COMMON GRACE*

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

I. THE CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

The common grace problem may quite properly be considered as being a part or aspect of the problem of the philosophy of history. Dr. K. Schilder speaks of Abraham Kuyper's great three volume work on "Common Grace" as an epic. And an epic it truly is. In setting forth his views on common grace Kuyper envelops the whole course of human culture in his field of vision. Common grace is said to be in large measure responsible for making history as a whole what it is.

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Though the question is a matter of debate we shall, for convenience, not enclose the phrase "common grace" in quotation marks. We use the phrase, and others like it, loosely.
has been, is, and will be. On the other hand in rejecting the
d Doctrine of common grace the Rev. Herman Hoeksema in
his various writings also takes the whole of history for his
field. He argues that history can best be explained if we
reject common grace. It may be well then if even at the out­
set we question ourselves about the Christian philosophy of
history. Doing so at this early stage of our paper will help
us in understanding both those who affirm and those who
deny common grace.

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

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

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

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

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

Current scientific description is not merely explanation, but it is definitely anti-Christian explanation. Current scientific methodology wants to be anti-metaphysical. It claims to make no pronouncements about the nature of reality as a whole. On the surface it seems to be very modest. In fact, however, current scientific methodology does make a pro-

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2 Charles Norris Cochrane: *Christianity and Classical Culture* (1940).
ouncement about the nature of Reality as a whole. When Eddington's "ichthyologist" says he is not interested in an "objective kingdom of fishes" he is not quite honest with himself. He is very much interested that that "objective kingdom of fishes" shall serve as the source of supply for his scientifically recognized fishes. Some of those "objective" fishes must permit of being graduated into fishes that have scientific standing. Some of them at least must be catchable. So the "facts", that is the "objective" facts, if they are to become facts that have scientific standing, must be patternable. But to be patternable for the modern scientist these "facts" must be absolutely formless. That is to say they must be utterly pliable. They must be like the water that is to be transformed into ice-cubes by the modern refrigerator.

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

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

We conclude then that when both parties, the believer and the non-believer, are epistemologically self-conscious and as such engaged in the interpretative enterprise, they cannot be said to have any fact in common. On the other hand, it must be asserted that they have every fact in common. Both deal with the same God and with the same universe created by God. Both are made in the image of God. In short, they have the metaphysical situation in common. Metaphysically, both parties have all things in common, while epistemologically they have nothing in common.

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

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

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

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

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

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

We accept this God upon Scriptural authority. In the Bible alone do we hear of such a God. Such a God, to be known at all, cannot be known otherwise than by virtue of His own voluntary revelation. He must therefore be known for what He is, and known to the extent that He is known, by authority alone. We do not first set out without God to find our highest philosophical concept in terms of which we think we can interpret reality and then call this highest concept divine. This was, as Windelband tells us, the process of the Greeks (History of Philosophy, Engl. tr., p. 34). This has been the process of all non-Christian thought. It is from this process of reasoning that we have been redeemed. On such a process of reasoning only a finite god can be discovered. It has been the nemesis of the history of the theistic proofs that this has been so frequently forgotten. Are we then left with a conflict between Faith and Reason? Have we no philosophical justification for the Christian position? Or are we to find a measure of satisfaction in the fact that others too, non-Christian scientists and philosophers as well as ourselves, have in the end to allow for some mystery in their system?

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

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

PARADOX

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

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

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

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

The Christian church has, consciously or unconsciously, employed the notion of the limiting concept in the formulation of its creeds. In these creeds the church does not pretend to have enveloped the fulness of the revelation of God. The church knows itself to be dealing with the inexhaustible God. The creeds must therefore be regarded as "approximations" to the fulness of truth as it is in God. This idea of the creeds as approximations to the fulness of the truth as it is in God must be set over against the modern notion of the creeds as approximation to abstract truth. The modern notion of approximation is based on the modern notion of the limiting concept. The modern notion of systematic logical interpretation as approximation is therefore based on ultimate scepticism with respect to the existence of any such thing as universally valid truth. The modern notion implies doubt as to whether any intellectual statement of any sort may be true at all. It is really no more than a hope, and that a false hope as we must believe, that there is in human interpretation an approximation to the truth. The Christian idea on the other hand rests upon the presupposition of the existence of God as the self-contained being that Scripture presents to us. The Christian idea is therefore the recognition that the creature can only touch the hem of the garment of Him who dwells in light that no man can approach unto.
If we have not altogether failed of our purpose, our discussion of the principles of a Christian philosophy of history will help us materially in understanding the literature that deals with common grace. In the first place it ought to enable those who affirm, and those who deny, common grace to be conscious of the fact that only in Reformed circles could the question have arisen at all. Roman Catholics and Arminians could not be interested in the subject. Only those who are seriously concerned with interpreting the whole of history in terms of the counsel of God can be puzzled by the question of that which is "common" between believer and unbeliever. For both the Roman Catholic and the Arminian it is a foregone conclusion that there are large areas of life on which the believer and the unbeliever agree without any difference. Only he who is committed to the basic absolute of God's counsel can, and will, be puzzled by the meaning of the relative.

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

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

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

II. ABRAHAM KUYPER’S DOCTRINE OF COMMON GRACE

Turning now to an exposition of Kuyper’s great work, we regret that we cannot begin with Calvin. (A reference, in passing, must be made, however, to the dissertation of Dr. Herman Kuiper, Calvin on Common Grace, 1928).4 We even pass by the pamphlet of Dr. Herman Bavinck on Common Grace with a remark or two. Bavinck wrote his booklet (published in 1894) with the purpose of bolstering up the claim he made for the Protestant Faith in his earlier address on The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church (published in 1888). It is Protestantism rather than Romanism, he avows in that earlier lecture, that expresses the truly catholic genius of the Christian religion. It is in accordance with this that

4 For a brief statement of the view of Charles Hodge, as well as for a more comprehensive statement of the exegetical foundation of the doctrine of common grace, we refer to the article entitled “Common Grace” by Professor John Murray in the November, 1942 issue of this Journal (V, 1–28).
he says in his pamphlet on *Common Grace*, “Through this doctrine of *gratia communis* the Reformed [theologians] have on the one hand maintained the specific and absolute character of the Christian religion and on the other have been second to none in their appreciation of everything good and beautiful that God has given to sinful men. Thus they have simultaneously maintained the seriousness of sin and the rights of the natural. And thus they were protected against both Pelagianism and Pietism” (p. 29).

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

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

When Kuyper speaks of the restraint of the destructive process of sin as being the essence of the doctrine of common grace he makes plain that common grace, like special grace, presupposes the doctrine of the sinner's total depravity. All men are born dead in trespasses and sins. “But”, he adds, “upon death follows a process of disintegration of the corpse. And it is the spiritual disintegration of the corpse that could be and was restrained, not wholly but in part. Not wholly, in order that the fearful results of sin might be apparent to all, but in part, in order that also in this manner the wealth
of God's creation and of His recreating power in our sinful race might be glorified" (De Gemeene Gratie (Leiden, 1902), I, p. 243). He asserts a little later that the entire doctrine of common grace presupposes the fact of total depravity (I, p. 248).

Both types of grace, special and common, presuppose total depravity. The difference between the two must be indicated by the different effect they accomplish upon the totally depraved. Regeneration, a gift of special grace, Kuyper argues, removes the cancer of sin by taking out its roots. In the place of sin it gives the power of eternal life. "But common grace does nothing of the sort. It keeps down but does not quench. It tames, but does not change the nature. It keeps back and holds in leash, but thus, as soon as the restraint is removed, the evil races forth anew of itself. It trims the wild shoots, but does not heal the root. It leaves the inner impulse of the ego of man to its wickedness, but prevents the full fruition of wickedness. It is a limiting, a restraining, a hindering power, which brakes and brings to a standstill" (I, p. 251).

Thus it is the restraint of the destructive force of sin that is said to be the essence of common grace (I, p. 242). Now, as sin has affected the whole universe in the course of its historical development, we find, according to Kuyper, that common grace reaches out everywhere. Summing up his discussion on this point, he asserts: "Thus common grace began in the soul of man, by keeping the 'small sparks' from dying out. It took its second point of support in the body of man by supporting its physical powers and thus pushing back the coming of death. In addition to this, common grace had to produce a third type of activity, namely, in the world of man . . ." (I, p. 261).

The essence of common grace is the restraint of the process of sin; its scope is man and his world. Its ultimate foundation, we must add, is the mercy of God. Says Kuyper: "Thus common grace is an omnipresent operation of divine mercy, which reveals itself everywhere where human hearts are found to beat and which spreads its blessing upon these human hearts" (I, p. 251).

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

Kuyper distinguishes in his second volume between the *constant* and the *progressive* aspects of common grace. By the constant aspect of common grace he means largely what in the first volume he speaks of as the essence of common grace, namely, the restraint of the process of sin. God's purpose with common grace, he adds in the second volume, is not merely to make human life possible by the restraint of sin, but also to provide for its progress (II, p. 600). "There is", he says, "on the one hand the constant operation of common grace which began in Paradise after the Fall, and which has remained till this day precisely what it was in the beginning and this constant common grace itself consists of two parts" (II, p. 600). These two parts are God's restraint of the power of destruction in nature and God's restraint "of the power of sin in the heart of man, to make possible the appearance of civil righteousness on the earth among sinners and heathen . . . This is the common grace that leads to the maintenance and control of our human life" (II, p. 601).

Continuing from this point Kuyper says: "Yet common grace could not stop at this first and constant operation. Mere maintenance and control affords no answer to the question as to what end the world is to be preserved and why it has passed throughout a history of ages. If things remain the same why should they remain at all? If life were merely repetition why should life be continued at all? . . . Accordingly there is added to this first constant operation of common grace . . . another, wholly different, operation . . . calculated to make human life and the life of the whole world pass through a process and develop itself more fully and richly . . ." (II, p. 601).

The course of history would, argues Kuyper, be wholly unintelligible if we forgot to bear in mind the progressive as well as the constant operation of common grace. Defining both aspects briefly again, he says: "The constant [operation] consists in this that God, with many differences of degree, restrains the curse of nature and the sin of the human heart. In contrast with this the progressive [operation] is that other
working through which God, with steady progress, equips human life ever more thoroughly against suffering, and internally brings it to richer and fuller development” (II, p. 602).

The “deep, incisive difference” between these two operations of common grace Kuyper signalizes by saying that in the constant operation God acts independently of man, while in the case of the progressive operation man himself acts as “instrument and colaborer with God” (II, p. 602). The history of civilization is here brought in as proof for his contention that man himself is the colaborer with God. At a somewhat earlier point in the second volume Kuyper says: “Common grace is never something that is added to our nature, but is always something that proceeds from our nature as the result of the constraint of sin and corruption” (II, p. 214). Here, though he speaks without limitation, he is evidently thinking only of what he later calls the progressive operation of common grace.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Note of the editor: The following Scripture passages are given as proof: Ps. 145:9; Matt. 5:44, 45; Luke 6:35, 36; Acts 14:16, 17; 1 Tim. 4:10; Rom. 2:4; Ezek. 33:11; Ezek. 18:23. We need not print these texts since the readers can easily look them up. They can also find the passages of the Canons of Dort referred to in their copy of the Psalter Hymnal. However, inasmuch as they have no access to

5 H. Hoeksema and H. Danhof: Van Zonde en Genade, p. 244.
6 Idem, p. 131.
the declarations of the Reformed fathers, we should translate these; but since that will take considerable space we shall omit a sentence here and there, where this can be done without obscuring the thought.

"Calvin: Book II, ch. II, 16: 'Yet let us not forget that these are most excellent gifts of the Divine Spirit, which for the common benefit of mankind he dispenses to whomsoever he pleases. . . . Nor is there any reason for inquiring what intercourse with the Spirit is enjoyed by the impious who are entirely alienated from God. For when the Spirit of God is said to dwell only in the faithful, that is to be understood of the Spirit of sanctification, by whom we are consecrated as temples to God himself. Yet it is equally by the energy of the same Spirit that God replenishes, actuates, and quickens all creatures, and that according to the property of each species which he has given it by the law of creation. . . .' Book III, ch. 14:2: 'We see how he confers many blessings of the present life on those who practice virtue among men. Not that this external resemblance of virtue merits the least favor from him; but he is pleased to discover (reveal — K.) his great esteem of true righteousness by not permitting that which is external and hypocritical to remain without a temporal reward. Whence it follows, as we have just acknowledged, that these virtues, whatever they may be, or rather images of virtue, are the gift of God; since there is nothing in any respect laudable which does not proceed from him.'

"Van Mastricht, First Part, p. 439: 'Now from this proceeds a threefold love of God toward the creatures: a general, Psalm 104:31 and 145:9, whereby he has created, preserves, and rules all things, Psalm 36:7 and 147:9; a common, directed to human beings in particular, not indeed to all and to each, but nevertheless to all kinds, without exception, the reprobate as well as the elect, of what sort or race they may be, to which he communicates his blessings; which are mentioned in Heb. 6:4, 5; 1 Cor. 3:1, 2.'

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

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

"Note of the editor: The following Scripture passages are referred to: Gen. 6:3; Ps. 81:11, 12; Acts 7:42; Rom. 1:24, 26, 28; 2 Thess. 2:6, 7.

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

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

"Van Mastricht, II, p. 330: 'God however moderates the severity of this spiritual death and bondage: (a) internally by means of some remnants of the image of God and of original righteousness. . . . to which things is added an internal restraining grace. . . . (b) Externally, through all kinds of means ("hulpmiddelen") of State, Church, Family, and Schools, by which the freedom and dissoluteness of sin is checked and restrained, and to which even an incentive to practice what is honorable is added.'

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

"Note: The Scripture passages quoted are: 2 Kings 10:29, 30; 2 Kings 12:2 (compare 2 Chron. 24:17-25); 2 Kings 14:3 (compare 2 Chron. 25:2 and vss. 14-16, 20, 27); Luke 6:33; Rom. 2:14 (compare vs. 13. Also Rom. 10:5 and Gal. 3:12).

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

"Ursinus, Schatboek; on Lord's Day III: 'Concerning an unconverted person it is said that he is so corrupt that he is totally incapable of any good. To understand this one must know what kind of good and what sort of incapability is spoken of here. There is a threefold good: (1) Natural (good), as eating, drinking, walking, standing, sitting; (2) Civic (good), as buying, selling, doing justice, some knowledge or skill, and more of such, which promote our temporal welfare. (3) There is also a spiritual and supernatural good, which is absolutely necessary for inheriting eternal life. It consists in this that one turns to God from the heart and believes in Christ. The last is meant here; in the other an unconverted man can even far excel a regenerated person although he has these (as a common gift) from God. See 2 Cor. 3:5; James 1:17; Ex. 31:2; Prov. 16:1.'

"Van Mastricht I, p. 458: "Reformed (scholars) acknowledge indeed that the unregenerate person, apart from saving grace, is able ... but they add to this that even these things are not done only through the exercise of the free will but through God's common grace working in the unregenerate all the moral good which is in them or which is produced by them. For example, all the natural art which was in Bezalel, Ex. 31:2, 3, and all the moral good in those of whom it is said that they were enlightened by the Holy Spirit, tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, Heb. 6:4, 5.'
“Van Mastricht, II, p. 330: '... There is a natural good, for example, eating, drinking, reasoning; there is a civic good as polite and friendly association with the neighbor, and offending no one; there is a moral or ecclesiastical good, as attending worship diligently, saying prayers, refraining from gross misdeeds, Luke 18:11, 12; and a spiritual good, for example, faith, hope, etc. ... in the state of sin the free will is indeed able to do a thing that is a natural, civic, or moral good, but not a spiritual good, which accompanies salvation.'”

We shall not pass in review the various criticisms made upon "the three points" by Hoeksema and his associates. These criticisms, together with their relative validity or invalidity will appear in substance as we turn to a fuller discussion of the latest phase of the debate on common grace.

(to be continued)

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1 Cf. H. Hoeksema: A Triple Breach; H. Hoeksema: Calvin, Berkhof and II. J. Kuiper; and The Standard Bearer.