

A CHRISTIAN UNIVERSE

Reflections on the Cross and Common Grace¹

by

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¹For a brief background to this paper, see *Every Square Inch*, vol. 1, p. 227. The book is at the top of this website page.

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Note: There are several Dutch quotations in this paper. The translation of the shorter ones is woven into the text with the Dutch original in the footnotes. As to longer quotations, the English translation occurs first in the body of the text, after which the original paragraph appears also in the text.

Introduction

The title of this paper is a phrase I have borrowed from Dr. Henry Stob, who likes to use it in his classes to press home the claim that only a Christian can understand the universe correctly. It is only the Christian who does not require a procrustean bed to fit all facts into their proper relationships. Though the purpose of this paper is not an apologetic one, I think the term a fit title nevertheless.

The question of common grace is, as I see it, a question of Christ's relation to the universe, but then Christ looked at from a certain point of view: as Redeemer. It is true, of course, that Christ is related to the universe not merely as Redeemer. As member of the Trinity He is intimately bound up with the universe from whatever point of view we wish to adopt. As the second Person, He is related to the universe, and for that matter, to the extra-universal, in His capacity as Mediator of creation. In the present discussion I will focus on Christ the Redeemer, although this does not preclude His other relations and functions.

A Bird's Eye View of the Reformed Concept of Common Grace

Reformed theology has always sought to do justice to the full scope of the work of Christ. It seeks to honor Him for cosmic redemption, but in its assertions concerning common grace, it has fallen short of its ideal. There is thought to be a grace of God to man that is not related to Christ the Redeemer, at least not in a historical sense. This holds true even for such a giant as Abraham Kuyper. Though he assigns an important place to Christ in his monumental work, *Gemeene Gratie*, Kuyper does not bring redemption to bear on the miracle of common grace, a grace touching all men, irrespective of their status before God. "According to him [Kuyper]

Christ as the Mediator of creation ... is the source of common grace. This means that the blessings of common grace flow from the work of creation.”² Berkhof’s interpretation is correct, even though one can find in the above mentioned three-volume work a number of statements that would seem to advocate cosmic redemption. We read that Christ has been given us “for the purpose of the re-creation of our total being, both soul and body, including the entire environment that is part of our existence...”³ This quotation read in isolation from context appears to favor a view of redemption that would include not only the soul of a man, but also his body, his environment, his neighbors, his relationships, *et al.* The main thrust of Kuyper’s thesis, however, is that saving grace is the only grace that Christ merited directly on the cross. There *is* common grace that touches all men and even the entire universe, but this common grace roots, as Berkhof correctly interprets him, in creation, not in redemption. Man has been made in such a way that if he should fall, he could be repaired. This is part of his very being.⁴ It almost amounts to a truism to say that man was capable of reparation, but that does not mean that he was bound to experience grace on account of it. Grace comes only from God and then only at His pleasure. I do not think that common grace can be based on creation, therefore. More is needed, especially in view of the subsequent fall. I will return to this point.

Basing his doctrine of common grace on creation, Kuyper nevertheless posits a relationship between Christ and common grace, for Christ is, after all, Mediator of creation as well as of redemption. While we distinguish between these two functions, Kuyper cautions us to remember that they are not separate acts in the divine counsel of God.⁵ If we wish to find the relationship between these two functions, we should not ask how these two act later in their mutual relationships so much as how God established this relationship in His Decree.”⁶ To seek the relationship in the divine counsel is dangerous procedure and had better be avoided. Besides, I am of the opinion that the relationship between Christ and common grace is much more direct than Kuyper suggests.

2 L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (4th ed. rev.; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1938), p. 437.

3 “*tot herschepping van heel ons aanzijn, naar ziel en lichaam, en sulks met inbegrip van heel die levenswereld die bij onze existentie hoort*”

4 *Ibid.*, II, pp. 81 ff.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 644.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 645. “*hebben wij dus niet te vragen, hoe deze beide later in onderling verband optraden, maar hoe dit verband door God gelegd is in zijn Besluit.*”

Masselink is eager to defend Kuyper, Bavinck, and Hepp over against the “Reconstructionists.” In so doing he states that common grace *is* founded on Christ’s redemptive work,⁷ but in this he certainly does not represent Kuyper. Neither is he very consistent in applying this relationship.

What then, according to the traditionally Reformed view, is the basis for common grace? To put the question in a different way, on what ground can God bestow grace to non-Christians? If this is not grounded in Christ’s redemptive work, there certainly cannot be a judicial basis. Berkhof cautiously suggests that “perhaps ... it is not necessary to assume a specific judicial basis for the bestowal of common grace on man” He posits two reasons for this assertion. First, it does not bring pardon. Second, it does not lift the sentence, but merely postpones it. Then he continues, “Perhaps the divine good pleasure to stay the revelation of his wrath ... offers a sufficient explanation for the blessings of common grace.”⁸ In view of Berkhof’s tendency to be absolutistic where modesty is more fitting, his hesitancy as shown in the repeated “perhaps” is striking. I have the impression that he is not entirely convinced of the matter.

S.J. Ridderbos is more straightforward on the issue:

God is long-suffering with respect to the godless simply because that’s how He is. If you want to find a judicial ground for this claim, then you will find it only in God’s Being. One can only speak of a judicial ground for common grace in the cross of Christ if this grace were otherwise to do injustice to God’s judicial right.

*God is lankmoedig jegens goddelozen, omdat Hij nu eenmaal lankmoedig is en indien men hier een rechtsgrond wil zoeken, dan zal deze alleen in Gods Wezen gevonden kunnen worden. Er zou van een rechtsgrond voor de algemeene genade in het kruis van Christus alleen sprake kunnen zijn, indien deze genade anders aan Gods recht te kort zou doen.*⁹

He warns us that it is quite possible to over-evaluate the work of Christ, and says this in all reverence. After all, Christ did not move God to love, but provided God with an avenue to express His love. The cross is the judicial basis for *particular* grace only. Ridderbos objects to the idea “that something must occur to enable God to exercise grace.”¹⁰ Common grace merely *postpones* a judgment that will surely come; it does not abrogate the judgment.

7 W. Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), p. 196.

8 Berkhof, pp. 437-438.

9 S.J. Ridderbos, *Rondom het Gemene-gratie-probleem* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1949), pp. 18-19.

10 *Ibid.* “dat er iets gebeuren moet opdat God genadig kan zijn.”

Ridderbos touches also on another important point in the Reformed concept of common grace: prolongation. Common grace stays the execution in order for God to be able to call His elect. Common grace is thought to be subservient to special grace: it provides *lebensraum* for saving grace; it sets the stage. Kuyper writes that if it were not for the preserving action of common grace, particular grace could not be accomplished. Common grace makes continuation of life possible, and hence the redemptive work of Christ.¹¹ The content of the covenant with Noah is not spiritual. It does have a spiritual significance, but it is found in its purpose rather than in its content. He writes: "Of course, the purpose of Gods gracious deed cannot be located in the lost, but must lie in the elect and is thus to be sought in Christ, in His people and His future..."¹²

My intention is to show that common grace *is* the result of redemption and that it was made possible through the cross. From this view it will follow that common grace does not provide room for special grace, but, quite to the contrary, common grace is the result of special grace. To make my point, it will be necessary to consider the entire sequence of creation, fall, and redemption. This is a method true to Reformed style.¹³

Creation, Fall, and Redemption

Reformed thought has usually thought of creation as being primarily the business of the Father, and correctly so. At the same time, it looks upon Christ, the Son, as the Mediator of creation. At this point there is no quarrel. There could hardly be, for Scripture is rather explicit on this score. We read in Colossians 1:16-17, that "in Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon earth; ... all things have been created through Him and unto Him; ... and in Him all things consist." This is no isolated passage. We find the same truth expressed in John 1:3 – "All things were made through Him. And without Him was not anything made that hath been made.: Hebrews 1 tells us in addition that Christ "upholdeth all things by the word of His power." This means, among other things, that it is in Christ that all creation finds its focal point, its resting point. It means that creation is not merely the sum of its parts, but that it is an organic unity, and that it could not continue to exist without Christ. Kuyper comments on Colossians 1:17 –

"In Him all things consist"... means that all things as one whole, taken in their organic relationship, exist, now and eternally, though the Word. Were the Word to withdraw Himself, the universe would explode like dust. Only the eternal Word that is embedded

11 II, pp. 679-680.

12 I, p. 22. "*Dan toch spreekt het vanzelf, dat het doel van deze genadedaad Gods niet in de verlorenen kan, maar in de verkorene moet liggen, en alzoo te zoeken is in Christus, in zijn volk en zijn toekomst*"

13 In much of the following discussion I am heavily indebted to S.G. De Graaf.

in the Creation makes Him the embodiment of God's thoughts and therefore of a cosmos. He is the tense and stirring power that upholds everything so that it continues to exist.

"Samen door hem bestaan" ... beduidt, dat alle dingen als een geheel, in hun organisch verband genomen, bestaan, nu en eeuwig, door het Woord. Trok het Woord er zich uit terug, het heelal zou als stof uiteenvliegen. Alleen het eeuwige Woord dat in de Schepping is, maakt ze tot draagster van de gedachten Gods en daardoor tot een kosmos. Hij is de spannende en bezielende kracht die het alles ophoudt, dat het staan blijft.¹⁴

Thus, creation is one organic whole, with man as its crown, its head. In the creation account, it is striking that as soon as man is mentioned, there is reference to his position: "Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."¹⁵ This was indeed complete dominion within creaturely limits, of course. His position did not place man over or above creation, but it made him its crowning glory. "Man is connected to the animal world, to the plant world and to the mineral world. Heaven and earth have their focal point in humanity."¹⁶ Man is in dominion over creation, but he is nevertheless a part of it. "Everything in this world is designed for humanity and reaches its fulfillment in humanity. One can only explain the entire plan for creation and the predisposition of the earth through humanity."¹⁷

How true this is and how important will become more clear when I discuss the effect of the fall upon the extra-human creation. Whatever happens to man determines the course of creation. It can be said, with necessary qualifications, that *man determines* the future of the creation.

But man, in Genesis 1, was only a potentiality. Only the one man, Adam, had been created, but in view of the organic unity of creation, mankind had in Adam its first expression. Adam was a man, but he was also mankind, or, at least, its representative, its root. Dominion was given not only to Adam, but to all mankind in Adam. Adam was the first person called upon to exercise this dominion. That Adam was thought of as a representative is also indicated by the fact that in

14 I, 392.

15 Genesis 1:26.

16 Kuyper, II, 103. "*is verwant aan het dierenrijk, verwant aan het plantenrijk, verwant aan het delfstoffenrijk. Hemel en aarde zijn in den mensch als in een brandpunt geconcentreerd.*"

17 *Ibid.*, I, 264. "*Alles in deze wereld is op den mensch aangelegd, bereikt eerst in den mensch zijn voleinding, en alleen uit den mensch wordt heel het plan der schepping en de gesteldheid van de aarde en het aardrijk verklaart.*"

the same passage where God spoke of His intention to create man (singular), there is also a reference to man in the plural.¹⁸

Besides having been placed in authority, man was created in God's image. It is not necessary or possible at this point to describe what exactly is involved in the image of God. Our interest in the image for the moment lies only in its bearing on the present problem.

In his comments on Lord's Day 3 of the Heidelberg Catechism, De Graaf states that the main thing of the image is *communion*. By having been created in God's image, man and God are able to have fellowship. This is, in fact, the main purpose of man, and herein man can find his self-realization and happiness. The image, however, has not been provided *primarily* for man's happiness; beyond this lies God's self-love.

There is, however, necessarily another side to this: God wanted a response to His love to emerge from the world He created. God's honour and joy were in the response that He would receive out of this world. That is the reason He created mankind in His image.

*"Er is echter hoofdzakelijk een andere kant: God wilde een antwoord op Zijn liefde uit de wereld, welke Hij schiep. God eer en vreugde was in het antwoord, dat Hij uit de wereld zou ontvangen. Daartoe heeft Hij de mens naar Zijn evenbeeld gemaakt."*¹⁹

That such communion with God is the purpose of man is also implied in the wording of Lord's Day 3 of the Heidelberg Catechism. It was such fellowship that made Israel a distinctive nation. It had a tabernacle and, later, a temple in which God dwelt and where the people met Jehovah. Such fellowship is the distinctive trait of the Church: here God dwells among His people and here men have fellowship with God and each other. Such fellowship, too, will be the final consummation. We read in Revelation 21:3 – "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them."

If communion between God and mankind was that important, there must have been a favorable attitude on the part of God towards mankind. Without such a favorable attitude it is impossible to have fellowship. And even though we do not find it described in so many words, the very atmosphere in which pre-fall history was unfolding itself betrayed that the relationship was indeed one of goodwill and fellowship. God created man, placed him in a paradise full of the goods of the earth, gave him a companion, and gave him a task to perform. The fact that Adam hid after the fall also suggests that there had been close association previously. It was all very good. Whether this attitude of God towards men ought to be called an attitude of grace or

¹⁸ Genesis 1:26.

¹⁹ S.G. De Graaf, *Het Ware Geloof* (Kampen: J.H. Kok N.V., 1954), p. 44.

favor I am not about to dispute. I will simply use “grace” without defending myself; such a defense would lead us too far astray.

If God created man in His divine image in order to establish communion, we must conclude along with De Graaf “that God’s favour was not merely an element attached to the creation, but constituted the background, the main theme, the controlling motif of the entire work of creation.”²⁰ Then life in its full sense does not merely include among other things an element of communion, but then life *means* communion or, better still, then *life is communion*. It is this that is meant when we say that life is religion. Without such communion there is no real life, and this life lived in communion with God is nothing else but covenantal existence mediated through Christ as Mediator of creation, for “in Him was life and the life was the light of men.”²¹ De Graaf interprets this to mean that this light refers to a life of communion.²² In this passage the light is not Christ Himself, for it is *in* Him. I John 1 confirms this identification of light and fellowship, for here fellowship is contrasted with darkness in verse 6. Furthermore, verse 7 tells us specifically that “if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.” Fellowship with God and men is of the essence of life. This is the force of the image not only, but the fact that we are told of the male-female relationship immediately at the point of creation bears this out too, as I see it. Light, as a metaphor for communion is so closely bound up with God that we find that the metaphor gets jumbled up so that we read that the light is in Him,²³ that “He is in the light,”²⁴ and that “God is light,”²⁵ while it is constantly brought to bear on fellowship.

God desired a response of love from His creatures, but this had to be a response which man would consciously and deliberately choose. It is the nature of covenantal existence that the relationship can be broken at any time, at least as far as man is concerned. God, therefore, put man to the test, a test accompanied with a threat of death. We ought not to interpret the test in such a way that God actually gave man a choice. Prohibition precludes choice. God wanted man to obey and to give the desired response. It would be of small profit to speculate what would have happened if man had chosen *for* God. We may be sure that this would at least

20 S.G. De Graaf, *Christus en de Wereld* (Kampen: J.H. Kok N.V., 1939), p. 81. “*dat Gods gunst niet een element was, dat bij de schepping bij kwam, maar de achtergrond, het hoofdtheme, het beheerschend motief in het gansche scheppingswerk.*”

21 John 1:4.

22 *Christus*, p. 80.

23 John 1:4.

24 I John 1:7.

25 I John 1:5.

include a full life of communion in whatever form. The fact is that man did not meet the test. He fell. Death!

No time elapsed between the fall and the destructive beginnings of death. Genesis 3:6ff reads:

“... and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of Jehovah God walking in the garden; ... and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Jehovah God”

Gone was fellowship with God and among men. Gone was the light of which John 1 and I John 1 speak. Instead of fellowship with God, there was fellowship with satan²⁶. This I infer from Genesis 3:15, where God put enmity between the serpent and the woman and their respective seeds. This presupposes that there was no such enmity previously.

To prove my point regarding the organic character of creation, I remind the reader that creation, too, fell. Childbearing was to become a painful process. The ground was cursed. The earth awaits redemption and in the meantime it groans and travails in pain, according to Romans 8. This is what I meant when I said previously that the course of creation depended on man. Man fell and creation fell with him. Kuyper writes:

It makes a real difference whether humanity stands up straight and thus turns God's favour towards the earth or whether we are out of alignment and draw the anger of God towards the earth. This causes that one and the same world in the first case is a Paradise blessed by God and in the other it is darkened under His curse, the elements are brought into a chaotic struggle, while the progress of life in all the natural spheres is muffled and loses all order.

En dit verschil nu, of de mensch recht staat, en dus Gods gunst zich naar dit aardrijk keert, of wel dat de mensch scheef gaat staan, en daardoor de toorn Gods naar dit aardrijk trekt, brengt teweeg, dat dezefde wereld de eenemaal, als van God gezegend, een Paradijs is, en de andere maal, onder zijn vloek verdonkerd, de elementen op schadelijke manier in worsteling brengt, en de voortgang van het leven in alle rijken der natuur dempt of verwildert.²⁷

It ought not to escape the reader that “God's favour” (“*Gods gunst*”) is the subject of “turns” (“*keert,*”) whereas “humanity” (“*de mensch*”) is the subject of “draw” (“*trekt*”). Sin demands justice; the one always and inevitably follows the other. This is not the case with obedience. It

26 I refuse to capitalize this name. He does not deserve that distinction.

27 I, p. 264.

is followed by the grace of God, but not inevitably, not automatically. The one does not demand the other in the same sense as sin demands justice. There is no automatic cause-and-effect relationship between obedience and grace. Rather, grace is always a free and sovereign turning towards creation. If before the fall God was obligated to exercise grace on account of the covenant, there was no such obligation after the fall. The covenant had been broken; divine grace and love had been rejected; fellowship was displaced by fear.

God did not let it go in this chaotic, deathly, and lonely situation. Yes, the earth was cursed and creation groaned. Death had entered, never to leave again completely. Nevertheless –

Thank God we can still speak of a “nevertheless.” All was not lost, for God, however sin fits into His plan, was not about to declare the entire project a failure. No creature was going to thwart the Creator! The covenant relationship had been an essential ingredient without which existence was impossible. Love and fellowship were a requirement for nature. The former had been rejected; nature had been made an “impossibility.” Death! Yes and no.

Yes, death. God had threatened it and its terrible effects were felt immediately. Something had to *happen*. To this not even Ridderbos would object. God’s love was still operative, but His justice required satisfaction. He had said so Himself. This was the first requirement. The second requirement was to establish a new fellowship, a new covenant. These were requirements, I say, only in the sense that God himself had embedded them in creation. God met both requirements in Christ. The Mediator of creation now became Mediator of redemption as well. A Seed was to come from the woman and this Seed was to bruise the serpent’s head. How? Through death on the cross. The cross was to be the way to victory. It was destined to lead to the resurrection. O death, where is your sting? We have been justified through His blood. With His stripes we are healed. Thus was the justice of God satisfied and fellowship re-established.

I disagree with De Graaf when he asserts that the fall put an end to God’s love towards His creation. He wrote, “God had no further love for a humanity that had rejected His love.”²⁸ John 3:16 tells us quite plainly that God *did* love the world. His *justice* had to be satisfied, not His love.

As to a new covenant, it received Christ as its root. Previously, Adam was considered to be the root of the entire creation. In him all died; in Christ all creation is reconciled. The new Head of the new covenant made fellowship with God possible once again, and because this is the basic ingredient of creation, the latter was spared from meaninglessness (*zinloosheid*) and death.

Now we come to the crucial question: what difference has the cross made? Who or what was reconciled at Calvary? That the elect are among the reconciled is, of course, beyond dispute. It

28 *Christus*, p. 91. “Er bestond geen liefde bij God meer voor de menschen, die Zijn liefde verworpen hadden”.

is my considered opinion that on this score Reformed theology has failed to do justice to the organic character of creation. The elect are reconciled and redeemed in the primary and most complete sense, but who are these elect? Are these mere individuals gathered into the Church? Are these individuals that have been or are made into a unity, quite separate from the rest of creation? Through one man the whole organism fell, but the new Root would then seem to have affected only a partial restoration. But this is false, for Christ did not reconcile the elect only, but “all things, ... whether things on earth, or things in heaven.”²⁹ John cried out: “Behold the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world!”³⁰ “And He is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”³¹

In view of the organic unity of creation, how could it possibly be that such a momentous – for momentous it was – act should affect only a small segment of the organism and leave the rest untouched? Paul tells us that if the root is holy, then the branches are holy as well.³² Here we have the metaphor of a plant – an organic entity. It would seem at first glance that this passage in Romans 11 supports the view that the redeemed are merely individuals or individual groups who are ingrafted into the tree, though contrary to their nature. It must be remembered, however, that Paul takes his starting point in these chapters in history after the fall: in Israel. Israel’s status as a separate people of God was only a temporary measure. If we begin with creation, we can only view sin and unbelief as the most abnormal and even unbelievable “pseudo-realities.” Christ re-established the natural order of things: covenantal fellowship between God and man. As Adam’s life was determinative for *all* of creation, so Christ’s death was as well. He is

shoved under this withered family tree of our race as a new living root. It is from this second Adam that new life begins to bloom.

That body is not just a loose conglomeration of individuals that are saved from destruction, but it is the deepest kernel of the very real family of our race, even if it has been seriously trimmed. What is elected and saved is not a bunch of more or less arbitrarily yanked off branches and twigs, but it is the trimmed, purified human race itself; It is God’s original creation that He planted on earth.

als een nieuwe levenswortel onder deze verdorden stamboom van ons geslacht geschoven, en het is uit de tweede Adam dat er een nieuw leven opbloeit.

29 Colossians 1:20.

30 John 1:29.

31 I John 2:2.

32 Romans 11:16ff.

En dat lichaam nu, ... is maar niet als zoeven een losse saamvoeging van enkelingen die voor het verderf behoed blijven, doch het is de dipeste kern, de wel zeer besnoeide, maar toch zeer wezenlijke stamboom van ons geslacht. Wat verkoren en voor eeuwig behouden wordt, zijn geen min of meer willekeurig afgeplukte taken of loten, maar het is de gedunde, gezuiverde menschheid zelve, het is Gods oorspronkelijke schepping die Hij op aarde geplant had.³³

If it were not so, then satan would have won his battle. Then Christ would have gathered loose twigs and branches of

the cancerous family tree of humanity and reserved them for the judgement fire that eventually will burn the crop, but the stump itself would remain hopelessly abandoned to destruction. The evil one would then actually have won the battle. For even though numberless souls would have been pulled free from his cruel fist, he would have succeeded in destroying God's marvelous creation and to drag the human race into perdition.

den verkankerden stamboom der menschheid, ... ze behoedend voor het vuur des oordeels dat straks de planting verteren zal, maar de stam zelf zou hopeloos aan het verderf prijsgevend blijven. De Booze zou het spel dan feitelijk gewonnen hebben. Want al werden hem tal van zielen uit de wreede vuist losgewrongen, hij zou er toch in geslaagd zijn Gods prachtige schepping te verderven en de menschheid, als een geslacht genomen, naar het verderf te slepen.³⁴

Thus in the remnant that is saved "to the uttermost" is represented *all mankind and all creation*. This is explicitly stated in Scripture and it is the necessary consequence from the unity of God's handiwork.

Lest my reader should get anxious, let it be understood that I am not suggesting any kind of universalism that would deny eternal punishment for the damned. The task of the Church is more urgent than to simply inform men that they are in Christ. I am saying that creation is wholly reconciled; that the cross has made possible its continued existence by having satisfied

33 J.J. Knap Czn., *De Kerk (Dogmatische Fragmenten)*; Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1914), p. 36.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

divine justice and by Christ's having become the new root of a newly created covenantal fellowship. The fall demanded that something should happen, and something did!

Particular and Common Grace: Their Relationship

By this time the reader may have almost forgotten that this paper, after all, is to deal with common grace, or some aspect of it. By means of this long, circuitous route I have finally come to it. My position, which is certainly not original, is that something had to happen, to use Ridderbos' phrase. I quoted Kuyper to the effect that man was made so that he could be repaired in case he should fall. This is true, but it may not and cannot mean that reconciliation took place *because* man was thus created. Potentiality does not guarantee realization. Reconciliation is a matter of grace that flows out of divine love quite spontaneously. At the same time, Ridderbos is right in warning us against placing too great a burden on the cross. In spite of De Graaf, Christ did *not* move God to love man. Christ's mission was the *result* of this love. De Graaf does overload the cross. At the same time, Ridderbos underestimates it when he rejects Calvary as the judicial ground for common grace.³⁵ The entire creation fell through Adam and, we are told, the entire creation was reconciled to God through Christ. God was not out to reconcile twigs, but the *plant*, the organic whole. It will not do for Ridderbos to place the burden of proof on De Graaf;³⁶ it is Ridderbos who must demonstrate how there can be grace outside of the cross in a fallen world. If Adam was the head of all creation, and if his fall required reconciliation, then Ridderbos ought to show us how this love can be sufficient ground for keeping creation intact without the need for reconciliation. The very basics of justice are at stake. De Graaf protests:

The "grace" that God would establish for the benefit of all people on basis of that covenant of grace, lacks all judicial ground if it were not the fruit of the cross of Christ. In that case, God would establish "grace" without it having any basis in the reconciliation of the world through the cross of Christ. The justice of God would then have been abandoned and replaced by mere caprice.

De "genade" welke God krachtens dat genadeverbond ... aan alle mensen zou bewijzen, mist, wanneer ze niet een vrucht is van het kruis van Christus, allen rechtsgrond. God zou dan "genade" bewijzen, zonder dat daarvoor een grond aanwezig

35 P. 18.

36 P. 19.

*is in de verzoening der wereld door het kruis van Christus. Het recht Gods zou dan prijsgegeven zijn, er zou slechts willekeur zijn.*³⁷

Ridderbos's position is possible only because of remnants of individualism in his thinking, and this holds for all who separate common grace and the cross, including Abraham Kuyper. This separation is inconsistent with their own train of thought, but it is there, nevertheless. They, in effect, cut individual men away from the organism. Dooyeweerd puts it very pointedly: "Common grace is meaningless without Christ as the root and head of the regenerated human race."³⁸

In this way the relationship of special to common grace has been reversed. Kuyper taught that common grace made special grace possible. The fact that Christ came and lived among us was made possible because of God's preserving common grace.³⁹ If it had not been for common grace, there would be no special grace. It is my contention that preservation was possible because of the maternal promise of Genesis 3:15, after which God regarded all creation as rooted in Christ, even though Christ had not (yet) done His work. It was because of the new covenant that existence continued. The circumstances produced by common grace *did* enable Christ to come and dwell among us, but these circumstances themselves were brought about by Him as the new root. Grace comes only through the cross.

I must answer the question that is bound to arise: What is the difference between the believer and the unbeliever? Not all are saved. Unbelievers will certainly meet their eternal doom. Yet there is a common grace extended even to unbelievers, a grace coming through the cross. This is indisputable, in spite of Herman Hoeksema and his fellows. Passages such as Matthew 5:45 and Acts 14:17 leave open no other interpretation. The fact that there is a restraint of sin and of death makes life possible and even bearable. The new covenant does not include all people, but "that is not to say that the one covenant of grace would not affect all of humanity."⁴⁰ All communion between God and man not only, but also that among men is simply inconceivable without this covenant and without restraint. Without the cross, sin would inevitably bring disintegration. It does so now too, but not completely as yet. "This operation of the Spirit takes place outside of the heart of unbelievers in this sense that it does not bring about regeneration

37 *Christus*, p. 93.

38 H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, trans. D.H. Freeman and W.S. Young (4 vols; Amsterdam: Uitgeverij H.J. Paris; Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1953), Vol. I, p. 523.

39 II, pp. 121-173.

40 De Graaf, *Christus*, p. 96. "dat will niet zeggen, dat het eene genadeverbond niet de gansche menscheid zou aangaan."

in their heart.”⁴¹ The love of God is extended to them only insofar as they are related to the human race, which, as a whole, lives out of the power of the resurrection. When a farmer loves his herd, he does not necessarily love every single head. He may hate a certain cow and yet, apart from its financial value, love it as part of his herd. God loves His children as members of the race and as individuals. God loves the non-elect as members of the organism.⁴² As individuals they will eventually be lost. The tree is saved, but some of the branches will be cut off to be burned.

Dooyeweerd discusses the relationship between particular and common grace and, as I have shown already, agrees with De Graaf that their unity lies not in Christ the Mediator of creation, as some would have it, but in Christ the Mediator of redemption. He agrees also with De Graaf that “particular grace directly concerns the supra-temporal root of mankind, whereas common grace remains restricted to temporal life.”⁴³ And, if I may quote him at some length,

“*Gratia specialis*” ... really refers to the radical change brought about by Christ Jesus in the apostate root of the whole temporal cosmos, which is concentrated in mankind; therefore this “particular grace” bears a *radical-universal* character. Already in the *present* dispensation this radical change of direction in the root of life must necessarily reveal itself in temporal reality, in its conserving effect as well as in its regenerative operation. Its conserving effect is primarily manifest in the preservation of the temporal world-order by God in Christ Jesus, as the Head of the Covenant, so that the disintegrating effect of the fall into sin in temporal life is checked.⁴⁴

And once again

In the full Scriptural sense of the word Christ Jesus is the second Adam, in Whom nothing of God’s creation can be lost. Only in Him all the nations of the earth are blessed according to the testimony of the Scriptures. Only in Him is God willing to have mercy on his fallen creation, and only in Him can the conserving effect of common grace have its creaturely root. Outside of Him there is no Divine grace, no “common grace” either, but only the manifestation of God’s wrath on account of sin. This conserving common grace also embraces the apostate, dead members of mankind for the sake of the full and true human race, included in the “*corpus Christi*,” in the “*ecclesia invisibilis*.”⁴⁵

41 *Ibid.*, p. 102. “Deze werking van den Geest gaat bij de ongeloovigen buiten het hart om in dien zin, dat daardoor hun hart niet wordt wedergeboren.”

42 S. Greydanus, *De Drie Brieven van den Apostel Johannes (Korte Verklaring der Heilige Schrift)*; Kampen: J.H. Kok N.V., 1952), p. 44.

43 Dooyeweerd, III, p. 523.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 524.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 525.

Kuyper, quite to the contrary, asserts that “the forever continuous and decisive distinction” between special and common grace lies in this

that common grace is that grace that operates in all of our human race just like it has Adam as its covenant head and Noah as its second (spiritual) forefather. To the contrary, particular grace operate only in the community of the elect, i.e., in that restored and renewed humanity that received Christ as its Covenant Head.

*Dat de algemene genade is die genade die werkt in heel ons menschelijk geslacht, gelijk het Adam tot verbondshoofd en Noach tot tweeden stamvader heeft, terwijl omgekeerd de particuliere genade alleen werkt in de gemeente der uitverkorenen, d.i. in die herstelde en vernieuwde menscheid, die tot Verbondshoofd den Christus ontving.*⁴⁶

My objection to this formulation is that it limits Christ’s headship to the elect and thereby violates the unity of the race. Basic to it is also a reduction of the merits of the cross, and an inconsistent denial of the need for a judicial basis. It has exactly all the weaknesses to which I object.

Berkhof writes

That the design of God in the work of Christ pertained primarily and directly, not to the temporal well-being of men in general, but to the redemption of the elect; but secondarily and indirectly it also included the natural blessings bestowed on mankind indiscriminately. All that the natural man receives other than curse and death is an indirect result of the redemptive work of Christ.⁴⁷

The nature of my objection ought to be clear by now. Common grace is not an indirect, but a direct result of the cross. Furthermore, Berkhof separates the spiritual from the natural when he says that special grace operates on the spiritual level, while common grace concerns only the natural.⁴⁸ Here Berkhof, I suspect unknowingly, disagrees with Kuyper. Kuyper asks the rhetorical questions:

Shall we say that in Him we have only the reconciliation of our sins or shall we continue to recognize that He also will one day change our humiliated bodies to make them like His glorified body? Shall we pretend that the reconciliation of our souls suffices, or shall we continue to confess a Christ of God as the Saviour of both soul and body, not recreate merely the invisible things but also those that are visible to the eye?

46 I, p. 292. “het altos doorgaand en beslissend onderscheid” ;

47 Pp. 438-439.

48 P. 439.

*Zullen we zeggen, dat we in hem alleen de verzoening onzer zonde hebben, of zullen we blijven erkennen, dat hij het is die ook onze vernederde lichamen eens veranderen zal gelijkvorming aan zijn verheerlijkt lichaam? ... Zullen we wanen genoeg te hebben aan een verzoener onzer ziel, of zullen we een Christus Gods blijven belijden, als den Redder van ziel en lichaam beide, en als herschepper niet enkel van de dingen die onzienlijk, maar ook van de dingen die zienlijk en voor oogen zijn?*⁴⁹

In making these rhetorical remarks, Kuyper is not concerned with the same question with which I am dealing. Nevertheless, the point I wish to make is fully supported here. Particular grace renews the elect wholly, spiritually *and* physically. Common grace does not effect a full salvation, but it nevertheless conditions men entirely, including their spiritual life. Calvinism, declares De Graaf, has always seen grace “as restoring nature.”⁵⁰ If we assign the two kinds of grace to different spheres, then we necessarily must view special grace as being an addition to nature, and we have landed in Thomism.

The two kinds of grace are so intertwined that it is difficult to determine the point of meeting. Dooyeweerd suggest that “special grace” be renamed “regenerating grace.” It “only embraces the *ecclesia invisibilis*, i.e. reborn mankind.” However, it “cannot remain hidden *in time*, but necessarily reveals itself as the root of the temporal conserving grace as well.”⁵¹ For this reason it can be said to have a “radical-universal character.”⁵² “Thus the deeper unity between conserving and regenerating grace finds expression in every sphere of human society, insofar as it reveals the influence of the Christian spirit”⁵³ The unbeliever is damned, but he still shares to a degree in Calvary. De Graaf puts it this way:

To put it strongly: It is Christ who works in them. This in neither denies the wrong motives or the formally sinful in the works of unbelievers nor does it say anything about a change or sanctification of their hearts. Still one can recognize the operation and power of Christ in them.

Even heel sterk gezegd: het is de Christus, Die in hen werkt. Daarmee is niets afgedaan van de verkeerde motieven, van het formeel zondige in de werken der ongeloovigen; en

49 I, p. 221.

50 *Christus*, p. 76. “als herstellende de natuur.”

51 III, p. 525.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 524.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 525.

*daarmee is niets gezegd over een verandering en reiniging van hun hart. Toch is in hun werken de kracht van Christus te herkennen.*⁵⁴

The very fact that unbelievers live and share in and, to a large degree, even direct the development of culture is proof of the work of Christ, for it would have been impossible without Him. It is for this reason that the unregenerate can do any good at all. They have not been engrafted into Christ, but the work of Christ restrains them from developing their true selves, from destroying themselves. And insofar as they contribute to the cultural development, they do so because of the power of Christ in them. Insofar as they introduce destructive elements into culture, they are being true to themselves.

The ideas here expressed and defended, however successfully, have real implications for some of the matters so heatedly debated in our own immediate community. They have bearing on the antithesis debate as well as on the "Dekker controversy." In the latter problem, especially, the unity of creation is frequently lost sight of. The universal scope of redemption would also help clarify matters. Both of these questions are beyond the scope of this paper, however,

After all that has been said, I hope it is understood that if we recognize two basic facts, namely that creation is an organic unity and that life is religion, then we *must* conclude that grace, all grace, comes to us only through the cross.

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⁵⁴ *Christus*, p. 101.

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