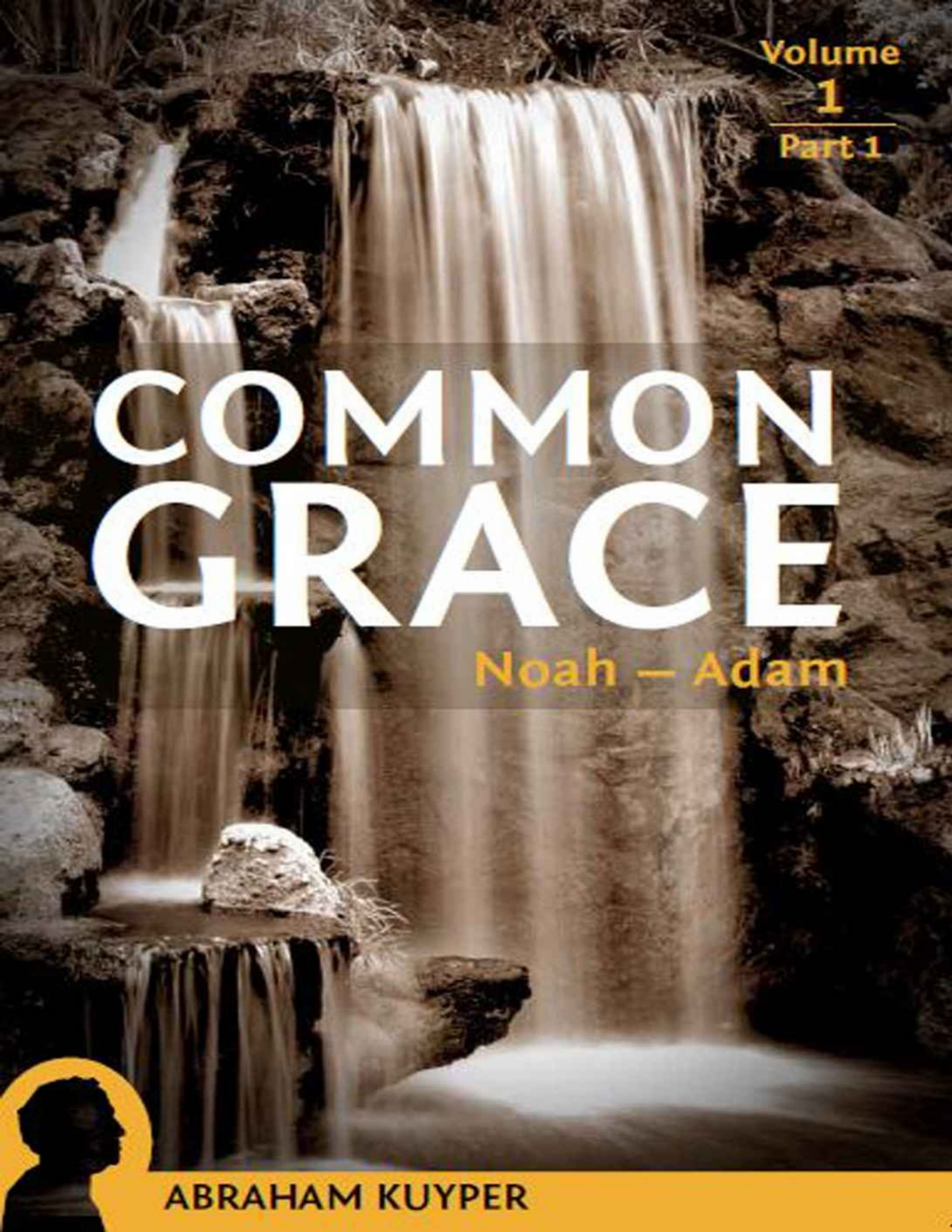

Volume
1
Part 1
COMMON
GRACE
Noah – Adam
ABRAHAM KUYPER

COMMON GRACE

Abraham Kuyper

Volume 1:
The Historical Section

Part 1:
Noah–Adam

Introduction by
Richard J. Mouw

Translated by
Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas

Edited by
Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill

Kindle Edition
Copyright © 2013 Christian's Library Press

CONTENTS

Editors' Introduction
Acknowledgments
Abbreviations
Kuyper on Common Grace by Richard J. Mouw

Foreword
1 Introduction
2 The Starting Point of the Doctrine of Common Grace
3 The Noahic Covenant Was Not Particular
4 The Spiritual and Practical Significance of the Noahic Covenant
5 The Blessings of the Noahic Covenant
6 The Ordinances of the Noahic Covenant
7 The Protection of Human Life
8 The Institution of Capital Punishment
9 Government and Capital Punishment
10 Further Objections to Capital Punishment
11 The Institution of Government Authority
12 A New Dispensation
13 From Noah Back to Paradise
14 The Paradise Story as Historical Narrative
15 The State of Righteousness
16 The Original Life Span
17 The Tree of Life
18 Natural or Supernatural?
19 The Crown of Creation
20 Perfect Integrity
21 Original Righteousness
22 Conscience and the Covenant of Works
23 The Basis for Further Development
24 The Language in Paradise
25 The Probationary Command

Appendix: Why the Term "Common" Grace?
About Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)

Bibliography
About the Kuyper Translation Society
About the Contributors

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

THERE IS OFTEN a temptation, particularly among evangelicals, to engage in social reform without first developing a coherent social philosophy to guide the agenda. To bridge this gap, Acton Institute and the Abraham Kuyper Translation Society have worked together with other institutions to translate Abraham Kuyper's seminal three-volume work on common grace (*De gemeene gratie*). *Common Grace* was chosen because it holds great potential to build intellectual capacity within evangelicalism and because a sound grasp of this doctrine is what is missing in evangelical cultural engagement. *Common Grace* is the capstone of Kuyper's constructive public theology and the best available platform to draw evangelicals back to first principles and to guide the development of a winsome and constructive social witness.

Common grace, as Kuyper conceived it, was a theology of public responsibility and cultural engagement, rooted in Christians' shared humanity with the rest of the world. Kuyper did not intend these volumes to be academic tomes. They were popular works—collections of newspaper articles written over a six-year period—in which he equipped common people with the teaching they needed to effectively enter public life. Kuyper neither politicized the gospel to accommodate his agenda nor did he encourage his followers to develop a siege mentality in isolation from the rest of the world. As Kuyper writes in his foreword to volume 1, "If the believer's God is at work in this world, then in this world the believer's hand must take hold of the plow, and the name of the Lord must be glorified in that activity as well." This project involves the complete translation of Abraham Kuyper's three volumes, totaling more than 1,700 pages.

A challenge in editing this translation of Abraham Kuyper's volumes on common grace is to meet the twofold requirements of scholarly accuracy and completeness while also rendering a text as useful as possible for a nonspecialist audience. These volumes are based on the published versions of Kuyper's collected essays rather than on some other critical edition with the addition of a large scholarly reference apparatus. As such, this translation is not a substitute for direct academic research into the original source material itself. A significant purpose of this translation project is to render into accessible English primary source material that has been foundational both for positive constructive theology as well as for doctrinal controversy throughout the twentieth century.

But the original genre of this work should not be overlooked. These were neither written nor published primarily as exercises in academic theology. Although the task of translating and editing requires scholarly sensitivities, the goal of this project is to produce a translation that will be as accessible as possible not only to a specialized audience of researchers, but also to interested pastors and laypersons.

With all this in mind, the additional editorial apparatus in these volumes has been kept as minimal as possible. Where Kuyper references particular historical events or figures that are likely to be unfamiliar to an Anglophone audience, we have provided some necessary context for Kuyper's remarks. In places where Kuyper refers to other works, we have attempted to provide some more detail about those sources in order to facilitate further research on Kuyper's arguments and train of thought. Given the nature of the source material, which originally appeared serially as newspaper articles, there is an unavoidable redundancy in places where Kuyper recapitulates his position, summarizes the flow of argument, and reorients the reader to the larger contours of the work. We have resisted the temptation to abridge the translation at various points, and thus the resulting translation is as faithful and complete a representation of the original text as possible.

Kuyper's unique voice resonates on these pages, and in an attempt to provide a translation faithful to the author's original intentions, we have retained as much of his particular, and sometimes even idiosyncratic, renderings as possible. Where Kuyper emphasizes words or phrases through italics in direct references to Scripture, for instance, that emphasis has been retained. Such emphasis also occurs throughout the main text itself, and that formatting has largely been maintained in the English text where that emphasis is meaningful and not simply distracting or spurious. Editorial interventions in the main text, most often making explicit a reference to Scripture that remained implicit in the original direct quotation, are enclosed in square brackets. In some cases, there were errors or inconsistencies in biblical references, arising in many instances from the difference in versification between the Dutch Bible and English versions. These have been updated and corrected to conform to standard English conventions. Likewise we have adjusted paragraph breaks and broken up some of Kuyper's longer sentences to enhance the readability of the text in English.

A key issue facing those working on translations is how best to render gender-specific references in the original into a different language. Wherever Kuyper's original intent clearly included both men and women, the translation

has preferred a gender-inclusive English rendering. But this practice was not extended in cases where the original reference was more specific or where the resulting English translation would have suffered in terms of style or readability. In some instances, this approach requires understanding *man* inclusively to refer both to men and women. We have thus not imposed gender-inclusive language on to Kuyper's text, but rather have sought to provide a gender-accurate and accessible translation.

The editorial apparatus has been updated to conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. Kuyper's original references have been maintained, but where these were incomplete or provided as in-text citations, they have been dropped to footnotes and wherever possible the publication details have been updated and corrected. The opening formula "Ed. note:" identifies notes provided by the editors. Throughout the text Kuyper refers to the classic Dutch translation of the Bible, the *Statenvertaling* (SV). The standard translation of choice for this project is the English Standard Version (ESV), and references to other translations or Kuyper's own paraphrases are noted throughout the text. Kuyper's quotations to works that appear in published English translation, such as Calvin's commentaries, have been adapted to conform to the published version wherever doing so does not obscure or alter Kuyper's argument. Likewise the references to various doctrinal standards, such as the Heidelberg Catechism, are based on the versions appearing in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, 4 vols., ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008–14).

A difficulty relating to the accessibility and format of these volumes on common grace involved the decision to divide what were originally published as three separate physical volumes into shorter parts, corresponding to the historical, doctrinal, and practical contents. This was necessary in part because the size of the volumes in English translation would have required larger volumes than their Dutch counterparts, given the relationship between source and target language. But this decision was also made in part to make the source text more accessible. So each original volume of Kuyper's work has been subdivided into three parts. The result will be nine physical books making up three larger volumes of three parts each. The point of division of these parts is not simply arbitrary, however, as there are natural breaks where Kuyper summarizes the progress of his argument and points forward to what will be covered in subsequent sections. In volume 1, for instance, the breaks between parts have been made as Kuyper traces his historical argument: Noah–Adam

(1.1), Temptation–Babel (1.2), and Abraham–Parousia (1.3). Cross-references throughout the text itself to other places in the translation will follow the volume, part, section format, such as *CG* 1.1.1. A separate comprehensive index volume will complete a ten-book physical set at the consummation of the translation project.

As Richard Mouw rightly notes in his introduction to volume 1, the task remains for this material "to be interpreted in terms that are accessible to 'ordinary' Christians, by teachers, pastors, and other leaders in the faith community." The publication of these volumes on common grace is only the beginning of a much larger endeavor to responsibly assess and apply Kuyper's deep insights into the significance of the Christian faith for the contemporary world. It is our hope and prayer that these volumes on common grace will be a fruitful source of revitalization and reformation for Christian social thought and engagement in the Anglophone world and beyond.

Jordan J. Ballor
Stephen J. Grabill
OCTOBER 2013

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE ABRAHAM KUYPER TRANSLATION SOCIETY, along with Acton Institute and Kuyper College, gratefully acknowledges the financial support and leadership received from Calvin College, Fuller Theological Seminary, Mid-America Reformed Seminary, and the Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College in the translation of Abraham Kuyper's seminal three-volume work on common grace (*De gemeene gratie*).

ABBREVIATIONS

GENERAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC

AKB Kuipers, Tjitze. *Abraham Kuyper: An Annotated Bibliography 1857–2010.* Translated by Clifford Anderson and Dagmare Houniet. Brill's Series in Church History 55. Leiden: Brill, 2011.

AKCR Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader. Edited by James D. Bratt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

CCS Calvin, John. *Calvin's Commentaries Series.* Edited by John King. 45 vols. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844–56.

CE The Catholic Encyclopedia. Edited by Charles G. Herbermann, Edward A. Pace, Condé B. Pallen, Thomas J. Shahan, and John J. Wynne. 15 vols. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907–12.

CG Kuyper, Abraham. *Common Grace.* Translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas. Edited by Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: CLP Academic, 2013–.

CO Calvin, John. *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia.* Edited by Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, and Eduardus Reuss. 59 vols. Corpus Reformatorum 29–87. 2nd ser. Brunswick: Schwetschke, 1863–1900.

ESV English Standard Version

Inst. Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559). 2 vols. Edited by John T. McNeill. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960.

KJV King James Version

LW Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works.* 55 vols. American ed. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann. Saint Louis: Concordia / Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955–86.

LXX Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT)

NIV New International Version

NSHE The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge. 13 vols. Edited by Samuel Macauley Jackson. Grand Rapids, Mich., Baker, 1949–50. Originally published in 12 vols., 1908–12.

NT New Testament

OT Old Testament

RD Bavinck, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics.* 4 vols. Translated by John Vriend. Edited by John Bolt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003–8.

SV *Statenvertaling* ("States Translation" of the Dutch Bible, 1637)

OLD TESTAMENT

Gen. Genesis

Exod. Exodus

Lev. Leviticus

Num. Numbers

Deut. Deuteronomy

Josh. Joshua

Judg. Judges

Ruth Ruth
1–2 Sam. 1–2 Samuel
1–2 Kings 1–2 Kings
1–2 Chron. 1–2 Chronicles
Ezra Ezra
Neh. Nehemiah
Esther Esther
Job Job
Ps(s.) Psalm(s)
Prov. Proverbs
Eccl. Ecclesiastes
Song of Songs Song of Songs
Isa. Isaiah
Jer. Jeremiah
Lam. Lamentations
Ezek. Ezekiel
Dan. Daniel
Hosea Hosea
Joel Joel
Amos Amos
Obad. Obadiah
Jon. Jonah
Micah Micah
Nah. Nahum
Hab. Habakkuk
Zeph. Zephaniah
Hag. Haggai
Zech. Zechariah
Mal. Malachi

NEW TESTAMENT
Matt. Matthew
Mark Mark
Luke Luke
John John
Acts Acts
Rom. Romans
1–2 Cor. 1–2 Corinthians
Gal. Galatians
Eph. Ephesians
Phil. Philippians
Col. Colossians
1–2 Thess. 1–2 Thessalonians

1–2 Tim. 1–2 Timothy
Titus Titus
Philem. Philemon
Heb. Hebrews
James James
1–2 Peter 1–2 Peter
1–3 John 1–3 John
Jude Jude
Rev. Revelation

OTHER ANCIENT WRITINGS
b. Sanh. Babylonian Sanhedrin (Talmudic Tractate)

KUYPER ON COMMON GRACE

A Comprehensive Theology of "Commonness"

RICHARD J. MOUW

WHAT DOES GOD think about French Impressionism? Or about the ethical teachings of Confucius in ancient China? Or about the courage shown by a Muslim mother who risks her life to save her son from a burning building?

Furthermore, what does God want *us* to think about those things? How do we answer those questions in ways that honor what the Bible teaches about the pervasive reality of human sinfulness in our fallen world?

These important volumes address those kinds of questions. Abraham Kuyper's extensive treatment of the doctrine of common grace has been around for more than a century, but it is now being made available for the first time in its entirety in an English translation. Kuyper had thought long and hard about how we as Christians can look for positive things in the culture around us, even when those things come to us from people who do not worship the God of the Scriptures.

Abraham Kuyper was one of the great Calvinist theologians of the nineteenth century. Calvinists typically do not have a reputation for offering positive assessments of the intellectual, artistic, and moral achievements of unregenerate people. One of the things people think of when they hear the word *Calvinism* is "total depravity." Kuyper was a good Calvinist, but he did not believe that this prohibited him from looking for truth and beauty and goodness beyond the boundaries of the Christian community. So he developed a comprehensive theology of "commonness," a perspective that could provide a helpful framework for encouraging and enabling Christians to benefit from the efforts of unbelievers.

Kuyper's efforts will surely be helpful to contemporary Christians who share his Reformed theological commitments. But they can also help others who struggle with these concerns from different theological traditions. After all, it can be illuminating to see how someone who operates out of a theological

framework that places a strong emphasis on human depravity can nonetheless develop a vibrant theology of active cultural engagement.

It is important to mention, in that regard, that this first volume is one of the products of a partnership between the Abraham Kuyper Translation Society and the Acton Institute—the latter being an exciting forum that has been focusing on being a "safe haven" for creative dialogue about Protestant and Catholic social thought. This is a much needed engagement, and those of us who care deeply about such matters are grateful for this and other fruits of those partnerships.

Again, Kuyper does not reject the Reformed tradition's strong emphasis on the devastating consequences that resulted from humankind's fall into sin. Our shared sinfulness has put human beings in a condition of what is often described in the Reformed tradition as "ethical rebellion." This means that the turning of our wills against God—the decision of our first parents to succumb to the Serpent's invitation to "be as gods"—resulted in a desperate state. To quote the old formula, "In Adam's Fall / We sinned All." Created to exercise a God-honoring "dominion" over the affairs of the creation, we chose instead to serve purposes that defied the Creator's design for human flourishing. And this decision resulted in the corruption of the totality of our being. Our rebellion has affected our capacity to think clearly about the basic issues of life, which means that all of our efforts—moral, political, economic, interpersonal, plus our interactions with the nonhuman creation—all of it exhibits the effects of our fallen state.

Kuyper not only accepted all of that—he made a point of featuring it in his overall theology. There is an "antithesis," he taught, that runs through the entirety of human life and thought in our present world. Once we have been taken hold of by the salvation that can only come by God's sovereign grace, our lives are meant to take a very different direction than the ways of fallen humanity. Salvation is meant to impact the totality of our lives: our moral dealings, our political perspectives, our economic practices, as well as the ways in which we farm and create art and shape the patterns of our family lives. In all areas of human interaction we are to honor God's revealed will for his creation.

Calvinists, then, with their doctrine of "total depravity," are clearly disposed to distrust the ways of fallen humanity. These pessimistic expectations, however, often run up against realities that do not conform to what our theology of human

sinfulness might lead us to anticipate. We often find the church acting worse than we had expected and the world acting better. In their theological formulations, then, Calvinists have frequently found it necessary to introduce some qualifications into their theological perspectives on the capacities of unredeemed human beings. Kuyper took up that challenge of spelling out those qualifications with great dedication.

In setting out to develop a detailed theology of common grace, Kuyper did not see himself as introducing something brand new into the Calvinist way of viewing things. John Calvin himself had already taken up the task. The Reformer of Geneva had started in developing his theology at the point where we would expect any good Calvinist to start—with a low estimation of the capacities of the unregenerate mind. In his classic work, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, for example, Calvin tells us that while we may come across occasional "sparks" of the light of creation shining through an unredeemed person's "perverted and degenerate nature," that original light is so "choked with dense ignorance . . . that it cannot come forth effectively." The efforts of sinful humanity to find the truth, says Calvin, amount to little more than a "groping in the darkness."

Having set forth clearly his view of the implications of his teaching on the effects of the fall, however, Calvin was not content simply to leave it there without some modifications. He was motivated to take some further steps because of his experiences as a student studying law before his conversion. In those studies he had come to admire the writings of some of the ancient Greco-Roman thinkers, especially Seneca. Nor was he inclined, after he had come to an evangelical faith in Christ, simply to change his assessment. This meant that he had to account for the fact that some of these unregenerate thinkers seemed capable of producing a little more than simply the occasional "spark" of truth.

So, in the *Institutes* Calvin admits that things are not quite as bleak as his straightforward affirmations of human depravity would suggest. God has not completely given the unredeemed human mind over to darkness. There are, he says, some "natural gifts" that are "by nature implanted in men" by God, and these gifts are "bestowed indiscriminately upon pious and impious"—a bestowal, he argues, that should be seen as a "peculiar grace of God."

Furthermore, this gift is so significant that when we come across a truth set forth by an unbeliever, "we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it

wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God."

Subsequent Reformed theology continued to deal with these matters. Calvin's followers devoted much attention to issues of natural theology, general revelation, the image of God, and similar ways of accounting for a more positive assessment of the deliverances of the unredeemed mind, in a way that did not simply abandon Calvin's emphasis on the serious effects of human rebellion for human life and thought. In exploring these options these thinkers have attempted to be faithful to what they had learned from Calvin himself, who had insisted that whatever good we can get from our studies of pagan thinkers is not due to some area of their being that is untouched by sin. Rather, the positive contributions they continue to make are the result of divine "gifts," offered by a kind of "peculiar grace of God."

The ideas of "gifts" and "grace" in that kind of formulation are meant to highlight the fact of divine sovereignty. While our radical sinfulness poses a threat to the unfolding of God's creating purposes, the Creator still loves his creation, and in his sovereign goodness he will not allow human rebellion to bring great harm to that which he loves. God has ways of exercising restraints on the depravity that, if left unchecked, would otherwise lead to creation's ruin. John Calvin put it this way: God keeps our sinful strivings in check "by throwing a bridle over them . . . that they may not break loose," especially when the Lord deems doing so "to be expedient to preserve all that is."

This picture of a God who continues to love the creation, and who expedites the means to "restrain" and "preserve" in the midst of human fallenness—this is the picture that Abraham Kuyper fleshes out in this wonderful treatise. And again, what Kuyper has to offer us on this subject has relevance far beyond the Calvinist community that would share his explicitly Reformed convictions. To be sure, non-Calvinists will have to forgive some of the "Calvinism-above-all" tone that frequently shows up in his writing. That offensive tone is all over the place, for example, in his 1898 Stone Lectures, delivered at Princeton Seminary, where he rails against Anabaptists, Lutherans, Catholics, and others. Actually, though, that combative tone is less evident in this series on common grace, where he offers more "ecumenical" observations, particularly in his quite creative comments about the blessings afforded by the "pluriformity" of the church. Indeed, it would have been odd for Kuyper to show much negativity

toward other Christian traditions in a work in which he is exploring the ways in which Christians can learn good things from the unbelieving world!

Again, then, this is a book that can help all of us as we struggle with new twenty-first-century versions of the challenges that Kuyper takes up. For one thing, the need for a theology of human "commonness" should be attractive to all believers who worry about the fragmented conceptions of human realities that are so prevalent in our "postmodern" (or, if you wish, our "post-postmodern") world. We are surrounded today by voices that deny—in practice if not also in theory—the existence of any "metanarratives." Claims of deep reaching "diversities" abound: racial, ethnic, sexual, national, religious, and generational. Ironically, as the technological capacity for communication increases, the ability to understand each other often seems to be decreasing. All of this poses important theological challenges about an underlying commonness for those of us who believe that God's ultimate intention for his human creatures is not the curse of Babel but the blessings of Pentecost. Kuyper's common grace theology can help to cast light on these matters.

And while Kuyper does clearly operate out of a Reformed framework, his theology of common grace is not tied in any necessary manner to, say, specific doctrines about predestination and election. Indeed, many of the theological themes that Kuyper saw in his nineteenth-century context as comprising the unique property of Calvinism—concepts like covenant, kingdom, "people of God," cultural discipleship—loom large in the contemporary vocabularies of a variety of Protestant and Catholic traditions.

What *is* foundational to Kuyper's presentation of common grace theology is a deep devotion to the notions of God's sovereignty and our obligation to participate in the divine call to be obedient to the lordship of Jesus Christ in all areas of life. And it is clear that many Christians these days—Wesleyans, Baptists, Lutherans, Catholics, Mennonites, and others beyond the boundaries of Reformed/Presbyterian life and thought—are looking for resources for equipping Christians to find alternatives to the various "world-flight" spiritualities that have long afflicted the broader Christian community.

To use a present-day label for assessing personality types, Abraham Kuyper was an amazing—even compulsive—"multi-tasker." He not only wrote in much detail about a variety of areas of Christian cultural engagement, he actually did a

lot of that engagement himself. He was a member of his country's parliament, heading up the political party that he had created, and even serving for a few years as the nation's prime minister. He taught and administered at the university he established. He wrote regularly for the newspaper he had founded. He spoke regularly to groups of farmers, at labor union conventions, and to artists' guilds.

And he was a churchman. This is important to emphasize in thinking about his career, because very often people who have attempted to carry out his vision in a variety of cultural spheres have not paid as much attention to the church as Kuyper would have insisted upon. If he sometimes in his writings seemed to treat the church as simply one among many "spheres," it was because he took the realities of the church and its mission so seriously that it was always assumed in all that he said about God's plan for the creation.

More specifically, Kuyper saw the church as the area in which "particular grace" functioned in a very special way. Kuyper knew the transforming power of saving grace in an intensely personal way. He had been trained, in his theological studies at the great University of Leiden, in the emerging liberal theology of the day, and had begun his ministry as a proponent of that theological perspective. But through the testimony of some very ordinary folks in his first parish, laity who met in their own homes for prayer and Bible study, he came to experience what he later described as "a blessing for my heart, the rise of the morning star in my life." Forever after that the church's proclamation that human beings are sinners desperately in need of God's gracious offer of salvation through the atoning work of Christ was central to his life and thought.

So, for Kuyper, common grace always had to be seen in its vital relationship to God's sovereign and gracious workings both in the church and in the larger world. The church is where God's renewing purposes, both for individuals and the creation, are openly revealed and taught about in the light of biblical revelation. But God is also at work in the broader human community. Common grace is a key force for this larger renewing mission.

Thinkers who find much that is helpful in Kuyper's common grace theology have still wondered at times whether it is helpful to call this phenomenon a kind of "grace." As we noted earlier, John Calvin himself employed that concept, in suggesting that the insights offered by pagan writers were the result of a "peculiar grace." Like Calvin, Kuyper did not limit the operations of divine grace to God's saving activity, using instead the broader understanding of grace as *unmerited favor*. In that sense of "grace," the very air we breathe is an undeserved gift from God, as is recognized in the hymn writer's prayerful

confession: “I’ll love thee . . . and praise thee as long as thou lendest me breath.”

The good things that come forth from the unredeemed portion of humankind, then, are not to be attributed to a capacity of fallen human beings to produce meritorious works on their own. They flow from God’s own sovereign choices to fulfill his purpose for the creation. This is why Kuyper’s common grace has to be clearly distinguished from the notion of “prevenient grace” that shows up in a number of traditions, particularly Wesleyanism and Roman Catholicism. From Kuyper’s kind of perspective, prevenient grace is a way of downplaying the extent of human depravity by positing a kind of automatic universal upgrade of those dimensions of human nature that have been corrupted by sin. To put it much too simply, the goal of prevenient grace *is* the upgrade; it is to raise the deeply wounded human capacities to a level where some measure of freedom to choose or reject obedience to God is made possible. Common grace, on the other hand, is for Kuyper a divine strategy for bringing the cultural designs of God to completion. Common grace operates mysteriously in the life of, say, a Chinese government official or an unbelieving artist to harness their created talents to prepare the creation for the full coming of the kingdom. In this sense, the operations of common grace—unlike those of prevenient grace—always have a goal-directed ad hoc character.

In discussing various examples of common grace, Kuyper distinguishes between the ways in which God operates both “internally” and “externally” in the lives of unbelievers. The “internal” aspect of these operations is both a risky topic and an important one. It is risky because Kuyper does not want in any way to suggest that common grace transforms human hearts in the way that particular grace surely does. God works mysteriously in, for example, the artistic efforts of a Picasso, without doing anything to the painter’s “inner” life that might approximate a kind of regeneration of his heart.

But the “internal” side of things is still an important feature of Kuyper’s insights regarding common grace. Many in the Reformed tradition who have made use of his common grace theology have focused exclusively on matters that can easily be characterized as “external” workings of God in the lives of the unregenerate. A classic example is the 1924 statement issued by the Christian Reformed denomination, with its “three points of common grace.” That church’s synod, drawing directly on Kuyper’s theology, affirmed that there is indeed a kind of nonsalvific attitude of divine favor toward all human beings that manifests itself in these three ways: (1) the bestowal of natural gifts, such as rain and sunshine, upon creatures in general; (2) the restraining of sin in human

affairs, so that the unredeemed do not produce all of the evil that their depraved natures might otherwise bring about; and (3) the ability of unbelievers to perform acts of civic good.

Those points certainly fit clearly into Kuyper's common grace theology. They do, however, have the kind of purely "external" character that could lead us to attribute them, not necessarily to actions motivated by a divine favor toward unbelievers, but simply to a traditional understanding of divine providence, where God in his own mysterious manner uses the actions of sinful people to further his own unfolding plan for the creation, without bestowing any real "gifts" on them in the process. And that is exactly the interpretation offered by the opponents of Kuyper's common grace theology within the Reformed tradition.

The fact is, however, that Kuyper goes further than those examples of common grace that lend themselves easily to a more "providential" interpretation, and in doing so he does point to phenomena that have an "internal" character. In addition to the purely "external" operations, he says, common grace is at work "everywhere that civic righteousness, family loyalty, natural love, human virtue, the development of public conscience, integrity, fidelity among people, and an inclination toward piety permeates life." These are precisely the features that point us to the "internal" lives of, say, the virtuous Confucian and the courageous Muslim mother.

Kuyper obviously has much to offer us in our attempts to engage the larger patterns and processes of cultural life. But here is a basic question: What is the real *point* of this engagement? If Kuyper is right that God wants us to take all of this seriously, why is this so important to God?

To answer these questions we need to pay attention to two aspects of his theology that do not often show up in other theological explorations of culture matters: his theological views about the original creation and about the end time.

Kuyper is arguably the most prominent proponent of the idea of a "cultural mandate" issued by God to human beings in the first chapter of Genesis. God programmed cultural formation into the original creation. When the Lord told the first human pair to "be fruitful and multiply," he was surely talking about procreation, but when he went on to instruct them to "fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion" over it (Gen. 1:28), he was referring to something more, the

“filling” of the Garden with the products and processes of cultural activity. As they began to fashion tools, work schedules, and patterns of interaction, Adam and Eve would be adding to the original contents of the creation, and eventually, even without the appearance of sin, the Garden would become a City, an arena of complex spheres of cultural interaction. In that sense, not only the family, but also art, science, technology, politics (as the collective patterns of decision making), recreation, and the like were all programmed into the original creation in order to display different patterns of cultural flourishing. God wanted artists to bring aesthetic excellence to the creation and scholars to advance the cause of knowledge. Economic activity would foster stewardship, while politics would promote justice.

Needless to say, all of this was deeply affected by the fall into sin. But the capacity for cultural formation was not lost in fallen humanity. Scarred, yes—even seriously distorted and corrupted. But the impulse toward cultural activity deeply implanted in human beings by God continues. And common grace sees to it that good things are produced, even where rebellious human spirits are in charge.

God *preserves*, then, the patterns of cultural formation that he desires for the creation. For Kuyper, though, it is not only about preservation. Common grace is a means by which God *prepares*. Common grace aims at that which is yet to come. To acknowledge, for Kuyper, that God cares about art, athletics, education, business, politics, and entertainment is to acknowledge also that God will not ever give up on these areas of human cultural achievement. All that has been accomplished in human history in promoting truth, beauty, goodness, justice, stewardship, even that which has flourished in contexts where the name of Jesus has not been lifted up—all of this will be revealed in the end time as counting toward the coming of his kingdom. To be sure, much of it will need a final cleansing, a purging of all that falls short of the full glorifying of God. But it will be gathered in.

Kuyper had a strong interest in eschatology. He was convinced that the works of culture would be gathered into the Holy City when it descends from the heavens as the New Jerusalem. His younger colleague Herman Bavinck had argued that there is a collective sense of the divine image that “is not a static entity but extends and unfolds itself” in the rich diversity of cultures, and that this image will be revealed in the end time when redeemed people from many cultures will enter the Holy City—and here Bavinck quotes from the book of Revelation’s final vision—to “bring into [the City] the glory and the honor of the

nations" (Rev. 21:26).

Kuyper held to the same perspective. He actually wrote a commentary on the book of Revelation, and as he focuses on that same final vision he argues that in that City, "The whole reborn humanity stands before God as a holy unity that is athrob with life," and this fully redeemed humanity "does not remain on its knees in uninterrupted worship of God," but it engages also in "new callings, new life-tasks, new commissions." The life of the future age "*will be a full human life* which will exhibit all the glory that God in the first creation had purposed and appointed for the same, but which by us was sinned away."

This is a vision that, rightly understood, gives us hope in our daily efforts to serve the Lord, the kind of hope described so nicely in more recent years by the great twentieth-century missionary-theologian Lesslie Newbigin:

> We can commit ourselves without reserve to all the secular work our shared humanity requires of us, knowing that nothing we do in itself is good enough to form part of that [heavenly] city's building, knowing that everything—from our most secret prayers to our most public political acts—is part of that sin-stained human nature that must go down into the valley of death and judgment, and yet knowing that as we offer it up to the Father in the name of Christ and in the power of the Spirit, it is safe with him and—purged in fire—it will find its place in the holy city at the end.

Kuyper was an activist, who often did his theology "on the run," with an eye to the very real practical challenges that he faced as a Christian leader in public life. That is one of the strengths of this book. While Kuyper probes some theological issues quite deeply, it is always out of an urgent concern to promote the cause of Christ's kingdom.

If some Christians in the English-speaking world only know one thing about Kuyper, it is likely his oft-quoted manifesto: "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'" That simple but profound affirmation of Christ's supreme lordship over all of creation—including what human beings are commissioned by God to add to the creation in their cultural engagements—has to be seen as what undergirds Kuyper's theology of common grace. Christ rules

over all—that is basic. But we also need the theology of common grace as a practical fleshing out of how we can best understand the implications of our affirmation of Christ's lordship.

What Kuyper offers us in these volumes is a perspective that can equip present-day Christians to engage in our own "on the run" involvements in daily life, with an overall perspective that is solidly grounded in God's revealed Word. Not all Christians today, of course, will have the patience or the technical understanding to make their way through the pages of this book or the volumes that follow. It needs to be interpreted in terms that are accessible to "ordinary" Christians, by teachers, pastors, and other leaders in the faith community. The encouragement and inspiration for doing so can come from the example of Kuyper himself. He was well known in his day as a much-admired champion of "the little people" (in Dutch, *de kleine luyden*) in the Christian community. Those folks had not mastered the texts he had authored, but they did catch his vision, putting it into practice in farming, labor, business, politics, education, family life, and the arts.

That is the kind of putting-into-practice that is much needed in our own time. This will not happen effectively if we simply repeat Kuyper's strategies for practical implementations of the cultural mandate. There is much, of course, in his also well-known doctrine of "sphere sovereignty" that speaks clearly to the issues of our own day. But we need to look for new ways to breathe life into the idea that Christians are obliged to seek out uniquely God-honoring patterns of involvement in all of the spheres of cultural interaction.

All of this calls for the kind of discernment that is grounded, not only in solid theological reflection, but also in a communal seeking of the guidance of the Holy Spirit through prayer, mutual correction, and the recovery of a variety of other spiritual practices that have strengthened God's people for kingdom service in the past.

And—to draw directly on an important element in common grace theology—this will mean openness to accepting truth, goodness, beauty, and justice wherever we find it. But this openness must always be accompanied by an awareness of the dreadful reality of the antithesis, the fundamental opposition between the ways of our shared rebellion and the sanctified desire to serve the Lord in all dimensions of our lives.

This book and its subsequent volumes in the series give us a much needed opportunity to absorb the insights of Abraham Kuyper about God's marvelous designs for human cultural life.

Volume 1:

The Historical Section

Part 1:

Noah–Adam

FOREWORD

THE REFORMED PARADIGM has suffered no damage greater than its deficient development of the doctrine of common grace.

The cause for this deficiency was the struggle to preserve its hard-won position, a tireless battle with pen and sword. Wrestling to dislodge the ecclesiastical monopoly of Rome required such incredible effort in France, the Netherlands, and Scotland. In addition, the Anabaptist movement arose in Western Europe, while Northern and Eastern Europe periodically faced the extremely hostile opposition of Lutheranism, as well as Arminian and Erastian agitation in our own land.

This is how, already in its earliest decades, Reformed ecclesiastical, political, and intellectual life came under severe pressure after its remarkably quick blossoming. When finally, by their stout resistance, Reformed people in the Netherlands and in Scotland had secured their freedom of existence, their robust strength was exhausted. Along with their success came a sense of ease that enervated them and diluted any ardor for pursuing the ideal. This explains why all their doctrinal energy was initially concentrated on endless polemic, leading ultimately to endless repetition of doctrinal platitudes.

After 1650 little doctrinal development occurred, either in Switzerland or in the Netherlands or in Scotland. After the earliest flowering of Reformed life, not one original talent blossomed in the doctrinal field. The stream of Reformed thinking that had once flowed so freshly across the plains of religious thought dried up. What had begun earlier with breadth and vastness withered into narrow-minded, truly byzantine investigation, the kind of inspection that lacks even the resilience to go back to the root of the Reformed idea. With their narrowness people were simply repristinating their well-worn polemic against Arminianism, hardly noticing any of the new challenges that have arisen. In this way the connection with the past was lost, and people became isolated from the ethos of their own time. This explains why there has been hardly any influence

upon the present era. People have quarantined themselves within their own circle, positioning themselves beyond reach of the forces driving cultural life. All the while, the barrenness of hairsplitting within their own ranks has awakened a reaction within their bosom. In various quarters the opposition toward all such intellectualistic biblical learnedness could no longer be averted, and resulted in disjoining what, in the sixteenth century, had been unified.

At the present time a change has occurred in this regard, among us at least. Historical investigation into the Reformed foundation has been reawakened, with the result that people have discovered this memorable truth: initially Reformed people had emphasized various principles that they had developed broadly and logically, looking very much like an all-embracing worldview, one that possessed enough flexibility to determine our own internal attitude amid the contemporary generation in this century.

What had seemed initially to offer merely historical value acquired significance as being intensely relevant for today. In addition, the pressing question arose concerning the relationship between the Christian life, as we understood it, and the life of the world in all of its manifestation and diversity. How could we restore our influence upon this common life, an influence that at one time had extended so widely but regrettably had later been lost? The answer to that question would not arise from a process of give-and-take, but had to be derived from the Reformed paradigm itself. An investigation had to be launched regarding what creative idea had originally governed Reformed people in their relationship to the non-Christian world, a study every bit as practical as it was theoretical.

Every Anabaptist sect had systematically isolated itself from the world. In opposition to this, Reformed people had chosen as their guiding principle the apostolic notion that “all things are yours . . . and you are Christ’s” (1 Cor. 3:21, 23), and had self-consciously invested themselves, with unusual talent and surpassing resilience, into the full range of human living amid the tumult of the nations. This defining character trait, standing out prominently in the history of all of Western Europe, could not have been accidental. The explanation for this character trait was to be found in its comprehensive and dominant foundational conviction. Accordingly, the identity of this governing foundational idea had to be investigated.

This investigation showed with immediate and indisputable clarity that this foundational idea consisted in the doctrine of common grace, an idea deduced directly from the sovereignty of the Lord, a doctrine that is and remains the root

conviction for all Reformed people. If God is sovereign, then his lordship *must* extend over *all* of life, and it cannot be restricted to the walls of the church or within the Christian orbit. The non-Christian world has not been handed over to Satan, nor surrendered to fallen humanity, nor consigned to fate. God's sovereignty is great and all-dominating in the life of that unbaptized world as well. Therefore Christ's church on earth and God's child cannot simply retreat from this life. If the believer's God is at work in this world, then in this world the believer's hand must take hold of the plow, and the name of the Lord must be glorified in that activity as well.

Therefore everything came down to resuscitating the rich foundational idea embodied in the doctrine of common grace.

Precise formulation of this doctrine could occur only after all the historical and doctrinal material relevant to this doctrine had first been carefully assembled and organized in terms of the Reformed paradigm. I have tried to the best of my ability to perform such a task in this work on common grace, offered in these volumes to Reformed churches around the world. A comprehensive and well-ordered presentation of the material was most important in this regard. What needed to become apparent was just how extensive this Reformed foundational conviction is, extending across the whole of human living.

Therefore I have divided the material into three sections. In the first section, common grace in its origin and operation must be objectively demonstrated. In the second section, theological reflection must focus on this subject, so that what has earlier been identified in its substance needs now to be illuminated doctrinally. Finally, in the third or practical section, we must bring to light the significance of this doctrine for living.

Spiritual isolation and ecclesiastical isolation are equally anti-Reformed. This work will have achieved the goal I have envisioned only when it ends such isolation without, God forbid, tempting believers to lose themselves in that world, a world that may not hold dominion over us, but rather a world within which we in the power of God must exercise dominion.

Abraham Kuyper
August 1, 1902

1

INTRODUCTION

When God's patience waited in the days of Noah.

PETER 3:20A

WITH ITS APPEARANCE in 1878, the initial summons to duty that *De Heraut* sounded throughout our country once again bore witness to our people regarding the Calvinistic confession of our ancestors, namely, *that grace is particular*. From then on the struggle to restore Reformed truth has been ongoing. We thank the Lord, to whom all glory belongs, that fifteen years after engaging in this battle, our struggle has achieved its goal. The particularity of grace, this bastion of our defense, at one time so threatened, is safe once again. In recapturing *the particular character of grace*, we recaptured the heart of our Reformed confession, which finds its necessary background in the *doctrine of the covenant*, and still further back, in the doctrine of *common grace*.

Particular grace deals with the *individual*, the *person* to be saved, with the *individual* entering glory. And with this individual, as child of God, we cannot wrap the golden chain of redemption around his soul unless that golden chain descends from personal, sovereign *election*.

For that reason, the almighty sovereignty of God, who elects whom he will and rejects those to whom he does not show mercy, remains the heart of the church, the *cor ecclesiae*, which the Reformed churches must hold firmly until the return of the Lord. The consequence of forsaking this truth would be their vanishing from the earth, even prior to the *Maranatha*. This doctrine is and remains, therefore, the heart of our confession. This is the testimony that, on the authority of God's Word, sealed by our personal experience, we shout aloud for all to hear: *grace is particular.*

Nevertheless, that same child of God is something other than an isolated individual, limited to himself. This individual is also part of a *community*, member of a *body*, participant in a *group identity*, enclosed within an *organism*. The *doctrine of the covenant* emphasizes and does justice to this truth.

Without the doctrine of the *covenant*, the doctrine of *election* is mutilated,

and the frightening lack of the assurance of faith is the valid punishment resulting from this mutilation of the truth. If separated from the confession of the covenant, election in isolation attempts to take hold of the Holy Spirit without honoring God the Son. The Third Person in the Trinity does not allow that violation of the honor of the Second Person. Christ himself testified that the Holy Spirit "will take *what is mine* and declare it to you" [John 16:14]. Anyone who presumes to trample upon this divine ordinance will not escape the severe anguish with which this unshakeable ordinance wreaks its misery of soul.

Therefore, in Holy Scripture this sovereign, personal election never appears in any other manner but within the context of *covenant grace*. The *individual*, this *single soul* must experience being incorporated into the *community* of the saints. We are elected personally, but together we are branches of the one Vine, members of the same body. For that reason, the confession of particular, personal grace is untrue and unscriptural unless it arises within the context of the *covenant*.

However, this is not the end of the matter.

The divine *covenant* in the Mediator in turn has its background in the work of original *creation*, in the existence of the *world*, and in the life of our *human race*. As *individuals* God's children belong to the *community* of the saints. But that community of saints also consists of the children of *men*, born of a woman by the will of man. Consequently they are interwoven and interconnected with all of human living that originated in Paradise and continues in its misshapen form even after humanity's fall from God.

Neither our election nor our attachment to the *community* of saints negates our common *humanity*, nor removes our participation in the life of family, homeland, or world.

Therefore, we need to consider not two, but three aspects: first, our *personal* life; second, our incorporation into the *body* of Christ; and third, our existence as *human beings* (i.e., our origin by *human birth*, our membership in the *human race*).

These three aspects, which our Heidelberg Catechism distinguishes as radiating from God's triune being, are differentiated in the following way.

First, concerning *God the Holy Spirit* and our sanctification, it refers to the powerfully personal aspect in God's dealing with his child. For the first time in that sanctification one's personal election becomes a certainty.

Second, concerning *God the Son* and our redemption, we confess the *covenant of grace*, of the Head of the *body*, of the one and only blood through

which we find *complete* reconciliation.

And then third, concerning *God the Father* and our creation, we confess that our origin is in Paradise, our ascent from natural life, our interconnection as *human beings* in the life of our *human race*.

Naturally, here the Catechism takes the order, the sequence, in reverse, for it began with our creation, and in this way at the same time proceeds according to the sacred order within the divine Being: first the Father, then the Son, eternally begotten of the Father, and thereafter the Holy Spirit, eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Thus the Catechism treats first *our creation*, then our *redemption*, and finally our *sanctification*. But in the understanding of God's child, who looks within and reflects on the progress of the soul's life, and consequently calculates from that point where he now stands, the course presented by experience and recollection is just the opposite. The child of God acknowledges God the Holy Spirit, who assures the believer of his personal election, thereby acknowledging that *grace is particular*. In none but Christ alone, however, does the believer find that assurance of faith, realizing that he is a member of the body, in the community of the saints, and in this way the glory of *the covenant* rises up before him.

Even with this, the matter is not yet finished, however.

Regarding that covenant, God's child looks backward to his origin, to his birth, to his ancestry, to the world in which he walks about as a human being. In so doing, he arrives at that *third* confession, not only that grace is particular, and that this particular grace lies entwined in the bonds of the covenant, but also that God was present before and after his creation, such that by God's own hand he has been skillfully and wonderfully knit together in his mother's womb [cf. Ps. 139:13-14]

This is what it means to confess *God the Father*; and with a voice louder than ever before, this boast of faith resonates from the lips of every believer: "I am elect, I am in Christ, and only for that reason do I believe deeply and fully in God the Father, the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, Creator of my being, both body and soul."

Even so, something is still missing here.

Between the creation glory in Paradise and one's own birth lies *the fall*, and thereby a shadow of death rests upon that world and on that human life in that

world, and on one's interaction with that world estranged from God. The line of grace seems to be broken. In one's *personal* election, that *grace* is particular; that *grace* is working organically in the *covenant*; but in the third place, that *grace* encounters the broken and violated creation. The line does not seem to continue.

For that reason, *covenant grace* must come to expand into *particular grace*, but behind covenant grace there is yet a third phenomenon expanding into covenant grace, namely, *common grace*.

So we find three emanations of God's grace: a grace that applies to you *personally*, then a grace that you have in common with *all God's saints* in the covenant, but also thirdly, a grace of God that you as a human being have in common *with all people*.

There is nothing in this that does not glorify God. Your personal salvation is entirely the fruit of sovereign grace. Your blossoming as a branch, together with all the sacred branches of the Vine, is the result of nothing except sovereign grace bestowed upon you. But now also your progress in that redemption *as a human being*, by virtue of your ancestry, by your birth and your entire human life, is a gift, a kindness, an outworking *of the very same grace of God*.

Do not stop with your *assurance* of faith or with the *inculcation* of your faith, not even with the creation within your soul of the *capacity* for faith. Rather, keep on moving further back, beyond conversion and regeneration, to your *natural* birth, yes, in order to bemoan your own sin and guilt, and the fatal guilt of your race, but also in order to extol the grace of your God in that very same natural birth.

Here, then, are three touchstones of grace. One is entirely personal, a white stone, engraved with a name known only to God and to you. This is wholly *particular grace*. The second one is the touchstone of the *covenant grace*, a blessed gift you enjoy in *common with all God's children*. The third is the touchstone of a general human grace, coming to you because you are among the children of humanity, yours together with not only all God's children but *in common with all the children of humanity*.

This new series of articles will treat this third element, in order to supplement both of our earlier series that dealt with *particular grace* and the *doctrine of the covenants*. Only when you comprehend *particular grace* and

covenant grace, as well as *general grace*, in their essence, significance, and connection, will your thinking find rest in its quest for unity.

We have purposely avoided the expression *general grace*, and for our title we have chosen instead *common grace*, i.e., *gratia communis*, to prevent misunderstanding. The assumption could so easily have slipped in that once again we meant [to suggest] that grace [*genade*] belonged to everyone and were thereby attempting again to dislodge the established foundation of *particular* grace. The notion of "general" grace [*genade*] is so easily misused, as if by it were meant *saving* grace, and that is absolutely *not* the case. The only grace that is "saving" in the absolute sense is particular, personal grace, and even covenant grace receives this title of honor only with certain qualifications. Nevertheless, even though covenant grace in certain instances is saving in terms of its nature and significance, this may never be ascribed to *general grace*.

In order to emphasize this strongly and forcefully, let it be noted immediately that in some measure *animals also* share in "general grace" (see Gen. 9:9–10). To differing degrees, general grace is the portion of *all* people, including the worst apostates whose consciences are completely seared and who are lost forever.

In itself general grace carries no saving seed within itself and is therefore of an *entirely different nature* from particular grace or covenant grace. Since this is often lost from view when speaking about "general grace," to prevent misunderstanding and confusion it seemed more judicious to revive in our title the otherwise somewhat antiquated expression, and to render the phrase *communis gratia*, used formerly by Latin-speaking theologians, as *common grace*.

The specialist knows that the discussion of this subject presents unique difficulties for reasons that are obvious. After all, in former times this subject never enjoyed separate treatment. Among the various main sections into which people usually divided academic theology, none bore this title. They treated the topics of Holy Scripture, God, the decrees, creation, sin, Christ, salvation, the church, the sacraments, the state, and the last things, but a separate main section treating *common grace* or *general grace* appeared nowhere.

When in the footsteps of Calvin, the attention primarily of Reformed theologians was specially directed to this extremely important subject, they

managed to work out its main features, but without devoting a separate chapter to it. The subject was treated mostly in connection with “the virtues of the heathen,” “civic righteousness,” “the natural knowledge of God,” etc., but without ever arranging all the various elements belonging to this subject into one ordered, coherent discussion. Nor does our Heidelberg Catechism treat it separately, and this in turn prevented us from completing a discussion of “common grace” in its own set of chapters in our commentary, *E Voto Dordraceno*.

Although we have repeatedly drawn attention to this “common grace” since 1878, and even though we took note with gratitude and interest of the well-formulated address on “Common Grace” published by Dr. Herman Bavinck in 1894, this weighty subject has until now not yet been treated with any degree of *coherence* and *completeness*. It remains for us, then, with this work to open our own path, with absolutely no pretense of finishing once and for all this section of dogmatics. Rather, since this subject reaches so deeply into life and into our present struggles, our goal is to offer an initial sample that could lead later to a more developed and polished doctrinal treatment.

Among the “perfections of God,” it is particularly his *forbearance* that is not exhausted in this “common grace,” but rather is magnified in a moving way. God’s holiness and majesty respond against all sin, not merely in part, but completely, in the most absolute sense. If this outworking of God’s holiness against sin were to proceed unimpeded, in all of its dreadfulness, there would be no “common grace.” But the Lord our God is not merely *holy*, but also in his holiness he is at the same time *forbearing*, and it is from that “forbearance,” which yields the divine patience of the Almighty for bearing *temporarily* with sin, that “common grace” is born.

In his *Institutes*, Calvin formulated the profound understanding of this *common grace* most clearly when he answered the question of how we can explain the fact that uprightness and nobility excelled among pagans and unbelievers so often to such a high degree. Most people who expressed their views always made it appear as though this fact provided proof against the deep and pervasive depravity to which our human nature had sunk through sin. “You slander our human nature,” so they argued, “if you confess that through sin we are inclined to all evil and incapable of any good. Those many excellent pagans,

who do not know Christ and who nevertheless often put us to shame, prove the opposite. And unbelievers as well who live among us often surpass many a child of God in quiet, sober devotion to duty."

Calvin protested against this view. Their claim would indeed be valid if these people were like that in and of themselves. But precisely this must be refuted, and the explanation sought rather in the claim that "amid this corruption of nature there is some place for God's grace; not such grace as to cleanse it, but to restrain it inwardly." Already in the first French edition of his *Institutes* Calvin formulated the matter this way: "When speaking of universal corruption, we need to consider that God's grace does somehow occur, not in the sense that he will alter the perverse nature, but bridle and restrain it from within." The formulation in the Latin edition is shorter and stronger: "grace does not purge our sin, yet dwells within us" [*gratia non quae illam purget, sed intus cohibeat*], something he repeats even more pointedly at the end of that paragraph: "God by his providence bridles the perversity of nature, that it may not break forth into action; but he does not purge it within" Here lies the root of the doctrine of "common grace," together with the explanation of why it forms such an indispensable part of the Reformed confession. It arose not from philosophical invention, but from the confession of the deadly character of sin. Our Reformed ancestors have always insisted on sin's lethal character. They unanimously confessed, "Dead by nature through sin and trespasses."

Apparently, however, this did not fit with reality. There was in that sinful world, outside the church, so much that was beautiful, that was worthy of esteem, that provoked jealousy. This placed a choice before people: either deny all this good, contrary to better knowledge, and join the ranks of the Anabaptists, or suggest that fallen humanity had not fallen so deeply after all, and thereby succumb to the Arminian heresy. Placed before *this* choice, the Reformed confession refused to go with either one. We may not close our eyes to the good and the beautiful outside the church, among unbelievers, in the world. This good existed, and that had to be acknowledged. At the same time we may hardly minimize in any way the pervasive depravity of sinful [human] nature. So then, the solution of this apparent contradiction lay in this, that outside the church grace operates among pagans in the midst of the world, this grace is neither an everlasting grace nor a saving grace, but a temporal grace *unto the restraint of ruin that lurks within sin*.

2

THE STARTING POINT OF THE DOCTRINE OF COMMON GRACE

This is like the days of Noah to me: as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, and will not rebuke you.

ISAIAH 54:9

THE FIXED HISTORICAL starting point for the doctrine of *common grace* lies in *God's establishment of a covenant with Noah, after the flood*. In the past, inadequate attention has been paid to this significant and decisive event. People move too quickly to Abraham and the patriarchs, with the result that the weighty significance of the Noahic covenant initially slipped into the background and then was almost forgotten.

Many people, including pious children of God, behold and admire the rainbow without being aware of the underlying covenant that is so powerfully addressing them. For that reason, we must begin with placing the lofty significance of that Noahic covenant in more radiant light once again. It must come alive for us once again, address us once again, become for us once again an essential component of the grace of God that sustains us.

What must then stand out in the foreground is that this covenant established by God with Noah appears in Holy Scripture not at all as a subordinate matter, and by no means does it appear incidentally as a matter of secondary importance. Rather, the establishment of the Noahic covenant is narrated to us more solemnly, more comprehensively, with greater detail than the establishment of either the covenant in Paradise or the covenant with Abraham. The establishing of a covenant is not mentioned indirectly, but the establishment itself and the making of the covenant are included in the narrative as a historical event. What God the Lord spoke and testified about is communicated with meticulous details. The entire event is concluded with reference to a sign in the clouds that as a sacred covenant sign would remind people century after century of the steadfastness and truth of the Noahic covenant.

Thus it is obvious that when the Lord our God gave the Holy Scriptures to his church, he clearly wanted to confirm for the church of all ages the remembrance of this covenant agreement. He necessarily approved the detailed knowledge of this event for his church. And he desired that his church throughout the ages would take into account the significant and rich meaning of this covenant agreement. Our Heidelberg Catechism understood this as well, and its description of the providence of God, that "herbs and grass, rain and drought," and so much more, "comes to us not by chance, but by his fatherly hand," was apparently taken from Genesis 8:22: "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

Noah became in fact the second progenitor of the human race; not that he replaced Adam, for Noah himself was the fruit of human procreation, as God had not directly formed Noah by his own hand. Noah inherited his nature and character from his parents and grandparents, which had not been the case with Adam. Adam was purely the product of God's creative imagination. Nor was Noah's wife taken from Noah's side, as Eve was taken from Adam's, but in Noah's wife we also find the outworking of the ancestral nature of her parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. And what obtains for Noah and his wife obtains as well for the wives of his sons. They too were the descendants and spiritual heirs of previous generations, bringing the corruption of these previous generations into Noah's family.

So it is absurd to want to put Noah on a par with Adam. As far as the source and the originality of their existence are concerned, they are simply not comparable. In Adam we find the source, the original fountain of all the generations of our human race. In Noah's family we find the flowing together and intersection of the various streams that by now had become tributaries. From our human race the only person who can be compared to Adam is the second Adam, the Man from heaven, by whom and in whom we once again find an entirely renewed source. Noah is our second *progenitor*; he is not a second *head* of our race.

Although Noah occupies a more modest position, this much is certain, that the current of the different streams of humanity came to a standstill in him for one brief moment, and then came to divide from him again into diverse streams.

You see such a phenomenon in higher elevations where the plateaus differentiate the higher mountain ranges from the lower bluffs, with all the little streams of those mountains flowing together into an azure lake that deepens into a basin, and from the other side of the lake water flowing out into two or three streams that seek their way to the plateau below.

With Noah there was just such an incision, one that was extremely severe, one that cut into the life of our human race. Nothing survived from what preceded it, except what was present in Noah and his wife and his daughters-in-law, and from this fivefold fruit of earlier human life there sprouted the entire subsequent development of our human life. Noah and those eight souls did not form a *new* humanity. Rather, they are merely the continuation of the original human race. But now, after this ancient race was radically pruned by the Lord and was cut down to the root, such that in fact nothing but these five shoots survived, represented by those eight souls, who would soon cause the life of our race to spread out in three main branches, through Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

So the ancient church of God was not cut off with the flood, in order to have begun as a newly formed entity with Noah's family. But the church came forth out of Paradise to Noah, borne by him in the ark, proceeding from the ark to dwell up the earth once again, and in this way continued its original existence in Noah's generation. The only difference is that after the flood the church appeared *in a new condition*. Shem would expand its tents; Japheth would be the first to depart from the church and later return; and Ham would forego its blessing.

The establishment of the Noahic covenant is also properly related to the future of God's church, but this relationship is in terms of the alteration that our general human life underwent. In this Noahic covenant there is after all nothing that intentionally or primarily pertains to *saving* grace. It involves neither forgiveness of guilt and sin, nor promise of adoption and eternal life. Salvation is not being bestowed on some, but in this covenant God's promise extends to *all* the children of men. The covenant does indeed benefit the church, and does have as its goal, if you will, the future flourishing of the church. This covenant seeks to make the church possible and to secure a place of rest for the church, but it does not involve the church as such. This covenant involves man *as man*, man in his society on earth with other *men*, man in his relationship to the *animals*, and

man in his relationship to the destructive elements of *nature*.

After Noah the situation of our entire earth was different than before; and on that earth the situation of our human race and of our human life is in many respects different than in the days before the flood came. We know very little of the situation that existed before the flood. We read of people with a life span of almost ten centuries. We read of the outbreak of violence, of a devout generation that maintained the fear of the Lord; and of the earliest development of human artistic capacity. But we also read of a frightening crisis that gave godless people supremacy and made unrighteousness and violence increase rapidly.

Finally all of human living appears to have degenerated into wantonness, sensuality, and bloodshed until, after Enoch's removal, only in Noah's family did the sacred service of the Lord continue. But only those general features are mentioned. We are not given many details. There is no material at hand to fuel our imagination. What the opening chapters of Genesis offer you is not an interesting story for stimulating your curiosity, but a completely sober portrait sketched in outline, with broad strokes, in order to humble you as a member of the human race in your human understanding.

So gloriously had Paradise been opened, so abundantly blessed by God, and look, that is what our human race brought forth from its own wicked root, until at last the judgment of the Almighty is issued, that "*every* intention of the thoughts of his heart was *only* evil *continually*" (Gen. 6:5b).

You can see clearly that if the One who created us had not intervened, and had not called into being a new order of things, that is, a new living situation, the church would have ceased to exist, and our entire race would have perished in its own pitiful ungodliness. Only in one family was the fear of the Lord still flourishing. How long would it have been until this particular family would also have been swallowed up by the universal stream?

Exactly *what* took place cannot be determined with precision. What Holy Scripture tells us about it is expressed with majesty and written down with ornate, impressive language, but it refrains from recording all the details.

The traditions of the ancient peoples tell us little more than the recollection of an awesome event. And what the investigation of this earth, of its surface, of its mountains and its core have taught us thus far indicates that colossal changes have taken place, but it still lacks the graphic detail and exactitude of history. Meanwhile, this much is certain, that even if Holy Scripture had been silent about the flood, and even if the traditions of the peoples had contained no recollection of an event like this, simply observing the earth in its mountainous

regions, and exploring the earth's surface in almost every country, would provide us the certainty that a massive cataclysm had taken place on this earth, one that altered the entire form of the earth and completely altered even its climatic patterns.

When God had completed his work in Paradise, and had crowned humanity as lord of creation, God saw "that everything was *good*" and our entire earth, as it had come forth from God's hand, must originally have displayed the image of complete harmony and purity.

But that earth no longer exists; *that* world you will not find. Especially those who hike through the rugged and rough mountain regions become deeply aware of this fact. For the devastation to which the mountains testify, particularly in their upper reaches, is startling and enormous. Of course, we can still admire the natural beauty and the majestic and delightful scenes of these high mountains, but then mostly from afar, and only in those elevated regions where the snow and ice fields conceal the destruction below the surface by the brilliance of its virgin snow and ice. Where there is no cover, and the naked rocks protrude, the mighty mountain monster displays its savagery. There we observe nothing but destruction, and sense an eerie wilderness, the ruin of what once existed, proclaimed in a most powerful language. Consider how terrible the ruptures and seismic activity involving the entire surface of the earth that must have occurred before this chaos emerged from the harmony of its original creation.

We leave the researchers of nature's phenomena to their own speculations and calculations, although we admire their perseverance and the ingenuity wherewith they pursue their investigations, extending as far as the earth's core. The only thing of interest for our subject is that the factual condition of our earth corresponds to what Holy Scripture tells us, namely, that *our earth is no longer* what it was originally, but that *colossal cataclysms* took place on the earth's surface.

Scripture records two such upheavals. In the first place, the original condition of the earth was changed immediately after *the fall*. Second, that condition underwent a colossal change through *the flood*. Scripture gives us no detailed account of the first change. Genesis 3 does not chronicle all the details of the fury of the elements that emerged so extensively with the flood. We are told only that (1) a curse had come upon the earth; (2) the plant world began to

bring forth thorns and thistles; (3) the wild animals came to have a different nature; and (4) the beauty of Paradise languished and then vanished.

Despite the brevity of this explanation, it supplies enough for us to surmise that an entire reversal of the condition of this earth must have occurred at that time. If the nature of the plant world had changed, if the nature of the animals had undergone such important alterations, if the original beauty of Paradise had departed, and the curse was placed upon the earth, then these brief indicators say enough for us to realize that entirely different relationships had entered life, and an entirely different, severely altered situation had come into being.

We simply cannot make a comparison with the earth *before* and *after* the curse. The world as God had originally created it at one time had perished under the curse, and an entirely different, sorrowful, and somber form of this same earth had now appeared. Only powerful processes within the elements could have brought this about, and the presumption is obvious that in the desolate scenes that nature still offers in many geographical regions to this day, we have before us the results of what occurred at that time.

In that world thus ruptured and disheveled lived the race that had reproduced from Adam until Noah. But then followed a *second* powerful upheaval, one that in a violent manner again tore and fractured the earth that existed. This catastrophe wholly changed the earth's appearance, and it was upon that earth's surface, crushed and rearranged for a second time, that the current development of our race began after the flood.

The narrative of the flood makes clear that in this second cataclysm the element of *water* played the major role. That same account also tells us that the earth's surface itself ruptured again, for it says that "all the fountains of the great deep burst forth" [Gen. 7:11]. Apparently this intends to tells us that enormous masses of water, hidden under the surface of the earth, forced through the fissures of earth's surface with great power and flooded the surface of the earth. To what degree this coincides with a sudden massive thaw of the ice fields covering the highlands, and whether this thaw caused the terrible and destructive downpour, can no longer be determined.

Enough is said for us simply to know that during the flood over this our earth, for the second time a comprehensively disruptive and comprehensively altering agitation of the elements occurred, and that from this point forward, this

earth as we know it received this form and shape that we now encounter.

Whereas this earth became what it now is through those two upheavals, Holy Scripture testifies to us both times concerning something about which the natural scientists know nothing, namely *this*, that both the first and the second upheaval were effected by *the wrath of God* against the *sin of our human race*. Once more for a third time, so this same Holy Scripture testifies, such a tremendous upheaval is awaiting us, one that will surpass both of those previous ones in terror, when "the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved" (2 Peter 3:10).

However, that third global catastrophe will not come until the hour has arrived when the *Maranatha* is ushered in and the sign of the Son of Man appears in the clouds. This third catastrophe will differ from the previous ones inasmuch as the former two disasters caused nothing but destruction, whereas the last catastrophe will actually serve to restore the harmony of creation and with it, the glory of Paradise, indeed, causing a glory of a *still higher order* to radiate upon this earth (that is, the new earth under a new heaven).

Until then the current situation of this earth continues. Prior to that last hour no new catastrophe will occur. There will be some regional disasters and even local destructions, especially in the countries and regions with active volcanoes; but what has *not* occurred since the days of Noah, and will not occur before the Lord's return, is such a universal catastrophe like the entrance of the curse, and during the flood, when the entire face of the earth was changed.

The extent to which the other heavenly bodies affected the earth during those two powerful upheavals is not reported to us. But it is prophesied to us that this will occur with the final catastrophe that will come one day. Then sun, moon, and stars will also cooperate in this global destruction, as repeatedly attested in the prophecy of the old covenant, and again in the Revelation of the apostle John. But until that day, the relation of this earth to the firmament will in general remain what it is now, which is clearly expressed in the promise that while the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease (Gen. 8:22).

Since the days of the flood, a *new condition of the earth* has come into being that pertains to the surface of this earth, as well as its atmospheric conditions. That new condition will not be disturbed, as it was twice before. Instead, it will remain unaltered until the final consummation and until the entrance of the new order of all things, when the glory of the Lord will fill his creation in undisturbed harmony.

And this fact, this permanence of the existing order, affecting our entire earth and human life on that earth, is now sealed for us in the *Noahic covenant*.

Until the time of Noah, everything surged back and forth in continual unrest, and was subjected to change. The curse continued its wrathful operation. But with Noah that turbulence was changed into rest through an omnipotent act of the Lord's mercy. After the flood God provided his covenant: his covenant given to this earth, to all who were called human beings, his covenant even to the animal world and to all of nature. It extends from Noah to the *Maranatha* for the external order of things, in undisturbed stability, rest, and order. It is the Lord's design. It is his sovereign good pleasure.

Moreover, so that we, the children of men, would taste and enjoy this rest, this peace and tranquility that had been prepared for us in this stability, the Lord God not only took counsel with himself to do this, but he also revealed his decision to Noah, and through Noah to us. And so that it would have a sure certainty for us, he anchored and sealed this decision in a covenant promise for us.

It is for that reason that we need to go back to Noah for the condition of our human life in all its aspects. There, at Noah's altar, erected after the flood and sanctified by the sacrificial blood, lies the mighty, majestic, predominant starting point for the entire developmental history of our human life. By means of that starting point with Noah, *common grace*, which began in Paradise, acquired its more definite form.

3

THE NOAHIC COVENANT WAS NOT PARTICULAR

I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

GENESIS 9:15

THE FAR-REACHING SIGNIFICANCE of the Noahic covenant requires no further demonstration at this point. For we have seen that this significance includes nothing less than the truth that the present condition of our earth and of our human life on that earth, from the flood until Christ's return, possesses the foundation for its certainty and permanence in this covenant of grace. The certainty that no further violent ruptures of the earth's surface will occur before the return of Christ, stands at the forefront of the Noahic covenant.

This comes to forceful expression in Isaiah 54:9, where Israel's God powerfully declares: "This is like the days of Noah to me: as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, and will not rebuke you." That this is not referring exclusively to a flood upon this earth by means of water, but refers generally to a universal destruction, appears from what verse 10 says about the mountains departing and the hills being removed. The flood is in the foreground, and the fact must be accepted that ultimately the supremacy and the totally destructive force of the water that dragged everything with it was most terrifying and frightening. But throughout all Scripture the memory echoed just as clearly of mountains that were wrenched loose and moved, of mountain tops that trembled and shook, and similarly of valleys that rose up from the deep, and of flourishing fields that later became scorched and withered into a desert.

All of this is an allusion that returns in the portrait of the end of all things. With a view to that end, Jesus speaks of "mountains that fall on people" and of "hills that will cover them" [Luke 23:30]. The apostolic word testifies that the

earth will once again be shaken, and that “the elements of the earth will melt” [2 Peter 3:12]. Furthermore, when reading the Scriptures we encounter the shaking of the mountains, the collapse and elevation of the earth’s surface, the transformation of fertile land into a barren wilderness, and the changes that can occur in the earth’s elements. We find the language of Scripture corresponding entirely with the scenes of terrible destruction that testify of former catastrophes in numerous regions.

Those who advocated theories of water and fire, the Neptunists and Plutonists, might contend by an appeal to Scripture, and identify the Noahic covenant as unworthy of God, only because they read into it that even though there would not be another flood, nevertheless a catastrophe just as terrifying that would involve other elements or would proceed from another cause could overtake us at any moment. The Noahic covenant gives rest, security, and confidence to the children of men only if you understand it in its wider and fuller sense to mean that such a violent cataclysm, like the one that occurred at that time and still awaits us at the final judgment, is by means of God’s sure promise excluded during this interim period and thus does not await us again.

In the meantime, we need to consider a serious objection concerning this Noahic covenant. Already in the time of our fathers, the question arose as to whether this covenant as well, since it bears the character of a covenant of *grace*, needs to be understood as established with believers only, such that it did not concern the world in general. In particular, Pareus, Perkins, and Mastricht understood it in this more restricted sense, and Rivet also uses an expression that seems to indicate that he was of the same opinion.

Since the view we have begun to present here does not agree with this analysis, but follows the older perspective of Calvin, we will defend our rejection of this narrower view as follows. Calvin says unambiguously, “There is no doubt that it was the design of God to provide for *all* his posterity. It was not therefore a *private* covenant . . . , but one which is *common* to all people, and which shall flourish in all ages to the end of the world.” His expression is *Foedus omnibus populis commune*, that is, “a covenant of grace common to all people.” The choice of these words shows clearly that Calvin did not understand the Noahic covenant as “saving,” but as pointing to God’s mercy, for the benefit of every human being, among all nations, through every age, until Christ’s

return.

No more words need to be devoted to arguing that we are indeed following in Calvin's footsteps. The above quotation from his commentary should suffice and any doubts may be expelled by a close rereading of his entire exposition about the Noahic covenant. The mistake of later divines consisted in failing to do justice to the clear formulations of Scripture, seeing them as focused too exclusively on the church and too little on human life in general.

This becomes even more evident since the Lord's words in Genesis 9 are so understandable, so clear as to avoid any possible misunderstanding, and so plain, that even the possibility of another opinion is excluded for anyone who seriously examines these words. These are, after all, the words of God spoken in the first person. And God is speaking not only to Noah, but to Noah and his *three sons*—thus not only to Shem, but also to Japheth and Ham, including the *descendants* of Japheth and Ham: "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you" (Gen. 9:9). Had this covenant been established only with Noah, one could still claim that the words "and with your offspring after you" referred only to Noah's *spiritual* descendants. But this interpretation is impossible. For the Lord God is speaking here not only to Noah, but to four persons, namely, Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Actually it should be rendered, "I myself hereby establish my covenant with all of you and with the seed of each one of you after all of you." In the original text we read *you* as well as *your seed*, not in the singular but in the *plural*, and so the entire notion that commonly prevails in Sunday school classes and catechism classes, suggesting that God was speaking only to Noah, is false. God stated explicitly and in plain language that he establishes his covenant not only with believers, nor even only with Shem's descendants, but also with Japheth and Ham, and with their descendants.

This is exactly what Calvin says: "A covenant of grace to *all* people and nations *in common*." And as if God had foreseen that a misunderstanding could nonetheless easily creep in, he added as further specification the literal statement: "and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth" [Gen. 9:10]. In [Genesis 9:]12 something along this line is repeated: "the covenant *that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations*." Indeed, as if to express still more concretely and clearly that this covenant applies essentially to our human life on this earth, we read in verse 13 of "the covenant *between me*

and the earth," and in verses 15, 16, and 17, it is repeated three more times: "my covenant that is *between me and you and every living creature of all flesh*."

As often as *six times* in this brief span of verses it is explicitly stated that we are *not* dealing here with a covenant of *particular* grace, but a covenant of *common* grace.

It is almost inconceivable how people, in contradiction of this, not considering this explicitly repeated, sixfold statement, nevertheless have explained away and virtually denied the *common* character of this covenant. Only a *false spirituality* could have induced them to do this. Having failed to consider Jesus' statement that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without the will of the heavenly Father [Matt. 10:29], they cannot comprehend what that caring for the birds in the sky and for all the animals on earth means here. Having neglected the testimony of John the Evangelist that *all things* are made by the Word, and therefore life is in that Word and this life is the light *of men* [John 1:4], people could not conceive of any other covenant of grace than one with a particular scope, and had no room in their limited conception for a covenant of grace with all the children of men.

The fact that we belong soul *and body* to Jesus with all its consequences did not penetrate their consciousness. That godliness yields a fruit of grace not only for the future life but also *for the present life* was not understood in its fullest.

It is for this reason that we move to the foreground with some emphasis once again the full scriptural truth concerning the Noahic covenant, and show Calvin's excellence here as well. Without evading this pursuit of a one-sided spirituality, he openheartedly acknowledged the establishment of this covenant with *all* peoples and nations around the globe.

Even the use of the name with which the highest Being is named, who established the covenant, forbids us from viewing the matter any other way. When the redemptive covenant of particular grace is mentioned, in Genesis 3 the name LORD is used, and when Shem receives the blessing of the Messiah, we read in Genesis 9:26 the name LORD. By contrast, with the Noahic covenant, as well as with the blessing of Japheth in verse 27, that covenant name of LORD is understandably omitted, and we read in this context only the name GOD. It is not the LORD, but the *God* of all flesh who enters covenant with all flesh, and in that covenant swears an oath that actually and simultaneously extends to *all* flesh, to

"*all* that has breath."

Calvin's observation is therefore exactly right, when he says that for this reason the animals are also mentioned, because what is involved is *the breath of life* (*vitalis spiritus*) that we have in common with the animals. This covenant applies to the condition and the existence of the earth and the atmosphere that surrounds this earth, for both that earth and that atmosphere have been given not only to people, but along with them to the animals.

Therefore, where God extensively mentions and describes the animal world, and includes in the covenant both animals and people as the single party, precisely by that mention of the animals he demonstrates as clearly as possible that a promise is involved that affects not the *spiritual* life of our soul but our *outward* existence in the world and on the earth.

That promise itself closes the door to further argument. The promise is described clearly and it includes nothing spiritual whatsoever. It includes nothing other than this one element: "the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh" [Gen. 9:15]. Only this. Nothing else. Not another word is included.

Of course, the terrible mass of water that once swallowed up all life was not destroyed after the flood. That very same mass of water still exists, whether soaked into the surface of the earth as groundwater, or collected in the oceans, which together cover three-fourths of the world, and in some places have a depth of more than seven thousand meters. Large amounts of water lie frozen in the glaciers on the mountains and in the ice mass of the North and South Poles.

At any moment these waters could be released. *God* alone is the reason they remain in their place, and do not swallow up this world. He keeps that frightening mass bound together in the hand of his almighty power. He does this according to his decree of common grace, solemnly sworn and sealed in his covenant with Noah *and* his sons.

After having placed this clearly in the foreground, we now need to direct our attention to a second point, one that grants relative validity to the observation of Pareus, Rivet, Perkins, and Mastricht. We note that in Genesis 8, before the blessing of Noah and the establishment of the covenant, another action occurred that relates well to the covenant of *particular* grace.

In *this* narrative, the eternal Being is called as many as three times not by the

creator name of *God*, but by the covenant name of *Lord*. This *earlier* account does not speak of establishing a *new* covenant. We read only that Noah brought thank offerings, that the Lord accepted this from his servant, and that he was speaking now to himself, *not* to Noah.

People usually overlook this, as if what follows were spoken to Noah and his sons. But clearly this was not the case. We read that the LORD "*said in his heart*" [Gen. 8:21]. This speaks of the counsel God took with himself, which only then in chapter 9 is revealed to Noah and his sons with the blessing and the establishment of the covenant.

The communication of that *intention* of God agrees in large measure with what we read about the establishment of the covenant, but with one considerable difference. Something is added here, namely, the reason why henceforth no new flood would swallow the earth. That reason is contained in these words: "for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth" [Gen. 8:21].

Much has been written about these words and people have wondered why God says in Genesis 6:5 that precisely because the intention of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil continually, he would *bring* the flood over the earth, whereas here in Genesis 8:21, and precisely *for this same reason* he would henceforth *ward off* such a flood from the earth. Nevertheless, the correct understanding of this declaration is not difficult.

First, observe that it is not true that the *same* reason is given both times. A similar reason, to be sure, but not the *same*. Before the flood it states that "the wickedness of man was *great* in the earth, and that *every* intention of the *thoughts* of his heart was *only* evil *continually*" [Gen. 6:5]. Here it is not the condition of the heart of sinners that is being described in general, but that particular *situation* affecting our human race before the flood. This situation had reached an extremely terrible outburst of cruelty and unrighteousness, and the spirit dominating the life of our race was so brutalized and appalling that it suppressed every noble impulse, suffocated every voice of conscience, such that literally and constantly, in all conversation and life expressions, nothing except evil manifested itself. In short, it had become a *hellish* situation on earth. If the fear of God had not survived in Noah's family, there would no longer have been a church on earth.

For that reason the flood came. From the human race that had become so thoroughly sinful no continuation of humanity could occur, equipped to make God's church flourish. Therefore, the current human race was wiped from the earth, and from the single remaining family of Noah, wherein the fear of God

was still maintained, a renewed human race arose.

By contrast, *after* the flood it states the matter entirely differently: "*the* intention of man's heart is evil" [Gen. 8:21]. Here we have a description not of human development during a particular period, but of *the orientation of the heart of the sinner* in general. Because sin takes refuge so deeply in the root of the human heart that from birth onward it poisons the soul, for that reason God will never again provide redemption by means of a flood, but he will take an entirely different route for the salvation of his church.

Calvin expresses this most characteristically as follows: "As this is the condition of the human heart, floods would be a perpetual necessity and there would be no end to the global deluges and continual upheavals of life on earth." Therefore, because man had reached such a condition, and a flood could at once wipe away a completely brutalized race, but could not arrest sin nor bring about salvation, for that reason God the Lord chooses another route now.

There will never again be a flood! The condition of life on earth will never again be violently disrupted. But through the increase of common grace, sin will be restrained with bridle and rein, so that sin will never again before the end of the world develop into such gruesome, hellish outburst and tyranny. If after the flood the earth had become *less* hellish than earlier, this is not because the sinner has essentially improved. Before and after the flood the sinner is just as evil to the core of his being. But the difference lies in this, that the restraining power proceeding from common grace against sin, has become *increased* from God's side after the flood. The beast within man remains just as evil and wild, but the bars around its cage were fortified, so that it cannot again escape like it used to.

At a later time a similar situation will occur once more, when the "man of sin" is revealed, whereby God will then have withdrawn his common grace. But then that will be the end, and the judgment of this world will be executed not by another global deluge, but by the burning of the elements.

This is consequently the counsel that God the Lord took with himself. No flood ever again, but a superior grace for the binding and restraint of sin. And this counsel that he revealed *thereafter* for the first time (see Genesis 9) in blessing and covenant establishment with Noah and his sons, is intended in its depths not for our external life, not for our temporal life, but it is a counsel of God's good pleasure that is intended for the Son of his good pleasure, for the body of the elect, and for the honor of his holy name. This is what Mastricht's argument, despite its confused presentation, saw correctly.

4

THE SPIRITUAL AND PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NOAHIC COVENANT

By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

HEBREWS 11:7

WITHOUT QUESTION, the Noahic covenant has a *spiritual* significance as well, and therefore occupies a place in the course of redemptive revelation. It certainly may not be assigned to a less holy domain, provided that you distinguish sharply between the *content* and the *purpose* of this covenant. That *content* of the Noahic covenant lies entirely within the sphere of *natural* life, envisions *temporal* and not *eternal* goods, and applies to unbelievers just as much as it does to those who fear God. Furthermore, it is not for man alone, but also for the animal. The content of this covenant is simply and plainly this: *that until the end of the world, the surface of our globe will not again be in a position to be disturbed, but will remain as it is now*. To identify this content in a *spiritual* manner and to wish to explain it in a redemptive way is therefore preposterous. That is just as impossible as it would be for you to identify creation itself as redemptive. When God creates light, demarcates the seas, and makes the herbs grow and the earth to swarm with animals, all these activities related to *natural* things, which indeed may have a *connection* with something spiritual, but in themselves they are not spiritual. Calvin rightly observed that the actual promise of the Noahic covenant does not extend further than reestablishing the result of the first creation, and securing "*the normal course of nature*."

You reach the *spiritual* significance of the Noahic covenant only when you look past its content, its special promise, and its subjects (humankind and animal) to which that promise extends, and approach the subject from a completely different angle and ask: for *what purpose* was this covenant

established? Then it will become obvious that the *purpose* of this work of God's grace can lie not with the *lost*, but with the *elect*. Consequently, this purpose is to be sought in Christ, in his people and their future, and through Christ in the glorification of the Lord's decree and name.

Beware of understanding this in a forced sense, as if this covenant were exclusively intended for maintaining access to a particular domain of ordered human life, so that the formation of local churches would be possible. This would be a mechanical concept, imaginable in the fantasy of human invention, but entirely inconceivable within the organic whole of a *history* directed by God. There is a connection, a life connection, organic connection between the elect and our human race, between soul and body, between us and Christ, and between Christ and his kingdom. Every redemptive work goes back as far as creation, and beyond creation to the eternal decree.

Here too we need to maintain a full and forthright confession of the holy Trinity in the divine Being. The work of the Holy Spirit proceeds from the work of the Son, and the work of both may never be considered separately from the work of the Father in the creation. Therefore, Christ is also connected with the life of the peoples and with our natural life. You do not understand John's prologue if you disconnect the Eternal Word in creation from the Mediator in the work of redemption.

So there does indeed exist a strong connection between the covenant of grace, established with the elect, and the Noahic covenant, established with "everything that has breath." That connection is guaranteed for us through the unity of God's decretive counsel and the unity of the work of the Mediator. It is guaranteed by the undeniable fact that God preserved his church in Noah's ark, and by the prophetic calling granted to Noah. In addition, it is guaranteed by the foreshadowing of the final judgment that was embodied by the flood, and which, in the waters of the flood, pointed to holy baptism. But above all, it is guaranteed by the all-determining circumstance that the fruit of the Noahic covenant, as *covenant*, could and still can be, enjoyed only within the sphere of believers.

Of course, the fact itself, that natural life on earth would not again be violently disturbed, is also beneficial for unbelievers and for animals. But the imperturbability, the certainty, the comfort that lay within what God promised us, sealed and sworn, that "never again shall there be a flood," [Gen. 9:11] is shared only by believers. The animal does not know that God established his covenant with the animals also, and the unbeliever, even if he has heard of it, does not believe it, does not accept it, and either forgets the entire account of the

history of Noah, or he makes it a target of unholy mockery.

This Noahic covenant applies to all peoples, and if only the native tribes in the heart of Africa and the Mongolian peoples of Asia realized this, they would also be able to savor the joy of knowing that the almighty God, Lord of heaven and earth, has entered into a permanent covenant with them also.

Even though a certain memory of the flood still lives among these peoples, nevertheless every memory of God's covenant is lost, and they no longer know anything about God's covenant. Even if you were to speak to them about it, they would not understand it any longer or believe it. The memory of the Noahic covenant now lives on only among those nations where the banner of the cross has been raised. Wherever the church of Christ has appeared, it reacquainted these apostate nations with the Noahic covenant and inserted it once again into their confession of faith.

In fact, one could therefore say that no matter how much the Noahic covenant applies to all the nations, it lives within human consciousness only where the church of the Lord became manifest. Consequently, this covenant is similar to the promise of an inheritance made to *all* the children of the same family, but which can be enjoyed and appreciated only by those children who have reached the age of discretion. The promise indeed still *applies* to the others, and they received the benefit thereof, but *in their consciousness* that promise does not exist. They are oblivious to it.

Thus, you see that the *spiritual* significance of the Noahic covenant is hardly unappreciated, even where one strictly maintains that the covenant itself has only a *temporal* reach, promises nothing but a *natural* good, and is common to *all that has breath*. Exactly for this reason, however, the observation may not be omitted that the church of Christ in later ages has read somewhat quickly past that Noahic covenant, which practice may be blamed for people not maintaining the memory, value, and significance of that covenant. For every child among us indeed still learns of Noah and the flood, that no flood will come again. But in the church's faith confessions justice is hardly ever done to this former work of God, and it is remarkable how little attention is paid to the Noahic covenant in the manuals of theological dogmatics. Calvin grasped and emphasized the full significance of this covenant very well—something that is clear to everyone who reads his commentary on Genesis—but after him hardly any attention has been

given to it. Perhaps this might have been prevented if Calvin had discussed this matter in his *Institutes* as well. Then as a matter of course this would have been carried over from the sourcebook of our Reformed dogmatics into later manuals.

Calvin's *Institutes* date, however, to his earlier years, when he understood the entirety less fully, and for good reasons not wanting to revise the original edition too much, he decided to treat this matter in his commentary, but then in detail, and thus it was omitted from virtually every subsequent manual of doctrine.

Only when Cocceius broke up the single revelation of God into the multiplicity of consecutive covenants, did the Noahic covenant come up for discussion again, and in this way especially Petrus van Mastricht discussed still more extensively the revelation that had occurred. Already by that time, however, the work of redemption had come to the foreground in the doctrine of the covenants so one-sidedly, that people knew no better than to view the Noahic covenant merely from its *spiritual* side. This explains why ministers rarely preached about this covenant, taught it in catechesis, or discussed it. One can safely say that virtually this entire period in divine revelation lay dormant, not only among the Lutherans and Methodists, but also among us Reformed.

We need to resist this. Anyone who is not an unbeliever, but who genuinely accepts and confesses that after the flood, God Almighty spoke in this way to Noah and his sons, and established a covenant with all people and all persons through all generations until the end of the world, including with *our* generation, with *our* family, and with *us* personally, indeed, with the animals of the field that surround us, such a person comes before his God with inadequate reverence and gratitude if he does not incorporate this divine covenant into his thought system, if he does not take it into account, if he does not factor it in.

This unbelief is particularly evident in connection with the appearance of the rainbow. With an abundance of words God said to Noah and his sons: "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth" [Gen. 9:12–16]. Thus far God's testimony.

We cannot resolve the question as to whether the rainbow appeared for the

first time then, or whether the already familiar rainbow was simply made into a sign at that time. Among the Lutherans the first view predominates; among us Reformed the latter view is more common. Calvin once stated that "it is pure audacity to imagine that the rainbow appeared only then." As a result, most people among us have rejected the first idea.

Even now, however, there are well-respected scientists who maintain the opposite, and defend the conviction that the rainbow appeared for the first time at that point. For this sentiment they appeal especially to what we read in Genesis 2:5–6, where it says: "When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had *not caused it to rain on the land*, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground . . . ." They fully accept that the rainbow *must* have existed before, because the atmospheric conditions were the same then as they are now. Furthermore, they do not deny that the rainbow colors can be reflected without rain, on a waterfall, for example, or as a circle around artificial light in the mist; and that the colors of the rainbow can be seen through a prism, thus without mist, or even by rubbing our eyes.

Nevertheless, they believe that with the release of heaven's floodgates, the atmosphere took on its current relationships, and from that time onward the atmospheric firmament has appeared in its current form. Thus, for the first time from that hour onward, when for the first time the waters were gathered into clouds and the sun's rays could play upon those clouds, the rainbow could be seen spanning the entire horizon. The refraction of light into colors would have been seen earlier, along with the tinting of those colors by the mist and by a waterfall, but that mighty bow *in the clouds*, spanning the entire heavens, would have been observed for the first time only at that point after the flood.

We will never be able to achieve certainty on this. The meteorologists can give us no solution, for they can only proceed from the assumption that the atmosphere worked in the same way before the flood as it does now, and on that basis everyone naturally admits that the rainbow must have been observed before the flood. But *whether* that is true, nobody can determine with certainty; and in that respect the message of Genesis 2:5–6 is particularly remarkable.

Meanwhile, in the arena of faith, the chief thing continues to be that we have to maintain that the rainbow—aside from the question whether it appeared then for the first time or earlier—from only that time forward was the *sign of the covenant*.

Every Christian shortchanges the honor of God when, as the rainbow appears in the clouds, he does not remember the faithfulness of his God, and does not recognize in that rainbow the sign of the covenant. He is acting like the pagans and unbelievers who observe nothing but a necessary phenomenon of nature, and a beautiful spectacle. Our God has emphatically testified that, as often as he displays the rainbow in the clouds, he is our God, and that he would “see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth” [Gen. 9:16]. This now lays upon us, the children of men, the duty to do in such moments what God is doing, and from our side to view the rainbow in a way that remembers the faithfulness of his covenant.

This was done among our ancestors. They did this and taught their children to do this. And there are still pious people among us who do the same. But their number is declining. The younger generation thinks itself wiser, is less concerned about practicing intimacy with God, and the church of Christ, which hardly ever talks about these things, shares the blame or that decline in devotion.

This subject therefore required that we present this Noahic covenant somewhat more broadly, and focus attention once again on the *rainbow in the clouds*. Only in terms of its interrelatedness will we sense the high importance and the rich significance of such a portion of revelation. The Methodist will never view it rightly, but the person whose confession is Reformed needs only to have these things specified in order once again to see the seriousness of it.

So we will not give up hope that in part through the reach of our word, as often as *the rainbow in the clouds* is seen, the memory of God’s covenant will once again be quickened among every living soul, among everything that has breath.

For that purpose one needs a clear understanding of the difference in the situation before and after the flood. Before the flood God the Lord allowed humanity, if not completely but certainly partly, to indulge sin without restraint. But not entirely, for the bridle of grace had already made its entrance in Paradise, right after the fall, but still only in a limited way. God wanted to show people by their own bitter experience how they would fare, were he to leave humanity to itself. At that point sin was unleashed in anarchy and vulgarity. It persisted and continued until, in just a few centuries, godlessness and cruelty had reached such a height that a *universal* violence had set in, not only in a few spheres, but

stretching from the center to the circumference of human life, so that finally the *entirety* of human life displayed a *hellish* character.

This was the situation of which God spoke: “and that *every* intention of the thoughts of his heart was *only* evil *continually*” [Gen. 6:5]. The situation had deteriorated to such an extent that the entire life of our race had sunk to such a degree of *general* madness, cruelty, and murder that it would ultimately have destroyed itself. Therefore, the judgment of God that came in the flood could not be averted. When the branches and stem of a bush are entirely diseased or withered, the expert horticulturalist cuts them off near the root. This is what God did with our human race in the flood.

Of course, God himself did not have to learn for the first time from this terrible degeneracy and corruption of our race where it would all end if this race were left to its own lusts, *but we needed to learn to understand it by experience*. In what happened here there lies a terrible lesson for the church of all ages. From what happened at that time, we know, once and for all, where our race, where a people, where a family, and where a person will end up if God lets us go, leaves us to ourselves, and withholds his preserving and comforting grace. It also teaches us what it will be like at the end of the age, when the “man of sin,” or if you will, the Antichrist appears, when once again the mystery of iniquity will be unveiled. Indeed, in the terrifying outcome of the degeneration of our race before the flood, lies a pointer toward what the self-generated abomination will be in the place where “there will be eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth” [cf. Matt. 8:12; 13:42; Luke 13.28]

If nothing in the state of affairs had changed after the flood, then in just as short a time as before the flood the development of our race would again have reached the same gruesome point, and once more a flood would have had to destroy us. In that way, therefore, the development of our race would have been nothing but a permanent repetition of the hellish development of that time, each time followed by a universal destruction. Consequently, there would never have been a continuous human *history*. Development would never have gone forward. The mercies of God in his work of salvation would have had no arena for its manifestation. What people now call our humane, our Christian world, would never have existed.

For that reason, after the flood *another order of things*, another state of

affairs, emerged. From that moment on, life itself was entirely different. It was different even in *nature* and in the *animal* world, but always according to the fixed regulation that connected this *nature* and this *animal* kingdom to the life of our human race. This was not through a connection that we lay down, but by virtue of a connection that God himself grounded in the creation of all things. When people are *righteous*, they live in *paradise*, when they *fall*, a curse comes upon the earth, and when they will be *holy* again, the glory of the Lord will shine once more on a new earth under a new heaven.

However mysterious this may be to us, it is true that after the flood, nature with its elements emerged in another manner, and that entire species of animals that formerly moved upon and across the earth disappeared. People still find their remains, but not the animals themselves.

There is a direct link between those changes in the form of the earth and in the atmospheric conditions, and the promise that there will never again be a flood. The fact that there will never be a flood reflects the decision of God's sovereign decree. He prevents it, but this "prevention" is worked out by the nature of things, which are now arranged in such a way that a flood no longer *can* occur.

When we speak of a human ruler we would say that he took measures to prevent a certain undesirable situation. Of course, we do not use this same expression when we talk about the Lord our God. But this does not remove the fact that within God's providential order, the natural relationships on this earth were of such a form and shape that the execution of God's promise was hereby ensured. His revelation to Noah ran parallel with what he, as our God and our Creator, had wrought in the earth itself and in the atmosphere.

This was not the end of it. God's merciful saving hand extended not only to nature's elements, but to *people* themselves. Within the life itself of human beings, a remarkable change took place. One of the most significant changes was the shortening of life spans. Noah almost reached the age of ten centuries. Shem's life was reduced by half, that of Peleg to a fourth, while the length of Jacob's life was 147 years. Yet, this particular change did not stand alone, for that change in the human condition carried a much more universal character. After all, prior to the establishment of the covenant there was a blessing and the instituting of a *life ordinance*, a course, which Shem, Ham, and Japheth were to follow by a *prophetic* appointment.

More about this in our next chapters.

5

THE BLESSINGS OF THE NOAHIC COVENANT

Because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

1 PETER 3:20

THE CONVICTION HAS been established now that the world *after* the flood was arranged differently that the world *before* the flood, and that with the Noahic covenant an altered order of affairs emerged that still continues and will continue in the future until Christ returns on the clouds.

From this fact it directly follows that no one can say, "Well, all these particulars applied to Noah and his sons, but they do not apply to us." Rather, each one has to take as starting point in every domain of life precisely that situation that arose at that point, and calculate from that point. One must instill in oneself and others that he as well as all others with him, including his pets and farm animals, stand within the Noahic covenant in exactly the same way as Shem stood with that covenant after leaving the ark.

It is precisely this situation that one senses less and less. It almost seemed as though the Noahic covenant belonged to the dispensation of shadows, as though what had been prophesied in this Noahic covenant had been fulfilled in Christ, and therefore, after the appearance of Christ, that entire Noahic covenant fell away, like circumcision and the unleavened bread of the Passover. Indeed, this estrangement from what had been given to Noah went so far that people, without putting it this way, nevertheless actually viewed this Noahic covenant as being included in the covenant with Abraham or in the covenant at Sinai. With Noah there had been merely an initial start, the first taste of such a covenant. That supposedly fell away when the much holier covenant with Abraham arrived. That covenant with Abraham was later included in the covenant with Israel. Finally all those ancient, earlier covenants were abrogated by Christ when at Golgotha he established the *new* covenant in his blood.

This is how people have become accustomed to viewing the series of

covenants. The New Testament is in front, as the only one we need to maintain, and behind this, but having now become obsolete and pointless, were those covenants with Abraham and Israel. And then there is a third covenant, even *much farther back* beyond those two obsolete covenants, which in days long gone and forgotten was made with Noah and his sons. Precisely for this reason it has no other value for us except as a historical remembrance. And as a result of these notions, people want to know of no other covenant except one designed for "saving the soul."

Naturally, when people went to register the spiritual quality of the Noahic covenant, they found so little in it that was "saving" that they soon let it drop. If they had recognized that the Noahic covenant is *not* redemptive, but that it applied to the life of every human being, indeed, even to the life of the animals, they would not have made the mistake of putting it on a par with the other covenants. Instead, they would have treated it separately, as a covenant of an entirely different kind. Only then would they have realized that it *could* not have fallen away when those others passed away, but that by virtue of its character and no less in view of its clear formulation, the Noahic covenant *continues* and *remains effective to this day*. We must place heavy emphasis on this at this point.

Anyone who overlooks these words is not possibly competent to discern the implications of this series of articles and be able to evaluate their truth. It is a wrong, unsound interpretation that is being rejected here, and the scriptural presentation that is here being advocated.

In all of our subsequent analysis we will proceed from the truth, which for us is incontrovertible, that the covenant established by God with Noah and his sons was established with you and me as well, and with everything that has breath that is now living, and that therefore the situation that came about at that time still governs *our life*.

Did the establishment of this covenant depend on the agreement of people? Were there negotiations regarding this covenant? Were stipulations accepted or rejected, after which a deal was clinched? In other words, may we place the *establishment* of this covenant on a par with a *contract* among people? Definitely not, and those devoted to covenant theology will do well to pay more attention to the fact that concerning such covenants it is repeatedly said, as it is here, that God *establishes* them.

These are the precise words God employs in Genesis 9:9: “Behold, I *establish* my covenant with you.” And in verse 11: “I *establish* my covenant with you,” and again in verse 17: “this is the sign of the covenant that I have *established*.” Only one time (in v. 12), another even stronger expression is used: “this is the covenant that I *make*,” unless this “making” is interpreted as making the rainbow.

Nowhere do we read of an agreement; nowhere do we read of any approval or of any act on the part of people. It is God who acts. He does it. Not through people and God acting together, but through an act of God alone does this covenant come into existence. It is not negotiated, but *established*—an expression which means that because of that act, the covenant does not lie dormant, but rather stands *upright* and *fixed*. It is therefore partially comparable to *an ordinance of God*. God does not ask whether people approve it, but he decides and it remains that way, even if people should resist it with all their might.

You might understand this best if you compared it with the course of the heavenly bodies. They also move and have their own places according to God’s ordinance; nevertheless, the Lord says to Jeremiah that he has *a covenant* with sun and moon. We read in Jeremiah 33:20–21[a]: “Thus says the LORD: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken.”

An *ordinance* given by God and established as a fixed appointment, an order of things that he has divinely and sovereignly prescribed and determined, can therefore receive the name of *covenant* if it applies to a subject with its own midpoint of motion. Hence this name of *covenant* is used already when it refers to sun, moon, and stars, but finds a much stronger application where it refers to people.

For that reason, and only for that reason, God’s ordinance, which governs and rules the current arrangement of things after the flood, is called *a covenant*, but a covenant that is entirely one-sided, and not in the least dependent on people having to follow certain stipulations. It is not: “I will not send a flood if you *abide* in my covenant, but if you *break* my covenant, the floodwaters will once more destroy the earth.” No, the promise is absolute, independent of every condition. There will never be another flood, and whether we observe the stipulations or do not observe them has no influence on the outcome.

In this covenant, God binds only himself, and the ordinances with which he

accompanies his covenant are not stipulations or conditions, but commands and statutes that God in his omnipotence institutes and imposes on man as his *creation* and as his *subject*. Age after age, among every country and nation, there is a struggle with one or more of the ordinances that accompany this covenant, but never for one moment was there any suggestion that for that reason another flood would come. God's covenant remained, and still remains; and similarly his ordinances continue to this day, quite apart from the question of whether people act according to them.

And thus not the form of a bare promise or pledge, but the form of a covenant is chosen, since the entire revelation of God serves to arouse in man the religious sense. In every religion a bond, a connection, a covenant becomes operative between two persons, namely, between him whom we must worship, and between us from whom that worship must proceed to the eternal One. The covenant form is nothing else than the form of religion. Where it never gets beyond ordinances, you find a *legalistic*, or at most, an *ethical* relationship. But the manifestation of God's hidden concourse, of religious devotion, of a soul's relationship to the eternal One, comes only with *the covenant*.

Therefore note well that the ordinances accompanying the Noahic covenant are *not* included in this covenant itself. Certainly they stand alongside it, but they precede it, and only after they have been treated, *fully* treated and concluded, does a new and independent subject follows, commencing in verse 8: "*Then God said to Noah* and to his sons with him, 'Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you'" [Gen. 9:8–9].

Of course, we should not infer from this that the preceding ordinances have nothing to do with the covenant, or that they are in no way related to it. The entire chapter shows otherwise. Nevertheless, the fact remains that these ordinances and commandments are not formally inserted into the covenant, but exist outside of it. Therefore, we need to distinguish among three subjects. First we are told of God's *intention*, in Genesis 8:21–22. There it says: "The LORD said *in his heart*." That is the first item. Following the first is the second in Genesis 9:1–8, where *God's address to rescued humanity* is set before us. And only then, in Genesis 9:9–17, do we have the third item: *the establishment of the Noahic covenant*, containing nothing other than God binding himself solemnly to everything that has breath, in order never again to bring a universal

destruction upon this earth until the return of Christ, and sealing this promise with the sign of the rainbow.

Let us therefore put aside the Noahic covenant for a moment, and consider more closely *that address of God Almighty to rescued humanity*. That address, full of majesty, spoken not by the LORD to his own people but by the Creator of heaven and earth *to all of humanity*, reads as follows:

> And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.
>
> Whoever sheds the blood of man,
>
> by man shall his blood be shed,
>
> for God made man in his own image.
>
> And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it [Gen. 9:1–7].

This divine discourse *begins* and *ends* with "pronouncing a blessing," and includes all the rest within this framework of blessings. It does not say: "And God spoke to Noah," but explicitly: "And God *blessed* Noah and his sons." For this reason people mangle the significance of the spoken narrative if they seek this character of a *blessing-granting* grace only in verses 1 and 7, and exclude it from what lies in between. This much may be admitted, that in verses 1 and 7 this character of blessing is more explicit. Note what is written here: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth," and again in verse 7: "Be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it."

What lies included between both of these explicit blessings involves the

following. First, man is given moral supremacy over all the animals. Second, man receives permission to eat the flesh of the animals. Third, man is prohibited from eating raw meat with its blood. Fourth, God provides the establishment of government and the institution of the death penalty. These four items are to be understood as expressions of *grace*, and only in that way can they be correctly understood.

Eight persons stood there around the altar, and they stood there as one, or if you like, as four families, with the question in their hearts: Has mankind been ruined now in one single family, or has the human race been saved, and will the human race expand again into a great multitude? And the answer was: With *a multitude* all the earth would be filled. God Almighty and he alone could create people, could make that restored humanity come forth from the loins of those four men, and in this way ensure the continued existence of our human race.

But a fear of the animal world had come over this small crowd. A wild, raw, destructive power against human beings had survived in that animal world. It remains one of the most surprising outcomes that this powerful animal kingdom did not succeed in eradicating what at that time was such a tiny human race. What could four men do against that multitude of animals, when one single lion or tiger was enough to overtake and destroy people who were as yet so poorly armed?

In Europe nowadays we hardly think of that fear any more, and one needs to travel to Asia or Africa where each year thousands and tens of thousands of people are still being killed especially by tigers and snakes, in order to understand that fear with which the animal world terrified people in those earlier years. Bears still live throughout Europe, and with bitter frost they become somewhat overconfident and descend from the mountain regions to the flatland, only to encounter immediately an entire host of experienced hunters armed with first-rate rifles, who shoot them. And from their sleighs people shoot the wolves that still render especially Eastern Europe unsafe.

But it was not like that in earlier times, especially not in Noah’s days. The greatest problem then was how *human society* could defend itself and be safe from the *animal kingdom*. This problem became the foremost issue, and it was primarily with a view to this fear and dread having entered the human heart that God reassured our human race immediately after the flood. The animal world would not overpower our human race, but the hand of mankind would be over the animal world.

That this would be the case was not due to man, but came to man from God,

along a twofold route. The first route was that God endowed man with leadership and deliberation, and granted him ingenuity, in order to outwit the lion and to defend himself against the lion with the right weapons. And, secondly, it pleased God to instill *fear* of humans among the animal world.

The wild animal especially surpasses a human being in raw, destructive power, such that human resistance would be inconceivable. But you see most clearly in the mighty horse, that it adapts to a human being; it yields to a human being; it moves out of the way for a human being, and it bonds so intimately with its master that it seems to become nothing less than an extension of that human being. Now this is a universal phenomenon that manifests itself, albeit in a less evident manner though quite noticeably, among various kinds of animals. The lion of the forest will suddenly pounce on a buffalo, but hesitates to attack a human being. A wild animal will soon withdraw to places further afield when it notices a person entering a wild habitat.

So we are dealing here with the impression animals receive from people, and what that impression would be depend on the relationship between man and animal, ordered by the Creator, who brought both together on the earth. This was therefore a grace, a good favor of our God, that he laid “the fear and dread of man” upon the animal kingdom. Not that people had control over the animals, but “they were *given over* by God into the hand of man” [Cf. Gen. 9:2]

The fact that in this phenomenon it is *grace* that is speaking is to be understood not only in the sense that for man it was a gracious arrangement, but also that by this act of grace God suppressed the evil consequences that man had brought upon himself through sin.

In Paradise fear of man did not exist in the animal kingdom. The animals came to Adam in quiet submission, and he observed them and understood them, and called them by their name. When the plant world did not yet produce thorns and thistles, there was no dangerous threat to man from the animals.

But when the curse burst forth on account of sin, and the divine harmony of Paradise was broken, then indeed thorns and thistles sprouted, and a bloodthirsty appetite to kill men entered into the wild animal. If God had permitted this bloodthirstiness to operate unbridled, and humanity had been annihilated in this way, then what would have overcome us would only have been the righteous punishment for our apostasy from God.

But instead of leaving us as prey to the natural consequences of our own wickedness, God the Lord comes to us in his mercies, and in this wrestling between human society and the animal world he takes our side against the animals, and fills the animals with fear and dread of man. Conversely, he has granted to man a capacity and alertness over against the animal that is more than a favorable arrangement, but consists of *grace*, because, our sin notwithstanding, it diverts from us the just punishment of sin. Even the fact that the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea are mentioned in this context is hardly superfluous. People have discovered the remains of earlier species of birds that must have spread fear and dread wherever they roamed because they were terrifying monsters of gigantic proportions. There were animals whose hideous representations people have reconstructed and whose skeletons still make us shudder. For that reason, it was necessary for Noah and his sons, who were surely still acquainted with the tradition concerning these monsters, that the birds of the heavens would have been mentioned, and the animals from the watery depths also had to be mentioned, so that neither shark nor crocodile nor any other river monster or sea monster would fill man with deadly fear of sea and stream.

Nevertheless, God's ordinance concerning the animal world was not yet complete. Brute creation did not finish there. Not only did it please God to transfer the fear that man had for the animal to the animal itself, but he also gave the animal to man *for food*. "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything" [Gen. 9:3].

This ordinance in the Noahic covenant is new. Originally in Paradise this was not the case. At that point, food for humans consisted in what the plant world offered as its delectable fruit, but you will discover no trace of eating meat. We are inclined to doubt that this justifies the claim that before the flood people would not have consumed meat.

It is almost unbelievable that during such a wild situation as the one resulting from the development of our race before the flood that the only human nourishment would have continued to consist of herbs and fruit. But a more clear indication is that the division between clean and unclean animals had already become customary already before the flood, and with the ordinance concerning the animals that had to be gathered into the ark God himself accommodated this

division. Nor may we forget, as our fathers already observed, that in Paradise after the fall, God clothed Adam and Eve with the skins of sheep, something that presupposes the slaughter of these animals.

In addition, after the flood, eating raw meat with its blood was forbidden, a prohibition that makes sense only if this crude, barbaric practice had appeared widely before the flood. For that reason, we reject the supposition, advocated even now by some believers, that before the flood all people would have been vegetarians. Even though formerly the eating of meat was *common*, nevertheless the original creation ordinance that designated the plant world as man's food was never in that sense supplemented and expanded. Yet this is what happened *after* the flood. It is God himself who after the flood institutes the use of meat for people. It does not say, "If need be, you may eat it, but it is better to refrain from it." Rather, as generally as possible, it says, "It shall be food for you as I have given you the green plants"—a phrase that referred of course to Paradise. For even though this ordinance certainly does not include the claim that people *must* eat meat, such that not to eat meat would be a sin, nevertheless it cannot be denied that in one and the same breath meat is here identified with the green plants as ordinary food for people. The result is that anyone who goes on to set up a different rule in opposition to this and *condemns* eating meat as illegitimate, wants to be wiser than God, and violates his divine right to determine how things must be.

6

THE ORDINANCES OF THE NOAHIC COVENANT

But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

GENESIS 9:4

IN THE SOLEMN word spoken by the almighty God after the flood to rescued humanity, that is, to the human race that had been spared, immediately after granting the right of man to kill an animal to take its meat for nourishment, there follows a twofold ordinance designed, in contrast to the forfeiting of the *life of the animal*, exactly for the opposite purpose, namely, for the preserving of the *life of man*. The significance of this ordinance must therefore be brought to light.

We begin with the observation that people often mistakenly confuse both of these ordinances with what the Jews call the Noahic commandments. According to the Jewish scholars there are seven "Noahic Commandments." These consist of prohibitions against (1) idolatry, (2) whoredom, (3) blasphemy, (4) murder, (5) theft, (6) eating blood, and (7) anarchy, or as they express it in the *explanation*, concerning the obligation to establish a government. They imposed these seven commandments on "the proselytes of the gate," and even ascribed to the observing of these seven commandments a certain share in eternal salvation.

They judged rather that six of these commandments had been laid down already for Adam in Paradise, and that during the time of Noah only the prohibition against eating blood was added. To the extent, however, that in Noah's time the incomplete six commandments were completed by the addition of that seventh commandment, and in this way the complete set of "seven ordinances" applied for the first time to Noah's descendants, they called them the *Noahic* commandments. To prevent any misunderstanding we had to make this comment at this point; for the rest, however, we will not engage this Jewish invention.

Let us return immediately to both ordinances of God reported to us in Genesis 9:4–6, which the church usually reads past far too quickly. Both of those

ordinances are (1) the prohibition given to the humanity that sprouted from Noah against "eating flesh with its life," and (2) the commandment given to this renewed human race to punish a murderer with death. Both ordinances are given in terms of their mutual connection in Genesis 9:5: "And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man."

Let us pause to consider each of these two ordinances separately.

The first ordinance concerning not eating "*flesh with its life*" has occasioned much misunderstanding, and even Calvin, and in his line our most Reformed expositors, have weakened the power and significance of this ordinance by a less correct observation. With this commandment, the Jewish scholars did not go about placing the general idea embedded in this ordinance in the foreground, but gave it a formalistic interpretation that descended into minutiae, and precisely in this way limited the moral scope of the commandment.

This ordinance, as some imagined, referred to the loathsome custom that had become ingrained especially among several nomadic shepherd tribes of cutting a piece of raw flesh from the body of a living animal and letting the mutilated area close by itself. The title of the seventh of their Noahic commandments, *Ever min Hachai*, literally means "the limb of the living" and it is probably still related to this interpretation. Expanding the formalistic meaning, the second ordinance was read as a prohibition against introducing any drop of blood in one's food. Finally, from this the rule was deduced that God was forbidding us to eat the flesh of any animal, since with its slaughter all of the blood had not drained out down to the last drop.

The custom, still maintained among the Jews, of slaughtering cattle or sheep in such way that all of the animal's blood is completely drained, is due in part to such understanding of the original ordinance. And since they derived this custom from a Noahic commandment, it was obvious that not only were they to follow this manner of slaughter, but they must place this requirement on others as well. According to these scholars, every other method of slaughter went against an *explicit* command of God.

When Calvin and others came to explain this prohibition, they did not adopt this rabbinic interpretation, but they nevertheless saw in this ordinance nothing other than a *ceremonial command* that as such bore a temporary and pedagogical

character. This explains why, given their natural aversion toward all superstition and works righteousness, they did not concede the applicability of this ordinance of God in the Christian dispensation, and counted themselves bound to the universal command that condemns cruelty and brutality. Amid the tumultuous struggle then raging in ecclesiastical and civil arenas, there was no time for pressing the full significance of the Noahic covenant. And the suspicion that here as well people were on the path of a kind of works-holiness activism led imperceptibly to making the familiar distinction at this point between the *ceremonial* and the *moral* within the commandment—a distinction that certainly fits with the covenant of shadows but not with the Noahic covenant.

Neither in Paradise nor with Noah, but with Israel the *ministry of shadows* arose for the first time, at that particular moment when the sacrament of circumcision was instituted. Consequently, with Israel the entire ministry was a foreshadowing in symbolic form of the spiritual truth that would arrive in Christ. You find nothing of this, however, with the Noahic covenant. This covenant refers not to an eternal, but to a temporal good. And the promise of this covenant was hardly abrogated by Christ, or hardly fell away with his coming, that we still now, after eighteen centuries, boast in the certainty that no flood will again destroy the earth. You see this most clearly in the sign of the covenant. The signs of the Israelite covenant, namely, circumcision and Passover, are abrogated and have fallen away, but the sign of the Noahic covenant still shines in the sky. So then, we do not hesitate for a moment to leave this ceremonial view of Calvin for what it is, and to maintain the perpetual validity of this ordinance.

The position you need to have on this matter was indicated by a person no more thorough than Calvin himself. Do you possess of yourself, that is, by nature, the right to put an animal to death and to eat it? Stated another way, does your right to kill an animal and use it for food proceed from creation, or not? Calvin denies this and is absolutely correct. Killing an animal is an act of violence that goes against a sense that has been created within us. The initial instincts of our heart still protest against the cruelty of such a business. Throughout their entire lives, especially women, by virtue of this sense, continue to feel aversion toward all killing of animals. Many a butcher has suffered a nervous breakdown by constantly suppressing this aversion. Vegetarians find support in this protest that arises from our very nature. The more refined and

nobler our development becomes, the more painful our experience when we ourselves are called to lead a sheep to slaughter. Many feel this aversion less with hunting, because killing occurs either after a chase or from a great distance. But taken in general, it cannot be doubted that by nature we recoil from shedding blood *also with animals*. Even the *sight* of blood in itself is gripping. The right to kill an animal can be inferred even less from property rights. Such has been argued, and on the same basis some have argued for the right of a slave owner to kill his slave and the right of a father to kill his child. But this pretense rests entirely on circular reasoning, of course. First one declares property rights to be absolute, a right *without limits*, and then one classifies slave, child, and animal as property, over which the capriciousness of the owner has limitless power.

Since, however, in order for us to classify the animals, the primary Owner found and captured the animals for us, and in terms of the procreation of the animals, even though their number is limited or expanded by man, nevertheless *life* must be recognized never as coming from man but only from God, since as the one who created and gave life, only *he* has authority over that life, including the life of the animals. Without arguing the matter in broad detail, Calvin admits that man would have no right at all in this matter, if the Lord had not explicitly assigned him this right. The granting of the right to kill animals and to be fed with their flesh demands therefore the character not of a natural ordinance but of a *positive ordinance*. Exactly here lies the basic reason why the granting of this right was tied to a *restrictive* stipulation. You may kill an animal and you may eat it, but under one condition: that in your roughness and barbarity you do not lose sight of the honor you are obliged to show me as the Creator of the life of that animal.

So it does not say that you may not consume meat with blood; rather, *blood* is mentioned only in the second place, and what is placed in the foreground in the ordinance is that you shall "*not eat flesh with its life [soul]*" [Gen. 9:4]. That "soul" [as older Bible translations render the word] certainly does not refer to a "spiritual essence" within the animal, but simply to its *life*, that which is in the animal as long as it is alive and disappears from the animal when it is dead. Therefore it is your God by whose power alone life is granted also to the animal, who by his ordinance requires from you—who can indeed *take away* the life of an animal but cannot *give life* to an animal—that when you eat of the slaughtered animal, you must wait until life has completely departed from the animal. You may slaughter the animal; but then you must wait until all life has departed from the animal, until the *soul* is no longer in the animal, and only when it has become

flesh *without the soul* may you take it for your food. It is therefore a very serious question whether drinking warm animal blood, as some doctors in our day prescribe, does not go against this positive ordinance of God.

Concerning this life of the animal, or as Scripture calls it, the *soul* of the animal, we are told that it is in its blood. Of course, not as if this blood itself is this soul, for this blood later congeals and then disintegrates. It only means that within the body, blood is the chief conduit for keeping the body in motion. The life that is the soul is different in the entire body, and Scripture itself teaches us that even when all the blood remains in the body, nevertheless the soul leaves the dying by means of the last breath. So the blood is presented here as the preeminent and, from our vantage point, most expressive and tangible conduit of life. If that animal has just been killed and the warm blood is flowing from the wound, then man must keep his distance. That flesh can become food only when the animal is gone and nothing remains but stuff that is set to decay.

For this reason, the letter of this ordinance is observed but the spirit of it is killed if one loses sight of the soul, the life, and continues to be devoted fearfully to the blood, as though eating a piece of cooked or roasted flesh from which a few drops of blood escape when it is cut, renders us guilty before God. Anyone who comes to such a judgment loses sight altogether of respect for God the Creator of the life and of the soul of the animal, and continues hanging on to the material elements of the blood. Such a person reads Scripture as though it said, “But the flesh in which there is still one drop of blood you shall not eat,” and forgets that it says something very different: “But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.” Our translation does include the phrase “that is,” but those words are not in the original text. With this we are keeping carefully in view that in Leviticus 17:14 and other passages, under the dispensation of shadows, not only the eating of *fat* but also of *blood* was forbidden (Lev. 3:17; 7:26; etc.), but this was entirely in agreement with the ministry of the shadows among Israel, which in everything had to be specified formalistically and outwardly. Nevertheless, it is exactly that specification of Leviticus 3:17, “you [shall] eat neither fat nor blood,” that shows in a convincing way, precisely through the addition of the word *fat*, that we are definitely not dealing here with the ordinance given to Noah but with a levitical stipulation. This was valid for the Jews until Christ came, but has fallen away in the dispensation of the New Testament.

The occasion for this ordinance would likely have been that in Noah’s preflood environment, raw meat containing the warm blood was frequently

devoured. This practice is acceptable for a *beast of prey*, but not for a *human being*. A beast of prey attacks his prey, and puts his claws and teeth into it. So too a beastly man who imagines that he has a right to the animal, and thus attacks, downs, and devours it. And against this unholy and brutish situation God institutes a situation of order: An order in which man receives the right to the animal, the right to kill it and take its flesh for food, from the One to whom that animal belongs and who gave life to that animal. But that order is also an order in which man kills the animal in the name of his God, respecting the supremacy of his Creator over that animal, and therefore takes it for food only when its life has completely departed and the flesh that initially *contained the soul* became flesh *without the soul*. Since this fact was observed for the normal use, that as soon as the blood has been drained and as a result the life-warmth has departed, that prior draining of the warm life-blood is established as a requirement.

With this enough has been said about the first ordinance, an ordinance that in its sacred significance naturally applies to us as well. It remains valid until the end of the world, and must be obeyed by everyone who honors God as Creator and fears him as the only Giver of all life.

We come now to [Genesis 9:]5, which constitutes a transition to the second ordinance. That verse reads as follows: “And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.” These words oppose first of all what people call cannibalism; that is, they oppose the gruesome custom that unfortunately still exists among numerous peoples, of eating the flesh of a dead person. In three regions of the world, Africa, Australia, and on a few Asiatic islands, that dreadful custom is still maintained. Formerly it was even more common, and it must undoubtedly have been just as rampant before the flood, not to mention the number of human bodies that were cut up in a way resembling the carcasses of animals, and devoured by people either raw or roasted. The reports about this that have been circulated by travelers and missionaries make your hair stand on end. Even stores selling human flesh were not a rarity until recently.

Well then, this cannibalism is an imitation of animal behavior, and therefore both are joined together in verse 5: “And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every *beast* I will require it and from *man*.” The wild animal

kills a man, not out of malice or rage, but to devour him as its prey. This is how one animal kills another, and this is how an animal kills humans, *as if humans were also animals*. On that devouring rage of the animal, man puts his seal, and *in so doing man becomes like an animal*, as often as he, like a cannibal, kills a human being to devour him as prey. In that manner the boundary line between animal and our human race is erased. Man is incorporated into the animal kingdom like a unique species of animal, and the same theory that the Darwinists preach philosophically today has been put into practice for centuries already by the cannibals with their hellish bacchanalia.

So a dam needed to be erected here. The profound distinction between our *human* race and the *animal* world needed to be safeguarded against weakening and blurring. All the more now that man acquired the right to kill animals and take them for food. For that purpose the ordinance of "not eating flesh with its life" was initially given. Here, after all, lies exactly the distinction between a tiger or a man choosing an ox for food. The tiger devours the ox with its life; the man takes him for food only *when the life has departed*. The tiger steals its prey and does not know God; the man uses a right given him by God, but simultaneously honors the Creator and the Giver of life by waiting until life has departed.

But verse 5 erects a second dam. From the fact that man receives from God the right to kill the animal and after its life has departed, to take it for food, it hardly follows that the animal in turn receives the right to devour the man, or that a man may eat his fellow man. On the contrary, both of them are explicitly denied *that* right. No animal may devour a man, and no man may take a fellow man as food. Despite this having occurred, however, God will require an accounting for all this shed blood.

In what manner God executes his judgment in the animal world in not mentioned. Therefore, concerning the words, "from every beast I will require it [your lifeblood]," one can come up with nothing more than guesses, to which our next chapter will return. The subject of requiring payment for shed human blood from the hand of murderers will be discussed as part of the interpretation of Genesis 9:6. At this point we will suffice with the observation that, when viewed properly, the starting point for the arrangement that God instituted for Noah's posterity lies in the distinction between *human beings* and *animals*. This was actually the first distinction confronting these *eight* "children of men" who came out of the ark. From that first and most natural distinction proceeds the entire divine instruction. The claim of Keil and others, that within this ordinance

one can supposedly find an early pointer to Israel's peace offering, appears less acceptable for that reason. Calvin's judgment is more attractive, that the goal and design of this ordinance are to ensure the *human* character of *human society*, even though we admit (but then in the *reverse* sense) that the sacrificial ministry under the dispensation of the shadows concentrated exactly for that reason on the "*shedding of blood*," because in the difference between *blood* and *blood* lies the basis of the entirely distinct value of *man* and *animal*.

7

THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN LIFE

If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

REVELATION 13:10

THE FACT THAT the command given to Noah concerned the avenging of *murder*, not just initially but almost exclusively, is in accordance with human nature and history. After all, history narrates how the situation with Cain and Abel almost immediately issued in murder, and human nature explains why in the protection against murder, the protection of all our human existence is provided simultaneously. The danger of being exterminated was for our human race at that time very great. After the flood our entire future depended on four men, and how easily an attack by a wild animal, or murder after a fraternal quarrel, or even death by disease could have taken that foursome. A fear that must have come over them early on, now that they had just stared at the appalling spectacle, how except for eight souls the entire human race had drowned in the flood. How easy it would have been for the lone family of Noah to have gone down under the waters, along with the thousands and ten thousands of families, and then our human race would have been *gone*.

After a shipwreck where virtually everybody has drowned, the one person who survived senses, at least for the first little while, that life is a precarious and anxious possession. Even after a terrible epidemic, that fear for endangered life continues to lodge in the heart of survivors for months long afterward. The tension following a great war is similarly explicable as arising from a similar kind of fear. What then must it have been like in that one family of Noah who had seen the whole world drown, and now standing alone and solitary and abandoned in an almost crushed world, having soon to fear the worst from the quickly multiplying wild animals. An ordinance of God like the one promulgated here, coming like a shield to cover the life of people, as much against the wild animals as against human bloodthirstiness, was therefore entirely *relevant*, fully

suited to the situation, and must have had a comprehensively encouraging and comforting effect.

It is sufficiently apparent how before the flood the life of people was often cut off by an attack of a predatory animal or by murder, and how necessary it was that the promise never again to bring universal death through a flood over the earth was supplemented by an ordinance of God, which assuaged death by predatory animals and by murder. Up to this point, three factors had been operative in causing people to disappear from the earth: predatory animals, murder, and the flood. People were terrified of those three factors, and it is over against those *three* factors that God places the contracted and diminished human race in safety. Against the flood by means of his *promise*, against the predatory animal by means of his *ordinance*, and against murder by means of his *commandment*.

"For your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it," is God's ordinance that precedes even the command against murder [Gen. 9:5]. Naturally in this connection the question is very weighty whether we have to imagine the flood as covering the entire globe or only the inhabited portion thereof. Of course nothing is to be deduced from Genesis 7:23, which says, "He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth." When in John 12:19 we learn of the complaint of the Jewish hierarchy, that "*the whole world* has gone after him," no one takes this in the sense as though the members of the Sanhedrin had intended to say that the inhabitants of the entire globe were following Jesus. When it says in John 21:25 that the world would not contain the written books, no one takes this literally. The saying in Lamentations 4:12, "The kings of the earth did not believe, nor any of the inhabitants of the world, that foe or enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem," hardly means that every living soul, head for head, in every region of the world, had an opinion about the strength of Jerusalem's fortress, but only that those who lived in the surrounding area and who had lived in Jerusalem held the view that Jerusalem was impregnable.

Already from these few examples, therefore, one sees that such formulations in Holy Scripture hardly need to be understood in the *broadest* possible sense, but very often must be taken in the *narrowest* sense. "The whole world has gone

after him" means: the whole world *to the extent that it came into contact with him*. That "the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" intends to say that there would not have been room for them at the current book shops; and with "any of the inhabitants of the world" who saw Jerusalem as an impregnable fortress, Scripture is referring only to those who had heard the rumor of Jerusalem's strength.

So it could well be that in the narrative of the flood, such general expressions are referring only to that part of the world that counted for Noah or where people lived. Most likely at that time only the middle of Asia was inhabited, and that inhabited region was entirely covered with water. But this does not entail the conclusion that the other side of the globe, what we now call America, underwent the flood. It *could* have been that way but doesn't necessarily follow from the expression. This being the case, God's ordinance against the predatory animal presupposes that no universal extermination had occurred. If at that moment all the wild animals were extinct, except those few pairs rescued in the ark, it is not clear what kind of danger would have threatened humanity from the wild animals. For at that point they would have been entirely under the control of Noah and his sons. They would have locked them in cages or stalls, and nothing would have compelled them to release them, and they could have dealt with the young newborn animals as they saw fit. So on the assumption that all the rest of the wild animals except the few specimens that were in the ark had become extinct because of the flood, it is difficult to explain how that definite feeling of dread for the predatory animal would have come to dominate people.

Just as we observe these animals in our zoos without fear, so Noah and his sons may have also viewed the enclosed lions and tigers, and the ark with its strong construction may have served as a repository for the beasts of prey. Nothing forced them to release those animals, thereby endangering the women and children. The ordinance against the predatory animals is explainable then only if one accepts the premise that the extermination affected only that portion of the earth where people were already living, and not the remaining portions of the earth. There the predatory animals continued to exist, and from those regions those animals could find entrance again into the region where Noah lived after the flood waters receded.

How we should understand those words, "and for your lifeblood I will

require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it" [Gen. 9:5], is not so easy to determine. Only this much can be said, that it does not mean one for one, as if each particular beast of prey that attacked a human being must be killed as punishment for that. The text itself opposes such interpretation. Concerning people the words are emphatic: "from his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man" [v. 5], and therefore, head for head. But with regard to the beasts of prey we do *not* read, "from the hand of *the same* animal," as if the meaning were one for one, but in general, from all animals. Consequently this permits the other interpretation, that each kind of animal that attacks a person would commit its own death.

By God's providential arrangement the course of things would be regulated in such a way that the animal species that respected and served men would gradually increase and gain in significance, and conversely, the animal species that shed people's blood would be wiped out. In fact, this has been the course of history, and even now, all the beasts of prey of the entire populated world have in a restricted sense been driven back, and they exist now only in some mountainous regions and in forests.

This goal has now been achieved by means of God's twofold action. First, he armed man with heroic courage, ingenuity, and weaponry, in order to overpower the beasts of prey; and secondly, he instilled fear into the predatory animal so that it would withdraw as soon as people approached it. We see this best when we observe a tamer of wild animals. Even those historians who do not acknowledge God recognize these facts. The beast of prey has withdrawn and extinction is its future.

And, although these facts are recognized, Scripture gives us more. Indeed, it reveals to us how behind and within these facts, a *divine administration of justice* is at work that exacts satisfaction from the beasts of prey for the human blood they shed. The people who have been attacked by a tiger or a bear, recoiling in fearful desperation and being torn apart by their claws, while dying, had in that moment, when nobody was there to help, cried out to God to avenge the gruesome act that caused their death. And although an ordinary account senses nothing of what was happening within the victim at such a moment, and certifies only his death, Scripture reveals the mystery operating behind the veil of the visible, and hence tells us that God Almighty will exact payment from the predatory animal for its nefarious deed.

Predatory animals will not succeed in wiping out the human race, but people will drive out the predatory animals as revenge for the shed blood. But this does not ensure that the life of every person is now saved or protected. No less serious is the second danger, namely, that humanity might destroy itself by murdering *each other*.

Until recently it was the rule in the interior of Africa that in the autumn one tribe would attack another tribe, and the victorious tribe would then usually massacre the vanquished tribe or sell the prisoners as slaves. Time and again entire tribes were massacred in this way, and slaughters occurred on a scale that would make you shudder if you read about it. Even in devouring their victims people could match the predatory animal.

This is the reason why the second *command against murder* comes after the ordinance concerning the beasts of prey, and in this formulation: *"From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man."* Concerning the beasts of prey we read that God will require a reckoning for human *blood* from the *animal species*, but here we read that he will require the *soul* of the victim from the hand of another *human being*.

Both differences deserve attention. Although we admit that the words *soul* and *blood* are very closely connected, and that the one word is often used instead of the other, nevertheless this does alter the fact that we need to note well the difference when both words appear in a different way in the same verse. It is remarkable that with the predatory animal mention is made only of *blood*, but with the murderer mention is made of *the soul*. The blood is the carrier of the soul, the soul is the life that is found in the blood. Where only the *blood* is mentioned, this refers more to the outward, just as the predatory animal often licks up the blood. With the person who commits murder, by contrast. the matter is taken more seriously. The murderer makes himself wittingly and willfully guilty not only of shedding blood, but occasionally even apart from shedding blood, guilty also of killing life, that is, of extinguishing the life of a person, such as by means of poisoning, strangling, or causing death in a number of other ways. Predatory animals kill for food, and therefore feed on the blood, but people act far worse, for often their act involves the enjoyment of seeing their victim suffer and die, finally to take him from the land of the living, or only to kill him out of hatred and revenge.

As peculiar as it was to speak of *blood* in connection with *predatory animals*,

it was as natural in the case of a *person* to mention not the *blood* but the *soul of a person*. The animal knows nothing of a soul, and thirsts only for *blood*. By contrast, blood is only the means to get to a person's *soul*, that is, his *life*. The root of murder lies not in hunting for prey, but in hatred and malice. He who hates his brother is a murderer [cf. 1 John 3:15].

Just as remarkable is the *second* stipulation: *from the hand of his neighbor*, this is, from the hand of the person's murderer, head for head, separately, because he is the brother of the one murdered, and thus *the murderer's brother*. Evidently this refers back to Cain and Abel. In that case they were two brothers, of which one murdered the other, and precisely in the fact that it was the murder of a brother, the abhorrent nature of this act is heightened in our human consciousness.

However, the Lord now declares that this same evil character attaches to all murder, for all who are called human are joined by one communal fraternal bond. Cain asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" But God answers by issuing a command that declares that every person should guard the life of his neighbor, because he is *his brother*. Someone who murders his fellow man is therefore inhuman, who instead of preserving life extinguishes life, and squanders instead of protecting.

And since this is the reason that every murder comes to stand in the sober light of *fratricide*, the Lord therefore declares to Noah and his sons, *"From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man."*

The command for capital punishment is not included here per se. In these words exclusive mention is made of what God says *that he will do*. The parallel with what is declared about the predatory animal may therefore not be lost from view. God will require the *blood* of the one murdered from the predatory animal, and he will require the *soul* of the one murdered from each and every murderer. If in the case of a predatory animal there is no mention of a judicial inquiry by man, but of vengeance that God executes in his providential order, then the context requires that one apply the same to what is said about the murderer as well. Concerning him as well it is declared here *what God will do*. God will require of him the soul of his victim, and he will do this by means of his providential order. This verse says nothing more, and Calvin was absolutely correct when he spoke here of "God's hidden action." Our Bible commentators

also first mention the capital punishment executed by the government in connection with the following verse. What is said here about “requiring from the hand of the murderer the soul of the one murdered” [cf. Gen. 9:5] must be explained on its own, and refers to what we were told earlier, that “the voice of your brother’s [Abel’s] blood is crying to me from the ground” [Gen. 4:10]. Likewise it refers to what we read elsewhere about the blood of the martyrs that cries out from the ruins of the cities accursed by God (Rev. 6:10 and elsewhere). Not a single person was ever murdered whose blood God did not avenge or will avenge.

This occurs in various ways. Often this occurs simply by means of an immediate deadly fear cast into the murderer’s soul, which from that moment on robs him of all rest and peace and joy of living. More than one murderer has finally surrendered to the authorities because he could not deal with the remorse of his conscience, and he literally *thirsted* for punishment in order to regain his peace of conscience. The identity of murderers who never reached this point and whose crimes were not discovered, who suffered the rest of their lives on account of that remorse of conscience, come to be known on more than one deathbed. They were tortured and tormented for their crime, sometimes for forty or more years, day and night. The murder they committed was punished with a *moral death*, with carrying around a living corpse for years afterward.

In the second place, God very often punishes the murderer whose crime remained undetected by overwhelming him in terms of his divine providential order with a very violent punishment, occasionally with a punishment equal to his crime. Someone who did not spare the child of another would occasionally be punished with the murder of his own child, more terrible than if he himself had been murdered.

Added to this, in the third place, is the eternal punishment. There is a prelude to God’s justice here on earth, but the actual administration of his divine justice comes only in the last judgment. So when God says that he will require the soul of the one murdered from the hand of his murderer, and you are dealing with a villain whose conscience has been seared and whose life went on without unusual punishment, that does not in the least contradict the absolute truth of this declaration. God will require the soul of the murderer’s victim from him, and the fact that he has not yet done so up to this point simply means that he will do it all the more terribly on the last day. This applies to *all* of God’s judgments. Undergoing his punishment already here and now is indeed seen to be grace. The most fearful thing is if God spares us here and heaps up his vengeance for the

day of his irrevocable judgment.

Apparently, there is only one exception to this. There are indeed many who, after having reached out their hand to take another person's life, came to accuse themselves and by God's grace were led to genuine conversion. Such is known about several whose crime of murder came to light, but also by the deathbed disclosure of several people whose manslaughter had remained hidden from the worldly judge. These people have passed away, whether on the scaffold, or on their deathbed, in the full assurance that their terrible sin had been forgiven, and that the soul of their victim would no longer be required from them. Only in this way did they die in peace.

But does this remove the truth of God's ordinance? Obviously, not in the least, for every child of God confesses that the punishment that brought him peace was laid on the Lamb of God. In this way, such a converted murderer has found peace for his soul only when he believingly confesses that his Savior has borne also this his murderous guilt, and has atoned the guilt of the shed blood in the shedding of his own life blood.

Therefore, we must in no way—absolutely none at all—limit the complete validity and the full extent of the Lord's declaration. Even now, as in the days of Noah, the established regulation continues to operate with exactitude and strictness, namely, that God had required, does require, or will require the soul of every one who was slain from the hand of the one who has slain him.

Until now, however, the motive for God's never-abrogated judgment continued to consist simply in this: that God created men from one blood as brothers, and that therefore the extinguishing of the life of a person is for that reason a violation of the deepest awareness that God has imprinted in the heart of all humanity, and that this breaks the bond wherewith our God has bound one person to another. Whoever commits murder, acts from the root of hatred, of malice, of sin in its divisive and socially undermining form. It is egoism and self-interest that one employs in order to eliminate any competitor to his egoism. In murder, sin reveals its principally devilish character as it goes directly against the fraternal bond of love. The wretch who commits this crime in this way assaults God's fundamental ordinance for all of human society. He violates his inborn human instinct. For this reason, as the One who created people under the ordinance of fraternal solidarity, God must avenge this brutal violation of his

divine order. Only in that way can his ordinance continue to be maintained. *Not* to avenge would at this point be to abandon his decree and order, to surrender his ordinance, and to hand over the entirety of our human life to the wild turbulence of sin and passion.

But even with this we have not yet said enough. There is more at stake among humanity than God's ordinance, even more than the fraternal bond. Man was also *created in the image of God*. This entails that whoever extinguishes the life of another person assaults not only God's ordinance but *God himself* in his image-bearer, and this explains why later in [Genesis 9:]6 God speaks of an entirely different vengeance. With this we come to our discussion of *capital punishment*.

8

THE INSTITUTION OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword."

MATTHEW 26:52

WE COME NOW to an extremely important verse, *Genesis 9:6*, a scriptural statement to which we cannot pay enough attention, given its extraordinary significance. We read in this verse: "*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.*"

Very recently, Professor Mr. J. Domela Nieuwenhuis who teaches Criminal Law at the National University in Groningen, has discussed this statement of Holy Scripture once again, in the weekly journal of the *Nieuwe Sprokkelaar*, in the dispute about capital punishment, but in a manner that is entirely untenable, as will become apparent.

Here is the professor's argument:

> Genesis 9:6 seems to point to the private vendetta practiced in ancient times by almost all known peoples. Nothing else is being said here other than that whoever sheds blood will for that reason receive from people a corresponding recompense, suited to the culture of that time. Here the Lord is permitting what in verse 5 he had identified as his right. There he had said, "I shall avenge," that is to say, "Vengeance belongs to me." From this, however, it hardly follows that God is issuing for all peoples and all times an obligation placed on the government to apply capital punishment. And if one does read that out of the verse, then let him be consistent and not distinguish between murder, voluntary manslaughter, and involuntary manslaughter. For it says, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed." The remaining passages that you cite from the Old Testament contain no words directed to Noah but contain stipulations in the Mosaic legislation that applied to

> the Israelite people. Concerning this I simply want to ask you whether you seriously mean that the Israelite legislation possesses any binding authority for our nation and our time? In my opinion the Christian lives in the new dispensation and not in the old dispensation. Now it is surely known to you that our Savior and Lord repeatedly said, “It was said to those of old, but I tell you.” Those words applied to, among other things, “eye for eye and tooth for tooth.”

The twofold conclusion of this argument can be quickly refuted. The claim that the legislation that was placed by God upon Israel would be applicable still today in its full scope was never made, neither by the aforementioned journal nor by any other person representing our side. Therefore the professor is wasting his arrows when he shoots them at that claim.

But the Reformed position has always maintained, and still maintains, that within this legislation one must distinguish between the moral, the ceremonial, and the political [civil] laws, and that as far as the latter [i.e., the civil law] is concerned, a distinction must be made between the *general principle* that underlies such a legislative stipulation, and the *form* in which this principle is applied to various times and situations. That form has now passed away, but that principle has remained, and we continue to be bound only to those principles, since they have been established by God.

Already with Professor Junius, one of the first Reformed theologians who provided higher education in our country, Professor Domela Nieuwenhuis can find this position explained.

The second comment can be dealt with just as quickly, since it proceeds from the assumption that our Savior, when he contested against what had been said “by those of old” would have meant by this the legislation of Moses. Not only by others but also in our magazine it has been shown with clear and extensive proof that this assumption conflicts entirely with what it says. “Those of old” are not Moses and Aaron, but the Jewish scribes who after the captivity severed the stipulations of the Mosaic law from their spiritual root, and formalistically restricted and falsified them. The requirement of “an eye for an eye” was a stipulation of a judicial nature in the Mosaic legislation. It was hardly intended that the individual citizen would act according to this rule, but only that the government would function in terms of recompense when it came to judicial punishment. “Those of old,” by contrast, who were the scribes, falsified this regulation by deriving from it the right for personal revenge, and saw in this

regulation a rule of conduct for personal living. So with an eye to that, Jesus now says as it were: The false scribes have taught you that you may live by “an eye for and eye” and “a tooth for a tooth,” but I tell you—not as something new, but something that had already been taught in the Old Testament—love your enemies, and do good to those who hate you [cf. Luke 6:27].

The same is recorded in Proverbs 25:21: “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.” Had the professor [J. Domela Nieuwenhuis] simply checked the reference notes in our standard Dutch Bible, he could have avoided erring on this point. The reference note accompanying Matthew 5:21 comments that here “the interpretations of the scribes” are refuted by Jesus; that the teachings mentioned here are found not with Moses but only with them; and thus what Jesus posits over against that is not new *but appears this way already in the Old Testament*. Now the professor is of course free to oppose that explanation, if he sees an opportunity to overthrow it. But what he should not have done was to suppose that no other explanation of Jesus’ discourse existed other than his own. In the meantime the professor can still catch up on the things he overlooked, and *if* there is a serious counterargument to be made, then the professor is welcome to make it.

The important thing, however, continues to be the question whether it is true that in Genesis 9:6 nothing besides personal vengeance is intended, and whether this declaration has nothing to do with capital punishment. We must challenge this sentiment of the professor, and we want to defend that challenge.

We begin then by observing that Genesis 9:6 does not follow Genesis 9:5 as something new, but seeks to further specify the conclusion of verse 5. In verse 5 God Almighty had said, “From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.” Here in verse 6 the manner in which that would occur is instituted, namely, that God will judge the murderer *by another man*. That this, and only this, is the correct and convincing interpretation appears from the omission in the sixth verse of any conjunction. If it had said, “And,” or, “And furthermore, whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed,” then that *conjunction* of “*and*” or “*and furthermore*” could give us to understand that the preceding was finished and a new topic was being started here. But the fact that there is no *conjunction*, and verse 6 is joined to verse 5 without any connective particle except in the form of a participle, requires the sound interpretation that

verse 6 is to be understood as the further explanation of what was taught at the end of verse 5. There is no kind of contrast present. For such a contrast would need to have been expressed in the original language. Since there is none, one may understand verse 6 neither as treating a *new* subject nor as a *contrast*, but must understand it in an *explanatory* sense, that is, as further stipulating in what way and by what means God himself shall avenge the shedding of man's blood. Even the choice of the Hebrew words points to that by means of alliteration, in order to imprint this judicial regulation deep in the heart and firmly in the memory. The Hebrew *dam ha'adam ba'adam damo* exhibits an intentional choice and arrangement of words.

The first uncertainty that must be removed here concerns the question whether in verse 6 we are dealing with an explanation that it *will* happen this way, or with an institution that it *must* happen this way. When Jesus says to Peter, "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" [Matt. 26:52], nothing is being commanded or stipulated or launched or instituted, but Jesus is simply pointing to the fact that anyone who draws the sword makes himself vulnerable. Likewise one could wish to understand Genesis 9:6 as though the words, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man *shall* his blood be shed," indicated nothing other than that this is how things ordinarily go, in part because the victim probably will have someone to avenge his blood with the blood of his murderer, or also because a certain mysterious justice often ensures sooner or later that one who murders another is himself murdered by another. If this were the intention of these words, then of course there would be nothing here about capital punishment, and the institution of capital punishment could never be deduced from this verse. So everything hinges on this point. If the idea is correct which claims that here it is simply being stated, "Ordinarily the murderer gets murdered in turn," then we must surrender our view. On the contrary, if this idea appears absolutely untenable, and that conversely verse 6 is to be understood as a *command* and an *institution*, then herewith the position of the professor is found to be untenable and the way has been paved for assessing our view.

That the latter view is indeed the case is apparent *in an absolutely certain manner* from the conclusion of the verse, where it says, *"for God made man in his own image."* Here of course all the emphasis falls on the conjunction *for*. This conjunction was not added to the translation, but it is present in the Hebrew.

“*For*” in the Hebrew is *ki*, and in the original this *ki* immediately precedes the last part of the sentence. So there is no point in resisting the fact that man’s having been created according to God’s image must be the reason, the fundamental ground, the motive for *why* one who sheds *a man’s* blood shall by *man* be put to death.

As long as one simply keeps *this* sharply in focus, the entire notion that here the verse is dealing with personal vengeance is hereby completely refuted.

You sense this immediately if you would reformulate verse 6 in line with that view [in favor of personal vengeance] this way: “Whoever kills a man will discover that a friend or blood relative of the victim will avenge his life; that appetite for vengeance therefore dwells in man, because man was created according to the image of God.” But that is absurd, you say, since the avenger kills the murderer *not* because the avenger was created in God’s image but because he is a *sinner*, and as sinner takes up the Lord’s justice, giving free rein to the passion of anger that drives him. And that is indeed the case. It *is* absurd, but exactly that utter absurdity shows in an incontrovertible manner the absolute untenability of this entire idea.

The *lioness* that sees that you have killed her cubs will immediately attack you, though she is not hungry, simply out of anger about what you have done to her cubs. To the degree that a man allows himself to be driven by a similar impulse, he is manifesting neither a higher understanding nor a nobler lineage, but a *beastly* trait is operating within him. The fact that man was created in God’s image would therefore have to result in exactly the opposite—in *not* being incited by vengeance but the reverse, *keeping the impulse for vengeance under control*.

For that reason we are not denying that a certain kind of *vendetta* can dominate, as still happens on [the island of] Corsica and in other regions. But this is completely different. The *vendetta* is in this respect on a continuum with the American *lynch law*, and aims *to render justice*. Even anyone who was not at all driven by the passion of revenge was nevertheless held to be executing the *vendetta*. Even though the murdered blood relative was his personal enemy, such that his death was a relief for him, the assigned person is nevertheless held to carry out this verdict of punishment. Even if the murderer was his friend, the obligation for executing a *vendetta* or reprisal still rests on him. This means nothing else than that, with the absence of a sufficient, or sufficiently strict, administration of justice, maintaining justice is placed on part of the people.

We admit without reserve that very often, perhaps even as a rule, evil

passions are *mixed in*, but this does not eliminate the fact that as soon as the retaliation occurs on the basis of the notion that one is appointed in a given case to maintain *justice*, then the retaliation itself becomes part of the procedure for corporal punishment and only then is permitted and justified. In the same way, capital punishment was introduced into the justice procedure by the justice of God. With that, however, one has come to embrace precisely the position we have adopted, which is *that God instituted capital punishment*.

Nor can one say that *the compulsion for justice* would lie in our having been created in God's image, and that therefore one would be able to understand *verse 7* this way: "Because man was created according to God's image, and consequently a strong impulse for justice lies within man, the blood relative or friend of the victim shall avenge the one murdered." This is so for four reasons.

First, we cannot take this view because after the fall it is impossible or impermissible to reason that way from having been created in God's image. In Genesis 6:5 it is explicitly observed that although man was created in God's image, now his heart is depraved, that the imagination of that heart has become totally wicked. The line of reasoning that man was created in God's image and for that reason certain good things are found in him was valid in Paradise but became invalid as soon as man was chased out of Paradise. Even assuming that such a *pure* impulse for justice already lay within man originally, after the fall that is no longer present within him in such a pure fashion, and therefore one cannot argue on the basis of such an impulse for justice. So too we can see how in our contemporary society this impulse for justice has so little vitality, such that rather refined people like Professor Domela Nieuwenhuis, although they have been created in God's image, hardly feel that impulse for justice leading to putting the murderer to death.

But also *in the second place*, this interpretation will not work because then it would need to have said, "*For man was created in God's image*." That is not what it says, however. The active voice is used: "For *God created* man in his own image." The emphasis was placed not on the fact that man stood in this particular situation and therefore must sense this particular impulse within himself, but just the opposite, on the fact that *God* made it so that as a result justice must be enforced not according to what man himself would invent, but according to God's original order. These two reasons are joined by two more.

First, exactly the opposite [conclusion] would flow from the fact of having been created in God's image, namely, that a person should not avenge himself but leave vengeance to God. In his original rectitude man knew and honored the justice of his God and did not arrogate to himself what belonged to God. Now since Scripture clearly teaches us that, according to his original command, God did not place *vengeance* within man but reserved it for himself, then every retaliation born of passion or revenge constitutes a *violation* of the image of God and can never constitute *respect* for the image of God.

In the *second* place, one cannot say that the person who retaliates is therefore moderating his revenge because the murderer was so evil-natured as to murder "someone created in God's image." For the person retaliating is not thinking about that at all. A husband whose wife was murdered pursues the murderer not because his wife was created in God's image but because she was his wife. You find that passion most strongly among people who are completely godless, who consider neither God nor his commandment, and least strongly precisely among those who genuinely respect a human being as having been created in God's image. This cannot be otherwise. For it would be absurd to say that such a husband killed the murderer of his wife because the murderer had assaulted a being who was made in God's image, since *that murderer himself is also just such a being*, and the husband deprived of his wife *may* not himself take the murderer's life precisely on that account.

From whatever angle one looks at it, it seems increasingly impossible to do justice to the words, "*For God created man in his image*," as long as one reads in [Genesis 9:]6 nothing but a certain prophecy that things would occur this way, and refuses to interpret these words as a *prescription* or an *institution*. That entire notion conflicts irreconcilably with the end of the verse, and Professor Domela Nieuwenhuis will never succeed in giving an explanation of these words, in terms of *his*position, that does justice to the context and does not come into direct contradiction of the comprehensive fact of creation in God's image, of the fact of the shattering of that image through sin, and similarly of the practical facts of retaliation.

It is then remarkable that to be on the safe side, the professor *simply omits* these words that govern the entire argument, excising them from the verse and saying nothing about them. One hereby instinctively gets the impression that the professor, who has of course read these words in his Bible, did not know what to do with them, and sensing that they weighed in against his position, preferred to leave them untouched.

More than that, from what the professor writes it appears most clearly that he himself sensed how as a bare prophecy that this would be the course of things could not be persuasive. For that reason he admits that there really is something more in these words, and he seeks that more in the fact that the Lord here *permits*what in [Genesis 9:]5 he had reserved as *his* right. Of course this does not satisfy, but rather is self-contradictory. First he says, "*Nothing more is said* than that he who sheds man's blood will for that reason receive from man a recompense that corresponds to the current situation and is suited to [the present] society." Immediately thereafter, however, he says *that there is still something else* in these words, namely, an abdication to man by God of the right that had belonged only to God. That this is *not* the same but is something entirely different, requires no argument. But this*difference* encompasses an idea that cannot be permitted in Holy Scripture. For then one cannot speak of any instituting of government, nor even of any instituting of capital punishment as punishment, but only that the relative of the victim who before this time had killed the murderer, knowing that he was thereby sinning against God, from now on could say, "Now I may innocently stab the murderer to death. God himself has given me his eminent permission for doing so." That approach, however, is never God's order, ever. The judicial order was indeed adjusted at more than one point with a view to man's weakness, but then as a*judicial order*, and never as a license for sinful man to give free rein to his passion.

Should the professor reply to this that he did not intend to say this, but merely wanted to say that "retaliation by the nearest blood relative" is being instituted here as a *judicial institution*, fine, but then he has moved over to our position and acknowledges with us that here we are not dealing with a fact that is being communicated or prophesied, but a *prescription*, an*institution* is being provided that consists in this, that capital punishment is prescribed to be exercised by the nearest blood relative. Then he is surrendering his position and coming over to our position, and with us he must accept the consequence that in [Genesis 9:]6 properly speaking the institution of government is being sanctioned. Taken apart from an instituted judicial order, however, the rule that he who kills a man must himself be put to death because that victim was created in God's image, would lead to a complete annihilation of our race. For that murderer was also created in God's image, and the shedding of *his* blood would then also have to entail identical consequences. As we will show in a subsequent chapter, this important verse, [Genesis 9:6], is not interpreted properly unless one understands it to contain the institution of government and the command for

that government, either itself or through others, to punish the murderer with death.

9

GOVERNMENT AND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay. And again, "The Lord will judge his people."

HEBREWS 10:30

AFTER HAVING CHALLENGED and, we trust, sufficiently refuted those who find no *prescriptive ordinance* in Genesis 9:6, one that obligates the government to exercise corporal punishment, we come now to the Reformed interpretation of this crucial word. As we see already from the annotations in the Dutch Bible, that interpretation consists essentially in the position that in this declaration God "establishes the government and ordains capital punishment because after the flood, something of God's image remained in man, and he does not permit his image being violated without that being punished." Literally they wrote, "*Here the office of government is established, and the sword is given to it for punishing evildoers*, Rom. 13:1, etc." At the conclusion of the verse, they make this note: "Although God's image was marred and broken through the fall, God has still left in man some remnant thereof, for various reasons, *which he does not wish to have violated, but here ordains punishment for such a violation*."

This brief explanation indeed expresses the general sentiment of the Reformed regarding this item, as can be seen in, among other places, the commentary of Professor Rivet of Leiden, who extensively refutes the sentiment being advocated now again by Professor Domela Nieuwenhuis, and clearly shows how completely untenable the opinion is that sees Genesis 9:6 as simply predicting, with the help of indeterminate prophecy, that the murderer shall sooner or later die an otherwise violent death by means of retaliation. He says that this incorrect opinion was advocated by the Anabaptists and the Socinians, and posits over against them, as the result of his own investigation, this: "That which lies before us here is an *ordinance or institution of God*, proclaimed by his own word, according to which ordinance it is our duty that everyone who as a private individual has perpetrated the outrageous act of shedding the blood of a man, is to be put to death *by a man* lawfully appointed thereto, that is, by the government." Calvin expresses himself in a similar spirit, and this opinion has

always been defended by the Reformed against the Socinians and others. It may even be added that the Reformed do not stand alone in this position, but the Lutherans together with various early Christian interpreters agree in the main with this opinion. Luther placed even more direct emphasis on this than we find in Calvin's commentary.

This last fact has a particular cause. For Calvin focuses attention on the fact that occasionally the murderer escapes his deserved punishment from the side of the government, and in order now to remove from the murderer all illusion that anyone escaping the government's punishment therefore goes scot-free, he intentionally points out that in addition to the government's punishment, there is still a "divine judgment" that occasionally brings about corporal punishment of the murderer already here on earth. This occurs, as Calvin puts it, "through a hidden order" of God, so that sooner or later the murderer nevertheless perishes at the hands of men, as often happens, as Calvin observes, in war. Of course Calvin is not wanting to say that a murderer *always* perishes, whether by the sword of the government or by the sword of a private individual. Some murderers die in their beds. This, however, invalidates neither the sentence nor the punishment, but simply postpones it to the "final judgment," and to "eternal punishment." What is certain is that God requires punishment for every murderer, though this occurs in one of three ways. Where his commands and ordinances are obeyed, *by the government*. If this is absent, *by individual persons whom God raised up for that purpose*. And in the third place, if neither the first nor the second has occurred, *on the last day*.

Following Calvin, Rivet also focused attention on this. That our official commentators on the Dutch Bible were also of this opinion appears clearly from their reference, in connection with Genesis 9:6, to Lamentations 4:13, Matthew 26:52, and Revelation 13:10, three declarations wherein precisely this is observed, that one who slays by the sword will perish by the sword, and that the blood of the murder victim that soaks into the earth is known by God and will be avenged by God. In so doing, these commentators provide the explanation first that here capital punishment was being ordained, but point out simultaneously, as Calvin did, that *in addition to* capital punishment still other methods of retribution occur that hardly cancel the ordinance of capital punishment, but become applicable where capital punishment is not applied, whether because the murderer was not discovered, his guilt was not proven, or his life was spared through the disobedience of the government to God's ordinance.

As far as the history of interpretation is concerned, without fear of

contradiction one can say that the mainstream Christian church has always understood Genesis 9:6 as Rivet did, and that only heretics rose up in opposition against this interpretation, whether it was the Anabaptists, because they wanted to apply the administration of *special* grace as the touchstone for the government and the civil administration, or whether it was the Methodists and others, because they were looking in the first place for the conversion *of the sinner* and only then for *the justice of God*. What Luther declared in his explanation of Genesis 9:6 is hardly an exaggeration: “Here we have the source from which stem all civil law and the law of nations. If God grants to man power over life and death, surely He also grants power over what is less, such as property, the home, wife, children, servants, and fields.”

We still have not finished the matter. The possibility is indeed very small but nevertheless conceivable that the great exegetes of the Christian church had erred, and that the true interpretation of Genesis 9:6 is to be found with the Socinians, the Anabaptists, and other sectarians. For that reason, we have to investigate the place itself and see if indeed this interpretation comports and agrees with what it says. We begin, then, by taking up the conclusion of this verse and paying close attention to the words: “for God *made* man in his own *image*.” After all, the key to understanding the entire verse lies in these words.

For this conclusion is *explanatory*. It is introduced by the *explanatory* conjunction “*for*.” Therefore it is a requirement that what preceded must be explained in such a way that the reason for the preceding is to be found in the fact that God has created man according to his image.

At this point two possibilities exist. The first is that the fact that God created man in his image contains the reason why *man* must punish the murderer. The other is that this contains the reason why the murderer of *a man* must be punished in this way. In the first instance the reasoning would go like this: The right to punish a murderer is given *to a man* because by virtue of his creation in God’s image, man is clothed with majesty. In the second instance, by contrast, the line of argument would come out this way: Because man was created in God’s image, the murder of a man is equal to attacking God’s majesty, and the murderer must be put to death on account of this abomination.

A third explanation is inconceivable. You cannot say that a murderer usually perishes in a violent way and encounters in *his* turn a man who murders him, *for*

man was created in God's image. Such a murder of the murderer is, after all, the fruit of hatred, vengeance, or malice, and neither hatred nor vengeance nor malice can be explained as something flowing forth from the image of God. Never can anyone ever show from the fact that as a private individual he puts someone to death who has a murder on his conscience, that thereby he was created in God's image. *Quite the opposite*. For from Genesis 1 it appears that in "being created in God's image" in itself does not yet contain any *dominion*, not even over the animals. Had this been the case, the *dominion* over the animals would not have been added as something intentional. And yet that is exactly what Genesis 1 tells us.

After man was created in God's image, and when he as yet stood before God in his original rectitude, dominion over the animals was mandated for him through a *separate divine ordinance*. And this ordinance was indeed a creation ordinance that fit man's righteous nature completely, and in this way corresponded with his creation in God's image, but nevertheless from this, *apart from* any mandate, no right for man has flowed forth at all. Our Reformed fathers emphasized this in order to keep God's sovereignty from being violated. All things belong to *God*. *To him* belongs *every created thing*. Including the animal. For this reason the disposition regarding the life of the animal belongs to God alone, and can be laid upon man *only by him*. If this is valid with respect to animals, then it is valid a fortiori with respect to man, and it can never be said that any man, no matter who he is, possesses by nature or by virtue of his creation the right to take the life of one of his fellow men. Only God has authority over man, and God decides. He is the one who kills and makes alive. No man ever possesses the right to take the life of another man, unless God himself grants that right or imposes the obligation to do so upon him.

Suppose that someone saw a defenseless child being brutally murdered, and roused to fury instinctively attacked the murderer and killed him. Even then, in this most plausible instance we would never derive the slaying of the murderer from the image of God. The fact that someone murders another person does not in the least create for you the right to murder him. In the aforementioned vendetta this can occur, insofar as a portion of *the judicial procedure* is handed over to the citizens, but at that point such retaliation flows forth from *the ordinance*, and thus falls outside our purview.

In no way whatsoever, therefore, is the saying, "for God created man in his image," treated justly if one lets the murderer die under the exercise of intentional vengeance or as a result of accidental bloodthirstiness by a third

party. This concluding part of the verse makes sense, especially explanatory sense, *only* with the assumption that here the reason is being supplied as to why the murderer may not remain unpunished but will have to be punished according to the statement of God's ordinance and upon his authority. That reason, that justification why the punishment may not be averted can be explained perfectly from the dignity possessed by the murdered victim. The murder of an ambassador is punished more severely because that ambassador was a bearer of the king's authority, and to a certain degree displayed the king's image. In the same way we can explain and understand perfectly that God said, "The murderer must be punished with death due to the dignity that lay in the murdered victim as bearer of my image." It is a requirement to punish the murderer, not because he overpowered a creature, which would not yet be the most serious, but because he stretched out his hand to strike a creature that stood in relationship *with me*, originally created *in my image,* and thus could not be assaulted without at the same time violating and attacking my royal majesty. In himself a sinner is certainly not always a respectable person, and there are many rascals of whom it may be said that it would be a blessing for us if they disappeared from the earth. The dignity itself that requires capital punishment for a violation does not lie in sinful man as such. But in everything that is called human, no matter how deeply a man has sunk, you are dealing always with a creaturely being possessing basic features belonging to the image of God, and for that reason you shall spare the life of a man, not for the sinner's sake but for the sake of my will, and if you do not spare his life that wicked deed will have to be paid for with your own life.

Therefore, everything here has to do with God and his majesty. This is so not, as many assume, because it pertains to the protection of human life in order to prevent murder. That is indeed the result, as well as the purpose, why God instituted this ordinance, but it is not *the basis* from which the ordinance arises. That basis actually lies in God's sovereignty. People are *his* people. They belong to him. He has jurisdiction over them. Since in those people he has deposited something of his divine honor, for that reason the honor of God is always attacked with murder. That may not happen. His ordinance opposes that. Precisely on that basis alone can *capital punishment* be ordained for the murderer.

Do not read too quickly past that last sentence. For a long time the objection

has been leveled against this single correct interpretation of Genesis 9:6 that if this is correct, then the executioner who shed the murderer's blood would also have to be put to death. He too has shed human blood and his blood must also be shed.

Indeed, this observation would be fully persuasive, as our previous chapter demonstrated, if one understood Genesis 9:6 to involve the private execution of the murderer. Anyone who kills a man without a mandate from God becomes liable for the shedding of that man's blood. For that reason his blood must also be shed. Thereafter again the blood of anyone who killed him. In this way the final point would be reached only when the last man remained, who then could do nothing other than shed his own blood.

But this entire absurd argument falls away immediately if, according to the requirement of the Reformed principle, you take into account the sovereign justice of God. For then it is he whose justice and honor are being violated through murder; the execution of the murderer occurs then in no other way than through the one to whom God gives the mandate to do so. For that reason the exercise of capital punishment never entails a second violating of God's honor and justice, because it is performed by virtue of God's ordinance and upon his authority.

Consequently, only the ancient established interpretation avoids the aforementioned absurd implication, to which every view automatically leads that interprets this as a private undertaking. Not the *life* of a human being, but the *honor of God* in the creature created in his image, becomes the judicial motive. This is something that becomes clear even from the choice of words. As we observed earlier in another context, it states *not* "for man was created in God's image," but with the active voice, with the name of the Lord at the beginning: "for *God* created man in his image." This means that God placed man in this creation as his representative and sent him out across this earth as his ambassador and as the bearer of his dignity.

If with this the interpretation of the end of the first has been established, then at the same time the meaning of the first sentence of the verse has thereby also been decided. The words, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed," *cannot* contain bare prophecy or a superfluous comment about what occurs naturally, but must be understood in terms of the full power of the word "*shall*." Here *shall* means *must*, a meaning that lies embedded in the Hebrew words. In Exodus 21:12 we read, "Whoever strikes a man so that he dies *shall* be put to death." Here too it says not *must*, but *shall*, though it is perfectly

clear that here *shall* means *must*.

As an aside, we need to add here that with stipulations that must be imprinted deeply within the memory, the original text often uses *alliterative* formulations, a phrase in which words begin with the same letter or syllable. For example, in the Dutch metrical version of Psalm 2, we read the phrase "zijn . . . *st*oel op *st*arren *st*icht," where the *st* is repeated three times, forming an alliterative manner of speaking, something that adds force and aids the memory. As we indicated earlier, this is also how the ordinance in Genesis 9:6 sounds in Hebrew: *dam* ha'a*dam* ba'a*dam damo*, with a fourfold repetition of the syllable *dam*, which means "blood." So it catches our attention when in Exodus 21:12, where similarly capital punishment was instituted, now specifically for Israel, we find such alliteration once again. In Hebrew we read, "*m*akkeh 'ish wa*m*et *m*ot yo*m*at." Four words that begin with the letter *m*. This ceremonious manner of expression fortifies the already clear sentiment that in Genesis 9:6 we are dealing with an *ordinance*, with a *command*, with a divine *institution*. Here the form agrees with the content.

Our conclusion can therefore be none other than that the Christian church has always justifiably read in these words not a prophecy, but a *command*, an *ordinance*, and that in this word God granted to man the *right* over the life of the murderer, and placed upon man the *duty* to apply corporal punishment to the murderer. This leads immediately to the question, *to which man* this duty is assigned, and then the context shows convincingly that it cannot mean *everyone who wants this*, but the identity of the man in view here must be determined according to established rule and order. To this extent, Luther was entirely correct to say that *here lays the official institution of government*, as were the Dutch Bible commentators in observing that here *the legitimacy of government* is being established.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that before the flood as well, an individual despot had assumed some kind of dominion over others, or occasionally many people had appointed a leader among themselves in order to defend themselves, although all such functioning of an authoritative person until now lacked *every higher sanction*. People cannot create *authority*. Only God can do that. Even though everybody wants to declare together, "We appoint a leader over us and assign him the right, in the event of murder, to slay the murderer," this would be

nothing but presumption. Only God, who is sovereign over all, can set one man over others and clothe him with authority, and in the same way only God, who created the lives of all of us, can give to one so clothed with authority the right to decide about the life of another person. So then, that is stated here as well.

Until now, by divine providence there existed on earth nothing but *paternal* authority, and *paternal* authority entailed no right to *slay* the child. From paternal authority nothing can be derived analogously in this regard for the government. But after the flood that mandate of authority was given, in assigning the right over life and death. God himself is speaking here. He commands and ordains. He it is who assigns such a right to people, and all those who as people shall exercise this right have to do this in God's name and in obedience to his command. For whoever reneges at this point thereby dislodges God's command concerning *capital punishment*, but at the same time thwarts the explicit declaration of almighty God who, after the flood, grants *his sanction* to the functioning of the government. Suppose that Ham had put Shem to death; at that point Noah had to punish Ham with death, not because he was Ham's father, but as the government appointed over Ham and Shem.

10

FURTHER OBJECTIONS TO CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death.

EXODUS 21:12

BY MEANS OF the accurate interpretation of Genesis 9:6, the difference [of opinion] regarding capital punishment has been decided for us. The words, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed," permit no other sense than that here a judicial institution is being ordained and putting to death a murderer is being assigned as a duty. If one believes and confesses that these words were indeed spoken to Noah *by God*, then it is God from whom this institution proceeded, and nothing remains for us other than *to obey*. Since God himself has ordained it this way, it *must* be this way..

That many do not find this conclusion convincing is generally because they do *not* believe that these words were actually spoken in this way by God: The text says that God spoke these words, but you must not take that in a literal sense. What is intended is merely that this thought arose this way within Noah's spirit, that under the impulse of that thought he imagined that God had given it to him, and on that basis he said to his wife and children, "God said it this way."

We are unable to reason in this context with anyone who thinks this way. What Noah thought about capital punishment is completely irrelevant to us. The issue involves not what Noah thought, but what God *ordained*. What is at issue is not a historical point of disagreement, but the fear, the respect, the obedience that we are obliged to render to God.

Nevertheless with this the issue has not yet been settled once and for all. For the objection continues still further and clothes itself in this form: "It is indeed the case that *at that time* God ordained capital punishment, but this no longer applies to us for that reason. For those days of barbarity, indeed, but not in our age of elevated refinement, [which is the] fruit of the gospel of the New

Testament. All of that is now abrogated, just like all sorts of laws of the old covenant." This comes down to saying that one agrees with us about the interpretation of Genesis 9:6, but opposes us because, as it is said, Genesis 9:6 *is now no longer applicable*.

Our reply to this objection can be brief.

First, where does it say that this divine ordinance is abolished? If you acknowledge that God ordained it this way at that time, then of course this ordinance remains valid until God himself retracts or suspends it. What God himself ordains can be abolished only by the very same God. As long as this has *not* happened, *it remains valid*. We read *nowhere* about such an abolition or retraction. Should someone claim, "Yes, but the entire Old Testament is to be examined through the gospel, and thus this command has expired," then we would dispute this. In the Old Testament one must distinguish between that which *preceded* Israel, and that which was ordained specifically for *Israel as a nation*. Everything relating to Israel *as a nation* constituted the "dispensation of shadows," and to the extent that these were *shadows*, they naturally expired when the Messiah appeared. By contrast, what belonged to the Israelite dispensation but was *not* a shadow did *not* expire, such as the moral law. Even for the specific Israelite dispensation it was only *very partially* true that it expired in and through Christ. But even if this expiration applied to what was ordained *for Israel*, then for a remarkable portion there was hardly any expiration of what God had ordained *before that dispensation of shadows arrived*. In that pre-Israelite dispensation God ordained that man shall work in the sweat of his brow in order to eat bread, that the wife shall bear her children in pain, and so much more. Has all of this *expired* in the new covenant, or has it continued? If you reply, "*It has continued, of course*," then what right do you have to say that the command for capital punishment *has indeed* expired?

Secondly, this command was given to Noah *and his children*. Do you, or do you not, belong to the children, the descendants, of Noah? Has not our own nation descended from Noah and his family? Is he not the second progenitor of us all? In this light, the command for capital punishment was not issued to one particular people, but to *all of humanity after the flood*. It is not a national but a universal-human ordinance, just like bestowing the right to eat meat. One can find, however, numerous people who eat meat but no longer want capital punishment. If you would ask them, "*By what right do you eat meat?*," they refer you to Genesis 9:3. There God gave us this right. For there are people who don't fear God who imagine that they have an inherent right to kill an animal and eat

it. But anyone who fears God and has a deep understanding of justice does not talk that way. Such a person appeals to Genesis 9:3, where God bestowed upon us the right to use meat. But then the question arises at this point as to whether it is anything but pure arbitrariness to say, “What it says in Genesis 9:6 about capital punishment has expired, but what is ordained in Genesis 9:3 about using meat is still valid.” In fact one can say that as often as a Christian who opposes capital punishment eats meat, he is caught in his own inconsistency.

Thirdly, the ordinance of capital punishment belongs to the Noahic covenant. Is this covenant now abolished, or does it still exist, so that we still live under it? In order to find a conclusive answer to that question, one needs only to ask a counter-question: What did this covenant contain, and what was its sign? And if you *can* answer only with *this*: “It meant that there would not be another flood, and the sign was the rainbow,” then with this answer the matter has been decided. You also still rely on God’s promise that there will not be another flood, and as often as the rainbow appears in the clouds, you also still see in it a sign of God’s faithfulness.

On the basis of these three considerations the following has been established: first, the ordinance of capital punishment was given *for the entire human race* that after the flood lived on earth or will live on it; second, this ordinance *cannot* be and was not abolished; and third, therefore no difference can arise concerning the permanent validity of this ordinance. These are firmly established, such that whoever raises doubt already by that fact shows that for him the authority of Holy Scripture is not completely valid.

To this we add the following comment. Far from suspending this ordinance, the New Testament far rather confirms this ordinance. What we read in Romans 13, that “*the government does not bear the sword in vain*,” means, according to the univocal testimony of all expert interpreters, that the government possesses jurisdiction over life and death, even as it explicitly states in verse 4, that the government “*is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer*.” This is something that agrees entirely with the fact that in the only national legislation that came from God himself, capital punishment was indeed ordained. In Exodus 21:12 the Lord said, “Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death.” Similarly in Leviticus 24:17, we read, “Whoever takes a human life *shall surely be put to death*.” Even if we concede that *this* legislation *no longer* applies for us, it nevertheless remains established that the *principles* from which this legislation proceeds have abiding significance. In addition, from this it appears to us that since man is created in God’s image,

murder is a crime against God involving [his] wounded majesty, and for this reason capital punishment must be applied to the murderer.

In order to be thorough, we still need to examine here those *anemic* arguments against capital punishment that have been advanced on spiritual grounds, among them especially the objections that by applying capital punishment one *eliminates the possibility of someone's conversion*, that occasionally an *innocent* person could be executed, and that the execution of a murderer *debases people*.

By putting someone to death because he killed another person, so people claim, you eliminate time for conversion. Here we must deal differently with Reformed people, on the one hand, and with Pelagians and semi-Pelagians, on the other hand. If you are a Reformed Christian, then such an objection is of course absurd. For a sound Reformed person confesses that the salvation of the soul is a work of God's grace that he himself, the Lord our God, initiates, continues, and completes according to his eternal counsel. So if a divinely elect person should face capital punishment, then no capital punishment *can* eliminate his salvation; for "those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified," as you can read in Romans 8:30. In terms of the Reformed position this objection *cannot* even be raised. God's counsel cannot be resisted, and no judge, no matter who he may be, "can snatch someone from the hand of his Father" [see John 10:28–29]. Moreover, this objection *may not* be raised in the Reformed context, because to do so is to place oneself above God's ordinance in order to approve the virtuousness of the ordinance. Since God has prescribed capital punishment for the murderer, to us belongs no further evaluation of its propriety. What God prescribes I as a person simply need to obey. Consequently, anyone who instead of obeying proceeds to claim, "Yes, but then someone is robbed of time for conversion," shows thereby that he wants to be wiser than God and is finding fault with God's way.

By contrast, the matter is different if you are dealing with a Pelagian or semi-Pelagian, who acknowledges *no* personal election, who places the matter of coming to salvation partially in the hand *of man*, and teaches *no* perseverance of the saints. In opposition to such views you can respond in two ways.

The most persuasive is to prove to them from God's Word that they in their

entire position are straying from the way of salvation, and that Holy Scripture truly teaches us that God elects persons, continues irresistibly the work of his grace with everyone who is elect, and that consequently every saint must persevere. Then you are making them Reformed, and as soon as they become Reformed, their objection disappears.

In the usual debate, however, it doesn't go that way, and therefore you can also answer them directly by saying that on this very same basis, war must be abolished. In war, after all, the government is the reason why sometimes thousands of people die in one day, people who had not yet come to conversion. As long as you maintain in your law the right of the king [government] to engage in war, but not the right to punish the murderer with death, then you are worried about the soul of one single criminal but not with the eternal salvation of thousands of innocent people, and you thus come to contradict yourself.

The question then also arises how the government can allow maritime trade, mining development, railway travel, and much more, since statistics show how these and other activities annually block the path toward conversion for an incomparably far greater number of people than would occur by means of the strictest enforcement of capital punishment in any country. For naturally one cannot advance the counterargument that without the shipping industry we would have no coffee and grain, that without mining development we would be sitting without coal, and without railroads we could not travel very far. For from the *spiritual* point of view held by these objectors, neither coffee nor grain nor coal nor travel counts nearly as much as the awfulness of the loss of one soul.

In addition, we can reply that they have always neglected to compile any statistics about spared murderers who later came to conversion, whereas conversely there are cases ready at hand of murderers who precisely by means of the seriousness of capital punishment came to experience the crushing of their souls.

Finally, we can say that insofar as capital punishment restrains the murderer, it is nonetheless a curiosity that they always take a stand on behalf of the *soul* of the murderer and never talk about the fact that the murderer (at least given their [the Pelagian or semi-Pelagian] position) cut off the possibility of conversion for his victim. From all of which it seems sufficiently clear that their objection is calculated much more for influencing piously disposed souls against capital punishment than for honestly defending the soul of the murderer.

Judicial mistakes do happen. Undoubtedly. But what conclusion do you draw from that? The following: that every action of government must be abolished that can lead in any way to the injury of a citizen. One would then have to abolish *all* judiciaries. It should also be clear that judicial mistakes were just as often the reason that someone who was innocent sat imprisoned for years. As far as the general mistakes of the government are concerned, it seems increasingly evident that the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, that cost more than one hundred thousand human lives, was the result of an intentional *mistake* in a dispatch sent from Berlin to Ems. It may also be said that our Aceh War would never have been if a *mistake* had not occurred in the preliminary negotiations.

So various *mistakes* are made by the government, mistakes also with promotions where someone is passed by and thereby held back for his entire career. All these government mistakes have painful consequences for the subject who becomes its innocent victim. Yet, those mistakes are simply the disastrous consequence of the limitation and sinfulness of civil servants, and also of judges in cases of judicial mistakes. Preventing them would occur by appointing to the judge's bench only *perfect* people, who do not exist, or since there are no such people, by abolishing every judiciary and all administration of justice. As long as no one dares to draw this conclusion, this argument holds no water.

People sense this themselves, and therefore say, "Not every judicial mistake can be prevented, but here we are dealing with someone's life." We too find this appalling; but no more appalling than the diplomatic mistake of Ems, resulting is a war that cost the lives of ten thousands of men.

And if you should want at this point to argue that by this mistake someone can be cut off from eternal life in the absence of conversion, we would refer you to what we recently set forth. No, judicial mistakes can only spur us to exercise extreme care, can lead to prohibiting the sentence of capital punishment as long as sufficient proof has not been provided, and can prompt the requirement of stronger proof in cases involving capital offenses. But wanting to abolish capital punishment or to acquiesce to its abolition for that reason, is an option only for the person who does not believe in eternal life and judges that capital punishment destroys someone's existence.

The third objection to capital punishment, that executions debase the masses, is hardly worth pausing to answer. It is obvious that the government is free in the

choice of the manner of implementing capital punishment. No one disputes the claim that that choice is often misguided, but the blame for this falls not on capital punishment, but on the imprudence of the government that acts so ineptly and inefficiently. There have been times when the government comprehended its calling in connection with such an execution to allow the populace to participate in a manner that evoked sobriety and made a powerful impression. People sensed that it was *God's justice* that was being executed, and there was no trace of debasement or excess to be found. We need say no more about this.

We are intentionally silent concerning statistical data. It is impossible to show by means of numbers whether capital punishment is a deterrent against murder and whether abolishing capital punishment causes the number of murder cases to increase. With numbers the plea can be made for as well as against capital punishment. For if someone shows that formerly, when capital punishment was practiced, the number of murders was no lower than now, then we reply, "This is true, but according to your own argument we have advanced so incredibly far in our culture since that time that even a learned man like Opzoomer thinks we can empty the prisons, which would cost the public school more. Ask yourself how much higher the number of murders would have been in those formerly uncultured times if there had not been capital punishment." And conversely, were you to show by the numbers that after abolishing capital punishment murders increased in number, then people will neutralize your numbers with the observation that the increased use of alcohol and cheaper firearms are responsible, and that if the use of alcohol had remained what it had been earlier, and the revolver had not been invented, the decrease in the number of murders would have surprised you. The number of murders committed is the result of such a *variety* of causes that it will always remain unfeasible to determine what influence maintaining or abolishing capital punishment has had on this. In general only this may be claimed, that the murderer was very fond of the discontinuation of capital punishment and this certainly does not argue for its abolition.

Moreover, we will not enter into this entire line of reasoning. It proceeds from the assumption that one would have to introduce capital punishment if it appeared that without it the number of murders *increased*, and could forego capital punishment if it appeared that the number of murders *remained relatively*

stable. In other words, introducing or abolishing capital punishment would then be decided on utilitarian grounds. From our perspective, since we are dealing with a specific command of God, this can never be permitted. God's Word is, for the one who believes and confesses, *the end of all argument*. Where a particular and certain ordinance of God *is absent*, you can, may, and must decide after having weighed the reasons for and against. But as soon as God has spoken, there remains nothing else for you than *to bow your head and obey*.

For that reason, we cannot stop for even one moment to consider a question like whether restoring capital punishment should not wait until the government itself again acknowledges that it is God's ordinance, or until the general public understanding of justice is again sympathetic to it. *Voluntas Dei suprema lex esto*, which means "let God's will be always and everywhere the highest law." And since that will of God is certainly and decisively revealed, not one single objection possesses even the slightest value for us.

If one should claim that a government that does not believe this on this basis cannot implement capital punishment, then our reply is that Romans 13:3 was written under a government that did not believe in Genesis 9:6 either. We would reply further, that we who may confess the authority of Holy Scripture are never discharged from the duty to stand up for the honor of God's ordinance because of the unbelief of the government.

Meanwhile, with this enough has been said and the issue of capital punishment in connection with Genesis 9:6, also in opposition to the objection of Professor Domela Nieuwenhuis, has been, in our opinion, sufficiently explained. We trust that after reading our critique, this professor will himself agree that his article in the *Nieuwe Sprokkelaar* was constructed too carelessly. We also trust that the *Nieuwe Sprokkelaar* will kindly inform its readers that we have provided a substantive response to the article by Mr. Prof. Domela Nieuwenhuis of Groningen.

The only thing still left for us in connection with Genesis 9:6 is to show how in this verse we find at the same time God's ordinance concerning *government*, that is, the establishment of civil authority as such.

More about that in the next chapter.

11

THE INSTITUTION OF GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY

By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just.

PROVERBS 8:15

WE NOW NEED to return to consider the "establishment of the government" as that took place, according to Genesis 9:6, immediately after the flood. Anyone who removes from this verse the instituting of capital punishment may have to consider that they not only advocate a conviction entailing weakened justice in the area of criminal law, but at the same time they dislodge the authority of government. That authority is stable only if it rests in the grace of God. The basis underlying all authority that arises from human free will shifts like sand, and only when that authority expands broadly and unshakably from the irresistible will of the eternal Being does the authority of government possess a foundation on which people can build and by which one dwells safely.

In three ways people have repeatedly tried to ground government authority in voluntary human action. From ancient times people saw acts of violence and domination as creating a right for the conqueror to subject to himself the people of the country that he controlled. Indeed, an authority thus established stood on a solid foundation as long as the conqueror always had the requisite military power at his disposal to maintain his supremacy, but no longer than that. As soon as the power of his sword weakened and the first conquered land saw a chance to set against him a power of some significance, then rebellion broke out against his authority, the bloodstained tyranny was broken, and those who were once oppressed rose to power. This explains the constant turmoil and unrest in regions and times when the authority of the government arose most often from such acts of domination.

Already in ancient times people sought to establish as being just the view claiming that the conqueror must be allowed, after some time had passed at least, to consider his possession as lawful. But it does catch one's eye how this

conviction, which on account of sin *had* to be nurtured (as long as no orderly state of affairs could otherwise be born), has nonetheless falsified the notion of justice through such large-scale crowning of robbery after murder, while in the private sector no murder was punished as severely as murder for the purpose of stealing. We will refrain from going into more detail here.

With this issue, however, civil justice faces a most difficult problem. For example, a hostile army invades your country, and whether or not a battle rages, against which you are powerless, you will either be crowned with honor for your faithfulness to the dynasty of your fatherland, or punished with a bullet as a traitor. In fact at this point justice does not rest on any foundation but hangs from the tip of a sword. This suffices to clarify that the right of the conqueror for his authority has no solid foundation.

The second way in which people have attempted to find such a foundation for authority lay *in the free will of man.* Each person, it is thought, by nature had the right to determine his own fate. Nobody could exercise any jurisdiction over him. Authority over him did not exist. But that person himself can call such an authority into being by his own free will. Standing alongside him were other people who were equally free. Were all these people to remain standing loosely alongside each other, this could be dangerous for all of them together. So it became desirable that a kind of administrative government would arise to keep order. Those individual persons, by an exercise of their free will, called such a government into being.

This was the foundation of the entire system of the French Revolution, with its doctrine of “social contract.” But of course this foundation was far from solid. For historically it could nowhere be demonstrated where that agreement had been made, where this contract had been concluded. It rested on pure fiction. In the nature of the case, someone could arrange something like that only for his own person, but not for his children. A person who reached the age of majority needed to have freedom of choice all over again. The system also entailed that anyone who wanted to choose differently tomorrow had to have the right to do so. It also meant that in one and the same city or village, one person had to be able to choose *for* such a government and another person *against*. As a result, along this path no comprehensive and overarching administrative government ever arose.

Finally, a third way in which people imagined that such authority originated is what one can express most clearly by speaking of *spontaneous development*. People who advocate this view believe that a certain irresistible natural impulse

operates throughout history. They believe that as a result of this impulse, certain events are interconnected, and that as a result of those events, one person ascends higher and another descends lower. In that way a certain power of the one group arises over the other group, which ultimately is consolidated in the supremacy of an individual person.

This system appears more stable than both earlier systems, since it fits the facts of history. It has indeed happened this way. Unfortunately, however, this system, which is not merely historical but at the same time pantheistic, had to lead to the loss of every moral quality of [historical] events. In this system, the noblest deed of a hero that liberated his nation comes by right to stand on the same level as the basest cruelty that massacred a nation. William of Orange won authority by risking his blood for his countrymen, but the [House of] Bourbons won it by cruelly massacring their countrymen by the thousands on St. Bartholomew's eve. In this way every moral quality departs, and history leads to authority resting on the *right of the strongest*, but then only to yield later to an arm that is still stronger.

For that reason, everything must be constructed for the dignity, the ethical character, and the security of authority in such a way that authority exists and is believed to exist *by the grace of God*. "Grace" here is understood in the sense of "common grace," the subject we are currently discussing. However, "by the grace of God" does not mean that God bestowed a special *privilege* upon a certain person, house, or dynasty, as if he had delivered a country or nation to such a house as its private hunting ground. "Grace" in this expression means God's gracious arrangement whereby he created order amid the chaos of a sinful world and arrested the disruptive destruction of sin.

In every given case this arrangement consists of two parts. In the first place, God institutes government authority as such, and secondly, he ordains in his providential administration the person who will exercise this government authority in a certain region or appointed country. If this sovereign or regent believes that this is how he received his authority, and if the subjects believe that this is how authority was invested in him, then this conviction is the bond that binds sovereign and subjects together, and this authority bears a holy character for both, and both are accountable to God for the things they know they have done for or against that authority. The rule, then, is that "by me kings reign," and

the apostolic word becomes true, that “all authority that exists comes from God” [see Prov. 15:8 and Rom. 13:1]. This is according to Jesus’ answer to Pilate: “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above” [John 19:11]. Therein lies the solid foundation of authority, since God’s will is exalted high above the changing character of our human ways of life, and is in itself absolute.

This “reigning by God’s grace” has nothing to do with the so-called “divine right” of kings, as if a sovereign were a privileged person who had received an entire people as his possession and at his disposal. Even less does it contain the idea of a theocracy, for a nation is governed theocratically only if God himself *gives the law* to a nation *without* the intervention of people, as he did to Israel, a law that is then also fixed and unchangeable.

This being the case, it is therefore of utmost importance to understand in what manner this instituting and establishing of government authority has occurred. What originates in creation develops and operates automatically, and therefore need not be initiated separately and intentionally. That happens, for example, with the authority that a father exercises with respect to his child, because this authority arises imperceptibly and automatically from the nature of their mutual relationship.

But this is entirely different with government authority. In a sinless situation there would have been no government authority proceeding from people, even as in the kingdom of glory there will be no more government *from* people *over* people. Not even with respect to Christ. For at that point he will deliver the kingdom to God the Father, so that everything leads again naturally to the creation ordinance, for then God will truly be *all* and *in all*. Such government authority arising *from* people *over* people must therefore be instituted and validated. The person who exercises this authority must be free to be able to show his title. It should be patently clear to [every] conscience that such authority is bound by God’s will.

Do not forget that this authority may lead to the greatest sacrifices. Your money may be taken for taxes, or your children for the battlefield, and that however innocent you may be, you can be robbed of your freedom and even undergo corporal punishment [see 1 Sam 8:10-18]. Where government authority can make such an enormous infringement upon your personal existence and

personal freedom, it is of course necessary that you be deliberately bound *in conscience*; and in order to be so, it needs to be divinely revealed to you that indeed this God, in whom is your life, has ordered and ordained it to be this way. Then we submit, otherwise we do *not*.

How shall you know that? Surely Paul's statement is very valuable, that all authority that exists is from God [see Rom. 13:1]. Also valuable is what Jesus said to Pilate: "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above" [John 19:11]. Similar value comes from the Lord's declaration through the poet of Proverbs as the personification of Wisdom: "By me kings reign."

Still, by itself this does not satisfy you. Before Christ's birth and Paul's appearance, nations and peoples had lived for thousands of years under various governments. Government authority did not appear for the first time with Pilate, to whom Jesus spoke, or with Nero, under whom Paul wrote. Even when the poet of Proverbs compiled his wise sayings, governments had already existed for centuries, and among many people who lived outside the sphere of Israel, governments had existed under which the wisdom poet sang and lived.

This is how the matter stands, then, that all of this explains in what way government authority arose from God's side, but it does not tell us how and where it was instituted and validated. Involved here is the *institution*, the *establishment*, an act or declaration of God whereby he ordained [government] to be that way. Such a human governmental authority is not natural, but *anti*natural. For that reason it is not automatically legitimate, but is legitimate only by virtue of an ordinance of God. *Where* will we find that ordinance? *Where* is the authority of government instituted and validated?

To this our fathers always answered by referring to Genesis 9:6. That this is clearly the case is apparent from the addition of the official comment in the Dutch Bible at Romans 13:4, which reads that in Genesis 9:6 the government "*received its authority* to employ capital punishment." And this "*receiving authority*" is the point at issue. You people think you have authority over other people, but from whom did you receive that authority? You cannot have this authority from yourselves. Your fellowmen cannot have given you this authority, for then they would have needed to possess it first themselves. None of us is his own master, for nobody lives of himself and dies to himself, but together we

belong to our God who *alone* has authority over us [see Rom. 14:7–8]. And so the question still remains: how, whence, and when did we receive this authority?

We urgently request our readers to place all the requisite emphasis on this. The one true position that Scripture points out to us is that as people we by nature have authority over *nothing*. All authority belongs to God and God alone. All things belong to him and nothing to you. You have no authority over anything, no matter what it might be, unless God grants you this authority.

Just read the creation account. In Genesis1:26 and 28 God *grants* humanity dominion, dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky and the cattle. In the second place, humanity is given dominion *over the earth* in Genesis 1:28. And in the third place, humanity received authority over "every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit" (Gen. 1:29). Initially all of this belonged to God, *not* to people; but now God *gives* it to people, and only because God gave it to people do people obtain the authority, dominion, and jurisdiction over it. People were not even allowed to eat what was edible without God's permission. This explains why Genesis 2:16 says, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden," but then note what follows: "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat." This would not have made any sense if by virtue of their nature people had everything at their disposal.

Indeed, on this one tree, the tree whose fruit God had forbidden people to eat, depended the principial, all-determining question, whether God or a human being was lord and sovereign over this creation. If God had the right to permit or to forbid eating, then *he* was sovereign. By contrast, if humanity had the right and authority, contrary to God's command, over this tree as if it belonged to them, then God was *not* sovereign over the world, but the authority over the whole world belonged *to humanity*. And so it becomes clear at once why the entire issue of God's sovereignty and supremacy was involved in the prohibition against eating from this particular tree.

Now if this establishes that human beings have no authority, not even over an animal or tree, not even over a worm or an insect, unless God gives that authority to them, then even far less can someone set himself up as an authority in order to assume power and control over another *person*, let alone over millions of *people* at the same time. Such a power and such a control can exist only if God institutes and ordains that dominion of one *person* over other *people*.

Judicial experts, who should construct jurisprudence as before the face of Christ, surrender in an unusually thoughtless manner the entire foundation of

jurisprudence if they do not show clearly where that *mandate for authority* of one person over another was introduced. And exactly for that reason the study of law itself causes such incalculable harm when it lets Genesis 9:6 slip from view or glosses over it as though it were an obsolete injunction. Actually, not only capital punishment but also the *institution* of *a government* itself is then being entirely abandoned.

If you should ask, then, where the first dominion of one *person* over another *person* was instituted by God, we would to point to Genesis 3:16, where God speaks to the woman after the fall as follows: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and *he shall rule over you*.” The commentators on the Dutch Bible add here: “This means, you shall be obliged to adapt yourself to your husband’s will, and *he will have authority over you to command you*, which will be burdensome for you according to the flesh, whereas before the fall it was nothing but delightful.” Here we have the *bestowing* of an authority, a jurisdiction, a right to command. The dependence [of the woman on the man] existed here by virtue of creation itself, but in such a way that the woman did not want it to be any different. It was natural for her to follow. At that point there was no commanding, and there was nothing like *authority*. But now that two wills have risen in opposition against each other, order had to be created amid chaos, and for that reason God instituted the authority of the man over the woman.

By nature a woman’s influence on a man is much stronger than a man’s influence on a woman, but when it concerns authority, decision, administration, and establishing rule and order, then God has clothed a husband with authority over his wife.

Actually in a certain sense this marital authority already carries within it the character of *government authority*, for it is the granting of authority of one *person* over another *person*, so that the one person must yield to the other, *since God commanded and ordained it in that way.* It is certainly true that usually the man is *stronger*, and as such actually possesses some supremacy; but this does not yet create any superior right. This superior right, however, is contained within the *authority* over the woman that God is here explicitly bestowing upon him.

Meanwhile, there is still a certain distance between the institution of the authority of one person over another in the small family circle and the larger circle of human society in nations and lands. For a time this arrangement of family life was able to extend by means of patriarchal authority to the bond between generations, families, and tribes. But when humanity began to multiply and came to occupy too large a territory, generations and families began to lose touch as they began living too far from each another. Eventually this marital authority, which naturally extended to the children of the woman, was unable to extend to the entire society. This explains why there was a need for government authority that would no longer emerge from the family circle and would bear a *mechanical* character. Mechanical, because the head no longer existed organically with his subjects through kinship or marriage.

Already before the flood such authority must have emerged. Yet the question now arises whether *such authority*, which had not arisen organically from the family, could be legitimate as an authority *that God had bestowed*. Before the flood you find no trace of any revelation concerning this. Exactly for that reason it is of paramount importance for the Lord God to "validate" (as our fathers used to put it) *this* specific authority after the flood.

How can such an authority be validated only in an absolute sense? The answer is "only by the Lord God making such authority, the authority *of* one person *over* another person, *absolute*." And the authority of one person over another person becomes absolute only by God granting the right to have jurisdiction over the life and death of another human being. Where that authority, where such power is granted, there we necessarily find the most absolute authority over people invested in one human being, and this therefore validates government authority in an absolute sense.

Well then, *this* is precisely what God did after the flood. When Cain killed Abel, Adam did not yet have the right to kill Cain on that account. Rather, God opposed this. But after the flood God instituted for Noah and all his descendants, including us, the ordinance that the blood of the one who sheds blood must and thus also may be shed *by another*.

The conclusion that therefore involuntary manslaughter should also be punished by death is obviously unfounded. God's ordinances do not work that way. When it says, "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" [Gen. 3:19a], this hardly means that nobody may eat bread unless his work made him sweat

first. Rather, all such explanations violate God's word. Such ordinances are not statutes from a penal code, but divine institutions with a rich germ that will develop by itself. That is also how it happened, namely, from this ordinance [in Genesis 9:6] there automatically developed both government authority and the right for putting a murderer to death, in good order and under further regulations.

All those who claim that people arranged it this way among themselves and that no ordinance, no institution from God was necessary, simply repeat the sin of Paradise. Just like Adam was not allowed to eat from any tree without permission from God, so too no government may rule over us people apart from God's decree. And whoever ignores this is acting as Adam did when he ate from the forbidden tree, and together with Adam he is proceeding on the assumption that man himself can determine his own affairs without God granting him that right.

The conclusion, therefore, is that in Genesis 9:6 both government authority is validated and capital punishment is instituted, not only for that time *but for all times*, for all of Noah's descendants, and thus also for us and for our descendants, until the coming of the Lord on the clouds.

12

A NEW DISPENSATION

"This is like the days of Noah to me: as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, and will not rebuke you. For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed," says the LORD*, who has compassion on you.*

ISAIAH 54:9–10

WE ARE NOW ready to present the conclusion from what we have been considering thus far. Taken broadly the result comes down to this: *after the flood the altered order of affairs has entered upon our earth*, and it is this altered order of affairs under which we are still living. Before the flood the situation of the earth itself and of humanity dwelling on earth *was different*. The earth itself underwent a remarkable transformation during the flood. After the flood, life on earth displays a *different* character.

That altered order of affairs resulted from the Lord's lofty decree. The plan of God's counsel unfolded in what occurred at that time. In the chain of events that binds together Paradise that was lost with Paradise that will be regained, the flood and the alteration that this flood brought about in our existence constitutes a very important link.

The Lord's holy wrath was manifested in the flood, but the dreadful verdict executed by this flood nevertheless pointed to *his grace*. According to the tenor of the holy apostle Peter's formulation, the water of the flood corresponds to baptism that now *saves* us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21). The "grace" displayed in the flood was not *special* grace but *common* grace. The ark did not save unto eternal life but for temporal life on earth. This explains how in the ark not only the "church of God" was rescued but also the reprobate Ham, together with the animals. For this reason a difference of opinion about this is impossible. The grace shown here is not particular, restricted to the elect and leading to eternal life, but *common*, extending to everything that *has*

breath, for *this* dispensation. Precisely for this reason the Noahic covenant is of such paramount important to us, since it points to the situation that still continues and wherein we yet live, which will endure for our children and grandchildren until the Lord's return.

For that reason, the idea that we need to be concerned only with the New Testament, and with the Old Testament only insofar as the shadows of the new dispensation overlay the people of Israel, and that even further behind this lay the Noahic covenant that is entirely irrelevant for us, must be resisted to the utmost. It is precisely the other way around. The Israelite situations have lapsed, and for us they have no other significance than principial and prophetic significance. But what lay *back beyond* Israel in the Noahic dispensation has *not* lapsed, but existed before Israel, among Israel, after Israel, and still exists. It is the order of affairs in the midst of which we ourselves live, which was introduced during Noah's time.

For that reason we began our discussion of *common grace* by taking our point of departure in the Noahic covenant. From there we will return to Paradise, and then trace the course of history up to our own time, so that ultimately the entire tableau of the general grace or common grace of our God may appear before us in clear portrait, and so that the significance of that common grace for our Reformed confession and Reformed practice may be illuminated clearly. With a view to this we saw the need of discussing the Noahic covenant in depth. Many who did not discern our purpose thought we went into *too* much depth; some even grumbled about verbosity. Yet a more concise discussion here would have been a mistake.

For the last century and a half, the entire Noahic history has been neglected, has been treated superficially in catechism instruction, and has disappeared almost entirely from sermons, so that we could not have obtained a firm basis unless we had started with an accurate exposition of Genesis 8 and 9. Especially the question regarding capital punishment had obscured the correct insight into these chapters in such a ludicrous manner that apart from honest and extensive interpretation at this point we could not have gone further. We may not rest content with placing one opinion over against another opinion, but it must be demonstrated in a *sure* manner why the vague opinion regarding these chapters is unconvincing.

The neglect of this Noahic account dates from the end of the disputes between Cocceius and Voetius. This account played a major role in that conflict, but unfortunately it came to be included as only one of the many covenant accounts within a longer or shorter series of accounts. The result was that the entirely unique and principial significance of the Noahic covenant was gradually lost from view. The fact that it concerned “common grace” and not “particular grace” was not perceived. And when finally the battle-fatigued combatants put their swords in their sheaths, the congregation comprehended the Noahic covenant as nothing more than a judgment upon sin, a warning against a debauched life, and of little significance as a preparation for the covenant that later was to be established with Abraham. When we compare the [extensive] attention that Peter van Mastricht gave to the time of Noah with the sketchy discussions of later times, then we have to agree that we may legitimately complain about neglect and underestimation. With a view to this, people will appreciate our attempt to revive once more the significance of the Noahic history by means of a somewhat broader treatment.

Allow us to summarize the results we obtained in the following main points.

First, what is rescued from the flood is the *human race*, not simply a few people, but the race itself, which God had created in Adam as the head of humanity. For thousands and tens of thousands were swallowed up by the flood, but only *eight* people rescued, but those eight were related to each other. These were not eight men or eight women, not eight young people or eight old people, and not eight people gathered from far and near, but these eight people stood in an organic relation to one another. They constituted a family; they constituted a race. They were men and women, old and young, fathers, mothers, and children, and those children were married. However terribly the flood had ravaged the human race, so that almost all its branches were snapped off and the trunk itself was nearly cut down to the ground, yet the tree was still alive at its root and at its severed stump. Later that stump sprouted again with remarkable speed, its branches sent forth shoots on every side, and those branches blossomed with a rich show of foliage. So today our *human race* lives on the earth, having come forth from the ark, and as something rescued by the ark, it is the same *human race* that was once created in Adam.

In the *second* place, the earth on which we live is still the *same* earth that existed before the flood, but significantly *changed* in its nature by the catastrophe of the flood. The idea that nothing would have happened at that time except a temporary rising of the waters that, after having covered the earth, retreated for the earth to appear again in the same form, seems to rest on a misunderstanding. God himself speaks in Isaiah 54:9–10 of the waters of Noah, and of the oath of his covenant that he would never again bring another flood upon the earth, and then immediately states, "For *the mountains may depart and the hills be removed*, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you."

We read in Genesis 7:11 that all the fountains of the great deep *burst forth*, and if the earth's surface teaches us that enormous ruptures, shifts, rifts, and eruptions had taken place, then it appears that in the *departure of the mountains* and the *removal of the hills* something of the events during the flood still reverberates. It is therefore remarkable that Psalm 46:2 and elsewhere speak *of moving mountains "into the heart of the sea*," and that in his instruction about faith, Jesus alludes once more *to mountains being moved into the sea* [see Matt. 17:20; Mark 11:23]. Also the fact that in Genesis 8:4 Ararat is called the highest mountain, coupled with the fact that today *many* mountains of greater height have been discovered and scaled, tells us that a colossal change must have occurred in the earth's surface. Consequently, after the flood our earth must have displayed a different form and appearance than before the flood, and the *bursting forth* of the fountains of the great deep may not be interpreted as poetic language, but must be understood in a literal sense.

In the *third* place, with this the likelihood is simultaneously provided that the relationship of the *atmosphere* to our earth also underwent change. It states that the "*windows of heaven were opened*," which is definitely not the same as clouds being emptied. We must relate this to Genesis 2:5–6, where we read, "for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground." We must also relate this to the remarkable fact that *the*

rainbow was appointed as sign of the covenant. Taken together, these supply ample warrant for supposing that certain alterations occurred at that time in the atmosphere.

We will not discuss to what extent these changes in the atmosphere were connected with any occurrence in the galaxies, although it deserves notice that when speaking of the final catastrophe that is still coming, all the prophets, including John on Patmos, specifically mention extreme changes that will occur in the position of sun, moon, and stars.

For our purpose it is enough if we pay attention to two things: (1) the flood was not a mere cloudburst or a tremendous torrential downpour, but a wholly extraordinary phenomenon in the atmosphere, and (2) the water that had descended was not destroyed, but was divided in a different way than before, whether at the North and South Poles, or across the earth's surface. However, before the flood the condition of the atmosphere was such that it caused the flood, and the condition of the current atmosphere possesses a safeguard against the return of such a flood.

What we can expect at the return of Christ is not a catastrophe by *water* but a catastrophe by *fire*. You can read this in 2 Peter 3:12: "The heavenly bodies will melt as they *burn*!" If a catastrophe by *fire* awaits us, which before came by *water,* then the general condition [of the earth], and particularly the relation of the earth to the atmosphere, must have undergone changes.

In the *fourth* place, the blessing of the new situation was intended not only for God's church, but for *everything that is human*, indeed even for the *animal kingdom*. It is not that the church was saved in order to abandon everything outside the church to general ruin. But the grace shown here extends to the entirety of human life. Most surely the purpose was so that God's church could find a place to set its foot, and also so that the church of the new covenant would gather together believers from all peoples and nations. But its purpose was also so that in a proper sense God the Lord would continue his work in that broad sphere of human life, not unto the saving of souls but no less unto the praise and glory of his great name.

Later when Hiram built Solomon's temple, he was still a wanderer outside God's church. He had no share in the particular grace of Israel. Nevertheless, the gift that worked in him was a gift bestowed upon him by God, and that gift was

devoted to building Jerusalem’s temple to the glory of the Lord’s name.

In the *fifth* place, the relationship between the human world and the animal kingdom is regulated, and now for the first time introduced into the situation in which we are familiar with that relationship. The dominion over the animals, which according to Genesis 1:26 was given to Adam in his state of rectitude and which according to Genesis 2:19–20 Adam exercised in such a glorious way, had of course suffered injury through the fall. Though in Paradise it was organic, that is, working automatically, through sin it turned into a *struggle* against the animals, and now after the flood it took on the character of *fear and dread* (Gen. 9:2), which overcomes an animal when it encounters a human being. In connection with this, all the animals were delivered into the hands of people. Indeed, even more strongly, human beings received the right to kill an animal and to take it for food. However, they must stay far away from using the fresh blood, so that eating the flesh of animals would not turn them into barbarians.

In addition, God’s righteousness functions to protect people against the wild animals. God will *require a reckoning from every animal* for the blood, the soul, of a human being. God’s grace stands between humanity and the animals in order to protect people. This grace is expressed in the claim God placed upon the animals over against human beings, in a Nimrod-like heroism with which God inspires humans against animals, and in the vengeance of destruction and extermination that gradually extended to all the predatory animals wherever human life became more developed.

In the *sixth* place, a remarkable change took place in the life of *humanity* itself. Apparently human strength diminished and the rate of human physical development quickened. Human strength decreased, for although Noah reached an age of *ten centuries*, Shem’s age decreased to six centuries, Eber’s to four, Serug to two centuries, and Abraham reached an age not too different from ours. The rate of human physical development was also increased, for although before the flood Methuselah’s age was 187 when his son Lamech was born, [after the flood] Shem fathered his son Arphaxad at the age of 100, and Arphaxad was 35 years old when obtained his son Selah. In Abraham’s time the situation had

already changed to such an extent that Isaac's miraculous birth occurred at an age at which Methuselah still had to live almost a century before obtaining his first child.

To explain this as due to a gradual regression of our human race is absurd. In the two thousand years before the flood human longevity extended to centuries. Adam lived to the age of 930, and Noah, who lived [nearly] twenty centuries later, lived to 950 and thus twenty years longer. We do not find a trace of this gradual regression before the flood. The decrease in human longevity after the flood was *sudden*, occurring in steps of two centuries at one time. God intervened here and deliberately decreased human vitality and simultaneously increased the rate of human physical development. At 35 years old, Arphaxad was at the same point as Methuselah was at 187. Abraham died at the age when the earlier patriarchs had begun to have children.

Undoubtedly this previous longevity had contributed significantly to the development of wickedness and unrighteousness. Even now elderly sinners are the most dangerous. And how fierce this eruption of unrighteousness must have been when these "elderly *sinners*" had eight or more centuries in front of them in order to complete their wickedness. The explanation that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," was definitely connected with the long life of the ungodly and unrighteous folk. Reducing this longevity would thwart unrighteousness. The reduced longevity is grace. Grace also for God's children, for how long must the pining for heaven have been for a child of God child who had to live on this earth for eight centuries or more.

And in the *seventh* place, the Lord God institutes an *order for human life* that was designed to thwart the outbreak of violence. The single former existing order of paternal authority and patriarchal influence had seemed to be insufficient. Hence *government* was instituted to make an orderly human society possible. That government was clothed with *majesty* because to government was entrusted the right over life and death, so that it would display not the tyranny of one person over another, but God's rule over his creature. Murder, something certainly common before the flood, could be restrained from now on by means of capital punishment, and in this way the filling of the whole earth by our human race would be possible. "*And you be fruitful*," says the Lord, "*and*

multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it" [Gen. 6:7], after having already said, "*be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*" [Gen. 6:1]. And precisely to this blessing the institution of capital punishment was added, so that the mutual massacring that began with Cain would be restrained, whereby populating the whole earth would become possible.

In that way this *regulated and stable order of affairs* was established, when for the first time the *history of our race* could get underway. Scripture indicates this in two ways. First, the *stability of the new order of affairs* was indicated by the promise, "*While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease*" [Gen. 8:22]. The fact that now for the first time the actual history of our human race gets underway is expressed in the prophecy that the Holy Spirit placed on Noah's lips, leading him to sketch out, in his full blessing for Shem, his partial blessing for Japheth, and his curse on Ham, the lines along which the history of the world would unfold. Within that prophecy lay embedded the concise program of all of world history; the disappointing experience with the Negro, the enduring significance of the Jews and Muslims as Shem's offspring, and the great significance Japheth has currently achieved, provide us to this day with the key for explaining world history.

So in the changed order of affairs that was introduced after the flood there is indeed revealed an act of *general grace* or of *common grace* that is all encompassing, governing all of history, decisive for our situation, and extending into the farthest future. This common grace must be gratefully accepted. Our confession must take account of common grace, and our perspective of life and of the entire situation of the world must be formed on the basis of common grace.

Whoever ignores or underestimates this powerful act of God's grace, and thereby also his *common grace*, distorts his view on life, ends up with a false dualism, and easily runs the risk of allowing his Christian religion to deviate from the *Reformed* track, that is, from the correct track.

13

FROM NOAH BACK TO PARADISE

But the LORD *God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"*

GENESIS 3:9

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF the so-called Noahic covenant has now been sufficiently elucidated to show us in a convincing way how the entire *current order of affairs* essentially came into existence for the first time *through* and *after* this Noahic covenant. The situation or, if you like, the state of affairs in which we ourselves live is not that of pre-fall Paradise nor that of post-fall Paradise—even less like that of the earth at the time it was burdened with the curse—but it arose *after the flood*. The post-flood situation is different from the preflood situation. The powerful event of the flood caused a considerable change in the life of humanity and in the relation of humanity both to the earth and to the animal world.

Therefore it is not putting the matter too strongly to say that with the Noahic covenant a new dispensation, a new state of affairs, an altered order of affairs began. We judged that it was necessary to place this significant fact, all too often lost from view, prominently in the forefront of our treatment of "common grace."

When reflecting on the past, believers usually jump straight from the present day back to Paradise without ascribing any significance, either for themselves or for our present world, to what happened with Noah. People take into account the state of innocence and Paradise, along with the fall and the curse, but then they usually move directly to Abraham, the people of Israel, and Christ, without ascribing any intentional or unique significance within that salvation structure to the great and tremendous event of the flood. The fact that in those days humanity's personal and social life, along with the earth itself, underwent a comprehensive alteration is certainly not denied when you point to these texts, but in the nineteenth century at least, these realities have not been sufficiently taken into consideration. The various parts of this history were not adequately

considered in terms of their coherence. The result was that everything that happened at that time slipped into the background and got lost in the mists. To be sure, at every baptism in Reformed churches the meaning of the flood for the covenant of grace was still mentioned, but often only by allusion rather than with appreciation for the full and rich significance this has for the church of Christ.

In order to be able to shed full light on the issue of “common grace” or “general grace,” we thought it would be most effective if at the outset we ended this glaring oversight by accentuating clearly the comprehensive alteration that this world underwent at that time. The issue of “common grace” comes down to discerning clearly that we are dealing here with an *act of God*. An act of God not for the benefit of those eight persons living at that time, but with *an act of God* that extends to the entire earth and the entire human race, not in a saving but in a preserving sense, of course. The fact that the Lord God has performed such an act of *preserving* grace that extends to *all* of our human life comes to no clearer expression than with the Noahic covenant. Everyone senses and perceives that here a promise is being given for the benefit of the *whole* world, and people discern immediately that what was promised contained rescue and preservation not for eternity but for this *temporal* life.

With this having been firmly established, we now return from Noah to Paradise. “Common grace” did not appear for the first time with Noah but began operating much earlier. Pre-flood humanity shared in that grace. It first began not after the flood, but after the fall. But note well: this same common grace that appeared immediately after the fall and began when God called to Adam, “Where are you?” is now no longer the same as in the days of Enoch and Methuselah. It has become different because it underwent alteration with Noah. Nevertheless, what appears in changed form continues to exist in that changed form, such that this one and the same “common grace” that began in Paradise still continues in the altered form it acquired with Noah. Its origin lies not initially with the ark but in Paradise, and to understand common grace in its unique character and true nature, we must return to Paradise.

For in Paradise this rather strange phenomenon appears, [namely,] that you read about [a threat] that subsequently did not occur. You read that in the state of innocence man was told [regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil], “the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” [Gen. 2:17]. And when man

nevertheless eats from that tree, *he does not die on that day*. On the contrary, Adam lives for a remarkably long time afterward—nine long, some would say endless, centuries.

Now we would not say that the Word of God was *not* fulfilled. We will return to this later. But it cannot be denied that it did *not* occur in the way that Adam and Even *must* have understood it when it was told them. On the very day Adam sinned, Adam *did not* die. This fact is certain. Adam received, if we may put it this way, a remarkable "stay of execution," not in answer to his own prayer but as a free act of God's will. And that act of God's will, which accounts for Adam *not* dying on that actual day but continuing *to live* that day and for *centuries* thereafter, is nothing other and nothing less than a very powerful act of common grace that affects all people, including us personally.

Imagine once what would have been the result of Adam dying on the day itself when he fell, that the entire history of this world would have been cut off. No human race would have developed. In terms of the Bible, before the fall Adam and Eve had no children yet. Suppose that the Word of the Lord, "*In the day* that you eat of it you shall surely die," had been literally fulfilled, then with their death the entire root of our race would have died and none of us would ever have been born on earth. If "common grace" is the means whereby Adam's presence on this earth was unexpectedly extended, then it follows that your own life, your birth, your existence as a human being arises not merely from *creation* but is an act that is rooted in *grace*. The total and direct outworking of sin, *had it not been arrested*, would have destroyed the entire human race with a single death sentence.

As we investigate the origin of this "common grace," we will stay close to the account of Scripture. If you deviate from this account in any way at all, you might as well save yourself and others the trouble of reflecting any further about the issue of common grace. For then all certitude will elude you, and the ground beneath your feet will disappear. Such a way of speaking is far from unusual today among Christians of other stripes. Especially among the Ethical theologians people have gradually become accustomed to giving the appearance of defending the accounts of Genesis 1–5, whereas *in reality* they have surrendered and undermined them. We do not doubt that originally this began with good intentions. At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the

nineteenth centuries, a mocking, superficial spirit gained the upper hand, having no understanding of the depth of these accounts, engaging in unholy sport with Adam and Eve, the apple, and the rest. The sacred was held up for contempt.

Then during and after the time of Schleiermacher, the Ethical theologians were moved by this sharp and chilling mockery to stand up and defend the profound significance of these opening chapters of Holy Scripture against this ridicule. We should not lose sight of this, for although the position of the Ethical theologians seems to us to be slippery and quite unsatisfactory, we must never forget that they were the first ones who, when a stream of contempt and abuse was poured out upon Scripture, were courageous enough to defend Holy Scripture.

Still less may we forget about the Bible-believing teachers of former times, because it was precisely their barren view of the Bible and their even more barren use of the Bible that in so many ways caused the disdain that came gradually to impact Holy Scripture. Especially at the end of the eighteenth century, Bible-believing theologians were making little more than a mechanical use of Holy Scripture. They no longer had an eye for its depth and its spiritual value. That was precisely how they prepared the coming generation to reject the Bible. Arresting this evil was the enduring gain registered by the school of Schleiermacher, and even though duty obligates us to oppose him in this respect as well, nevertheless we do not want to do so without first having acknowledged our gratitude for that achievement.

The mistake they committed consisted in separating *form* and *content* from one another. Without doubt, so they reasoned, the course of events *can* be no different from what is portrayed in Genesis 1–5. In that sense, what lies before you there is indeed essential and sacred history. Everything transpired in this way, and only in this way, at the beginning of our race. Except, such powerful things as happened at that time cannot be encompassed within the limits of language. What happened is far more rich and powerful than the account can communicate. So you must not imagine that all of this transpired literally only in this way. The story is merely an incidental form designed to evoke within you an imagination, a picture, of the course of things that yielded such a result.

People allowed themselves to be deceived by this perspective by acknowledging that the account was so profound and so full of information that

an entire world of ideas was packed into almost every verse. They began to ponder those profound ideas. They found them so beautiful and so true. They corresponded so completely to the relation by which people felt connected to the origin of things. They explained so completely the present situation, the prevailing misery, the corruption of the human heart, and our nobler and better aspirations as well. Precisely here the deception emerged.

They felt so much at home in the thought world of these accounts that they imagined, “If I had to invent it from the experiences of my own heart, then I would have invented it precisely this way.” That is why they ultimately imagined that the entire account could be a product of the invention of the human heart. Not of one person, but of many people. Not of the superficial folk among our race, but of the best and most profound. Already in ancient times these people must have undergone experiences similar to those that people undergo nowadays. From this a certain communal idea must have gradually taken shape; it was the result of this invention of the human heart that had eventually received this new narrative garment. Some traditions and recollections could have been included so that a historical background could be detected, but the spiritual development portrayed in the account was not an actual *tradition* but had to have been an *invention* of the human heart. Precisely in this way it spoke most powerfully to us. Understood precisely in that way, our heart was most easily attracted to it. Truly, just as the human heart in earlier centuries had invented it for us, so too all the generations thereafter reinvented it for our heart. In this way every conflict disappeared, and people at once felt at home again in these beautiful, invented stories.

It was true, of course, that the common man who viewed all that inventing simply as a farce had to conclude that with such an approach the *value* of these stories was lost, but the more refined person did not judge that to be so. People knew all too well that genuine poetry arises from the heart and is therefore real. Precisely for that reason, turning back from the *dead* tradition to the *living* invention of the human heart represented not loss, but gain. Only along this route, what stood written there became for us nobler, holier history.

We feel at once the seductive power of this idea, and we should not be surprised that so many theologians have gone along with it. Obviously no one was interested in the dry recitation of facts apart from their meaning, but in the

sense and meaning of these facts. Well, in the manner explained above, people could continue accepting this profound meaning, talking about it with warmth and conviction, even with passion, without on that account having to understand it literally as it appeared in the Bible. The problem was, however, that these theologians unintentionally ignored some indisputable facts that overturned their entire position.

In the first place, there is the fact that the human heart in India, China, Babylon, among the Germanic people, and everywhere else *did not* come to this position about the origin of things, the fall, and the reestablishment of the human race. Even the deep-thinking Greeks had construed all of this completely differently. From this fact alone it is evident that the human heart by itself does *not* come to a presentation such as Genesis 1–5 provides, but construes the course of events *completely differently*.

In the second place, people ignored the fact that these theologians who declared that they find the experiences and conclusions of their own heart explained so accurately in these accounts, had come to these ideas and perspectives not apart from these accounts, but *after* having become acquainted with them and *after* having been nurtured in a Christian church that was nourished by the content of these accounts.

Combining these two facts, one obtains the result that the human heart does *not* fabricate in this manner when it did *not* know these accounts [beforehand], and conversely, where the human heart imagined it was inventing them, this invention began only *after* it had borrowed the content of its fabrication from these accounts.

The comment that they did not really mean that the human heart naturally would discover all this, but that such a fabrication emerged only where the Holy Spirit had exercised his influence on the heart, does not remove our objection in the least. For the Holy Spirit, understood now as the Cultivator of the human heart, can indeed disclose to us our internal condition, but not inform us of *facts.* And the issue involves precisely the denial that we are dealing here with *facts*. These theologians believed that the idea that people in China, India, etc., formed concerning primeval matters fit the human heart *more accurately*. Their hearts felt differently, sensed differently, contemplated differently, thereby coming up with an idea that was nothing but a mirrored reflection of what went on in their

own hearts. Thus the human heart, to the extent that it lived with more or less depth, has fabricated various ideas about Paradise and the fall, and our ideas would have no greater value beyond correctly reproducing what agreed with our inner perceptions. They had *their* ideas and we have *ours*, and both for them and for us that idea agrees with the perceptions and ponderings of our heart, but quite apart from any certainty that this idea corresponded with *reality*. At most one could say that our hearts perceived and pondered more deeply, and that therefore the assumption originated that our idea came closer to the truth.

However, something that comes close to the truth is not yet completely identical with the truth itself. The Muslim stands much closer to the truth than the servant of Baal or Molech, and yet Muhammad stood infinitely far from *the* truth.

What we need is *certainty*. Certainty regarding the things that occurred at the origin and the emergence of our human life, and regarding things that have governed life in all of its further development. Above all, we need certainty concerning what the Lord God did, ordained, and spoke at that time, as well as concerning the promises he gave regarding our future. And that certainty is *utterly* missing in the idea of the Ethical theologians. One of the elementary rules of logic is this: *ab posse ad esse non valere conclusionem*, that is, you can never say that because something *can* be so, therefore it *was* so. These theologians violated this basic truth of all sound logic.

True, these theologians explained to us with absolute clarity how we could derive much from the experience of our hearts and from our inner life, and that these things could have taken place in that way. If it had happened the way we read in Genesis 1–5, then everything was fine. All of this corresponded to our heart, and our heart agreed with what was narrated there. For that reason they were able to say that it *could* certainly have been so. But between this *could* and the certainty that it *had been so*, lies a deep chasm that no one can bridge without receiving a direct account from the past. Not a report or message that something *approximately* like this, or something of that nature, or something that along these broad lines must have occurred. *Broad* lines are useless here. All depends precisely on the *small*, fine, individual lines. Only when those are established, when you know what God created, spoke, and ordained, and what the head of our race did thereafter, and what judgment then fell upon us, and

what promise was then given, and what grace was then bestowed, only then do you have solid ground under your feet and a solid base under your chiseled sculpture.

It is on this basis that the community of believers always refused, and will continue to refuse, to go along with such half-baked ideas. All *origins* lie in obscurity. Just as someone who lacks information about his parents or relatives can know nothing from himself regarding his earthy origin, and would not even know who his mother is unless that mother herself or others had disclosed that to him, so too here. Regarding the origins of our human race we would know nothing, absolutely nothing, if God had not told us and revealed it to us. Even though a child might declare afterwards, "I feel in my heart that this is my mother," this is hardly any basis for certitude. Many a child who was switched soon after birth, or entrusted to a woman who was not his mother, nonetheless honored, adored, and loved that woman as his mother for his entire life. But the conclusion *that the woman was therefore his mother* would still be a fallacy. *Facts* cannot ever be constructed from the notions of the heart. The kind of facts that function here appear in the realm of the objective, and can come to us from objective history only by means of communication and by means of the record of that communication.

This is a truth we must therefore discuss somewhat more broadly, because before turning to the history of Paradise, we must maintain and prove our right to take the words as *literally* as they stand in Genesis 1–5, to depend on the *facts* told us in those words, to draw our *inferences* from those facts and words, and thus to come to the *conclusion* that not simply for our imagination and not merely in appearance, but in reality and in truth, the origin of things transpired precisely in the way we are told in these opening chapters of Holy Scripture.

14

THE PARADISE STORY AS HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

GENESIS 1:31A

WE HAD TO recall explicitly that the first chapters of Genesis must be understood as history. For only if the Paradise narrative is history do we have the right to draw conclusions from the events that are recorded in those chapters and to rely on what is reported to us as having been spoken by God or man or Satan. Those who deny that we have history here before us still appeal with a measure of ostentation to the so-called Paradise gospel, which states that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent, or also to the ordinance that a sinner will eat bread in the sweat of his brow. But this is simply *impermissible* on *their own* perspective. Whoever does not believe that God actually spoke in this way in Paradise has no right to appeal to such expressions as if they were clothed with divine authority. Appealing to such statements is legitimate only if we acknowledge wholeheartedly that we have in these first chapters a narrative of events *that have really taken place in this way*, and in which the same words were actually used that are reported to us as having been spoken. Therefore not only that what is *narrated* must be real history, but also the *report* of it that has come to us must be such that we can rely on it. What is narrated in these first chapters of Genesis is of such extreme importance and governs our entire view of the world to such an extent that literally every word, indeed, *every* letter is crucial. Thus it is of no use to us if we are told that approximately such or such may have happened. No, we must know accurately and with certainty. Only then can we rely on it, draw conclusions from it, and build our worldview on it.

The question whether the words we read as having been spoken back then have actually been uttered in that sequence and with the same phrases that now lie before us does not need deter us here, as long as the Holy Spirit gives us the

guarantee that the *meaning* and *significance* of those words—even if they were *expressed* differently—are entirely the same, so that any uncertainty is precluded for us. Even if it is stated that the serpent spoke, we must have certainty that this and no other thought came from Satan to humanity. And also when it is continually said that God spoke, we must not take this as meaning that God did *not* speak but that man merely felt the thought come up in him. Also, and especially when it comes to God's speaking, we must understand without doubt both the fact *that* God really spoke and the *content* of what was said.

This "speaking of God" is the great fact that is placed in the foreground throughout Holy Scripture, ceaselessly and with stress and emphasis. It is that which makes Scripture [to be] Scripture. The crucial point in Scripture is not what man thought or contemplated, but precisely that which God spoke. Today God no longer speaks to us. He has spoken at many times and in many ways by the prophets and, after prophecy came to an end, by his Son [Heb. 1:1–2]. But now this speaking of God has ceased, and that is precisely the reason why this past speaking is of such all-decisive value to us. When we close our ear to this, we only have to blame ourselves if, without the light of revelation, we grope in the darkness for the wall. For whoever listens to what God has said walks in the light, and that which God spoke is a lamp for our feet on the path of life [Ps. 119:105]. We can still say that God speaks in nature, that there is a voice of God in the thunder and the lightning, in the howling of the hurricane and in the whispering of the soft coolness, and also a voice of God in the moving of the Spirit in the heart and in the language of conscience, but all of this is *metaphorical*. It is not speaking in the proper sense of the word. True, all these voices engender a feeling of reverence and worship, or stimulate an urge in us, or keep our foot from the wrong path. But all such speaking reveals nothing to us, communicates nothing to us, and does not let us know God's will.

In the proper sense of the word, speaking takes place only when from the *consciousness* of the speaker *conscious* thoughts are transferred into the *consciousness* of the hearer. This is the sense in which we must understand God's speaking in Paradise and after the fall. If we do not do this, we are playing with words if we continue to derive our notions from such sayings. Thus when it states, for example, that God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," [Gen. 1:26] and we do *not* believe that this was spoken in this way, then we lack any right to build our system about humanity on the creation of man in the image of God. Yet that is precisely what people do today. They cling to a notion as beautiful as the creation of man in the image of God, they build

systems and theories on it, but when asked, “Do you really believe that Genesis 1:26–27 must be taken literally in this way?” people shrug at your naïveté. Surely people don’t believe *that*. But equally naturally, all further reasoning on the basis of this standpoint about the creation of man in the image of God has no solid foundation whatsoever on which their edifice could rest. All that people write down then is nothing but their own concoction, ideas that one expresses, beautiful thoughts by which one lets oneself be attracted. But that it would contain reality is an assertion without proof. One does not have a *foundation*, a firm foundation for saying all this.

This “speaking of God” must therefore be emphasized [today] more than in the past. It is perfectly true that God is a spirit and consequently does not have a mouth nor power of speech. But the same applies to the *eye*. A spirit has no body and therefore also no eye, yet no one hesitates to acknowledge that God can nevertheless *see* without an eye, indeed, can see everything, much better than we do with our eye. Exactly the same is true of the *ear*. Because he has no body, God has no ear. That goes without saying. And yet everyone agrees that even without an ear, God hears everything very well, with a sensitivity that far transcends all our hearing. We show that we believe it ourselves when we pray. Why else would we pray, if we were not firmly convinced that God hears us, even when we whisper almost inaudibly.

This is what the psalmist sings: “He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see?” (Ps. 94:9). The difference between God and the idols is precisely that the idols have ear and eye, but neither hear nor see, and that God, by contrast, sees and hears everything *without* eye and ear. And this *must* be so because before he created the eye and the ear, God within himself *thought up* the eye and the ear. It must first have been in this thought before it came into being. The act of seeing and hearing must thus have existed for God before he created eyes and ears in humans and animals, and the whole functioning of seeing and hearing must have been known to God in order to create ear and eye, also in relation to the vibrations of the sound and light waves and the effect on our nerves, and the working of the nerves on the soul. And because seeing and hearing thus were before God antecedent to his calling ear and eye into being, [it follows that] for God seeing and hearing must therefore be independent of these instruments that are indispensable for us.

And this is also how it is with God's speaking. It is explicitly stated about the idols, "They have mouths, *but do not speak*" [Ps. 115:5]. Not speaking is therefore the mark of an idol; by contrast, the activity of speaking much and speaking well that characterizes the living God. Here also the question applies: "Would he who formed the mouth and gave speech to man not speak?" Did the mouth then come first and did God at that point give speech to humankind on the basis of that mouth? Or has that mouth been created by God exactly as it had to be in order to be capable of bringing forth speech? If the latter, must then not speech have been in God before he made the specifications, the plan for the mouth and all kinds of speech organs? And are these organs of speech anything other than an aid, an instrument that is indispensable for us creatures to be able to speak, but that God, who is not in need of anything, does not need?

If the living God wants to work by means of your ear by letting sounds play on your auditory nerves, what would prevent him from doing so? Or even when he wants to bypass your hearing to excite directly within your soul the same sensations a human being excites in you by speaking, what would hinder him? Are not all languages his? Given by him to the nations? Would there be a single language that is unknown to God? And what, indeed, would prevent him from transmitting his thoughts into our lucid and clear consciousness by means of a language that is clear and precisely understandable? Let us therefore allow that speaking of God [to stand] in the unimpaired, full sense of the word. Adam, Eve, Cain, Noah, Abraham, they all have plainly and clearly heard the same thing we become aware of when a human being speaks to us. No vague ideas arose within them, but *language* went out to them, words have been caught by them, *sayings, expressions, proofs, declarations, promises* came through to them, which they could repeat literally. They were not floating feelings affecting the soul, which they themselves interpreted, but clear, firm, well-formulated thoughts that they received in their consciousness.

Let no one think it superfluous that we have insisted here in somewhat greater detail on the reality of this speaking of God. Especially in more sophisticated circles the firm belief in such a real speaking of God has been weakened to such an extent by a theology that has lost its way, that the only way to make the weak knees firm again is by means of a deliberate argument. For people *say* they believe, but they *don't*. Well, yes, approximately, more or less,

provided that it is not firmly and on all points, . . . and in this way the overwhelming impression of what it means when God has spoken is totally lost. People don't bow before the Word because they cannot cling to the Word as an actual *word of God*. If this is how you view the matter, then the reading and rereading of Genesis 1–5 does not give you anything, for, yes, it is beautiful and lovely as things are presented there, but whether it all was like that and whether its truth still holds, then people shrug their shoulders. This is why by way of introduction to what follows, the reality of the "speaking of God" had to be insisted on with some emphasis. For only those among our readers who with us heartily believe in such an actual "speaking of God" can be convinced by that which we will unfold hereafter. Others may take note with a measure of goodwill, but it gives them no ground under their feet, no standpoint from which they can view the life of the world. And yet this is precisely the point of this series of articles about "common grace." We must move away from floating notions back to the *firmness* of *conviction*. As people who confess the Lord we must once again adopt an unshakeable position. We must know how things really are and in order to know that, we must *first know where we stand*.

For no matter how hard we try to set aside the all-dominant questions of life, they always come back. The questions about where we come from, how this universe and this world came into being, and how we came into existence in this world, will simply not be repressed, and the unbeliever who, in his discomfiture to cede nothing to faith, in the end forbids himself to reflect on these questions, dulls his own mind, and darkens his consciousness. We can cut off the question about *the origin* of things as little as we can suppress the questions about where we go when we die, and how this whole world will one day end up, and what the purpose of this whole creation is. And it is precisely the rich book of Genesis that gives us a fully satisfying answer to this question of *the origin* of things.

Indeed, we do not understand this book as long as we fail to realize that it has in fact been given to us for the specific purpose of informing us about *those origins*. It is called *Genesis*, and Genesis means "birth." Hence we read in Genesis 2:4 in the Statenvertaling [the standard Dutch Bible], "*These are the births* of the heavens and of the earth." The same expression "these are the births" is repeated in Genesis 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 25:12, 25:19, 36:1, and 36:9. And because this word *birth* was rendered *genesis* in the Septuagint, this word has

come to be used as the title for the whole book. The Jews called it not Genesis but *Bereshith*, i.e., *in the beginning*, which are the opening words of Genesis 1:1. Yet “in the beginning” also pointed already to the origin of things, to their birth, to their beginning, to their appearance. And indeed, the book of Genesis presents us with the *origin* of all things: The origin of the universe; The origin of the angels; The origin of all creatures; The origin of humanity; The origin of marriage; The origin of sin; The origin of grace; The origin of suffering; The origin of the present state of the earth; The disruption of the order of human society; The origin of all justice and all dominion; The *origins* of all that still stirs your interest, of all that surrounds you in your own personal life, and of all that goes on within your heart, are unfolded before us in this book of Genesis.

For this reason that book of Genesis is so extremely important for the church, for the nations, for the government, for our living together in home and society, and no less for our whole thought world. We must always, again and again, immerse ourselves in the wealth of treasure that lies before us in this book. The church must ceaselessly try to firmly establish the congregation in the certainties of this book that dominates our entire life, and in Sunday school and catechism classes everyone’s efforts must be aimed at firmly establishing in the consciousness of the upcoming generation the basic principles of our whole being, life, and existence.

It would, of course, take us much too far afield to even consider unraveling the entire content of this book in all its details. We will stick to our purpose and therefore limit ourselves to our subject, which is “common grace.” But precisely in order that the doctrine of “common grace,” which has so sadly sunk into obscurity, would regain acceptance and again exert its influence on our thought and life, it is of such vital importance that also the remaining aspects of this revelation that has been given to us in Genesis reenter our thinking. The mind must live in it, must be at home in it, must stand firm in it.

The world outside of Christ is in search of all manner of life philosophies and worldviews. In this search it repeatedly slips and falls and repeatedly hopes to regain a sure footing, i.e., to find again a position that can serve as a vantage point from which to view things. And those worldviews and philosophies of life change daily. Time and again the one replaces the other. And in the end people are desperate and don’t know anymore what they must cling to; they often end

up with the despondent exclamation that certainty has not been granted us human beings, so we must retreat into our ignorance. But it is precisely the great privilege of the church of Christ that it does *not* need to search and does *not* need to ask, but that things have been revealed to us by God. A well-grounded Christian always has his answer ready. He no longer doubts and hesitates, but rests in the revelation given to him. The philosopher *seeks* for a philosophy, but a Christian who knows God's Word *has* his philosophy, has his view of reality, has his standpoint, and from that standpoint has an unfaltering view on what lies behind, around, and before him.

Here then lies the mystery as to why simple Christian people among farmers and laborers often have as clear a perception as those who are wealthy and educated. Even opponents have often commented that no book equals our Bible in its suitability to provide people with a well-rounded development. Those who have been raised in the light of the Scriptures have their philosophy, know their world history, and have a firm and correct outlook on the great world events. For them, there is a perspective in things. Christ and his cross constitute the center, and all that lies before it leads up to that center. All that happens now is explained by that cross, and all that will happen hereafter has been prophesied in that cross. But precisely for that reason it is so essential that Christians stand firm on Scripture as their point of departure, and why it causes such incalculable harm to the church of God if the narratives of Genesis 1–5 are declared *not* to be authentic.

But even with all of this not enough has yet been said. The fact that Christians are so divergent in their confession of the truth, and that they stand over against one another with such variant ideas, can be ascribed in no small degree to the fact that they do not all understand these important chapters in the same way. The differences that keep Christians divided find their birth, their origin in these first chapters of Genesis. Especially the contrast that emerged between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches finds its origin in the different way in which each side understands the creation of man in the image of God, the disruption caused in humanity by sin, and the relationship between nature and grace. And when subsequently a new opposition arose between the Anabaptist and the Calvinist aspirations, then the origin of that contrast lay again in the different ways in which the narrative of Paradise and the

fall and the restoration of the sinner were understood. Indeed, the fact that Reformed life flourished in many respects so richly in the days of our forefathers, and after 1650 declined so sadly until ultimately the stream silted up completely, can be explained to no small degree from the fact that our forefathers stood firm on these first chapters, read them lucidly, and understood their content and significance, whereas the rich meaning of these chapters was later lost sight of, neglected, and not taken into account.

The latter is true especially of "common grace," which our forefathers discovered, honored, and confessed, and which was later entirely neglected and disregarded in Reformed circles. It is not going too far to assert that the future of the Reformed churches and the renewed flourishing of Calvinism hangs on the question as to whether this doctrine of "common grace" will revive again with the force it once had. If this doctrine remains neglected as it has been thus far, then the Reformed churches are doomed to locking themselves into a preaching of salvation without background and without foundation, and they will be unable to find their way to reaching once again a firm starting point and a firm position in the midst of the war of the minds and the turbulences of this world. They then bob to and fro and lack a firm rudder. On the other hand, if we succeed in once again finding acceptance for this rich, beautiful doctrine and allow it again to take the place it deserves in our convictions, then the awareness *that we know where we stand* will once again become common, and we will be able to determine once again, with a firm hand, the relationship in which we find ourselves placed vis-à-vis the life of the world. For the Twelve Articles of Faith not only deal with the Redeemer and with the Holy Spirit, but begin by bringing us face to face with *God the Father, the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth.* And our confession of God's Holy Trinity even lacks its foundation if we do not trace our whole confession of the Son and the Holy Spirit back to God the Father. Our whole preaching of salvation and the preaching of sanctification in the church must therefore be brought back again to the preaching of God the Father, and with it back to creation and to the re-creation of all things. Only in this way do we acquire *unity* in our confession, *firmness* in our standpoint, *determination* in our conviction. And because *sin* breached this and restoration followed, and because "common grace" is the doctrine that shows us *the situation that resulted from this,* we cannot but stand weakly and hesitatingly as long as the doctrine of "common grace" has not been brought to clarity again before us. No matter how much we enclose ourselves within our church, we cannot escape the necessity of living also in the midst of the world. And we

cannot perceive clearly the relationship between those two, namely, between *church* and *world*, as long as we have not been grounded in the doctrine of "common grace."

15

THE STATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

And the LORD *God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.*

GENESIS 2:8

THE STARTING POINT for a correct understanding of what sin has wrought lies in the correct knowledge of the state of righteousness. This has been recognized by all who have reflected on the sacred things. Three kinds of states must be considered: (1) the state of righteousness; (2) the state of sin; and (3) the state of grace. Or, as it has also been expressed, humanity as *created*, *fallen*, and *restored*. Only, the approach was one-sided in that the emphasis was too exclusively on the *spiritual state* and too little attention was paid to the *external condition* associated with these three states.

The Heidelberg Catechism avoided this one-sidedness by speaking not only of the knowledge of *sin*, but also of the knowledge of *misery*; for if sin is the poison, misery points to the consequences that flow from the destruction brought about by this poison. In line with this train of thought we will therefore take *state* and *condition* together and consider them both in their interconnectedness. Each *state* has a corresponding *situation* or *condition*. Humanity in the state of righteousness befits a *paradise* as in the Garden of Eden. Fallen humanity befits an earth on which the *curse* rests. Humanity utterly fallen for all eternity befits *hell*. The redeemed who have been made perfectly righteous befit a *glory* as that of heaven.

This also applies to the body. To human beings in the state *without* sin belongs a body *without* pain or illness. To *fallen* human beings belongs a body subject to pain and affliction. To the *utterly fallen* human being belongs a body of damnation. And to human beings in the state of perfected holiness belongs a glorified body. We can extend this list also as it applies to our senses, our capacities of knowledge and will, and so much more. But for the time being we can leave this, as long as we realize clearly that according to God’s ordinance,

perfect consonance and pure harmony must exist in all things. One thing must fit in with the other. Whatever does not fit *clashes* and does not spring from the ordinance of creation.

When we ask on the basis of this perspective how we should imagine the *condition* of humanity before sin, then it should be noted that the name "Paradise" does not occur in the oldest record of Scripture. The word occurs three times in the New Testament: in Luke 23:43, "today you will be with me in Paradise"; in 2 Corinthians 12:3–4, where Paul relates how in an ecstatic experience he was drawn up in paradise; and in Revelation 2:7, where Christ writes to the church of Ephesus that to "the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

The Old Testament, on the other hand, uses the word only of Solomon's pleasure garden in Song of Solomon 4:13. The word gained currency in its present sense through the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. They wrote in Genesis 2:8, "God planted a garden [*paradeison*, lit "paradise"] in Eden," because *paradise* was at that time the common word for *pleasure garden*. From this Septuagint translation the word came to the Greek-speaking Jews of Jesus' day, and thus it crept into the New Testament. And because the Roman Catholic Vulgate read in Genesis 2:8, *Plantaverat Dominus* paradisum *volputatis*, i.e., "God had planted a paradise of pleasure" [Douay-Rheims version], the word *paradise* has gradually come to be used in the whole Christian church as the fixed, standard term, so that now the *Garden of Eden*, which is exactly the same thing, makes an entirely different impression. *Paradise*, after all, has become the euphonic word to express the ideal state of happiness that once existed, then went away, and will be brought back in even richer glory.

But let it be noted here immediately that not the whole earth was Paradise. The "Garden of Eden" is sharply and clearly distinguished from the rest of the world, in two ways. First, because it says, "the LORD God planted [i.e., on the earth] a garden in Eden, *in the east*." That addition "in the east" shows that the garden extended in only one direction. Not to the south or north or west, but only *in the east*. And second, it follows from the fact that after the fall, Adam and Eve could be expelled from Paradise to another part of the earth. Thus we must not imagine that after creation the earth was one paradise. The whole earth was indeed *good*, so that it far exceeded in lushness and splendor that we can still see

of the beauty of nature, but nevertheless Paradise was something different. It was a garden, a pleasure garden, a deliberately appointed location. Not a garden in the sense in which we speak of it, let alone a kind of orchard. The additional statement that the sources of the four great, mighty rivers let their waters roar through this Paradise proves that we have to do here with a pleasure garden of immense vastness. Yet, no matter how vast, it was a *garden*, i.e., an expanse of terrain that was appointed with a certain purpose in mind, that was laid out for this purpose and that immediately gave the impression that this was not merely a valley or an immense forest but a *planned* region.

Whenever human beings penetrate wild regions, the first thing they do is *develop* it to make it suitable for them. Where there is development there is a center, there are roads and paths that connect the parts with the center, and a design to give the whole a certain unity by means of the arrangement of hills and meadows and parks. Wild animals do not need any design. Cows and horses already need a measure of design. But this applies much more to the place where *human beings* shall live. Human beings have special needs, and human life makes certain demands. And when we read that God planted a garden or Paradise in Eden, it *cannot* mean anything else, therefore, than that God arranged a certain place on earth in such a way that man could live there, could feel at home there, and received the impression that this garden suited his situation. This surmise is fully confirmed by the statement that this garden certainly had a center, for it speaks of "the midst of the garden" [Gen. 2:9]. And also by the fact that two special trees had been placed there, the tree of *life* and the tree of *conscience*, if we may state it succinctly. This garden or this paradise must also have had a certain evident boundary, for it says that Adam was instructed to *work* it and *keep* it.

This entire garden or that Paradise was thus a creation of God's all-providing love for humankind. Nothing that could in any way hinder or distress humanity is compatible with the thought of Paradise. There was neither cold nor heat. It did not rain, because Genesis 2:5–6 states that "the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground." Harmful changes in atmospheric conditions were thus entirely precluded. There was no thunder and lightning. Nothing in the whole outside world that surrounded Adam

did he experience as unpleasant. Rather to the contrary, his whole environment provided him with a luscious, refreshing, invigorating experience. The whole flora smiled on him and offered him food abundantly and generously. There was neither thorn nor thistle that could scratch. No weeds grew. There was no fear of poisonous fruit. No worm could enter the abundant fruit that had grown perfectly.

We still see occasionally a few marvelously beautiful specimens of fruit at an agricultural show, but such and even much more beautiful and refined was the wealth of the plant world with which God had surrounded his human children. Flowers so delightfully beautiful as we no longer know them. Foliage that by shape and variegated colors enticed the eye. Trees that far exceeded the cedar and the palm tree in splendor. Inexpressible gloriousness all around. And in addition to all this there was also the animal world. Paradise was not funereal and quiet, but the whole Garden of Eden throbbed with life, not only through the wind in the daytime, and through the water that splashed and gurgled from all sides, but also through the songbirds in the branches and the noble, pure-blooded animals that populated Paradise, newly created by God in undamaged perfection. And also in the animal world peace reigned. No tormenting insect, and no prowling tiger that raised its paw. Everything was, of course, still *much* more beautiful and glorious than our words can sketch it. Paradise is gone, and only the imagination can to some extent conjure it back for us. But none of us who have been conceived and born in sin can get a full, profound impression of what that heavenly Paradise must have been for Adam. Only when one day we rise from the dead will we have the receptive capability to perceive such inexpressible beauty and glory.

This is sufficient, as long as Paradise ceases to be a hollow sound for us, and as long as we once again realize that the glory of Paradise was something exquisite, intentionally so ordered by God’s love for mankind, which saw to it that mankind, newly created, did not experience any suffering or was in any way exposed to it, but on the contrary felt his whole being vibrate with a glorious happiness. Not only were suffering and misery absent in Paradise, and every need was met, but there was an overwhelming splendor of overabundance and magnificence, as the name “Eden” itself clearly expresses: “all-round delight.” It was not enough for our God that humanity did not experience any harm nor lacked anything; from the golden cornucopia of his abundant power he poured over humanity also the overabundance of his divine love. The *fountain of all good* flowed, neither hindered nor hampered by anything.

This must be placed clearly in the foreground, lest the true resilience of our faith be broken in us. In our present condition we are used to pain and sorrow. There is a cross that must be borne daily. Therefore, the highest that we can imagine is living in a state in which sorrow spares us for a while, in which we lack nothing, and in which a measure of joy refreshes our heart. For anyone who may enjoy life in this way, “the lines have fallen . . . in pleasant places” [Ps. 16:6]. The heart virtually never strives after a higher ideal. But the heart *should* do that. We *must* not put the condition of our highest desire lower than God has ordained it for us. When we do that, we demean our life and surrender that which God has destined for us and has by grace ordained for us once again. It dulls us when we settle for less. We then *miss* less because we *desire* less. We make ourselves less sensitive, and therefore have less pain. But that impassivity then also brings us into a false situation, it falsifies the standard whereby we measure things, and it distorts our view on the past and on the future. And what we also must not forget is that our sense of guilt suffers from this, for when we do not clearly recognize from how high a state of bliss and heavenly overabundance we have fallen, we cannot gauge the depth into which sin has thrown us. It is therefore not an indifferent, incidental matter to clearly perceive in what state of bliss God had originally placed humankind. Only when we form the correct conception of this state of bliss do we understand what has been thrown away through sin and has been lost, and also what the ideal is toward which we reach in Christ.

In this Paradise the first human felt only *one* lacuna and void. He felt *alone*. Not in the least in the manner in which we would feel alone if we stood all alone, as the only one in the whole world. In loneliness *we* miss the presence of others, because we have been accustomed to their presence our whole life long. Also, sin makes loneliness so much more terrible. Those who are holy endure loneliness so much more easily. Furthermore, the fellowship of the newly created human being with his God was a perfect one, and to that extent “lonely am I, not alone” was applicable to him in a much higher sense than for us. When it is recorded of Enoch and Noah that they walked with God, then this walking with God was a memory of the condition in Paradise. After his creation, Adam not

only walked with God but was not without God's fellowship for a moment. Even as the life of a child in the first days of its life is at one with that of the mother, so also immediately after creation, the life of the first man was one with the life of his God. He had just come from God's hand, and he still lived from moment to moment out of and through that hand, the hand that had let him go in the act of creation and yet still held him caringly. Yet there was something about being alone that became burdensome as soon as it was felt, and it ultimately had to be felt because the duality of the sexes and the unity of human being with human being [man and woman] were included in the ordinances of God's creation.

We read, then, that the social life of the animals evoked this feeling of lack in Adam. Not as if human beings had evolved from the animals. Exactly the opposite is apparent from this narrative. The animals already had a social life. If humanity had evolved from the animals, and had been the most highly developed species of the animal kingdom, then the social impulse would have manifested itself to a rather high degree in humankind. But this is not so. The animals were created in pairs, but the man in his singularity. For man, the female being would be taken *from himself*, in order to give expression to that highest unity that comes into existence not when the one is added to the other, but only when both are one at the very root of their being.

The woman should not be something that came to man from the outside, but something that came *out of him*. Not man's creation—the woman also had to be God's creation—yet taken from man, in order to express in this way the highest, most intimate, most perfect unity in that wondrous creation.

Man, therefore, did not come from the animals, but the animal world is intended for man and was created with man in view. When God created the animals, he already knew within himself the human being he would create, and he knew that human being in soul *and body*. And in order that that animal world would be suited to man and would not be too alien to man but as it were a part of his own life, God created the animal world in such a way that, in increasing measure, the bodies of the animals contained a clear foreshadowing of the body he had intended and ordained for man. We can also express this succinctly: *God created the animals in the image and likeness of humankind*.

If we view it in this manner, we understand immediately the peculiar relationship that exists between man and animal. We do not find anything

strange in all the discoveries that have, since Darwin, brought to light such a strong physical correspondence between man and animal. We sense immediately why the conclusion, which many in our day have drawn from Darwin's discovery, that man evolved from the animals lacks all compelling power. No one will say that God has his origin in man because man has been created in God's image. And in the same way, we now lack any right to deduce from the undeniable fact *that God created the animals in the image of man* that man would have come from the animals. There is unity, equality, relatedness. This is a fact we must never deny. But this unity, equality, correspondence, and relatedness have their origin in the mind of God. In God's thought, man was first, and then the animals; but from that thought of God came forth, first the animals, and then man. Whoever perceives this clearly is not for a moment at a loss vis-à-vis the Darwinist.

Thus when it says that the social life of the animals evoked in Adam a certain sense of lack, we must not for a moment think of a certain animal trait that surfaced in Adam. It is simply absurd to think of an animal trait in man apart from sin. The matter was quite different. In the thought of God's ordaining, man was ordained not to be lonely but to be in company with people. Because man had been thus ordained, God foreshadows that trait of sociability also in the life of the animals. So when that social life of the animals drew Adam's attention, it did not awaken something of the animal nature in him, but that life trait was awakened within him that had been ordained of God, that belonged to man and was only foreshadowed in the life of the animals.

The awakening of that feeling preceded the creation of Eve. And then came the woman. She found the man from whom she had been taken, and Adam saw in her not so much a second individual but rather a part of himself. *Isha* would be her name or, as it has been translated, *wo-man* [Gen. 2:23]. She was not yet Eve; that name she received only after the fall. "Counterhalf" or "counterpart" would be too strong a word. "*Other self*" is too philosophical an expression. But both her wondrous creation and the first name she was given express that she was not an addition to the man but was part of his life, which became complete only through her. A *wedding* in our sense was inconceivable at that point. At our *wedding performance* people are brought together who were strangers to each other and first lived separately; such a ceremony is therefore conceivable only

after the fall. It is a weak effort to restore and redress what was lost through sin. In Paradise there was no wedding performance but a creation *in* marriage, a being one together through the origin of life itself.

Byzantine argumentations have been advanced about the rib of Adam from which the woman was taken, and it has even been calculated whether from that moment on Adam lived with one fewer rib. The text prohibits such vain pedantry. When Adam sees his wife he does not say, “This is one of my ribs,” but something quite different: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” [Gen. 2:23]. The further explanation that follows immediately, given by Adam himself, must not be overlooked. Granted that it reads “one of his ribs,” but this must not be construed as if this expresses the *whole* matter. The full sense of the phrase is that the bone and the flesh of Eve, i.e., her whole physical presence, was not taken from the *dust from the ground* but from his bone and flesh, and was built into a complete body by creative power alone.

We do not read anything about children born before the fall. But Genesis 2:24 shows that procreation was most definitely not a consequence of sin, as if, in the absence of sin, each new human being would have been created individually. This has been suggested, but wrongly so. After all, after the creation of Eve it is stated explicitly, “Therefore a man shall leave his *father* and his *mother* and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” [Gen. 2:24]. The designations *father* and *mother*, which are unthinkable apart from procreation, are thus discussed already before the fall and are associated directly with the creation ordinance of God. This is also apparent from the formation beforehand of the animals in the image of man. Reproduction exists in the animal world as well, and that trait in the life of animals was also a foreshadowing of what would be revealed perfectly only in man.

In that high, holy unity, therefore, man and woman stood in a Paradise that was bathed in divine overabundance. It was a divine masterpiece. The masterpiece that was the ultimate goal of all of creation. The whole world existed for the sake of that Paradise, and that Paradise existed for the sake of humanity that had been called by God and blessed by God. Man was the center in that creation, and the crown of God’s entire creation.

16

THE ORIGINAL LIFE SPAN

Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

REVELATION 22:14 KJV

WE DEGENERATE SINNERS simply cannot compare Adam in his original perfection and fullness of strength to ourselves. We wear the autumnal robe of fadedness and decay, whereas Adam blossomed in the springtime luster of a strength not yet injured by anything. We know this from what we are told about the age of the early patriarchs. For the report that the oldest patriarchs lived to be almost a thousand years of age must not in any way be discounted. There can certainly be differences of opinion as to the extent and duration of a year, and history shows that such differences of opinion did indeed exist for a long time. The manner of calculating time could develop only gradually to the level of accuracy and precision that we have today. In ancient times, people as a rule had to make do with inadequate data.

This resulted in a degree of difference between the results of their measuring time and the changes of seasons in the course of nature. Attempts were made to smooth out those differences. One group of people did this more roughly, others with more refinement. As a result, divergent chronologies developed, especially as a result of the difference between the so-called *solar year*, based on the course of the sun, and the *lunar year*, based on twelve months of four weeks each, and thus having only 336 days. Yet it is absurd to appeal to this difference in calculating time in seeking an explanation for the high age of the early patriarchs. After all, nature itself indicates unfailingly the passing of a year through the cycle of the seasons. Life in nature, in the field, and in the orchard knows a beginning of the resurgence of life, a going on to blossoming and to a ripening to the full harvest, followed by a waning and finally a hibernation, and only after this hibernation it awakens again.

This cycle is what constitutes a year, and in demarcating the limit of that cycle no people would have been able to make any significant mistake. One year the cycle may differ somewhat from the next. But no matter the extent of that difference, there is no year inserted between the two and no year can drop out from between them. Even in regions where two harvests are gathered within a year, the farmer knows very well how to distinguish between the late harvest of the preceding year and the early harvest of the new year.

When the first chapters of Genesis speak of *years*, therefore, we must think of natural years, in which nature completes its life cycle; and it is absurd to say, as has been done, that those years should be viewed as months. Mahalalel fathered Jared when he was sixty-five years of age [Gen. 5:15]. If we take this to be months, then Mahalalel would have begotten this son when he was *five years old*. Furthermore, if years did indeed mean months, then the change in the meaning of the word should be indicated. But we do not find any indication of this. Gradually the life expectancy drops, and already with Abraham we find a life span that corresponds more or less to the life span that is reached still today in Russia and other countries.

We must therefore abandon any attempt to make the life span of the early patriarchs equal to ours. We are told that they lived *ten times* as long as we, and we must accept this report. *Ten times as long as we* is the clear indication given to us in these ages: Adam, 930; Seth, 912; Enosh, 905; etc. These numbers divided by ten give the still very respectable ages of 93, 91, and 90 years, respectively. If it is incontrovertible that a person's life *force* is related to his life *span* and vice versa, then we can draw the conclusion that the early patriarchs surpassed us nine times in natural vitality. This is true also of the ancient patriarchs after the fall, when their strength had already been partially injured and was maintained only through grace. Thus the life force that was in them then already was *no longer* what that life force must have been immediately *after creation*. And although we lack any criterion to calculate the difference in vitality immediately before and after the fall, it is in the nature of things that that vitality must have been even greater before the fall.

This is relevant also when we come to the incarnation of the Word. When we hear that the Son of God took upon himself human nature, not in its original but in its *enfeebled* state, we generally fail to understand this properly, because Jesus was, after all, neither deformed nor sick and his entire appearance undoubtedly made a blindingly noble impression. This then easily leads to the thought, what then did Jesus still lack? But if we take into account the difference between us

and the early patriarchs, then we know that they possessed a vitality *ten times* stronger than ours, and when furthermore we take into account that Adam before the fall must have shone in a still nobler light, then it becomes clear to us what [it means that] the Son of God "took upon himself our lowly nature." Had he not assumed our "lowly nature" but our original one, then with respect to his body he would have had to have been like Adam.

Already this difference in life span is significant for the entire position of original man. After all, we must not say, "*After the fall* Adam reached the age of 930 years; without the fall he might have reached *one thousand*," because no matter how much truth this may contain, this idea is incorrect. It presupposes that without sin, Adam's vitality would have become exhausted and that he would ultimately still have died. And this is precisely the wrong way of thinking. Apart from sin, the life force does *not* diminish at all. All decrease in vitality is a consequence of the fall. Human life was not designed to decline, to diminish, and to finally dissolve in death. The life that God created in human beings was designed for *living*, for living *eternally*. Death is not part of God's creation. Death entered God's creation through, and as a result of, sin. And if sin had *not* entered the human race, humanity would never have experienced death.

The slow decline and depletion of the life span comes to light, therefore, in the presence of a slow work of destruction. In the beginning, the supremacy of life over death was still great. The life of humankind, then as now, was borne by two factors: first, by the hereditary strength inherent in the *race* and, second, by the strength inherent more specifically in the *individual*. This is still true. In one family we find people who often reach eighty or ninety years, in another family they generally die between sixty and seventy years. This depends on the strength inherent in the lineage. But within the families themselves there are still differences. In a family whose members generally reach a high age, one person will reach ninety-five or ninety-six while another passes away at eighty-six or eighty-seven years of age. That then depends on the strength of the individual. And so too in the earliest times, when death had just begun to break [down] our vitality. Death's destructive influence had to work on both factors. First the strength of the *race* had to be broken, then the *personal* strength of the individual. We see this breaking [down] of the strength of the *race* in the decline of the life span from more than 900 to less than 100, and the breaking [down] of

the *individual* strength we see happening immediately in the decline from 930 to 912 in Adam and Seth respectively.

In Adam and Eve before the fall, on the other hand, both the strength of the race and the strength of individual life were entirely intact and unimpaired, and there was no question of a decline in vitality. Without sin they *could not have died*. Scripture teaches us clearly that *death came into the world through sin* (Rom. 5:12). On this point there can be no doubt among Christians. This is true for us, and in our view we must not tamper with this. Life in Paradise was a life without even the *shadow* of death. If we understand this in something more than the superficial sense, then what is expressed here differs entirely from saying that Adam would not have died apart from sin. That too, of course, but much more. Dying, after all, is absolutely not merely breaking the thread of life, but also the result of a protracted process that takes place in us. It is said that already at birth a child brings into the world the seed of its death. And even though this is manifestly true for us in the case of hereditary illnesses such as cancer, it is nevertheless true in principle for each child. We do not *become* mortal at a later point in time; we are *born* mortal.

Thus death does not come at the moment when we breathe our last, but is at work in us throughout our life. The pangs of death precede death itself, in part through illness and sickness, but also apart from sickness through the diminishing of our strength, the withering of our face, the dulling of our eye, the graying of our hair. Yes, we even see these signs of decline manifest themselves in all kinds of pain and discomfort, in all kinds of susceptibilities and disorders, in nervous exhaustion and fatigue. Thus, if we want to imagine a human being at the point of creation, we must completely eliminate from that image not only death, but also all sickness, all aging, all pain, all breakdowns, all lassitude and nervous exhaustion. It must have been a life in perfectly unbroken strength, in profound harmony, moving along in continuous balance. Even the dread or fear of the possibility that something *might* go wrong with them was entirely alien to their state of bliss.

Holy Scripture does not give us a direct answer to the question what the

outcome, the course, the end of man's existence on earth would have been if sin had not entered. We are taught *negatively* that man would then *not* have died, but what *would* have happened to man is not stated *positively*. Nevertheless, we cannot suppress this question, and throughout the ages believers have considered themselves justified in thinking that had sin not entered, then after having completed God's counsel on earth, the first man would have been taken up into glory without dying. This notion was based especially on what the apostle [Paul] teaches us will happen to those who confess the Lord and will live on the earth when he returns on the clouds. For he says that they will, without dying, be *transformed*, i.e., will change into a more glorious form and appearance in order to thus be forever with the Savior [1 Thess. 4:17].

One is justified in using that reference to the extent that it shows that also without dying it is possible to change from one condition to another, from one shape to another, from one form to another. For this reason the transfiguration on Mount Tabor can also be considered in this context, since the event on Tabor also speaks of such a transition prior to death intervening [Matt. 17:1–13]. We cannot doubt this possibility, therefore, and to that extent there is no objection to considering the possibility of such a transition from a lower to a higher state, form, and shape without death taking place also in the case of Adam in Paradise

All the same, we must add that neither what Paul prophesies nor what is reported to us about Tabor is directly applicable here. The children of God who on the day of Jesus' return will not die but be "changed" will have been conceived and born in sin, and are therefore subject to all manner of misery and therefore also to the abasement of their nature. When Jesus returns they will stand here on earth in their weakened and degraded body, and what Jesus will do to them is that he "will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Phil. 3:21). Also, on Tabor, Jesus still bore that "humiliated nature" that he had put on for our sake. Both cases thus involve a human nature that had been *humiliated* and now changes over into a state of glory. But this self-evidently could *not* have been applicable to Adam. In Adam, human nature had *not* yet been humiliated, and without sin it would not have been humiliated. In a sinless development, his leaving this state of being would consequently neither have been parallel to the "change" of which the holy apostle Paul speaks, nor to the glorification on

Tabor, indeed, not even to the glorification of the Christ in his resurrection and ascension.

But even this does not yet show the distinction completely. For us who live on an earth that has come under the curse, no ultimate escape is possible without the perishing of this earth in its present form and the appearing of the new earth under the new heaven from the hand of God's omnipotence. Then the redeemed first go from the earth to heaven and only when at the return of the Lord the contrast between "heaven and earth" shall have fallen away through the destruction of *this* earth and the appearance of the *new* earth, shall the children of the kingdom inherit the earth and live in glory with their Lord. But in a development of humanity without sin, this would not have been so. Without *sin* in humanity, no *curse* would have come on the earth, and no destruction of an earth apart from a curse is conceivable. To some extent we might even say: glory would not have had to come, for glory was already present. The whole of Paradise was bathed in the glory of the Lord.

We might incorrectly conclude that if no sin had come at all, and Satan had not invaded our human life, the paradisal condition would simply have remained what it was originally. Our forefathers expressed this by saying that *eternal life* had been promised as reward in the covenant of works, and our Catechism also gives as the ultimate goal of the service of God that we might "live with him in eternal happiness." It cannot be gainsaid that a distinction is clearly drawn between the paradisal condition and the coming kingdom of glory. Doctrinally this is expressed by saying that in Paradise Adam could fall, whereas in the kingdom of glory any sin would be utterly inconceivable. In Paradise there *was* no sin, but sin *could* enter. In the kingdom of glory, on the other hand, not only *is* there no sin, but any entering of sin is utterly inconceivable.

This spiritual difference is, of course, also linked with a difference in the external aspect. Paradise could perish, as indeed it has perished, and in its place could come the curse. Conversely, in the kingdom of glory any thought of perishability is incongruous. The same is also true of humanity's external existence. In Paradise, Adam existed in such a way that his vitality remained unimpaired, but he *could* lose it, he *could* be humiliated in his nature; he was not yet a *mortal*, but he *could* become subject to death. And this is precisely what will no longer be true in the kingdom of glory. On the new earth under the new

heaven, death will no longer rule over him. Death will have been eradicated. The glorified nature will no longer be *capable* of being humiliated. Vitality will be *inamissible* there.

Herein, and only herein, lies the transition that Adam would have had to make, apart from sin, if he were to attain his enduring, permanent condition. We will speak later about his spiritual state and position. Here we confine ourselves to saying that in the first place he had to acquire spiritual incorruptibility; secondly, that the world had to become *curse*-proof, if we may express it so; and thirdly, that his human nature had to become *insusceptible* to humiliation.

In our language we use the word *fireproof* to describe what cannot be affected by fire. Something is fireproof if fire cannot get at it. And so we could also put it succinctly this way, namely, that by virtue of his creation Adam was susceptible to sin, death, and curse, such that he had to make a transition to a state that was sin-*proof*, death-*proof*, and curse-*proof*. Perseverance of the saints was not enough. The perseverance of the saints does not preclude sin or even a temporary falling away. What is meant here is that neither sin nor death nor curse can penetrate his being and his world.

This condition Scripture calls *eternal life*, and the Catechism calls *eternal happiness*. Adam most definitely was not yet in that condition by virtue of his creation. He had to *go over* to that condition. And it is that transition from one condition to the other that would have brought an end to his first existence.

In Paradise itself, this transition was denoted sacramentally by the *tree of life*. This *tree of life*, we read in Genesis 2:9, stood in the midst of Paradise. It constituted its center. This phrase “tree of life” is found again in Proverbs 3:18, where it says, “*[Wisdom] is a tree of life* to those who lay hold of her,” which is then explained further: “those who hold her fast *are called blessed*.” So here this “tree of life” is something by means of which one enters into blessedness. In Proverbs 11:30 the same is said about “righteousness,” in Proverbs 13:12 about “a desire fulfilled,” i.e., of the reaching of our ideal, and in Proverbs 15:4 words of love, compassion, and comfort are the “medicine of the tongue.” And then, after the rest of the books of Holy Scripture have been silent about the *tree of*

life, it returns in the book of Revelation, where Christ says to the church of Ephesus, “To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the *tree of life*, which is in the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). And in the depiction of the kingdom of glory the “tree of life” is shown, not as one tree but as a row of trees on both sides of the river of crystal that flower and yield fruit twelve times in a single year, that bring about the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:2), and whose fruit may be eaten by those who “have the right to the tree of life,” i.e., those who are blessed because they do the commandments of him who is the Alpha and the Omega (Rev. 22:14).

Thus all these references to the “tree of life” point to a tree of God whose fruit gives or maintains life, and whose leaves even bring healing. The same is confirmed by what we read in Genesis 3:22, where God expresses the fear that fallen man in his audacity might “take also of the tree of life and eat, and *live forever*,” which is why God decides to expel man from Paradise. “Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever.’”

From of old, two interpretations have been prevalent here. The one maintained that this tree of life contained a divine power, so that whoever ate from that tree added divine, eternal power to his life by the eating as such. The other view rejected such a notion and saw in the *tree of life* nothing but a *sign*. Eating from this tree was, on this view, nothing but an act of obedience, the obedience of faith, and whoever demonstrated this obedience of faith received from God a heavenly strength. People preferred to compare this to the sacrament. At the Lord’s Supper we use *bread* and *wine*. This bread and wine do not possess the power of grace in and of themselves, but whoever takes, eats, and drinks these sacramental signs in the obedience of faith receives from Christ from heaven, through the Holy Spirit, the grace that the sacrament promises and seals. In the same manner, it is then said, this tree of life was placed there as a sacramental sign, whose fruit which man was given to eat, simply as the fruit of a tree, and this eating was linked with the promise of higher grace. It was not as if this grace came from the tree; rather, in this case the obedience of faith was followed by the giving of higher grace. Others, finally, do not even want to go this far and are of the opinion that in fact the first human was *not* allowed to eat the fruit of this tree but simply had to *look* at it, even as the Jews in the wilderness had to look at the serpent, and to this sacramental act of looking at this sign was attached the promise of higher grace.

The battle over the sacraments that our forefathers waged against the Roman Catholics and Lutherans has undoubtedly not remained without influence on their choice in the interpretation of this mystery. Even as they still tried to maintain the truth over against the Roman Catholics and Lutherans that the water in baptism was and remained simply water, and thus also the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper were nothing but common bread and common wine, they also maintained that this *tree of life* was nothing but a common tree, and that only the *promise* was the source of inflowing grace.

17

THE TREE OF LIFE

Then the LORD *God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever.*

GENESIS 3:22

AS WE STATED briefly in the preceding chapter, currently the most common interpretation of the *tree of life* as if it were nothing but a sacramental sign in the covenant of works is not adequate. This interpretation does not satisfy. One feels that something of this nature may be involved, but the notion that this marvelous tree in Paradise served only this purpose does not resolve the difficulty facing us.

This tree is assumed to have been nothing but a common tree. Adam then would occasionally have looked at that tree. And looking at that tree would have had a sacramental effect on his faith that strengthened his inner life. What else would this be but transporting a means of grace from the covenant of grace back to the period of the covenant of works? Under the covenant of grace the Lord most certainly commands us to take common water and equally common "bread with wine" and to see in these common elements a "sign" that is a seal of his solemn promise. And he, our God, graciously grants us under the sacramental use of these signs a spiritual grace that strengthens either the implanted capacity for faith or the faith that has budded. But this whole view of the sacrament is geared to *fallen man*, not to man in the "state of righteousness." In fallen man that original faith has been damaged and disrupted, and has in part even changed over into *unbelief*. In him, therefore, *faith* cannot be restored other than by a spiritual, miraculous act of God in the heart, and only in the form of "faith in Christ." This *restored* faith then is opposed in the child of God in all manner of ways. This is why it must be strengthened. And for that strengthening of saving faith in its continual oscillations, the sacrament is serviceable.

In that sacrament, therefore, nothing is required of, nor presupposed in, the sinner other than that, first, restored faith be present (whether as yet only

potentially or already in its budding out); second, this faith be threatened; and third, the strengthening of this faith is sought with God and not with man. All the rest then comes from God the Lord, by virtue of the Word of promise, by the mystical inworking of the Holy Spirit. Precisely for this reason the signs have to be so completely common: water, bread, wine. It is then sufficient that these simple, quite common signs point symbolically to the substance: the water to cleansing, the bread to sustaining, and the wine to the exhilarating and enhancing of life; that the action in the sacrament likewise have a symbolic interpretation; and that all this has not been devised or invented by man but has been ordained by God.

But *can* this apply equally in the covenant of works? Definitely not. For in the covenant of works what matters is not *believing* but *doing*. The ground rule of that covenant is not "Believe and you will live," but quite otherwise: "If you *do* these things you will live forever." At this point we cannot elaborate further on this contrast. Let it only be said that all *doing* presupposes faith. But the "faith" that Adam possessed in Paradise was not faith in the Mediator and Surety, but faith in God. Even as Christ himself, of course, also did not have "faith in the Lord Jesus Christ" but rather, and exclusively, general faith in God. This general faith does not mean, as it is often understood, admitting readily and wholeheartedly that there exists a provident God who holds our breath in his hand. "Faith" as Adam possessed it in the state of righteousness and as Christ possessed it according to his human nature has nothing to do with that kind of rationalistic bleating, but is the immediate connection, without any interference or obstacle, of the conscious life of the soul with the living God.

This is the faith presupposed in the whole covenant of works. Whoever does not live in original or restored conscious fellowship with the living God does not bow before his law, does not have his law written on his heart, does not know the impulse to fulfill the law, and does not seek to grasp eternal life through fulfilling the law. This general faith as Adam possessed it in the state of righteousness is always the foundation and presupposition of fulfilling the law. It is inseparable from it. And as soon as this faith allows even a sliver to be split off, it is damaged, its power is broken, it is turned into unbelief, and it can no longer lead to the fulfillment of the law.

For this reason, any strengthening of this faith is inconceivable. As long as it is sound, it does not need strengthening; and as soon as it becomes unsound, it would not benefit by it. A human being who has turned from faith to unbelief cannot be saved by a *strengthening* of damaged faith; in him the capacity for

faith must be restored and renewed into another form. He needs to be born again, and only after that rebirth does the sacramental strengthening of the newly implanted faith, which is now faith in Jesus Christ, become possible. For that reason it was not adequately and sufficiently thought through when people spoke of a strengthening of faith before the fall. Theirs was a failure to adequately distinguish between the very different natures of the two covenants. The tree of life was therefore certainly not a sacrament in the sense of a means of grace as we receive and enjoy it.

In order to arrive at a more correct insight into the significance of the tree of life, it is safest to start with what is *known* and what is *certain* in order to ascend from there to the *unknown*. These firm particulars we have in Genesis 2:9 and in Genesis 3:22. About the *institution* of a sacrament we read nothing, not a single word. But we are told that there was a garden in Paradise, and that in this lush garden there were two trees that had a distinct significance. Not in the sense that the rest of the trees were unsightly and of a lesser sort and that only those two trees were splendid specimens. On the contrary, it says that *all* trees were beautiful to the eye and yielded noble fruit. For we read, "And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" [Gen. 2:9]. But two trees are set apart from all the rest, and of those two it is said that the one has to do with our *being*, the other with our *consciousness*. For the one is called the tree of *life*, i.e., of *being*, the other is the tree of moral *knowledge*, i.e., of consciousness.

It strikes us immediately that the number *two* here dominates. Not one tree, not three trees, but *two*, and these two trees are placed in relationship to man, even as man himself has been created as a duality: as *soul* and *body*. The human being for whom these two trees are intended, for whom they have been planted, and for whom they stand there, has two aspects to his existence; and corresponding to these two parts, sides, or aspects of his existence, two trees are pointed out to him. Of those two trees he is told that the one has to do with his *intellectual consciousness*, with his *moral knowledge*, hence therefore with his inner, spiritual existence, with the existence of his soul. Of the other tree, by contrast, is said that this one involves not his moral insight but his *life* in general. If we take this contrast as it stands, then we may surmise that this tree of life points more to natural life, whereas the second tree relates more to our spiritual

existence. For no one will be able to maintain that the moral knowledge of good and evil lies outside our spiritual life. Only, we must not misunderstand the expression “natural life” here.

Today, “natural life” constitutes a contrast with the supernatural power that Christ generates in us, but originally “natural life” was life itself, life as it was intended to pass over into eternal existence, in short, what we now call our *existence*. And over against that *existence* then stands the spiritual *consciousness*, which arises from our *moral* knowledge. And even as that “tree of knowledge” stood in relation to our consciousness, so also the “tree of life” stood in relationship to our existence as such. Or to express it more simply (though not entirely accurately), the tree of life related to our *body*, the tree of knowledge to our *soul*.

What we read in Genesis 3:22 dovetails and fits completely with the preceding. [By now] man has fallen and stands unregenerate in his sin, in the midst of Paradise. Both trees still stand within his reach. He has eaten from the fruit of the one tree, and it became his fall. And now the Lord says: We must be on guard that *(fallen) man does not “reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever*.” In our circles these words have generally been interpreted in an ironic sense, as if God the Lord said mockingly, “Look, there stands man in his conceit, as if he had become one of us and as if, by eating from the tree of life, he now could also make his life and his existence eternal.” Even Calvin takes this same ironic approach in his explanation of this verse. But we cannot agree with this, because irony can never induce one to implement a serious measure. And yet a very serious measure is indicated here. Fallen man is expelled from Paradise. A heavenly guard of cherubim is placed at the entrance to the garden to guard it. And man wanders off, his heart still holding the memory of Paradise-lost, now to dwell upon the curse-laden earth. Would it make sense for God to say, “That foolish man fancies that by eating from the tree of life he can make himself immortal, and therefore I will execute this radical turnabout in the existing order of things. Indeed, what he fancies is not true, but just because he imagines it in his pride, I will take away Paradise from him and leave him with only the cursed earth.” Who does not sense that this interpretation is unsatisfactory?

The matter lies very differently, however, when we view, according to the

interpretation we found in Genesis 2:9, the *tree of life* as a tree whose fruit has to do only with our *physical* existence and not with our *spiritual* existence. For Calvin's claim, and that of all theologians before and after him who took refuge in an ironic reading of Genesis 3:22, was implicit in the fact that they thought of spiritual life in relation to the *tree of life*, and then, of course, they *could* not admit that fallen man could have acquired *spiritual life* by eating of that tree. This was self-evident, and as long as we continue to think of *spiritual life* in connection with the *tree of life*, Genesis 3:22 is simply unintelligible and incongruous. If, on the other hand, we abandon this unproven thesis and attach the *spiritual* significance to the *tree of knowledge* only, but a physical significance to the *tree of life* as pointing only *natural* life, then the matter appears in a very different light. For we could very well think that fallen man, who was utterly powerless to grasp *spiritual* life, nevertheless reached for what could strengthen his *natural* life. Today the extravagant sinner still grasps for all that nature offers him to strengthen his body weakened by sin, so that he can all the more freely indulge his appetite for sin. The urge to do this springs up of its own accord. Sin gives a feeling of weakness, also in relation to the body. And the first thing the sinner does is to seek not the welfare of his wounded soul but the renewal of strength for his weakened body. And what then was more natural than that fallen man, feeling God's wrath upon him and threatened in his existence, was in the first place intent on taking from the *tree of life* and seeking in its fruit the strengthening of his life?

To see the significance of this, we have only to remember the undeniable truth that our *physical* life does not maintain itself spontaneously, but lasts only by continually taking in nourishment. Our body continually digests, and that loss must be compensated for by the steady intake of new nourishment. This is true not only now, as a result of sin, but was also true in Paradise: "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden" [Gen. 2:16]. And so it will also be one day on the new earth under the new heaven. The heavenly Bridegroom awaits us at a wedding banquet full of fat and marrow, and along the river of life stand, as delightful fruit trees, the same *trees of life* from which all those are empowered to eat who have fallen asleep in Christ [1 Cor. 15:18; Rev. 22:2].

We are therefore mistaken if we imagine that in Paradise the maintenance of the body was of secondary importance. On the contrary, the body had to be fed

in Paradise as well. Add to this, secondly, that in Paradise this body was only in a *provisional* state. If Adam had kept God's law, then he would also have gone physically from a condition of mortality to a condition of immortality, *without dying*, even as he would have progressed from being *able* to fall to being *unable* to fall. This then assumes both a spiritual and a physical transition. The soul that is able no longer to fall is different from the soul that is still able to fall. And thus also the body that is still *able to die* is different from the body that is *no longer able to die*. And now we venture to ask whether it is so unlikely that the *tree of life* bore precisely that fruit that man had to eat to bring about this momentous change in his physical condition? The purpose of all the other trees in the garden was to maintain man's physical life in the state in which it had been created, but this one tree had the purpose of taking his *physical* body into the state of glory. After all, in Paradise the *tree of life* is an exception, but on the new earth it is a common fruit tree.

In this connection we must indeed remember that the cursed earth still bears the tree of life, but it has turned into its opposite, or its purpose has been changed. The opposite of the tree *of life* is, of course, the tree *of death*, and what is that other than the *poison tree* whose fruit brings death to man, be it slowly, be it suddenly. The *Belladonna*, the *Upas* tree in Java, the *Strychnine*, and so many more are all plants that were inconceivable in Paradise but that sprouted from the cursed earth. Related to the *tree of life* are, on the other hand, the quina tree and so many others that offer beneficial sap or medicinal fruits that do not kill life but save it when sick. These facts therefore show that at present, God the Lord has substances in his plant kingdom that either threaten or save natural human life and can do this with such intensity that a single drop of a particular poison is sufficient to destroy life, and that one thousandth and one ten-thousandth part of Belladonna or another plant can save a life from certain death. Poison and life are thus linked most closely. Does not the practice of homeopathy have this indisputable merit, that it has discovered how the same botanical substances that usually bring death can by contrast sustain life when taken in very small doses?

So the poisonous tree and the life-giving tree have in common one underlying principle, and for this reason we have every right to maintain that the poisonous and the medicinal trees that we now find on the cursed earth take us back directly to the *tree of life* that stood in Paradise, and that one day will

bloom on the new earth that is to come in the kingdom of glory with a splendor that was unknown even in Paradise. All these trees have a very different character than the common trees that provide nourishment. For their nature and character are that they do not nourish life but affect directly our existence at the root, whether to destroy that root or to strengthen that root of life within us. And this agrees fully with the view that the *tree of life* in Paradise, unlike the common fruit tree, was intended not to feed and sustain human life, but to bring it to a state of higher strength.

Think what would have happened if after his fall, Adam had partaken of this "elixir of life" as it is called in Theosophy—what would have been the consequence? This, that his natural life, which now served sin, would have developed to a higher level of strength and that he would have physically fortified himself against physical death. This is what is referred to in Genesis 3:22: "Lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever." This would have had the same effect as what we see on a smaller scale in the villain who, in order to intensify the enjoyment of his crime, first raises his life spirit through strong drink, or, as so often happens in case of a riot, that the lower class of people is first plied with drink to inflame the populace and make them more reckless.

And thus the argument runs progressively, and erases all the difficulties. We then understand why there stood, in addition to the *tree of knowledge*, which pointed to the life of the soul, another *tree of life*, which pointed to the physical or natural life. We understand why that *tree of life will be the rule* on the new earth, when the spiritual salvation will be fully accomplished. We understand why Adam after his fall had to be intent on eating precisely from that *tree of life* and thus fortify himself against death. We understand the connection between the tree of life and the *poison tree* on the cursed earth. We understand the profound connection discovered by homeopathy between the life-threatening and the life-saving power of poisonous plants such as Belladonna. And finally, we understand why Adam's intention had to be cut off and the cherub had to descend to ward off such a sacrilegious abuse of the tree *of life*.

The main point is, therefore, that the *tree of life* will be the rule on the new earth and was an exception in Paradise, serving to physically prepare the transition to the state of perfect glory. An interpretation that we offer herewith to

our fellow theologians for reflection and consideration—not without the quiet hope that the correct understanding of this mysterious tree may have been advanced somewhat through our comments. We would add only two points. First, that eating from the tree of life in Paradise was nevertheless most definitely sacramental, provided that we do not limit "sacramental" to the entirely unique meaning of baptism and Lord's Supper but understand it in the sense in which also the rainbow in the Noahic covenant bears a sacramental character. Nourishment of the *body* and nourishment of the *spirit* are two acts that are generally viewed as having nothing in common. That this is a mistaken notion is sufficiently apparent from the fact how frequently sumptuous food and drink are the cause of all kinds of sinful and excessive consequences. But in any case this much is certain, that eating from the tree of life was connected with Adam's faith in the salvation that was promised him, even as our partaking of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is connected now for us with the hope of eternal life. And to that extent this *tree of life*, as the commentators on the authorized Dutch Bible say, was most definitely a sign. It stood there in the midst of Paradise as a sign that life in Paradise was not the highest good, but that Adam's striving and desire had to consist of wanting to leave the provisional paradisal condition and to reach for eternal life and perfect bliss, in the glory of God.

Our second comment concerns the other tree, the tree of *knowledge*. Of the tree of life man could eat, but he was not allowed to eat from the tree of knowledge. A directly opposite ordinance, thus, but in this context entirely natural. For body and spirit are distinguished in us in such a way that for our *physical* life we must *want* to be dependent on nature and its food. *Not* wanting this is to resist God's ordinance. But for the life of the spirit, conversely, that other law applies, that this higher life in us must be elevated above nature, and that we *must not* expect its sustenance from nature, but *must* expect it from God. Wanting to expect moral knowledge and the maturation of our spiritual life from the eating from the fruit of a tree would be a total reversal of God's instituted order. In that order, instituted by God, the command to *eat* applied to the *tree of life* and concerned the physical life. But for the *tree of knowledge* the command to *eat not* concerned the spiritual life. For the *tree of life*: You *must* eat, but for the *tree of knowledge*: You *may not* eat. The fact that Adam nevertheless did the latter, is really what constituted his fall.

18

NATURAL OR SUPERNATURAL?

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

GENESIS 1:31A

FROM ADAM'S OUTWARD position we now move to his *inner existence*. We must also have a clear sense about this inner existence if we are to understand the consequences of the fall, the condition it brought about, and the common grace that ameliorated this condition. In this we merely follow the good example of all Christian authors who, in order to get a good perspective on the present, always began by rendering account of the influence of *sin* and *grace* on that which presently exists. In order to arrive at their conclusions they asked themselves in what state and position man stood before sin, and what changes sin brought about in these. Not only the Reformed, but also the Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Greek Orthodox authors did this. This good habit was abandoned only when rationalism had undermined any faith in the "state of righteousness" and the "fall." And it is pitiful to see how today even Christian writers are led from the right path by this evil example and deny this wisdom of our forefathers. It is as clear as can be that a physician called to attend to a sick person must first be aware of the human being in a healthy condition, as well as the cause of the illness that turns him from a healthy into a *sick* person. In the field of medicine or surgery, no one thinks differently on this point. And even architects and master shipbuilders entrusted with restoring or patching a damaged building or a damaged ship will always begin by asking for the plans and specifications according to which the building or ship was initially built. It is therefore a distinct error to consider a discussion of the "state of righteousness" to be superfluous here. The doctrine of "common grace" cannot be known nor understood without having a clear perception of the scriptural truth, especially with regard to the state of righteousness.

The Reformed understanding on this point was formed in antithesis to what

the hierarchy under the influence of Rome had developed as the truth to be confessed long before the Reformation. From the Roman Catholic side, the notion had been accepted that man's "original righteousness" did not belong to our human nature by virtue of creation, but was added as a supernatural gift of grace to our natural gifts. In man as such, as he existed by nature, not "righteousness" but conflict ruled. In him the flesh stood by nature in opposition to the spirit. On this view, "concupiscence" or desire did not come into the world through sin and is in itself not sin; rather, it has been created in man by God. But precisely because this "desiring" of the flesh against the spirit made the possibility so great that the flesh would gain the upper hand over the spirit, God the Lord added a safety measure to this dangerous situation, which consisted in bestowing on man, by supernatural grace, something that was added to his nature. And what *was added to his nature* was "original righteousness." Even as the horseman, in order to be sure of his horse, puts a bridle on it, so also God bestowed on Adam a bridle, in order to be able to control the flesh more firmly through the spirit. Even without that bridle it would not have been impossible that the spirit would have continued to reign over the flesh within Adam, but then such rule would have hung as it were by a thread. The balance would then have very easily swung to the wrong side. God therefore wanted to give man more safety. Man was not simply set on the horse, but first a bridle was placed on the horse. This bridle does not belong to nature, but it is added to nature. The bridle is not organic but instrumental. Where his organic, natural life was concerned, man had, properly speaking, nothing but "the spirit" to rule the "flesh with its desires." But in order that it might be easier for him to keep that control, God now bestowed on him, over and above "the spirit" which he had by nature, in addition to this gift of his nature also a second means of control that did not belong to his nature but was added to it and was to that extent supernatural. This gift that was added to his nature was "the original righteousness."

This Roman Catholic dogma about mankind's original condition does, of course, have far-reaching influence on the whole view of man and on our human life as that has come to be as a consequence of sin. For if we think that "original righteousness" was lost through sin, but that this righteousness as such was something that was added to our nature, then what was lost through sin was what had been given to us as bridle for holding the flesh in check, but nature itself has

not been affected. That nature may be in a somewhat languishing condition, but in itself it remains what it was before the fall. Now as then, flesh and spirit stand over against one another in our nature, and the first impulse of desire is in itself not sinful. Grace must now come to our aid, it is true, to make redemption and salvation possible, since otherwise the horse would run away with its rider, i.e., the *flesh* would run away with the *spirit*. But the capacity to choose by one's free will nevertheless continued in the sinful part of the human spirit, and today free will remains the starting point of moving toward spiritual perfection, if not in the Pelagian sense then at least in the manner of the semi-Pelagians.

The import of this system is best understood if the human being is compared to the spider or the bee, or to any other animal that by instinct executes masterpieces. Such a small creature not only has the *capacity* of creating such a work of art, but it also *does* it. The question is, are *doing* as well as the *ability* for doing both part of its nature? Or does the creature's nature entail merely the *ability* to do something, whereas that the creature actually *does* something is effected by an internal divine operation added to its nature? If we answer by saying that for a bee, merely its *ability* to gather honey, to make a honeycomb, and to fill that honeycomb belongs to the bee's nature, but that the fact that instead of spilling the honey, as many species of wasps do, the bee delivers the honey to the comb is a mysterious function that is *added* to the nature of this insect, then we have a depiction of the view of Rome concerning original righteousness. On the other hand, if our answer is, no, God created the bee not only with the *ability* to do it but also with the impulse and the instinct to actually *do* it, so that both the ability to do it and the doing itself belong to the nature of the bee, then we have the Reformed system.

Of course, the comparison does not in the least constitute proof here, but serves solely to clarify the two confessional positions. Otherwise the immediate answer from the Roman Catholic side would be, and correctly so, "We grant this in terms of the bee, but the bee lacks moral life, and it is precisely for the redemption of the moral life in man's nature that we have established our dogma in this manner concerning 'original righteousness.'" Only with that purpose in mind Bellarmine argues that within a human being there is by nature "a conflict between his flesh and his spirit, between his reason and his desire; that from this conflict certain sickness and weakness have ensued, resulting from a certain condition of the material; and that God therefore has added 'original righteousness' to [human] nature as a *golden bridle* to temper that conflict; or as a *robe* to cover his nakedness; or as a *medicine* to come to the aid of his

weakness." This image of the *robe* is in turn linked to the expression of being *in puris naturalibus*, i.e., in his bare nature, apart from the added covering of "original righteousness." And from this whole conception also follows the well-known statement that what man possessed by nature also remained after the fall, but that what he had received over and above his nature was lost. We must keep clearly in mind that in this context the word "supernatural" does not mean, as it usually does, something that belongs to a different world order. When it is said that "original righteousness" was a "supernatural gift," this indicates merely that it was something that *was added to nature*.

Our Reformed churches have resisted this view and taught that "from the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise (Genesis 3; Rom. 5:12, 18–19), whereby *our nature became so corrupt* that we are all conceived and born in sin (Ps. 51:5)." Our confession is, therefore, that we did not lose anything through the fall that had been *added* to our nature, but something that *belonged* to our nature itself. Let there be no misunderstanding here. Our Reformed churches have never gone along with those who taught that through the fall humanity's *essence* was affected, so that a "sinner" would no longer be a "human being." This is what Flacius Illyricus, a Lutheran theologian, asserted in his conflict with Strigel, and has also been taught by Spangenberg. But the Reformed have never wanted to have anything to do with this view. They even protested repeatedly against the incautious expression of Luther as though the sinner would be little else than a "stone and block." *Essence* and *nature*, so they maintained, must be distinguished. The essence is the *abiding*, while nature is the *changeable*, such that sin did change the functioning of the *nature* of man, but the essence of man has remained what it was, and will remain so, even if it descends forever into the place of damnation. In Satan as well, the essence of the angel remains unchangeably the same, only his nature has, with regard to its function, changed completely into its opposite. The same is equally true of mankind. All that belongs to the essence of man, and what makes him human as such, is present as equally in the sinner as it was in Adam before the fall. What has changed is not his essence but the functioning of his nature. *Undamaged* in his essence, he has become *depraved* in his nature.

This distinction returns when we discuss the image of God. If we understand

having been created in the image of God as involving two things—(1) that the essence of man is created according to the image of God, and (2) that man stood in the likeness of God in the perfection of his nature—then we must say that the sinner, that fallen man, bears the *image of God* in his essence even as Adam did before the fall. Thus it also appears in Genesis 9:6, where it speaks of sinful people and yet states in so many words that the human being that is killed was made in God's image. But if we look at the second aspect, namely, the likeness of God in the perfection of *our nature*, then we must say that through sin man lost [that aspect of] the image of God, that only through common grace small remnants of it have been rescued, and that it can be restored in the sinner in and through Christ, already here on earth in principle and only above in its fullness.

When God had created all things, he looked down upon his created world and "behold, it was *very good*." That verdict of God related to the natural condition of things, to the elements and the various kingdoms of nature and the ordinances under which they existed. Without anything supernatural intervening, this creation was *very good* in the eyes of the Lord, which of course means: without defect and capable of answering to the purpose for which God had called it all into being. How then can we assume that only man was an exception, that only man was created "deficient," that something was lacking in man, and that only in man a "safety valve," if we may put it this way, had to be installed mechanically, as it were? If the response is that man was distinguished from all other creatures by the fact that in him a rational nature had been created, that precisely herein the danger lurked, and that precisely for this reason a means of prevention had to be installed within him, such a response does not bring us any further. This might have some validity if this "addition to original righteousness" would have prevented the fall. But this was not the case.

Despite the fact that man had been handed this "golden bridle," the evil animal was nevertheless beaten to death and man has come to grief. We grant that being *able* to fall is inseparable from the original nature of the moral life, and to that extent it is not a proof of the imperfection of God's creation. This would be the case if in God's counsel there would have been no provision to nevertheless save man if he became a sinner. Because the fall, by virtue of the nature of the moral life, had to be considered possible, a perfectly sufficient justification for the original creation lies therefore in the power of grace, which

irresistibly restores the sinner and leads to imperishability. But that theodicy is lost, even when the possibility of the fall remains, if with Rome we conceive of the creation of human nature as being so defective *that something had to be added*. Human work is like this, but not the work of God. It is this way with our work because what we build, construct, or accomplish is dependent on all kinds of things beyond our control. We cannot increase steam pressure beyond a certain point or the danger exists that the boiler will explode, and *we* are therefore obliged to install a safety valve. If, on the contrary, the steam and the pressure of the boiler were under our control to such an extent that such an explosion would be impossible, then the addition of a safety valve would be absurd.

God, on the other hand, is Creator. When he creates, he is not dependent on anything. He speaks and it is. And it is as he has willed it. And if we say that in creating human nature, God ordained that nature to be so insufficient, so imperfect, so inadequate that at an incalculable moment after creation, something had to be added, affixed to it, coupled to it, dripped in, or whatever you want to call it, but nevertheless always in such a way that this human nature as created constituted a danger, and that in order to avert this danger a safety valve had to be installed—does not such a view detract from God's honor? What else is this than a mechanistic concept precisely at that point where only the organic is appropriate? And what then must we think of the perfection of a Creator who first creates imperfectly and later adds a safety device to that imperfect creation, when immediately thereafter the safety valve nonetheless fails and the fall shows that God's precaution was in vain? We admit, of course, without hesitation that the nature of the moral life makes a breach possible, and that such a breach requires mechanical restoration afterward. But even apart from this, how can it ever be explained away that in creation itself, before the fall and without preventing or averting that fall, a mechanical aid intervenes that is added to what has been created and yet fails to achieve its goal?

The only position that allows for any support of this view is the position of those who are of the opinion that our human nature could not have been created other than at the very beginning of its development. For if we posit that at its creation our nature could not have had a trace of moral strength because moral strength develops only gradually through practice, then yes, we could indeed say

that original man was indeed morally so indescribably weak that he needed external support, even as we put a stake next to newly sprouted plant to support the stem. Viewed in this way, looking at it superficially, we might think that God the Lord created man with such an insignificant beginning of moral life that this moral life needed the support of a reed or a stick in order to be able to grow; this then would be the mechanical *addition*.

But this is incorrect, for two reasons. In the first place, because the entire notion that what God created could develop only gradually from a small kernel is contrary to the entire doctrine of creation. Adam's body was a complete, mature body. Every plant and animal was created in its mature state. And in full agreement with this is the claim that man's spiritual nature as well did not stand at the beginning of its development but was created in its normal strength. Adam was not mentally deficient when he began, but was supplied with normal human wisdom. And in the same way Adam was not a total novice in the moral realm, but was created with normal moral strength, and therefore stood in *original righteousness*, and because he was free from any abnormal development, was *holy*. This in no way means that his rich, normal moral life could not unfold even more richly, but rather that it was normal from the first and contained everything it needed for that richer unfolding. More about this later.

Our second objection is this. If Adam's moral life had needed an external support, then that support would have had to consist of something of a *different kind*. Then an angel would have had to be added to him to protect him against Satan, or something similar. But "original righteousness" is not external support, nor is it something of a different kind, but is precisely that to which he had to come via normal development. The nature of "original righteousness" itself therefore prohibits us from viewing it as something that is added to our nature. "Righteousness" is required of our nature, it is that for which our nature contains the data, it is the target placed before our nature, and it is the goal God's children still pursue even now. How then would we want to add something that must mature from within man's nature as something external? Would it make sense to say: Here is a small and tender child, but God has added the "mature person" to it, as something additional to that childlike nature?

19

THE CROWN OF CREATION

And to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

EPHESIANS 4:24

THE IMPORTANT QUESTION whether the "original righteousness" in Adam was natural or supernatural, i.e., belonged to his nature or was added to his nature, is ultimately linked to our confession concerning the essence of sin. Bellarmine, the skillful Roman Catholic polemicist, who has argued the case for the Roman Catholic side of this doctrine most thoroughly, returns time and again to the point that the temptation to sin lies in the makeup of *our nature*. Thus he says among other things, "The desire of the flesh is at present a punishment for sin, but for man in his natural state this condition would undoubtedly have been *natural*, not as a given *positive aspect* of his nature, but as a *deficiency*, yes, even as a certain *sickness* of his nature, *that flowed from the constitution of matter*." This is not to say that God brought Adam to life imperfectly. To the contrary, Adam received "original righteousness" additionally, precisely in order that this imperfection would be prevented. And taken in that sense, Bellarmine himself acknowledges that that "original righteousness" can be called *natural*. But if we remove this additional gift from the picture, and view man as he would have been if God had placed him in Paradise with only that which his nature gave him, then, according to the constitution of all that is material, the flesh in him would have desired against the spirit, with a certain tendency toward following the inclination of the flesh. This implies that God was not free vis-à-vis matter; that the material has by nature a measure of power over God; and that once he decided to compose man from matter and spirit, or, if you will, from body and soul, God could do it only in a manner that incorporated the seed of sin in his nature.

For if God the Lord would have been able to create human nature in such a way that it needed *no* further provision, then his perfection as Creator would

have demanded this. A creature that is fully complete and perfect in itself, so that nothing needs to be added, stands of course on a higher level than a creature that is still in need of a bandage. In Bellarmine's view, God in fact created man's nature such that his nature had a defect, a defect that had to be rendered harmless by means of an added remedy. But this could not have been arbitrariness on God's part. Was he able to create man with a nature *without* defect, to which therefore nothing had to be added? That he did not do this can only be explained from the fact that God could not do it. And that God could not do it was not due to a lack of will or of intent, but to *matter*. There was something within the material from which man's body was formed that prevented this. Bellarmine states this himself: "It would not have been *because of* but *against* the intent of the Creator." But now God triumphs anyway. If the constitution of matter and therefore of the flesh prevents the creation of a human nature *without defect* or *without sickness* (*defectus et morbus naturae*), then God overcomes that defect by adding to this defective nature something supernatural, namely, "original righteousness," and by this means the evil *is* arrested. But the fact still remains that in matter, and thus also in the flesh, the spirit is being opposed by a power that makes it impossible for God the Creator to create a nature in man without defect or disease. The nature of man per se would stumble; now it gets a crutch and does not stumble. But that such a crutch was necessary, and that man's natural legs did not enable him to walk, was caused by God's powerlessness to create a being from matter and spirit in which matter did not perform its contrary activity.

Thus we see how profoundly this contrast makes deep inroads in the confession of the truth. A force within matter comes to stand over against God, and because of the inevitable contest against the spirit that lies raging within the flesh, the fountain of sin opens up within matter. As concerns his nature, man is therefore an imperfect being, as yet without sin, it is true, but nevertheless with the temptation and a certain tendency toward sin. And it is only through an additional expedient, through something that is added, by means of a crutch placed under his arms, that he is protected against this danger. For it does not matter whether we say that man thus possessed this "original righteousness" as something of his own, as something that belonged to him. The fact remains that it stands outside his nature, and the very images of a "bridle" and a "robe" that

Bellarmine uses give sufficient indication that he himself views "original righteousness" not as an organic part of man's being, but as something added mechanically. Thus it is the nature of sin and the omnipotence of God that are at issue here. Not sin itself, but the fountain of sin is sought here, not in a despoliation of the good but in a quality inherent within *matter*, and it is over against this inherent quality of *matter* that God is powerless. Not powerless in the sense that he would not be able to overcome evil, but powerless as regards creating a human nature without defect. Doubt is here impossible, since Bellarmine states it clearly: "Taken strictly in his nature, the desire of the flesh would have been for Adam a certain defect, a certain sickness that resulted from the constitution of matter." To avoid misunderstanding let us add that Rome does not consider the first stirrings of desire to be sin, but sees concupiscence becoming sin only when man in any way consents to it.

However much the Reformed churches rejoice in the agreement with the Roman Catholic Church in the confession of the mysteries of the Trinity and of the incarnation of the Word, as soon as we come to the doctrine of man and the doctrine of sin, they stand diametrically over against Rome, and it is in the divergent confession concerning the state of righteousness that this difference emerges and finds its origin. We deny that the contrast between flesh and spirit, between soul and body, exists by nature. We deny that in this contrast a power stood opposed to God that prevented him from creating human nature other than with an inherent defect that had to be remedied mechanically. We deny that desire, as a first stirring, would be a defect but not a sin. Over against this we maintain that the nature of sin is spiritual and not fleshly or material, that sin finds its origin neither in God nor in man, but in Satan, who lacks a body and any material form, and who existed and still exists only as a spiritual being. We consequently confess that neither in substance nor in matter, neither in the body nor in the flesh, did a power ever stand over against God that constrained God to create human nature with a defect and to remedy this defect by means of something additional. We confess rather that God created our human nature in noble perfection, without any defect, and that our present misery does not consist in the fact that we have lost something that was added to our nature, but herein, that our nature itself is corrupt, robbed of its original excellence, and depraved. We maintain that this excellent nature was not created independent but dependent and therefore could not persist in its excellence for a moment without its bond with the grace of God (something Rome denies). In all spiritual creatures, be they humans or angels, in whatever state, now and forever, this

belongs to their nature and is inseparable from that nature. And this we sum up in the acknowledgment that man was created in the image of God, and that by virtue of this creation he possessed a nature whose original perfection included standing before God in righteousness.

When we come, after this introductory remark, to the question of how then we must conceive of the original human being in Paradise, we are not sidetracked by the opinion, current in various circles today, that man only gradually climbed up from animal wildness to a degree of human consciousness. Those who posit this do not believe in any Paradise, do not believe in the creation of the first human, and even less delve into the delicate, tender issues connected with the doctrine of "original righteousness." They simply have no eye for this. With such people one can enter into dispute, but that has to occur in an entirely different sphere: the sphere that deals rather with the question of languages, classification of races, historical tradition, zoology, and so much more. This set of issues does not belong in the present context. In general then, we suffice with the observation that from our perspective we do not deny a certain preformation of the human in the animal world. But we must keep in mind that because man was created in the image of God, God did not come forth from man. And so too, even if it became more and more apparent that God created the animals according to the image of man, from this it would not follow at all that man would have come forth from the animals. The only conclusion would be that since he knew how he would create man, God formed the animals with a measure of correspondence with what later would be seen in man. But what occupies us here is not the creation of the animals in the image of man, but the creation of man in the image of God.

In all this, let it be emphasized that God also created man *for his own sake*. This obligates us to take man from the outset, not as being standing independently vis-à-vis God, but as an instrument that he created for his glory. Man does not only stand *under* God, but in his creation he exists only *for* God and *for* God's *sake*. The objective of man's being and purpose of man's existence do not lie within man himself, but man is, if we may express ourselves so, created for God's use. God uses man and has created him for that use, and in man's creation God equipped him for that use. This must not be toned down in any way, because any feebler statement elevates man at the expense of his

Creator.

It is therefore necessary to cut off at the outset any notion of human greatness, to reduce to nothing every conceit of the pride that is inborn in us sinners, and not to imagine man, even for a moment, even in his original excellence in Paradise, as anything other than a creature that exists *because of* the Creator and *only* because of the Creator. Not even a dual purpose must be admitted here. We must not say, for the glory of God *and* for his own blessedness. For even therein sounds an echo of Pelagianism, which is always intent on assigning to man, in any way possible, a certain independent position, if not *over against* God, then at least *alongside* God. God and man then become, if we may put it this way, the two great forces in the creation, and power must be negotiated between these two. All semi-Pelagian schools of thought—Socinians, Arminians, and Methodists, as well as Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox—lean more or less toward that thoroughly unhealthy conception, as if to some extent and in some way man possesses his purpose within himself. The reason this is so impious is that to the extent that man finds his purpose within himself, God himself becomes the means toward that purpose. Man then *begins to use God*, in general to improve his lot in life, and more specifically to effectuate his salvation; what man no longer wants is *being used by God*.

When we therefore speak of our having been created in God's image, we must immediately emphasize that what is intended here is not *our* excellence but our *suitability* for God. A teacher who educates a talented student will be delighted if he succeeds in shaping, even in a limited way, the mind of that young person in his own image, and when that talented young man later achieves a much higher and more influential position than he himself, and far surpasses him in learning, the notion that this young man was once his pupil and that he was able to help educate him will still invigorate him. But then the young man of exceptional genius becomes the central figure, and as teacher he has served him. But this is not the case here. God creates man in his image, not in order that in Paradise this excellent being would be honored and worshipped and then would praise God because God had so outstandingly created that excellent human being. Rather, God creates man so excellently because as God he needed such an excellent instrument for himself. Not as if he needed anything, but because it had pleased him to glorify himself in this way. This is precisely why the Reformed

steadfastly maintained over against Rome that also in the state of righteousness Adam lived by grace. Not, of course, by merciful grace but by sustaining grace, so that it would be utterly out of the question that Adam could take up an independent position vis-à-vis God. He was a creature and had to remain a creature.

Now it is always extremely difficult to account for what God desired for himself in the creation of his creatures. Holy Scripture nevertheless gives us some indications when it comes to the creation of man. In Proverbs 8:31, Wisdom is “delighting in the children of man.” Is it not being implied here that God wanted to see something of himself in his creature? All other creatures did bear a divine imprint, and all paths of creation showed the imprint of God’s footstep, but what he could not see in the rest of his creatures was the image of himself. Therefore, the relationship referred to here does not apply to man as such, but to the divine in man. It is God who glorifies himself in the divine that he created within man. The world outside of man remains foreign to God. It lacks consonance with his spiritual nature. It displays shades of color and glimmerings, forms and lines, powers and skills, effects and beauties, but no heart speaks in it, no inspired, conscious life directed toward higher things. And now God wants to draw this alien world toward himself by epitomizing it in man and reflecting his image in that human being; he desires to bring the world that went forth from him by the word of creation back to his divine heart. Only when the song of the worship of man’s lips climbs upward to him is the word of creation interpreted before God in a spirit-inspired word and only then does it return to him. Apart from man the world stands at a distance from God; in man it comes close to him. Now for the first time something of God’s own life beats and sparkles in this world. Mute before God as long as man was still absent, the whole creation now speaks to God through man. Even as for us a piece of nature remains dull and somber and dead as long as it is wrapped in darkness, but comes to life and speaks to us as soon as the sun rises upon it, so too without man creation was cold and uninspired before God, and only now that the light of the human spirit shines upon this world and from that world shines back to God, only now is the creation alive for God and breathes thanksgiving toward him. Our Confession expresses this by saying that all creatures may serve mankind “to the end that man may serve his God.” And Adam was in fact placed in this

creation as high priest in order that he would encapsulate that whole creation within himself and then, bearing that creation as an offering, he would bow down before his God in worship and thanksgiving.

We can understand Adam's unique position in Paradise only in this way. That creation and that Paradise do not exist for his sake. Everything exists for God's sake, and also Adam himself exists only for God's sake. Without Adam creation was not finished. He is its crown, not that he might take creation for himself but in order that he might bring it to God. No altar stands in Paradise, but all of Paradise is an altar on which Adam as priest of God offers God the glory of his handiwork. Adam must not exist for himself, nor for Eve, nor for any animal. He must busy himself for God alone, continually serve God, untiringly devote to God the glory of his creation. And that he might be able to do this and might be suitable for and capable of doing this—for this purpose and this purpose alone was he created in the image of God. It is not as if God is in need of anything; from eternity, even without the creation, he was self-sufficient, bearing the creation in his eternal counsel. But having called the world into being in accordance with and through his sovereign will, he now also had to create man, because only through man could he receive the worship and the glorification of his name, and thus the fruit of his entire work of creation. Man's nature thus had to be prepared for this purpose, and he had to be qualified and equipped with the capability for it. And this would be unthinkable and impossible if man himself were not God's offspring [Acts 17:29], unless he were created in relation to the divine nature and could act as the bearer of his image. It goes without saying that in that elevated position lurked the danger of a deep fall, but that high position itself was not given to Adam for the sake of man himself, but only and solely because of the will of our God.

20

PERFECT INTEGRITY

See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

ECCLESIASTES 7:29

IF WE KEEP clearly in view the central Reformed position that our creation in the image of God took place, not because of man but *because of God*, then this automatically sheds light on “original righteousness.” One who must deliver a mirror must deliver it in unclouded purity, so that the owner can see his image reflected perfectly, to the maximum extent that glass covered with mercury can do this. Later, for whatever reason, the glass may crack or the mercury may get tarnished, but this must not be the case when it is delivered. At delivery the mirror must be in good condition and must have no defects. This first of all. But the delivered mirror must also be flawless in a second respect. A corrected flaw remains a flaw. And whoever received a mirror that reflected perfectly but part of which had once been flawed, and over that unclear portion a thin, finely polished piece of glass had been very skillfully laid, would, as soon as he noticed it, refuse to accept the mirror. Whether the mirror maker had made the mirror on order for someone else, or for himself, does not change anything. An honorable mirror maker would, even if the mirror were for his own use, have the double requirement (1) that he could see his image as clearly as the kind and nature of the glass allowed, and (2) that as a result of pure workmanship, the mirror would reflect without any modification, in order (to use a manufacturing term) to pass inspection.

Exactly the same applies here. In creating man, God makes for himself a mirror in which he wants to see his own image as clearly as the nature of the creaturely makes this possible. In this case it does not depend, as it does for the mirror maker, on glass and mercury that already exist, but he forms that glass and mercury himself as he needs it for this his creation. And this is why this creation would have been unworthy of God and a failure if, as soon as Adam was completed, God had not seen in Adam, as in a mirror, the clear reflection of

his own image. The churches express that purity and perfection of this reflection by speaking of Adam's creation in "original righteousness." The fact that that this reflection could *later* become, and has become, tainted, touches on an entirely different issue and has nothing to do with the perfection of the work of the Creator as such. What we must hold fast is only that at the moment man came from God's creating hand, man possessed that for which God had created him, namely, that God clearly saw his image in him. In creaturely fashion, of course, yet with all the clarity that can exist in something that has been created.

Now the other point. The product of God's creation in man must function in a pure fashion, not thanks to repairs and modification, such that man originally did not really present this reflection but God remedied the defect by means of an expedient, as Bellarmine teaches. It must function perfectly without anything affixed or added to it. If any creature had attempted to achieve such a result, and had it remained defective, then we could imagine that God might supplement and improve it; but it is contrary to the perfection of the Creator and the flawlessness of the work of creation to imagine God as delivering a creature that was in fact flawed, to which he supplies a covering or remedy. And this is why our churches not only confessed Adam's "original righteousness," but over against Rome, additionally maintained that this "original righteousness" was not added to his nature but was organically bound up with his nature. To use another image, Adam in his original state was not a rosebush without rosebuds to which a bouquet of roses was fastened, but a bush with buds that belonged to the bush. Thus the conclusion remains with regard to the newly created man that God saw that "it was very good" (Gen. 1:31) and also that "God made man upright" (Eccl. 7:29).

God thus wanted to see an image of himself in his creation, and for this reason he created man in "original righteousness," and that "original righteousness" he created *in* and not *in addition to* his nature. Here a question arises that, even though we cannot answer it with certainty, must nevertheless be considered. Let us go back to the rosebush with the buds. For us, no buds are thinkable on that bush unless we imagine that first the bush grew up and the buds sprouted from the branches of that bush. It is fully understandable that in terms of creation, we prefer to view it in such a way that God created the seed for the rosebush in the soil, that from this seed grew the bush, and that on this

bush the buds sprouted. Thus far such a view does *not* contradict the story of creation, for Genesis 1:11 says, "And God said, '*Let the earth sprout vegetation*, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.' And it was so."

But the matter becomes quite different if we were to explain this in such a way that the first palm tree needed many years to grow tall, and therefore the plant kingdom would not have stood in its full strength until fifty or more years later. For then we come directly into conflict with verse 13: "And there was evening and there was morning, the third day." For without entering into the question whether we must think here of twenty-four-hour days, from the description of evening and morning it follows that only one light change is meant, not a long series of *light changes*. Apparently for that reason we must not understand it in such a way that God created only the seeds, so that they might sprout naturally and would need approximately as much time for this process as they do now; rather, the intent is apparently that through his miraculous creative power God brought forth from the earth at once the mature plant, the fruit tree already bearing its ripe fruit. In the meantime it remains clear that they were not planted in the earth from the outside but sprouted from the earth, in an accelerated process, so that on this one occasion, through God's omnipotence, there came into being in one moment of time what today, thanks to his sustaining omnipotence, takes sometimes fifty years or more to achieve the same result.

If we move from plants to animals, we find something similar, but already with a change. In verse 24 we read on the one hand, "God said, '*Let the earth bring forth* living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds," but in verse 25 it is stated very differently: "*And God made* the beasts of the earth," etc. The substance from which the animals are made is thus drawn from earth, but here there is nothing like sprouting or accelerated growth. *God made the animals*. Every intermediate link falls away. The question of the *chicken* or the *egg* has hereby been decided, in the sense that first the chicken was created full-grown, and that this created bird laid the first egg, from which then came the next generation.

With man, the difference is even greater. Here unlike with the animals, it is not said, "Let the earth bring forth man . . . and God made man." *Nothing* is said here to the earth. The earth does not do anything here; it remains altogether passive. Not to the earth, but to the persons of the Triune Being the voice goes out: "Let us make man," and from the dust of the earth Adam's body is

fashioned, and in that body a soul is created until the spirit of life causes him to breathe.

Nevertheless, we can also raise the question at this point whether we must think of an accelerated growth process or of a direct creation in full dimensions. One senses what our meaning is. Even now a human being is constructed from a small, inner kernel. That kernel contains the data for his whole body. God had stipulated that during nine months this kernel, that first, unformed lump, would miraculously develop like a skillful embroidery. Then the child is born, and that child needs about three times seven, or twenty-one years, to grow into adulthood. What happened at Adam's creation? Was there also first an embryo, and did God arrange things, through an accelerated process, so that in a single moment the complete man would mature? Or did he place man at once in Paradise in his full stature? It is not proper for us to conclude more here than Scripture reveals to us, and we cannot make a definite judgment. But let us note that the scriptural narrative *does not* support the former, but *does* support the second idea, for it says (1) that God formed man from the dust of the ground; (2) that God then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and (3) that man only then "became a living creature" [Gen. 2:7]. With us it is different. When the body is ready, the breath of life is also breathed into our nostrils, but the child lives and moves already in the mother's body even before it can breathe.

Now the question certainly remains whether we have the right to draw conclusions from such minor indications, but this does not detract from the fact that we definitely stay closer to Scripture if we do not conceive of Adam's creation as an accelerated growth process but as an immediate, direct formation in the dimensions of the adult human being. This does not mean, of course, that Adam's body could not undergo any changes thereafter. For after all, we ourselves distinguish three periods: (1) our life in the mother; (2) our life from birth to adulthood; and (3) our life after we have reached adulthood, as an adult and elderly person. The creation narrative, understood in the sense we have, says only that Adam stood all at once at the end of the second period, i.e., as an adult man, but in such a way that the *third* period, with the changes belonging to it, still had to follow.

We needed to explain this in detail with respect to the human body, because only now can we get to the question that occupies us at present, namely,

Adam's*spiritual existence* at the moment of his creation. This question is of course much more difficult, because we know so much less about our soul than about our body. We speak of "soul science," but what does the most learned man know about the actual essence of the soul beyond what Scripture reveals about it? We can observe manifestations of the life of the soul, and also determine the relationship between soul and body from the perspective of the body, but we know so extremely little of what is going on inside us. We have no conception, no notion of it, we have no language and no words for it, and everything we say about the soul is in fact couched in metaphorical language. We must therefore remain clearly aware of our ignorance in this area.

When we come to the soul we touch on a mystery, and we may be grateful if we can allow a single ray of light from the Word of God to fall on this puzzling mystery. This does not prevent the same questions from coming up that arose earlier in connection with the plants, the animals, and the human body. This much is certain: at present, our inner invisible being goes through a certain developmental process. We remember very well how there was a time when we understood less, grasped less, knew less, were less conscious of things, and felt less consciously. For back behind the adult lies a period during which he was mentally trained and gradually matured, a process of maturation that still continues in adulthood. Thus when we retrace our life, we ultimately come to a period about which we have *no* memory, and we actually do not know who and how we were back then. In order to fill this gap we then observe other little children and assume that we must have been like what we now see in these children. In those children we see a slow development from the small bundle of humanity, without a will of its own, lying in the nurse's lap, to the little rascal who for the first time lets go of the chair and totters away. But beneath and within all of this, we always observe that such development involves *two*components. All kinds of things are added to the child*from the outside*; but the child also has all kinds of things *on the inside* through which it absorbs the things that are brought to it from outside.

There is therefore much similarity between *nurture*and *nutrition*. In the case of nutrition, there are two components: (1) the food that comes from the outside, and (2) the child's internal organs for eating and digestion. And so too with raising a child, all kinds of knowledge are offered to and instilled in the child; this is possible with a child, however, but not with a young dog, because the child has mental organs by means of which it absorbs the knowledge. This we call aptitude, ability, disposition, and so much more, and that ability, aptitude,

and disposition have not entered the child for the first time in the cradle or after the cradle, but the child has entered the world with these things. All of this was present and dormant in the little infant, and manifested itself as the child grew up. Here, therefore, we see once again a three-stage process: (1) the period when all of this is inside but still dormant; (2) the period when it emerges and develops to adult dimensions; and (3) the subsequent period when the adult person increasingly matures and bears fruit.

When we apply this to Adam, the question therefore arises: Was this inner aspect of Adam created in the condition of the first, second, or third period? When Adam opened his eyes to the light of life, was he a mature child? Physically mature, but mentally undeveloped and ignorant like a newborn infant? Or was he created in the second period of development, so that at most he could grasp something in, say, the manner of a seven-year-old child? Or, was Adam created at once with the mental capacity of an adult? By analogy with what we found earlier with plants, animals, and the human body, we answer: Certainly in the adult state of mental development. We are certain of this, in the first place, because an adult person who is mentally undeveloped like a child impresses us as something foolish and contradictory, and makes us laugh. An old man who becomes senile is an inept being. God could not have said concerning such a being that it was very good. Secondly, because such a silly figure would not have been suitable for God as the mirror in which he beheld his image. And we are certain of this, thirdly, since what is stated about Adam immediately thereafter does not even remotely remind us of a mentally undeveloped child but definitely of a mature, fully developed man.

The question now remains whether we must suppose that Adam came to this state through an accelerated process of development or through a direct act of creation. To this we answer: through a direct act of creation, and not through an accelerated process. For such a process of development happens with us through upbringing, i.e., because something from outside comes to our aid. Never out of ourselves. A child left to its own devices remains, even if it grows up, still entirely foolish and naïve when it is twenty. Experiments have proven this. So too here, where one of the factors needed for the process was entirely absent, an accelerated process is out of the question. Hence our definite conclusion that the adult state of mental existence in which Adam was created was the fruit of

immediate, direct creation.

And now we finally arrive at the most difficult question, that of his religious and moral state, and it is self-evident that also here our conclusion *cannot* be different. Not only his intellectual but also his moral and religious state had to be that of an adult, and in Adam this had to be the result not of development nor of an accelerated process, but of immediate and direct creation. God, who today makes the rose come from the bud and the bud from the branch and the branch from the seed, created the first rose bush with roses on it; so too that same God, who today makes first the seed appear, and from the seed the child and from the child the man, created Adam *as man*, with male*maturity* in body and soul. As for his intellectual life, this means that he was created in original *wisdom*; as for his moral life, that he was created in original *holiness*; and as for his *religious* life, that he was created in original*righteousness*. Does this preclude that he could still enrich his wise mind in all kinds of ways and make it fruitful? Ask yourself whether the mature scholar no longer improves himself and brings forth intellectual fruits until he dies. And in the same way it does not in the least preclude that Adam could also morally enrich himself and bear fruit; and could also in the religious realm develop and improve and bear fruit. This was the purpose of the probationary command of the covenant of works. The state of original wisdom, holiness, and righteousness was as yet not in the least the state of*absolute consummation*. This would come later, and would form the transition into eternal blessedness.

What the Christian church means by the *state of righteousness* will also have become clear at this point. With this term it expresses that the first human was created as an *adult*, in body as well as soul, and that in that soul he was intellectually, morally, and religiously an adult: *wise*, *holy*, and *righteous* before God. This denies that there was any foolishness or lie in Adam’s mind that detracted from this *wisdom*. There was no darkness in him. No veil covered his intellect. He clearly and lucidly perceived the creation around him. There was nothing between him and the truth of things. This is why he was *wise*. Likewise there was neither defect nor weakness in him in the moral realm; his inclinations and expressions were in perfect conformity to the law of life that stood written in his heart. This is why he was *holy*. And finally, there was in him no mind nor will to be other than the image of God; there was no duality in his heart vis-à-vis

God, but he felt himself to be wholly a creature before God as God, created for God's glory. This was his *correct position* before God, his *original righteousness*.

So in Paradise he stood under God, before the face of God, existing only for God, and thus he had dominion over all of creation. Dominion is the Lord's, and therefore this trait of dominion could not be absent in his image. But dominion in Adam was nothing but a reflection, a shadow, and it served to let God see his image in man. It was not Adam who took the world for himself and gave a tenth of it to God, keeping the other nine tenths for himself; he was the image-bearer of God who took the whole world into himself, to bring it to God. He was king because he was priest. An anointed one, a servant of the Lord. Thus in Paradise there was spiritual*perfection*, though not yet the *final consummation*, in the three spheres of intellect, morality, and religious life. From that *perfection* it would have progressed, apart from sin, through maturation, development, and fruit-bearing to the *final consummation*. The shape of the image in his *being*, the traits of the image in his*capacities*, the radiance of the image in his *virtues*, [these were present] until the breach came and, though the basic shape remained, the radiance faded and the traits were distorted into impurity.

21

ORIGINAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

NOTWITHSTANDING THE CONFESSION that the first man was three things, viz., *wise, holy,* and *righteous* (wise in his *intellectual* life, holy *before the Law,* and righteous *before God*), we nevertheless hardly ever speak of anything but Adam's "original *righteousness*." There is no objection to this, as long as we are clear about our justification for doing so. This justification then includes that in terms of what is called "image" or what the image represents, the question of the relationship between *image* and *original* is always in the foreground. The original here is *God*, the image is *man*. The fact that man is created in the image of God makes everything here dependent on the pure or impure relationship in which man, as product of creation, stands to his God. For the purity of that relationship, Holy Scripture uses the word *righteous* or righteous before God, and for that relationship itself, if it is pure, the name *righteousness*. We only have to recall the whole doctrine of justification to make this immediately apparent. The sinner knows himself to be justified at the very moment that his faith breaks through. But this being justified is still something quite different from his *sanctification,* which comes only afterward and is completed only in death.

According to the Reformed point of view, therefore, *righteousness can* mean nothing other than *being in the right position before God*. Only then, when man stands directly and immediately before God with the mirror of his essence, the image of God reflects perfectly in him. Had Adam been created neutral, and had it been left up to him to take his position there where the image of God *could* reflect perfectly in him, he might conceivably have taken up a wrong position. But this was not the case. It was not imposed on Adam, nor was it left up to him, to *take* his position vis-à-vis God, but he was *placed* in his position by God.

For him then the question would arise whether he wanted to *remain* by a choice of will in that position where he had been placed passively; and this he did not do. But this does not detract in any way from the fact that the first man was not placed somewhere outside of God, so that he might search for his God, but rather he began by finding himself in the right position vis-à-vis his God. That he began by thus standing in the right position was not the fruit of his choice or action but the fruit of God's act of creation. God created him in that right position; and that is why, when he first became aware of himself, he stood in that "state of righteousness." This is what the doctrine expresses by speaking with some emphasis of "*original* righteousness." For "original" here means that this "righteousness" was not acquired nor later allotted to him, but was a fruit of creation itself. When Adam opened his eyes to the light he thus found himself in the right position before his God. Of course, the mirror of which we spoke in this connection is only an analogy, but it is an analogy that nevertheless clarifies the matter, and which we the more readily dared to make because in 2 Corinthians 3:18 the same comparison occurs in a similar context: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding [as in a mirror] the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

Upon reflection, the surprise is not that we speak of "original *righteousness*," but that generally we do not speak separately of our original *holiness* and *wisdom*. After all, the least impurity in the moral arena would have removed the first man from his right position before God and destroyed his "original righteousness." It is different with the "imputed righteousness" that the ungodly possess in the Mediator. The ungodly person is not holy, but he is nevertheless counted as being righteous, since he is not viewed as he is in himself but as he is in Christ Jesus through regeneration and faith. But man in his [original] creation is not in Christ, but stands on his own account. And precisely for this reason the least defect in holiness would have been cause for his not standing before God as *righteous*. At creation, the moral life (that of holiness) and the religious life (that of righteousness) are inseparable from one another. They both stand and fall together. Original righteousness, therefore, includes original *holiness*.

It is no different with "original *wisdom*." If Christ is given to us for "righteousness, sanctification and redemption," then he is given to us in the first

place for "*wisdom*" [1 Cor. 1:30]. Therein lies the starting point. Saving faith can therefore not be based on a mystical feeling, but must begin with choosing the "wisdom of the cross" over against the "foolishness of the world." Unlike Buddhism in India, Holy Scripture knows nothing of truth driven merely by sentiment. Life with and for God is not shrouded in mists but shines in clarity and must be a conscious life. We do not *feel* or *guess*, but we *know* that we have passed from death into life. The moral life is not an unconscious life of the will, but our will follows and obeys our consciousness. This is why the fall into sin rapidly darkens the intellect, why the sinner is called a *fool*, and why the regenerated person has "the eyes of [his] heart enlightened" [Eph. 1:18]. This is why Satan first attacked "original wisdom." Satan did not mesmerize Eve, but he *persuaded with reasons*. In this way she departed for the first time from the law of God, and consequently from her right position before God. Righteousness, holiness, and wisdom are thus three pearls of the same strand, and it is in terms of the greatest of the three that man's state is named the state of "original righteousness," since this one automatically encompasses the other two.

The objection often raised against this "original righteousness" actually touches more on the "holiness" than the "righteousness." [Those who raise this objection] still grant, and can still accept, that Adam had not yet committed any wrong. But what they neither grasp nor understand is how Adam can be said to be "holy." The cause here is misunderstanding. Man will be holy, so they say, only after death, in heaven. We are holy only when we are lifted above all sin. The stimulus of sin can no longer have an effect on the holy person. Only those can claim the label "holy" who have first known temptation, overcome and conquered it, and stand once again free over against it. Holy is God and holy are the good angels and holy are the beatified around the throne. But how can we speak of "holy" in the case of Adam, who had not yet known struggle and who failed in the first temptation? Our answer here is unequivocal. If taken in that sense, the first human *was not* and *could not* be holy, and Adam was thus definitely not holy in that sense. On this point no dispute can arise and we don't have to waste words on it.

But does it follow then that Adam's original state was *unholy*? Yet that is the choice facing us. Every rational being (which includes man) must be pronounced either holy or unholy. There is no *tertium quid* [third thing] between holy and

unholy. You cannot be half holy or one-third holy. Whoever is not unholy is holy. Whoever is not holy is unholy. A sinful man, incorporated in Christ through regeneration and faith, is holy. Not half, but entirely. And the apostle attests this: one who is "born of God . . . cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God" [1 John 3:9]. But apart from Christ, this person in and of himself is still entirely unholy, a miserable human being, crying out "who will deliver me from this body of death" [Rom. 7:24]. Certainly, we can also speak of degrees in this context, so that even our Catechism speaks of "the holiest men, while in this life." But this is an entirely different realm of concepts. One man can be more manly than another, one woman can show the feminine in her character more beautifully than the other, but this does not take away from the fact that the difference between what a man is and what a woman is, is fixed. And in the same way, we can speak among the "saints," i.e., among "believers," of less holy, holier, and holiest personalities, but this does not touch on the *principle* and points only to the lesser or greater virtuosity with which the principle is at work in them.

Given this contrast, the reason we have a measure of difficulty in thinking of Adam as "holy" is that we can never come *to* holiness other than *from* sin, whereas the holiness in Adam still existed entirely outside the contrast with sin. This distinction is best felt when it is transferred to an entirely different realm. Take, for example, the contrast between dry and damp. If someone has fallen into the water and gone under, then after you have pulled him to the shore, he is still wet through and through. And then you cannot say, of course, that he is *dry* until the last damp spot on him has dried. For someone who has been in the water, being dry is the result of removing all dampness, something not achieved until this drying process has been entirely completed. On the other hand, for someone who has not fallen into the water being dry is not the result of such a process, but it is the original, natural condition, which is not disturbed until moisture is added. And so too here. Adam, and with him all of us, have been submerged into the stream of sin, and also when our Redeemer pulls us out of that stream of unrighteousness again and puts us safely on the rock in Christ, sin still drips from us on all sides. This is what makes it impossible for us to imagine "being dry," i.e., "holy," other than as the result of a struggle through which we gradually get rid of sin and of all that is sinful. And as long as a single drop from that stream of unrighteousness remains splattered on us, holiness has not been achieved.

Taken in this way, holiness lies only at the end of the long road and is

inconceivable in this life. How then could we justify applying this to Adam before the fall, to Adam for whom as yet there could be no shaking off of sin that did not yet cling to him? To the newly created human in whose person there was nothing but that which God had created in him? In the case of Adam before the fall we must therefore take “holy” in a *positive* sense, not as an overcoming of and struggling free from sin, but as a state of *standing as yet completely outside of any communion with sin*. The angels who did not fall did not become gradually holy, but remained holy without ever slipping into sin. Had Adam not fallen, he would also have remained holy, as he was created holy, without ever having felt the grip of the bonds of sin. More than that: the fallen angels were also created holy, after all, and fell from holiness. And even as the fallen angels, Adam stood originally in holiness and fell away from that holiness by his yielding to Satan.

In the meantime, we are mistaken if we think that the “image of God” consists only of these innate “wisdom, holiness, and righteousness,” and if we think that therefore through the fall the image of God disappeared altogether from man. This would be the case if man’s essence stood outside this image. Man then would have existed in his essence separate from that image, and only then the traits of the image of God would have been engraved in this already existing human being. The engraved traits of wisdom, holiness and righteousness then would have constituted in and of themselves the image of God, and when man became a sinner, he would by losing these three traits also have lost the image of God itself. In this view, there would first have been a man *without the image*, then man with this image *engraved in him*, and then man in whom this image had been *worn away* and *disappeared*. This entire notion must be rejected, and even Rome has not dared to teach this. Rather, the Roman Catholic Church is inclined to take the escape route of making a certain distinction between the *image* and the *likeness* of God. The *image* then points to man’s essence and nature, the *likeness* to the supernatural righteousness that was added to human nature by way of a bridle. We will not dwell on this entirely arbitrary distinction. Those making this distinction have to prove its validity, and until now no one has done so.

Close and careful consulting of Holy Scripture as to what can be found about the “image” separately, both with Christ as well as with man, or also about

“image and likeness” together, and finally in the parallelism of the prophets about *likening* and *comparing* rather supports the conclusion our forefathers reached from the outset, that we must understand image and likeness as the same thing being expressed in two ways. But there is an element of truth in this Roman Catholic notion to the extent that we must seek the image of God not only in the *quality* of man’s nature but definitely also in his *essence*. It was not so that a man who already existed was only later modeled into the image of God, but man as a whole, as created, was designed to manifest the image of God. There is nothing in man nor about him that was not created for the purpose of manifesting the image of God the better, the more perfectly, and the more gloriously. Just like the entire camera is devised, designed, and constructed to capture and record images accurately, and the camera is the more excellent to the degree that everything *not* serving this purpose has been omitted, so too the whole human being is, if we may put it this way, an apparatus invented and designed to be capable of displaying the image of God. If you want to call this man’s *essence* in contradistinction to his nonessential *qualities*, then we must indeed acknowledge that man has been created in the image of God in two respects: (1) in his essence to be *able* to reflect the image of God, and (2) in the qualities of his nature to actually do this.

Traditionally the more orthodox dogmatic theologians correctly applied this also to man’s body. Not as if the body itself, as such, could be the image of a body of God, which is entirely foreign to God, who is a spirit. It would be absurd to even think this. We must nevertheless also maintain this application of the image of God to our body, by virtue of the correspondence that exists between soul and body. Our body belongs with our soul. It is not an envelope in which the soul has been inserted, but an artful instrument that is prepared by God to serve the soul, and that for each soul individually. Soul and body are organically one, and even though they are pulled asunder in death, they will nevertheless be reunited in the resurrection of the dead. The body also has abiding, enduring, eternal significance. One day the body will inherit immortality.

Since this is the case, it is inconceivable that the soul of man would be designed for the image of God and that our body would have nothing to do with it. Yet these similarities cannot, of course, be sought in the *members* of our body as such, but must be sought in the *functions* of those members and senses. With

our body we see, we speak, we walk, we descend, we climb, and so much more. And in Holy Scripture, all these functions, and so many more, are ascribed not only to our God, but they are ascribed in terms of the same senses and members of the body that we use for them. God also hears with his ear, sees with his eye, walks with his feet, strikes with his hand, saves with his arm, points with his finger, feels with his heart, moans in his inner parts, shows wrath with his face, and so much more. Of all these expressions and manifestations of life in God, an imprint has been put in man, and this imprint expresses itself through the members and senses of the body. And for this reason it won't do to say that our body as such has nothing to do with the image of God.

Nevertheless, our body is only the form of our being through which we manifest ourselves in the visible [world] and through which we have fellowship with the world outside us; our actual human essence lies deeper within us and exists spiritually. In the essence of the soul, therefore, the image of God radiates much more unmistakably. For even though we can also discover sensations and outwardly directed operations in animals with more highly developed organs, discoveries that certainly elicit our admiration, even in the most highly developed animal the faintest notion of the image of God is so completely absent that it seems as if these animals have been created for the express purpose of showing us the vast distinction between some animal traits possessed by these animals, and the complex of these higher phenomena as manifested only in man.

That consciousness and self-awareness, that having communion with the world of the beautiful, the good, and the true, that lighting up in passion and being inspired to pursue higher ideals, that all-round observing and discovering, that conceiving of and thinking through of things, that taking hold of the past in the present and that prophesying of the future out of the present, that warm and tender sentiment, that empathy with the suffering of others, that loving and devoting oneself, that strongly willing and persevering, that unlimited aiming all means toward a single chosen goal, and so much more—all of this teaches us to know all these capacities and powers as a disposition and capacity in man as human being that transcend the bounds of the lower creaturely life, and can be explained only on the basis of the reflection of the things of God in our human being. In that sense we are truly God's offspring, and in him we live and move and have our being [Acts 17:28–29], and even in the midst of the most horrible self-degradation, the foundation of our human being still remains lofty, so that the self-deification of the human being, created in the image of God, is well-nigh unavoidable on the part of those who have fallen away from that God.

Thus the image of God dominates the whole creation, the whole manifestation, the whole presence, the whole existence, of man as human being. And only because he exists in *this* way as human being, he was able originally not only to capture, but also to reflect the image in his qualities and in the manifestations [of these qualities]. Thus God saw his own image in the human being he had created, and he saw that it was very good. But precisely because man bore the image of God, it belonged to his nature to be imperishable in soul and body. Plants come and go so that although the species remains, the specimens disappear. And in the same way animals are only transient bearers of the species to which they belong. But man *cannot* be thus.

Because God is enduring, the bearer of his image must also have permanence, not only the race but also the individuals. Our immortality is not for our sake, but for God's sake. A human being *cannot* cease to exist. His existence continues even if it goes through death. He is not a wave that materializes on the surface of the sea, reflects the light for a short while, and submerges again, but he is something distinctive, not only as species but also as person and as individual human being. Plants and animals perish, but the human being is imperishable, because he has been created in God's image. The image-bearer of the One who alone possesses immortality within himself must, by virtue of the image he shows, bear within himself the indestructibility and eternal permanence of the only immortal God. It scarcely requires reminding that this indestructibility does not preclude being *able to die*.

22

CONSCIENCE AND THE COVENANT OF WORKS

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

GENESIS 2:16–17

THE CONCLUSION REACHED thus far was that God created man in such a way that he saw his image reflected in man for the purpose of being able to use him as an instrument for his glory, and that he created him for that purpose:, *wise*, *holy*, and *righteous*, i.e., not only without any defect, but also definitely at that normal point in the adult human life when that life just begins its richer unfolding. But this does not yet say nearly enough about the spiritual condition of man in Paradise. We need only mention the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" to immediately open up a new, and certainly not limited, field of inquiry. But if we are to feel at home in this new field, we must get it firmly in our mind beforehand that what we call "conscience" did *not* exist in the newly created human being.

At first glance this may appear strange, yet it is quickly and clearly grasped if we do not take "conscience" to mean what the unbelieving world has turned it into, but rather as our forefathers always understood it. As the people of the world want to delude us into believing, conscience would be a kind of Urim and Thummim [Exod. 28:30] within us, a divine oracle. We would need only to inquire from that oracle to know what God wants from us. And also when we go against the will of God, the oracle rebukes us inwardly. So anyone who did what his conscience dictated and refrained from doing what his conscience forbade was on this basis a man after God's heart. And armed with that conscience-religion, people allowed themselves to push aside Scripture, the law of God, and the gospel. People could do without all of these as long as they went by their conscience and acted in accordance with it. With that compass one [presumably]

always proceeded safely. Cliffs left undisclosed by this compass did not exist.

It is striking, therefore, how this boasting in *conscience* arose at precisely the time when rationalism was busy trampling *faith*, and how even now people are most busily occupied with the conscience in [those] circles where faith in God has in fact been lost. This would not be the proper place to denounce the worship of conscience and its implicit self-deification of the man whose conscience it is. We limit ourselves here to a reminder that Holy Scripture does not know anything of such a *Urim* and *Thummim* in our heart, and that our Reformed forefathers had a wholly different view of the conscience. For they actually denied that the conscience is something distinct in man; they refused to say that man has feelings, and will, and intellect, and inclinations, and so much more, and then, in addition, also a conscience.

Conscience is not a *capacity*; it is not an inner habit; rather, it is a continually recurring activity within us, an expression or activity of our *consciousness*. For our consciousness is compelled to be engaged *with ourselves*, to reflect on our moral situation, our thoughts, our words, our deeds, our omissions and commissions, and reflect on them with a measure of evaluation and choice. This requires[, firstly,] a certain moral awareness or knowledge of good and evil according to the law of God. For this it is necessary[, secondly,] that we know ourselves and that we objectify for ourselves our own person and our actions. And this requires, thirdly, a higher impulse that forces us again and again to condemn or acquit ourselves according to that yardstick of our moral awareness. Thus in the moral realm it is precisely the same as what must happen in the realm of the intellect, of beauty, and of so much more. We discover that in the realm of truth, fixed laws of thought apply. So we must investigate for ourselves whether we have respected those laws in our thinking. If we have not, then we must think differently and better. If we have, then we stand firm in our conviction.

We also affirm this sound doctrine concerning “the conscience,” but precisely for this reason it is inconceivable that there was in Adam immediately after his creation what we call “conscience.” Indeed, Adam possessed consciousness, self-awareness, moral self-awareness, but as long as the first experience of guilt was missing, he could not act as judge vis-à-vis himself and render judgment. Had sin failed to appear, no government would have arisen, and no tribunal would ever have been held. And even as there would have been no external judge, so too there would have been no *internal judge*. Or, if you will, the person who had to act as judge when necessary did exist, but as long as

no one appeared in court, the judicial function could not be exercised. That *judicial* role is inseparable from the function of our consciousness if we are to speak of a judgment of conscience, and therefore the conscience-function could come into existence only when there was guilt or at least an accusation. But it could *not* exist, and is unimaginable, as long as there is not the remotest hint of guilt, nor even of any self-accusation.

Therefore we *cannot* speak of conscience in the proper sense in Paradise, *nor* in the case of him whom we worship in the image of the "spotless Lamb," nor among the beatified. Conscience is the functional form of our rational awareness as soon and as long as sin divided the unity of our inner life; and as such within this functioning of conscience there lies a piece of "common grace" of no little significance, even as Paul testifies that the Gentiles are morally accountable in terms of the acquittal or indictment of their conscience [Rom. 2:15]. Precisely because of the breach that sin caused in our being, and the resulting permanent dividedness of our inner life, the image of our person in the mirror of our conscience takes on a form that differs from our ordinary self-awareness. And this explains why we begin to discern something distinct in this curious function of our consciousness, and why we are almost incapable of looking at it in any other way than that our conscience is a separate capacity.

Therefore, with respect to Adam, although we could not yet speak of a *conscience*, he certainly did have *faith*. Not, of course, the same faith whereby a sinner is justified. The faith that saves from perdition could not yet be present in the first human being who had not yet fallen. The faith that saves sinners is thus faith of a *special* nature, which came because of sin and it will, after sin will have been destroyed, once again show its *general* primary character. After all, faith as such is a foundational feature of human nature. Faith is the conscious rapport between the divine image and the human being who has been created in that image. Where that image goes into hiding, this faith darkens. Where the image turns into its opposite, this faith becomes deliberate *unbelief*. Christ was the perfecter of this faith [Heb. 12:2]. And according to the apostolic testimony this faith, which makes the soul dwell with God and brings about a conscious rapport, abides, together with *love* and *hope* [1 Cor. 13:13]. That faith is therefore a piece of creation. It belongs to the nature of man, as soon as we think of this nature as being in rapport with God. And this is why in Adam such faith,

as the breath of life of the soul, was part of “original righteousness.” Adam’s original righteousness is inconceivable apart from that faith.

The *covenant* in which God stood with Adam falls within the same line of thought. The word “*covenant”* for the relationship between God and Adam is derived from Hosea 6:7, where the Israelites of that time are reproached that “*like Adam they transgressed the covenant*,” because “they dealt faithlessly with [their God].” Attempts have been made to omit Adam’s name from Hosea 6:7 by means of a different translation, but this attempt was *bound* to fail. That the name Adam means man or human being in our language [Dutch: *mensch*] is very well known. Based on this, it has been suggested that Hosea 6:7 should be translated, “They have transgressed the covenant *as human beings*.” But this rendering runs afoul of its own illogic. For how in the world would the Israelites have wanted to transgress the covenant with their God other than as human beings? They simply were nothing other than human beings, and there simply *could* be no transgression of the covenant other than by humans. If this had referred in a special sense to the kings or the priests, who were held to a more scrupulous faithfulness than the common people, then it might be translated as “They, though being kings and priests, have transgressed the covenant as if they were *common people*.” But this cannot be, because those who are being reproached *are* the common people. The rendering “They have transgressed the covenant like Adam” therefore encounters increasingly less opposition. For us it is the only option.

We attach importance to this statement because in Genesis 1–3 no explicit mention is made of a covenant of God with the first man, and also elsewhere in Scripture the name, but not the substance, occurs in connection with Adam. Furthermore, such an unexpected reference to Adam is also found elsewhere in Scripture. Thus we read in Job 31:33, “If I have concealed my transgressions as Adam by hiding my iniquity in my bosom.” And in Psalm 82:7 our preferred rendering is “Nevertheless, *like Adam* you shall die, and fall like any prince.”

Especially the Reformed have therefore correctly insisted that establishing the covenant of works with the newly created Adam must be fully taken into account. The silence of Genesis 2 and 3 must certainly not be disguised and must be explained, but it does not in the least refute the fact that a covenant was being established. This fact is certain on the basis of the whole contrast that runs

through Holy Scripture between the covenant of grace that is based on *faith* and the covenant of works that is based on *doing*. Nobody denies this contrast, and it simply *cannot* be ignored.

It might be objected that the covenant that is based on the rule “Do this and you shall live” is generally found in the form in which it was proclaimed to the Israelites. But it is self-evident that a covenant based on this rule has not been made with *sinners* (and the Israelites were sinners). Or what sense would it make if God the Lord, knowing how fallen man was incapable of any good, would have presented a covenant, not to Adam in the state of righteousness, but after Adam was fallen, on the condition that he would do perfectly what is good and through this would live, but otherwise would forever be under the curse? Among humans such a consolation would be called repulsive deceit; how then can we ascribe it to God? Furthermore, according to Genesis 3:17 the curse already rested on this fallen world, and how then could it be that not until Horeb was the curse threatened for those who did not continue in all that was written in the Book of the Law? On that interpretation of Scripture, no guilty verdict against Adam would even have been possible. We categorically reject the entire notion that the covenant of works was revealed for the first time at Sinai, and there [at Sinai] was intended to be a covenant of works. This might be true in a symbolic and nationalistic sense, but it could *not* be true in relation to individual humans with respect to their soul before God; nevertheless, this latter is how it is understood repeatedly in the New Testament (Rom. 10:5).

All of this can be explained very well if we accept that (1) the covenant of works was already established and broken in Paradise; (2) that in this covenant the absolute bond between inner existence and external condition is expressed, which nevertheless continues forever; (3) that God in his covenant of grace with Israel has refreshed the memory of this covenant of works; and (4) that it was indeed valid for Israel in a symbolic and nationalistic sense. Abundance and delight as long and insofar as they served God, hunger and pestilence when they burned incense for the queen of heaven.

But as strictly as we maintain this, just as readily do we admit that especially since the rise of *covenant theology* the former restraint has been abandoned in far too large a degree. Everything was worked out precisely in terms of the tiniest particulars: who the parties were, where the covenant between them had

been made, when the covenant was made, what the parties to the covenant were like, what the stipulations and conditions were, what promise was held out as enticement, and what threatened punishment struck terror. We would almost say that they were able to present these details with the scrupulosity of a notary. But Calvin and the best Reformed theologians did *not* do it this way. They remained more restrained and were therefore more in harmony with the Paradise narrative itself.

Nevertheless we do acknowledge the relative right with which people have approached the issue in this manner, (insofar as [their approach] can have a positive side) by drawing out into the spotlight everything that can be found on the issue and investigating it down to the details. Indeed, there certainly were parties, and obligations, and the obligations rested on conditions, and those conditions held beyond Adam for all his descendants. But we must guard against one thing: let us not describe *how* God presented this covenant to Adam nor what Adam presumably answered, for then we arrive at factual assertions that we must be able to substantiate from Scripture. But in Scripture we find virtually nothing mentioned about this. Scripture tells us clearly that Adam was placed under the covenant of works, and we with him, and what the stipulations and promises and threats of that covenant were, and still are, but the entire Paradise narrative tells us nothing about the way it came into being.

This silence in a matter of such importance can be explained only if we understand the covenant of works in its first revelation not as having been put together mechanically but as functioning organically. Two parties that at first did not belong together, but who negotiate to reach an agreement are establishing their covenant, if they reach it, perfunctorily. But this is not how it *can* have been here, because God had created man in his image and for himself, so that man was his and belonged to him. In such a relationship there is no *coming* together but a *being* together, and the form of the covenant can only function *organically*, i.e., as a matter of course and as a natural expression of a mutual relationship. Because man was created in God’s image, the mutual relationship between God and newly created man could be no other than that of a covenant, with all the emphasis this word implies and all the consequences it entails.

Covenant expresses a bond between two [parties] who are distinguished by relative independence. Where that independence is absent, there is a bond but no covenant. What is called *covenant* in human discourse therefore comes closest to what this original relationship of man to his God is. Here the stipulations are natural as well. There is no capriciousness or whim, but life, living completely

according to God's holy ordinances. And the stipulations also emerge organically from the relationship. Living in terms of God's ordinances leads to a natural and complete flourishing of our existence as eternal life. Resisting that ordinance injures life and brings death. Nor could Adam separate himself, in his individuality, from his offspring. For God, the [covenant] bond encompasses us and all that is ours, now and forever. Adam could be no other than simultaneously the first man and the covenant head of us all.

This is the first point. But secondly, the link between *doing* and *living*, between *not doing* and *death* was not a mechanical one either. This relationship is also definite and will not be shunted aside; it would not satisfy us if, in the wake of a few new philosophers, that bond were either made incidental or severed. The outcome shows that that bond could *temporarily* be severed, and precisely then the covenant of grace must intervene mechanistically to restore the breach. But even though the cross saves the world, the cross remains *unnatural*, and we are not back on the path of righteousness until our Savior receives a name above every name, and when we hear that every knee shall bow before him. But no matter how seriously this relationship may be disrupted temporarily, Scripture nevertheless prophesies and faith speaks into your soul that in the end the original relationship will be restored again, and the turbulence of chaos cannot come to rest before the internal and external states are once again reintegrated.

But if we turn this into a covenant made *perfunctorily*, then we start from the false assumption that it was not fixed *in* creation but only formulated *after* creation. If, on the other hand, we follow the thought that the covenant of works is an *organically* determined covenant, fixed in the conditions of life itself, then creation and covenant firmly interlock, and we can understand why the law of the covenant of works that was not supposed to be broken, continues all the way to Golgotha, both in reconciliation and satisfaction. This is all the more emphatically so because in the case of a perfunctory establishing of the covenant the entire covenant would depend on the probationary command. That command is stated. It is mentioned. The narrative tells us about it. But of course, a covenant made solely on the basis of a probationary command would definitely not be the covenant of works. The covenant of works must rest on *the whole of God's law*, and the whole of that law of God would then have had to be read

aloud and written down, just like at Sinai, if it had come to an external making of the covenant in the literal sense. But no one supports this [notion]. Although some, following à Marck's example, have calculated how many commandments applied to Adam and how many did not—a calculation whereby in a true Pharisaical manner they inevitably lost sight of the root of the commandments. But that approach has not found a following. When we speak of the law of God in connection with Adam, we speak of that law as created in Adam's heart and as belonging to and being part of that "original wisdom" with which the first human was adorned. It therefore convincingly appears that the stipulation of the covenant of works was *organically* woven into Adam's nature; how then would a covenant based on that stipulation have taken place *perfunctorily*?

But let us not exaggerate in the other direction either, as if the making of this covenant had taken place outside Adam's consciousness. To the contrary, in the first moments of his existence, when the newly created man awoke in the newly created world and for the first time entered into the relationships in which he stood, also in relation to his God, the fact of this bond *must* have crossed his consciousness in such a way that it also felt to him like a covenant. This is why God himself came to Adam's aid, for what we read about the probationary command did indeed take place perfunctorily. At that point God has revealed himself to Adam, has spoken to him, has said certain things to him that were easily understood, and has focused the whole relationship of Adam to his God into a single point, on which, as on the point of a needle, the entire future development of humanity would rest. In this we definitely encounter an *external* covenant making, and it is in the making of the covenant on this one point that Adam had to become conscious of the *whole* of his relationship to his God, and in which the whole meaning of the covenant of works was drawn together as in a single grasp.

23

THE BASIS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

GENESIS 3:6

MAN STOOD IN Paradise, created in the image of God, in an "original righteousness" belonging to his nature, but without a functioning of conscience, in genuine faith, being wise, holy, and just—wise in mind, holy before the moral law, righteous before God. At the beginning there was therefore perfect flawlessness. Not a single defect, not a single weakness. A creature in the image of God, about whom it could truly be said, "And God saw that human being, and behold, it was very good."

With this the starting point had been determined for man, but as yet nothing about the end of road, as was the case with the plants and the animals. A spider weaves its web century after century with uniformly impeccable accuracy. Crows and swallows migrate. The ant lives marvelously in its ant colony from generation to generation. The thunder with which God has clothed the neck of the horse continues to instill dread. The bee gathers honey then as now. But it is not so with man. In his case two things stood at the door. In the first place, the development of that which had only been imagined. And second, within that development the choice between two possibilities: a development in accordance with God's ordinance, or a development that went against that ordinance. Choice in any event, but a choice that would correspond to the *requirement implicit in the position of image-bearer* or that would go against *being that image*.

Anyone called to resemble another's image should, in order to keep bearing that image, want to turn toward him. By turning away from him the image is lost. We can call such freedom of choice the manifestation, the characteristic feature, of the moral life, but it was in fact nothing other than the fruit of having

been created in God's image. God possesses sovereignty, and no natural necessity. He is a God above all things, because all things are his creation. In that sovereignty lies the mark of his divinity, and only by confessing that sovereignty can we escape the grip of pantheism, and only this confession elevates our entire human life.

Well then, man had to bear the *image* of this *sovereign* God, and this caused the contradictory problem both that this trait of *sovereignty* had to exist in man and yet this trait could exist in him only as a reflection, i.e., as something *dependent*. In that contradictory notion of a *dependent* trait of *sovereignty* lies the whole mystery of our religious moral being: created in the image of God, consequently possessing the *moral choice of our will*. This moral choice of will as a trait of the image of God, and therefore *dependent*. A choice of will that was not exercised at every point along the way, for even God, once he created a world such as this, was bound to what he had created. Consequently, further along the way, man would similarly be bound by what lay behind him. Unconditioned power lies only in *the first choice of the will*. It involves not only unconditioned freedom, because at that point nothing binds man as yet, but also power, because it binds everything that follows.

Those who in the distant past defined our concepts praised God as an eternal Being who is *omnia determinans, determinatus ab nihilo*: determining everything, determined by nothing. And the shadowed marker of this lay precisely in that first choice of man's will. In that choice of will, and in it alone, two things were implicit: being bound by nothing, and the dreadful reality that it determined all of existence forever. Thus we notice that we have here a shadowed marker of God's image. Everything of God that is reflected in us is so incomparably glorious, but also so fearfully terrible. We make a choice without fully thinking it through and that choice determines our whole existence. And yet, we cannot do otherwise. It must be so. For thus God made a choice at one time, and it determined the existence of all things, for then and for now and forever. The most frightening thing is that man had to accomplish this act of sovereignty with derivative, with received, with dependent powers. For Adam was indeed *wise*, but with received wisdom; he was indeed holy, but with a holiness that was instilled in him; and so too he was righteous, but in a state of righteousness because God had placed him in that state.

That decision was made when Adam had to move forward. For the curious thing about his position was that he had to develop. With animals there is certainly a process of development, partially also with plants, to the extent that both go from small to full-grown and bear fruit; but in the case of a human being something entirely different comes into play. He not only possesses the [feature] of developing from child to adult, but having reached adulthood, of continually growing in insight and skill, and even beyond that, of progressing through the centuries as a species, as humankind, to a higher state. Jacob is more mature when he blesses his sons on his deathbed than when as a deceitful character he stole the blessing from his father. But Isaiah stands on a higher [plane] than Jacob. In John a much richer world opens up than in Jeremiah. The life of humanity at the present is much more richly developed in every way than it was in the centuries before the Reformation.

Therefore Adam could not simply confine himself to being conservative, even though the notion would not be so strange: “Having been created so exquisitely by God, remain who you are, and don’t change.” Yet that option was cut off. That conservatism would have been sinful in itself. If God creates man with the burden that he move forward even at the risk of stumbling, then it is not proper for man to say, “I will stay where I am, so that I won’t stumble.” Adam had to move forward. The state of simply being a product of creation could not continue. He had to move from that state to go on to that second state, which would be the product of creation together with a choice of will. Man himself working *in* God’s work and *as* his work. Or, if he chose *against* God, working against God’s work and therefore immediately locked in punishment and curse by the reaction of God’s sovereignty.

So you cannot say, “Oh, if only that tree, and what is recorded about that tree, had stayed out of Paradise, and if only Satan had never been let loose against Eve!” This would not have helped Adam at all. He *had* to go through the test, in this manner or another. Man, who until then was nothing but a passive product, had to be brought into *action*. He had to come to a choice. The road before him was long, but precisely for that reason the first step on that road had to be taken as soon as possible. A life stretched out for many years in the luxuriousness of Paradise, without man coming to his first moral act, is an incongruous notion. Even if you measure the course of things not in hours and seconds, the popular notion is still the most likely one: the fall does not wait; it comes immediately. No sooner was man seen in Paradise than Satan immediately approaches him.

We therefore repeat what we said in the opening of this chapter: original righteousness was the *starting point*. It was nothing more, and from that starting point it had to progress through a rich development to a still higher existence. Involuntarily the question arises here *why* it had been ordained in this way, and why God did not much rather create man all at once in finished form, on the highest plane of perfection, so that no battle or struggle would be necessary, and eternal life would be his inalienable portion as a matter of course.

But that question doesn't get us very far. Although on first hearing, it sounds plausible. People ask: if it was God's purpose to have a gathering of perfectly righteous humans rejoice around his throne in eternal bliss, why then not have that large multitude of saints created all at once in that perfect degree of holiness, in the state of perfect sinlessness, in that state of inalienable righteousness? Then the same goal would have been reached, all the misery of sin would not have occurred, and all the bitter suffering that is concentrated in Golgotha would have stayed away forever.

Is it not understandable that such a notion arises, that it arises from the same train of thought that now causes us to question why not all humans will ultimately come to eternal life? If God can save the most stubborn sinner, then why not also the less stubborn? And why then not all, either here or in the hereafter? Who keeps him from doing this? And in this way all human creatures would be saved!

Such questions are understandable. But both are questions that inexorably collapse as soon as we have insight into the creation of man *in the image of God*. This is why *sovereign power* must be reflected in the *choice of the will*, and therefore the goal cannot be reached unless man himself walks toward it. He can be *placed* at the starting line, but he cannot be *placed* at the finish line. Man must *walk* the road between these two. This is implicit in the fact that man was not created in such a way that he was unable to sin. That was the point he had to reach, but only in the second stage. First he had to be in a position where he could forfeit what he had in order that it might thereafter become inalienable. "Perseverance of the saints" is an excellence that *could* not be created in man. Perseverance is not an *original* gift. It only comes later. Having been created, man therefore stands immediately under an inexorable creation ordinance. He must stand the test. Only then can the gate open for him through which he shall enter into "eternal life," i.e., to that high existence that no longer knows change

or development but *perseveres in what it is*. That is, after all, the hallmark of the eternal. Divine *conservatism*, because it is *absolutely perfection*.

In connection with this, the Lord God plants in the midst of the Garden of Eden "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." It is difficult to know whether this was a single tree or a kind of tree. Both options have been defended back and forth. But even though we must admit that the literal words also allow for thinking of a *kind* of tree with many specimens, we think we are safe in maintaining the standard notion of only a single tree. In no case could it have been a kind of tree that was found throughout the garden, for we are told in Genesis 3:3 that this tree stood only *in the midst* of the garden. So even if it was a kind of tree, it could have stood only in a small area in which a group of such trees perhaps stood close together, and this multiplicity might have had no other purpose than to draw all the more attention to this tree through its frequent fruit bearing. Such a deliberate exacerbation of the temptation does not seem to be very plausible to us, and the story itself teaches us that at first Adam did not ask about the tree but was induced by Eve to look at it. We therefore stay with the notion of one tree.

We would prefer to give this tree the name *tree of conscience* because, as we saw, the functioning of conscience in newly created man was still inconceivable and, as we shall see later, was generated precisely by that tree. In any case, it is impossible to maintain that the fixed and actual name of the tree was "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Holy Scripture teaches us in fact that the name "tree of life" was indeed the name of [the other] tree, because that name is found as the name of a tree not only in the Paradise narrative but in a number of other places, including at the end of Revelation. But such is definitely *not* the case with this tree. It is not mentioned again anywhere else in Scripture, and even in the Paradise narrative the phrase "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" occurs only [in a single context], in Genesis 2:9, 17. Already in Genesis 3:3 there is mention only of "the tree that is in the midst of the garden," and in verse 6 only of "the tree." In 3:11 God says, "Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" and also in verse 12 Adam speaks simply of "the tree." On this basis most theologians expressed as their opinion that the words "knowledge of good and evil" in Genesis 2:9, 17 indicate the evil to which this tree has led, but did not represent a name that would belong to the tree as such.

In an earlier chapter we have already combined this *tree of conscience* with the *tree of life* in such a way that their duality was related to the duality of *body* and *soul* in man. The *tree of life* was intended for the glorification of the *body*, the *tree of conscience* related to the life of our *soul*. This duality is neither arbitrary nor uncertain. There are, after all, the *visible* and the *invisible*, and there is no *tertium quid* [third thing] between these two. There is *mind* and *matter*, but not a third something that would as "mental-material" constitute the link between the two. Since God the Lord created man, not as an angel, exclusively from *spirit* in the *invisible*, but at the same time as *matter* in the visible [world], it is self-evident that man cannot consist of anything but *soul* and *body*, and all twaddle about man being constituted of *body*, *soul*, and *spirit* is simply absurd.

Attempts have been made to introduce this [trichotomy] also in our circles. Especially Delitzsch's *A System of Biblical Psychology* has promoted this view. But the Reformed churches remained sober under all this and did not for a moment let themselves be diverted from the old, tried way, and implacably maintained the duality or, as it was called, the *dichotomy* of man. Especially the statement that in man's tripartite being the Holy Trinity was mirrored was objectionable to us Reformed [Christians]. The spirit in us then would correspond to the Holy Spirit, the soul to the Son, and therefore . . . the *body* would correspond to the Father. Do you sense the sacrilege implied in the latter? Your body the image of the Father!

We cannot enter into more detail here, although it will be good to expose the invention of the *trichotomy* that divides man into body, soul, and spirit once and for all for what it is, in all its futility, also in the interest of our pedagogy. For the time being it is sufficient for us to leave it at this, as long as the *duality* of our existence is understood to be a necessary [doctrine]. This duality persists also in death. Then the soul is separated from the body, yet the body is not gone—it is in God's keeping. That separation of the body from the soul is a state of privation. And when glory comes, the body immediately returns, then to be heavenly, and to abide forever, even as the soul.

If this is the relationship between *body* and *soul*, then it is entirely fitting that for man's transition from his original to his permanent state, *two* trees stood next

to each other in Paradise, in the midst of the garden. Both were real trees, but trees that did *not* belong to the order of Paradise. To the order of Paradise belonged that which did not yet *sink down* and did not yet *advance upward*. Both are possible for something that has been created. It can *sink below* its original state, when the curse descends upon it. But it can also *gain* [and rise] above its original state, when it is drenched in glory.

Concerning the three orders, we now read with respect to the world of trees: (1) the trees as God created them; (2) the trees that produce thorns and thistles; and (3) the tree of life in the new Jerusalem or in the kingdom of glory. Neither a tree with *thorns* nor a tree of *life* thus belonged to the order of Paradise. Since one specimen of the latter nevertheless stood there indicates that it was a tree of a higher order that pointed to a higher order of life, and was thus as such already a sign. This was apparently also the case with the *tree of conscience*, which was evidently also a tree of a higher order. For the woman looked at that tree and saw that it was "good for food, and a delight to the eyes, and to be desired to make one wise," [Gen. 3:6] a description that clearly points to something exceptional. We are told that the tree was not like the other, ordinary trees, but that to the woman it surpassed those ordinary trees in beauty and luster and appeal. On that basis we therefore argue that this *tree of conscience*, like the *tree of life*, was also a tree of a higher order, which as such was already a sign of the higher order of life man would occupy one day. Taken in this way, the two therefore belong together, and together they belong with man. Man must not remain who he was, but develop into a *higher* order of life, to an inalienable condition.

Well then, both of these trees stand in the midst of the garden as a prefigurement of what it would be in the kingdom of glory. As something that transcended the glory of Paradise, they pointed man toward the destination and calling that beckoned him, not to sink below Paradise, nor to stay forever in this Paradise, but to ascend higher than Paradise. And they also showed him that this transition from the good that could be lost to the good that could not be lost applied to him in his *totality*, i.e., to both aspects of his being. That was the message given him by the tree of life concerning his *body*, and by the tree of conscience concerning the life of his *soul*.

As natural as it is for a tree that points to the *body* to offer food to eat, it is just as natural that with a tree that points to the *soul, eating* is not the means to

achieve its purpose. The body consists of matter, exchanges that matter, and takes in new matter. This is *eating*. Thus once we rightly understand that the tree of life points to the *body*, we understand automatically that eating from the tree was the means to bestow a higher existence on the human body. But conversely, it is then also entirely understandable that the *tree of conscience*, which has nothing to do with the *body* but only relates to the *soul*, does *not* accomplish its work by material means at all, but *must* do it by *spiritual* means.

This has also been understood differently, by imagining that there were certain powers in these trees that worked on the mind and could either strengthen or poison the mind, but this is not very plausible. Although in fairness it must be conceded that the fruit of a tree can very well influence our mental state. From of old, people pointed to the grapevine, and the question was raised whether the *tree of conscience* was not simply a grapevine. After all, it was sufficiently known that wine could stimulate or cloud the mind. Also, all kinds of plants that stimulate the sexual drive and thus degrade the mind have been pointed to as proof that through its fruits a tree can very easily have a direct impact on our brain. And this is true. Especially various poisons have a swift and strong impact on the life of the mind. This is the result of the connection between body and soul and is experienced by every individual, sometimes in a pleasurable way, sometimes in an unpleasant way. We may concede all of this without this proving in any way that the fruit of the *tree of conscience* has a natural impact on the life of our soul. Wine may overstimulate the mind, but later, when the intoxication of the wine has fully run its course, the mind *remains* what it was before, and the quality of the life of the soul has not undergone any *change*. There may have been a *moral* weakness involved with indulging in the wine, and that has aftereffects, but the wine as such does not touch the state of the soul. We must therefore decidedly reject the notion that by means of a bite of the fruit of the tree Adam and Eve experienced a transition within their soul from good to evil, such that a food they ate caused a direct poisoning of the moral life. This is seeking sin in the material and takes us along the path of the Manicheans and befits the pantheist who lets the functioning of matter and mind merge together; but it does not befit the confessor of God’s triune being, who accepts matter and mind in their absolute contradistinction. Apart from the question, therefore, whether the fruit of this tree of conscience was, as said, entirely innocent, and even granting the possibility that a certain stimulating effect on the mind emanated from the fruit of this tree, all of this could in no way have had nothing other than a secondary [effect]. The actual working of this “tree of conscience”

consisted not in the stimulating effect its fruit might have had on the blood or on the nervous system, but rather in its exceptional attraction, coupled with God's command not to touch it. A tree as such does not have rapport with the soul. Rapport can emerge only when either the beauty of that tree has a hypnotic effect on us, or when an ordinance of God, through a word or command, establishes a deliberate and mechanical connection between our soul and that tree. And in this way, the contrast here is completely transparent. The *tree of life* for the *body*, and therefore its fruit *must* be eaten; but the *tree of conscience* for the *soul*, and therefore a strict *prohibition* against any notion of "eating" from it.

24

THE LANGUAGE IN PARADISE

You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.

GENESIS 3:3

WE LEFT THE question undecided whether the *tree of conscience* bore a fruit that could effectively stimulate man's blood or nervous system. We are not told anything definite on this point. And when it says that after Adam and Eve had eaten of the tree "the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked," this can be understood entirely in a *moral sense*. The only reason why we are not averse to the notion that a certain effect on man emanated from this fruit is because nothing neutral or indifferent was found anywhere in the work of God. If this *tree of conscience*, just like the *tree of life*, was of a higher order, then a power of a higher order must also have been at work in its fruit, although we do not know how it worked or what its properties were. It was certainly not a grapevine, as many surmise, since that fruit does not cloud the senses except after the fermentation of the grape juice. Rather, we would have to think of a tree along the lines of the grapevine, but of such a nature that the effect of this tree on the blood and nerves emanated directly from the fruit, without fermentation. We leave this question undecided, however.

There is no question of any kind of intoxication caused by the eating of this fruit. The whole narrative shows this. To the contrary, their shame sought covering for their shame. But what settles the matter for us, even if the forbidden fruit had a stimulating effect, is that it was in any case entirely secondary. The declaration "*You will die*" was definitely not intended to convey physical poisoning. For then they would not have felt *shame*, but they would have become *unwell* and together they would have fallen down, deathly ill. The natural effect of the fruit of the tree, which we do not deny in the least, is therefore certainly not the main issue, that which matters most. That this tree

was a *tree of conscience* did not depend on its physical properties but on the word of God that had been pronounced over that tree. As Eve told Satan, God had commanded them that they should not even *touch* that tree. Even touching the tree of conscience would have fatal consequences, which amounts to this, that neither the touching nor the desiring of the fruit, but the *deliberate disobedience* that expressed itself in the eating of the tree, would be the cause of death.

This is the place to say something about *the language*. This would not be necessary if the poisoning of the soul had been the consequence of the poisoning of the blood. Everything that occurs physically can be accomplished without using the instrument of language. Motioning our finger toward our open mouth indicates clearly enough that we mean *eating*. But it is different, of course, now that we have come to the conclusion that the *tree of conscience* was merely an instrument, not a second cause, and that the effect proper emanated from the word of God to which they had to be obedient but had become disobedient.

Now what really matters are the *words* that are used, and we must face the fact that Adam and Eve were capable of grasping the meaning of these words. Generally no attention is paid to this point. The words we refer to are so overly familiar to us since our youth, and all the concepts expressed here so common, that the thought doesn't even arise within us how Adam and Eve could understand these words. But this question is definitely legitimate. The single concept "die," "surely die," is so difficult and complex that we cannot escape the question how Adam, who had never heard or seen anything [connected with] dying, could form any conception of it when he heard the word. Even more strongly does the question press itself upon us when we take into account the temptation of the serpent. That temptation also occurred with *words*, by means of a fine web of words, by giving words a slightly modified meaning. [Because] this temptation [came in words,] it could either have no effect on Eve, or it could be too inhumanly difficult, since she was incapable of fully grasping with any of our clarity the snare in which Satan was trying to entrap her. So the question of *language* indeed comes to the foreground. And before proceeding it is therefore necessary to ask ourselves what meaning *language* had for Adam and Eve in Paradise.

We who have been born later learn our language gradually. When we want to

make clear to a very young child that a glass or cup contains deadly poison, we would not say, “By tasting this you will die,” but we would try to give the impression of something horrible by means of strong gestures or vigorous sounds of *yuck* and again *yuck*! And so it is with our entire language. When we stand at the beginning of life, our language already exists outside of us, in the thoughts, conversations, and writings of older people, and only very gradually do we grow into that existing language. The great majority of people grow into their mother tongue so extremely imperfectly that for a normally educated woman to employ one tenth of the vocabulary of our language is already a significant feat. For many young men, who are less in touch with real life, the available vocabulary is generally even much more limited. Languages also differ among themselves. Languages such as those of our civilized peoples in Western Europe have a [level of] development that many indigenous African languages cannot come close to. As rich as our languages are, so poor are the languages of those primitive peoples, not at every point but in general.

Judging by this, when we think back to Paradise, we might perhaps arrive at the notion that Adam and Eve’s speech must have been very defective: an initial stammering or the uttering of some sounds that only in the course of the generations developed from those stammering sounds into something that resembled language. But this notion is completely incompatible with what the Paradise narrative tells us. After all, from the very first moment God the Lord reveals himself to Adam not by means of signs or gestures, but in extensive speeches, in concepts, through words.

In a statement like “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,” we even see a certain luxuriance due to a multiplicity of words, a certain style, a certain nuancing of concepts. Stated crudely it would have been sufficient to say, “You must fill the earth with people.” But now we find *three* concepts: first, *being fruitful*, then the *multiplying* that flows from it, and only then *filling the earth*. Similarly, when it says, “You shall surely die,” and not simply, “You will die,” the former displays a refined form of speaking, a strengthening of the notion by repeating the word itself, something unthinkable if their language had been like that of infants. Therefore it is undeniable that Adam and Eve appear in this narrative as people who, immediately after their creation, are already capable of *fully understanding* a rich, finely developed language.

If we nevertheless assume the contrary, and say that they probably understood something close to this, getting more or less the main point, but that they were rather obtuse in their grasp of the language as language, then an

abhorrence creeps into the story. For then you assume that God, knowing how Adam and Eve did not really understand him, or understood him at best in a very limited way, nevertheless hung *their* future and the future of their *entire* offspring on such an imperfectly understood command. This would assume injustice in God and is therefore unacceptable.

In addition, however, the notion that Adam understood language still only imperfectly cannot be reconciled with the rest of the narrative. In the first part of the story, Adam listens more than he speaks, but it is entirely different in the continuation of the narrative. There, with astuteness and nuance Eve argues with Satan, and Satan with her. Then she reasons with Adam. And after the fall we hear Adam and Eve both plead their case with God, and God rendering judgment, and all this in a manner that would have no meaning if language were not understandable. Indeed, the data the narrative provides go even further. It appears from the narrative that at the outset Adam and Eve even had the capacity to create language and were fully conscious of this. When Adam sees Eve he calls her *Isha*, i.e., wo-man, and later *Chawwah*, or Eve, i.e., life. Later Eve in turn calls her eldest son *Cain*, referring to the fact that she had *received* this child, and later another child *Seth*, because, she said "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel." The Hebrew word *Seth* means "to set, to appoint." This shows a strong linguistic awareness. That this was instilled in Adam is clearly apparent from the fact that God also brought the animals to Adam to see what he would *call* them, and [Adam] gave each a name according to how he perceived their nature and character. Thus once again [we see] a marvelously strong manifestation of linguistic formative power.

Let us here in passing remove an objection that easily arises. The names of Eve, Cain, Seth, etc., are derived from Hebrew roots. Does this mean that Hebrew was spoken in Paradise? This has indeed been thought for many years, and we would not claim that the generation that thinks this way has by this time died out entirely. Meanwhile, further research and comparative linguistics give us certainty that the Hebrew language as we know it from Holy Scripture was formed at a much later date and harks back to a language with much simpler roots. Hebrew is one of those languages that belong to the descendants of Shem and that as a group differ greatly from the languages belonging to the sons of Japheth and Ham's descendants. Hebrew arose after, and has therefore

undergone the consequences of, the confusion of tongues at Babel.

Although it may be reasonable to think that the descendants of Seth lived near the Paradise region, and thus spoke a language most closely related to the language of the first humans, there is nevertheless such an immeasurable distance between that oldest language and our Hebrew that even if they are related, the two languages still differed no less than, e.g., Russian and our rural Frisian. If we accept this, then the difficulty arises how the names Eve, Isha, Cain, and Seth can occur here as having been derived from Hebrew roots, since Hebrew did not yet exist then. But this objection can easily be eliminated. Already the word Isha, or woman, indicates how such names can be *translated* to make the motivation behind the name evident. If our translators had wanted to be consistent, they should have written, “she shall be called Isha,” rather than “she shall be called woman.” Or they should later also have written, “The man called his wife’s name Life-giver, because she was the mother of all living.” If instead of using the names Adam, Eve, and Cain, Genesis would speak of *Man*, *Life-giver*, *Received*, and *Substitute*, then the allusions would have been transferred to our own language, without anyone concluding from this that English was spoken in Paradise. Everything fits well, therefore, if we assume that the language of Paradise was a much more original language, and that only later, when the Paradise narrative was written down, this allusion to the derivation of the words was transferred from that Paradise language to Hebrew.

We now return to the main point, namely, that not only Adam but also Eve were immediately after their creation capable of both understanding and speaking a living, richly developed language. How did they come to this [capability]? It is of course out of the question that they would have memorized this language. How in the world would this have been conceivable? Where then was this language? And where were the aids for learning this language? The only answer therefore can be that this language was in fact created within them, not by means of a language or speech *capacity*, but as a language they were fully conversant with and that belonged, as part of the original righteousness, to the image of God. God speaks. It belongs to his divine majesty to utter the Eternal Word. With God, speaking is creating, and creating is speaking. And thus it could not be otherwise than that man also, having been created in the image of God, had to possess both the capability of speech *and* the language, in order to

manifest the image of God in this way, by means of this language.

As we saw, in his creation Adam was perfectly *wise*, *holy*, and *righteous*. But this *wisdom*, this *being wise*, is inconceivable without *language*. Speaking and thinking belong inseparably together. Thinking is the basis for speaking, and in language the thoughts and the deliberations of the heart issue forth. So there is nothing inherently incongruous in the fact that Adam understands a language and speaks a language. To the contrary, if Adam were capable only of stammering, his creation in the image of God would not have been properly reflected, nor would Adam's original "wisdom" have shone forth.

The clearer we grasp the nature and origin of language, the less strange this is. People have argued almost endlessly about the origin of language, and two main notions have competed for dominance. On the one hand it was maintained that language was an *agreed-upon patchwork*. People had agreed among themselves that a creature with two legs would be called a *bird* and a creature with four legs a *beast*. In this way the language had become increasingly richer and ever more comprehensive. And humans newly come [into the world] merely memorized what had in the past been agreed upon by mutual consent. All kinds of attempts have been made to make this view plausible; and all of these involved *conventional* language systems, i.e., systems that explain the origin of languages on the basis of correspondence, derivation, or convention.

But over against this, a quite different paradigm emerged already among the Greeks that explained language on the basis of human aptitude. Humans, said the representatives of this paradigm, were created in such a way that [a given] thing made a fixed impression on them, and they represented that fixed impression not arbitrarily but necessarily in a fixed sound that God had intended for it. This paradigm has always been advocated by the theologians who took Holy Scripture into account. Human language, they said, is not a human invention but of divine origin. God first devised how this human language would be before it came across our lips. That language was created by God in man. Man therefore *had* to speak in that language. And it also explains how God himself could speak in that language to man. Later linguistic study, which was much more in-depth than the earlier study and was carried out much more systematically, came to confirm this to the extent that it led increasingly to a demonstration of a measure of fixed kinship among all languages and a confirmation of the hypothesis that all languages gradually developed from a single parent language.

Except, however, that linguists again and again encountered the equally undeniable fact that *all kinds of confusion* are noticeable in the languages, that

peoples who barely differ from one another in outlook nevertheless speak entirely different languages, and that in all languages today there is a whole series of phenomena that can be explained almost in no other way than on the basis of chance or arbitrariness. Apart from Holy Scripture this objection is indeed very difficult to eliminate. But if we take into account not only the Paradise narrative but also the narrative about the confusion of languages at the building of the tower at Babel, as well as the event on the day of Pentecost, then all mystery is lifted.

The Paradise narrative then explains the unity of the origin of languages; what happened in the plain of Shinar [at Babel] then clarifies how nevertheless there could and had to be such a boundless confusion within each language and among languages; and finally the story of Pentecost tells us how in the midst of that virtually boundless confusion, the unity of our human language still persists. The languages of the Parthians and Medes and Elamites and so forth converge there once again in the basic unity they jointly possess, and thus all languages appear to be nothing but the rich multiplicity of forms in which the *one human language* has spread among the nations.

That one human language, then, was the *original*, the pure, the hitherto unconfused and unspoiled mother tongue among the languages from which all individual languages have come. And it is that one, original human language that flowed of necessity from the nature of man’s creation, [the language] that God had prepared for man, and that Adam and Eve understood and spoke as soon as they attained consciousness as human beings.

This attaining consciousness was not a process they went through. They were suddenly awake with clear lucidity, and it was in this lucidity that they could think and speak and understand, as if they possessed the fullness of their instinct. It is exactly instinct that possesses the curious [quality] of manifesting life without any training school, suddenly with perfect clarity. Measure the angles and lines of the honeycomb in the beehive and you will see that they never deviate, that they are always accurate, as accurate as the angles and curves of the spider web, without the bee or spider ever having had to weary their budding little brains with learning angles and lines or with acquiring technical skills. God *causes* the small animals to *do* all this accurately and precisely, guided only by instinct.

Man has no capacity on this instinctive level. Granted, man has instinctive traits, and we see that this instinctive aspect is sometimes very prominent in people with artistic talent, but in humans all this has a very different basis. Our

nature is not instinctive. Rather, it is our nature to come from nothing to something by learning, by copying, by imitating, by experience, and by force of habit. But in Adam at his creation, on the other hand, there was not the tottering and unsure appearance of a gradually emerging life, but rather the instinctive [use] of what was immediately available. He spoke and understood without learning and without repeating, which we can do only as the fruit of practice and habituation. Had we been able to converse with Adam, we would definitely have used many concepts and words that were foreign to him, but apart from that, we would have received not the least impression of a defective development. Rather, a certain feeling of inferiority would have overtaken us such as we sometimes experience when, having shaken off the dust of our bookish learning, we come to speak with a truly wise and sensible man from among ordinary folk.

We even emphasize "wise and sensible." There are people whose mouth resembles a fountain of words and who, without very much thinking, sometimes even with almost no thought at all, let whole series of well-turned phrases fall from their lips without any effort. The French call these kinds of people *moulins à parole*, "word mills" [or, "chatterboxes"]. But this is not how we must conceive of Adam's use of language. The thought, if it is sound, must be the soul of the word, and the word is the incarnation of the thought. Words without thought are like the dead, shriveled snake skin from which the living snake has crawled. That such hollowness can be found in people is at present a consequence of sin, even as it reflects a lack of harmony when someone who thinks profoundly cannot find words for his thoughts.

Neither the one nor the other is conceivable in Adam, who had come from the hand of the Creator as a flawless product without spot or wrinkle, entirely unblemished. Harmony prevailed in him. The word was there to incarnate the thought, and the thought to animate the word. And in the words that came to him he grasped the spirit of the thought that sought expression in them. It is self-evident that at this point, there was no elaborate, fully developed treasury of thoughts [expressed] in words. Again and again thoughts had to arise for the first time and be expressed in words that had never yet come across his lips. But that which had not yet been worked out [in specifics] was nevertheless definitely present, present at any given moment to render precisely the service needed.

At this point we are not settling the matter as to whether the *images* rather than the *concepts* operated within his consciousness. Much is certainly to be said for the former. But we must never imagine that Adam had no comprehension and could only gradually form his first naïve concepts. Whoever holds this simply

cannot accept the Paradise narrative, for in this narrative numerous concepts appear, used in a very precise manner. There are certainly concepts of simple things and of composite things that Adam could not have, because these things would present themselves to him only later. It would have been ballast for him to have possessed them already then. What truly mattered here was that he had at his disposal those notions and concepts that were indispensable in his world at that point, and these he undoubtedly possessed. This should not surprise anyone.

If God created in us the marvelous capability to gradually form concepts, to combine those concepts, and to reach conclusions based on those combined concepts, then both that capacity and the functioning of that capacity within us have come from him, and there is no conceivable reason why that same God who achieves this result in us by more gradual practice, cannot have put that same result in Adam solely by virtue of the divine act of creation. Only in this way do we maintain the full reality of what is reported to us from Paradise. And we do not properly understand the ordinance of God that lends the *tree of conscience* its significance if we construe it as having been formulated later for the first time by Moses or by whomever, but we must view it as actually having come from God in Paradise, in language audible to and eminently understood by Adam.

25

THE PROBATIONARY COMMAND

He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

GENESIS 3:11

OUR BRIEF EXCURSUS about *language* in Paradise served to restore faith in what was spoken by Adam and Eve in Paradise. In the days of our forefathers all this was accepted as real in the full sense, but without reflecting on the way in which this speaking in Paradise should be understood. Later, people came to think that the language ostensibly spoken in Paradise was actually more an embodiment of later thoughts, thus in fact destroying the credibility of this narrative. Now for the first time, the church of Christ comes to this higher view that she fully realizes both what language in Paradise was, and that this does not undermine the narrative but rather confirms it and accepts its truth.

If from this perspective we now take a closer look at what was discussed in Paradise, then it immediately follows that the first human, when he heard the words addressed to him, must have thought something distinct and specific. That one tree was set apart for him from all trees in Paradise as a tree that was linked with the knowledge of good and evil. He was forbidden to eat from that tree. And he was told that transgression of this command would mean that "in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Such an ordinance would, of course, have no meaning for a half-wit man-child or child-man, as many people imagine Adam to have been. A parent may tell an eighteen-month-old child about a plate with beautiful and tempting sweets, "Don't taste this marzipan, for eating of it will bring you death," but it would have no effect. The innocent toddler would not understand it. And if the sweets did indeed contain strong poison, and the child ate of it anyway and died, then the child would not have committed *suicide*, but that reckless father or mother would be guilty of *infanticide* and could even be prosecuted by the civil judge.

Along the same lines, we falsify the portrait of the fall if we assume that Adam and Eve did not have a clear understanding of the probationary command and the threat connected with it. For if they did not clearly understand the content of the probationary command, nor rightly understand what God meant by “dying,” then guilt for the fall largely disappears, and this guilt is then to no small extent placed on God for jeopardizing his creatures by subjecting them to a test to which they morally should not be subjected. Then this whole portrait becomes a fantasy game. It is not fraught with any seriousness. And for a human being who has learned to think and to penetrate to the core of things, at least, it then becomes utterly *impossible* to deduce the guilt of his own heart and the eternal doom of his loved ones from what happened with the eating from the “tree of conscience.” The gravity returns, and the reality of what happened back then grips our heart, only when we know and realize that Adam and Eve understood the language that was spoken at least as clearly as we understand it, and we realize that when they heard the probationary command and the warning attached to it, they fully understood the Spirit’s meaning and the meaning of God’s ordinance.

We thus start from the notion that by virtue of his natural contact with the moral world order, Adam knew what was good and what was evil, and similarly by virtue of the life created in him, he knew what death was and what dying was —not as a memorized lesson but through the natural functioning of his consciousness. What happened with the animals and the creation of Eve sheds light on this for us.

God placed nothing in the hands of Adam that even remotely resembled an academic text on zoology. He received no instruction either about their division into species, or about their nature and propensities, or about their mutual relationships and way of life. Nor did he know them from the past, because they appeared before him for the first time, and only then did he see them. And yet, no matter how unfamiliar he seemed to be with respect to these creatures, it appeared immediately that they were *not* unfamiliar to him, that he knew them much better than any zoology professor today, and that he grasped the nature of their being in its totality so excellently that naming their names was for him a matter of course. This can be explained only on the basis of “life contact,” i.e., by the direct impact of life on the consciousness.

The same phenomenon manifests itself in the appearance of Eve. God brings Eve to Adam, and without further instruction, Adam immediately understands what this new being in Paradise means. This is flesh of his own flesh, bone of his own bone. *Not* a man, and yet *from* the man and *for* the man and therefore he called her wo-man. And then he immediately perceives the whole matter of marriage and family, as yet without shame, in clear and innocent holiness before God.

For this reason we must not simply gloss over such facts; rather, we must look at them with intense concentration, and in this way clearly understand how differently human consciousness worked then compared with today. Now everything in and around us is darkened, but back then our human consciousness shone in the full, clear light. Man had been created in God's image, and thus in human measure and human form, God mirrored his own knowledge in man's consciousness. Man knew nothing by way of study, and even less from within himself. Neither did nature as such teach him. All his knowledge in which he had been created was light from God that glowed in the mirror of his consciousness.

It must have been this way with his knowledge of good and evil as well, and with his knowledge of dying. If we had wanted to give Adam an examination about morality, he would have failed it. Or if we had asked him questions about biology or life skills, he would not have answered us. But in both respects his immediate awareness nevertheless functioned impeccably. So too it happens that we occasionally encounter among children who are shabbily clothed and neglected in almost every respect a boy or a girl with such perfect pitch that they immediately detect every wrong note and even experience that with a degree of pain. But when you ask that same boy or girl the names of notes or scales, they would look at you in surprise and not understand you.

In this sense Adam and Eve were also aware that there was something beautiful, good, and marvelous toward which their whole soul pressed them, and that conversely there was a pull, a tow, a force and energy they had to stay far from. The law of their God was written in their heart, not as a tacked-on list of commandments but as a fine-tuned, moral hearing of the notes vibrating in God's world order. An urge toward the holy and good is unthinkable apart from fleeing from what opposes it. There is no pole of goodness without a pole of evil

opposed to it. To imagine the first humans as still being color blind in the moral realm cannot be squared with their having been created in the image of God. It is impossible to exist as a moral being and as an adult with clear awareness without knowing the contrast between good and evil, i.e., between what must be sought and what must be shunned. A magnetic attraction emanates from the moral world order itself, which attracts and moves every moral creature.

It is less easy to imagine what Adam and Eve must have thought when they heard the words *death* and *die*. Nevertheless, not every trace is absent here either. But keep in mind that Adam came into existence suddenly from nothing, and that he consciously experienced this coming into being. This is something that happens to none of us. We come into being without knowing it. And only after we have been around for months and exist for more than a year, those very first, very faint impressions later take hold in us that, when we think back to the past, make us realize at most that we existed already back then. For us, therefore, there is no transition, no moment concerning which we know: at that moment I was, and before that moment I was not. In Adam, by contrast, this took place suddenly, completely and with full clarity. One moment he *was* not and did not yet think, and lo, the next moment he *is*, and he feels and knows that he is, with his whole being and with all that goes on inside him.

Adam therefore experienced the transition from *not* being to *being*, he experienced becoming aware of coming into existence, he experienced the first transition from *not*-living to living, and he did so neither as someone dreaming or drowsy, but in clear, perfect sober-mindedness. He felt how he came from God's hand. He *felt*, if we may express it so, himself being created, *felt* how he came to life. The contrast between first *not* being and then *being* was therefore not alien to him, but permeated his whole awareness and his whole being. And in this way it is not at all incomprehensible that the idea about how this life could be undone rose clearly before him. We lack any awareness of dying until now and then, through observation or stories of others, we come into contact with the deathbed and the grave, but for Adam this was entirely different. He knew death from the other side, because he had consciously entered *life* out of nonbeing.

We therefore totally reject the notion that Adam would have awakened to a moral self-awareness only through eating from the fruit of the tree, and that up to that evil moment he would have been a moral simpleton or dreamer. It is not so that there was darkness before the fall and clarity only after the fall. Rather the reverse: sin brought darkness, whereas *before* the fall there was clarity of insight. We therefore do not dispute that sin brought an "opening of the eyes" and that

therefore something was “known” of sin that they did *not* know before. This is clearly stated, and we do not tamper with it, but we will return to this point later. What we must understand beforehand is that, when God gave him the probationary command, Adam was in no way a moral dimwit but to the contrary, clearly bore the law of God in his heart, and bore in his soul the awareness of the contrast between what corresponded with that law and what deviated from that law.

What does the probationary command do? Does it place Adam before the choice of keeping or not keeping one of the commandments God’s law imposed on him? Certainly not. The probationary command did not embody a demand that flowed from the moral world order, but was rather an entirely arbitrary ordinance based on nothing but the sovereign determination of God’s will. We cannot deduce from any one of the Ten Commandments that there must in the literal sense be a tree somewhere in our environment from which we must not eat. The law written in the heart could never have revealed this probationary command. Had this probationary command not been given to Adam in so many words, entirely mechanically, then he would never have known it nor known of it.

This probationary command as such therefore stands entirely *outside* the moral world order, falls *outside* the law of God, and the eating or not eating of the tree was as such morally indifferent. We must never lose sight of this entirely unique character of the probationary command, else we will fail to see its significance. For then we would not understand how its *strict* binding nature lies precisely in the *triviality* of the command. For what mattered was not that tree, nor that fruit, but only that God presses upon man his absolutely sovereign will and forbids him something *by virtue of that sovereignty*.

What then is the great issue lying behind this? You can do what is good *for the sake of the good*, or you can do what is good *for the sake of God*. Everything you do because it agrees with the better instincts of your heart, you do *not* do because of God but because you yourself feel and confess that it is good and in accord with the moral world order. You then follow the call of your own ideal, the urging of your own heart, the involvement of the moral law of life within your own heart. This position is the position of the unbelieving world, not the position of faith. We reach the position of faith only when, apart from any

judgment of our own, we do what we do *because God wants it thus*. Only then does the *religious* life intertwine with the *moral* life, and does the worship of God through his image on earth celebrate its complete triumph. Doing what is good *for the sake of the good*, without taking God into consideration, is "moral self-sufficiency," something not only able to be coupled with a very unbelieving heart, but also something that in fact ultimately murders all faith within the soul. So if Adam had continued entirely to follow the good *for the sake of the good*, because that good drew him and comported with the inner exhortation and sense of his heart, then he would have been a lover of virtue but of such a kind that he would have denied the God of his life in whose image he had been created.

And yet there was something in his being created in God's image that engendered precisely that danger of such a self-sufficient development. For because he had been created in God's image, it *could* not be otherwise than that he *had* to feel himself in conformity with God's law in his heart, he *had* to agree with that law, he *could* do nothing else than want that law, and he *had* to incline himself completely toward accomplishing the good of that law because it captivated him and appealed to him.

Leaving God out of consideration, we would even have to say that there was a certain recipe for disaster here. If Adam had brought into the world a measure of disinclination toward God's law in his heart, even if only on one point, then it could have appeared from this one point whether he would nevertheless obey God's will, even if the inclination of his own heart went against it. But that is precisely what could *not* be. His heart agreed on *all* points with the law of God. And it was therefore impossible and inconceivable that it could appear from any single component or element of the law whether he fulfilled it *for the sake of God's will* or because of the *good* it contained. To reach a moral decision there had to come one moment of contradiction between *God* and the *good*, and it had to appear from that whether Adam chose the good for God's sake or for the good itself. But this contradiction *could* not exist in the moral law and *could* not arise from within Adam himself by virtue of the original righteousness—*that* contradiction is implicit in the probationary command. A command whose content does *not* speak to Adam's heart, that as commandment found *no* point of attraction with his inner awareness, and to whose fulfillment nothing else could force or move him than the sober, clear, unconditional obedience to the word of his God *because of that word*.

The struggle here was the same we encounter again and again in the small child or the soldier. You command or prohibit something for your small child,

and the child wants to obey, provided that you first explain *why* it has to be this way and no other. If you do that, and you convince the child, then the child will act according to your command, but not because you commanded the child but because the child himself now views the matter in this way. At that point, in fact, both your command and the child's obedience are set aside, and what remains is your child acting according to his own moral insight. This is considered to be very good, but you have in fact undermined the foundation of all child-rearing.

Ask the great generals where the strength resides to which they owed their victories: They commanded, their soldiers obeyed. Even as the centurion in the Gospels says, "I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes" [Matt. 8:9]. On that principle rests all military discipline and military strength. But if the soldier says, "I will follow, but show me first that this will lead to good results," then the discipline is gone and the strength of the army is broken. And this is precisely how it stands with us vis-à-vis God. *We* are those children and *we* are those soldiers, and not our insight into the good, but the fact *that God commands* must be the impulse that moves us to devotion to our duty. *God wills it*, and that will of God is the end of all contradiction, without a *why* being tolerated.

Two things had to be united in man, therefore. *First*, because he was created in God's image, his own moral awareness had to be in perfect and complete agreement with the law of God, and he had to do the good from a delight in the good. But *second*, this whole moral development had to be made dependent on the motivation "*for God's sake*," and thus receive the stamp of obedience and display the nobility of *faith*. *This* then is what the probationary command had in view and what it was wholly designed for. Whether to eat from the tree or not was as such a matter of complete *indifference* to Adam. Morally there was nothing against eating from the tree, and conversely a certain stimulus could be exerted on him by the tree in order to make eating of the tree *desirable*. Here is therefore a command, an ordinance of God, not supported by any moral insight and therefore based solely on the fact *that God instituted it thus*. This moves the battle immediately from the *moral* to the *religious* sphere, from God's *law* to *faith*, from personal *insight* to *submission* to him in whose image Adam was created. Had Adam triumphed in this, then he would forthwith have come to the decision in his heart that his bond with the good was not about that good as such

but *about God's will*. But now that he had gone against this probationary command, it had become clear that he sought the good *not* because of God but because of the good itself, and thereby had denied God in his heart and had elevated his own concept of virtue to his god. This is why the fall was absolute. It was a cutting through of only one link, but that link could not be cut without the whole chain collapsing. The right, perfect standing before God had been surrendered, and therefore the image could not but become warped. It was like the sundial that is removed from its place. Once removed from that location, it no longer shows the time.

We now also sense why the probationary command had to be so *insignificant* as to its content. It has been called recklessness, a mocking of man, to make a world and an eternity dependent on a peach or an apple. Wrongly so. If the probationary command had imposed a heavy, difficult task on Adam, his own moral awareness would have entered into it and he would have acted on the basis of his own moral insight and not in the blind obedience of faith. It was precisely to render Adam's moral insight inoperative this once, and to concentrate the whole focus of the soul on the obedience of faith, that the matter had to be so trivial, so insignificant, so trifling. A military leader who wants to test his soldier whether he obeys *strictly* has to test him on the basis of an order that has no material content, an order that in fact seems to him to be a mockery. At issue was the battle that thereafter continued through all the ages and still continues, whether God is who he is *because of the law* or the law is what it is *because of God*. If we say, "There is an eternal law, and God was bound to that law, and that is therefore why he gave us his moral law"—then God has in fact been denied, virtue is placed above God as an independent ideal, and your devotion to duty becomes self-sufficiency, a satisfying of your own insight, instead of a childlike submission to God. If, on the other hand, the law is binding solely *because God gave it to us*, and if our inner sympathy for that law is solely the inward fruit of the Holy Spirit, then it wouldn't matter *what* was commanded in the probationary command. The more insignificant the matter, the more decisively and certainly it would be clear whether obedience was because of God's will.

APPENDIX

Why the Term “Common” Grace?

BEFORE CONTINUING, we need to insert at this point a brief response to an entirely different question repeatedly addressed to us, one that seems to require clarification. Why is it, people have asked us more than once by letter, that you always speak about “common,” and not about “universal,” favor or grace?

The answer to this question is simple: our fathers spoke of “gratia *communis*,” and in our language the word *communis* means not “universal” but “common.” In Latin the word does mean “universal,” equivalent to *universalis*, from which we get our word *universal*. We are not contesting the fact that both of these concepts often mean practically the same thing, but nevertheless a distinction does exist between them that we would do well not to neglect. That distinction consists in this, that *universal* refers to something that is found everywhere, something that is valid everywhere, and by the nature of the case is applicable to everyone. Whereas by contrast, the word *communis* or *common* refers to something that is shared in common among a particular group.

Here we have that group known as humanity, our human race, and this divine favor is shared in common among this group. The word *universal* views the persons or things to which it refers as existing on their own, apart from any connection or relationship, and it expresses that the same feature is valid for or is found with each of these members. *Legal prescriptions* are “universal,” since they apply to all individual objects without distinction. A *theorem* is “universal,” in that it is valid in every given situation. A *preamble* is “universal,” because it does not descend into particularities but is limited to what applies to all the particularities.

By contrast, people speak of a *communis opinio*, something we call *a “common judgment,”* because that opinion has arisen within a particular group and has gained common currency among that group. In this manner people used to speak of a “*commonwealth”* to describe a group in which everyone together pursued their life’s happiness. In the same way we speak about “by common consent,” referring to something agreed upon within a particular group. The phrase “common purse” refers to sharing costs within a particular group. A

“common pasture” means the pasture in which all the farmers belonging to a particular group are allowed to have their animals graze. To “provide common access” is to bring an issue within reach of the circle in which our language is understood. Here then, where talking not about something belonging to everyone by nature, but about a good given from someone to the group known as humanity, our fathers spoke very correctly not about “gratia *universalis*” but about “gratia *communis*.” “Universal favor” was a phrase preferred by their opponents. Given our intention to discuss this doctrine thoroughly, we had to investigate which title would be most proper, and at that point we thought we needed to adopt the title, *Common Grace*.

True enough, the word *common* may not be used as much any longer, but from the phrases mentioned above, it seems evident that our language today retains an understanding of the word *common* in the sense we have explained. If this is so, then it enhances language when in connection with such discussions that involve very refined distinctions, we resuscitate moribund expressions. One would have no right to do this if this meaning of the word *common* had fallen entirely into disuse. But that is not the case here, as a glance in the most authoritative dictionary will confirm. Though we would not think to malign someone who chooses differently, we firmly think we have sound reasons for preferring the phrase “common grace” or “common favor.”

We will continue using the word *grace* [*gratie*] in the sense of *favor*, despite the fact that in popular usage, grace [*genade*] is identified so exclusively as “saving” grace. The word *grace* [or *reprieve*] is still the word used universally to describe a stay of execution. And since our expanded argument is discussing precisely that grace which stays the execution of Genesis 2:17, the phrase *common grace* seemed not improperly to express the very character of our topic.

Undoubtedly it would have been better to place this explanation at the beginning of our discussion, but at that point it seemed unnecessary for us to explain our choice of title. Now, however, since objections have arisen, we thought we should insert our added explanation here.

ABOUT

ABRAHAM KUYPER

(1837–1920)

ABRAHAM KUYPER'S life began in the small Dutch village of Maassluis on October 29, 1837. During his first pastorate, he developed a deep devotion to Jesus Christ, spurring him to a deep commitment to Reformed theology, which profoundly influenced his later careers. He labored tirelessly, publishing two newspapers, leading a reform movement out of the state church, founding the Free University of Amsterdam, and serving as prime minister of the Netherlands. He died on November 8, 1920, after relentlessly endeavoring to integrate his faith and life; truly, his emphasis on worldview formation has had a transforming influence upon evangelicalism, through the diaspora of the Dutch Reformed churches and those they have inspired.

In the mid-nineteenth-century Dutch political arena, the increasing sympathy for the "No God, no master!" dictum of the French Revolution greatly concerned Kuyper. To desire freedom from an oppressive government or a heretical religion was one thing, but to eradicate religion from politics as spheres of mutual influence was, for Kuyper, unthinkable. Because man is sinful, he reasoned, a state that derives its power from men cannot avoid the vices of fallen human impulses. True limited government flourishes best when people recognize their sinful condition and acknowledge God's divine authority. In Kuyper's words, "The sovereignty of the state as the power that protects the individual and that defines the mutual relationships among the visible spheres, rises high above them by its right to command and compel. But within these spheres . . . another authority rules, an authority that descends directly from God apart from the state. This authority the state does not confer but acknowledges."

FOR DR. RIMMER DE VRIES,

In recognition of your lifetime pursuits

and enduring legacy as a cultural leader, economist,

visionary, and faithful follower of Christ,

who reflects well the Kuyperian vision

of Christ's lordship over all spheres of society.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

AQUINAS, THOMAS. *De ente et essentia*. Translated by Armand Maurer as *On Being and Essence*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1968).

AUGUSTINE. *THE CITY OF GOD AGAINST THE PAGANS*. Edited by R. W. Dyson. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

———. *ON GENESIS LITERALLY INTERPRETED.* Translated by Roland J. Teske as *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book, in On Genesis* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1991).

AVRAMESCU, CĂTĂLIN. *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism.* Translated by Alistair Ian Blyth. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

BALLOR, JORDAN J. *Covenant, Causality, and Law: A Study in the Theology of Wolfgang Musculus.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012.

BAVINCK, HERMAN. *De Algemeene Genade, Rede bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Theologische School te Kampen op 6 December 1894.* Kampen: Zalsman, 1894. Translated by R. C. van Leeuwen as "Herman Bavinck's 'Common Grace,' " *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (1989): 35–65.

———. *REFORMED DOGMATICS.* 4 vols. Translated by John Vriend. Edited by John Bolt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003–8. Originally published, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*. 4 vols. (Kampen: J. H. Bos, 1895–1901).

BELLARMINE, ROBERT. *De gratia primi hominis.* In *Opera omnia.* Naples: Josephum Guiliano, 1858.

———. *DISPUTATIONES DE CONTROVERSIIS CHRISTIANAE FIDEI.* 3 vols. Ingolstadt: Sartori, 1586–93.

BENTE, FRIEDRICH. *Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.* St. Louis: Concordia, 1921.

BERKOUWER, G. C. *Man: The Image of God.* Translated by Dirk W. Jellema. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962. First published in 1957.

BLACKBURN, SIMON. *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy.* 2nd rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

THE BOOK OF CONCORD THE CONFESSIONS OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH. Edited by Theodore G. Tappert. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959.

CALVIN, JOHN. *Calvin's Commentaries Series.* Edited by John King. 45 vols. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844–56.

———. *INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION* (1559). 2 vols. Edited by John T. McNeill. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960.

———. *IOANNIS CALVINI OPERA QUAE SUPERSUNT OMNIA.* Edited by Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, and Eduardus Reuss. 59 vols. Corpus Reformatorum 29–87. 2nd ser. Brunswick: Schwetschke, 1863–1900.

THE CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA. Edited by Charles G. Herbermann, Edward A. Pace, Condé B. Pallen, Thomas J. Shahan, and John J. Wynne. 15 vols. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907–12.

DE BEER, TACO H., AND ELIZA LAURILLARD, EDS. *Woordenschat, verklaring van woorden en uitdrukkingen.* The Hague: Haagsche Boekhandel, 1899.

DELITZSCH, FRANZ. *System der biblischen Psychologie.* 2nd ed. Translated by Robert Ernest Wallis as *A System of Biblical Psychology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869). Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966. First published in 1855.

FITZGERALD, ALLAN D., ED. *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

HADSUND, PER. "THE TIN-MERCURY MIRROR: ITS MANUFACTURING TECHNIQUE AND DETERIORATION PROCESS," *Studies in Conservation* 38, no. 1 (February 1993): 3–16.

HEILBRON, J. L., ED. *The Oxford Companion to the History of Modern Science.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

HEPPE, HEINRICH. *Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik in der reformirten Kirche, namentlich der Niederlande.* Leiden: Brill, 1879.

HET BOEK DER PSALMEN, NEVENS DE GEZANGEN, GIJ DE HERVORMED KERK VAN NEDERLAND. Edited by F. L. Rutgers, with assistance from H. Bavinck and A. Kuyper. Amsterdam: J. Brandt, 1865.

HOEKSEMA, HERMAN. *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America: Their Origin, Early History and Doctrine.* Grand Rapids: First Protestant Reformed Church, 1936.

HULBERT, CHARLES. *Museum Europæum; or, Select Antiquities, Curiosities, Beauties, and Varieties, of Nature and Art in Europe.* Shrewsbury: C. Hulbert, 1825.

THE JEWISH STUDY BIBLE. Edited by Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

JUNIUS, FRANCISCUS. *De Politae Mosis Observatione.* In *Opuscula Theologica Selecta*, edited by Abraham Kuyper. Amsterdam: Muller, 1882.

KEIL, C. F., AND F. DELITZSCH. *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament.* Translated James Martin. 25 vols. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1864–78.

KUIPERS, TJITZE. *Abraham Kuyper: An Annotated Bibliography 1857–2010.* Translated by Clifford Anderson and Dagmare Houniet. Brill's Series in Church History 55. Leiden: Brill, 2011.

KUYPER, ABRAHAM. *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader.* Edited by James D. Bratt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

———. "CALVINISM A LIFE-SYSTEM." IN *Lectures on Calvinism*, 9–40. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931.

———. *E VOTO DORDRACENO: TOELICHTING OP DEN HEIDELBERGSCHEN CATECHISMUS.* 4 vols. Amsterdam: Wormser, 1892–95.

———. *Lectures on Calvinism.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931. These lectures were first delivered at Princeton Seminary in 1898 under auspices of the L. P. Stone Foundation. Originally published as *Calvinism: Six Stone-Lectures.* Amsterdam-Pretoria, Höveker & Wormser; New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1899.

———. "Pantheism's Destruction of Boundaries.—Part I." Translated by J. Hendrik de Vries. *Methodist Review* 75 (July 1893): 520–35.

———. *The Revelation of St. John*. Translated by John Hendrik De Vries. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1935.

———. "Sphere Sovereignty." In *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, edited by James D. Bratt, 461–

90. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. Inaugural address at the founding of the Free University of Amsterdam, October 20, 1880.

LEE, BRIAN J. *Johannes Cocceius and the Exegetical Roots of Federal Theology: Reformation Developments in the Interpretation of Hebrews 7–10.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009.

Lombard, Peter. *The Sentences.* Translated by Giulio Silano. Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies, 2008. Originally published in 1147–51.

Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works.* 55 vols. American ed. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann. Saint Louis: Concordia / Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955–86.

Marck, Johannes à. *Christianæ theologiæ medulla didactico-elenctica.* Amsterdam: Borstius, 1690.

Mastricht, Petrus van. *Theoretico-practica Theologia.* Amsterdam: Societatis, 1715. First published in Latin in 1655.

McKim, Donald K., ed. *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007.

———. *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992.

Newbigin, Leslie. *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.

The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge. 13 vols. Edited by Samuel Macauley Jackson. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1949–50. Originally published in 12 vols., 1908–12.

Newton, Michael. *Savage Girls and Wild Boys: A History of Feral Children.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003. First published in 2002.

O'Rahilly, Ronan, and Fabiola Müller. *Human Embryology and Teratology.* 3rd ed. New York: Wiley-Liss, 2001.

Praamsma, Louis. *Let Christ Be King: Reflections on the Life and Times of Abraham Kuyper.* Jordan Station, ON: Paideia Press, 1985.

Reformed Confessions Harmonized. Edited by Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999.

Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation. 4 vols. Compiled by James T. Dennison Jr. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008–14.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Du contrat social, ou, Principes du droit politique.* Amsterdam: Chez Marc-Michel Rey, 1762.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers.* Translated by John Oman. London: K. Paul, Trench.

Tuke, D. Hack. *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine.* 2 vols. Philadelphia: P. Blakiston, Son & Co., 1892.

Ueberweg. Friedrich. *System of Logic and Logical Doctrines.* Translated by Thomas M. Lindsay. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1871.

Van Asselt, Willem J. *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669).* Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Van Dale, J. H. *Nieuw Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal.* The Hague: Nijhoff, Wijthoff, Thieme, 1872.

Vos, Geerhardus. "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology." In *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos.* Edited by Richard B. Gaffin Jr., 234–

67. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980.

Wolff, Pius Alexander. *Preciosa.* Drama in four acts, with overture and music by Carl Maria von Weber, first represented at the Royal Opera House, Berlin, March 14, 1821.

Zuidema, S. U. “Common Grace and Christian Action in Abraham Kuyper.” In *Communication and Confrontation,* 52–105. Assen: Van Gorcum / Kampen: Kok, 1972.

ABOUT THE KUYPER TRANSLATION SOCIETY

IN 2011 a group of Abraham Kuyper scholars and experts met to form an association that has come to be known as the Abraham Kuyper Translation Society. Kuyper College and Acton Institute, along with other Abraham Kuyper scholars, have an interest in facilitating the translation of Abraham Kuyper's writings into English. Currently the society is involved in translating Kuyper's seminal three-volume work on common grace *(De gemeene gratie)*, his three-volume work on the lordship of Christ *(Pro rege)*, and key Kuyper texts on the church. The translated texts on the church will be published by Christian's Library Press in 2014 as an anthology.

THE SOCIETY recognizes that translations are not ends in themselves. Hence, plans are underway to produce an Abraham Kuyper Islam anthology that will focus on how deeply Kuyper's encounter with Islam toward the end of his life affected him and galvanized *Pro rege*, the last major work Kuyper completed in religion and theology. One anticipated result of translating Kuyper's writings on Islam is to reveal to twenty-first century Christians, particularly Christian students, how Kuyper successfully "engaged" another world religion and another culture. It is also hoped that this anthology, along with the translation of Kuyper's other writings, will enable Christians to draw on their Reformation heritage and develop a sense of vocation as wide as creation itself.

THE SOCIETY also exists to further additional Kuyper scholarly projects that will help promote a holistic vision of God's renewal encompassing all things.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

JORDAN J. BALLOR (Dr theol, University of Zurich) is a research fellow at Acton Institute for the Study of Religion & Liberty and executive editor of the *Journal of Markets & Morality*. He is also the author of *Covenant, Causality, and Law: A Study in the Theology of Wolfgang Musculus* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht) and *Ecumenical Babel: Confusing Economic Ideology and the Church's Social Witness* (Christian's Library Press).

STEPHEN J. GRABILL (PhD, Calvin Theological Seminary) is director of programs and international as well as senior research scholar in theology at Acton Institute for the Study of Religion & Liberty. He is author of *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Eerdmans) and general editor of the *NIV Stewardship Study Bible* (Zondervan).

NELSON D. KLOOSTERMAN (ThD, Theological University of the Reformed Churches [Liberated], Kampen, the Netherlands) is ethics consultant and executive director of Worldview Resources International, a service organization whose mission is to produce and provide resources designed to assist in understanding and applying a Christian worldview to responsible living in a global culture. He has served as minister and professor for more than thirty years and has translated dozens of works on Reformed theology and ethics.

RICHARD J. MOUW (PhD, University of Chicago) currently serves as president emeritus and professor of faith and public life at Fuller Theological Seminary. A philosopher, scholar, and author, prior to his two decades as president he served as provost, senior vice president, and professor of Christian philosophy and ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary. He has also served as professor of philosophy at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in addition to his work as a visiting professor at the VU University Amsterdam (Free University of Amsterdam).

ED M. VAN DER MAAS (ThM, Dallas Theological Seminary) is an editor and translator. Among his translations are several volumes of the *Korte Verklaring* (*Bible Student's Commentary*) and *Concise Reformed Dogmatics* (Van Genderen and Velema). Ed has worked for several Dutch publishers and was also the associate editor for the *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements.* Until his retirement he was senior editor at HarperCollins Christian Publishers/Zondervan in Grand Rapids, Michigan. A native of the Netherlands, Ed lived in the United States for more than forty years before returning to his European base.

****