

From the Library of  
Morton H. Smith

*A Letter on*  
**COMMON GRACE**

CORNELIUS VAN TIL

A LETTER ON COMMON GRACE

Cornelius VanTil

#### NOTE

The discussion of this pamphlet deals with the work of Dr. William Masselink, Th. D., Ph. D., entitled Common Grace and Christian Education. Because this was prepared before the publication of Dr. Masselink's more recent book, General Revelation and Common Grace, it has been impossible to take note of this later work.

Copies of this pamphlet may be obtained  
from  
Lewis J. Grotenhuis  
Belvidere Road, Phillipsburg, N. J.

Price, 50¢

Dear Friend:

Recently you wrote me asking about my views on common grace. You remarked that somebody had made a statement in your hearing to the effect that if he were to take my position on common grace he did not see how he could make any use of the results of the scientific work of those who are not Christians. This gentleman apparently got the impression that on my view the non-believer must be thought of as being unable to discover any truth at all of any sort in any field.

A criticism of a similar nature is to the effect that I do not think that unbelievers can do anything that is good in any sense.

It is said, in short, that I have too negative a view of the "natural man." I am said to teach absolute instead of total depravity. That is to say, I am said to teach that man is as bad as he can be, thus not allowing for the fact that he can, because of the operation of God's common grace upon him, do much that is morally though not spiritually good.

In all this I am said to draw "too near to Herman Hoeksema." Have not I criticized Abraham Kuyper, and that not on a point of detail but on his very epistemology? In short I am said to hold to an "absolutist position," a position that involves "intellectual Anabaptism," a position that is out of accord with the Reformed Confessions which speak of the "natural light" that remains in men after the Fall and of the "remnants" of the knowledge of God and of morality that they still possess.

My position is reported to be part of a reconstruction theology, a theology of rebellion against the views of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck of Holland, and of the view of the "old Princeton theology" of such men as B. B. Warfield and J. Gresham Machen. To be sure, I am said not to belong to

the drastic reconstructionists, like Klaas Schilder and Herman Hoeksema, but to the more moderate ones like Professors D.H.Th. Vollenhoven and H. Dooyeweerd.

Much of this sort of criticism of my position has found expression in the book Common Grace and Christian Education, published in 1952 by Dr. William Masselink, now a professor of the Reformed Bible Institute in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Dr. Masselink seeks to show that "the old traditional view of Common Grace is the only tenable position" (p. 3). And since I am, in his eyes, undermining this traditional view, he seeks to prove that my views are untenable.

Dr. Masselink is very frank in his admiration of the theology of his teacher at the Free University of Amsterdam, the late Dr. Valentine Hepp. His assumption is that Hepp's views are identical with the traditional position and are, to all intents and purposes identical with those of Kuyper and Bavinck. He therefore adheres strictly to the criticisms that Hepp has made of Schilder, of Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd and others. And he agrees in the main with the criticism made of my position by Dr. S.J. Ridderbos in his booklet Rondom het Gemene Gratie Probleem (1949). He quotes Ridderbos with approval to this effect. "If one continues to reason in this line the possibility is cut off to acknowledge the 'glimmerings' of the 'natural knowledge of God'" (p. 98).

It is not my intention in this letter to deal with the general criticism of my position outlined above in full. My main purpose is to seek to remove some misunderstandings that have developed with respect to my views. These misunderstandings may no doubt in considerable measure be due to myself. My terminology may sometimes be am-

biguous. But I cannot believe that such misconstruction of my view as is now being advertised is fairly found in anything that I have written or said.

I shall deal first with Dr. Masselink's analysis of my view of facts, the objects of human knowledge. Then I shall deal with the human mind, with the subject of human knowledge, in particular with the "natural man."

### I. Facts or the Object of Knowledge

In describing my view of fact, Dr. Masselink says: "To the question 'What is a fact?' the non-Christian answers, 'Only that which has been defined, interpreted and patterned by man.' Therefore all 'facts' are anti-metaphysical. Anything which man cannot define is not a 'fact.' There may be 'brute facts,' that is, not real 'fact,' but an interpreted 'fact.' This, according to the non-Christian, is the presupposition to the finding of any 'fact.' Therefore the non-Christian himself determines what is a 'fact.' He makes a 'fact' by his interpretation of it."

"According to the Christian, on the one hand, God only can define a 'fact.' God's description or His plan of the 'fact' makes a 'fact' a 'fact.' What modern science ascribes to man, namely, power to make facts, the Christian ascribes to God. Therefore, as far as the epistemology is concerned, Christians and non-Christians have no 'facts' in common" (Common Grace and Christian Education p. 66). Then, after two paragraphs on what I have said on the place of law and of man, Dr. Masselink adds:

"Now you ask, What is the view of VanTil? I think we find the answer on page 70 of 'Common Grace,' where he expresses his agreement with

Schilder'' (Ibid).

And on what am I said to agree with Schilder? It is on the point that from 'facts as such' we are not to conclude to any such thing as an attitude of God toward the reprobate.

"Therefore, according to Schilder and VanTil, facts cannot be separated from faith. In other words, a 'fact' is impossible with a non-Christian'' (Ibid).

On this description of my position I may remark as follows: (1) It leaves out two qualifications that are essential for a fair statement of my view. First I said that the non-Christian virtually ascribes to man what the Christian ascribes to God on the matter of "making facts." Man needs material; he does not pretend to produce material. The exact point in comparison is that of definitory power. On this point, I argued, the non-Christian ascribes to man what the Christian ascribes to God. Dr. Masselink's presentation is calculated to leave the impression that, according to my view, the natural man claims to create out of nothing as God is said to do in the Genesis narrative. This is not at all what I said.

In the second place I said that,

"When both parties, the believer and the non-believer, are epistemologically self-conscious and as such engaged in the interpretative enterprise, they cannot be said to have any fact in common. On the other hand, it must be asserted that they have every fact in common. Both deal with the same God and with the same universe created by God. Both are made in the image of

God. In short, they have the metaphysical situation in common. Metaphysically, both parties have all things in common, while epistemologically they have nothing in common'' (Common Grace, p. 5).

My statement that epistemologically Christians and non-Christians "have nothing in common" is meant to hold only to the extent that men are self-consciously engaged in the interpretative enterprise. Why did Dr. Masselink, in presenting my views, omit this obviously all-important qualification? It is this qualification which, later in my argument, allows for commonness "up to a point" between believer and non-believer.

It is equally evident that my statement just referred to has for its correlative the other statement to the effect that "metaphysically speaking, both parties have all things in common." This point too is of basic importance. Suppose someone had seen fit to make me out to be a "relativist." He would then have said: "According to VanTil, believers 'have every fact in common. Both deal with the same God and with the same universe created by God. Both are made in the image of God. In short, they have the metaphysical situation in common.'" (Common Grace, p. 5). He would merely have omitted such words as "epistemologically they have nothing in common." Yet his description of my full position would not, in point of adequacy, be far behind that of Dr. Masselink.

(2) Dr. Masselink asserts that I agree with Dr. Schilder in saying that we must not conclude from "facts as such" to any such thing as an attitude of God toward unbelievers. The exact reverse is actually the case. The whole thrust of the section from

which the quotation is taken is to the effect that I disagree with Schilder on this point. I make one minor concession to him. It is to the effect that over against a Romanising type of natural theology such a warning is in order. Dr. Masselink presents this minor concession as being identical with agreement on the main issue. But the following words indicate something quite the opposite; immediately after making this concession the following paragraph appears:

“If there are no brute facts, it must be maintained that all facts are revelational of the true God. If facts may not be separated from faith, neither may faith be separated from facts. Every created fact must therefore be held to express, to some degree, the attitude of God to man. Not to maintain this is to fall back once again into a natural theology of a Roman Catholic sort. For it is to hold to the idea of brute fact after all. And with the idea of brute fact goes that of neutral reason. A fact not revelational of God is revelational only of itself” (Idem p. 70).

It is precisely because I believe that such facts as “rain and sunshine” do manifest an attitude of God, and that a favorable attitude to men as his own creatures, that I have defended the first of the “three points” formulated by the Synod of the Christian Reformed church in 1924 against Schilder’s criticism of it.

Dr. Masselink asserts that according to my view a ‘fact’... ‘is impossible with a non-Christian’ (Idem p. 66). This sentence is the conclusion of the quotation given above. He finds corroboration for this assertion in another agreement of mine

with Schilder. And this time it is a real agreement. Schilder rejects the idea that there is a neutral territory of interpretation between believers and unbelievers. So I agreed by saying: “Schilder quite rightly attacks the idea of a territory that is common to believer and non-believer without qualification” (Common Grace, p. 25). It is commonness “without qualification,” that is, the idea of neutral territory of interpretation between believers and non-believers that I reject. Is it this idea of neutral territory that Dr. Masselink would defend? Is it his understanding that that is the traditional and only defensible view? And must one who believes in commonness but in commonness with qualification be spoken of as one who has made the break between God and man complete? Such seems to be the view of Dr. Masselink as the following quotation, in addition to the others already given, seems to indicate:

“It is therefore clear that both VanTil and Schilder reject ‘with vigor’ every idea of ‘common territory’ or, ‘common ground’ between the believer and the non-believer. This, we believe, means that both Schilder and VanTil accept not only an absolute ethical antithesis between God and ‘natural man,’ but an absolute logical and absolute aesthetic antithesis as well. The break between God and ‘natural man’ is then complete” (Op. Cit. p. 67).

Our discussion so far has been on the basis of the first part of the seventh chapter of Dr. Masselink’s book. The second part of his chapter deals with my “disagreement with the Old Reformed Theologians in their epistemology” (Op. Cit. p. 68). The list of headings and descriptions under this general

topic is as follows:

“I. VanTil’s Criticism of Kuyper

1. VanTil states that Kuyper is not Calvinistic but Platonic and Kantian in his conception of the universals.
2. VanTil accuses Kuyper of being like Plato and Kant in his conceptions of facts.
3. VanTil says that Kuyper is like Catholics, Aristotle and Scholastics in his views as to what believers and non-believers have in common.

“II. VanTil’s disagreement with Bavinck and the ‘Old Princeton Theology.’

1. He says Bavinck must be charged with ‘Moderate Realism and Scholasticism.’
2. VanTil says that Bavinck identifies the Christian and the pagan conception of the unknowability of God.
3. VanTil says that Bavinck uses ‘non-Christian form of reasoning’ in his theistic arguments.
4. VanTil accuses Bavinck of wavering between a Christian and non-Christian concept of natural theology.
5. VanTil summarizes his disagreement with Kuyper, Bavinck and the ‘Old Princeton Theology’ as follows. [Here follows a long quotation from pages 50 and 52 of Common Grace].

“III. VanTil’s disagreement with Hepp follows the same line of thought.”

(pp. 67-62, Common Grace and Christian Education).

Under each heading there is a quotation of material

taken from Common Grace. These can easily be checked by any interested reader. The section ends as follows:

“From all this we come to the conclusion that there is a basic disagreement between VanTil on the one side, and Kuyper, Bavinck, Hepp and the ‘Old Princeton Theology’ on the other side, in regard to their views on Common Grace, -- especially concerning that which VanTil correctly considers to be fundamental to our whole conception of Common Grace, namely, Epistemology” (Op. Cit., p. 72).

At various points in his work Dr. Masselink comes back to this matter of my disagreement with the great Reformed theologians of the recent past. He sums it all up as follows:

“When VanTil characterizes the views of the Old Reformed Theologians on epistemology as being ‘Kantian,’ ‘Platonic,’ ‘Non-Christian’ etc. we maintain that the difference between the views of these Theologians and the heathen philosophers, to amplify beyond Romanism, is so drastic that it does not admit of a comparison. We will only mention a few self-evident facts:

1. The worldly heathen philosophers do not admit of Christ. Theirs is a Christless philosophy, even though there may be remnants of truth in what they have to say. The Reformed Theologians, of course, base all their views of epistemology on the Covenant of Common Grace, which is based upon Christ’s atonement.

2. The heathen philosophers admit of no Ontological Trinity. The Reformed theologians take this as their starting point.

3. The heathen philosophers have no Bible as

basis for their thinking. The Reformed Theologians proceed from the Scripture.

"To say, as VanTil does, that the views of these Reformed Theologians relative to epistemology are 'Kantian,' 'Platonic,' 'Non-Christian,' etc. because they acknowledge some elements of truth in the philosophies of the world, and say that some of these truths because of God's Common Grace may even be traced to them, is, to say the least, surprising to us" (Op. Cit. p. 81).

Dr. Masselink has thus far tried to prove that my basic alignment of the matter of what unbelievers may know about "facts," and even on epistemology in general, is with the "drastic reconstructionist," Schilder, and away from the great Reformed theologians, such as Kuyper, Bavinck, Hepp, Warfield and Machen. The evidence for the first part of this claim is the one point that with Schilder I do not hold to the idea of a neutral territory of knowledge between believer and unbeliever. On this point I may say that if the idea of a neutral territory does fairly represent the "traditional view," then I can only disagree with it.

The second point is calculated to make the reader think that my disagreement with these great theologians goes to the root of their theology. Dr. Masselink finds it necessary to point out as against me that these theologians, in distinction from such men as Plato, Aristotle and Kant, were Christians and that they believed the Bible.

Well, has there been in anything I have ever said or written as much as an insinuation that the root of their thinking was not from the Bible?

"It is well to emphasize again that it is from Kuyper, more than from anyone else in modern

times, that we have learned to think concretely. Both on the question of the universal and on that of the particular, Kuyper has taught us that we must build on our own presuppositions. Yet it must be said that Kuyper has not always been able to live up to this high ideal" (Common Grace, p. 35).

In similar words I began my section on Bavinck by praising him for having shown, better than any one before him, the necessity of building up one's theology from one basic principle, namely, Scripture; adding that "Bavinck has not always lived up to this conception" (p. 45). As for "Old Princeton Theology" in the booklet on Common Grace, I have scarcely referred to it. Elsewhere I have expressed disagreement with its apologetics. In this I was following Kuyper. But never have I expressed a basic difference with its theology or its basic epistemology. Dr. Masselink might better have followed Dr. S. J. Ridderbos on this point as he has done on others. Dealing with the same point with which Dr. Masselink deals, Ridderbos says that I have criticized "subdivisions" of the theology of Kuyper and Bavinck (Rondom het Gemene Gratie Probleem, Kampen 1949). This is in accord with the facts.

The impression is given that there is full agreement between the "Old Princeton Theology" on the one hand and the Amsterdam theologians on the other hand, on the question of common grace and of general epistemology. But in a former publication Dr. Masselink himself has made a good deal of the differences between the views of Warfield and those of Kuyper. In particular does he point up the departures of Machen from what he considers the full Reformed position as maintained by Hepp. Some of the criticisms he makes of Machen's views have a bearing on the



problem now under discussion. Some of them do not. We shall give some indication as to the general nature of the criticism made by Dr. Masselink.

1. He says that Machen agrees with Warfield, A. A. Hodge, and Patton as against Kuyper and Hepp on the place to be assigned to apologetics. And in assigning "to apologetics the introductory place to all the theological sciences," and in this Warfield "was a follower of Schleiermacher" (J. Gresham Machen by W. Masselink, p. 140).

Kuyper assigned to apologetics the subordinate task of defending dogma. According to Warfield Kuyper did this because he makes "too absolute the contrast between the 'two kinds of science'-- that which is the product of the thought of sinful man in his state of nature, and that which is the product of man under the influence of the regenerating grace of God" (quoted by Dr. Masselink, Op. Cit. p. 140, 141, from Warfield's Introduction to F. R. Beattie's Apologetics or the Rational Vindication of Christianity, Richmond 1903).

2. Machen follows Warfield as against Hepp on the question of method in apologetics. "Our criticism against Prof. Machen's apologetics becomes more pronounced when the question is raised about The Method of Apologetics According to his Conception" (Op. Cit. p. 145).

"The question arises, does Machen make sufficient allowance for the 'super-rational' element in his Apologetics. We believe not. . . . . The apologetics of the past, as well as the Roman Apologetics of today, make the mistake of trying to justify the religion before the bar of natural intellect. Such attempts are vain. How can there be any affinity between the unregenerate reason and the depths of the Christian religion which

makes the understanding possible. The Apologetics which is based upon rational proofs, has always ignored the word of Paul that the psychic, the unspiritual man, does not understand the things of God. We believe that these conclusions to which Prof. Hepp has come, are sound and cannot be refuted" (Op. Cit., p. 147).

Here then Dr. Masselink signalizes a deep difference between the Old Princeton Theology which, he says, Machen closely follows, and the Amsterdam theology. Princeton charges Amsterdam with stressing too much the difference between unregenerate and the regenerate men with respect to their ability to know the truth about the facts that surround them. If the unity of science is to be maintained there must be no such sharp distinction between the knowledge of the unregenerate and the knowledge of the regenerate man. On the other hand Amsterdam charges Princeton with failing to do justice to the fact that there is not any affinity between the unregenerate reason and the depths of Christianity which makes understanding possible. And Dr. Masselink agrees with Amsterdam as against Princeton in saying that there is not any affinity for the truth of Christianity in the unbeliever. Just how does this position differ from what I said on the "absolute ethical antithesis"?

3. Machen had too high an estimate of the "Theistic proofs." "We do not share Prof. Machen's views regarding The Relationship Between Natural Theology and Faith" (Op. Cit., p. 147). Machen would establish faith in God by these proofs. After some quotations from Machen, Dr. Masselink concludes, "From these and many other similar quotations from Machen we conclude that Machen bases the Christian Faith upon Theistic proofs of God which can be derived from Natural Theology" (Ibid).

But in his doctoral dissertation on the Testimony of the Holy Spirit Hepp has taught us that general revelation cannot give us certainty of knowledge. "This is because all revelation takes place through means. We cannot know the essence of things except through things themselves. If this revelation, therefore, would have to give us certainty in regard to these matters. it would have to do it through the things themselves. These would then in turn become the basis of our certainty. This we have already observed cannot be, as then the certainty is in the creation itself and not in the Creator. The absolute certainty I receive only then, when the Holy Spirit gives me assurance that these things are so apart from the external revelation" (Op. Cit. p. 150). "The 'theistic proofs,' therefore, cannot be the basis of Faith, as Machen says" (Op. Cit. p. 153).

From what has been said so far it appears that there was, according to Dr. Masselink himself, a considerable difference between the position of Kuyper and that of Warfield on the question of facts and their knowledge by unbelievers. In his dissertation Dr. Masselink contends that Amsterdam and Old Princeton stand over against one another on the question how the unity of science may be preserved. Kuyper wants to maintain the unity of science by basing it upon frankly Christian foundations; the non-Christian, having not any affinity for Christianity cannot then maintain the unity of science. Warfield wants to maintain the unity of science on the basis of a rationality which all men, non-believers as well as believers, have in common. All men can interpret the facts of their environment correctly up to a point. The theistic proofs, as historically formulated, are for Warfield and for Machen sound as a foundation for belief in Christianity. Dr. Masselink

chooses against the Warfield-Machen position and for the Kuyper-Bavinck position.

In the later work Dr. Masselink speaks as though the Kuyper and Warfield points of view were in agreement with one another on the question of science and as though I have departed from a position that old Princeton and Amsterdam had in common. He criticizes me for not following both Kuyper and Warfield at the same time. A few years ago he did essentially the same thing for which he now charges me with being a reconstructionist.

I may now add a few words about my view of the nature of facts and of the unbeliever's knowledge of them.

1. I hold that all the facts of the universe are exhaustively revelational of God.
  - a. This is true of the facts of man's environment in nature and history.
  - b. This is also true of man's own constitution as a rational and moral being.
2. In consequence of these two points I hold that all men unavoidably know God and themselves as creatures of God.

A brief explication of each point may be in order. For Dr. Masselink contends that according to my view the natural man has no knowledge of either God or morality. The reverse is true. I have greatly stressed the fact that all men know God. Following Dr. Machen I hold that Christianity is capable of scholarly defense. And this is so, I believe, because the facts of the universe clearly and unmistakably show forth the existence of God and of his truth.

Speaking of my view of man's natural knowledge of God, Dr. Masselink says:

"The denial of 'natural knowledge of God' and sense of morality is, to our mind, in conflict with Synod's declaration" (Common Grace and Christian Education, p. 96).

The reference is to the declarations of the Synod of the Christian Reformed church relative to the matter of Common grace (1924). But I do not deny the "natural knowledge of God" or the "sense of morality." To be sure I do deny that this natural knowledge of God and of morality is the result of common grace. I think it is the presupposition of common grace. It is the presupposition also of saving grace.

First then, if there is to be a natural knowledge of God all the facts must clearly speak of God. Calvin maintains that they do and I have closely followed him. The following quotations and references are from the syllabus to which Dr. Masselink makes reference: An Introduction to Systematic Theology.

After quoting from Calvin's exposition on Romans chapter 1:20 these words appear:

"What Scripture therefore emphasizes is that even apart from special revelation, men ought to see that God is the Creator of the world" (1952, p. 78).

"Again, men ought to see the munificence of God (Idem p. 79). "Even the result of sin in no wise reduces the perspicuity of God's revelation. "We would think of a man in the midst of heathendom and remember the elements in the revelation at his disposal in order to see then what logical

conclusions he ought to draw if he reasoned correctly. In the first place, he ought to think of God as the creator of this world. In the second place, he ought to believe in the providence of God. In the third place, he ought to think of the presence of a certain non-saving grace of God." (Idem, p. 82). Then the revelation through the facts of nature is brought into close relation with the original supernatural revelation that God gave to the human race through Adam (p. 83). Mankind has once been in direct contact with the living God through supernatural revelation and "man remains responsible for these facts" (Idem, p. 84).

The facts of man's constitution no less than the facts of his environment reveal God to man. Calvin says:

"For, in the first place, no man can survey himself without forthwith turning his thoughts toward God in whom he lives and moves because it is perfectly obvious, that the endowments which we possess cannot possibly be from ourselves, nay, that our very being is nothing else than subsistence in God alone" (Idem, p. 90).

Sin has not effaced this natural knowledge of God. A sense of Deity is "indelibly engraven on the human heart." Try as men will they cannot suppress this knowledge of God; "for the worm of conscience, keener than burning steel, is gnawing within them" (Idem, p. 91). So also the seed of religion is divinely sown in all. Men should have recognized God; the revelation from without and from within is a daily challenge to them to turn to God (Idem, p. 93). God's power and divinity "are still displayed in man as well

as about him, in the fact of the self-conscious activity of his person, in his own negative moral reaction to the revelation about and within him, in his sense of dissatisfaction with all non-theistic interpretations, and in a measure of involuntary recognition of the truth of the theistic interpretation as the true interpretation of the origin of the world" (Idem, p. 97).

It is therefore utterly impossible for any man not to know God and morality.

"The natural man has knowledge, true knowledge of God, in the sense that God through nature and man's own consciousness impresses his presence on man's attention. So definitely and inescapably has he done this, that try as he may, man cannot escape knowing God. It is this point that Paul stresses in the first two chapters of Romans. Man has the sense of deity indelibly engraven upon him. He knows God and he knows himself and the world as God's creation. This is objective revelation to him. Even to the extent that this revelation is in man, in his own constitution, and as such may be called 'subjective' it is none the less objective to him as an ethically responsible creature, and he is bound to react as an ethical person to this objective revelation" (Idem, p. 27).

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

God, yet in a restricted sense know God, and do good" (Idem, p. 28).

"If this be kept in mind, it will be seen that if, as Reformed theology has contended, both the doctrines of the absolute ethical antithesis of the natural man to God and of his relatively true knowledge and relatively good deeds must be maintained, we are not led into any inconsistency or self-contradiction" (Ibid.).

In an essay on Nature and Scripture published in The Infallible Word (Philadelphia, 1946) the same sort of stress is found on the clarity of God's revelation to man in his environment and within himself. This is done over against the Roman Catholic concept of analogia entis. "God is light and in him is no darkness at all. As such he cannot deny himself. This God naturally has an all-inclusive plan for the created universe. He has planned all the relationships between all the aspects of created being. All created reality therefore displays this plan. It is, in consequence, inherently rational" (p. 269).

Or again, "By the idea of revelation, then, we are to mean not merely what comes to man through the facts surrounding him in his environment, but also that which comes to him by means of his own constitution as a covenant personality. The revelation that comes to man by way of his own rational and moral nature is no less objective to him than that which comes to him through the voice of trees and animals. Man's own psychological activity is no less revelational than the laws of physics about him. All created reality is inherently revelational of the nature and will of God. Even man's ethical reaction to God's

revelation is still revelational. And as revelational of God, it is authoritative. The meaning of the Confessions' doctrine of the authority of Scripture does not become clear to us till we see it against the background of the original and basically authoritative character of God's revelation in nature. Scripture speaks authoritatively to such as must naturally live by authority. God speaks with authority wherever and whenever he speaks.

"At this point a word may be said about the revelation of God through conscience and its relation to Scripture. Conscience is man's consciousness speaking on matters of directly moral import. Every act of man's consciousness is moral in the most comprehensive sense of that term. Yet there is a difference between questions of right and wrong in a restricted sense and general questions of interpretation. Now if man's whole consciousness was originally created perfect, and as such authoritatively expressive of the will of God, that same consciousness is still revelational and authoritative after the entrance of sin to the extent that its voice is still the voice of God. The sinner's efforts, so far as they are done self-consciously from his point of view, seek to destroy or bury the voice of God that comes to him through nature, which includes his own consciousness. But this effort cannot be wholly successful at any point in history. The most depraved of men cannot wholly escape the voice of God. Their greatest wickedness is meaningless except upon the assumption that they have sinned against the authority of God. Thoughts and deeds of utmost perversity are themselves revelational, revelational, that is, in their very abnormality. The

natural man accuses or else excuses himself only because his own utterly depraved consciousness continues to point back to the original natural state of affairs. The prodigal son can never forget the father's voice. It is the albatross forever about his neck" (Infallible Word, p. 265-267.).

In the pamphlet The Intellectual Challenge of the Gospel the same procedure is followed as in the foregoing. The revelation of God to man in the created universe is said to be clear. Men therefore cannot help but know God. Man's own consciousness is part of the revelation of God to himself as an ethical reactor.

"Paul makes bold to claim that all men know deep down in their hearts that they are creatures of God and have sinned against God their Creator and their judge" (p. 5).

"Paul knows that those who cling to the 'wisdom' of the world do so against their better judgment and with an evil conscience. Every fact of 'theism' and every fact of 'Christianity' points with an accusing finger at the sinner, saying: 'You are a covenant-breaker; repent and be saved!'" (Ibid).

It is only against the background of this stress on the perspicuity of the natural revelation of God about and within man, and these as related to the original supernatural revelation vouchsafed to Adam in paradise, that the meaning of the statement that the natural man and the regenerated man have nothing in common epistemologically must be taken. And it is constantly put in that context. The point is that when and to the extent that the natural man

is engaged in interpreting life in terms of his adopted principles then, and only then, he has nothing in common with the believer. But man can never completely suppress the truth. On necessity he therefore knows that it is wrong to break the law of God. This point will receive further discussion under our second head dealing with,

## II. Man as the Subject of Knowledge

It is well to hear what Dr. Masselink has to say on my view of the natural man as the subject of knowledge. Something of this has already appeared in the preceding section; we now turn to the matter explicitly.

"Our great difficulty with VanTil's philosophy of Common Grace," says Dr. Masselink, "is his premise or starting point, namely, the absolute ethical antithesis between God and man. This premise controls his whole system of thinking. All of the objections which follow are immediately related to this primary premise, which VanTil himself declares is his starting point."

"VanTil says: 'We must begin by emphasizing the absolute ethical antithesis in which the 'natural' man stands to God,' (Introduction to Systematic Theology, p. 25). All Reformed Theology, of course, asserts that there is an ethical antithesis between God and fallen man. The question is whether it is absolute. According to Webster's dictionary the term absolute means without qualification, limitation or restriction. The question is whether the term absolute is not too sweeping and far-reaching here" (Common Grace and Christian Educa-

tion, p. 73).

Dr. Masselink assumes that by the idea of the "absolute ethical antithesis" I must mean that man is as bad as he can be. "The absolute ethical antithesis of God is the devil. If we place man ethically, in the same category with the devil, then what becomes of the image of God in man?" (Idem, p. 74). "Reformed theology distinguishes between total and absolute depravity. By total depravity we mean that human depravity extends to every function of the soul, intellect, will and emotions. . . . By absolute depravity we mean that man is as bad as he can be. With absolute depravity there can no longer be any curbing of sin through Common Grace. . . . The Devil and the Lost in Hell are absolutely depraved, because there is no Common Grace in Hell. The absolute ethical antithesis between God and 'natural man,' as VanTil says, must imply absolute depravity. By affirming the absolute ethical antithesis we fail to see how there can be any room left for Common Grace" (Idem p. 75).

On this analysis of my view the following remarks are in order:

1. If Dr. Masselink had consulted my usage of the expression "absolute ethical antithesis" instead of going to the dictionary he would have found: (a) that I usually imply the expression total depravity. Apparently Dr. Masselink has been unable to find the expression absolute depravity in my booklet on Common Grace. The expression total depravity is there constantly used. (b) For me the idea of total or absolute depravity means that the sinner is dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). In principle man is therefore blind. If he is to see the truth about God and himself he must be born again. He must be born again unto knowledge. (Cf. the dis-

cussion of Charles Hodge on this point in his Systematic Theology). But in spite of the fact that man is spiritually dead, dead in principle, absolutely dead, not half or partly dead in principle, he may know and do much that is relatively good.

“Here we should again bring in the fact of the non-saving grace of God. In the case of Satan, the folly of his interpretation appears very clear. In the case of the sinner, however, we have a mixed situation. Through God’s non-saving grace, the wrath of God on the sinner has been mitigated in this life. This appears along the whole line of man’s interests. It appears along the line of man’s physical life. Man is given an abundance of food and drink. It is shown in the fact that man’s body, though weakened, is even so, particularly in some instances, a usable tool for the soul of man. It is shown in the fact that man’s mind is not fully and exclusively bent upon evil. Though basically man is at enmity against God so that he is prone to hate God and his neighbor, this enmity against God does not come to full expression in this life. He is not a finished product” (Introduction to Systematic Theology, p. 98).

(c) The burden of the entire discussion in Common Grace is to the effect that it is fully consistent with the fact of total depravity to maintain that there is a genuine commonness between believer and unbeliever. There are those who have denied common grace. They have argued, that God cannot have any attitude of favor at any stage in history to such as are the “vessels of wrath.” But to reason thus is to make logic rule over Scripture. Against both Hoeksema and Schilder I have

therefore contended that we must think more concretely and analogically than they did, allowing ourselves to be led only by Scriptural exegesis. All the truths of the Christian religion have of necessity the appearance of being contradictory. But since we build our thinking on the ontological trinity and therefore on the revelation of this triune God as given us in Scripture, we think analogically. We do not fear to accept that which has the appearance of being contradictory. We know that what appears to be so to us is not really so. So also in the case of the question of common grace. We are not to say that God cannot have any attitude of favor to a generality of mankind, including both reprobate and elect because our logic seems to require us to do so. In the case of common grace, as in the case of every other Biblical doctrine, we should seek to take all the factors of Scripture teaching and bind them together into systematic relations with one another as far as we can. But we do not expect to have a logically deducible relationship between one doctrine and another. We expect to have only an analogical system.

For this reason then we must not hesitate to say that God has a common attitude of favor to all mankind as a generality. We must not fear to assert that though the ultimate end of God for the elect is their salvation they yet are under God’s displeasure when they do not fully live up to his requirement for men. Similarly we must not fear to assert in the case of the reprobate that though they are ultimately vessels of wrath they yet can be in history, in a sense, the objects of the favor of God.

The case is similar with respect to the knowledge of unbelievers and their ability to do that which is relatively good. The fact that they are in principle opposed to God and would destroy the very

foundation of knowledge and ethics, yet, in spite of this, because of God's common grace they can discover much truth and do much good.

"We say that this is one factor of the whole situation. We do not say that it is the only factor. God loves the works of his hands, and the progress that they make to their final fulfillment. So we may and should rejoice with God in the unfolding of the history of the race, even in the unfolding of the wickedness of man in order that the righteousness of God may be most fully displayed. But if God tells us that, in spite of the wickedness of men, and in spite of the fact that they misuse his gifts for their own greater condemnation, he is long suffering with them, we need not conclude that there is no sense in which God has a favor to the unbeliever. There is a sense in which God has a disfavor to the believer because, in spite of the new life within him, he sins in the sight of God. So God may have favor to the unbeliever because of the "relative good" that God himself gives him in spite of the principle of sin within him. If we were to think of God and of his relation to the world in a univocal or abstract fashion, we might agree with those who maintain that there is no qualitative difference between the favor of God toward the saved and toward the unsaved. Arminians and Barthians virtually do this. Or, we might agree with those who maintain that there is no sense in which God can show favor to the reprobate. On the other hand, if we reason concretely about God and his relation to the world, we simply listen to what God has told us in his Word on the matter. It may even then be exceedingly difficult to construct a theory of

"common grace" which will do justice to what Scripture says. We make Scripture the standard of our thinking, and not our thinking the standard of Scripture. All of man's activity, whether intellectual or moral, is analogical; and for this reason it is quite possible for the unsaved sinner to do what is "good" in a sense, and for the believer to do what is "evil" in a sense.

"With respect to the question, then, as to whether Scripture actually teaches an attitude of favor, up to a point, on the part of God toward the non-believer, we can only intimate that we believe it does. Even when we take full cognizance of the fact that the unbeliever abuses every gift of God and uses it for the greater manifestation of his wickedness, there seems to be evidence in Scripture that God, for this life, has a certain attitude of favor to unbelievers. We may point to such passages as the following: In Psalm 145:9, we are told, 'The Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works.' In seeking the meaning of such a passage, we must be careful. In the first place, it is to be remembered that God is constantly setting his own people in the center of the outflow of his goodness to the children of men. So, in Exodus 34:6, 7, we read: 'And the Lord God passed before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation.' In this passage we are, as it were, warned to



think concretely on the question before us. God's mercy and grace is primarily extended to those whose sins are forgiven. If in any sense it is given to those whose sins are not forgiven, it must always be remembered that God does not overlook iniquity. We may therefore expect that in Psalm 145 the Psalmist teaches nothing that is out of accord with what has been taught in Exodus 34. Thus, the primary meaning of Psalm 145 is again that God's great favor is toward his people: Even when God gives great gifts to non-believers, they are, in a more basic sense, gifts to believers. Gifts of God to unbelievers help to make the life of believers possible, and in a measure, pleasant. But this does not detract from the fact that the unbeliever himself is, in a measure, the recipient of God's favor. There is a certain joy in the gift of life and its natural blessings for the unbeliever. And we may well think that Psalm 145 has this in mind. Such joy as there is in the life of the unbeliever cannot be found in him after this life is over. Even in the hereafter, the lost will belong to the works of God's hands. And God no doubt has joy that through the works of evil men and angels, he is establishing his glory. Yet that is not what the Psalmist seems to mean. There seems to be certain satisfaction on the part of God even in the temporary joy of the unbeliever as a creature of himself, a joy which will in the end turn to bitterness, but which, nonetheless, is joy while it lasts.

“Another passage to which we briefly refer is Matthew 5:44, 45. ‘But I say unto you, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that spitefully use you,

and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good.’ In this passage, the disciples of Jesus are told to deny themselves the selfish joy of expressing enmity against those that hate them. They are not to express their attitude of hostility. But this is not all they are to do. They are to replace the attitude of hatred with an attitude of love. He does not know but that this one who now hates him may one day become a believer. This is one factor in the total situation. Yet this is not to be made the only factor. It is not even the expressed reason for his loving his enemy. The one guide for the believer's action with respect to the enemy is God's attitude toward that enemy. And the believer is told definitely to love his enemy in imitation of God's attitude toward that enemy. God's attitude toward that enemy must therefore in some sense be one of love. It is no doubt the love of an enemy, and, therefore, in God's case, never the same sort of love as the love toward his children. And to the extent that we know men to be enemies of the Lord, we too cannot love them in the same sense in which we are told to love fellow-believers. God no doubt lets the wheat and the tares grow together till the day of judgment, but even so, though God's ultimate purpose with unbelievers is their destruction and the promotion of his glory through their destruction, he loves them, in a sense, while they are still kept by himself, through his own free gifts, from fully expressing the wicked principle that is in them” (Introduction to Systematic Theology, p.246-248).

(d) It is not in accordance with fact to say that the

absolute ethical antithesis, even when taken as being such in principle only is for me the starting point when dealing with the relation of the believer and the non-believer. As the preceding quotations imply, my starting point is always the fact that God originally made man in his image and that he placed him in an exhaustively revelational context.

To be sure we cannot agree with the Roman Catholic position. According to this position there is an area of knowledge, an area of interpretation, which believers and unbelievers have in common without difference. Similarly also the Arminian position calls for such a common or neutral territory of interpretation (Cf. Bishop Butler's Analogy). Over against this we must take into consideration the fact that the natural man is ethically depraved, "...wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body."

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

(a) The Adamic consciousness, or, the reason of man as it existed before the fall of man. This reason was derivative. Its knowledge was, in the nature of the case, true, though not exhaustive. This reason was in covenant with God, instead of at enmity against God. It recognized the fact that its function was that of the interpre-

tation of God's revelation. In paradise Adam had a true conception of the relation of the particulars to the universals of knowledge with respect to the created universe. He named the animals 'according to their nature,' that is, in accordance with the place God had given them in his universe. Then, too, Adam could converse truly about the meaning of the universe in general and about their own life in particular with Eve. Thus the subject-object and the subject-subject relationship was normal. In paradise man's knowledge was self-consciously analogical; man wanted to know the facts of the universe in order to fulfill his task as a covenant-keeper.

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

roduction to Systematic Theology, p. 25, 26).

It is only after we have dealt with what men have in common that we turn to that which separates them as sinners saved and sinners not saved. The fallen consciousness wants in principle to be creatively constructive. The regenerated consciousness wants, in principle, to be receptively reconstructive. So we might expect that two such mutually exclusive principles of interpretation could have nothing in common. But we cannot take such an absolutist position.

"We are well aware of the fact that non-Christians have a great deal of knowledge about this world which is true as far as it goes.... That is, there is a sense in which we can and must allow for the value of knowledge of non-Christians" (Idem, p. 26).

We do not make this point as a concession but rather as a fact taught directly by Scripture itself and as such observed in daily experience.

The question how those who are totally depraved in principle can yet do the natural good and have true knowledge "has always been a difficult point." But no more or less difficult than all other Christian teaching. Pighius argues against Calvin that commonness must always be commonness without qualification. He contends that therefore the attitude of God to all men must be the same without difference. Hoeksema argues that since God has determined some men to be elect and others to be reprobate there must be nothing but difference between them. But the truly Reformed position does not go off on a tangent toward Arminianism nor does it go off on a tangent with Hoek-

sema. Both types of thinking are univocal instead of analogical, abstract instead of concrete.

We therefore do not expect to be able to settle this difficult point, or any other difficult point, to the full satisfaction of either Hoeksema or the Arminians. We would do with this problem as we must do with all other theological problems. We would take all factors into consideration simultaneously and thus "hem in the question." That is all that the fathers did when at Chalcedon they established the relation of the two natures of Christ to one another. They were not able to satisfy and neither did they desire to satisfy the "logical" demands of either the Eutychians who wanted a confusion of natures lest there be no identity between them, nor of the Nestorians who wanted two persons lest there be no difference between God and man.

Now "In order to hem in our question we are persuaded that we must begin by emphasizing the absolute ethical antithesis in which the 'natural man' stands to God."

From the point of view that man as dead in trespasses and sins, seeks to interpret life in terms of himself instead of in terms of God, he is wholly mistaken; "From this ultimate point of view the 'natural man' knows nothing truly. He has chains about his neck and sees shadows only" (Introduction to Systematics, p. 26).

Dr. Masselink quoted this passage as though it controlled the whole discussion of the relation of the knowledge of believers and unbelievers. Nothing could be further from what is actually said. The very idea of man's ethical depravity as absolute in principle presupposes that men are inherent-

ly and originally in possession of the truth about God and themselves.

We must therefore distinguish between the natural man's knowledge of God by virtue of the revelational character of all created reality, himself included, and the natural man's being without God in the world and blind because of sin. "The natural man has knowledge, true knowledge of God, in the sense that God through nature and man's own consciousness impresses his presence on man's attention" (Idem p. 27). But man seeks to suppress this revelation of God about and within him. "Having made alliance with Satan, man makes a grand monistic assumption. Not merely in his conclusion but as well in his method and starting point he takes for granted his own ultimacy" (ibid). He needs therefore as Warfield put it, new light and new power of sight. The natural man has cemented colored glasses to his face. And all things are yellow to the jaundiced eye. So then "to the extent that he works according to this monistic assumption he misinterprets all things, flowers, no less than God" (ibid). However, lest someone should draw absolutistic conclusions, conclusions dictated by a supposed logic rather than by Scripture, from what has been said we hasten to add:

"Fortunately the natural man is never fully consistent while in this life. As the Christian sins against his will, so the natural man 'sins against' his own essentially Satanic principle. As the Christian has the incubus of his 'old man' weighing him down and therefore keeping him from realizing the 'life of Christ' within him, so the natural man has the incubus of the sense of Deity weighing him down and keeping

him from realizing the life of Satan within him.

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

It appears then that the section in which I did use the expression "absolute ethical antithesis" is mainly directed against those who would interpret the idea of the antithesis to mean that man is as bad as he can be. The whole burden of the argument is that to hold to the idea of absolute or total ethical depravity does not need to, and must not lead to, the idea that man is now Satanic. Since the antithesis is ethical and not metaphysical God's restraining grace keeps man from being as bad as he can be.

From the preceding discussion it will also be clear what reply I would make to another charge made by Dr. Masselink. He says: "The absolute ethical antithesis is in conflict with our conception of the Divine image in 'natural man.'" And again, he adds: "If we assert that there is an absolute ethical antithesis between God and fallen man, then how can we speak of fallen man as bearing the image of God, unless with Hoeksema we restrict this to the strictly formal sense, meaning thereby that man is merely 'capable of bearing God's image' (Op. Cit. p. 74).

But I have argued at length, particularly against Barth, that the image of God in man consists of actual knowledge content. Man does not start on the course of history merely with a capacity for knowing God. On the contrary he begins his course with actual knowledge of God. Moreover he cannot even eradicate this knowledge of God. It is this fact that makes sin to be sin "against better knowledge." In this I think I am in line with Reformed theology in general and with Calvin in particular.

But at this point there no doubt emerges a difference between Dr. Masselink and myself on the question of the function of common grace. I do not think it is the function of common grace to maintain the metaphysical status quo. Roman Catholic theology thinks of the creature as beginning as it were from the borders of non-being. There is according to Roman theology in man, as in created reality generally, an inherent tendency to sink back into non-existence. Hence the need of supernatural aid from the outset of man's being. There is in Roman theology a confusion between the metaphysical and the ethical aspects of man's being. If there is any one thing on which Bavinck has laid great stress throughout the four volumes of his Dogmatiek, it is that true Protestantism is a matter of restoring man, the creature of God, to his true ethical relationship with God. The destructive tendency of sin is not to be seen in a gradual diminution of man's rationality and morality. Man is not less a creature, a rational moral creature of God when he turns his back to God and hates his maker than he was before. Therefore when God gives to man his grace, his saving grace, this does not reinstate his rationality and morality. It reinstates his true knowledge, righteousness and

holiness (Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24). It restores man ethically, not metaphysically. So too if we take common grace to be that which has to do with the restraint of sin, then it is an ethical not a metaphysical function that it performs. It does not maintain, as Dr. Masselink seems to contend, the creatural characteristics of man. It does not sustain the image of God in "the wider sense," consisting of man's rationality and morality. It keeps the man who will be rational anyway from expressing his hostility to God in the field of knowledge to such an extent as to make it impossible for himself to destroy knowledge. And in restraining him in his ethical hostility to God, God releases his creatural powers so that he can make positive contributions to the field of knowledge and art. Similarly in restraining him from expressing his ethical hostility to God there is a release within him of his moral powers so that they can perform that which is "morally" though not spiritually good. As constitutive of the rationality and morality of man these powers had not diminished through sin. Man cannot be amoral. But by sin man fell ethically; he became hostile to God. And common grace is the means by which God keeps man from expressing the principle of hostility to its full extent, thus enabling man to do the "relatively good."

True, we have to speak of sin as, in principle, destructive of the work of God. We have to speak "as if" sin might prevent God's plan for the universe from being realized. And this would seem to indicate that the world, metaphysically speaking, would have been destroyed by sin. And it might seem to indicate that common grace keeps the metaphysical situation intact. At the same time we know that sin and Satan were bound to be defeated. God planned this defeat before the foun-

dation of the world. These two notions are limiting or supplementative concepts. They modify one another. We cannot make linear deductions from one of these principles taken by itself. Therefore we cannot say that the world was on the way to being destroyed by sin. Then common grace came in and saved it from destruction. We must rather reason from the fact of God's all-comprehensive plan and make relative distinctions within it. Then we conclude that common grace, by restraining sin, influences the condition of the universe as planned by God.

According to Dr. Masselink the created powers of the universe themselves tended to disappear into nothingness and have to be kept in existence through common grace. On this, then, there is disagreement between Dr. Masselink and myself; I would think of common grace as an ethical attitude on the part of God to mankind and an ethical response which is otherwise than this response would be if sin were allowed to go unchecked.

### Conscience

Dr. Masselink also criticises me for thinking of conscience as revelational of God. "Van Til speaks of conscience as a means of general revelation. We cannot at all agree with this. There is a vast difference between God's general revelation and human conscience. God's general revelation is objective whereas conscience is subjective; God's general revelation is Divine whereas conscience is human; God's general revelation is infallible whereas conscience is fallible. Conscience is man's answer to God's general revelation. The Holy Spirit witnesses within man's heart that God is holy and an avenger of evil, and conscience is man's response to this internal witness. If there

is an absolute ethical antithesis between God and man all functions of human conscience become impossible" (Op. Cit. p. 75).

This criticism is the same in intent as that made with respect to Machen in Dr. Masselink's dissertation. "In the fifth place we do not like the way in which Prof. Machen speaks of conscience as a means of revelation" (J. Gresham Machen, p. 155). In criticising Machen's view Dr. Masselink deals with Romans 2:14, 15, and concludes by saying: "Also here God's general revelation namely, the work of the law, and conscience are distinguished" (Op. cit. p. 158). He quotes Hepp as follows with approval: "To be sure the Holy Spirit is active in all of this, yet only in a mediate way. So there is a difference in principle between conscience and the General testimony which is directly a testimony of the Holy Spirit" (Op. Cit. p. 157).

The main charge against Machen and myself is therefore that we have confused the divine and the human; but neither Machen nor I have done such a thing. Leaving out Machen's views I may point out that, as has appeared even in the quotations given, I take conscience to be an aspect of the created consciousness of man. And everything created is revelational of God. In this broad sense even the sinful reaction of man to the revelation of God in the narrow sense is still revelational of God's general purpose. It is only by thus thinking of all created reality as revelational that the ethical actions of man can be properly focused. Without thus making all created reality revelational of God the ethical reaction of man would take place in a vacuum.

To be sure, the revelation of God in the consciousness of man is psychologically subjective. It is the human subject which, in its very constitution

and function, speaks of God. Calvin wonders at the marvelous working of the human mind and heart as revelational evidence of the work of God. And Dr. Masselink admits that "also 'conscience' was often conceived of as a means of revelation by the old Reformed theologians, but that 'conscience' was conceived of in a very broad way" (Op. Cit. p. 156). Well, it is in a broad way that I am taking it.

Nor was it only the "old Reformed theologians" who spoke of conscience as revelational in this broad way. Bavinck himself does so not once but repeatedly. Speaking of the comprehensiveness of God's general revelation he says: "He reveals himself also in the heart and conscience of every man, Job 34:8, 33:4; Prov. 20:27; John 1:3-5, 9, 10; Rom. 2:14, 15; 8:16. This revelation of God is general, in itself observable and intelligible to every man" (Gereformeerde Dogmatiek, Third Ed. 1918; Vol. I, p. 321). Discussing the principles of religion Bavinck speaks as follows: "Thus there is not only an external, objective, but also an internal, subjective revelation" (Idem p. 290). Elsewhere he signifies the testimony of the Holy Spirit by which man accepts the truth of Scripture as revelational. "Objective revelation is therefore not sufficient; it must in a sense be continued and completed in subjective revelation" (Idem p. 534). Other passages of similar import could be cited.

The main point is that if man could look anywhere and not be confronted with the revelation of God then he could not sin in the Biblical sense of the term. Sin is the breaking of the law of God. God confronts man everywhere. He cannot in the nature of the case confront man anywhere if he does not confront him everywhere. God is one;

the law is one. If man could press one button on the radio of his experience and not hear the voice of God then he would always press that button and not the others. But man cannot even press the button of his own self-consciousness without hearing the requirement of God.

### The Theistic Proofs

The question of the theistic proofs also involves the idea of the all comprehensiveness and the perspicuity of general revelation in man's consciousness as well as in the facts about him. Dr. Masselink rejects Machen's view of conscience as revelatory of God. That is the question of revelation in and through the human subject. So he also rejects Machen's acceptance of the "theistic proofs" as foundational to the truth of Christianity. That is the question of revelation in and through the facts of the universe in general. Following Hepp's line of reasoning Dr. Masselink says that in the former case we would be making our certainty to rest upon the human subject, and in the latter case we would be making our certainty to rest upon the created object. In both cases we would be depending upon a creature. And certainty rests in God alone. With Hepp we must speak of the general internal testimony of the Holy Spirit as witnessing to general revelation. Then by this general testimony of the Spirit we have certainty.

Even the general external testimony of the Spirit, says Dr. Masselink, cannot by itself give certainty to man.

"It is a revelation which comes to us as a witness. A revelation is a disclosure of the thoughts of God. The whole creation is full of God's thoughts and they come to us in the General Ex-

ternal Testimony of the Spirit. This general External Testimony of the Spirit can reveal God's thoughts to us, but cannot give us certainty with regard to them. Why not? you ask. This is because all revelation takes place through means. We cannot know the essence of things except through the things themselves. If this revelation, therefore, would have to give us certainty in regard to these matters, it would have to do it through the things themselves. These would then in turn become the basis of our certainty. This we have already observed cannot be as then the certainty is in the creation itself and not in the Creator. The absolute certainty I receive only then, when the Holy Spirit gives me this assurance that these things are so apart from the external revelation" (Op. Cit. p. 150).

The point of importance here is again the question of revelation, especially of general revelation. This revelation discloses the thoughts of God. These thoughts come through the general external testimony of the Holy Spirit. But though the general external testimony reveals God to us this testimony cannot give us certainty. The reason is that this revelation or testimony takes place through means. And the means are created facts, objective or subjective. So, since they are not God himself, they cannot give us certainty with respect to God. Hence the need of a direct internal witness added to the external witness of the Spirit.

On this construction of Hepp's the following remarks are apposite:

1. It is not found in Kuyper and Bavinck or in "the old Princeton theology." Hepp himself says that Bavinck came near to his idea of a general

testimony of the Spirit, but that he did not quite attain unto it.

2. It is out of analogy with the relation of Scripture and the special internal testimony of the Holy Spirit witnessing to the truth of Scripture; this in spite of the fact that Hepp seeks to carry through the analogy. Calvin's doctrine of the internal testimony of the Spirit does not presuppose the lack of certainty in the revelation given in Scripture. On the contrary, for Calvin all revelation is objectively true and certainly true. But the sinner does not want to believe that which is in itself certain and clear as day. So the Holy Spirit in regenerating and converting man enables him to accept that which as unregenerate and unconverted he could not accept. It brings him back, in principle, to the normal state of affairs. The testimony of the Spirit within man is to the objective and certain truth of that which comes to man through external revelation.

3. Even the "immediate testimony" of the Holy Spirit has, at last, to terminate upon man. It has to be mediated to man through man's own consciousness. Otherwise it has no content. The human mind must think upon and reconstruct for itself the objective revelation given to it whether through Scripture or through "nature." But to think upon it is a psychological activity. It is an activity of the human mind. It is to the thinking subject that the internal testimony of the Spirit comes. It terminates upon this subject. It is unavoidably mediated to the ethically responsible subject through this very subject itself. Without mediation through both object and subject there is no revelation and no reception of revelation. Subjectivity in the objectionable sense of the term does not come into the picture of Christian thinking by the insistence that both



the created object and the created subject are nothing but what they could not help but be, namely, revelational, exclusively revelational of God. Subjectivity of the objectionable sort comes into the Christian's thinking only if he tones down this objective certainty. For if he does and then tries to make up for it by the idea of an internal testimony of the Spirit then the directness of this testimony unavoidably partakes of the nature of identification of the creature with God. It leads to the position that only God can know God to be God with certainty.

Dr. Masselink's criticism of my evaluation of the theistic proofs is quite different from his criticism of Machen's acceptance of these proofs. But the unity of these two criticisms lies in the fact that both Machen and I are out of agreement with Hepp's evaluation of them. And this evaluation of them by Hepp rests upon his doctrine of the external and internal general testimony of the Holy Spirit. Dr. Masselink's criticism of my view will be given first, then the views of Hepp stated; and after that an analysis made of the idea of the general testimony of the Spirit.

1. Dr. Masselink asserts that I deny any truth value to the theistic proofs (Op. Cit., 1. 83). "According to VanTil, Bavinck's 'Theistic Proofs' have no value whatsoever. This too is a logical consequence of his major premise of the absolute ethical antithesis between God and natural man" (Idem p. 85).

This is again simply contrary to fact.

"The argument for the existence of God and

for the truth of Christianity is objectively valid. We should not tone down the validity of this argument to the probability level. The argument may be poorly stated, and may never be adequately stated. But in itself the argument is absolutely sound. Christianity is the only reasonable position to hold. It is not merely as reasonable as other positions, or a bit more reasonable than other positions; it alone is the natural and reasonable position for man to take. By stating the argument as clearly as we can, we may be the agents of the Spirit in pressing the claims of God upon men. If we drop to the level of the merely probable truthfulness of Christian theism, we, to that extent, lower the claims of God upon men. This is, we believe, the sense of Calvin's Institutes on the matter" (Common Grace, p. 62).

To say that the argument for Christianity and for the existence of God is absolutely valid I am merely applying the idea that God's revelation without and within man is perspicuous. If then man rightly interprets this revelation he has an absolutely valid argument for the truth. But the sinner, so far as he works from his adopted principle which rests in himself as autonomous, does not interpret the facts of the universe rightly. How could he? He assumes himself to be ultimate. He therefore assumes also that the facts of the universe are not created but exist in themselves. He also assumes that man's reasoning powers are ultimate and that they must therefore be determinative of what is possible and what is impossible in the realm of being.

Now in principle, the natural man interprets human experience upon these false assumptions.

In principle he interprets all things in terms of man as the final reference point. And so he comes to the conclusion that god is some abstract principle beyond the cosmos, is some unifying principle within the cosmos, or is identical with the cosmos.

But the facts of the universe about him testify against such a distortion of them. Men ought to know, and know they ought to know and see God as their Creator and benefactor. They ought to see God as manifesting his wrath upon men when they behold the evils of nature. Similarly they ought to see God as the Creator and benefactor when they behold themselves as image bearers of him. They ought to see God as their judge when their conscience witnesses in approval or in disapproval of their deeds.

“In order to receive knowledge we must also have God’s general revelation and God’s general internal revelation” (Common Grace and Christian Education, p. 129).

So the interpretative effort, so far as it is self-conscious, is a means by which the natural man seeks to suppress the truth about God and the world that he has both about and within himself. But he cannot ever completely suppress the knowledge of God and of morality within himself. Dr. Masselink at one point expresses himself in a similar vein:

“Can this disposition to receive knowledge ever be lost by sin? The answer is no, as it belongs to the image of God. The disposition through which we receive knowledge, however, is now corrupt. In the state of integrity before

the Fall, the three means by which knowledge was received -- disposition, natural revelation, and historical revelation -- were all pure but now there is corruption. In Hell these three means continue too. The consciousness of the ‘I’ is unchanged by sin, but the nature of ‘I’ is changed” (Masselink p. 130).

“This general revelation is basis for Common Grace, and not vice versa -- Common Grace is basis for general revelation, -- since general revelation is before the fall, and therefore existed before Common Grace. The image of God cannot be removed for two reasons: First, because it belongs to the essence of man, and, second, because man receives internal and external revelation” (Ibid.).

Therefore prior to Common Grace, as its presupposition, we presuppose that man is of necessity confronted with the truth about himself as the creature of God. This objective truth about man himself, this ineradicable truth, this inescapable confrontation by God, man, so far as he thinks from his sinful principle, seeks to suppress. But he cannot suppress it. It comes to him with the pressure of God, the inescapable One. God’s revelation is everywhere, and everywhere perspicuous. Hence the theistic proofs are absolutely valid. They are but the restatement of the revelation of God which, as Dr. Masselink says, is infallible. God the Holy Spirit presses the revelation of God, external and internal, upon man. I have not denied the general testimony of the Spirit any more than I have denied the validity of the theistic proofs. God the Holy Spirit presses upon men the revelation of God as being infallible, not as inherently unable to give certainty.

Even so it is imperative that a distinction be made between what is the objective revelation of God, both external and internal, and what is our interpretation of that revelation. In preaching the Reformed minister of the gospel seeks to bring the system of truth as given him in Scripture. But he does not claim that any sermon of his infallibly mediates the revelation of God to man. His sermons are true so far as they reflect the revelation of God. So too with the formulation of the theistic proofs, these are true, so far as they reflect the revelation of God. They are true when they reflect Scriptural procedure. And Scriptural procedure involves making the ontological trinity the foundation of all predication.

But these arguments have often been stated otherwise. In the first place men have often formulated them and have built them upon the assumption of man as autonomous. This is, for instance, the case with Aristotle, with Descartes, with the British empiricists, with the rationalists, etc.

When the theistic proofs are thus constructed they do not convey the revelation of God; they then become the means of suppressing that revelation in terms of the monistic assumption of the natural man. How could "the theistic proofs" then be sound, for if they "prove" that the God of Aristotle exists, then they disprove that the God of Christianity exists.

Now it is the difference between theistic proofs when rightly and when wrongly constructed that I have been anxious to stress. It is this that I think has not been adequately stressed even in Bavinck. And this in spite of the fact that he has given us, perhaps better than other Reformed theologians, the means by which to distinguish between

the right and the wrong way of reasoning about God. He has rejected the scholastic idea of natural theology. It was this scholastic natural theology that took into the Christian camp the false way of reasoning about God. It took over to a large extent the method of Aristotle. Bavinck himself has signalized the proofs as formulated wrongly as being invalid. Kuyper did the same thing. He assigned a subordinate place to apologetics just because he assumed that it sought to prove to "reason" that of which "reason" cannot be the judge.

In this criticism of the validity of the theistic proofs Kuyper too had a different position from that of "old Princeton apologetics." When I arrived at Princeton Seminary as a student, Professor William Brenton Greene was the professor of apologetics. The method of apologetics that he taught was to a large extent based on Bishop Butler's Analogy. It was based on the idea, as expressed by Butler, that there is an area or territory of interpretation on which Christians and non-Christians agree. To ask men to believe Christianity we must ask them only to apply the same principle of interpretation to Christianity and its phenomena that they have already applied to the realm of nature. Then they would have to admit that Christianity is very probably true as they had already admitted that God very probably exists.

In this method it is assumed that the reason of the natural man quite properly takes itself to be the judge of what is possible or impossible. Says Charles Hodge,

"Christians concede to reason the judicium contradictionis, that is, the prerogative of deciding whether a thing is possible or impossible. If it is seen to be impossible, no authority and

no amount or kind of evidence can impose the obligation to receive it as true" (Systematic Theology, Vol. I, p. 51).

Now I have criticized this old Princeton apologetics in the way that Kuyper and Bavinck and Hepp have criticized positions similar to it. Dr. Samuel Volbeda says that this method of apologetics does not do justice to the Pauline statement that the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit since they are spiritually discerned.

"Methodologically the Warfieldian scheme of Apologetics does not fit in with Reformed Hamartology and Soteriology. With you I believe that Apologetics should be so defined as not to carry with it implications contradictory of I Cor. 2:14" (From a letter to Gerrit G. Hospers, quoted in the latter's pamphlet Apologetics, N. Y. 1922, p. 28).

The Princeton method, so far as it worked by this method of appeal to the reason of man as such as the judge of the possible and the impossible, was flatly opposed to old Princeton theology, according to which only that is possible which God in his sovereign will determines shall come to pass. Princeton Apologetics did not live up to its own teaching in theology to the effect that the natural man must be born again unto knowledge. Princeton apologetics started with the non-believer from an abstract idea of possibility, based upon its calculations of what might probably happen, and then concluded that Christianity is very probably true.

But David Hume has long since shown the invalidity of such an argument. Abstract possibility presupposes the idea of Chance. And in Chance

there are no probabilities, no tendencies one way or the other. And a Christianity that is probably true is not the Christianity of the Scripture.

So far as choice had to be made between the two positions, I took my position with Kuyper rather than with Hodge and Warfield. But there were two considerations that compelled me finally to seek a combination of some of the elements of each position. Negatively Kuyper was surely right in stressing that the natural man does not, on his principles, have any knowledge of the truth. But Hodge and Warfield taught the same thing in their theology. It was only in their apologetics that they did not lay full emphasis upon this teaching. Positively Hodge and Warfield were quite right in stressing the fact that Christianity meets every legitimate demand of reason. Surely Christianity is not irrational. To be sure it must be accepted on faith, but surely it must not be taken on blind faith. Christianity is capable of rational defense. And what the Princeton theologians were really after when they said that Christianity is in accord with reason, is that it is in accord with the reason that recognizes its creatureliness and its sinfulness. It is only that the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian concepts of possibility and probability has not been adequately brought out by them.

"The reason why these differences do not appear on the surface is that, as a matter of fact, all men are human beings who were created in the image of God. Even the non-regenerate therefore have in their sense of deity, though repressed by them, some remnant of the knowledge of God, and consequently of the true source and meaning of possibility and probability. It is to this remnant of a truly theistic interpretation of experi-

ence that Hodge really appeals when he speaks of the laws of belief that God has implanted in human nature. It is, of course, not only quite legitimate, but absolutely imperative to appeal to the 'common consciousness' in this sense. But in order really to appeal to this 'common consciousness' that is repressed by the sinner we must refuse to speak of a 'common consciousness' that is not suppressed by the sinner.

"The non-regenerate man seeks by all means to 'keep under' this remnant of a true theistic interpretation that lingers in his mind. His real interpretative principle, now that he is a covenant-breaker, is that of himself as ultimate and of impersonal laws as ultimate. It is he himself as ultimate, by means of laws of logic that operate independently of God, who determines what is possible and probable. To the extent, then, that he proceeds self-consciously from his own principle of interpretation, he holds the very existence of God, and of the creation of the universe, to be not merely improbable, but impossible. In doing so he sins, to be sure, against his better knowledge. He sins against that which is hidden deep down in his own consciousness. And it is well that we should appeal to this fact. But in order to appeal to this fact we must use all caution not to obscure this fact. And obscure it we do if we speak of the 'common consciousness' of man without distinguishing clearly between what is hidden deep down in the mind of natural man as the revelation and knowledge of God within him, and what, in rejecting God, he has virtually adopted as being his final interpretative principle" (Introduction to Systematic Theology, p. 39, 40).

Again in the case of Kuyper and Bavinck, is it not to the common consciousness of mankind as involved in Calvin's idea of the sense of deity, as involved in the very idea of the image of God that they can and do allow as a legitimate point to which we may appeal with the gospel? In spite of their rejection of apologetics as that discipline which must establish the foundation of the truth of Christianity, and in spite of their insistence that the natural man has no affinity for the truth of Christianity, they yet themselves appeal to that which lives in the consciousness of every man but which every man as a sinner seeks to suppress. Further, through criticising the sort of method that was used at old Princeton, Kuyper and Bavinck often used that very same method themselves. They too, often appealed to a common consciousness of man as containing a body of truth on which there is not much disagreement between Christians and non-Christians.

Of course it was with great diffidence and hesitation that I sought a solution for the apologetic problem and for the problem of common grace by the means of thus sorting out, rejecting the weaknesses in both positions and building upon the solid foundation in both, derived from Calvin and ultimately from St. Paul. But it was impossible to ignore the differences between the two positions. It was also impossible to agree with the old Princeton position to the effect that appeal must be made to reason without differentiating between a reason conceived of as autonomous and reason conceived of as created.

Finally it was impossible to agree with what seemed to be a lowering of the claim for Christianity by Kuyper and Bavinck when they concluded from the fact that sinful man cannot of himself accept the truth to the idea that there is no objectively valid

reason to be given for the truth.

Here then is, so far as I am now able to see, the direction in which we ought as Reformed Christians to travel.

1. The foundation of the the thinking of both the Amsterdam and the old Princeton men was that which both derived via Calvin from Paul, namely the fact that God has unavoidably and clearly revealed himself in general and in special revelation. The whole triune God is involved in this revelation. The whole triune God testifies to man in this revelation. This is the general testimony of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is nothing more than the Reformed philosophy of history. God controls and therefore manifests his plan in "whatsoever comes to pass." It is his will of decree that comes to expression in a measure, in nature and in history. In this decree lies the basis, the unity and the guarantee of the success of "science."

2. Both the men of Amsterdam and the men of Old Princeton agree that God has promulgated to mankind in Adam his will of command. He set before mankind the task of subduing the earth. Here lies the command for all men to engage in the scientific enterprise. Here also lies the expression of the generally benevolent attitude of God to mankind. This is not grace, for grace presupposes sin. But it presupposes God's favorable attitude toward man. All men are responsible for proper reaction to this assignment of task.

In his will of command God deals with man as a created person; he deals with him conditionally. God wants self-conscious covenant reaction to his will of command and promise. But the entire covenantal transaction takes place according to the counsel of God.

3. Amsterdam and Old Princeton agree that the relation between the will of decree and will of command cannot be exhaustively understood by man. Therefore every point of doctrine is a "difficult problem." As men we must think analogically. God is the original and man is derivative. We must not determine what can or cannot be by argument that starts from the will of decree apart from its relation to the will of command. In particular we must not say that God cannot display any attitude of favor to the generality of mankind because we know that he intends that ultimately some are "vessels of wrath." On the other hand we must not argue from the revealed will of God with respect to man's responsibility to the denial of man's ultimate determination by the will of decree. We need therefore at this point, which is all inclusive to be "fearlessly anthropomorphic."

"Applying this to the case in hand, we would say that we are entitled and compelled to use anthropomorphism not apologetically but fearlessly" (Common Grace, p. 73).

And to think analogically, to be fearlessly anthropomorphic, is to think concretely, for it is to take all the factors of revelation into consideration simultaneously. It is to admit that no theological problem can be fully solved exhaustively. The Council of Chalcedon excluded logical deductions based on anything short of a combination of all the factors of revelation with respect to the God-man. So in the problem of common grace we must not argue for differences without qualification or for identities without qualification. The former is done by Hoeksema; the latter is done if we insist that there must be a neutral territory between be-

lievers and unbelievers.

4. Amsterdam and Old Princeton agree on the doctrine of sin. Both teach total depravity. Total depravity for both means that sin has affected man in all his functions. But it does not merely mean that. It also indicates how deeply sin has affected all his functions. Man is "wholly defiled," not partly defiled in all his functions. He hates God and his neighbor. He therefore seeks to suppress the truth within him. He worships and serves the creature more than the Creator. He cannot but sin.

5. Amsterdam and Old Princeton agree on the doctrine of election. Both teach that God from all eternity planned to redeem a people unto himself. Disregarding the differences between infra- and supralapsarianism all Reformed theologians, in accord with the Reformed Confessions, teach that God is redeeming a people unto himself. Those who are God's people are totally saved. They are saved in their every function. They are absolutely saved in principle. Paul calls them righteous and holy without qualification. John says that they cannot sin.

6. Amsterdam and Old Princeton agree on the genuine significance of human responsibility. Their position has been called absolutist and determinist. It has been charged that with their doctrines of election and reprobation the "free offer of the gospel" would be meaningless. But Scripture teaches both the ultimate determination of the destiny of men by God and the fact that men die because of their sin. So both Amsterdam and Old Princeton, following Calvin, argued that the conditional is meaningful not in spite of but because of the plan of God in relation to which human responsibility takes place.

Hence both preached with conviction the universal or general offer of salvation to men as a class. They were not deterred by those who would impose "logic" upon Scripture either by way of rejecting election in favor of the sincerity of the general offer of the gospel, or by way of rejecting the sincerity of the offer of the gospel in favor of election. They thought concretely and Scripturally rather than abstractly and deductively from one aspect of revelation.

7. Both Amsterdam and Old Princeton therefore taught common grace as well as the common offer of the gospel to the generality of mankind. From the beginning God had in mind his ultimate plan with respect to the final differentiations between men. Both infra- and supra-lapsarians agree on this. But this did not reduce the favorable attitude toward mankind at the beginning of history. Why then should God's general favor not continue upon man even after the fall? Only if sin were taken to be the act of a being that is itself ultimate would that be the case. From eternity God rejected men because of the sin that they would do as historical beings. So he elected others because of the work that Christ would do for them and the Spirit would do within them in history. It is as true and as important thus to assert the significance of the historical whether as contemplated by God or as realized in fact as it is to say that history is what God intends by his plan that it shall be.

Thus the general favorable attitude toward mankind at the beginning of history becomes the sincere offer of the gospel and common grace to those who have sinned. All men were, because of sin, in the way of death (Calvin). To man as a class God comes with the sincere offer of the way of life (Romans 2). That is the general witness of

the triune God to men.

Therefore God's good gifts to men, rain and sunshine in season, are genuinely expressive of God's favor unto them. At the same time they are a general testimony by which the Spirit of God labors with men to call them to repentance, and therefore to the fulfilment of the task originally assigned to mankind in Adam.

Therefore also through common grace the natural man is enabled to do "good works."

"Total depravity has two aspects, one of principle and one of degree. The first representative act of man was an act that resulted historically in the total depravity of the race. This act was performed against a mandate of God that involved mankind as a whole; without that "common mandate" it could not have been done; without that common mandate the 'negative instance' would have been an operation in a void. Thus mankind came under the common wrath of God. But the process of differentiation was not complete. This common wrath, too, was a stepping-stone to something further. The elect were to choose for God and the reprobate were each for himself to reaffirm their choice for Satan. The reprobate were to show historically the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Totally depraved in principle, they were to become more and more conformed in fact to the principle that controlled their hearts" (Common Grace, p. 91).

It will now be apparent why I have found it impossible to agree with Hepp in his evaluation of the theistic proofs. There are two ways of constructing a proof for the existence of God. These

two ways are mutually exclusive. The one is in accord with the basic construction of Reformed theology; the other is destructive of it. The one begins with the presupposition of the existence of the triune God of the Scriptures. The other begins with the presupposition of man as ultimate.

The true theistic proofs undertake to show that the ideas of existence (ontological proof), of cause (cosmological proof) and purpose (teleological proof) are meaningless unless they presuppose the existence of God.

This involves interpreting human reason itself in terms of God. It involves saying that unless human reason regards itself as being what Scripture says it is, created in the image of God, that then it has no internal coherence. To this must be added that it involves the fact of sin as darkening the understanding and hardening the will. Yet no one but a Christian will admit these two truths about himself. By nature all men seek to suppress the facts of their sinfulness and creaturehood. They cannot succeed in fully suppressing this truth. As you cannot mop the figure off the surface of an indelible linoleum so man cannot erase his creatureliness and sinfulness, try as he may.

One of the most subtle and apparently effective ways by which the natural man seeks to cover his guilt is by "proving the existence of God" to himself. By that means he makes an idol for himself. Worshiping his idol, his god, he seeks to make himself believe that he has done all that may be expected of him.

That the gods produced by the "theistic proofs" are frequently nothing but idols is plain to any one familiar with the history of philosophy. Aristotle proved the existence of a god; there must, he reasoned, be an unmoved Mover back of all movement.



Thomas Aquinas used essentially the same method that Aristotle did in proving the existence of God. Yet the god of Aristotle did not create the world, does not control it, is not even a person. Aquinas wanted to prove to those whose standard of judgment is reason rather than revelation that it is proper to believe in God. But the only god that he can rightfully hold to on this basis is such a god as no Christian should call God.

In modern times Descartes used the ontological argument. But he started from the idea that he knew his own nature as man without first or at the same time knowing that God exists. This assumption is the exact opposite of that from which Calvin starts. Calvin argues that not a word can truthfully be said about man himself unless it be presupposed that he is a creature of God. Accordingly Descartes, as well as Aristotle, had at best a finite god. And a finite god is, from the Christian point of view, an idol.

It is therefore quite impossible to speak intelligently of the theistic proofs without distinguishing between the method by which a Christian believer and the method by which a non-Christian uses them.

It is therefore of the essence of Protestantism, and in particular of the Reformed theology to reject the "natural theology" of Rome. Kuyper and Bavinck have done so in no uncertain terms. And so has Hepp. And the whole genius of "Old Princeton" was against it.

A truly Reformed apologetic cannot be worked out unless one follows closely in Calvin's wake. Men ought to see God's being as the being who is self-sufficient and self-contained. Men ought to see themselves as creatures, as beneficiaries of their Creator's bounties. They ought

to see themselves as under the law of God. And men cannot but see themselves as such. Yet such is the folly of sin, that men hold down the truth in unrighteousness. They do this by assuming that they participate in the being of God, or that God's being is of a piece with theirs. So their systems of philosophy, based as they are on this monistic assumption, are means by which men seek to suppress the truth about themselves. The result is folly and ruin to themselves.

Either presuppose God and live, or presuppose yourself as ultimate and die. That is the alternative with which the Christian must challenge his fellow man.

If the Christian thus challenges his fellow man then he may be an instrument of the Spirit of God. The proofs of God, then become witnesses of God; and witnesses of God are God witnessing to men. The theistic proofs therefore reduce to one proof, the proof which argues that unless this God, the God of the Bible, the ultimate being, the Creator, the controller of the universe, be presupposed as the foundation of human experience, this experience operates in a void. This one proof is absolutely convincing. To be sure, in so far as it is an interpretation of Biblical and general revelation it cannot be assumed to be infallible. Only revelation to man (which includes revelation through man as a psychological being) is infallible. When man, even redeemed man, reinterprets this revelation, it cannot be said to be infallible in detail. Reformed theology does not attribute infallibility to its Confessions. Yet the main points of doctrine of these confessions are, by Reformed men, assumed to be for all practical purposes, a faithful reproduction of the truths of revelation.

It will now be apparent why I cannot agree with Hepp's estimate of the proofs. Hepp does not distinguish between such proofs as are constructed upon true and such as are constructed upon false presuppositions. He simply speaks of the theistic proofs. He assumes that the non-believer can and does correctly interpret the revelation of God. After warning us against overestimating the value of the proofs Hepp says:

"The so-called proofs for the existence of God are not at all without value. They teach us that nature within us and round about us witnesses of God. They convey in set formulas, the speech which comes to us from the cosmos as a whole (cosmological proof), from the world of ideas (ontological proof), from the moral world, (moral proof), from history (historical proof), from the purposiveness nature of things (teleological proof) and testify to us constantly that God reigns and that He is the Creator of the ends of the earth who does not faint or grow weary. They press powerfully upon our consciousness. But - they cannot give us the last ground of certainty" (Testimonium Spiritus Sancti, p. 152).

Against the type of argument developed by the old Princeton apologetics Hepp therefore objects because it claims certainty for the proofs. But certainty, says Hepp, cannot be derived from revelation since revelation comes through media, whether subjective or objective. Certainty, he contends, comes from the testimony of the Spirit only.

In this objection of Hepp's against too great a reliance on the theistic proofs he leaves un-

touched what constitutes, we believe, the one great fault in them. Hepp ignores the basic difference between a theistic proof that presupposes God and one that presupposes man as ultimate. And this is not an oversight. Hepp's whole doctrine of the general testimony of the Spirit is constructed with the purpose of showing that there are certain central truths on which all men agree. Non-Christians as well as Christians, can, he argues, correctly interpret God's general revelation. They can together put this revelation in set formulas, as they do in the case of the theistic proofs. Thus they can and do, together believe in certain central truths.

Here then the Christian and the non-Christian together interpret God's general revelation and together come to the same conclusion, namely, that God exists. But they are not certain of this truth, for revelation cannot give certainty. So the Holy Spirit testifies within them, so as to bring certainty within them with respect to the conclusion of their process of reasoning.

All this is in effect to have lapsed into the natural theology of Romanism. The doctrine of the general testimony of the Holy Spirit as developed by Hepp is in itself no cure for natural theology. Hepp assumes that the natural man can and does, even on his own interpretative principle, correctly interpret the revelation of God on central questions. There is then an area of fact, of revelation which non-Christians and Christians together interpret correctly. There is then a neutral territory, a "territory between" where men can positively build together on the house of science.

In this area the Holy Spirit does not testify to the non-believer through the believer to the effect that he must turn from idols to the service of the living God. On the contrary, in this area the Spirit

testifies to both believer and unbeliever that they are right in believing in God. The Spirit, as it were, testifies to Calvin that he is right in thinking of God as his creator and judge and also testifies to Spinoza that he is right in believing in the existence of God as identical with all reality. Or, if this be not so, then the Spirit must testify to the contentless form of God, it must testify to the fact that God exists without any indication as to what is the nature of that God.

Now either idea, the idea that the Spirit should testify to the existence of a finite god, or to the existence of a mere form, devoid of content, is directly contrary to Scripture. Nature within man and through the facts about man testifies that God as creator, as controller of all things and as judge, exists. It is to this that the Spirit testifies. And testifying to the existence of this God it testifies against the existence of such gods as men have made for themselves, often by means of the "theistic proofs."

It is in this conception of the theistic proofs and of the general testimony of the Spirit witnessing to what they express, to this idea of central truths on which Christians and non-Christians are in agreement, that I have rejected. I have rejected it for the same reason for which I have rejected the method of the old Princeton apologetics. And I have rejected both in view of my close adherence to the old Princeton and the Amsterdam theology. It is, in short, because I hold the appeal to reason as autonomous to be both illegitimate and destructive from the point of view of Reformed Faith that I am bound to reject Hepp's position as well as that of old Princeton apologetics. But happily I can do so in view of the theology that I have learned from old Princeton and Amsterdam.

In this connection I may explain to you a remark I made last Spring on the occasion when Dr. Masselink and I debated the question of common grace. I argued that on the basis of such an apologetics as old Princeton furnished us we were still on an essentially Romanist rather than on a Reformed basis. For it is of the essence of Romanism to argue with the non-believer on the ground of a supposedly neutral reason. No Reformed person could espouse such a position and then honestly claim that his position was uniquely Calvinistic and as such calculated to save science.

In this context I contended that a doctrine of common grace that is constructed so as to appeal once more to a neutral territory between believers and non-believers is, precisely like old Princeton apologetics, in line with a Romanist type of natural theology. Why should we then pretend to have anything unique? And why then should we pretend to have a sound basis for science? Nothing short of the Calvinistic doctrine of the all-controlling providence of God, and the indelibly revelational character of every fact of the created universe, can furnish a true foundation for science. And how can we pretend to be able to make good use of the results of the scientific efforts of non-Christian scientists, if, standing on an essentially Romanist basis, we cannot even make good use of our own efforts?

Why live in a dream world, deceiving ourselves and making false pretense before the world? The non-Christian view of science:

- (a) presupposes the autonomy of man
- (b) presupposes the non-created character, i.e. the chance-controlled character, of facts; and,
- (c) presupposes that laws rest not in God but somewhere in the universe.

Now if we develop a doctrine of common grace in line with the teachings of Hepp with respect to the general testimony of the Spirit, we are incorporating into our scientific edifice the very forces of destruction against which that testimony is bound to go forth. Then "we might as well blow up the science building with an atom bomb." I have apologized for that statement. But to the meaning intended then I subscribe today. We should as Reformed Christians be able to present a well articulated philosophy of knowledge in general and of science in particular in order to justify our independent educational institutions.