

CALVIN AND NEO-CALVINISM ON NON-CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

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Christian faith and non-christian thought

In the following article I examine a theme which, through the centuries, has been of central importance for many Christian thinkers and which, as will be shown, has occupied Professor Vollenhoven’s deepest reflective powers: the question of the relationship between Christian faith and non-christian thought. The history of philosophy and theology supplies ample evidence that this problem is extremely complicated and almost impossible to oversee. Since some kind of selection is necessary I will focus on this problem as it is dealt with in calvinistic circles.

An investigation into this matter confronts us immediately with three urgent questions: 1. Is the problem of the relationship between Christian faith and non-christian thought a truly relevant one? 2. Is the problem as stated here correctly put? 3. Is the problem not too narrowly formulated if limited to the calvinist reformation? The scope of my topic will become evident if I begin by giving short answers to these three questions.

Peripheral or central problem?

¹ This article was originally a speech given at the annual closing conference of the Philosophy Faculty of the Free University on June 5, 1972. The general theme of the conference was “The relationship between Christian faith and non-christian thought in the history of philosophy”. For the sake of liveliness I have retained the “speech form” in the final revision. I owe Drs. G. E. Morbey a great debt of gratitude for the rendition into English.

1. When one considers how philosophy is increasingly becoming a tool of language analysis or an engaged critique of social structures and at the same time how Christian faith is increasingly experienced as an ineffable private experience — then the question arises inevitably: Is the theme presented here indeed relevant? Is not the relation of Christian faith to philosophy of peripheral concern when compared to the gigantic problems our world and century are faced with?

This is certainly not the case! In the first place it will have to be admitted that this so-called peripheral problem has been a basic issue of western culture from the 1st century after Christ until the 18th century. The 2nd century “Wanderphilosoph” Justin Martyr early met the earnestness of this problem when he was converted to Christ and wrestled with the problem of how the truth of Christianity could be harmonized with the results of worldly philosophy. And I believe Justin’s problem will continually confront the Christian conscience so long as the church does not become sectarian and a cultural drop-out.

Nor has the problem lost its urgency outside the Christian camp. I realize that many with a secularized view of science will hardly be interested in this issue because it does not seem to concern them. However, modern thought is ambiguous in casting aside the Christian faith. For it still continues to bear the stamp of Christianity. Present-day philosophy is not nonchristian but post-christian. This is not only true of philosophy! The whole world in which we live is the cultural product of Athens and Jerusalem, of pagan culture and the Christian church, of worldly wisdom and biblical truth with all their indelible characteristics. Profane, secularized thought can never fully rid itself of its own *historical roots*. If it wants to know itself then it will have to know its own past and, accordingly, the mysterious relationship and interwovenness of Christian faith and non-christian philosophy.

An existential problem

2. Is it correct to establish an antithesis between Christian faith and non-christian thought? Does not such a formulation conceal a double contrast between what is Christian and what is non-christian and between faith and reason? If considered systematically this argument is indeed valid. When considered historically, however, it is necessary to add some additional remarks. Of course it is possible for one — including the historian — to treat the contrast between Christian faith and non-christian faith and the relationship between faith and reason

separately. But history shows that these problems are always interrelated and just here manifest their existential depth. History witnesses to men who put their trust in Christ and as a result were forced to face the question: How to deal as Christians with previously obtained philosophical insights? Does the acceptance of the Bible as the authoritative Word of God involve saying farewell to the dialogues of Plato, to the organon of Aristotle, or, if you like, to the works of Kant and the writings of Marx? Or do these philosophers still have an independent worth or perhaps only a subordinate worth?

These questions can be likened to those arising in the confrontation between Christian belief and non-Christian morality. Many missionaries have experienced how the acceptance of Christianity by heathen tribes undermines such customs as polygamy and slavery and opens them to discussion: Is the Christian faith a refinement or an corroboration of pagan standards of life, or is it a change of course, perhaps even a total rejection of heathen morals? These questions, arising from the tension between Christian belief and pagan morality, reverberate in the conflict area between Christian faith and pagan philosophy and that with even greater urgency, because of the Bible's less explicit pronouncements about philosophy.

Yet in my opinion it is incontestable that the radiance of God's Word lights also non-Christian thought and philosophy. The apostle Paul expressed it graphically as follows: “Casting down reasonings, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10 : 5). Reading only the first sentence — about every high thing that must be cast down — it appears as a simple sentence of destruction spoken against all worldly wisdom. However, reading the second sentence — about human thought that must be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ — it appears that the relationship between Christian faith and non-Christian thought cannot simply be understood in terms of negation and exclusion. And so the problem of Justin and Augustine, of Thomas and Bonaventure, of Calvin and Pascal and of so many others, remains.

Splendida vitia?

3. It may also be asked whether or not our theme is too narrowly defined if we confine it simply to the tradition of the reformed faith and chiefly to Calvin, Groen van Prinsterer, Kuyper and their adherents. That I pay special attention to these men is not, let us say, out of

pious consideration for the reformed tradition. Rather, I am concerned with something completely different. There is a truly conclusive reason that an examination of our problem concerns itself with a separate study of the calvinist reformation. The reformers cast the problem in a new form and had therefore to find a new solution for it. The basis for this new attempt is found in the reformed teaching on *sin* and *grace*.

Luther and Calvin rediscovered in the Bible the totalitarian character of sin. They read primarily in the letters of Paul how sin was much more than a human defect, that, on the contrary, it revealed itself as rebellion against God, as lawlessness, apostasy and unwisdom. In their view sin manifests itself in an unholy standard of conduct, in a misguided reason and in corrupt desires. It is an evil which festers in man's heart and in all his living. The reformers taught the *corruptio totalis*, the total corruption of human nature. This view is echoed in the Heidelberg Catechism where it states that man's nature is "... wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all evil".²

The doctrine of *corruptio totalis* was not, as some have suggested, a sample of calvinistic "sin-pessimism". The reformers — and this goes for Luther just as much as for Calvin — were men with a liberating message. But they saw this liberation only in terms of the community of faith with Christ. Jesus, who himself rose from death to life, wants also to resurrect those who are slaves of sin and give them new life. And all this He does freely, purely out of grace, not as a divine reward for possible human merits. In short, the reformers considered *corruptio totalis* and *sola gratia* as complementary ideas.

It is self-evident that the idea of *corruptio totalis* also implied that human reason was corrupted and that it must therefore play a vital role in the consideration and judgment of non-christian thought. Did not the radical reformed doctrine of sin and grace lead inexorably to the conclusion that the world outside of Christ wandered in darkness, that there the lamps of wisdom and insight were completely extinguished? Must this not lead to the bizarre view (as far as I know incorrectly attributed to Augustine) that [46] the virtues of the heathen are nothing more than "splendida vitia", i.e., splendid vices?

We are placed here before a complex of deeply involved problems. It is for this reason I claim that everyone who himself knows the perversion and pervasiveness of sin and who has perceived for himself in "sola gratia" the voice of our gracious Lord will want to focus

² *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day III, 8. That the corruption of sin is total in fallen man certainly does not mean that all sin is equally bad. The Bible speaks of lesser and greater sins and even of mortal sins. It does mean, however, that there is no area of life which escapes the grip of sin. Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 285 ff.

his attention on the question of how precisely on the basis of this biblical-reformed conviction the worth of non-christian philosophy is judged and is to be judged.

It is clear that in this article I must limit myself to a few central issues. If I refer only to Calvin, Groen and Kuyper *cum suis*, it does not mean that others such as Luther, Melancthon, Schleiermacher, Vinet, Bavinck and Brunner are of less or no importance to our study. I believe, however, that the work of the first mentioned is especially suited to show in which direction the views have developed and in which direction we too must look for an answer.

Calvin against scholasticism

Let me first say something about Calvin. Calvin turned resolutely against the classical medieval view that up to a certain point human reason retained its self-sufficiency and ability to discover truth. "All parts of the soul", so he states, "were possessed by sin after Adam deserted the fountain of righteousness".³ He also believed that human reason was radically corrupted. Thus he called the *lumen naturale*, the natural light of reason, "blind".⁴

Calvin fought medieval scholastic dualism with these and similar phrases. Scholasticism, as is generally known, distinguished between a natural and a supernatural realm. Even though human nature was considered soiled and damaged, still, it was not corrupted at its root. It remained more or less "right side up". On the other hand, after the Fall in paradise, the original righteousness of supernature was completely lost to man. It could only be restored through the sacramental administration of grace by the Catholic church. Calvin rejects this scholastic dualism of nature and super-nature because he feels it misjudges the totalitarian character of sin.⁵

Calvin's view of sin as a corruption and perversion which pervades man's total being has far-reaching consequences for our study. It implies that in matters concerning the highest knowledge, i.e., the knowledge of God, human reason is so darkened that only muddled notions are produced. Calvin considers this all the more remarkable since God through his

³ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), II, I, 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵ Cf. H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Vol. I (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1953), p. 516. Calvin distinguishes more than once between the natural and the supernatural, although he usually means by this the distinction between natural life (born of earthly parents, etc.) and spiritual life (born of God, regeneration, etc.). I don't mean to defend, however, the total absence of scholasticism in Calvin's terminology.

general revelation manifests himself in his whole creation and before the eyes of all. Man remains imprisoned, however, in ignorance and superstition. On account of this, says Calvin, besides his general revelation in creation God has again explicitly revealed himself in Scripture. Calvin calls Scripture [47] “the spectacles” which help us again to see the true God in the world around us.⁶

Has Calvin condemned, then, all non-christian and unscriptural thought? This is by no means the case! He definitely states that there are still some sparks of light to be found in man’s degenerate nature.⁷ This applies above all to human reason. Calvin considers it incompatible with both Scripture and common sense to condemn reason to permanent error and blindness.⁸ Granted, reason achieves very little where it directs itself to God and heavenly things. It is more competent when it directs itself to earthly affairs. And to these earthly affairs Calvin reckons politics, art and science.⁹ Even science! Calvin, who himself had a great knowledge of classical antiquity, declares that the light of truth in the works of heathen authors shines wondrously” and that apostate reason “... is still clothed and ornamented with God’s excellent gifts.”¹⁰ Calvin’s attitude to all non-christian culture and science appears therefore to be exceedingly nuanced. On the one hand, he does not want to depreciate or ignore the gifts which God has distributed outside his church. That would be a deep ingratitude to the Giver.¹¹ On the other hand, he does not want to consider these gifts merely in themselves and esteem them as pure human achievements. Calvin continually occupies himself with how these gifts function in man. Do they serve to satisfy individual ambition and insight or do they tend to the service and glory of God? It is precisely in the latter that man on his own falls short. All human gifts are by nature affected with sin. No one can reap glory from them. This applies also to human reason. Human comprehension and understanding, says Calvin, “... is an unstable and transitory thing in God’s sight, when a solid foundation of truth does not underlie it.”¹²

Hence Calvin speaks of God’s “common grace” to avoid denying human depravity or misjudging God’s work outside the circle of faith. “Common grace” in the sense that the Lord God has allowed human nature many benefits even though man is deprived of the true

⁶ *Institutes*, I, vi, 1. Cf. *The Belgic Confession*, art. 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, I, v, 14.

⁸ *Ibid.*, IV, ii, 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, II, ii, 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, II, ii, 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, II, ii, 16.

good.¹³ "Common grace" such that the Lord bridles the power of sin and holds it in check in those who have not been purified of sin so that no one can give full rein to his evil desires.

Common grace and general revelation

One thing must be kept in mind, however. Although Calvin sometimes speaks of "common grace" he does not use it in a fixed technical sense as was done in later reformed theology, for example by Kuyper.¹⁴ Calvin [48] speaks just as easily of God's kindness, of his mercy or indulgence,¹⁵ of his particular grace to all or to a few¹⁶ or again simply of God's providence through which he still presents gifts to the individual or all humanity and restrains the outbreak of sin.¹⁷

That Calvin's views on this matter were brought together at a later stage and systematized under the heading of "common grace" has had benefits as well as definite draw-backs. For what is God's purpose in restraining sin and bestowing gifts of grace? Calvin mentions widely divergent motives. It has to do with God's upholding of his creation, of caring for the human race,¹⁸ or of preserving his church in the world.¹⁹ Indeed, there is still more. Through the agency of his blessings God wants to bring the unbeliever to repentance.²⁰ He wants to display his goodness - every day anew - even to those who scorn it.²¹ The intention of God's benefits can even be to brand the conscience of the ungodly, to impress him of his ingratitude and rebellion, his guilt and deserving of punishment, to remove his every excuse.²² God, the gracious Father, stresses Calvin, is also the sovereign judge.

¹³ *Ibid.*, II, ii, 17.

¹⁴ A. Kuyper's remark that the doctrine of common grace is a calvinist dogma in his *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 59, 118, or that it is "an indispensable item of the Reformed confession" has been justly criticized. Calvin nowhere presents this doctrine as an independent tenet of faith. In the reformed confessions "common grace" is at the most here and there presupposed: *Belgic Confession*, art. 13, 14, 36; *Canons of Dordt*, II, 5, 6, III and IV, 4, 8/9; *Westminster Confession*, V, 6. See also note 64. The doctrine, however, quickly spread in reformed theology and was defended with all sorts of variants and further distinctions, again frequently malting room for a scholastic nature-grace scheme.

¹⁵ *Institutes*, I, v, 14; III, 25; II, 17.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, II, respectively 14, 17. Calvin states in paragraph 17 that some men excel others thanks to God's special grace, so that it may appear that his grace is not bound to any. That is, God has given his gifts to all but not in the same way and in the same measure; *ibid.*, II, 4. Cf. J. Bohatec, "Das Naturrecht und die innerweltlichen Ordnungen nach Calvin", *Publicaties van de Reïinisten-Organisatie van N.D.D.D.*, no. 8, pp. 4, 8.

¹⁷ *Institutes*, II, 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, II, ii, 16; II, iii, 4; III, xiv, 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I, xvii, 11, 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, III, iii, 25; I, v, 14

²¹ *Ibid.*, III, xxiv, 2; III, xx, 15.

²² *Ibid.*, I, 1; III, 25; I, v, 14; III, xxv, 9. For a more extended discussion of the purpose of common grace in Calvin see: H. Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1928), pp. 206-212; and for the subtle details: J. Douma, *Algemene Genade* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1966), pp. 234-257.

This last point is especially important. Calvin appeals here to Romans 1 : 20. This text states that God reveals himself in the works of creation and thus removes from fallen man every excuse for saying: I have never noticed anything of God!

Hence for Calvin, this motive of "inexcusableness" is one of the most important reasons why God not only upholds nature (cf. Acts 14 :17) but also culture and science. Endowed with so many gifts and possibilities, man will never be able to prove either before the judgement seat of God or before the forum of his own conscience that God did not reveal himself in his goodness.

It is striking, therefore, that Calvin relates the idea of God's "common grace" to the idea of God's "general revelation". (I will stick to these accepted terms for the present) Both have to be understood, according to Calvin, in relation to the "inexcusableness" theme in the first chapter of Romans. How Calvin further develops the mutual relationship between general revelation and common grace is not relevant to our problem. For that [49] matter, Calvin outlines the idea of common grace as loosely as he does the relation of this idea to the idea of general revelation. I'm simply noting here, that what we usually understand by general revelation and common grace has for Calvin a similar intention and therefore a close mutual affinity.

I hope to return to the connection between general revelation and common grace at the close of my article. I will confine myself here to a short summary of what has been remarked about Calvin up to now.²³ 1. Sin pervades total human existence as perversion and corruption. 2. God has his own reasons for restraining sin in man and society. 3. God still blesses the unconverted with all sorts of creaturely gifts including the gift of knowledge and understanding. 4. Non-christian thought, therefore, does not witness to a partially remaining goodness or self-sufficiency of human nature, as Scholasticism maintains. 5. If it witnesses to anything, then it is to a God who not only upholds his goodness and grace but also his sovereignty and righteousness in a sinful world.

Groen and scholastic dualism

Now I come to the Dutch historian and statesman Groen van Prinsterer. This involves a big step: from the 16th to the 19th century. Naturally, this time difference has left its mark in

²³ For a broader outline of Calvin's position on this point see: J. Klapwijk, "Calvijn over de filosofie", *Correspondentie-Bladen Ver. Calv. Wijsb.*, 38 (March, 1972), 13-20. I also discuss there Calvin's idea of "christiana philosophia" and his view of "lex naturalis".

Groen's work, however much he wished to concur with Calvin.

In Groen, just as much as in Calvin, we meet with a sharp opposition to scholastic dualism. Agreeing with Calvin, Groen rejects the view that man on the strength of his own reasonable nature can attain knowledge of an eternal, divine being, while Christianity on the basis of revelation gives the necessary supernatural addition.²⁴

Groen's argument is nevertheless new. He calls the scholastic view "antihistorical".²⁵ There is, he says, such a thing as a "natural" knowledge of God and this knowledge is also "reasonable" but it is not drawn from the reasonable nature of man.²⁶ It has, in reality, arisen from some historical religion. Thus, Aristotle's doctrine of God developed from ancient Greek folk-religions, and the deist's natural idea of God can be traced back to the Christian faith. Here we encounter a general thesis of Groen, namely, that philosophy is in essence a derivative of religion.²⁷ [50]

Philosophy, religion, christianity

Philosophy a derivative of religion! The real purport of this thesis only becomes clear in connection with a second thesis: that all religions are in essence derived from Christianity. In Groen's words, "Christianity is the source of all religious enlightenment".²⁸

This thesis is also remarkable. Groen does not simply mean that the God who has revealed himself in Christ has also made himself known in his work of creation to the heathen world. That would be completely in line with Calvin's doctrine of general revelation. Granted, Groen does have a doctrine of general revelation but he interprets it in a strongly, if not fully, historical fashion. For him, the light of God's

²⁴ G. Groen van Prinsterer, *Beschouwingen over Staats- en Volkerenrecht*, Vol. I (Leiden: Luotmans, 1834), pp. 36, 80. My analysis relies mainly on Groen's *Beschouwingen*. This youth work is the most systematic treatment of Groen's philosophical position. It retained its value for him and in 1858 he had it reprinted in shorter form

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36

²⁶ The philosophical tenets in question are not reasonable in the sense of the self-sufficient reason, *ibid.* In what way are they reasonable then? They are only such in so far as all science reasons from higher truths or first principles which require faith: faith (belief) is "the beginning of science", p. 5. Touchstone for all such faith is God's word, p. 2. Reason applies general truths or faith-demanding principles to the various areas of science, p. 2. Christian science can be called "applied Christianity", p. 93.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 76: "Philosophy has always been inseparable from and dependent on religion." However, Groen does not reject the possibility that non-Christian philosophy surpasses non-Christian religion in value. Sometimes it is able to separate critically the gold of original revealed truth from the dross of superstition (e.g., where it concerns the unity of God or the immortality of the soul, p. 37, cf. p. 79).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34. In combination with the first thesis Groen can now go further and posit Christianity central for all philosophy. "So we have seen in Christianity the only source of religious and philosophical enlightenment", p. 97.

general revelation is the light of the primordial revelation in paradise.²⁹ God made himself known to man in paradise. This was in fact or at least in principle the beginning of the Christian church.³⁰ The various religions, through tradition, still bear knowledge of this in so far as their knowledge of God does not refer to God's new revelation in his Word.³¹ It is for this reason that all religions and indirectly all philosophies can be seen as derivatives of Christianity.

The picture of Groen so far presented is certainly not complete. What has been said up till now would place him in league with Christian romantic historicism. It would label him an adherent of Herder, Schlegel and Schelling and thinkers of that strain. But there is also another Groen: Groen the follower of Calvin, indeed, the one who takes seriously the biblical doctrine of the radical corruption of sin. Not only for historical but also for scriptural reasons the idea of a natural knowledge of God is an absurdity for Groen: "Enmity against God, that is the natural religion of a depraved nature."³²

Groen then, just as Calvin, is profoundly aware of the power of evil in man. Primordial revelation has everywhere become degenerate. Nevertheless, there is at the same time astonishment that so much good can be observed in the life and thought of the nations even where Christ is not served. Groen wants to acknowledge this good even in the enlightenment philosophy of unbelief, against which he fought his whole life. For did not the deists and atheists of the 18th century teach morality, immortality, freedom and equality?³³

This feeling of wonder leads Groen to thankfulness and critical distance! Thankfulness, because, light still shines from its source in original revela-[51]tion and also at a later stage from the Word revelation, through the non-christian religions and in the philosophical dogmas derived from them. There is truth then in non-christian thought!

But Groen would not be Groen if he did not at the same time maintain a critical distance. The heathen religions originated through the influence of sin. The lie has

²⁹ Groen, under the influence of the romantic-historical philosophy of religion of Herder, Schelling, etc., appears to interpret Rom. 1 : 19, 20 (απο κτίσεως κόσμου) not so much in terms of a natural but an historical (from the paradise tradition) knowledge of God, cf. *Beschouwingen*, p. 37.

³⁰ Here Groen can appeal to the Belgic Confession, art. 27, *Beschouwingen*, p. 2.7.

³¹ Groen says that his thesis that Christianity is the source of all religious enlightenment, is a "completely historical remark", *ibid.*, p. 34. And in another place: "All religion is traditional", with the understanding that Christianity also knows of God's Word-revelation as the "recording and development of original revelation", p. 37.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

followed the truth and not only mixed with it but also taken advantage of it. Indeed, the more truth added to the lie, the more power the lie gets! Yet in spite of themselves the religions witness to the truth while holding it down.³⁴

Hence Groen recognizes the relative worth of apostate philosophy. But his appreciation is coupled with this warning: "that all the Food and excellent becomes corrupted through the direction given to it."³⁵ Against this background, I now dare to cite Groen's words which by themselves could lead to a source of misunderstanding: "On a Christian basis one can be an eclectic thinker in a good sense".³⁶ Groen can maintain this because he believes that all scientific truth has a religious and ultimately Christian origin. As we noted before, this origin lies in paradise revelation and also possibly in the later added biblical revelation. Therefore, Christian research does not have to reject all non-christian philosophy but should guide it back to its own true, but hidden from itself, origin.³⁷

Groen and Kuyper

Abraham Kuyper, the famous Dutch statesman, theologian and founder of the Free University, was a devotee of Groen. Their congeniality lies not only in the fact that after their conversions they both consciously adopted the calvinist tradition of faith but they were also influenced to a certain extent by 19th century romantic historical idealism. I have touched on this point before where I mentioned that Groen considered all non-christian religion and its philosophical-scientific development and application to the various areas of reality to be fruits of the historical tradition originating in paradise. One finds related ideas in the work of Kuyper. Yet his view is more original, broader, with more nuances and certainly more complex. In

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39, 41.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42. The views of enlightenment philosophy with respect to morality, immortality, freedom and equality, so he says here, are pernicious because they have been broken away from their original Christian life-principle, "whereas, in proper relation to higher truth, they are as beneficial as they are undeniable" In ancient philosophy the hidden root of self-exaltation and egoism must be discerned, p. 81. Therefore, he also rejects the view of Christian romantics like De Maistre and Schlegel who saw the ancients as "la préface humaine de L'Evangile", or as "die wissenschaftliche Einleitung in die christliche Offenbarung", p. 79. Essential for Groen is that outside Christianity no knowledge of the origin of evil, the way of salvation or Christ as mediator is possible, p. 80.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36. Groen quotes with approval Göschel: "In der ... heidnischen Philosophie ... ist nur so viel wahr als christlich ist," p. 90.

³⁷ "Every science, correctly pursued, witnesses to the truth of Revelation (1); incorrectly pursued, it still exalts the highest truth against its will through aberration and fallacy (2). Careful study returns it to the general source of light and life (3)", *ibid.*, p. 95.

addition Kuyper works out his own interpretation of Calvinism.

Here, of course, we are concerned with all these motives only in connection with our topic, the relationship between Christian faith and non-[52]christian thinking. Kuyper is supposed to have said: “The church could be better, the world could be worse. ‘ This saying betrays Kuyper’s inclination to expect more from the church and less from the world. This is to a certain extent understandable. Kuyper’s starting-point is the reformed doctrine of the radical and total corruption of sin and with it the reformed confession of complete salvation given through Christ to his church. Kuyper initially (about 1874) wanted to explain the apparent success of the world, despite this doctrine of sin and grace, on the basis of the “natural knowledge of God” seen as a fruit of general revelation.³⁸ Contrary to his original starting-point Kuyper in elaborating this viewpoint has not in my opinion remained free of scholastic influence. This is especially apparent where he interprets the natural knowledge of God as a “bridge” between church and world or as a point of contact for faith.³⁹ Enclosed in the image of a “bridge” or of a “point of contact” lies the view that man, in spite of his sin, is already advancing along the path to salvation on his own strength and ability. Half a century later, Karl Barth in the famous controversy with Emil Brunner justifiably rejected such a viewpoint. One can regard Barth’s exclusive reliance on the Word revelation as fundamentally insufficient (see below) yet in my opinion he has correctly seen in the idea of a “point of contact” an inevitable step in the direction of a scholastic *theologia naturalis*.⁴⁰

³⁸ On the one hand, Kuyper understands the natural knowledge of God to be the still unconscious *innate* knowledge of God (Calvin used the terms “sensus divinitatis”, “semen religions”, etc.). On the other hand, the *acquired* knowledge of God is that which originates through the influence of nature, the human world, history, tradition and personal life-experience based on the innate knowledge of God. Evidently Kuyper takes much more into consideration than the paradise revelation about which Groen spoke. Yet Kuyper does believe that general revelation originated in paradise. Hence, he can speak of particular revelation in Israel and general revelation among all nations as two separate streams which flow together in the final revelation of God in Christ. — The natural knowledge of God retains its value for the church even though it lives within the sphere of particular revelation. Consequently the reformed fathers are supposed to have built a bridge to the world. Neglect of this possibility has opened a deep split between world and church and brought about a complete animosity between science and faith. See *Het Zondagsblad* (Aug. 2-15, 1874), bound in *Uit het Woord*, Series I, vol. III (Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser), pp. 167-225.

³⁹ Yet at the same time Kuyper emphasizes the deep taint of sin. However, sin cannot destroy the natural knowledge of God because the latter belongs to the nature of man. “Their moral degeneration changes the relationship in which they stand to God, but does not remove their awareness of God ... Hatred of God is unthinkable, unless the sinner is restlessly occupied with an awareness of God’s existence and holiness.” If one agrees with this, however, the question arises as to how a bridge between church and world or a point of contact for faith can be found in such a perverted knowledge of God. Cf.: *Uit het Woord*, series I, vol. III, p. 170.

⁴⁰ K. Barth, *Nein, Antwort an Emil Brunner* (Munich: Kaiser, 1934). Indeed also in later years Kuyper still spoke of a “natural knowledge of God” and even of a “point of contact”. He now feels the problems more sharply. He calls

Common grace: its extent, nature, purpose and ground

The problem under consideration is placed in a new and much broader framework when, at a later stage (1895J), Kuyper writes his most characteristic study *De Gemeene Gratie*. The title gives the framework: the doctrine of common grace. [53]

Like the English word “grace”, the Dutch word “genade” is open to confusion. It can refer either to *common* grace or to *special* (particular) grace. Kuyper revived the archaic form “gratie” for common grace in order to avoid any misunderstanding. It was his opinion that one usually understands “genade” to mean saving grace. But saving grace is particular. Salvation is something personal. Kuyper was afraid that if he introduced the term “common grace” using “genade” he would be understood as defending the doctrine of universal salvation. To avoid this he uses “gratie” for the second term in the concept “common grace”.⁴¹

Kuyper posited emphatically that his usage of common grace has a broader scope and a different content, purpose and ground than particular grace. It has a greater breadth because it is common: it applies to the whole world and the whole of humanity.

Common grace also has a different nature and content.⁴² The content of particular grace is deliverance from sin and the gift of salvation. The content of common grace is a temporal blessing of grace for man and creation. Kuyper explains this as follows. In paradise God had said that man would surely die if he sinned (Gen. 2 : 17). Sometimes grace is extended to those under the death-sentence. In the same way God has extended grace to fallen humanity. Grace in the sense that the punishment (eternal death) was postponed until the last day. Grace in so far as room is made for the long drawn-out history of mankind. Grace in that the deadly poison of sin in humanity is restrained, indeed turned back in the whole creation.⁴³

the heathen's natural knowledge of God “deranged knowledge of God”, and even an “anomaly”; *Encyclopaedia der Heilige Godgeleerdheid* III (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1894), pp. 449, 452; cf. also II, p. 249 ff.

⁴¹ *De Gemeene Gratie*, Vol. I (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1931), p. 8 f.

⁴² “Common grace... by itself contains no single kernel of saving grace and is, consequently, of a totally different nature.” *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 243 ff., 285 ff. Kuyper says himself: “The doctrine of “common grace” did not arise from philosophical reflection, but from the confession of the deadly character of sin ... Apparently, this did not square with reality. There was so much good in the sinful world, also outside the church ... This placed one before the choice, either to deny all this good (... the Anabaptists ...); or to consider that fallen man has not fallen so deeply (... Arminian heresy ...). Yet here lies the solution ... , that grace works also outside the church ... not eternal or saving grace, but

The purpose of common grace also differs from that of particular grace. Particular grace for Kuyper is the mysterious reality of God's gracious intervention in the human heart, through which a man gets a new life, becomes a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. This re-birth is of a supernatural order, something which is not simply given with creation, an eschatological reality in so far as the believer here on earth may already taste the powers of the world to come (Hebr. 6 :15). Re-creation, re-birth is not something totally new if compared with the original creation. And yet it can not be explained from the old. Particular grace and its fruits (new life and finally the new heaven and the new earth) goes beyond the natural creation order.⁴⁴ The goal of particular grace, therefore, is the anticipation of the new heaven and die new earth.

Particular grace means: God makes a new beginning. Common grace: God perpetuates the old. The aim of common grace is both negative and positive: negatively as the restraint of sin or conservation of the creature. [54] Positively as referring to the yet to be developed possibilities placed in creation by God, or the opening process of creation.⁴⁵

Serious difficulties attend this contrast between earth and heaven, creation and recreation, cultural activity and salvation of the soul. There is in all of this the threat of a spiritualizing dualism which expresses itself in a separated directedness to the hereafter and to the present.” Only rarely does Kuyper know how to connect both spheres centrally. Yet there are moments that it dawns for him: the cross of Jesus bears the future but also the present.⁴⁶ To Jesus Christ is given all power in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28 :18). Then he honours Christ as king also in the sphere of common grace. Then he can proclaim the lofty utterance: “There is not a square inch of our whole human existence of which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not say: Mine.”⁴⁷

Mostly, however, the tensions in Kuyper's cultural theology remain. These tensions reflect themselves also in Kuyper's person. In part his work echoes the mystery of the

temporal, checking the depravity that lay hidden in sin.” *Gemeene Gratie* I, p. 11. Cf. also *Lectures on Calvinism*, pp. 121 ff.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Gemeene Gratie*, Vol. I, p. 243 f. with vol. II, p. 613 f.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 616-623.

⁴⁶ This is also one of the main reasons why Kuyper, despite his “architectonic critique” of society, has received so little understanding and appreciation in the newer theology.

⁴⁷ *Souvereiniteit in eigen kring* (Amsterdam: J. H. Kruyt, 1880), p. 32. See also S. U. Zuidema, “Common Grace and Christian Action in Abraham Kuyper”, *Communication and Confrontation* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972), p. 95. Kuyper has great difficulties with a radically christocentric view of culture. For, whole-heartedly devoted to emancipating culture (fruit of common grace) from the control of the church (institution of particular grace) he fears that a christocentric view might lead to a new ecclesiastical domination over political and social life.

born-again heart, the sigh of the weary pilgrim who longs for his eternal home. In part he is driven by an extraordinary vigour to work at the unfolding of God’s creation in state, society and science. And even here his ideas diverge. At times he sees the creation mandate as a common human task in which Christian and non-christian stand shoulder to shoulder. Then again he is sure that the great cultural mandate must be translated into a program of organized Christian action in all areas of life including philosophy and science.⁴⁸

Common grace and science

This brings us back to our main theme again. Thinking, science and philosophy are grounded in God’s creation order. Science is “God’s own creation”.⁴⁹ Hence science is also to be seen as a fruit of common grace. Sin has darkened the understanding and it follows that all science would end in deceit and self-deception if there had been no common grace. God’s grace is the cause that men such as Plato, Aristotle, Kant and Darwin(!) have shone as “stars of the first magnitude”.⁵⁰ The conclusion is that Kuyper can appreciate pagan and profane thought. The appreciation is not added to the account of sinful man, however, but to the grace of God.

Yet Kuyper will also say that science is seriously affected by sin. Kuyper’s opposition to non-christian science is much stronger than his appreciation of it, despite his theory of common grace.⁵¹ [55]

Kuyper acknowledges a difference between the sciences. He thinks that in the natural sciences general validity and common acceptance is to a large extent possible because so much depends on exact, objective observations. On the other hand, in history, philosophy and the other humanities, the subjectivity of the researcher is at stake, since questions arise concerning the origin, connection and

⁴⁸ One can find a condensation of this in *Pro Rege* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1911/12).

⁴⁹ *Gemeene Gratie*, Vol. III, p. 495.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 498.

⁵¹ Kuyper can also give grounds for this. What does it mean that our thinking is darkened by sin? Not that we can no longer think logically or observe with our senses. It means that we no longer see things in their mutual connections and divine origin. Context and origin is not simply read off from things. Our spirit could still sense these relationships as long as it stood in a living relation with God, but just this property is lost because of sin. We can still see various parts of creation but we no longer understand its unity, origin and purpose. Here we can cite one of Kuyper’s famous images: Man has become like an insane architect Who, shut up in a cell, peers out the window and stares at the walls and spires of his building without being able to understand the motive of the structure, *ibid.*, p. 499. Thus, the darkening of the understanding means for Kuyper not only the end of natural theology and its philosophical ascent to God, but also the impossibility of reaching a true knowledge of creation, *ibid.*, p. 499 ff.

purpose of things, questions which cannot be solved through observation.⁵² With respect to the physical sciences, therefore, Kuyper does not want to place an opposition between what is Christian and what is unchristian. However, with respect to theology and the rest of the humanities (including the philosophy of science) things are different and two kinds of science become possible. Here a truly christian science is demanded. The born-again mentality rather than the consideration of Scriptural data determines the distinctive character of christian science.⁵³

Hence Kuyper’s position with respect to non-christian thinking is clearly ambiguous. Sometimes he stresses the gifts which God in his goodness permitted to humanity. Then he can speak with admiration of Plato, Kant and others. More often, however, he stresses that only a regenerate man can “compare spiritual things with spiritual” (I Cor. 2 : 13). Then the necessity of a particular Christian science and philosophy seems to be required by his theology of rebirth. Then sides are taken: “the science of the new birth” versus ‘the science outside the influence of the new birth.’⁵⁴ Then the idea of common grace functions no longer as the basis for appreciating non-christian conceptions but rather as the basis for justifying Christian initiative.

Antithesis in the sciences

This trend has continued in Kuyper’s famous Stone *Lectures on Calvinism* given in 1898. In the chapter “Calvinism and Science” a few sentences are addressed admiringly to the “treasures of philosophical light” found in ancient Greece and Rome — based on common grace.⁵⁵ Yet immediately [56] following is a program of Christian scientific activity still more universal and radical than in *De Gemeene Gratie*. More universal, because Christian and non-christian activity “both cover here the complete field of human knowledge ... They dispute with each other the whole

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 508, 512.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 514, 521. That the born-again man also takes account of the Holy Scriptures is for Kuyper an indispensable and yet incidental difference. Indispensable, because it is just the Bible that sheds light on the great questions concerning the origin, government and purpose of things. And yet incidental, firstly, because man must be reborn in order to understand the Scriptures and secondly, because Scripture is properly concerned with particular grace and is directed to the salvation of the elect. And yet, if Scripture sheds its light also on creation, then this a welcome and indispensable reinforcement of the dim light of common grace, *ibid.*, p. 515.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Lectures on Calvinism*, pp. 121, 125.

terrain of life.”⁵⁶ More radical, because the starting-point is now *tout court*, that two mentalities are involved: the regenerate and the unregenerate. And these two are not the same!⁵⁷

It is a striking difference for Kuyper. The unregenerate mind believes the existing cosmos is normal. The regenerate knows that because of the intrusion of sin the world is abnormal and can only reach its goal through recreation. In this way the antithesis is marked out in science between “the normal” and “the abnormal”: “two absolute starting-Points which allow no comparison.” The normalists and the abnormalists cannot desist from a persistent attempt to completely break down each other’s systems and presuppositions.”⁵⁸ Even with all their spiritual affinity Kuyper is here far removed from Groen’s “eclecticism”!

The Van Peursen-Dooyeweerd discussion

In the light of our discussion of Calvin, Groen and Kuyper it is perhaps possible to make a few clarifying comments on the well-known discussion between Van Peursen and Dooyeweerd found in *Philosophia Reformata* (1959-1961).⁵⁹ One of the most important points of difference between them was their evaluation of non-christian philosophy. In the short remarks that I make here I am at the same time seeking for, an evaluation that concerns the other thinkers we have discussed.

Dooyeweerd and Van Peursen both want to give a positive evaluation of unbiblical thinking. However, the degree of appreciation apparently differs. But of more importance yet is the fact that the ground of their evaluation differs.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 133. Hence, a common ground for the “lower”, natural sciences is no longer acknowledged!

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 137. One will understand the intent of these words if one considers that for Kuyper regeneration, just as the incarnate Christ and the Holy Scriptures, are abnormal means (*ibid.*, p. 134) which really, as already noted, represent a supernatural order and anticipate the new creation.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 130 ff. It is remarkable that Kuyper again stresses common grace in his view of art which makes it possible to enjoy the art of unbelievers and then (appealing to Calvin!) rejects the tying together of art and regeneration. Why? Because, he says, art does not belong to believers alone and must not remain ecclesiastical. In short, art is not a product of particular grace, but belongs to the natural gifts, *ibid.*, p. 161. Kuyper tries to show with rather ambiguous arguments that Calvinism was not allowed to develop its own Christian art style, p. 139. It is, however, not clear why just here the aesthetic consciousness of the regenerated must follow other ways than scientific thinking. One cannot escape the impression that apologetic ad hoc arguments are introduced here, e.g., there was a Free Christian University, but no Christian art academy. In his *Gemeene Gratie*, however, Kuyper touches on the problem when he speaks about artistic expressions “inspired by the spirit of the abyss and those “inspired by the spirit of rebirth” and in connection with the latter speaks of a “gap in the life of Christianity”, *Gemeene Gratie*, Vol. III, p. 570 f.

⁵⁹ C. A. van Peursen, “Enkele critische vragen in margins bij ‘A New Critique of Theoretical Thought’,” *Philosophia Reformata* 24 (1959), 160-168; H. Dooyeweerd, “Van Peursen’s critische vragen bij ‘A New Critique of Theoretical Thought’,” *Philosophia Reformata* 25 (1960), 97-150; C. A. van Peursen, “Antwoord aan Dooyeweerd”, *Philosophia Reformata* 26 (1961), 189-200.

Dooyeweerd thinks that non-christian philosophy can [57] and ought to be appreciated inasmuch and insofar as it appears to be confronted with “states of affairs which conform to the law-structures of creation” which, as it were, force themselves upon every man. Van Peursen does not recognize such “states of affairs” because the “affairs” according to him are never static but always move within human-meaning-giving and inter-human patterns of interpretation.⁶⁰

Where then does Van Peursen find a ground for his evaluation of non-christian thinking? He speaks of *God’s presence* in all human thought-activity, meaning, apparently, God’s general revelation (his appeal) even among the heathen nations. However, it is here that Dooyeweerd disagrees because he is convinced that in all non-christian thought-systems not God, but only an apostate ground-motive is present, a motive which stands in “radical antithesis” to the biblical ground-motive.⁶¹

The overpowering truth

I would like to add my own comments to this controversy over “states of affairs” and “God’s presence”. Concerning the first point, it seems to me that Dooyeweerd deserves support when he speaks of incontrovertible states of affairs. Granted, man does on occasion have the faculty to give new meaning or significance to certain affairs. But the possibility to give such a meaning is always limited and never arbitrary. Human meaning-giving is always effected within the framework of divine meaning-stipulation. If God is creator, is he then not also the final law-giver and meaning-giver of creation?

Here lies, I believe, the great worth of Kuyper’s teaching on common grace. With this doctrine Kuyper wanted to give expression to the fact that God, in spite of sin, upholds the world by his “creation ordinances.”⁶² He is and remains the sovereign law- and meaning-giver. But Kuyper has not stressed nearly enough that all this is done for the sake of Christ. He has not made it clear enough that not only the earth bears the Cross but primarily the Cross bears the earth. His common grace doctrine is not Christocentric enough, that is, not sufficiently based on particular grace.

⁶⁰ Van Peursen, *Philosophia Reformata* 24 (1959), 162 f., 168; Dooyeweerd, *Philosophia Reformata* 25 (1960), 105 f., 150.

⁶¹ Van Peursen, *Philosophia Reformata* 24 (1959), 168. See also his *Filosofische Oriëntatie* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1964), p. 134 ff.; H. Dooyeweerd, *Philosophia Reformata* 25 (1960), 144 ff.

⁶² Cf. *Gemeene Gratie*, Vol. I, pp. 243, 259.

It is the great merit of Dooyeweerd that he has reformulated Kuyper’s view on a Christocentric basis.⁶³ The common grace doctrine, anchored Christocentrically, offers, according to me, the possibility of correctly evaluating non-christian thought. But this is true only provided something else is taken into consideration! With the “something else” I mean the point that Van Peursen has brought into the discussion.

The theme of “God’s presence” is, to my mind, closely related to the question of the structural nature of all religion. I believe that every religion has an “answer-structure”. Religion is religion inasmuch and insofar as it [58] responds to an appeal from God’s side, that is to say, to God’s revelation in his Word (special revelation) or in his works (general revelation). The answer that man gives in his religion is always one of surrender or rebellion. Whatever the answer, there always echoes in it something of the original call of God! “Adam, where art thou?”

I agree with Dooyeweerd that a radically apostate ground-motive functions in non-christian thinking. Yet this in no way contradicts God’s presence in this apostate thinking. On the contrary, the apostate motive is always religious, a self-willed cry to heaven, a holding down and twisting of the truth which nevertheless continually confronts the unregenerate.

Here lies, I believe, the merit of Groen. I do not share his view of general revelation as being mainly or merely a working out of original paradise revelation nor do I share his one-sided derivation of philosophy from religion. I support him, however, where he discerns, in line with Calvin, the ambiguity of all pagan religion, and from this the ambiguity of all pagan philosophy.

We must always bear in mind, in connection with the above, that although the human lie is mixed with divine Truth, this does not tend to weaken the satanic power of the lie. Rather it confirms the superior power of the Truth. “For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth” (II Cor. 13 : 8).

God’s voice and the voice of facts

I have argued in support of Dooyeweerd’s so-called “states of affairs”. I have also argued for Van Peursen’s view of God’s presence. Now, I fear that the impression may arise that, in this cardinal matter, I am halting between two opinions or striving for a bad

⁶³ Dooyeweerd solves Kuyper’s problem (how to arrive at a christocentric and yet non-ecclesiastical oriented view of culture) by making a sharp distinction between religion and faith. His view of culture and science while religiously rooted in Christ, would still not imply any direct tie with ecclesiastical articles of faith.

compromise.

Neither impression is correct. In my opinion we will only be able advance further in this matter if we realize that both emphases directly refer to each other and form an original unity. Stated in another way: I fear that an exclusive appeal to universal states of affairs or to an equally universal presence of God will still ensnare us in a spiritualizing dualism a la Kuyper, as long as the connection between both is not discerned. For this reason I drew attention to the teaching of Calvin in which general revelation and common grace are joined together, although, as far as I know, Calvin never developed this position.⁶⁴ God's action upon the heart of man and his upholding of creation structures cannot be separated from one another. God's voice and the voice of facts are indivisible. The Bible says that God reveals himself to us in the works of his hands. If the voice of God was no longer heard in all the world, the voice of facts would also be silenced."⁶⁵ [59]

Vollenhoven's opposition to synthesis

⁶⁴ The relation between general revelation and common grace has been continually under discussion in the history of reformed theology. However, its elaboration was often quite unsatisfactory, e.g., a falling back into the scholastic idea of a "lumen naturale", etc. *The Canons of Dordt III/IV* are curious in this connection with their rejection of the Remonstrant doctrine of "common grace" (through which they understand the light of nature) in article 5. This is the only place in the reformed confessions where the words "common grace" are mentioned *expressis verbis*.

⁶⁵ As a consequence of this, non-Christian thinking cannot simply be understood in terms of apostate religious ground-motives such as form/matter, nature/freedom, etc. Similarly, there ought not to be spoken without further qualification of a radical anti thesis between religious ground-motives, as if non-christian thinking flows from these motives in an analogous way as Christian thinking flows from the "biblical ground-motive". The biblical witness to the enmity between "the seed of the woman" and the "seed of the serpent", between Christ and Satan, must not be detracted from (Gen. 3 : 15). Yet the religious attitude of the non-christian can only be understood in terms of *both*. In other words, non-christian thinking is certainly ruled by an apostate ground-motive in whatever way this is expressed. This, however, does not alter the fact that non-christian thinking precisely in its apostate ground-motives ought to be examined in the light of the Christian ground-motive. Dooyeweerd has touched on this problem himself when he says: "the biblical ground-motive in the revelation of the Fall embraces and discloses them in their true nature", *Philosophia Reformata* 25 (1960), 146. I agree with this but think that the Christian ground-motive (I would rather say "the biblical Word-revelation") is still much more penetrating. The Word-revelation "discloses" not only through the revelation of sin but also through the revelation of creation and of grace: it makes clear that non-christian thinking is not only driven by the power of sin but also continually influenced by God's revelation in creation (so that even sayings of heathen sages and philosophers are present and sanctified in the Old and New Testaments) which in turn is an expression of God's grace in Christ. It also seems to me necessary to realize that common grace is not only revealed in the world of culture and science (e.g., in the moments of truth when apostate thought is able to give its interpretation of incontrovertible "states of affairs"), but also, even in the first place, in the religion and heart of man. Calvin has already said that everywhere in general revelation "scintillae" (sparks) of the Knowledge of God are kindled (*Institutes*, I, v, 14) and that a "census divinitatis" (awareness of divinity) has been implanted in all men and, "Ever renewing its memory, he repeatedly sheds fresh drops." And thus "... they are condemned by their own testimony because they have failed to honor him and to consecrate their lives to his will." (*Ibid.*, I, iii,1.) I ask: "Would the history of philosophy and religion only witness to human depravity and not at the same time to this unceasing activity of God? Kuyper has said that God has checked the corruption of sin also in the heart of man (*Gemeene Gratie*, Vol. I, p. 250). Elsewhere he remarks that the history of mankind proves, "that although on the one hand the terrible *law of sin* ruled, on the other hand a *law of grace* broke the power of sin (*ibid.*, pp. 250, 253). See also J. H. Bavinck, *Religieus besef en christelijk geloof* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1949).

Recent developments in Professor Vollenhoven’s thinking are extremely interesting for our discussion. From the outset he has taken a firm stand against the spirit of accommodation and compromise. According to him,

Christian thinkers, without regard for the totalitarian character of sin, have tried to unite human wisdom and divine truth either through a *Hineininterpretierung* of pagan philosophy in the Bible, or by a paradoxical acceptance of double truth”, or else by regarding profane philosophy as the vestibule of the temple of Christian theology. The choice for or against such a synthesis has been of such cardinal importance for Vollenhoven that already in the earliest editions of his history of philosophy syllabus⁶⁶ he divided the history of philosophy into a pre-synthetic, asynthetic and a post-synthetic (anti-synthetic) period. He regarded the latter period as taking either a reformational or a humanistic direction. [60]

This standpoint has had sweeping consequences. Historically, Vollenhoven made it his task to expose the continuity of pagan thought forms in every type of synthesis philosophy. Systematically, it brought him to a new formulation and an original solution for most of the basic philosophical problems, even when this approach led to a certain isolation.⁶⁷

Yet such an isolation is not the last word for Vollenhoven. This has become increasingly clear in the last few years. When asked in 1970 “what, according to him, the background reasons were for the present changes taking place in our solidarity with each other” he gave a remarkable but not easy to grasp answer in the *Mededelingen*. He explains the “divergences”, “tensions” and “oppositions” within the Association for Calvinistic Philosophy in terms of classical Greek thought-structures tenaciously dominating the reformed world. These thought-structures have

⁶⁶ In his *Conspectus Historiae Philosophiae* from 1931 (mimeographed) Vollenhoven already distinguishes these three periods: “I. History of the pre-Christian philosophy; II. The period in which the attempts dominate to synthesize (Dutch: ‘tot verbinding van’) philosophical moments in the Gospel with the ancient non-Christian philosophy; III. The period in which the impossibility of the former synthesis (‘verbinding’) is perceived.” This periodization in the syllabi from 1931, 1932, etc., is the more remarkable as it stands for a division in which even the Eastern philosophies (from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, India, etc.) are involved. See also D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, *Het Calvinisme en de Reformatie van de Wijsbegeerte* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1933), p. 111, 200 and “De waarheid in de godsdienst-wijsbegeerte”, *Vox Theologica* 13 (1942), 113-123.

⁶⁷ Cf. J. Klapwijk, “Over mogelijkheden van christelijk filosoferen”, *Meded. Ver. Calv. Wijsb.* (September, 1971), 7. Account must also be taken of the fact that Vollenhoven always expressed himself in an extremely cautious manner whenever he spoke of the idea of common grace. He was certainly influenced in this matter by the radically critical attitude of K. Schilder with whom he drew up a minority report in 1939 entitled *Van “Oorzaken en Redenen”* for the General Synod of the Gereformeerde Churches in the Netherlands, of which the first part treated “common grace”.

to be distinguished as partly dualistic, partly monistic.⁶⁸ According to Vollenhoven, Kuyper and his followers would side more with the dualistic type of thinking, while in contrast, J. Woltjer and his followers would seek more the side of monistic thinking, notably, of the so-called theory of interaction (among others, formulated by the Church (Father Gregory of Nazianus)).

Surprisingly, however, Vollenhoven gives a very different evaluation of Kuyper than he does of Woltjer, even though he considers both their views to have roots in pagan types of philosophy. Vollenhoven has serious objections to Kuyper's dualism which takes man to be a combination of something higher and something lower, something immortal and something temporal. He denounces this dualism as "speculative semi- mysticism".⁶⁹ His judgement of Woltjer, by contrast, seems quite mild. Although Vollenhoven also rejects monism as being incompatible with the biblical belief in creation, yet he thinks that Woltjer was never "speculative" and mentions (apparently with approval) that Woltjer's starting-point is "that man totally is and ought to be image of God".

Conformity and ambivalence

Now, in the last few years this view of Vollenhoven's seems to have become more defined. This can be gathered from the remarks he has made on more than one occasion that he sides with Gregory of Nazianus and Woltjer. And so we return again, as if by magic, to the problem of our [61] article. Vollenhoven interprets Gregory as a follower of an interaction theory that originates with the early Greek thought of Anaximenes! Is this not after all a Christian appreciation of non-christian thought?⁷⁰

⁶⁸ See also for the following D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, "Historische achtergrond en toekomst", *Meded. Ver. Calv. Wijsb.* (December, 1970), 2-3.

⁶⁹ Vollenhoven alludes here to what I have previously called Kuyper's "spiritualizing dualism". He fears that this dualism has more or less penetrated the Association for Calvinist Philosophy, namely, I take it, where the soul-body relationship is expressed in terms of "temporal" and "supratemporal", etc. According to Vollenhoven the soul (not to be confused with the heart or spirit, which refers to the inner man) is in biblical terminology "the whole man". It would be interesting to compare this with "The Whole Man", chap. 6 in G. C. Berkouwer, *Man, The Image of God* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1962).

⁷⁰ As long as Professor Vollenhoven has not expressed himself publicly and considering the limits of my article, it does not seem fitting to give an analysis and evaluation of his position, which for that matter would also have to include an evaluation of his "consequent probleem-historische methode" as such. For the sake of clarity I will mention that although Vollenhoven places himself in the tradition of Anaximenes, he does so with strict reservations. In any case, with respect to the various conceptions within this line of tradition, he wants to note separately where the

It seems fitting that I should conclude my outline of reformational thinking with Vollenhoven. Few have been so averse to all synthesis thinking as he. He has never attempted to salvage or vindicate pagan thought by adapting it to a Christian framework. And then he ends, as it were by surprise, by discovering in retrospect that some thinkers outside the pale of Judeo-Christian tradition produced results which agree with his! May his example be a warning to us not to evade the challenge of non-Christian thought by resorting to the facile "solutions" either of synthesis schemes or of antithesis formulas. May Professor Vollenhoven himself be given the opportunity to work out more fully his most recent insights.

The voice of truth has sounded again and again in the history of mankind. He who listens has cause for wonderment and bewilderment. Wonderment at the working of God's Spirit in a world of heathenism and secularism. Bewilderment that this working of God is continually warped through human arrogance and guilt. The ambiguity and ambivalence of non-Christian thinking always remains.⁷¹ It asks from us complete openness and total opposition. An opposition that casts down every high thing exalted against God. An openness to bring all human thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

biblical belief in creation has replaced the monistic view of origin. But, notwithstanding, there still remain, according to him, certain agreements with reference to the structure of man and cosmos.

⁷¹ Berkouwer states regarding the problem of "theologia naturalis" and Calvin: "I thought that Calvin preferably would have used the word 'ambivalent'." G. C. Berkouwer *et al.*, *Letters of Voortrekkers* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1970), p. 43.