13] *Op. cit.*, p. 288.
[14] Vol. 1, p. 453.
[15] Vol. 1, p. 461.
[16] *Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. 1, p. 30.
[17] Vol. 1, p. 31.
[18] Chap. 8, 2.
[19] *Calvin and Calvinism*, p. 384.
[20] Warfield, *op. cit.*, p. 263.
[21] Warfield, *op. cit.*, p. 264.
[22] Warfield, *op. cit.*, p. 270.
[23] Warfield, *op. cit.*, p. 270.
[24] *Dogmatiek*, 2, p. 293.
[25] *Idem.*, p. 293.
[26] Vol. 2, p. 311.

Chapter 18: The Communicable Attributes of God

God is unlike man; he has “incommunicable” attributes. God’s also like man; he has “communicable” attributes. God is transcendent above but also immanent in man. As man is created by God and is like him it is right to say that God is like man.

In the first place we speak of the spirituality of God. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth In saying that God is a Spirit we do not think of some vague generic concept of spirituality of which God is one particular instance and man another God is the absolute Spirit. He is the self-contained Spirit. He does not need materiality over against himself in order to individuate himself. He is the self-individuated Spirit.

Of this spirituality man, created as he is in the image of God, carries within him a faint replica. It cannot be said of man that he is a spirit. Man is a physico-spiritual being. We do not mean by this that man is a physico-individuated being in the sense that something spatio-temporal is his basic principle of individuation God as self-contained Spirit is man’s ultimate principle of individuation. God has created each individual man just as he in his inscrutable counsel has determined. But God has created man a physico-spiritual being.

It goes without saying that all forms of materialism are set aside in the notion of God’s spirituality. He who in any sense thinks of the spatio-temporal world as a non-created entity does despite to the spirituality of God To think of the spatio-temporal world as non-created is to think of God at best as a correlative to this spatio-temporal world. Then God is reduced to the spiritual aspect of a spirito-material reality. It is in this way that idealistic philosophy thinks of the spirituality of God. And it is in this way that modernistic theology also thinks of the spirituality of God. When it speaks much of spiritual values it means merely that there is somehow, beyond the visible aspect of the universe, another aspect which is spiritual.

It is only if we see clearly that God is the self-contained spiritual being that we can worship him aright. To worship spiritual values of some nondescript sort is not to worship God in spirit and in truth. Nor can one be

said to be spiritual if one meditates frequently on nondescript higher things of life. We may legitimately use the phrases “high things of life” and “spiritual values” if only we can be clear in our minds that for us these things are what we call them only if they are what the self-revelation of the self-contained spiritual God wants them to be.

In connection with the spirituality of God we may also speak of the invisibility of God. When Scripture ascribes bodily organs to God this is no doubt to be taken figuratively. God alone is immortal and invisible. Jesus does say that he who has seen him has seen the Father also, but this only corroborates the contention that by “seeing God” is meant a spiritual seeing. No one saw Jesus’ divinity except insofar as it was expressed in his human nature. Bavinck points out that, under the influence of Pseudodionysius, the false notion of the vision.

Dei per essentiam as a possibility for ultimate human attainment entered into Christian theology.[1] Scholastic theology indulged its speculative tendency when it spoke of a *lumen gloriae* by which man is supposed to be lifted out of his creatural limitations in the life hereafter in order that he may have a large measure of insight into the very being of God.[2]

In Lutheranism there is found a similar tendency. Even some of the Reformed theologians spoke of a *visio Dei per essentiam*.[3] But most reformed theologians, following the example of Calvin, refused to engage in such idle speculations,[4] and outright denied the *visio Dei per essentiam* in the hereafter. They did this because they held to the eternal incomprehensibility of God. God is infinite and man is finite. This is true in the state of glory no less than in the present state. God can be seen by man in no other than a creaturely fashion. “The object,” says Bavinck, “may therefore be infinite, but the representation of that object in the human consciousness must always be finite. But then the vision of God cannot be *per essentiam*. God must always give a *sungkatahasis*, a revelation, in order by it to condescend to man and make himself known. Matthew 11:27 remains in force to all eternity. The *visio Dei per essentiam* would carry with it that man were made divine and that the border-line between creator and creature would be wiped out.[5] The salvation of man no doubt consists in a *visio Dei beatifica*, but this beatific vision is such a vision as is possible to finite man.[6]

Attributes of the Understanding

We are told in Scripture that God is light and that there is no darkness in him at all (1 Jn 1:5). He dwells in light that no man can approach unto (1 Tm 6:16). Bavinck says: “In this appellation there is included the idea that God is fully conscious of himself, that He sees through the whole of His Being, and that there is nothing in His Being that is hid to His consciousness.”[7] Or again, “There is and can be in God no darkness, He is altogether light, He dwells in light and is the source of light.”[8] Or yet again: “God is eternal and pure being. And His eternal knowledge has nothing less than that full eternal essence for its object. Being and knowledge are coterminous in God.”[9] In contrast to this an Arminian theologian, C. Norman Bartlett says, “His subconscious perfections flower out into conscious self-recognition through the activities involved in the shaping of more or less refractory material into an ever closer resemblance to the divine original.”[10]

It is only if we thus insist on the coterminеity of the self-knowledge with the being of God that we can escape all forms of pantheising thought. If God’s knowledge is not coterminous with his being his knowledge can, at best, be a correlative to being. This being is then given a potentiality of its own. God’s knowledge can then no longer be an internally complete knowledge. It becomes instead a knowledge that he must obtain by a process of investigation of a being that exists independently of himself Such is actually Bartlett’s view.

By the idea of coterminеity of the knowledge and the being of God we can avoid the identification of the self-consciousness and the world-consciousness of God. If being and knowledge are not coterminous in God then being stands over against the knowledge of God as a complement. There is then no possibility of distinguishing between non-created and created being. There can then be no creation except in the attenuated Platonic sense of formation of a pre-existing material. God’s consciousness of self is then interwoven with his consciousness of the world. That too is Bartlett’s view. It is, of course, true that we must distinguish between God’s knowledge and his being. This is as true as that we must distinguish between the various attributes of God. But if these distinctions are really to be maintained in their full significance they must be maintained as correlative to a principle of identity that is as basic as they are themselves.

To avoid the blank identity of pantheism we must insist on an identity that is exhaustively correlative to the differentiations within the Godhead. So also to avoid the abstract differentiations and equivocations of deism, we need a differentiation that is exhaustively correlative to the principle of identity in the Godhead.

God's knowledge of himself may further be spoken of as necessary knowledge. He himself exists as a necessary being His knowledge of himself is therefore necessary in the sense that it is knowledge of himself as a necessarily existing being. And it is because God has this full and extensive knowledge of himself necessarily, and therefore exhaustively, that he also has a comprehensive knowledge of all possibility beside himself. That possibility itself depends upon God's plan with respect to it. God is free to create what he pleases. This knowledge that God has of all possibility beyond himself may therefore be called the free knowledge of God. It is in this way that we may keep a rigid and clear distinction between God's knowledge and his power.[11] Bavinck points out that of the necessary knowledge of God man can have no more than a finite replica.[12]

Idealistic philosophy cannot make this distinction. For it there is no real difference between the possible and the actual. God did not freely create the universe, but necessarily expressed himself in it. Thus God cannot have a free knowledge of the possible. Neither can he have a necessary knowledge of the possible. In fact he cannot have knowledge of anything. He cannot exist as an absolute personality.

Arminianism does not base God's knowledge of the universe upon God's control of the universe. If we keep clearly in our minds the point that God's knowledge of himself is an absolute and necessary knowledge and that he can therefore freely create and freely know reality beyond himself, we are safeguarded against the false notions that speak of God's foreknowledge as though it were something that depended upon the prior existence of something beside God. Strictly speaking, there is no foreknowledge in God. But we may speak of foreknowledge if only we realize that we speak analogically. God knows all things beyond himself with one act of vision of his own plan with respect to those things. It is this that we signify when we say that God's knowledge is analytical. We take this word in its modern philosophical sense of "self-dependent."

Because God's knowledge is to be thought of as analytical we reject what is usually spoken of as the mediate knowledge of God. It is contended

that in the case of certain circumstances, God's knowledge depends upon certain conditions which are to be fulfilled by man. So, for instance, in 1 Samuel 23:11, when David inquires of the Lord whether the men of Keilah would deliver him to his enemies if he remained among them, it seems that the Lord's answer depends upon a condition over which he has no control. Or again, when Jesus said that if the mighty works that he did elsewhere had been done in Tyre and Sidon these cities would not have been destroyed, it seems as though there is a condition over which he had no control. Against this notion of mediate knowledge, Hodge rightly contends that there is no other category beside that of the possible and the actual and that God controls both completely. God's fore-ordination controls whatsoever comes to pass.[13] If God had to wait for events to happen independently of himself before he could know them, he would be a finite God. His knowledge would then be inferential.

The same objection also holds against the Arminian notion that God's knowledge may be separated from his fore-ordination. This would mean that events take place in this universe independently of the plan of God. God's knowledge of such events would be inferential, *post-eventum* knowledge. There is no third alternative. Either one thinks of God as the wholly self-conscious being for whom there are no brute facts, or one makes God dependent upon brute facts. It is on the basis of his own decree with respect to the world that God has full knowledge of the world.

If we keep this biblical notion of the knowledge of God before us, we shall think of human knowledge as analogical of God's knowledge. And only if we do this can we have a truly Christian apologetic. Arminianism, with its salvation on the basis of foreseen faith, and Roman Catholicism, with its semi-Pelagian doctrine of human freedom, rest their thinking upon a false notion of divine knowledge. Accordingly, they are not able to offer an effective argument against idealist philosophy when it reduces the personal God to an abstract *a priori* principle which needs as its complement an equally ultimate *a posteriori* principle. This has become newly apparent in the writings of C. S. Lewis, C. Norman Bartlett, and John Thomas.[14]

As for Karl Barth and his school, they too destroy the biblical notion of the knowledge of God. They do not wish to speak of a fore-ordination of all this in this world. They do not wish, therefore, to speak of the knowledge of God with respect to this world as vouchsafed to man in any systematic way.

They deny the validity of the analogical knowledge that man has of God, even when this knowledge is confessedly based upon the self-revelation of God. It is difficult to see how one, in doing this, can avoid doing injustice to the sovereignly free knowledge of God with respect to the world. If God has such a knowledge there is no reason why man, created in God's image, may not have a finite and therefore systematic replica of that knowledge. And if Barth, by implication at least denies the free knowledge of God with respect to the world, he also by implication denies the absolute and necessary knowledge that God has of himself. The former is based upon the latter. We should begin with the absolutely necessary self-knowledge of God. From it we conclude to the free knowledge of God with respect to the world. And from it in turn we may conclude that man may have an analogically constructed and therefore systematic, though not comprehensive, knowledge of God and of his will.

Wisdom

In connection with the knowledge of God we should mention the wisdom of God. It is much praised in Scripture. God is set forth as the One who uses the most effective means for the accomplishment of his one inclusive purpose. We may contrast the Christian and the non-Christian notion of the idea of wisdom. The Christian notion of wisdom depends upon the notion of the self-contained God. Because of his self-contained and necessary knowledge he can, when he chooses, create a universe, and create this universe just as he wants to create it. This is, therefore, "the best of possible worlds." God's wisdom is displayed in it. Man can understand something of it if only he will think God's thoughts after him.

But exactly here lies the difficulty. Idealistic thought has sought to think out an order and plan in this world by positing certain eternal principles of truth, goodness and beauty. And then it has made the mind of man the standard by which to judge of the effectiveness by which these principles seem to be realized in this world. The Idealists were kind enough to find that this is perhaps the best world that God could make, in view of the limitations he was under. In this way "the best possible world" of Leibniz's theodicy is really nothing more than a great apology for a finite God.

A Christian theodicy will have to start its defense from quite different principles. It will need to start frankly from the presupposition of the self-sufficient God. It goes without saying that this self-sufficient God, who controls all things and knows all things because he controls them, can use the best means to attain his end. But what are the best means? They are those that God sees fit to use. And since they are those that God sees fit to use they may be wholly beyond the reach of human understanding. It was wholly beyond Job's understanding to know why he should suffer. His friends could advise him that it was for the purpose of cultivating his personality. And this was no doubt true as a formal principle. But why did God have to make him suffer so much more than others who were certainly, in their deeds, no better than he? He found the solution only when finally he surrendered himself fully into the hands of the sovereign God. To be sure, the wisdom of God appears in the world, and man can see something of it. Yet it remains true that God is a God that hideth himself, and no man should essay to approve or condemn the deeds of the Holy One by standards of his own devising. The Reformed "theodicy" is therefore quite different from the Romanist and Arminian. The latter finds that God needed obstacles in the universe in order fully to realize himself.[15]

The Moral Attributes of God

From the intellectual we turn now to the moral attributes. First we deal with the goodness of God. Here, too, we should distinguish between what God is in himself and what he is with respect to the created universe. God is, first of all, good in himself. There is none good but one (Mk 10:18). Goodness is not a mere attribute that must be attached to God as a subject, but God is goodness. In him, ideas and being are one.[16] It is for this reason that God must be self-centered in all his moral deeds. He cannot seek anything beyond himself as the final end of moral action. When God expresses his goodness to his creatures he does so ultimately for his own sake. The Arminian (Bartlett<) says that such a view of God is to make him selfish.

It is this notion of the goodness of God that forms the foundation of true Christian ethics. God must be man's *summum bonum*. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. For non-Christian ethics of every sort

the ultimate *summum bonum* can be no more than an abstract principle of goodness. Idealistic philosophy may speak of the eternal idea of the good, but this idea is not as eternal as it seems to be. It is no more than the correlative to a universe of change. For all non-Christian ethics change is ultimate, and therefore correlative to any ultimate principle of ethics men may think they have. The result is that there is nothing that is absolutely unchangeable. For idealism, too, personality cannot be ultimate. God himself is next to and therefore really subject to the principle of the Good. Thus the subject and the adjective or the particular and the universal of ultimate ethical reality are separated. Once this separation is effected, there is no telling to what lengths men may go in their ethical theories. If the kingdom of the absolute God is not made the *summum bonum* for man there is nothing. In the end, to keep man from making himself his own *summum bonum*. There are those who worship and serve the creator, and there are those who worship and serve the creature. No third class exists.

In the second place we should observe that God, who is good in himself, does good to his creatures. It is not as though his being would naturally overflow into other being. God's creation of the world was a self-conscious act.[17] It was a self-conscious act of himself as the one who is altogether good. There can therefore be no good in any creature except it have its source in God. "God is the *causa efficiens, exemplaris et finalis* of all good, howsoever diversified this good may be."[18] God saw that his creation was good when first he made it. Scripture calls upon us to praise the goodness of God continually. It a world of suffering this goodness of God manifests itself as mercy and pity.

When God's goodness manifests itself to the utterly undeserving it is called grace. We cannot speak of the question of grace fully. That is a matter to be discussed in soteriology. We merely speak of it here as a manifestation of the goodness of God. Only he who believes in the God of the Scriptures, the fully self-conscious God, the God in whom being and idea are coterminous, can really do justice to the biblical notion of grace. If one does not believe in the God of the Bible one must hold that not all goodness is ultimately dependent upon him. Then not all evil is an offense against the goodness of God. And if sin is not exclusively an offense against the goodness of God then grace can, at best, be a sort of fellow-sympathy on the part of God for beings that are somehow not as fortunately situated as he.

Modern theology, therefore, based as it is upon idealist philosophy, has no right to speak of the grace of God to sinners. And Barthian theology, which pretends to be vigorously opposed to modernism at every turn, cannot do justice to the notion of grace because it, too, holds to the existence of an evil that is not the result of a wilful act of disobedience on the part of man Barthianism does not believe that God originally created man perfect, and that sin came into the world by the fall of an historical Adam who lived in paradise. For a Barthian, the whole story of paradise is not to be taken as an account of historical events, but is rather to be taken as symbolical of spiritual truths. It is thus that dialectical theology takes away the foundation for a true doctrine of the grace of God to man. And as for Arminian theology, it, too, cannot consistently preach the full scriptural doctrine of the grace of God inasmuch as it, too, thinks of man as independent of the council of God at some point of his activity. Man's offense in breaking God's law in paradise was, for Arminianism, not wholly and exclusively an offense against the absolute God. Arminianism does not hold to a wholly absolute God. It could not hold to a wholly absolute God unless it were willing to give up its teaching with respect to man's ultimate independence at some point. And sin not being wholly and exclusively an act of hostility against the absolute God, grace cannot be wholly and exclusively the sovereign act of the removal of sin as an offense against the absolute God.

Thus it appears that, in the full proclamation of the absolute unmerited grace of God to man, the Reformed Faith, with its fully biblical notion of God as self-contained in all his virtues and therefore in goodness, stands alone. No doubt others do, in a measure, preach the grace of God. Yet, it remains true that it is the mission of the Reformed Faith to recall man to the full scriptural teaching on this subject. It is Calvinism's doctrine of God that enables it to do justice to the gospel of the free grace of God.

Common Grace

It is only if we think concretely of God that we can also think concretely of the things of the created world. And therefore we can think scripturally about the much-disputed doctrine of" common grace." If we think concretely of the question, we see at once that the term "common" is really

applicable only in a very loose sense to the idea of grace. God's attitude toward the saved and the unsaved can at no point be strictly common. It is well that we begin at this point, God always regards the reprobate as reprobate. When, therefore, he gives to the reprobate certain gifts in this life, of which they are undeserving, and these same gifts (as, for instance, rain and sunshine) also come to the saved, we cannot conclude that, with respect to rain and sunshine. God has the same attitude toward the believer and the unbeliever. When we speak of the attitude of God toward unbelievers we must take into consideration the total picture of the unbeliever's relationship to God. Thus the gifts of rain and sunshine to the believer are the gifts of a covenant God who has forgiven the sins of his people, and who knows that his people need these gifts. In a similar way, the gifts of rain and sunshine to unbelievers are gifts to those whom God hates, and are given because they too have need of those things to fulfill the purpose that God has with them God gave Pharaoh life and ability to rule, that he might be able to do that for which God had raised him up.

Both the wheat and the tares receive rain and sunshine so that both may reach the day of judgment for the revelation of the glory of God. In all this, God gave a witness to his presence. Acts 14:16 Men are through this witness without excuse. Thus God gave men and nations everywhere what they needed for a natural life and civilization, that they might accomplish the purposes of God. He restrained them in their natural tendency to do only evil continually, so that they, in spite of their own inherent evil nature, do that which externally resembles the requirements of the law of God (Rom 2:14–15). It was thus by the gifts of God to sinners that the full demoniacal character of sin appeared and shall appear. When the world by its wisdom shows itself to be ignorant of God, God by his grace saves sinners unto himself. When the righteousness of men is shown to be but as filthy rags, God reveals his righteousness from heaven among men.

We conclude then, that "common grace" is not strictly common. The "common" grace that comes to believers comes in conjunction with their forgiven status before God; the "common" grace that comes to unbelievers comes in conjunction with their unforgiven status. Externally considered, the facts may be the same, but the framework in the two cases is radically different.

When, therefore, we are exhorted to follow God's example in doing good to our enemies, that is, in giving gifts to them and helping them, (Lk

6:35) we are asked to have the same attitude toward them that God has toward them. We are not to forget that they are haters of God. We are to do good to them in spite of this fact. We are to do good to them, in part at least, for the purpose of enabling them to accomplish the purpose that God has with them. To be sure, we are not to judge absolutely. Absolute judgment God reserves for himself. Yet, by the appearance of the wicked deeds of men, we cannot but think of them as enemies of God.

We say that this is one factor of the whole situation. We do not say that it is the only factor. God loves the works of his hands, and the progress that they make to their final fulfillment. So we may and should rejoice with God in the unfolding of the history of the race, even in the unfolding of the wickedness of man in order that the righteousness of God may be most fully displayed. But if God tells us that, in spite of the wickedness of men, and in spite of the fact that they misuse his gifts for their own greater condemnation, he is longsuffering with them, we need not conclude that there is no sense in which God has a favor to the unbeliever. There is a sense in which God has a disfavor to the believer because, in spite of the new life in him, he sins in the sight of God. So God may have favor to the unbeliever because of the "relative good" that God himself gives him in spite of the principle of sin within him. If we were to think of God and of his relation to the world in a univocal or abstract fashion, we might agree with those who maintain that there is no qualitative difference between the favor of God toward the saved and toward the unsaved. Arminians and Barthians virtually do this. Or, we might agree with those who maintain that there is no sense in which God can show a favor to the reprobate. On the other hand, if we reason concretely about God and his relation to the world, we simply listen to what God has told us in his Word on the matter. It may even then be exceedingly difficult to construct a theory of "common grace" which will do justice to what Scripture says. We make Scripture the standard of our thinking, and not our thinking the standard of Scripture. All of man's activity, whether intellectual or moral, is analogical; and for this reason it is quite possible for the unsaved sinner to do that which is "good" in a sense and for the believer to do what is "evil" in a sense.[19]

With respect to the question, then as to whether Scripture actually teaches an attitude of favor, up to a point, on the part of God toward the nonbeliever, we can only intimate that we believe it does. Even when we take full cognizance of the fact that the unbeliever abuses every gift of God

and uses it for the greater manifestation of his wickedness, there seems to be evidence in Scripture that God, for this life, has a certain attitude of favor to unbelievers. We may point to such passages as the following: In Psalm 145:9, we are told: “The Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works.” In seeking the meaning of such a passage, we must be careful. In the first place, it is to be remembered that God is constantly setting his own people in the center of the outflow of his goodness to the children of men. So, in Exodus 34:6–7 we read: “And the Lord God passed before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and fourth generation.” In this passage we are, as it were, warned to think concretely on the question before us—God’s mercy and grace is primarily extended to those whose sins are forgiven If in any sense it is given to those whose sins are not forgiven, it must always be remembered that God does not overlook iniquity. We may therefore expect that in Psalm 145 the psalmist teaches nothing that is out of accord with what has been taught in Exodus 34. Thus, the primary meaning of Psalm 145 is again that God’s great favor is toward his people. Even when God gives great gifts to non-believers, they are, in a more basic sense, gifts to believers. Gifts of God to unbelievers help to make the life of believers possible, and in measure, pleasant. But this does not detract from the fact that the unbeliever himself is in a measure, the recipient of God’s favor. There is a certain joy in the gift of life and its natural blessings for the unbeliever. And we may well think that Psalm 145 has this in mind. Such joy as there is in the life of the unbeliever cannot be found in him after this life is over. Even in the hereafter, the lost will belong to the works of God’s hands. And God no doubt has joy that through the works of evil men and angels, he is establishing his glory. Yet that is not what the psalmist seems to mean. There seems to be certain satisfaction on the part of God even in the temporary joy of the unbeliever as a creature of himself, a joy which will in the end turn to bitterness, but which, none the less is joy while it lasts.

Another passage to which we briefly refer is Matthew 5:44–45. “But I say unto you, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be

the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good." In this passage, the disciples of Jesus are told to deny themselves the selfish joy of expressing enmity against those that hate them. They are not to express their attitude of hostility. But this is not all they are to do. They are to replace the attitude of hatred with an attitude of love. He does not know but that this one who now hates him may one day become a believer. This is one factor in the total situation. Yet this is not to be made the only factor. It is not even the expressed reason for his loving his enemy. The one guide for the believer's action with respect to the enemy is God's attitude toward that enemy. And the believer is told definitely to love his enemy in imitation of God's attitude toward that enemy. God's attitude toward that enemy must therefore in some sense be one of love. It is no doubt the love of an enemy, and, therefore, in God's case, never the same sort of love as the love toward his children. And to the extent that we know men to be enemies of the Lord, we too cannot love them in the same sense in which we are told to love fellow-believer. God no doubt lets the wheat and the tares grow together till the day of judgment, but even so, though God's ultimate purpose with unbelievers is their destruction and the promotion of his glory through their destruction, he loves them, in a sense, while they are still kept by himself, through his own free gifts, from fully expressing the wicked principle that is in them.

So also ought we to think of what is often called the universal well-meant offer of salvation we know that there are those whom God, in his secret counsel does not intend to save. Of those round about us, we do not always know who are saved and who are not. In a sense, therefore, our ignorance accounts for the necessity of using a general formula in preaching the gospel. Yet this is not the only reason why Christ wept over Jerusalem, over a Jerusalem which he knew would for the most part, reject him. So God calls those whom he knows will harden their hearts. He labored with Pharaoh to let his people go before the final time of destruction should come. Yet he had raised up Pharaoh for that final destruction. It is the duty of men to repent, as it was originally their duty not to sin. It is always the duty of man to obey the voice of God. The call to repentance that unbelievers receive will add to their judgment because they do not heed it. But to be able to add to their judgment, it must have had a real meaning in their case. To say this is not to fall into individualistic Arminianism. Those who have not heard the call of redemption will be judged because they are

sinners in Adam and with Adam. Yet those who have heard the call and have not accepted it will receive the greater damnation. Thus, there must be a genuine meaning in the call that comes to them. It is only if we really think analogically or concretely of the attributes of God that we can thus do justice to all the aspects of Scripture truth. It is only if we keep all this in mind that we can understand something of what is meant when Paul says in Romans 2:14, 15 that the natural man does by nature the work of the law. This cannot mean that man's Sinful nature is no longer sinful. If that were the case, it would mean that he had already received the gospel. It can only mean, therefore, that, in spite of his sinful heart, he habitually does things that, externally considered, fulfill the requirements of the law. His good deeds are adventitious as far as his sinful heart is concerned, but there is in him such a thing as an old nature, which, in spite of himself, leads him to do that which is good after a fashion. It is not merely not as bad as it might be, but it is, in a sense, good. It is a gift of God to the unbeliever when in this life he leads an externally good life, even if it be not from his heart. The deeds of the unbelievers are, to be sure, splendid vices; they are that, but they are also at the same time something else. They are, in a sense, a gift of God's favor; and they, in turn, are the object of a certain favor of God.

All in all the idea of commonness, whether applied to grace or to the gospel call should be closely connected with the idea of earlier and later. Commonness is always commonness up to a point and with a difference. But commonness is more common earlier than later. Men in general, believers and unbelievers, are regarded and treated similarly according as the process of differentiation between them has not come to development. There is a common wrath upon elect and non-elect to the extent that the difference between the elect and the non-elect has not yet come to expression. So also with common grace and the common gospel call. It is to men regarded in their more or less undifferentiated state that the term commonness is applicable. History has genuine meaning; the doctrine of election may not be interpreted so as to destroy its meaning, but rather so as to be the foundation of it.

The Holiness of God

In discussing the holiness of God, we may again begin at the point of his self-sufficiency. Moses says in Exodus 18:11: “Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” In 1 Samuel 2:2, Hannah praises God as she says, “There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God.” Thus the holiness of God rests in his incomparable self-existence. God does not have holiness, but is holiness. The prophet Amos brings this out in these words: “The Lord God hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks.”Am 4 The Lord could not swear by his holiness if his holiness were not identical with himself.

By the holiness of God we therefore signify God’s absolute internal moral purity It is naturally to be expected that when this attribute of God expresses itself in the revelation of God to man, it requires his complete purity. This complete purity in man consists in the complete dedication of man’s moral activity to the moral glory of God. Negatively, this will need to express itself as separation from sin.

In the Old Testament this negative expression of the holiness of God comes strongly to the fore. There is all manner of dedication to God of persons and things from a secular to a sacred use. The idea is that because of sin the whole of human life has become desecrated. It is not as though this was originally so; quite the contrary. The “secular,” as such, is not evil. It has become evil because of the sin of man. Barthian theology does not hold to the fall of man in history and, consequently, cannot do justice to the biblical distinction between the sacred and the secular. Barth’s views really amount to saying that there is evil in matter per se. It is therefore impossible, according to Barth, that there should be any deeds done by temporal man that are truly holy even in principle. There can really be no sacred as distinct from unholy deeds for him.

The position of Barth is not radically different from that of modernism. Neither can make room for that which is truly holy in this world because neither believes in an original perfect creation and in an historical fall. And neither believes in a self-sufficient holy God back of the world. If they did they would also have to believe in temporal creation and in the fall of man in history.

In the New Testament the positive expression of the holiness of God is stronger than the negative. God wants his people of their own accord by the gift of his grace to dedicate themselves to him. It is the Holy Spirit that creates in man a true holiness to God. Of course, the negative aspect has not disappeared It shows itself in the punishment of the wicked, of those who reject the Holy One. Eternal punishment for the wicked is the natural result of the holiness of God.

The Righteousness of God

With the righteousness of God we signify the internal self-consistency of the divine being. God is a law unto himself. He is the absolute self-existent personality and therefore, at the same time, absolute law. God does not have law, but is law. His self-conscious activity regards with absolute complacency the internal rightness of relationship between the various aspects of multiplicity that are found within the divine being. He cannot and does not tolerate any subordination of any one aspect of his being to any other aspect of his being. The attributes and the persons of God are all on a par.

This self-contained consistency expresses itself in the created world by maintaining created consistency among men. There is, of necessity, a negative and a positive aspect to this expression of the righteousness of God among men. God distributes justice among men and will finally distribute complete justice among them. He punishes injustice and rewards justice. But if God is to reward justice there must be justice. And among sinners there is no justice. There is, to be sure, a measure of civil righteousness among men. But this proceeds from the “old man” within them which they have not been able to subjugate fully. Men may do that which is right because at bottom they know they are God’s creatures, but to the extent that they live up to their own self-consciously adopted principles they are wholly unrighteous. If there is to be any justice in a world of sinners, it must therefore be given to them. It must be a gift of the grace of God. And those to whom God, by his grace, gives righteousness he rewards with greater grace. He visits their sins upon them; that is, he chastises them, but in the end he rewards them for the righteousness which is theirs by grace, with still more grace.

Thus the consistency that is found in the believer is correspondent to the consistency that is found in God. This consistency in the believer consists in willingness to think God's thoughts after him, in willingness to do God's will after him, and to feel God's feeling after him. If the Christian realizes this, he will find it to be his duty to maintain, as far as he can in himself and in his fellow men, a correspondence of the human consistency to divine consistency. He will seek the maintenance of God's laws for men everywhere and at all times, in ways that are themselves in accord with those laws. He will not hesitate to intimate to men that the natural consequence of their inconsistency is the eternal separation from the consistent One. Nor should he fail to point the weak and wavering to the fact that for the righteous there ariseth eternal light.

It goes without saying that modernism cannot do justice to the righteousness of God. For modernism, as for idealist philosophy, righteousness among men is not correspondence to the internally consistent nature of God, but correspondence to supposedly existing eternal laws. But, except upon the presupposition of the self-consistent God, there is no ground for thinking that law will not change. True law cannot exist except upon a Christian foundation.

What is true of modernism is also true of dialectical theology. Emil Brunner, in his book *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen* (English tr. *The Divine Imperative*) contends that it is possible on the dialectical principle to do justice to the ordinances of God with respect to this world. But it is easily observed that he who does not believe in a temporal creation cannot believe in the biblical notion of providence. And he who does not believe in providence does not do justice to the ordinances of God. The dialectic theologians, as a matter of fact, do deny that there is a possibility of finding in history any organization that can be said even in principle to embody the ordinances of God, for any sphere. There can be no state, no church, or any other organization that is in its historical manifestation anything but sinful, according to Barth.

Here again extremes meet. Modernism and dialectical theology join hands in rejecting the historic Christian position.

Attributes of Sovereignty

As the self-existent being God wills himself as his own end.[20] He rules himself in the sense that he is altogether self-ruled. This is not to be taken nominalistically. God cannot exist otherwise than he exists. His will does not act independently of his nature. His will wills his nature as his nature comes to expression in his will.

Thus it is once more with the self-contained God that we begin our thought with respect to his will. Doing this, we may say that just as there is for God a necessary and a free knowledge, so there is for him *a propensio in se ipsum and a propensio in creaturas*[21] And the latter depends upon the former.

Putting the matter this way we can see that there is a basic contrast between the Christian and the idealist notion of the will of God. Idealism is not able to make the distinction we have just made. For it there is no God in whom, as far as his own being is concerned, self-consciousness and essence are coterminous. Accordingly there is no God who can really will himself as the ultimate One. For idealism all consciousness is always thought of as having over.

For the idea of the internal self-completeness of God, Bartlett would substitute that of "self-fulfilment through self-negation on the part of the Persons in the Godhead …"[22]

against itself non-conscious being of some sort. Idealist philosophy may not unfairly be called a philosophy of the unconscious. For idealism God can at best be a finite god who expends the energy of his will upon the brute facts that are within or about him.

Turning to the question of God's will with respect to the created universe we can make clear the distinction between the Christian position and the non-Christian by asking whether a moral act is right because God wills it, or whether God wills it because it is right in itself. If a Christian answers truly according to his principle of interpretation, he should say that such an act is right because God wills it. On the other hand, if a non-Christian answers truly according to his principle of interpretation he should say that God wills it because it is right in itself. For a non-Christian that which is right does not have is ultimate foundation in the being of God. For a Christian the ultimate foundation of that which is right is and can be found nowhere else but in the being of God. And it is always to be remembered that the being of God is not to be contrasted to the will of God as the final

court of appeal with respect to what is right for mans. For man the will of God expresses the nature of God, not exhaustively but still truly.

Considering the will of God with respect to the universe in more detail, we may distinguish between his secret and his revealed will. Or we may speak of the will of God's decree and the will of God's command.

With respect to the secret or decreed will of God, the following remarks are in order: (1) It is called "secret" not because man knows nothing of it. Much of God's secret will has already been realized and, as such, revealed. But man cannot know of it in advance. And even this is not altogether true, since man, e.g., can know in general that God will make his cause to triumph. But man cannot know precisely and in detail what God will bring to pass.

(2) It is the source of all substance and power in the created universe. It is comprehensive. Everything is derived from it: Creation, Revelation 4:11 "… for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they are and were created." Government, Proverbs 21:1 "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord as the water courses, he turneth it whithersoever he will." Daniel 4:35 "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" Ephesians 1:11 "… who worketh all things after the counsel of his will." The sufferings of Christ, Luke 22:42 "Nevertheless not my will, but thine be done." Election and reprobation, Romans 9:15 "… will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Regeneration, James 1:18 "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures." Sanctification, Philippians 2:13 "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure." The sufferings of believers, 1 Peter 3:17: "For it is better, if the will of God should so will, that ye suffer for well-doing than for evil doing." Our whole life and destiny in little things, as our term *Deo Volente*, Acts 18:21; James 4:14 "If the Lord will." Matthew 10:29.

(3) It is inclusive and permissive of the fact of sin. The question of inclusiveness at once brings forward the further problems of the origin of sin. On the basis of the absolute inclusiveness of God's will, both in the physical and in the moral spheres of created being, logic would seem to drive us at once to say, "Then God is responsible for sin." Accordingly the

attempt has been made to have sin enter into the universe in spite of God. But this would imply that there was a power beyond God not created by him. A second attempt to solve the problem is made when men seek a certain necessity above God so that God, in order to create the good, especially the morally good, had to allow for evil or at least the possibility of evil. “A God whose essential nature is holy love will not and cannot rule by force. Since this is so, there will inevitably be evil in a world of free finite beings.”[23] But there is no reason why God, the perfect moral being who cannot sin, should not be able to create a finite moral being who could not sin. Scripture says that God did use a possibility for evil in order through it to enhance his glory, but it does not say that God had to use it even as a means.

The problem of evil is no greater here than is the problem of creation. The logical difficulty is quite similar in both cases. In both cases we seek, following Scripture, to avoid pantheism. In both cases we bow to mystery. In both cases we say we are certain no other system has solved the problem or in any degree approached a solution. In both cases we hold that our position is the only reasonable solution, because it has the absolute God as a center of rest, while all other systems rest on the sinking sand of relativism. When we say, therefore, that God’s will is permissive with respect to sin we do not claim to have solved the difficulty, but only to have followed the Scripture in two things. (a) denying that God is responsible for sin, and (b) denying that anything happens in spite of him and in circumvention of his purpose. God’s decree, though permissive with respect to sin is none the less efficient.

(4) It is free, not necessary.

(a) God’s will with respect to himself is necessary and free. That God would be denying his nature if he did not will himself as the highest good, and yet he is not determined in seeking himself by anything beyond himself. In order to distinguish God’s will with respect to the created universe from God’s will with respect to himself, we called the latter necessary and free, and the former, not necessary but free.

(b) More important is the distinction between the freedom of God’s will and a pantheistic conception of necessity. There is a pantheistic and there is a theistic conception of necessity. The latter is founded in the nature of God as absolute personality: the former is thought of as beyond God, or at least as curbing the absoluteness of God’s personality. The two are diametrically

opposed to one another. Christian theology is based upon the idea of theistic necessity; it would be destroyed by the idea of pantheistic necessity.

Accordingly, when it is maintained that God's will is free, this is said chiefly in opposition to pantheistic necessity. Pantheistic necessity is the result of the monistic assumption of the non-Christian. It asserts that God had to create the world, or it cannot really contribute to his glory. It says that God could not create a morally perfect being. The supposition all the while is that the temporal and human are the standard for the eternal and divine, instead of *vice versa*. Theism holds that God did not have to create the world inasmuch as he is all-sufficient. Nor was he, when he decided to create the world, limited to a certain number of choices, so that, as Leibniz says, this is the "best possible world" under the circumstances. God was free to create, and free as to what to create. He could create anything that was in accord with his nature.

(c) Freedom not indifference. Some theologians, spying the danger of pantheistic necessity, have gone into the opposite extreme of denying every form of necessity. They have done this by identifying God's freedom with indifference. God just happened to create the world. Duns Scotus, the father of Nominalism (in his commentary on the Sententiae of Lombardus) carries this idea through until for him chance really ruled above God. If God's will is a will of indifference not led by his intelligence, chance is higher than God. And chance amounts to necessity once more, but this time again a pantheistic necessity. For chance sets the impersonal above the personal and principle higher than personality.

Accordingly Christian theology has tried to escape Scylla and Charybdis in its conception of God's will on the one hand by denying indirect pantheistic necessity or nominalism. Here too, Christian theology does not claim to have solved the logical difficulty. The logical difficulty is this, that God's will is free, but that, when exercised in the creation of the universe, in this act of the will there is an expression of God's nature. How can an eternally active being, fully self-conscious, be free? With respect to God's own nature, the greatest necessity is the greatest freedom. With respect to the universe, we maintain that God was free in the sense that its creation was in no sense necessary as God's being is necessary. The idea of creation was present to God from all eternity, but the actual accomplishment was not. And this is as far as our finite minds can reach. At this stage, we are in danger of inserting our temporal categories into the eternal. We realize that

our thinking is but analogical. Yet we also realize that our thinking is genuinely analogical, so that the distinctions that we must make are true as far as they go.

(5) God's will is absolute. The distinction made between an absolute and a conditional will of God does not apply to God's secret will, because the secret will does not fully tell us how God's will is to be realized. It says that all things will happen according to God's plan but does not fully indicate the manner in which this is to be done. Whether this particular event will or will not come to pass or whether it will come to pass in part, or not at all through the action of finite personality, is sometimes left unrevealed. The absoluteness of God's will is implied in the absoluteness of God's nature, and in the very comprehensiveness of his will. It could not be comprehensive if it were not absolute, and it could not be absolute if it were not comprehensive.

(6) God's will is a unit. The distinction between an antecedent and a consequent will of God does not apply to God's secret will. It could not, unless God's will were a temporal act. If it be said that it points to a logical and not a temporal order, the distinction may be innocent, but it has historically been made in the interest of inserting the temporal into the eternal and this the Church cannot allow.

The Revealed Will

With respect to the revealed will, also called the "will of command," we may remark as follows; God's revealed will is the rule given to his rational creatures by which they are to regulate their lives. The revealed will of God tells us what we must do while the secret will determines what God does, whether through man's agency or not. What, we ask, is the relation between these two?

First we may say that it cannot be flatly contradictory, as is often asserted. It should be noted first that a large territory of the secret will of God as realized in history is not realized through the will of command at all. Everything that happens in the universe in which man does not act as an agent offers no possible opportunity for conflict. In the second place, we hold that, in the territory in which both wills, or the two aspects of the one will of God are operative, there can be no opposition unless it be

maintained that God cannot overrule evil for good, and that evil is a power not under God's control. If God does control evil, if it did not get into the universe in spite of him, the fact that evil comes to expression in the action of finite personality makes no difference. In the third place, the assumption of any position which maintains that there is an insuperable dualism between the secret and the revealed will of God is that, unless man could oppose God absolutely, man would not be a morally responsible person, and the commands given him would be meaningless. This would mean that responsibility cannot reside in a finite or dependent person, since one would have to be able to withstand an absolute God in order to be considered responsible. Thus, only God could be responsible, and God cannot be responsible because he must be the source of responsibility. We conclude therefore that there cannot be contradiction between the two aspects of God's will because they are expressions of the same God, the God of absolute veracity. To say that there can be contradiction between the secret and the revealed wills of God is to presuppose that man can act independently of God.

The actual cases of transgression by man of God's will of command do not prove that there is contradiction between these two aspects of God's will. The disobedience itself is not in spite of, but useful to the realization of God's secret will. The case is here precisely the same as the problem of the entrance of sin above discussed.

To say, however, that the two wills cannot be contradictory, does not mean that man can rationalize, harmonize them without residue. The difficulty is again the same as the difficulty with respect to the entrance of sin. How was it possible that God could hate sin and still permit its entrance into the universe? How is it possible that God should forbid murder and yet permit the perpetration of it? The difficulty is not solved, in the sense of made logically penetrable to man, by saying that God overrules evil and transgression for good. Scripture itself tells us that he does. Yet the difficulty is fully solved by means of this assertion inasmuch as it points to the fact of God's wholly self-contained character. And only on the basis of the idea of the self-contained God of Christianity does the very idea of human responsibility have any meaning at all. No non-Christian system of thought can find a solution of the question of human responsibility. None can find sufficient independence for their own requirements. Many have given up the problem as hopeless of solution. They regard man as the

helpless, irresponsible victim of fate. Such pessimism is to be expected when men refuse to accept the solution God offers them.

God's secret will is often realized directly through his revealed will. A great part of God's will is to be realized positively through the secondary agency of man. God commands obedience. Man does obey and God is therewith greatly glorified. We may note in passing that the same logical difficulty presents itself here that we met with in the preceding paragraph. If then the objections were valid in the one case, they would be valid in both. If one maintains that through sin man can really frustrate the secret will of God in any sense, then, to be consistent, one must also maintain that through obedience man does not actually enhance God's glory. Rationalism is consistent in denying both.

The religious significance of a sound conception of God's will can scarcely be over-estimated. This is true both in the field of creation and in the field of redemption. It is readily seen that Christianity cannot long endure if, e.g. evolution undermines the biblical conception of creation. A sound conception of creation is in order to a sound practice of Christianity. All the anti-biblical conceptions of creation are pantheistically tinctured. They seek a necessary instead of a free relation between creator and creature. For this reason we must stand guard in defense of the freedom of the will of God, and the freedom of God's will cannot be maintained unless it has also the other characteristics that have been mentioned. Secondly, in the field of salvation, the sound conception of the will of God saves us from discouragement. If the sinner could frustrate the secret will of God heaven would remain empty and God be robbed of glory. Moreover, it also makes us strong in the assurance that our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

God's Power or Omnipotence

God's power should not be identified with his will, although God's will implies power to accomplish what he wills.

God's omnipotence does not signify that he can make a lie true, that he can sin. There is no absolute power in God that works in contradiction to his perfections. God is the source of possibility. What is possible is determined by God's nature. The very question whether God can do the impossible is impossible. It has no meaning unless it be first assumed that

there is such a thing as impossibility apart from God. Now if there is such an impossibility, God is not God, so that the question drops. On the other hand, if there is no such impossibility, that is, if God is the source of possibility, the question is answered before it is put: i.e., then God does not want to break an impossibility. He would be denying himself, which he tells us he cannot do. Nm 23:19, 1 Sm 15:29, 2 Tm 2:12, Heb 6:18, Jas 1:13, Jas 1:17

Not all that is possible to God is actually realized. In this sense possibility is greater than actual reality. Gen 18:14, Jer 32:27, Zec 8:6, Mt 3:9, Mt 26:53 It is necessary to maintain this once more against pantheism which maintains, because of its elevation of principle above personality, that all that is possible in the universe has also been realized. This would compromise once more the freedom and independence of God.

[1] *Dogmatiek 2*, p. 179.
[2] *Idem*., p. 180.
[3] *Idem*., p. 180.
[4] *Institutes*, 3, 25, 11.
[5] *Dogmatiek 2*, p. 181.
[6] *Idem*., p. 181.
[7] *Dogmatiek 2*, p. 182.
[8] *Idem*., p. 182.
[9] *Idem*., p. 186.
[10] *The Triune God*, p. 118.
[11] see Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 394.
[12] *Dogmatiek*, 2, p. 187.
[13] *Systematic Theology*, 1, p. 399.
[14] *Philosophic Foundations*.
[15] C. F. Barlett, op cit.
[16] Bavinck, 2, p. 205.
[17] Bartlett holds that to become self-conscious God created the world.
[18] Bavinck, 2, p. 207.
[19] Cf. The writer's booklet, *Common Grace*.
[20] For the idea of the internal self-completeness of God, Bartlett would substitute that of "self-fulfillment through self-negation on the part of the Persons in the Godhead …" *Idem*., p. 148.
[21] Bavinck, 2, p. 232.

[22] *Idem*., p. 148.
[23] Bartlett, *op. cit*., p. 120.

Appendix to Chapter 2

In his syllabus *Common Grace and Christian Education*, Dr. William Masselink charged me with beginning my whole system of thought with the idea of the Absolute Ethical Antithesis.

I made reply to this charge in a pamphlet entitled A Letter on Common Grace. In that pamphlet I made clear that I begin rather with the creation of man as made in the image of God. Following Calvin I then speak of all men as unavoidably knowing God. Rom 1:19 All men, even after the fall, know, deep down in their hearts, that they are creatures of God, that they should therefore obey but that they have actually broken the law of God.

After the fall, therefore, all men seek to suppress this truth, infixed in their being, about themselves. They are opposed to God. This is the biblical teaching on human depravity. If then we are to present the truth of the Christian religion to men we must take them where they are. They are: (a) creatures made in God's image, surrounded by a world that reveals in its every fact God's power and divinity. Their antithesis to God can therefore never be metaphysical. They can never become anything but image bearers of God. They can never escape facing God in the universe about them and in their own constitution. Their antithesis to God is therefore an ethical one.

(b) Because of God's common grace, this ethical antithesis to God on the part of the sinner is restrained, and thereby the creative forces of man receive the opportunity of constructive effort. In this world the sinner does many "good" things. He is honest. He helps to alleviate the sufferings of his fellow men. He "keeps" the moral law. Therefore the antithesis besides being ethical rather than metaphysical is limited in a second way. It is one of principle, not one of full expression. If the natural man fully expressed himself as he is in terms of the principle of ethical hostility to God that dwells within his soul, he would then be a veritable devil. Obviously he is often nothing of the sort. He is not at all as "bad as he may be."

All of this is found in this syllabus and in other syllabi. This was pointed out in A Letter on Common Grace. Yet Dr. Masselink keeps repeating the idea that I start my whole system of thought from the idea of the Absolute Ethical Antithesis, and insists that I mean by this that man "at present is as bad as he can be."[1]

Masselink says that according to Reformed theology the antithesis is "principial," not absolute. "I do not believe that Reformed Theology ever speaks of an absolute ethical antithesis.' By 'Principial Antithesis' is meant that natural man in principle is dead in sin and completely depraved."[2]

"Natural man, however, is absolutely depraved in principle."[3]

Masselink therefore also uses the term absolute with respect to the total depravity of man. And I have repeatedly used the qualification that the depravity is absolute only in principle. The only difference at this point seems to be that I add one more qualification than does Masselink. I am careful to note that the antithesis is ethical, and not metaphysical. I do not discover this distinction in Masselink. Perhaps this failure accounts for the fact that at other points he reasons as though the antithesis is not absolute in principle even when this antithesis is conceived of ethically. I refer to the fact that he follows Dr. Valentine Hepp in his idea that there are general ideas of God, of man and the universe on which Christians and non-Christians have no principial difference.[4]

In passing it may be noted that the usage of the phrase "absolute antithesis" is not so unheard of as Masselink surmises. So, for instance, Dr. Herman Kuiper uses it and ties it in closely with the absoluteness of Christianity. He says: "In this connection it is in place to note that Calvin's conception of common grace can help us in upholding the absoluteness of Christianity. Especially in recent years many who profess Christianity are unwilling to subscribe to the orthodox conception of Christianity as the only true religion. Instead of maintaining that there is an absolute antithesis between Christianity and all non-Christian religions, they prefer to look upon Christianity as the highest development of the seed of religion which is implanted in the heart of every man."[5]

A second point of criticism made on my views by Masselink and others pertains to the laws of logic. Says Masselink: "In his recent publication, 'A Letter on Common Grace,' Van Til says of reason in general that 'such a thing does not exist in practice.' The issue between us and Van Til does not at all concern a degree of difference in knowledge between the Christian and the non-Christian, but rather whether we with Kuyper can say that the laws of logic in natural man have not been completely destroyed by sin."[6] The reader will at once observe that it is wholly counter to the approach taken in this syllabus to say that the laws of logic have been destroyed in the sinner. The whole point of the distinction between the antithesis as

being ethical rather than metaphysical is that as a creature made in God's image man's constitution as a rational and moral being has not been destroyed. The separation from God on the part of the sinner is ethical. How could it be metaphysical? Even the lost in the hereafter have not lost the power of rational and moral determination. They must have this image in order to be aware of their lost condition.

And this has a bearing on Masselink's point that in my view the sinner's consciousness would be entirely "devoid of ethical content." "If this 'God-consciousness and moral consciousness' were entirely devoid of ethical content our Confession would be untrue when it speaks of 'civil righteousness.'[7]

But the distinction between a metaphysical and an ethical antithesis is made for the specific purpose of avoiding the idea that there should ever be a stage in which man can be devoid of moral consciousness. It is because on the Romanist position this distinction cannot be made that the effect of sin is thought of in terms of the scale of being. Under the Aristotelian idea of the analogy of being, man when in "*in puris naturalibus*," is well nigh devoid of ethical consciousness. It takes the *donum superadditum*, a metaphysical notion, in order to give him such a moral consciousness, even in paradise. Then after the entrance of sin, when this *donum superadditum* is removed, man sinks down close to the bottom of being and also of the ability to discern good and evil.

It will be difficult for Masselink to keep from falling into this line of thinking. He seems to operate with the idea of the scale of being in the sentence following the one quoted. "In hell the antithesis between God and natural man is absolute. There is no common grace nor civil righteousness in perdition." Now it is true that there is no common grace in the estate of the lost. But are the lost "devoid of ethical content"? Does not their conscience smite them forever for having offended the holiness of God? Masselink makes the very idea of "ethical content" to depend upon the presence of common grace. He thereby shows that on his view common grace, in restraining the principle of sin, keeps men from falling into a state where they are no longer able to have moral awareness. This is in line with the Romanist idea of sin as having a deleterious metaphysical effect on man.

The whole question of the influence of sin, whether it is ethical or metaphysical, is centrally expressed in the idea that except for the entrance

of common grace the whole world, including man, would have fallen to pieces. Herman Kuiper quite rightly rejects this notion when he says: “We also refuse to subscribe to Calvin’s teaching in Book 2, ch. 2, 17 to the effect that the fall of man would have resulted in the destruction of our whole nature, including our reasoning power if God had not spared us. Calvin here seems to forget that the revolt in the world of angels did not have for its result that the devils have lost all reasoning ability, and he also leaves out of consideration the fact that the lost souls who will one day inhabit the place of torment will remain men and will retain a certain measure of intellectual power.”[8]

In *A Letter on Common Grace*, I expressed the idea that we need to use the ideas of “metaphysical” and “ethical” in connection with the fall of man as limiting or supplementative notions.[9] We have to speak as if sin would have destroyed the work of God. That was certainly its ethical intent. But we know that this was not an ultimate metaphysical possibility, for it was already, from all eternity, a part of the plan of God that sin should be defeated through the work of the Christ.

Genuine advance in Reformed thinking has come about in the last generation by means of the use of supplementative concepts. This true has enabled G. C. Berkouwer and others to avoid some of the scholasticism that must otherwise obtain. In theology this appears when on the ground of the idea of election we deduce that God cannot in any sense whatever have any attitude of favor to mankind as a group. It also obtains when, because we hold to the idea of responsibility we hold also that there can therefore be no election. It obtains too when we say there can be no equal ultimacy of the idea of election and reprobation in God, or when we say that Adam’s choice for obedience was equally ultimate with his choice for disobedience. In short, without thinking of our theological concepts along these lines as being supplementative of one another, we fall into logicism. We reduce the significance of the stream of history to the static categories of logic.

The gift of logical reason was given by God to man in order that he might order the revelation of God for himself. It was not given him that he might by means of it legislate as to what is possible and what is actual. When man makes a “system” for himself of the content of revelation given him in Scripture, this system is subject to, not independent of, Scripture. Thus the idea of system employed by the Christian is quite different from the idea of system as employed in modern philosophy.

It is therefore pointless for Christians to tell non-Christians that Christianity is “in accord with the law of contradiction” unless they explain what they mean by this. For the non-Christian will take this statement to mean something entirely different from what the Christian ought to mean by it. The non-Christian does not believe in creation. Therefore, for him the law of contradiction is, like all other laws, something that does not find its ultimate source in the creative activity of God. Accordingly the non-Christian will seek to do by means of the law of contradiction what the Christian has had done for him by God. For the Christian God legislates as to what is possible and what is impossible for man. For the non-Christian, man determines this for himself. Either positively or negatively the non-Christian will determine the field of possibility and therewith the stream of history by means of the law of contradiction.

This means that for the non-Christian the concepts that he employs while using the law of contradiction are taken to be exhaustive of the “essence of the thing” they seek to express. And by taking each concept as wholly expressing the essence of a thing, non-Christian thought seeks to express the whole of reality, even of temporal reality, in terms of concepts that are static. Even when it is admitted, as it generally is in modern thought, that reality is exhaustively temporal and therefore not at all or not fully expressible in terms of concepts, still it is maintained or assumed that what is expressed by means of concepts is all that man can know. Men may then speak of revelation as another means of knowing reality. They may even say that this other reality is more basic than the reality that is known through conceptual manipulation. They will then posit a dualism between the idea of faith by which this wholly other reality is “known” and reason by which the world of phenomena is known. In any case the genuine significance of the facts of history is destroyed.

This is most clearly illustrated in the case of dialectical theology. In order to maintain the uniqueness of the facts of history this theology thinks it necessary to speak of primal history in distinction from ordinary history. Ordinary history cannot, say Barth and Brunner, manifest anything unique. And their reason for saying this is that they assume that man must interpret ordinary history in the way non-Christian thought interprets it. That is to say, it must be interpreted by means of concepts, and these concepts, in their view, kill all individuality. Concepts, we are told, can deal only with abstract essences. The individual is by means of the concepts reduced to an

instance of a class. In fact the individual is wholly lost in the concepts that describe it.

Now it is only in Reformed theology that the means are available to oppose this modern approach. And that is not because Reformed theology has access to some means of manipulation of reality not open to anyone. It is rather because only in Reformed theology is full justice done to the idea of God as man's creator. If God is really man's creator then man's thinking must be thought of as being analogical. And therefore his concepts cannot rightly be employed as the instruments of a deductive system. These concepts must be employed as means by which to display the richness of God's revelation. When then the apparently contradictory appears, as it always must when man seeks to know the relation of God to himself, there will be no denial either of election or of human responsibility in the name of the law of contradiction.

Applied to the general problem of common grace, the idea of limiting or supplementative concepts means that we shall not deny common grace nor, on the other hand hold to common grace that creates a neutral territory between believers and unbelievers.

The Image of God in Man

The necessity for the use of the idea of the limiting or supplementative concept may be illustrated further by observing what happens if it is not used with respect to the idea of man as the image-bearer of God.

It is customary in Reformed circles to distinguish between the image of God in the wider and the image of God in the narrower sense. But difficulty develops if we do not clearly stress that this distinction is not to be carried through deductively.

This difficulty may be indicated by a brief summary of *The Image of God*(*Her Beeld Gods*) by Abraham Kuyper, Jr. The image of God in the wider sense, Kuyper says, must be found in the essence of man.[10] And this essence of man remains unchanged in fallen man[11] "Man has been permitted to keep much, and is, in spite of his deep fall, capable of much, because he has kept the image of God in its essence and because Common Grace came to his assistance."[12] "This image of God cannot be lost since, if man can Jose it, he would at the moment of losing it, cease to be a human

being. The image of God in the wider sense (*sensu latiore*) has reference to the human in man, to that whereby man, in distinction from all other creatures, is man and not an angel or an animal or a plant."[13]

Summarizing his own discussion of the image in the wider sense as being the unchangeable essence of man, Kuyper says that it must be sought in the first place in the "I through which man is a person, and then further in the two capacities which this marvelous 'I' controls, the capacity to know and the capacity to will …"[14]

The image of God in the narrower sense is said to consist of true knowledge, righteousness and holiness. As usual, Ephesians 4:23–24 and Colossians 3:10 are quoted in support of this. Kuyper also speaks of immortality as part of the image of God.[15] But we need not, for our purpose, follow his analysis in detail.

Our interest turns to the fact that this image in the narrower sense is said to be lost. "Thus the image of God in the narrower sense consisted of true knowledge, righteousness and holiness. This image was lost, and in its place there came blindness, guilt, and sinfulness."[16] This image is lost, it disappears.

What, we are tempted to ask, is the effect of the disappearance of this image in the narrower sense upon the image in the wider sense? The latter, it will be remembered, cannot be lost. It is therefore called the "image as such" (als zoodanig).[17] And the knowledge of this image as such is called knowledge as such.[18] Yet through sin the reason which belongs to the unchangeable essence of man is said to be darkened.[19] His immortality that he possessed in paradise is lost.[20] There is no longer any righteousness in his will.[21]

Can we then continue to say that the essence of man, his person, his reason and will have no wise been affected by the loss of true righteousness, true knowledge and true holiness Or if we continue to say that the essence of man remains unchanged while his nature changes, does anything then remain to be said about this essence at all? Has it not become an entirely featureless entity?

Similar problems confront us with respect to the image of God in the narrower sense. Is it so loosely, so "accidentally" related to the essence of man that it can be lost without affecting that essence at all? Is the essence of man, the human personality, the image as such with knowledge as such completely devoid of ethical content? If so, is the ethical content to be a gift

of pre-redemptive common grace after the fashion of the Romanist *donum superadditum*? Then grace after the fall would be greater grace, but grace of the same sort that man was given before the fall.

Thus the initial antithetical distinction between a changeless essence and a changing nature turns into its opposite. Since the essence cannot in every sense be maintained to be unaffected by the loss of the perfect nature, sin has a damaging effect on the essence of man after all.

Common grace is then required to save the metaphysical situation intact, "God the Lord intervened with Common Grace, a grace given to man as man, through which sin was restrained, the curse was checked, and natural life on earth, however drastically changed, was maintained. A human race could develop itself, and history could begin its course. Without the entrance of Common Grace this would have been altogether impossible."[22]

On the other hand the remnants of the image of God that remain in the sinner are said to be remnants of the image in the narrower sense. "The image of God does not consist only in true knowledge and service of God, and in righteousness and holiness, of which remnants are preserved in the religious feeling and in the moral life of the natural man, but also in the kingly control over the earth by man."[23] It is in line with this that the author says: "Without the entrance of Common Grace man would have lost the image of God, and would have come to the full expression of bitter hostility to God and to a life explosive with sin and unrighteousness. The life of his soul would have become like that of a devil, with respect to whom we cannot speak of common grace at all."[24]

Thus common grace is interchangeably said to be that which preserves some remnants of the image of God in the wider sense, and some of the remnants of God in the narrower sense. In the former case common grace is required to save the metaphysical situation intact. Thus we are virtually back with the Romanist concept of the *superadditum*. In the latter case common grace seems to be a means of toning down the doctrine of total depravity. The "remnants" of the image of God in the natural man then appear to be little specs of true knowledge, true righteousness and true holiness. The difference between the believer and the unbeliever then becomes one of degree.

It appears then that if we do use concepts as "essence" and "nature" without stipulating that they are limitative and supplementative of one

another we not only get into confusion and contradiction, but we are inadvertently led into positions which we were trying to avoid.

All this is not surprising. In a non-Christian methodology such as Romanism took over from Aristotle, man is the final point of reference in predication. On this basis man is not regarded as the creature of God. And his intellect is therefore not thought of as being dependent upon God. To be sure, the word analogy is used to describe the relation of human to divine thought. But on Aristotelian basis this idea of analogy is based upon the idea of participation rather than upon the idea of creation. Man is thought of as participating in the being of divinity by means of his intellect. By means of his concepts he is supposed to discover the essence of reality as something that is wholly changeless. Change in the created universe is then taken to be the same as Chance. Individual facts of the created world are taken to be characterized by Chance. Or if they have any reality at all it must be because they somehow participate in the eternity of the divine. The result is that when man seeks to order the facts of the temporal world he must find their reality in a world of essences that are non-temporal. To explain is therefore, on this basis, to explain away the individuality that was to be explained.

In using this Aristotelian scheme and applying it to the idea of the image of God in man. Romanist theology was driven to the idea of the scale of being. Near to non-being is man in *puris naturalibus*. He is there practically without ethical content. The ethical content must be placed upon him artificially by means of the idea of potential participation in divinity.

Surely it is of the greatest importance for Reformed theology to use the concepts of the image of God in man in truly analogical fashion, that is with the definite intent to think as creatures who are called upon to give order to the revelation of God. Using human concepts in this way means being deeply conscious, moment by moment, that each concept employed must constantly be subject to the whole of the revelation of God. And this implies the setting of such concepts as the essence of man and the nature of man in definite relationship of correlativity to one another. The idea of the essence of man simply cannot be taken as standing for something wholly unchangeable. And the idea of nature cannot stand for something that can wholly change. So we find that in actual practice modifications are constantly being used. The essence is said to be affected by the change the

nature undergoes. And the nature is itself in need of a “nature” within itself that is not wholly subject to change.

When therefore the two notions are taken as self-consciously in supplementation of another, better justice is done to the content of revelation that one intends to express. Then the man who is created perfect, who falls into sin, is the recipient of common and in some cases special grace is seen in his historical development.

Then too the doctrine of common grace can do better justice to the historic development of man. The scholastic view is in the nature of the case bound to do injustice to the significance of history.

One of two things always takes place. Either an absolute and artificial separation is made between the essence and the nature of man, or, if the separation is overcome it is overcome by reducing the distinction to one of degree. The metaphysical and the ethical are either wholly separated or they are reduced to differences of degree.

Looking to the past, this appears in the following manner. The idea of grace, whether special or common, is said to be wholly inapplicable to preredemptive man because it is exclusively applicable to man who has become a sinner. This might seem to be in the interest of stressing the significance of the historical, that is the significance of the fact of the fall of man. In reality this would lead to the destruction of the historical by reducing it to the nonrelational or irrational. It is the sort of thing that one finds when it is asserted that Adam’s choice in paradise for good was equally ultimate with his choice for evil. This is the essentially Arminian idea that God does not control whatsoever comes to pass but that man’s deeds are ultimate.

On the other hand, when, on this scholastic basis, a continuation is sought between God’s attitude toward man before and after the fall, this is sought along metaphysical rather than along ethical lines. That man is not wholly a demon (an ethical notion) is reduced to or at least commingled with the idea that man has the power of distinguishing good and evil, which Satan and the lost hereafter also have. Then common grace becomes interchangably that which maintains the remnants of the image of God in the wider or the image of God in the narrower sense of the term. In order to avoid the idea that man should be wholly devoid of ethical content it is thought necessary that he have remnants of the “true knowledge” and true morality such as Adam had.

With singular sagacity Calvin avoided this scholastic approach when he spoke of the revelation of God as penetrating into the *penetralia* of man's psychological being. The sense of deity is the principle of continuity which he presupposes as that in relation to which the ethical reaction of man takes place. And this means that man is always reacting ethically to this revelation of God. He first lives under the general favor of God and reacts favorably. Then he reacts unfavorably and comes under the curse of God. So far as his ethical attitude is concerned this is in principle entirely hostile to God. Then grace comes upon the scene, both saving and non-saving grace. It does not preserve some remnants either of the image of God in the wider or in the narrower sense, if these should be taken in scholastic form. How can common grace keep sin from being principial hostility to God? There are no degrees in the principle of depravity. In this sense the image of God has been lost. On the other hand, common grace does not preserve remnants of the image in the wider sense, if this image is thought of as that which is unchangeable. How can remnants be saved of that which was never subject to change?

[1] *Torch and Trumpet*, Vol. 3, No. 6, p. 15; cf. also an article, "New Views Regarding Common Grace," in *The Calvin Forum*, April, 1954.

[2] *Calvin Forum* p. 174.

[3] *Torch and Trumpet*, p. 15.

[4] Cf. *A Letter on Common Grace* and the chapter on Hepp in this syllabus.

[5] *Calvin on Common Grace*, Goes, 1928, p. 231.

[6] *Calvin Forum*, p. 174.

[7] *Torch and Trumpet*, p. 15.

[8] *Idem*., p. 226.

[9] p. 37.

[10] p. 62.

[11] *De natuurlijke mensch, die als zondaar leeft, heeft zeer zeker de rede, het verstand de kennir, het intellect, hoe men het noemen wil. Kennis behoort tot het wezen van den mensch, de mensch is immers, ook de gevallen mensch, een redelijk-zedelijk wezen*. (p. 69.)

[12] p. 75.

[13] p. 123.

[14] p. 68.

[15] p. 92.

[16] p. 126.

[17] p. 130.
[18] p. 69.
[19] p. 70.
[20] p. 92.
[21] p. 126.
[22] p. 180.
[23] p. 200.
[24] p. 181.

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