



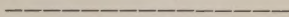
# PARTICULARISM AND COMMON GRACE

By CORNELIUS VAN TIL

In the first lecture of this series Dr. Robert K. Rudolph set forth for us the Reformed doctrine of God. He expounded the Westminster Shorter Catechism definition of God as the One Who is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. This self-contained and self-sufficient Being by the sovereign act of His will created the world. And since their creation by God all things whatsoever in this world are being controlled by His providence. God controls "whatsoever comes to pass."

This sovereign God gave man a task to perform. It was to till the ground, to bring out its powers, to act as prophet, priest and king in the midst of the world that God had made. He was to engage in scientific, artistic and philosophical enterprises of every conceivable sort. Such was man's cultural mandate. It was given to mankind as a whole. It was therefore a task that all men would have in common. Mankind was instructed with respect to this its task through its first representative, Adam. There was to be a reward for the faithful performance of it. He was to be given eternal life. And as his life when first given him was a life of perfection in a universe of perfection, so it may be thought that the eternal life that he would receive would be fulness of life with the rewards of his cultural labours all about him.

So far then we have (a) the sovereign God (b) the universe created and controlled by God (c) the representative of mankind confronted with the cultural mandate for all men (d) with a reward of eternal life awaiting him on condition of love and obedience to God.



In the second lecture Professor John W. Sanderson told us how Adam sinned for all mankind. He broke the covenant that God had made with him for them. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12). Thus all men come into the world as covenant-breakers. And they are as such under the *common* curse of God.

In the third lecture the Reverend Mr. George S. Christian addressed us on the covenant of grace. He spoke of the immeasurable love of God, of God Who so loved the world, the world of sinful, fallen mankind, that He sent His only Son into the world that whosoever should believe in Him might be saved. Again there was the note of commonness. First it was mankind as a unit that was given the common task of subduing the earth. Then mankind broke the covenant and God put all men under the curse, a common curse. After that it was Christ Who came to save the *world*. And it is said that *whosoever* believeth on Him may be saved.

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## PARTICULARISM

Yet it was the sovereignty of God and the particularism of the Gospel that was stressed in all three lectures. The sovereign God has not seen fit to save all men. The Gospel is not universally offered to all men everywhere. Millions have never heard of it. And though it is true that *whosoever* believeth on Christ shall be saved it is also true that of themselves men cannot believe. They love darkness rather than light. They are dead in trespasses and sins. If they are to believe they must be made alive by the Spirit of God Who takes the things of Christ and gives them to His people. It is they for whom and for whom alone Christ died. It is they and only they who were from all eternity ordained unto eternal life.

This Gospel of particularism goes right back to the original plan of God. When God through Adam assigned to mankind its common task, He did so with the ultimate purpose in mind of saving a people for His own possession. God approached all mankind through one man, Adam, and by this means was effecting His purpose with respect to particular men in the future. In this intricate manner the particular and the universal are from the outset of history intertwined with one another. God approaches the mass of mankind through one man as their representative and He approaches each individual human being throughout history through the mass of mankind that has been thus approached through one man. When John Brown is born he may find himself in Africa or in Europe; he may look into the mirror and find himself to be black or white. He may be unable to play ball with other children because of infantile paralysis or he may be a better ball player than his fellows. All the factors of his inheritance and environment are mediated through and are expressive of, the covenant relationship that God from the beginning established with mankind. All the facts of life about him speak of the mandate of God upon mankind, and therefore upon him. And all these facts also speak of the fact that mankind has, through Adam, broken the covenant with God. Thus self-consciousness for John Brown is identical with covenant-consciousness. John Brown knows he is a covenant breaker to the extent that he knows anything truly at all.

## OBJECTIONS RAISED

It is to this scheme of things that men constantly raise their objections. Listen to what the objector has to say. "So then," he exclaims in triumph, "all that is done by John Brown is a farce, is it? He would have been saved or doomed no matter what he would have done. Adam had to fall or there would have been no people for your Christ to save. You want your Christ to save a *special* people. It was these *special* people that He had in mind from the beginning. He did not care for the rest of mankind. In fact your God must have hated the rest of mankind from all eternity. When you spoke of a common gift of life and a common mandate with the prospect of a common eternal life in glory, all that too was a farce and worse than

a farce, was it not? God never meant to give the reprobate of whom you speak eternal life. He intended from the beginning to send them to hell for His own pleasure, regardless of what they might do.

“And as for the elect of whom you speak did not God plan to save them from all eternity? Then all their deeds are also a meaningless performance. These elect of yours would get to heaven no matter what they did. Christ would die to take away any sins they might perform. And the sins they would perform would not really be sins, for they would be done of necessity. Then why speak of these elect as being under a common curse with the reprobate? Or why speak of any curse upon any man since all men sin by necessity? And why have your Christ come into the world at all since the elect will be saved of necessity and the reprobate will be condemned of necessity. The whole of man’s moral standards are, on your basis, destroyed. Your God has no connection with anything that is moral according to the standards of civilized men.”

It is apparent from these words of the objector that he wants a “gospel” that is universal, that is favorable to all men. If he is to believe in a God it must be such a God as will do His best to save all men. He wants a God of love, a good God, One Who is the cause of “good” and not of “evil.” But then, it will be observed that the objector is bound also to follow Plato when he says: “Then God, if he be good, is not the author of all things, but he is the cause of a few things only, and not of most things that occur to men; for few are the goods of human life, and many are the evils, and the good only is to be attributed to him: Of the evil, other causes are to be discovered” (*The Republic* Jowett’s Translation, New York, 1885, Vol. II p. 202).

The “objector” then has a finite God. It is this God that he substitutes for the sovereign God of Scripture. His God does not control whatsoever comes to pass, but is himself surrounded by Chance. According to the Scriptures that, and that alone, is possible which is in accord with the plan of God; according to the objector *anything* is possible because possibility is beyond and above God. But to say that anything is possible, is to start with Chance. The objector has not been able to avoid assuming or presupposing something about the nature of all reality. He had to have something on which to stand in order to remove the Scriptural doctrine of God, and that something on which he stands is the idea of Chance. And to interpret human experience in terms of Chance is wholly devoid of meaning.

But all this has been neatly kept under cover. The objector himself is usually not fully aware of the fact that his own position involves the idea of Chance. In that case what he appeals to when he raises his objections to the gospel is “experience” and “logic.” He says he experiences freedom. He asserts that this freedom enables him to initiate that which is wholly new in the world; and if this is so, it is illogical or contradictory to say that God controls “whatsoever comes to pass.” The Christian, the objector as-

serts, holds that God is all glorious. God is full of glory in some such way as a bucket may be said to be full of water. At the same time, man, by his deed in history, by the exertions that proceed from his own choice, must seek to glorify God. That is as though he must add water to the bucket which he has himself said to be already full of water.

What is the Christian to answer to such a charge as that?

Perhaps he feels the need of help. And does not the objection voiced above concern all Christians, and therefore the entire Christian church? Surely all Christians want to do justice to human freedom and responsibility; none therefore want to be determinists. It seems as though the objector is right when he says that if one is to do justice to experience and logic then one must preach a gospel which includes all men. Then the gospel cannot in any sense be particularistic. Then God must not merely offer salvation to all men everywhere, but He must have the intention of saving all men. If then all men are not saved this is, in the last analysis, due to their freedom to do that which is against the best intention and efforts of God. God's efforts are common without difference, and the differentiation among men comes in because of the ultimate choice of man. But would not this lead to indeterminism?

## A CONFERENCE OF ALL CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIANS

Let us call a conference of all Christian theologians, Roman Catholic and Protestant, orthodox Protestant and modern Protestant, traditional Protestant and dialectical Protestant and ask this conference what reply must be given to the objector. Among others present we note in particular those who speak for Thomas Aquinas, for Luther, for Calvin, for Arminius, for Schleiermacher, for Ritschl and for Barth.

### The First Session

What marvelous agreement there seems to be between these Christian theologians. They agree negatively against the objector that it will not do to subject God to the universe of Chance. "How terrible!" they shout. They agree positively that we must hold to God as man's Creator and Lord and that it is only through Christ that man can be saved. They also agree that human experience and human logic must be interpreted in terms of God and Christ rather than that God and Christ must be interpreted in terms of human experience and logic.

What unison, what harmony!

But here we see that Socrates was right again. Men and Gods agree so long as they talk of general principles. "But they join issue about particulars." On the generalities mentioned even the objector might agree. Even he would be glad to say, as Plato said, that we must posit a *Good* that is above all the distinctions of good and evil that men make. But then it is to be understood, the objector would add, that this Good is "above all

that men can say about it." It is above good and evil. It is indeterminate. It is a subjective ideal even when, as in the case of Plato, it is hypostatized and thus made "real."

Kant would also agree that men must posit the idea of God as Creator and Ruler of the world, so long as it is made clear that it is impossible for the theoretical reason to say anything about Him. Such a God, Kant would argue, must be an ideal of the practical reason, but cannot be known by means of the concepts of the theoretical or scientific reason. With such a God we can do justice to human experience and to logic too. For then the human mind is assumed to be a law unto itself, and therefore its "experience" of freedom is taken to be ultimate. And logic we then assume to be resting on this supposedly ultimate human experience. It therefore never pretends to make any assertions about anything that is beyond itself, Kant would say, and to talk of God as eternal is meaningless since man is temporal and has no experience of eternity. Any God that exists must be subject to the same limitations to which man is subject. If He is not, Kant would argue, then He is unknown and unknowable to man, and devoid of significance for man.

### The Second Session

When thus challenged, as it were, by the objector to leave the formal introductory atmosphere of generalities and come to a discussion of particulars, the representative of Thomas Aquinas was given the floor first of all. As senior member of the fraternity he was entitled to this priority.

Surely, he argued, a synthesis must be possible between the objector and ourselves as representatives of the Christian church, for God has created man in His image. Do we not all agree on this? Therefore the reason of man, given by God Himself, must be honored as able to speak the truth in its own field. Let us listen then to Aristotle, the greatest representative of reason that has ever lived. He did not find it contradictory to believe in God. In fact he said that it is reasonable to believe in a first unmoved mover as the cause of the universe. And yet he started from experience as autonomous when engaged in his philosophical research. But Aristotle could not deal otherwise than with "essences." And theology deals with the personal God as One Who *is*. So Moses must be added to Aristotle. Theology must teach man that the Christian religion is only *above* not *against* human experience and logic.

The whole problem of the relation between the supernatural truths of faith and the natural truths of reason can be solved with Aristotle's idea of the *analogy of being*. Aristotle says there is one being, but God expresses the fulness of this being, and man expresses in a lower degree this same being. This idea of gradation or of potentiality developing into actuality solves all difficulties between God and man. It provides for the unity that reason requires (univocism) and it also provides for the diversity that the experience of freedom requires (equivocism).

How marvelously authority and reason seem to have been brought together here. Here the authority of the living voice of Christ and the reason of Aristotle seem to be in perfect unison with one another.

The objector was much pleased with this representative of the Christian church. He knew, if the sentiment expressed in this first speech of our conference of Christian theologians would prevail, that then the gospel would be made common to men.

Why should the objector object to singing the praise of *being in general*?

To sing the praise of *being in general* would be to sing the praise of man as well as the praise of God. It would be to substitute the idea of man's participation in God and God's participation in man for the idea of creation of man by God. Thus man would not need to live by the instruction of God except as God gave him advice about the laws of the universe. Thus the idea of authority, that of good advice not that of absolute authority, would be extolled. Thus all grace would be common because God would also need the grace or good fortune of the world of Chance about Him. Here was the universalism the objector was looking for from the beginning. What was left of grace after the representative of Aquinas got through was nothing but the idea of the possibility of salvation, which possibility on Aquinas' scheme was not dependent exclusively on God after all but also on Chance.

The Protestants agreed among themselves that it was somehow not right to join with the representative of Thomas Aquinas in his answer to the objector. With one accord they said that they must go to the Bible and not to the Pope to get their instructions about the nature of the gospel and about answering the objector. Did not Protestantism recover the Bible, they asked. Are not all Protestants in agreement on this? Is not the Bible and what it teaches the end of all controversy?

## THE CONFERENCE OF ALL PROTESTANT THEOLOGIANS

It is disappointing indeed that no general Christian answer could be found to give to the objector. But such was the sad situation. There was such a basic difference between the Protestants and Roman Catholics as to the source of Christian doctrine that they could not tell the objector clearly what, in the light of Christianity, was the basic error of the objector's position.

Roman Catholicism has sought to combine the Word of God and the word of man in the form of tradition as the rule of faith, said the Protestant theologians. How then can it indicate clearly what is wrong in the position of the objector who took the word of man alone as the rule of faith, they asked. So they met together in order to draw up an answer to the objector, and to show him that he needed the grace of God.

Again by reason of seniority the representative of Luther was first given the floor. He spoke in eloquent terms of the Scriptures as the Word of God. "In terms of it alone, no matter what it teaches," he said, "we must interpret human experience. In it there is set forth, once for all, the system of truth by which men are to live."

In broad general lines he spoke of the contents of that system. He spoke of the triune God, sufficient to Himself from all eternity, causing the world to come into existence by an act of His will. He spoke of Adam and Eve in paradise and of how they were driven forth from the presence of God because they sinned against His express commandment. He spoke of men as sinners subject to the eternal wrath of God and headed for eternal doom because of their breaking of the law of God. He spoke of Christ who came into the world, Who lived and died and rose from the dead. He said that those who believe in Christ should escape the wrath to come, and live forever in heaven in the presence of God and of their Savior.

At this point the representatives of Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Barth simultaneously raised their hands asking for the floor. And when each of them in turn had spoken it appeared that there were two basically opposed conceptions of Scripture in the midst of this group of "Protestants."

They had agreed on the general statement that Scripture is the formal principle of Protestantism. But on the particulars as to how it is they disagreed. The three men mentioned stood over against the other three, the representatives of Luther, Calvin and Arminius. The latter three said that the Bible is the direct revelation of God to man and as such contains a system of truth given once for all to men. The former three rebelled against this idea: they said that to hold such a position was worse than Romanism.

The idea of the Bible as a direct revelation of God to man and as therefore containing a system of truth by which man must live, they contended, was to reduce the personal relation between God and man to the impersonal system of law. It is, they argued, to explain the world deterministically in terms of causes, rather than personalistically in terms of reasons. The idea of cause is a mechanical idea. To be sure, science needs such ideas as cause. But then science deals, in the nature of the case, with the relations of things within the world. It cannot say anything about the relation of the world as a whole to God.

If men wish to speak of the relation of the world as a whole, or of man, to God they must give up using the concepts of the theoretical reason. For if they use these concepts dualism always results. Men must then, as Plato did, attribute what they call "good" to a good God back of the world, and what they call "evil" to an evil God back of the world. To avoid such dualism we must use the ideals of the practical reason and posit a God Who is good, in Whom the "good" and the "evil" of the theoretical reason are "somehow" united.

And, above all, to think of the Bible as containing a system of conceptually stated truth is to think of the atonement along legalistic lines. It is to think of God as giving men laws and of men as breaking these laws and being in consequence liable to eternal punishment. It is to think of the sufferings of Christ and of His merits mechanically. Men are then said to have the merits of Christ attributed to them in some such way as money may be transferred legally from one person to another.

True Protestantism, the representatives of Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Barth argued, must start with faith in Scripture as the revelation of God. But the God of this Scripture must Himself be a faith-construct. He must be conceived independently of the systems of thought devised by man's philosophy, science or even theology. He must be conceived as above the relative distinctions and differentiations of the Human reason. He must therefore not be conceived as in any wise existing or as in any wise known otherwise than through Christ.

There must be no God in Himself, and no counsel of such a God according to which the course of the world is brought into existence and controlled.

There was therefore no original man, called Adam, who knew God and who broke the covenant that this God had made with him. Man, apart from his relationship to Christ, hovers on the verge of non-being. His reality consists in the fact that he is related to the Christ of Whom the first Adam is but a sort of shadow.

Two things in particular these three men, the representatives of Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Barth, wanted to stress as over against the position of Luther, Calvin and Arminius. Both have to do with the centrality, and therefore the uniqueness, of the person and work of Christ. By enmeshing Jesus Christ in the realm of history as open to systematic interpretation by science, philosophy or theology the view of Luther, Calvin and Arminius, they contended, virtually denied the very uniqueness of Christ that they were so anxious to maintain. The uniqueness and authority of Jesus Christ can only be maintained, they argued, if you introduce the notion of holy or primal history as over against secular or ordinary history. In holy history God is God for man and man is man for God through Jesus Christ. In holy history God is truly free, free to turn into the opposite of Himself, free to become identical with man. In holy history man is truly free for God, free to partake of the very attributes of God. Thus there is nothing that keeps God from freely choosing man, for the man He then chooses is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the electing God and also the elected man. The object receiving the grace of God is God Himself in man.

In the second place these three men claimed that in stressing the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ they had released the full and all encompassing love of God for all mankind. If one holds to the idea of the Bible as the direct revelation of God, containing a system of doctrine, they



said, then one cannot escape the hard and fast dualism of some that are ultimately saved and of others that are ultimately lost. For on such a basis the love of God is not more ultimate than is the righteousness or justice of God. Therefore on such a basis there are those who are only the objects of the punishment of God and others who are only the objects of the love of God.

On the other hand on the truly Christological basis of Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Barth, they contended, the reprobation of men is always reprobation in Christ. Men cannot reject Christ unless they are in Christ. They cannot sin unless they are aware of their sins as forgiven in Christ. This point of view, they argued, and this alone, can furnish the foundation for the truly Protestant doctrine of eternal security. For here is security that lies deeply imbedded in the eternal love of God. In that love all men have been saved from all eternity. They participate from all eternity in the saving work of Christ. Every idea of God as arbitrarily choosing some to eternal life and of casting others into everlasting doom is thus done away. All men, to be men, must have been men in Christ from eternity. They must have partaken in the act of revelation of God which is identical with Christ. The subject dispensing the grace of God is man himself in God and with God.

In some such way as this the representatives of Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Barth argued that they conceived of true Protestantism. They said that they had differences among themselves, and that they thought of these differences as important too. But they owned that their internal differences were as nothing in comparison with the great cleavage that separated them from Luther, Calvin and Arminius.

For them Protestantism meant personal confrontation with God through Jesus Christ. And as long as one holds to the legalistic idea of the Bible as containing a system of truth one cannot meet God personally. Even the Romanist conception of the analogy of being, they contended, was not so impersonalistic as the orthodox Protestant doctrine of Scripture. If the representatives of Luther, Calvin and Arminius really meant to be Protestants then why not join them in substituting the fully personal notion of the *analogy of faith* for the idea of a system of truth. Then they would be free from every attack on the part of science and they would have a fully personal relationship to God. They would then be able to answer to the objector and yet hold to grace, even universal grace.

## THE OBJECTOR AGAIN REJOICES

After the speeches of these representatives of Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Barth, the objector was even more pleased than he had been when the representative of Thomas Aquinas had spoken. For he knew that this *analogy of faith* which these men were proposing as a substitute for the Romanist notion of the *analogy of being* was altogether in his favor. He knew that the philosophy of Kant, from which this purely "theological"

idea of the *analogy of faith* had been taken, was even more hostile, if possible, to the Christian religion than was the philosophy of Aristotle on which the *analogy of being* was built. For it is of the essence of the *analogy of faith*, as proposed by these three men, the objector knew, that the ideas of God and man be thought of as correlative to one another. God is then nothing but what He is in relation to man through Christ and man is nothing but what he is in relation to God through Christ. If the idea of correlativity between God and man was already involved in the idea of the *analogy of being*, it came to its full and final expression in the idea of the *analogy of faith*.

According to the *analogy of faith*, thought the objector to himself, God apart from Christ is wholly indeterminate. How could He then have any control over man? How could He mean anything to man? Man could make God in his own image. And according to it man, apart from Christ, is wholly indeterminate. How could he sin against God except he be already forgiven in Christ? In this way man can project for himself a God Who regards all men, however much they may violate His supposed commandments, as His children still. Man would, in short, project a God Who would save all men if He could (save them and Himself that is) from the unfortunate circumstances of a somehow hostile universe.

The objector laughed to himself as he thought of this conference of all Protestant theologians. He saw in this conference the means by which the Gospel of the grace of a sovereign God might be most effectively destroyed from the world. If he could only get the representatives of Luther, of Calvin and of Arminius to agree with the other three. Then the church of Christ itself, the very agency that alone was preaching the gospel of particularism, would have sold itself out to the idea of common grace, grace common to all men everywhere, grace for God as well as grace for man, grace for all gods and for all men in a universe of Chance.

## A CONFERENCE OF ALL ORTHODOX PROTESTANT THEOLOGIANs

The representatives of Luther, of Calvin and of Arminius realized that they could not go along with the other three in answering the "objector." They began gradually to sense the fact that the other three would preach only such a grace as is *common* grace, such a grace as the natural man himself is quite willing to accept, a grace that involves no repentance from sin. If God and man are made interdependent or commonly dependent upon a common universe then there can be no grace of God for man.

It was to point out this fact that the representative of Calvin spoke. He intimated simply that so long as one holds to the idea of interdependence between God and man in any form there could be no mention of grace. We have to come back to the system of Scripture according to which man is wholly dependent upon God because he is the creature of God, and to the idea that whatever comes to pass is controlled by God, he said.

The very idea of Scripture, he continued, would be meaningless unless it was the voice of such a God. How could we think of Scripture as the infallible and sovereign Word of God if God Himself were no sovereign? How could the Scripture foretell the plan and purposes of God if He Himself were partly dependent upon forces outside Himself? It would be wholly devoid of meaning to say that God can predict what will happen if the universe is run by Chance.

"In particular," he said, "we shall have to stress that the will of man and all of its actions are genuinely significant within and only within the plan of God. And this shows," he said, "that our system of theology is a system based upon Scripture which is presupposed as being the Word of God, and upon God Who is presupposed as being the God of Scripture." For we cannot "prove," either deductively or inductively, or by the principle of coherence in the way that the objector would require, that man's will is genuinely significant within the plan of God. For if we did try thus to prove it, then this will of man would have to be woven into the being of God. And therewith we should be back to the *analogy of being* of Romanism or to the *analogy of faith* of the modern Protestantism of the three gentlemen who have just left us. On the other hand we cannot show by an appeal to experience that the will of man has genuine significance only in relation to the plan of God in the way that would satisfy the objector. For if we tried thus to satisfy the objector we would have to show that the plan of God is itself dependent upon the will of man and then there would be no plan of God in the Biblical sense of the term. We need therefore to maintain that our system of truth which we set over against the idea of the *analogy of being* and over against the idea of *analogy of faith* is frankly based upon Scripture as the Word of that God Who controls whatsoever comes to pass.

"Yet we can show negatively that unless the objector will drop his objections and stand with us upon the Scriptures of God and hold with us to the God of the Scriptures there is no meaning to his experience. Thus the law of contradiction may be used negatively as a means by which the two mutually exclusive views of life may be set apart from one another. Thus it may be shown that if this law is to be used in the way that the objector would use it, then this very law would have no application to anything. On the assumption of the ultimacy of human experience, as involved in the position of the objector, the universe is a universe of Chance. And in a universe of Chance the law of contradiction has no fulcrum. It is then like a revolving door resting upon chance moving nothing into nothing except for the fact that it then cannot move.

"When this has been shown to the objector, then it will appear objectively (whether he will accept it or not) that his own environment and his own heredity has all the while actually been controlled by the God of the Scriptures. Otherwise there wouldn't be any world. That is to say it then appears that all the facts of this world, including the facts of man's own consciousness as well as the facts of his environment, must be seen

in the covenantal perspective in which, as was pointed out, the Scriptures put them in order to exist at all. All the facts therefore speak to all men everywhere of the fact that God once spoke to mankind in general about their common creation and confrontation by God. All the facts speak of the one event that took place at the beginning of history and therefore of the fact that God was favorably disposed toward mankind and that He offered them eternal life on condition of love and obedience to Him with their whole hearts."

It is thus, he argued, that the genuinely Biblical idea of common grace to all mankind *has its foundation* at the beginning of history. It is thus also, he argued, that the genuine significance of the choice of the human individuals has its true foundation at the beginning of history. The two are interdependent. The choice of the individual man, Adam, was so overwhelmingly important that the eternal weal and woe of all men depended upon it. Such importance is nowhere else ascribed to the will of man. But such importance could be ascribed to the will of man only against the background of the fact that the sovereign God controlled whatsoever comes to pass. Without that background the will of man would have operated in a vacuum. It could have had no significance even for the individual himself, let alone for the whole of the human race.

"And how, without the all controlling counsel of God," he added, "could the consciousness of sin as it is found in every man, the consciousness of having broken the law of God, be seen for what it is? This consciousness can be seen for what it is, for what the Scriptures describe it as being, only if seen in the light of the fact that God was originally favorable to mankind and that all mankind in Adam have turned against this favor of God given and offered to them.

"And how could the fact that the environment of man is anything short of what corresponds with the internal desserts of man, as utterly wicked, be explained except for the fact that God still extends favor even upon those who deserve nothing but to be cast into eternal separation from Him? How could even the punishments of God by which men are kept from breaking forth into utter violence be fully seen for what they are except as evidence of the favor of God?

"To be sure," he continued, "this general or common grace is not common in every sense. God's dealings with those who are to be in His presence and those who are to be finally driven forth from His presence is never wholly common, common without difference. From the beginning God's favor was common only for the purpose of setting before man his task and his responsibility. Commonness was from the outset correlative to difference in one common plan of God. How much the more then shall common grace to sinners imply the fact that it is for the purpose of placing men before a significant choice?

## RAIN AND SUNSHINE

“When God therefore gives His gifts to men, the gifts of rain and sunshine in season, these gifts are the means by which God’s challenge to man speaks forth. God’s challenge means that men are asked to love God their creator and to repent of sin and ask Him for His forgiveness. In long-suffering patience God calls men to Himself through these gifts. If they are not so conceived then these gifts are not conceived according to their function in the plan of God. To say that the facts of rain and sunshine in themselves do not tell us anything of God’s grace is to say in effect that the world and what is therein does not speak forth the revelation of God. But how can any fact in this world be a fact and be the kind of fact it is, except as revelational of the will of God to man? A fact in this world is what it is according to the function that it has to perform in the plan of God. Every fact *is* its function. And therefore every fact contains, in conjunction with all other facts, the covenantal claims of God upon man. *It is when seen as a part of this covenantal claim that the idea of common grace is seen for what it is.* When the sinner does not turn to God because of the challenge that comes to him through all the facts of the universe, his punishment is thereby greatly increased. The fact that the unbeliever who eventually turns out to have been a reprobate adds to his punishment because of his misuse of the gifts of rain and sunshine about him is not a proof against the idea that these facts are the gift of God’s favor to him. On the contrary it were impossible that his punishment should be increased by his manipulation of the facts about him unless these facts were evidence of the undeserved favor of God in relation to him. From the beginning all the facts surrounding any man in the entire course of history were set in the framework of the covenant that God made with man. If they are in any wise separated from the framework then they become subject to the manipulation of the false logical and experiential requirements of the apostate man.

## CHRIST FOR THE WORLD

“By thus placing all the facts of man’s environment in covenantal perspective the meaning of God’s so loving the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever should believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life, will be seen both for its breadth of sweep and for its sovereign particularity. Christ is sent to the world of sinful men. He is sent to save sinners. These sinners will ultimately show themselves to have been either elect or reprobate. They will show themselves with clarity to have been elect or reprobate in the fact of their acceptance or rejection of Christ if confronted by Him.

“Sinners are challenged as a class to accept the Christ. They are challenged through Him to undertake the cultural task that all mankind was originally given to do through Adam. Not all sinners are thus challenged. There is a delimitation as to the area where Christ comes to men.

There are many to whom this second challenge and call does not come. This delimitation is due to the sovereign pleasure of God. All men were confronted with the cultural task and with the promise of eternal life with God at the beginning of history. When all men rejected God and broke the covenant then God did not owe any of them a second call. To be sure, He kept calling all men to repentance through all the facts about and within men. But He did not put the way of life positively before all men a second time. Many were left in the misery into which they had cast themselves through their first disobedience and fall in Adam. Yet Christ came to sinners as a class. He did not come to those who were already designated by Him as reprobate or as elect. To this class of sinners to whom He speaks through the preaching of the Gospel God says that He would have them turn unto Him and after repentance undertake the task of making all things subservient to the coming of the kingdom of God in Christ.

“The Apostle Paul tells us what God has in mind through the coming of Christ. Christ, he says, is the first born of every creature. By Him all things were created. By Him all things consist. It pleased the Father that in Him as the head of the body which is the church, all things in heaven and on earth should be reconciled to God.

“It is in this program of God, it is in connection with this work of Christ by which the world that was cursed of God should be reconciled unto Him for the greater glory of God, that common grace must have a part. All things in history must serve this glorious consummation. Even Satan and all his hosts must through his defeat by Christ serve the purpose of glorifying God. If men do not accept the Christ but reject Him, if perhaps they crucify the Son of God afresh, they have thereby shown sin to be exceeding sinful. Twice over, once in Adam and again in direct relation to Christ, they have refused to undertake under God, and for God, the performance of their cultural task. Twice over they have joined Satan in seeking to ruin the ultimate plan of God. Twice over they will be shown to have been defeated in their purpose. God will attain His purpose in spite of their rejection of Him both in relation to the first and in relation to the second Adam.

### MAN'S RESPONSE TO THE GIFTS OF GOD

“However, God not only gives good gifts to men in general, He not only calls men with the good news of the Gospel to a renewed acceptance of their original cultural task, He also restrains the wrath of man. He keeps the negative, and therefore destructive, force of sin from breaking out in the fulness of its powers. All men everywhere are kept from working out self-consciously their own adopted principle as covenant-breakers and as the children of wrath. But none of them have reached maturity in sinning. If they had there would be no opportunity left for them to be frustrated in their evil efforts.

“For those who reject the Christ and those who have never heard of Christ, but who have sinned in Adam are still laborers, even though unwillingly, in the cultural task of man. Being slaves to sin they are also partners in the defeat of Satan, unwilling slaves of God and His Christ. In spite of Satan’s best efforts his followers are found to be contributors to the great edifice that is built by God through Him who is the first born of every creature. All the skills of those who are artificers in iron and brass, all the artistry of painters and sculptors and poets, is at the service of those who, under Christ, are anew undertaking the cultural task that God in the beginning gave to man.

## THE RECIPIENTS OF SAVING GRACE

“In contrast with those who are slaves of sin and Satan, but who have to be unwilling workers in the performance of the cultural task of mankind, there are those who by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit have been made alive from the dead. They are those who have by the power of God believed in Christ as their substitute. They are now through Him no longer subject to the wrath to come. They are now through Him the heirs of eternal life. To them the promise that God had made to mankind, the promise of eternal life in fulness of a glorified earth and heaven, shall be fulfilled. With great enthusiasm they therefore undertake the cultural task of mankind. It is they who build the temple of the Lord in accord with the vision showed to them on the mount. The gifts of rain and sunshine they use in self-conscious subordination to their one great plan of accomplishing the cultural task that God has given to man. The master plan of their lives is therefore radically diverse from the master plan of those that are still covenant breakers. There is no common enterprise between covenant keepers and covenant breakers. That is to say there is no community project in which there is no difference of purpose. The covenant keepers are in control of the situation. They are in control of the situation because they are servants of Christ. This is true even when their enemies may for the moment seem to be the Lords of creation. It is the meek who shall inherit the earth. The earth and the fulness thereof belongs to the Lord and to those to whom in His sovereign grace He gives it. To them therefore belong all the common gifts of God to mankind. Yet that it may be the earth and the *fulness* thereof that is developed, the covenant keepers will make use of the works of the covenant breakers which these have been able and compelled to perform in spite of themselves. As Solomon used the cedars of Lebanon, the products of the rain and the sunshine that had come to the covenant breakers, and as he used the skill of these very covenant breakers for the building of the temple of God, so also those who through the Spirit of God have believed in Christ may and must use all the gifts of all men everywhere in order by means of them to perform the cultural task of mankind.

“How beautifully,” the representative of Calvin said, “all things thus fit together according to the plan of God. Though the system that we thus

construct is still, as noted before, only an analogical system, and it is therefore true only to the extent that it actually re-expresses the revelation of the Word of God, yet we can see something of the symmetry of the truth of God. And we can see how radically different the system of Scripture is from the system of the objector. Both systems have in them an aspect of particularity and an aspect of universality. The system of the objector, and of the modern Protestant, has such universality as involves the identity of God and man. It has common grace which is common, but which is not grace. At the same time this system has such particularity as to destroy the very idea of unity or systematic coherence altogether. It has common grace which comes to such as have nothing in common because they live in total isolation.

“In contrast with such a system we as believers in the Word of God and in the God of the Word presuppose this Word and this God. We therefore presuppose the internal and eternal harmony between unity and diversity which lives within this internally self-complete God. It is on the basis of the presupposition of this God and of this Word of God that there is both genuine individuality and genuine universality in the created world. Only on the basis of this presupposition can unity and individuality stand in relationship with one another without destroying one another. When we stress the commonness of the cultural task given to man, when we stress the commonness of the curse of God on man, the commonness of the non-saving grace of God to man, the commonness of the offer of the gospel to men, the commonness of all those who by birth are in the covenant of saving grace that God has made with believers and their seed, this commonness does not in the least tend to reduce the genuine significance of the particular. On the contrary this commonness is required in order that the process of particularization may be accomplished.

“The commonness is one of the two indispensable factors of the covenant which God has made with mankind. The other factor is the genuineness of the choice of man. And through the two factors operating in dependence upon one another God accomplishes His one great purpose of glorifying Himself through the deeds of men. It is His all encompassing plan in relationship to which and within which the course of history in its process of differentiation takes place. The choices of men therefore take place and have their significance in relation to the task that God has assigned to mankind as a whole. These choices are either an acceptance or a rejection of the responsibility of performing this task. But both the acceptance and the rejection take place in relation to the same task. And there would be no such thing as a common task in relationship to which the choices of men could have their genuine meaning unless there were one plan of God according to which all things come to pass. On the objector's basis there would be no true commonness in history.

“On the other hand there would be no truly significant choices of men, either by way of accepting or by way of rejecting the common task of mankind unless these choices are themselves subordinate to the one



plan of God. There would be nothing in relationship to which human choice could take place if it were not for the common plan of God back of all things, and if it were not for the common task that God according to this one plan has set for men. Without this all things would be indeterminate. There would be and could be no culture, no civilization, no history.

“Thus then we return to the particularism of the Gospel, that was so greatly stressed in the other lectures. It is not to tone down this particularism but rather to support it and to show it in the breadth of its significance and in the depth of its foundation that we dealt with common grace.

“There is first the self-contained eternally self-sufficient God. By His sovereign will this God created one world and through His providence He controls and leads this world to the end for which He has created it. At the beginning of the history of this world He created one human pair from whom all men were to spring. And through the first man, Adam, He dealt conditionally with the whole human race. Through Adam He confronted the entire human race with one cultural task. It was in relationship to this one task that Adam, representing all men, made his choice. His choice was therefore significant not in spite of, but because of, the fact that it took place in precisely such a situation and in such circumstances. What seemed to the objector to be determinism thus turns out to be the very condition for freedom and significant choice. If there was to be determinate experience for man it could not take place in a vacuum. It could take place only in relationship to the principle of unity back of all history, namely, the counsel of God, and in relation to the principle of unity within history, namely, the common cultural task set before man.

“And so down through the ages each time the will of man is asked to function it functions in relation to the original cultural task that was given to mankind as a whole. For that cultural task continues to speak through every fact of man’s environment. It speaks always to all men. It speaks more narrowly and more intensely to those to whom the gospel of saving grace is offered. It speaks still more narrowly and still more intensely to those who are born within the sphere of the covenant of saving grace. And as man’s response to the original challenge was ultimately in the hands of the sovereign God and plan so the acceptance or rejection of this task by men still rests upon the sovereign will of God. It is God that wills man to will and to do what is required of him.

“Thus the common task, the common curse, the common grace, the common call to the gospel and a common participation in the promises of the covenant of grace is the background in relationship to which man’s original disobedience, his continued rejection of God in the fact of the facts within and about him, his rejection of Christ when called to Christ and his breaking of the covenant, have their significance. And thus a true Biblical commonness is seen to be involved in a true particularism of the gospel of God.”

## The Lutheran and the Arminian Leave

At this point in the long address of the representative of Calvin those who stood for the views of Lutheranism and Arminianism raised their voices in protest. For a while it had seemed to them that things were not going so badly. But then when it appeared that only such a commonness was to be allowed as would fit in within ultimate particularism of the gospel, they could keep silent no longer.

Even though it was clearly shown to them that unless one held to such a concept of commonness as is correlative to, and therefore necessarily implied in, particularism, he will be carried on to commonness without difference and to difference without commonness: they were not satisfied. Said the representative of Luther: "Calvinism emphasizes the sovereignty of God in such a one-sided manner that the countenance of grace is virtually obliterated" (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Saint Louis, Missouri, 1950, Vol. I, p. 463). "Modern Calvinists teach with Calvin that the purpose of the written Word is not to lead all men to faith and salvation, but to harden the hearts of the majority of the hearers" (*Idem*, Vol. I, p. 275). "But over against the idea of the sovereignty of God, in which we too believe, we must place the counterbalancing notion of man's freedom. We must therefore say that God intends to save all men through Christ and that Christ died for the purpose of saving all men. Particularism, in whatever form it appears, is founded not on the Word of God, but on human speculation as to the will and the work of God" (*Idem*, VI. II, p. 26). "But we know that though God in Christ intends to save all men, God's purpose is not accomplished in a part of mankind (John 3:18: 'He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God')" (*Idem*, Vol. II, p. 27).

The representative of Arminius agreed with this position. He spoke of it as a balanced position, a position in which justice was done to both God and man. Both the Lutheran and the Arminian were sure that when such a position was presented to the objector it might be expected that he would drop his objections and accept Christianity for himself. For the objector, they argued, was after all a reasonable person and a "reasonable person" cannot refuse to admit that the Scriptures are the Word of God, and that what they teach is true. (Cf. Pieper, *Op.Cit.*, Vol. I, p. 310.)

Meanwhile the objector was again rejoicing. He had been very sad when the representative of Calvin had spoken. He realized much better than the Lutheran and the Arminian did that grace is no more grace if God who must give the grace must Himself be dependent on man, and that the freedom of man is no longer freedom when it is cut loose from the plan of God as the only atmosphere in which it can function. The Lutheran and the Arminian did not want particularism. For it they substituted a common grace by which Christ died for all men with the intention of saving them all. But on this basis God's purpose may be and is foiled by men.

On this basis God Himself is involved in the realm of possibility: how then can He even make salvation possible for any one man, let alone making it possible for all men? If God is not the source of possibility then He cannot make salvation possible for men: and if He is the source of possibility then He is this source because He is in control of all actuality.

The objector was glad when he saw that the Lutheran and the Arminian were once more following the road of the *analogy of being* of Romanism and of the *analogy of faith* idea of modern Protestantism. To be sure, he realized that they were doing it inadvertently. He realized that they meant to hold to the grace of God. He realized that they did not want to obliterate the difference between the being of God and the being of man as is done in part in the Romanist and completely in the modern positions. None the less he rejoiced when he saw that the Arminian and the Lutheran were willing to introduce such a notion of common grace as tended to turn into the same destruction of grace as is involved in the Romanist and especially in the modernist Protestant views. The Lutheran and Arminian types of universalism, according to which a finite God does the best He can to save men, by making it possible, so far as He can, that they should be saved has in it a tendency toward the identification of God and man. And having in it this tendency toward the identification of God and man it at the same time has in it a tendency that leads to the destruction of the significance of the will of man.

The objector realized all this. And so at the last he was left alone with the representative of Calvin.

Only in the Reformed Faith is there true commonness and true particularism. The particularism of Calvin's view cannot possibly be supplemented with the universalism of the Lutheran and Arminian view. Each system has its own particularism and its own universalism. The particularism of the Reformed Faith requires a universalism that is based upon the Creator-creature distinction. The particularism of the system of the objector requires a universalism in which there is no difference between God and man. The same must be said of the particularism of the modern Protestantism of Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Barth. Romanist theology seeks to occupy middle ground between Christianity and paganism. Then as to orthodox Protestant theology it is in the Lutheran and in the Arminian systems that there is some measure of non-Christian universalism or commonness, in the idea of Christ dying for all men and making salvation possible for all men. Here God is supposed to have the same attitude toward all men without difference. But the price the Lutheran and the Arminian pay for this identity of attitude is that of God's almighty and all comprehensive control of all things. If the particularism of the Lutheran and the Arminian view is to be maintained then God has to limit Himself when He creates man with a full will of his own. And so when God gave His commandments to men He was not asking them to react to a situation over which He had full control. He was really only able to give them good advice as to how best to get along in the universe. So man's will, in dis-


obeying the law, was not really disobeying the law of God but making an exception to the orderly course of the universe. Therefore God could not make possible the salvation of man; He did not control the universe; He could do His best in the situation, but the situation was not fully under His control.

Realizing all this the objector was finally compelled to face the choice between his own position and that of Scripture and the God of Scripture. Neither the Lutheran nor the Arminian was willing or able, according to his adopted principles, squarely to challenge the unbeliever and give him a reason why he should change his position. The difference between the Christian and the non-Christian position could not be and was not clearly and fully made out except by Calvin. But at last it appeared that if there is to be true challenge of the natural man by the gospel of the sovereign God then the particularism of this gospel must be supported by a commonness of the call of God to all men everywhere. Common grace must support special or saving grace; saving or special grace cannot be adequately presented except in relationship to and in connection with common grace. Together they form the covenant framework in which the sovereign God deals with man.

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