

Systematic Theology 4.1

The Application of the Work of Redemption

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*Part Four: The Doctrine of the Application of the Work of Redemption — Section 4.1: Soteriology in General,
the Holy Spirit's Operations, and Common Grace*

Editorial note

The text has been updated to UK English; gloss boxes have been added to explain technical terms; summaries have been included; and questions for further study have been added. We have also included a master outline with the part represented in this volume shown in bold.

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Berkhof's Systematic Theology: Master Outline

This six-part guide is designed for use at the beginning of each volume. The part represented in this volume is shown in bold.

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The Application of the Work of Redemption

I. Soteriology in General

Soteriology considers how the redemption accomplished by Christ is applied to sinners. It follows the order in which God brings His people into the blessings of salvation.

A. CONNECTION BETWEEN SOTERIOLOGY AND THE PRECEDING LOCI.

GLOSS Soteriology: the doctrine of salvation, especially the application of Christ's redemption to sinners.

SOTERIOLOGY deals with the communication of the blessings of salvation to the sinner and his restoration to divine favor and to a life in intimate communion with God. It presupposes knowledge of God as the all-sufficient source of the life, the strength, and the happiness of mankind, and of man's utter dependence on Him for the present and the future. Since it deals with restoration, redemption, and renewal, it can only be understood properly in the light of the original condition of man as created in the image of God, and of the subsequent disturbance of the proper relationship between man and his God by the entrance of sin into the world. Moreover, since it treats of the salvation of the sinner wholly as a work of God, known to Him from all eternity, it naturally carries our thoughts back to the eternal counsel of peace and the covenant of grace, in which provision was made for the redemption of fallen men. It proceeds on the assumption of the completed work of Christ as the Mediator of redemption. There is the closest possible connection between Christology and Soteriology. Some, as, for instance, Hodge, treat of both under the common heading "Soteriology." Christology then becomes objective, as distinguished from subjective, Soteriology. In defining the contents of Soteriology, it is better to say that it deals with the application of the work of redemption than to say that it treats of the appropriation of salvation. The matter should be studied theologically rather than anthropologically. The work of God rather than the work of man is definitely in the foreground. Pope objects to the use of the former term, since in using it "we are in danger of the predestinarian error which assumes that the finished work of Christ is applied to the individual according to the fixed purpose of an election of grace." This is the very reason why a Calvinist prefers to use that term. To do Pope justice, however, it should be added that he also objects to the other term, because it "tends to the other and Pelagian extreme, too obviously making the atoning provision of Christ a matter of individual free acceptance or rejection." He prefers to speak of "the administration of redemption," which is indeed a very good term.[Christian Theology, II, p. 319.]

B. THE ORDO SALUTIS, (ORDER OF SALVATION).

GLOSS Ordo salutis: the order of salvation: the logical sequence in which God applies redemption to His people.

The Germans speak of "Heilsaneignung," the Dutch, of "Heilsweg" and "Orde des Heils," and the English, of the "Way of Salvation." The ordo salutis describes the process by which the work of salvation, wrought in Christ, is subjectively realized in the hearts and lives of sinners. It aims at describing in their logical order, and also in their interrelations, the various movements of the Holy Spirit in the application of the work of redemption. The emphasis is not on what man does in appropriating the grace of God, but on what God does in applying it. It is but natural that Pelagians should object to this view.

The desire to simplify the *ordo salutis* often led to unwarranted limitations. Weizsaecker would include in it only the operations of the Holy Spirit wrought in the heart of man, and holds that neither calling nor justification can properly be included under this category.[Cf. McPherson, *Chr. Dogm.*, p. 368.] Kaftan, the most prominent Ritschlian dogmatician, is of the opinion that the traditional *ordo salutis* does not constitute an inner unity and therefore ought to be dissolved. He treats of calling under the Word as a means of grace; of regeneration, justification, and the mystical union, under the redemptive work of Christ; and relegates conversion and sanctification to the domain of Christian ethics. The result is that only faith is left, and this constitutes the *ordo salutis*.*[Dogm.*, p. 651.] According to him the *ordo salutis* should include only what is required on the part of man unto salvation, and this is faith, faith only, — a purely anthropological point of view, which probably finds its explanation in the tremendous emphasis of Lutheran theology on active faith.

When we speak of an *ordo salutis*, we do not forget that the work of applying the grace of God to the individual sinner is a unitary process, but simply stress the fact that various movements can be distinguished in the process, that the work of the application of redemption proceeds in a definite and reasonable order, and that God does not impart the fulness of His salvation to the sinner in a single act. Had He done this, the work of redemption would not have come to the consciousness of God's children in all its aspects and in all its divine fulness. Neither do we lose sight of the fact that we often use the terms employed to describe the various movements in a more limited sense than the Bible does.

The question may be raised, whether the Bible ever indicates a definite *ordo salutis*. The answer to that question is that, while it does not explicitly furnish us with a complete order of salvation, it offers us a sufficient basis for such an order. The nearest approach found in Scripture to anything like an *ordo salutis*, is the statement of Paul in Rom. 8:29,30. Some of the Lutheran theologians based their enumeration of the various movements in the application of redemption rather artificially on Acts 26:17,18. But while the Bible does not give us a clear-cut *ordo salutis*, it does do two things which enable us to construe such an order. (1) It furnishes us with a very full and rich enumeration of the operations of the Holy Spirit in applying the work of Christ to individual sinners, and of the blessings of salvation imparted to them. In doing this, it does not always use the very terms employed in Dogmatics, but frequently resorts to the use of other names and to figures of speech. Moreover, it often employs terms which have now acquired a very definite technical meaning in Dogmatics, in a far wider sense. Such words as regeneration, calling, conversion, and renewal repeatedly serve to designate the whole change that is brought about in the inner life of man. (2) It indicates in many passages and in various ways the relation in which the different movements in the work of redemption stand to each other. It teaches that we are justified by faith and not by works, Rom. 3:30; 5:1; Gal. 2:16-20; that, being justified, we have peace with God and access to Him, Rom. 5:1,2; that we are set free from sin to become servants of righteousness, and to reap the fruit of sanctification, Rom. 6:18,22; that when we are adopted as children, we receive the Spirit who gives us assurance, and also become co-heirs with Christ, Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:4,5,6; that faith comes by the hearing of the word of God, Rom. 10:17; that death unto the law results in life unto God, Gal. 2:19,20; that when we believe, we are sealed with the Spirit of God, Eph. 1:13,14; that it is necessary to walk worthily of the calling with which we are called, Eph. 4:1,2; that having obtained the righteousness of God by faith, we share the sufferings of Christ, and also the power of His resurrection, Phil. 3:9,10; and that we are begotten again through the Word of God, I Pet. 1:23. These and similar passages indicate the relation of the various movements of the redemptive work to one another, and thus afford a basis for the construction of an *ordo salutis*.

In view of the fact that the Bible does not specify the exact order that applies in the application of the work of redemption, there is naturally considerable room for a difference of opinion. And as a matter of fact the Churches are not all agreed as to the *ordo salutis*. The doctrine of the order of salvation is a fruit of the

Reformation. Hardly any semblance of it is found in the works of the Scholastics. In pre-Reformation theology scant justice is done to soteriology in general. It does not constitute a separate locus, and its constituent parts are discussed under other rubrics, more or less as *disjecta membra*. Even the greatest of the Schoolmen, such as Peter the Lombard and Thomas Aquinas, pass on at once from the discussion of the incarnation to that of the Church and the sacraments. What may be called their soteriology consists of only two chapters, *de Fide et de Poenitentia*. The *bona opera* also receive considerable attention. Since Protestantism took its start from the criticism and displacement of the Roman Catholic conception of faith, repentance, and good works, it was but natural that the interest of the Reformers should center on the origin and development of the new life in Christ. Calvin was the first to group the various parts of the order of salvation in a systematic way, but even his representation, says Kuyper, is rather subjective, since it formally stresses the human activity rather than the divine.[*Dict. Dogm., De Salute*, pp. 17 f.] Later Reformed theologians corrected this defect. The following representations of the order of salvation reflect the fundamental conceptions of the way of salvation that characterize the various Churches since the Reformation.

1. THE REFORMED VIEW. Proceeding on the assumption that man's spiritual condition depends on his state, that is, on his relation to the law; and that it is only on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ that the sinner can be delivered from the corrupting and destructive influence of sin, — Reformed Soteriology takes its starting point in the union established in the *pactum salutis* between Christ and those whom the Father has given Him, in virtue of which there is an eternal imputation of the righteousness of Christ to those who are His. In view of this precedence of the legal over the moral some theologians, such as Maccovius, Comrie, A. Kuyper Sr., and A. Kuyper Jr., begin the *ordo salutis* with justification rather than regeneration. In doing this they apply the name "justification" also to the ideal imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the elect in the eternal counsel of God. Dr. Kuyper further says that the Reformed differ from the Lutherans in that the former teach justification per *justitiam Christi*, while the latter represent the justification per *fidem* as completing the work of Christ.[*Dict. Dogm., De Salute*, p. 69.] The great majority of Reformed theologians, however, while presupposing the imputation of the righteousness of Christ in the *pactum salutis*, discuss only justification by faith in the order of salvation, and naturally take up its discussion in connection with or immediately after that of faith. They begin the *ordo salutis* with regeneration or with calling, and thus emphasize the fact that the application of the redemptive work of Christ is in its incipency a work of God. This is followed by a discussion of conversion, in which the work of regeneration penetrates to the conscious life of the sinner, and he turns from self, the world, and Satan, to God. Conversion includes repentance and faith, but because of its great importance the latter is generally treated separately. The discussion of faith naturally leads to that of justification, inasmuch as this is mediated to us by faith. And because justification places man in a new relation to God, which carries with it the gift of the Spirit of adoption, and which obliges man to a new obedience and also enables him to do the will of God from the heart, the work of sanctification next comes into consideration. Finally, the order of salvation is concluded with the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and their final glorification.

Bavinck distinguishes three groups in the blessings of salvation. He starts out by saying that sin is guilt, pollution, and misery, for it involves a breaking of the covenant of works, a loss of the image of God, and a subjection to the power of corruption. Christ delivered us from these three by His suffering, His meeting the demands of the law, and His victory over death. Consequently, the blessings of Christ consist in the following: (a) He restores the right relation of man to God and to all creatures by justification, including the forgiveness of sins, the adoption of children, peace with God, and glorious liberty. (b) He renews man in the image of God by regeneration, internal calling, conversion, renewal, and sanctification. (c) He preserves man

for his eternal inheritance, delivers him from suffering and death, and puts him in possession of eternal salvation by preservation, perseverance, and glorification. The first group of blessings is granted unto us by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, is accepted by faith, and sets our conscience free. The second is imparted to us by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, renews us, and redeems us from the power of sin. And the third flows to us by the preserving, guiding, and sealing work of the Holy Spirit as the earnest of our complete redemption, and delivers us, body and soul, from the dominion of misery and death. The first group anoints us as prophets, the second, as priests, and the third, as kings. In connection with the first we look back to the completed work of Christ on the cross, where our sins were atoned; in connection with the second we look up to the living Lord in heaven, who as High Priest is seated at the right hand of the Father; and in connection with the third we look forward to the future coming of Jesus Christ, in which He will subject all enemies and will surrender the kingdom to the Father.

There are some things that should be borne in mind in connection with the *ordo salutis*, as it appears in Reformed theology.

a. Some of the terms are not always used in the same sense. The term justification is generally limited to what is called justification by faith, but is sometimes made to cover an objective justification of the elect in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to them in the *pactum salutis*. Again, the word regeneration, which now generally designates that act of God by which He imparts the principle of the new life to man, is also used to designate the new birth or the first manifestation of the new life, and in the theology of the seventeenth century frequently occurs as synonymous with conversion or even sanctification. Some speak of it as passive conversion in distinction from conversion proper, which is then called active conversion.

b. Several other distinctions also deserve attention. We should carefully distinguish between the judicial and the recreative acts of God, the former (as justification) altering the state, and the latter (as regeneration, conversion), the condition of the sinner; — between the work of the Holy Spirit in the subconscious (regeneration), and that in the conscious life (conversion); — between that which pertains to the putting away of the old man (repentance, crucifying of the old man), and that which constitutes the putting on of the new man (regeneration and in part sanctification); — and between the beginning of the application of the work of redemption (in regeneration and conversion proper), and the continuation of it (in daily conversion and sanctification).

c. In connection with the various movements in the work of application we should bear in mind that the judicial acts of God constitute the basis for His recreative acts, so that justification, though not temporally, is yet logically prior to all the rest; — that the work of God's grace in the subconscious, precedes that in the conscious life, so that regeneration precedes conversion; — and that the judicial acts of God (justification, including the forgiveness of sins and the adoption of children) always address themselves to the consciousness, while of the recreative acts one, namely, regeneration, takes place in the subconscious life.

2. THE LUTHERAN VIEW. The Lutherans, while not denying the doctrines of election, the mystical union, and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, do not take their starting point in any one of these. They fully recognize the fact that the subjective realization of the work of redemption in the hearts and lives of sinners is a work of divine grace, but at the same time give a representation of the *ordo salutis* which places the main emphasis on what is done *a parte hominis* (on the part of man) rather than on what is done *a parte Dei* (on the part of God). They see in faith first of all a gift of God, but at the same time make faith, regarded more particularly as an active principle in man and as an activity of man, the all-determining factor in their order of salvation. Says Pieper: "So kommt denn hinsichtlich der Heilsaneignung alles darauf an,

dass im Menschen der Glaube an das Evangelium entstehe.”[Christl. Dogm. II, p. 477. Cf. also Valentine, Chr. Theol. II, pp. 258 ff.] Attention was already called to the fact that Kaftan regards faith as the whole of the *ordo salutis*. This emphasis on faith as an active principle is undoubtedly due to the fact that in the Lutheran Reformation the doctrine of justification by faith — often called the material principle of the Reformation — was very much in the foreground. According to Pieper the Lutheran takes his starting point in the fact that in Christ God is reconciled to the world of humanity. God announces this fact to man in the gospel and offers to put man subjectively in possession of that forgiveness of sins or justification which was objectively wrought in Christ. This calling is always accompanied with a certain measure of illumination and of quickening, so that man receives the power to not-resist the saving operation of the Holy Spirit. It frequently results in repentance, and this may issue in regeneration, by which the Holy Spirit endows the sinner with saving grace. Now all these, namely, calling, illumination, repentance, and regeneration, are really only preparatory, and are strictly speaking not yet blessings of the covenant of grace. They are experienced apart from any living relation to Christ, and merely serve to lead the sinner to Christ. “Regeneration is conditioned by the conduct of man with regard to the influence exerted upon him,” and therefore “will take place at once or gradually, as man’s resistance is greater or less.”[Schmid, Doct. Theol., p. 464.] In it man is endowed with a saving faith by which he appropriates the forgiveness or justification that is objectively given in Christ, is adopted as a child of God, is united to Christ in a mystical union, and receives the spirit of renewal and sanctification, the living principle of a life of obedience. The permanent possession of all these blessings depends on the continuance of faith, — on an active faith on the part of man. If man continues to believe, he has peace and joy, life and salvation; but if he ceases to exercise faith, all this becomes doubtful, uncertain, and amissible. There is always a possibility that the believer will lose all that he possesses.

3. THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW. In Roman Catholic theology the doctrine of the Church precedes the discussion of the *ordo salutis*. Children are regenerated by baptism, but they who first become acquainted with the gospel in later life receive a *gratia sufficiens*, consisting in an illumination of the mind and a strengthening of the will. Man can resist this grace, but can also assent to it. If he assents to it, it turns into a *gratia co-operans*, in which man co-operates to prepare himself for justification. This preparation consists of seven parts: (a) a believing acceptance of the Word of God, (b) an insight into one’s sinful condition, (c) hope in the mercy of God, (d) the beginning of love to God, (e) an abhorrence of sin, (f) a resolve to obey the commandments of God, and (g) a desire for baptism. It is quite evident that faith does not occupy a central place here, but is simply co-ordinated with the other preparations. It is merely an intellectual assent to the doctrines of the Church (*fides informis*) and acquires its justifying power only through the love that is imparted in the *gratia infusa* (*fides caritate formata*). It can be called justifying faith only in the sense that it is the basis and root of all justification as the first of the preparations named above. After this preparation justification itself follows in baptism. This consists in the infusion of grace, of supernatural virtues, followed by the forgiveness of sins. The measure of this forgiveness is commensurate with the degree in which sin is actually overcome. It should be borne in mind that justification is given freely, and is not merited by the preceding preparations. The gift of justification is preserved by obeying the commandments and by doing good works. In the *gratia infusa* man receives the supernatural strength to do good works and thus to merit (with a *merit de condigno*, that is, real merit) all following grace and even everlasting life. The grace of God thus serves the purpose of enabling man once more to merit salvation. But it is not certain that man will retain the forgiveness of sins. The grace of justification may be lost, not only through unbelief, but through any mortal sin. It may be regained, however, by the sacrament of penance, consisting of contrition (or, attrition) and confession, together with absolution and works of satisfaction. Both the guilt of sin and eternal punishment are removed by absolution, but temporal penalties can be canceled only by works of satisfaction.

4. THE ARMINIAN VIEW. The Arminian order of salvation, while ostensibly ascribing the work of salvation to God, really makes it contingent on the attitude and the work of man. God opens up the possibility of salvation for man, but it is up to man to improve the opportunity. The Arminian regards the atonement of Christ “as an oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world” (Pope), that is, for the sins of every individual of the human race. He denies that the guilt of Adam’s sin is imputed to all his descendants, and that man is by nature totally depraved, and therefore unable to do any spiritual good; and believes that, while human nature is undoubtedly injured and deteriorated as the result of the fall, man is still able, by nature, to do that which is spiritually good and to turn to God. But because of the evil bias, the perverseness, and the sluggishness of sinful human nature, God imparts to it gracious assistance. He bestows sufficient grace upon all men to enable them, if they choose, to attain to the full possession of spiritual blessings, and ultimately to salvation. The gospel offer comes to all men indiscriminately and exerts a merely moral influence on them, while they have it in their power to resist it or to yield to it. If they yield to it, they will turn to Christ in repentance and faith. These movements of the soul are not (as in Calvinism) the results of regeneration, but are merely introductory to the state of grace properly so called. When their faith really terminates in Christ, this faith is, for the sake of the merits of Christ, imputed to them for righteousness. This does not mean that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to them as their very own, but that, in view of what Christ did for sinners, their faith, which involves the principle of obedience, honesty of heart, and good dispositions, is accepted in lieu of a perfect obedience and is reckoned to them for righteousness. On this basis, then, they are justified, which in the Arminian scheme generally simply means that their sins are pardoned, and not that they are accepted as righteous. Arminians often put it in this form: The forgiveness of sins is based on the merits of Christ, but acceptance with God rests on man’s obedience to the law or evangelical obedience. Faith not only serves to justify, but also to regenerate sinners. It insures to man the grace of evangelical obedience and this, if allowed to function through life, issues in the grace of perseverance. However, the grace of God is always resistible and amissible.

The so-called Wesleyan or Evangelical Arminian does not entirely agree with the Arminianism of the seventeenth century. While his position shows greater affinity with Calvinism than the original Arminianism does, it is also more inconsistent. It admits that the guilt of Adam’s sin is imputed to all his descendants, but at the same time holds that all men are justified in Christ, and that therefore this guilt is at once removed, at birth. It also admits the entire moral depravity of man in the state of nature, but goes on to stress the fact that no man exists in that state of nature, since there is a universal application of the work of Christ through the Holy Spirit, by which the sinner is enabled to co-operate with the grace of God. It emphasizes the necessity of a supernatural (hyper-physical) work of grace to effect the sinner’s renovation and sanctification. Moreover, it teaches the doctrine of Christian perfection or entire sanctification in the present life. It may be added that, while Arminius made the bestowal on man of an ability to co-operate with God a matter of justice, Wesley regarded this as a matter of pure grace. This is the type of Arminianism with which we mostly come in contact. We meet with it, not only in the Methodist Church, but also in large sections of other Churches, and especially in the many undenominational Churches of the present day.

II. The Operation of the Holy Spirit in General

The Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ and gives life to the Church. His operations are both general in creation and special in the saving work of grace.

A. TRANSITION TO THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

GLOSS Holy Spirit's work: the Spirit's application of Christ's saving work, bringing sinners into the life of grace.

As already intimated in the preceding, in passing from Christology to Soteriology, we pass from the objective to the subjective, from the work which God accomplished for us in Christ and which is in its sacrificial aspect a finished work, to the work which He realizes as time goes on in the hearts and lives of believers, and in which they are permitted, and also expected, to co-operate. And in the construction of this doctrine, too, we should be guided by Scripture. Dr. Bavinck calls attention to a difficulty that arises here, since the Bible seems to teach on the one hand that the whole work of redemption is finished in Christ, so that nothing remains for man to do; and on the other hand, that the really decisive thing must still be accomplished in and through man. Its teaching respecting the way of redemption seems to be both autosoteric and heterosoteric. Therefore it is necessary to guard against all one-sidedness, and to avoid both the Scylla of Nomism, as it appears in Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism, and Neonomism, and the Charybdis of Antinomianism, as it reared its head, sometimes as a specific doctrine and sometimes as a mere doctrinal tendency, in some of the sects, such as the Nicolaitans, the Alexandrian Gnostics, the Brethren of the Free Spirit, the Anabaptists of the more fanatic type, the followers of Agricola, the Moravians, and some of the Plymouth brethren. Nomism denies the sovereign election of God by which He has infallibly determined, not on the basis of the foreseen attitude or works of men, but according to His good pleasure, who would and would not be saved; rejects the idea that Christ by His atoning death, not only made salvation possible, but actually secured it for all those for whom He laid down His life, so that eternal life is in the most absolute sense of the word a free gift of God, and in its bestowal human merits are not taken into consideration; and maintains, either that man can save himself without the aid of renewing grace (Pelagianism), or can accomplish this with the assistance of divine grace (Semi-Pelagianism and Arminianism). On the other hand Antinomianism, which is sometimes said to be favored by hyper-Calvinism, holds that the imputation of our sins to Christ made Him personally a sinner, and that the application of His righteousness to us makes us personally righteous, so that God sees no sin in us any more; that the union of believers with Christ is a "union of identity" and makes them in all respects one with Him; that the work of the Holy Spirit is quite superfluous, since the sinner's redemption was completed on the cross, or — even more extreme — that the work of Christ was also unnecessary, since the whole matter was settled in the eternal decree of God; that the sinner is justified in the resurrection of Christ or even in the counsel of redemption, and therefore does not need justification by faith or receives in this merely a declaration of a previously accomplished justification; and that believers are free from the law, not only as a condition of the covenant of works, but also as a rule of life. It virtually denies the personality and work of the Holy Spirit, and in some cases even the objective atonement through Christ. Both atonement and justification are from eternity. The penitent sinner wrongly proceeds on the assumption that God is angry with him and merely needs information on that point. Moreover, he should realize that whatever sins he may commit cannot affect his standing with God.

Scripture teaches us to recognize a certain economy in the work of creation and redemption and warrants our speaking of the Father and our creation, of the Son and our redemption, and of the Holy Spirit and our sanctification. The Holy Spirit has not only a personality of His own, but also a distinctive method of working; and therefore we should distinguish between the work of Christ in meriting salvation and the work of the Holy Spirit in applying it. Christ met the demands of divine justice and merited all the blessings of salvation. But His work is not yet finished. He continues it in heaven, in order to put those for whom He laid

down His life in possession of all that He has merited for them. Even the work of application is a work of Christ, but a work which He accomplishes through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Though this work stands out in the economy of redemption as the work of the Holy Spirit, it cannot for a moment be separated from the work of Christ. It is rooted in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and carries this to completion, and that not without the co-operation of the subjects of redemption. Christ Himself points out the close connection when He says: "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He shall guide you into all the truth: for He shall not speak from Himself; but what things soever He shall hear, these shall He speak: and He shall declare unto you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me, for He shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you." John 16:13,14.

B. GENERAL AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

GLOSS General and special operations: the Spirit's work in all creation and His distinct, saving work in God's people.

Scripture clearly shows that not all the operations of the Holy Spirit are part and parcel of the saving work of Jesus Christ. Just as the Son of God is not only the Mediator of redemption, but also the Mediator of creation, so the Holy Spirit, as represented in Scripture, is operative, not only in the work of redemption, but also in the work of creation. Naturally, Soteriology is concerned with His redemptive work only, but for its proper understanding it is highly desirable to take some account of His more general operations.

1. THE GENERAL OPERATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. It is a well known fact that the trinitarian distinctions are not as clearly revealed in the Old Testament as in the New. The term "Spirit of God," as it is employed in the Old Testament, does not always denote a person, and even in cases in which the personal idea is clearly present, does not always specifically point to the third person of the Holy Trinity. It is sometimes used figuratively to denote the breath of God, Job 32:8; Ps. 33:6, and in some instances is simply a synonym for "God," Ps. 139:7,8; Isa. 40:13. It serves very commonly to designate the power of life, the principle that causes the creatures to live, and that is in a unique way peculiar to God. The spirit dwelling in the creatures, and on which their very existence depends, is from God and binds them to God, Job 32:8; 33:4; 34:14,15; Ps. 104:29; Isa. 42:5. God is called the "God (or, "Father") of the spirits of all flesh," Num. 16:22; 27:16; Heb. 12:9. In some of these cases it is quite evident that the Spirit of God is not a mere power but a person. The very first passage in which the Spirit is mentioned, Gen. 1:2, already calls attention to this life-giving function, and this is particularized in connection with the creation of man, Gen. 2:7. The Spirit of God generates life and carries the creative work of God to completion, Job 33:4; 34:14,15; Ps. 104:29,30; Isa. 42:5. It is evident from the Old Testament that the origin of life, its maintenance, and its development depend on the operation of the Holy Spirit. The withdrawal of the Spirit means death.

Extraordinary exhibitions of power, feats of strength and daring, are also referred to the Spirit of God. The judges whom God raised up for the deliverance of Israel were evidently men of considerable ability and of unusual daring and strength, but the real secret of their accomplishments lay not in themselves, but in a supernatural power that came upon them. It is said repeatedly that "the spirit of Jehovah came (mightily) upon them," Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14. It was the Spirit of God that enabled them to work deliverance for the people. There is also a clear recognition of the operation of the Holy Spirit in the intellectual sphere. Elihu speaks of this when he says: "But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty giveth them understanding." Job 32:8. Intellectual insight, or the ability to understand the problems of life, is ascribed to an illuminating influence of the Holy Spirit. The heightening of artistic skill is also

ascribed to the Spirit of the Lord, Ex. 28:3; 31:3; 35:30 ff. Certain men, characterized by special endowments, were qualified for the finer work that was to be done in connection with the construction of the tabernacle and the adornment of the priestly garments, cf. also Neh. 9:20. Again, the Spirit of the Lord is represented as qualifying men for various offices. The Spirit was put, and rested, upon the seventy who were appointed to assist Moses in ruling and judging the people of Israel, Num. 11:17,25,26. These also received the spirit of prophecy temporarily, to attest their calling. Joshua was chosen as the successor of Moses, because he had the Spirit of the Lord, Num. 27:18. When Saul and David were anointed as kings, the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, to qualify them for their important task, I Sam. 10:6,10; 16:13,14. Finally, the Spirit of God also clearly operated in the prophets as the Spirit of revelation. David says, “The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me, and His word was upon my tongue,” II Sam. 23:2. Nehemiah testifies in Neh. 9:30: “Yet many years didst thou bear with them, and testifiedst against them by thy Spirit through the prophets: yet they would not give ear.” Ezekiel speaks of a vision by the Spirit of Jehovah, 11:24, and in Zech. 7:12 we read: “Yea, they made their heart as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which Jehovah of hosts had sent in His Spirit by the former prophets.” Cf. also I Kings 22:24; I Pet. 1:11; II Pet. 1:21.

2. THE RELATION BETWEEN THE GENERAL AND THE SPECIAL OPERATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. There is a certain similarity between the general and the special operations of the Holy Spirit. By His general operations He originates, maintains, strengthens, and guides all life, organic, intellectual, and moral. He does this in different ways and in harmony with the objects concerned. Something similar may be said of His special operation. In the redemptive sphere He also originates the new life, fructifies it, guides it in its development, and leads it to its destiny. But in spite of this similarity, there is nevertheless an essential difference between the operations of the Holy Spirit in the sphere of creation and those in the sphere of redemption or re-creation. In the former He originates, maintains, develops and guides the life of the natural creation, restrains for the present the deteriorating and devastating influence of sin in the lives of men and of society, and enables men to maintain a certain order and decorum in their communal life, to do what is outwardly good and right in their relations to each other, and to develop the talents with which they were endowed at creation. In the latter, on the other hand, He originates, maintains, develops, and guides the new life that is born from above, is nourished from above, and will be perfected above, — a life that is heavenly in principle, though lived on earth. By His special operation the Holy Spirit overcomes and destroys the power of sin, renews man in the image of God, and enables him to render spiritual obedience to God, to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and a spiritual leaven in every sphere of life. While the work of the Holy Spirit in creation in general undoubtedly has a certain independent significance, yet it is made subordinate to the work of redemption. The entire life of the elect, also that preceding their new birth, is determined and governed by God with a view to their final destiny. Their natural life is so regulated that, when it is renewed, it will answer to the purpose of God.

C. THE HOLY SPIRIT AS THE DISPENSER OF DIVINE GRACE.

As the covenant in which God made provision for the salvation of sinners is called the covenant of grace, and as the Mediator of the covenant is said to have appeared “full of grace,” so that we can receive out of His fulness “grace for grace,” John 1:16,17, so the Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of grace,” since He takes the “grace of Christ” and confers it on us.

1. THE BIBLICAL USE OF THE TERM “GRACE”. The word “grace” is not always used in the same sense in Scripture, but has a variety of meanings. In the Old Testament we have the word *chen* (adj. *chanun*), from the root *chanan*. The noun may denote gracefulness or beauty, Prov. 22:11; 31:30, but most generally means favour or good-will. The Old Testament repeatedly speaks of finding favour in the eyes of God or of man.

The favour so found carries with it the bestowal of favours or blessings. This means that grace is not an abstract quality, but is an active, working principle, manifesting itself in beneficent acts, Gen. 6:8; 19:19; 33:15; Ex. 33:12; 34:9; I Sam. 1:18; 27:5; Esth. 2:7. The fundamental idea is, that the blessings graciously bestowed are freely given, and not in consideration of any claim or merit. The New Testament word *charis*, from *chairein*, “to rejoice,” denotes first of all a pleasant external appearance, “loveliness,” “agreeableness,” “acceptableness,” and has some such meaning in Luke 4:22; Col. 4:6. A more prominent meaning of the word, however, is favour or good-will, Luke 1:30; 2:40,52; Acts 2:47; 7:46; 24:27; 25:9. It may denote the kindness or beneficence of our Lord, II Cor. 8:9, or the favour manifested or bestowed by God, II Cor. 9:8 (referring to material blessings); I Pet. 5:10. Furthermore, the word is expressive of the emotion awakened in the heart of the recipient of such favour, and thus acquires the meaning “gratitude” or “thankfulness,” Luke 4:22; I Cor. 10:30; 15:57; II Cor. 2:14; 8:16; I Tim. 1:12. In most of the passages, however, in which the word *charis* is used in the New Testament, it signifies the unmerited operation of God in the heart of man, effected through the agency of the Holy Spirit. While we sometimes speak of grace as an inherent quality, it is in reality the active communication of divine blessings by the inworking of the Holy Spirit, out of the fulness of Him who is “full of grace and truth,” Rom. 3:24; 5:2,15, 17,20; 6:1; I Cor. 1:4; II Cor. 6:1; 8:9; Eph. 1:7; 2:5,8; 3:7; I Pet. 3:7; 5:12.

2. THE GRACE OF GOD IN THE WORK OF REDEMPTION. A discussion of the grace of God in connection with the work of redemption again calls for several distinctions, which should be borne in mind.

a. In the first place grace is an attribute of God, one of the divine perfections. It is God’s free, sovereign, undeserved favour or love to man, in his state of sin and guilt, which manifests itself in the forgiveness of sin and deliverance from its penalty. It is connected with the mercy of God as distinguished from His justice. This is redemptive grace in the most fundamental sense of the word. It is the ultimate cause of God’s elective purpose, of the sinner’s justification, and of his spiritual renewal; and the prolific source of all spiritual and eternal blessings.

b. In the second place the term “grace” is used as a designation of the objective provision which God made in Christ for the salvation of man. Christ as the Mediator is the living embodiment of the grace of God. “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us ... full of grace and truth,” John 1:14. Paul has the appearance of Christ in mind, when he says: “For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men,” Tit. 2:11. But the term is applied not only to what Christ is, but also to what He merited for sinners. When the apostle speaks repeatedly in the closing salutations of his Epistles of “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,” he has in mind the grace of which Christ is the meritorious cause. John says: “The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ,” John 1:17. Cf. also Eph. 2:7.

c. In the third place the word “grace” is used to designate the favour of God as it is manifested in the application of the work of redemption by the Holy Spirit. It is applied to the pardon which we receive in justification, a pardon freely given by God, Rom. 3:24; 5:2,21; Tit. 3:15. But in addition to that it is also a comprehensive name for all the gifts of the grace of God, the blessings of salvation, and the spiritual graces which are wrought in the hearts and lives of believers through the operation of the Holy Spirit, Acts 11:23; 18:27; Rom. 5:17; I Cor. 15:10; II Cor. 9:14; Eph. 4:7; Jas. 4:5,6; I Pet. 3:7. Moreover, there are clear indications of the fact that it is not a mere passive quality, but also an active force, a power, something that labours, I Cor. 15:10; II Cor. 12:9; II Tim. 2:1. In this sense of the word it is something like a synonym for the Holy Spirit, so that there is little difference between “full of the Holy Spirit” and “full of grace and power” in Acts 6:5 and 8. The Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of grace” in Heb. 10:29. It is especially in connection with the teachings of Scripture respecting the application of the grace of God to the sinner by the Holy Spirit, that the doctrine of grace was developed in the Church.

3. THE DOCTRINE OF GRACE IN THE CHURCH. The teachings of Scripture respecting the grace of God stress the fact that God distributes His blessings to men in a free and sovereign manner, and not in consideration of any inherent merit of men; that men owe all the blessings of life to a beneficent, forbearing, and longsuffering God; and especially that all the blessings of the work of salvation are freely given of God, and are in no way determined by supposed merits of men. This is clearly expressed by Paul in the following words: “For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory,” Eph. 2:8,9. He strongly emphasizes the fact that salvation is not by works, Rom. 3:20-28; 4:16; Gal. 2:16.

This doctrine did not go entirely unchallenged. In some of the early Church Fathers, particularly of the Eastern Church, we already meet with a strain of moralism that is not in harmony with the Pauline emphasis. The tendency that became apparent in that section of the Church, finally culminated in Pelagianism. Pelagius’ conception of grace was rather unusual. According to Wiggers he comprehended under grace: (a) “The power of doing good (*possibilitas boni*), and therefore especially free will itself” (b) “The revelation, the law, and the example of Christ, by which the practice of virtue is made easier for man.” (c) “Our being so made as to be able, by our own will, to abstain from sin, and in God’s giving us the help of His law and His commands, and in His pardoning the previous sins of those who return to Him.” (d) “Supernatural influences on the Christian, by which his understanding is enlightened and the practice of virtue is rendered easy to him.” [Augustinism and Pelagianism, pp. 179-183.] He recognized no direct operation of the Spirit of God on the will of man, but only an indirect operation on the will through the enlightened conscience. In his view the operation of the grace of God was primarily, though not exclusively, external and natural. In opposition to the Pelagian view, that of Augustine is often designated as “the theology of grace.” While Augustine admitted that the word “grace” could be used in a wider sense (natural grace), and that even in the state of integrity it was the grace of God that made it possible for Adam to retain his uprightness, his main emphasis is always on grace as the gift of God to fallen man, which manifests itself in the forgiveness of sin and in the renewal and sanctification of human nature. In view of the total depravity of man he regards this grace as absolutely necessary unto salvation. It is wrought in man by the operation of the Holy Spirit, who dwells and works in the elect and is the principle of all the blessings of salvation. He distinguished between operating or prevenient, and co-operating or subsequent grace. The former enables the will to choose the good, and the latter co-operates with the already enabled will, to do the good. In his struggle with Semi-Pelagianism Augustine emphasized the entirely gratuitous and irresistible character of the grace of God.

In the subsequent struggles the Augustinian doctrine of grace was only partly victorious. Seeberg expresses himself as follows: “Thus the doctrine of ‘grace alone’ came off victorious; but the Augustinian doctrine of predestination was abandoned. The irresistible grace of predestination was driven from the field by the sacramental grace of baptism.” [History of Doctrine, I, p. 382.] During the Middle Ages the Scholastics paid considerable attention to the subject of grace, but did not always agree as to the details of the doctrine. Some approached the Augustinian, and others the Semi-Pelagian conception of grace. In general it may be said that they conceived of grace as mediated through the sacraments, and that they sought to combine with the doctrine of grace a doctrine of merit which seriously compromised the former. The emphasis was not on grace as the favor of God shown to sinners, but on grace as a quality of the soul, which might be regarded as both uncreated (i.e., as the Holy Spirit), or as increated, or wrought in the hearts of men by the Holy Spirit. This infused grace is basic to the development of the Christian virtues, and enables man to acquire merit with God, to merit further grace, though he cannot merit the grace of perseverance. This can only be

obtained as a free gift of God. The Scholastics did not, like Augustine, maintain the logical connection between the doctrine of grace and the doctrine of predestination.

The Reformers went back to the Augustinian conception of grace, but avoided his sacramentarianism. They placed the emphasis once more on grace as the unmerited favour of God shown to sinners, and represented it in a manner which excluded all merit on the part of the sinner. Says Smeaton: “The term grace, which in Augustine’s acceptation intimated the inward exercise of love, awakened by the operations of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), and which in the scholastic theology had come to denote a quality of the soul, or the inner endowments, and infused habits of faith, love, and hope, was now taken in the more scriptural and wider sense for the free, the efficacious favour which is in the divine mind.” [The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, p. 346.] While the Reformers used the term grace in connection with justification, in other connections they often used the phrase, “the work of the Holy Spirit,” instead of the term grace. While they all emphasized grace in the sense of the internal and saving operation of the Holy Spirit, Calvin especially developed the idea of common grace, that is, a grace which, while it is the expression of the favour of God, does not have a saving effect. According to the splendid dogma-historical study of Dr. H. Kuiper on Calvin on Common Grace, [pp. 179 ff.] he even distinguished three kinds of common grace, namely, universal common grace, general common grace, and covenant common grace. The Arminians departed from the doctrine of the Reformation on this point. According to them God gives sufficient (common) grace to all men, and thereby enables them to repent and believe. If the human will concurs or co-operates with the Holy Spirit and man actually repents and believes, God confers on man the further grace of evangelical obedience and the grace of perseverance. Thus the work of the grace of God is made to depend on the consent of the will of man. There is no such thing as irresistible grace. Says Smeaton in the work already quoted: “It was held that every one could obey or resist; that the cause of conversion was not the Holy Spirit so much as the human will concurring or co-operating; and that this was the immediate cause of conversion.” [p. 357.] Amyraldus of the School of Saumur did not really improve on the Arminian position by his assumption, in connection with the general decree of God, that the sinner, while devoid of the moral ability, yet has the natural ability to believe, an unfortunate distinction, which was also carried over into New England by Edwards, Bellamy and Fuller. Pajon, a disciple of Amyraldus, denied the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit in the internal illumination of sinners, in order to their saving conversion. The only thing which he regarded as necessary was that the understanding, which has in itself a sufficiency of clear ideas, should be struck by the light of external revelation. Bishop Warburton in his work on The Doctrine of Grace, or the Office and Operations of the Holy Spirit knows of no saving grace in the accepted sense of the word, but limits the word “grace” to the extraordinary operations of the Spirit in the apostolic age. And Junckheim in his important work denied the supernatural character of God’s work in the conversion of the sinner, and affirmed that the moral power of the word effected all. The Methodist Revival in England and the Great Awakening in our own country brought with them a restoration of the doctrine of saving grace, though in some cases tinged more or less with Arminianism. For Schleiermacher the problem of the guilt of sin was practically non-existent, since he denied the objective existence of guilt. And consequently he knows little or nothing of the saving grace of God. Says Mackintosh: “This central Biblical truth (of divine mercy to sinners) Schleiermacher for the most part passes by in silence, or mentions only in a perfunctory fashion that shows how little he understands it.” [Types of Modern Theology, p. 96.] The doctrine of divine grace is also necessarily obscured in the theology of Albrecht Ritschl. And it may be said to be characteristic of the whole of modern liberal theology, with its emphasis on the goodness of man, that it has lost sight of the necessity of the saving grace of God. The word “grace” has gradually disappeared from the written and spoken word of many theologians, and many of the common people in our day attach no other meaning to the term than that of gracefulness or graciousness. Even Otto calls attention to it in his work on The Idea of the Holy that people fail to sense the

deeper meaning of the word.[pp. 32 ff., 145.] The Theology of Crisis deserves credit for stressing anew the need of divine grace, with the result that the word is once more coming into use.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY: On which elements of the *ordo salutis* did the emphasis fall in the first three centuries? In how far did these centuries reveal a drift towards moralism and ceremonialism? How was the doctrine of justification understood? How did Augustine conceive of it? What was his conception of faith? How many kinds of grace did he distinguish? Did grace exclude all merit in his system? Did he conceive of saving grace as amissible? What factors favored the development of the doctrine of good works? How did the Scholastics represent the doctrine of justification? How did the *ordo salutis* fare in the hands of the Antinomians? How did the rationalistic and pietistic neonomians conceive of it? What other than saving operations are ascribed to the Holy Spirit in Scripture? Which are the different meanings of the word 'grace' in Scripture? What does it designate in connection with the work of redemption? What is the relation between the doctrines of free will and grace in history?

III. Common Grace

Common grace is God's undeserved favour restraining sin and preserving good in a fallen world. It is distinct from saving grace, which renews and saves God's people.

In connection with the general operations of the Holy Spirit the subject of common grace also calls for attention. It should be understood, however, that Reformed theology does not, like Arminian theology, regard the doctrine of common grace as a part of Soteriology. At the same time it does recognize a close connection between the operations of the Holy Spirit in the sphere of creation and in that of redemption, and therefore feels that they should not be entirely dissociated.

A. ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF COMMON GRACE.

GLOSS Common grace: God's non-saving favour that restrains sin and sustains order, gifts, and goodness among all people.

1. THE PROBLEM WITH WHICH IT DEALS. The origin of the doctrine of common grace was occasioned by the fact that there is in the world, alongside of the course of the Christian life with all its blessings, a natural course of life, which is not redemptive and yet exhibits many traces of the true, the good, and the beautiful. The question arose, How can we explain the comparatively orderly life in the world, seeing that the whole world lies under the curse of sin? How is it that the earth yields precious fruit in rich abundance and does not simply bring forth thorns and thistles? How can we account for it that sinful man still "retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and shows some regard for virtue and for good outward behavior"? What explanation can be given of the special gifts and talents with which the natural man is endowed, and of the development of science and art by those who are entirely devoid of the new life that is in Christ Jesus? How can we explain the religious aspirations of men everywhere, even of those who did not come in touch with the Christian religion? How can the unregenerate still speak the truth, do good to others, and lead outwardly virtuous lives? These are some of the questions to which the doctrine of common grace seeks to supply the answer.

2. AUGUSTINE'S ATTITUDE TO THIS PROBLEM. Augustine did not teach the doctrine of common grace, though he did not use the word "grace" exclusively as a designation of saving grace. He spoke of a grace which Adam enjoyed before the fall, and even admitted that man's existing as a living, sentient, and rational being might be termed grace. But over against Pelagius, who stressed the natural ability of man and recognized no other grace than that consisting in the natural endowments of man, the law and the gospel,

the example of Christ, and the illumination of the understanding by a gracious influence of God, — he emphasized the total inability of man and his absolute dependence on the grace of God as an inner renewing power, which not only illumines the mind but also acts directly on the will of man, either as operating or as co-operating grace. He employs the word “grace” almost exclusively in this sense, and regards this grace as the necessary condition to the performance of each good act. When the Pelagians pointed to the virtues of the heathen, who “merely through the power of innate freedom” were often merciful, discreet, chaste, and temperate, he answered that these so-called virtues were sins, because they did not spring from faith. He admits that the heathen can perform certain acts which are in themselves good and from a lower point of view even praiseworthy, but yet considers these deeds, as the deeds of unregenerate persons, to be sin, because they do not spring from the motive of love to God or of faith, and do not answer to the right purpose, the glory of God.[Cf. Polman, *De Predestinatieleer van Augustinus*, Thomas van Aquino en Calvijn, pp. 77 f.; Shedd, *History of Christian Doctrine II*, pp. 75 f.] He denies that such deeds are the fruit of any natural goodness in man.

3. THE VIEW THAT DEVELOPED DURING THE MIDDLE AGES. During the Middle Ages the Augustinian antithesis of sin and grace gave way to that of nature and grace. This was based on another antithesis which played an important part in Roman Catholic theology, namely, that of the natural and the supernatural. In the state of integrity man was endowed with the supernatural gift of original righteousness, which served as a bridle to hold the lower nature in check. As the result of the fall, man lost this supernatural gift, but his real nature remained or was but slightly affected. A sinful bias developed, but this did not prohibit man from producing much that was true, and good, and beautiful. However, without the infusion of the grace of God, all this did not suffice to give one a claim to life eternal. In connection with the antithesis of the natural and the supernatural, the Roman Catholic Church developed the distinction between the moral virtues of humility, obedience, meekness, liberality, temperance, chastity, and diligence in what is good, which men can gain for themselves by their own labors, and with the timely aid of divine grace; and the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which are infused into man by sanctifying grace. Anabaptism and Socinianism suffer from the same antithesis, but with the distinction that the former exalts grace at the expense of nature, while the latter exalts nature at the expense of grace.

4. THE POSITION OF THE REFORMERS AND OF REFORMED THEOLOGY. On this, as on some other points of doctrine, Luther did not entirely escape the leaven of Roman Catholicism. While he did return to the Augustinian antithesis of sin and grace, he drew a sharp distinction between the lower earthly sphere and the higher spiritual sphere, and maintained that fallen man is by nature capable of doing much that is good and praiseworthy in the lower or earthly sphere, though he is utterly incapable of doing any spiritual good. With an appeal to Augustine the Augsburg Confession teaches “that man’s will hath some liberty to work a civil righteousness, and to choose such things as reason can reach unto; but that it hath no power to work the righteousness of God.”[Art. XVIII.] The Article contains a quotation from Augustine, in which many of the good works pertaining to the present life, which the natural man can do, are named. Zwingli conceived of sin as pollution rather than as guilt, and consequently regarded the grace of God as sanctifying, rather than as pardoning, grace. This sanctifying influence, which penetrated in a measure even into the Gentile world, accounts for the true, the good, and the beautiful that is in the world. Calvin did not agree with the position of Luther, nor with that of Zwingli. He firmly maintained that the natural man can of himself do no good work whatsoever and strongly insisted on the particular nature of saving grace. He developed alongside of the doctrine of particular grace the doctrine of common grace. This is a grace which is communal, does not pardon nor purify human nature, and does not effect the salvation of sinners. It curbs the destructive power of sin, maintains in a measure the moral order of the universe, thus making an orderly

life possible, distributes in varying degrees gifts and talents among men, promotes the development of science and art, and showers untold blessings upon the children of men. Since the days of Calvin the doctrine of common grace was generally recognized in Reformed theology, though it also met with occasional opposition. For a long time, however, little was done to develop the doctrine. This was in all probability due to the fact that the rise and prevalence of Rationalism made it necessary to place all emphasis on special grace. Up to the present Kuyper and Bavinck did more than any one else for the development of the doctrine of common grace.

B. NAME AND CONCEPT OF COMMON GRACE.

1. NAME. The name “common grace” as a designation of the grace now under discussion cannot be said to owe its origin to Calvin. Dr. H. Kuiper in his work on Calvin on Common Grace says that he found only four passages in Calvin’s works in which the adjective “common” is used with the noun “grace,” and in two of these the Reformer is speaking of saving grace.[Cf. p. 178.] In later Reformed theology, however, the name *gratia communis* came into general use to express the idea that this grace extends to all men, in contrast with the *gratia particularis* which is limited to a part of mankind, namely, to the elect. In course of time it became evident that the term “communis” admitted of various interpretations. In Dutch theology it is often regarded as equivalent to “general,” and as a result it became customary to speak of “general grace” (*algemeene genade*) in the Netherlands. Strictly speaking, however, the term *communis*, as applied to grace, while implying that it is general in some sense of the word, stresses the fact that this grace is communal, that is, possessed in common by all creatures, or by all men, or by those who live under the administration of the gospel. Thus Dr. H. Kuiper classifies the common grace of which Calvin speaks under three heads, namely: (1) Universal Common Grace, a grace that extends to all creatures; (2) General Common Grace, that is a grace which applies to mankind in general and to every member of the human race; and (3) Covenant Common Grace, a grace that is common to all those who live in the sphere of the covenant, whether they belong to the elect or not. It is quite evident that Reformed theologians also subsumed under the term “common grace” a grace that is not general, namely, the external privileges of those who are living under the administration of the gospel, including the external universal calling. At the same time they point out that this grace, in distinction from general common grace, belongs to the economy of redemption.[Cf. Mastricht, *God geleerdheit* I, p. 441; Brakel, *Redelijke Godsdienst* I, pp. 729 f.; Hodge, *Syst. Theol.* II, p. 654; A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theol.*, p. 449; Shedd, *Calvinism Pure and Mixed*, pp. 98 f.; Vos, *Geref. Dogm.* IV, pp. 13 f.] Finally, it should be noted that the term *gratia communis* is susceptible of, and has actually received, not only a quantitative, but also a qualitative interpretation. It may denote a grace that is common in the sense of ordinary. The ordinary, in distinction from the special, operations of the Holy Spirit are called common. His natural or usual operations are contrasted with those which are unusual and supernatural. This is the meaning of the term “common” in the Westminster Confession X. 4; and the Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 60. W. L. Alexander declares of the common grace enjoyed by those who live under the gospel: “The grace thus bestowed is common, not in the sense of being given to all men in common, but in the sense of producing effects which are ordinary, and may fall short of a real saving efficacy.”[*System of Bib. Theol.* II, p. 352.] So understood, the grace of God may be common without being general or universal.

2. CONCEPT. The distinction between common and special grace is not one that applies to grace as an attribute in God. There are no two kinds of grace in God, but only one. It is that perfection of God in virtue of which he shows unmerited and even forfeited favour to man. This one grace of God manifests itself, however, in different gifts and operations. The richest manifestation of it is seen in those gracious operations of God which aim at, and result in, the removal of the guilt, the pollution, and the punishment of sin, and the

ultimate salvation of sinners. But while this is the crowning work of the grace of God, it is not its only manifestation. It appears also in the natural blessings which God showers upon man in the present life, in spite of the fact that man has forfeited them and lies under the sentence of death. It is seen in all that God does to restrain the devastating influence and development of sin in the world, and to maintain and enrich and develop the natural life of mankind in general and of those individuals who constitute the human race. It should be emphasized that these natural blessings are manifestations of the grace of God to man in general. Some prefer to say that they are expressions of His goodness, kindness, benevolence, mercy, or longsuffering, but seem to forget that He could not be good, kind, or benevolent to the sinner unless He were first of all gracious. It should be borne in mind, however, that the term *gratia communis*, though generally designating a grace that is common to the whole of mankind, is also used to denote a grace that is common to the elect and the non-elect that are living under the gospel, such as the external gospel call that comes to both alike, and that inner illumination and those gifts of the Spirit of which we read in Heb. 6:4-6. It is understood, however, that these privileges can be called common grace only in the sense that they are enjoyed by the elect and the reprobate indiscriminately, and that they do not constitute special, in the sense of saving, grace. In distinction from the more general manifestations of common grace they, while they do not constitute a part of the grace of God that necessarily leads to salvation, are nevertheless related to the soteriological process. They are sometimes called “special” grace, but then “special” is not equivalent to “saving.” In general it may be said that, when we speak of “common grace,” we have in mind, either (a) those general operations of the Holy Spirit whereby He, without renewing the heart, exercises such a moral influence on man through His general or special revelation, that sin is restrained, order is maintained in social life, and civil righteousness is promoted; or, (b) those general blessings, such as rain and sunshine, food and drink, clothing and shelter, which God imparts to all men indiscriminately where and in what measure it seems good to Him.

The following points of distinction between special (in the sense of saving) and common grace should be noted:

a. The extent of special grace is determined by the decree of election. This grace is limited to the elect, while common grace is not so limited, but is granted to all men indiscriminately. The decree of election and reprobation has no determining influence on it. It cannot even be said that the elect receive a greater measure of common grace than the non-elect. It is a matter of common knowledge, and has frequently been observed, that the wicked often possess a greater measure of common grace and have a greater share in the natural blessings of life than the pious.

b. Special grace removes the guilt and penalty of sin, changes the inner life of man, and gradually cleanses him from the pollution of sin by the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit. Its work invariably issues in the salvation of the sinner. Common grace, on the other hand, never removes the guilt of sin, does not renew human nature, but only has a restraining effect on the corrupting influence of sin and in a measure mitigates its results. It does not effect the salvation of the sinner, though in some of its forms (external calling and moral illumination) it may be closely connected with the economy of redemption and have a soteriological aspect.

c. Special grace is irresistible. This does not mean that it is a deterministic force which compels man to believe against his will, but that by changing the heart it makes man perfectly willing to accept Jesus Christ unto salvation and to yield obedience to the will of God. Common grace is resistible, and as a matter of fact is always more or less resisted. Paul shows in Rom. 1 and 2 that neither the Gentiles nor the Jews were living up to the light which they had. Says Shedd: “In common grace the call to believe and repent is invariably

ineffectual, because man is averse to faith and repentance and in bondage to sin.”[Calvinism Pure and Mixed, p. 99.] It is ineffectual unto salvation because it leaves the heart unchanged.

d. Special grace works in a spiritual and re-creative way, renewing the whole nature of man, and thus making man able and willing to accept the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ, and to produce spiritual fruits. Common grace, to the contrary, operates only in a rational and moral way by making man in a general way receptive for the truth, by presenting motives to the will, and by appealing to the natural desires of man. This is equivalent to saying that special (saving) grace is immediate and supernatural, since it is wrought directly in the soul by the immediate energy of the Holy Spirit, while common grace is mediate, since it is the product of the mediate operation of the Holy Spirit through the truth of general or special revelation and by moral persuasion.

This conception of common grace should be carefully distinguished from that of the Arminians, who regard common grace as a link in the *ordo salutis* and ascribe to it saving significance. They hold that, in virtue of the common grace of God, the unregenerate man is perfectly able to perform a certain measure of spiritual good, to turn to God in faith and repentance, and thus to accept Jesus unto salvation. They go even farther than that, and maintain that common grace by the illumination of the mind and the persuasive influence of the truth incites the sinner to accept Jesus Christ and to turn to God in faith and repentance, and will certainly achieve this end, unless the sinner obstinately resists the operation of the Holy Spirit. The Canons of Dort have this in mind where they reject the error of those who teach “that the corrupt and natural man can so well use the common grace (by which they understand the light of nature), or the gifts still left him after the fall, that he can gradually gain by their good use a greater, that is, the evangelical or saving grace, and salvation itself.”[III-IV. Rejection of errors 5.]

C. COMMON GRACE AND THE ATONING WORK OF CHRIST.

GLOSS Atoning work: Christ’s work that deals with sin and secures the saving benefits of redemption for His people.

The question naturally arises, whether the manifestation of common grace is in any way connected with the atoning work of Christ. As far as we know, Dr. Kuyper does not posit such a connection. According to him Christ as the Mediator of creation, the light that lighteth every man coming into the world, is the source of common grace. This means that the blessings of common grace flow from the work of creation. But this hardly suffices to answer the question, how it is to be explained that a holy and just God extends grace to, and bestows favors upon, sinners who have forfeited everything, even when they have no share in the righteousness of Christ and prove finally impenitent. The question is exactly, How can God continue to bestow those blessings of creation on men who are under the sentence of death and condemnation? As far as the elect are concerned this question is answered by the cross of Christ, but how about the reprobate? Perhaps it can be said that it is not necessary to assume a specific judicial basis for the bestowal of common grace on man in view of the fact (a) that it does not remove the guilt of sin and therefore does not carry pardon with it; and (b) that it does not lift the sentence of condemnation, but only postpones the execution. Perhaps the divine good pleasure to stay the revelation of His wrath and to endure “with much long suffering vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction,” offers a sufficient explanation for the blessings of common grace.

Reformed theologians generally hesitate to say that Christ by His atoning blood merited these blessings for the impenitent and reprobate. At the same time they do believe that important natural benefits accrue to the whole human race from the death of Christ, and that in these benefits the unbelieving, the impenitent,

and the reprobate also share. In every covenant transaction recorded in Scripture it appears that the covenant of grace carries with it not only spiritual but also material blessings, and those material blessings are generally of such a kind that they are naturally shared also by unbelievers. Says Cunningham: “Many blessings flow to mankind at large from the death of Christ, collaterally and incidentally, in consequence of the relation in which men, viewed collectively, stand to each other.”[Hist. Theol. II, p. 333.] And it is but natural that this should be so. If Christ was to save an elect race, gradually called out of the world of humanity in the course of centuries, it became necessary for God to exercise forbearance, to check the course of evil, to promote the development of the natural powers of man, to keep alive within the hearts of men a desire for civil righteousness, for external morality and good order in society, and to shower untold blessings upon mankind in general. Dr. Hodge expresses it thus: “It is very plain that any plan designed to secure the salvation of an elect portion of a race propagated by generation and living in association, as is the case with mankind, cannot secure its end without greatly affecting, for better or for worse, the character and destiny of all the rest of the race not elected.” He quotes Dr. Candlish to the effect that “the entire history of the human race, from the apostasy to the final judgment, is a dispensation of forbearance in respect to the reprobate, in which many blessings, physical and moral, affecting their characters and destinies forever, accrue even to the heathen, and many more to the educated and refined citizens of Christian communities. These come to them through the mediation of Christ, and coming to them now, must have been designed for them from the beginning.”[The Atonement, pp. 358 f.] These general blessings of mankind, indirectly resulting from the atoning work of Christ, were not only foreseen by God, but designed by Him as blessings for all concerned. It is perfectly true, of course, that the design of God in the work of Christ pertained primarily and directly, not to the temporal well-being of men in general, but to the redemption of the elect; but secondarily and indirectly it also included the natural blessings bestowed on mankind indiscriminately. All that the natural man receives other than curse and death is an indirect result of the redemptive work of Christ.[Cf Turretin, Opera, Locus XIV, Q. XIV, par. XI; Witsius, De Verbonden, B. II, Kap. 9, s. 4; Cunningham, Hist. Theol. II, p. 332; Symington, Atonement and Intercession, p. 255; Bavinck, Geref. Dogm. III, p. 535; Vos, Ger. Dogm. III, p. 150.]

D. THE RELATION BETWEEN SPECIAL AND COMMON GRACE.

Several questions may be raised respecting this relation, of which the following are some of the most important.

1. DO SPECIAL AND COMMON GRACE DIFFER ESSENTIALLY OR ONLY IN DEGREE? Arminians recognize alongside of sufficient (common) grace the grace of evangelical obedience, but aver that these two differ only in degree and not in essence. They are both soteriological in the sense that they form part of the saving work of God. The former makes it possible for man to repent and believe, while the latter, in co-operation with the will, causes man to repent and believe. Both can be resisted, so that even the latter is not necessarily effectual unto salvation. Reformed theology, however, insists on the essential difference between common and special grace. Special grace is supernatural and spiritual: it removes the guilt and pollution of sin and lifts the sentence of condemnation. Common grace, on the other hand, is natural; and while some of its forms may be closely connected with saving grace, it does not remove sin nor set man free, but merely restrains the outward manifestations of sin and promotes outward morality and decency, good order in society and civic righteousness, the development of science and art, and so on. It works only in the natural, and not in the spiritual sphere. It should be maintained therefore that, while the two are closely connected in the present life, they are yet essentially different, and do not differ merely in degree. No amount of common grace can ever introduce the sinner into the new life that is in Christ Jesus. However, common grace does

sometimes reveal itself in forms that can hardly be distinguished by man from the manifestations of special grace as, for instance, in the case of temporal faith. Dr. Shedd does not seem to bear the essential difference between the two in mind especially when he says: “The non-elect receives common grace, and common grace would incline the human will if it were not defeated by the human will. If the sinner should make no hostile opposition, common grace would be equivalent to saving grace.” In a note he adds: “To say that common grace, if not resisted by the sinner, would be equivalent to regenerating grace, is not the same as to say that common grace, if assisted by the sinner, would be equivalent to regenerating grace. In the first instance, God would be the sole author of regeneration; in the second He would not be.” [Dogm. Theol. II, p. 483.] This reminds one of Lutheran theology, but the author’s meaning is not entirely clear, for elsewhere he also ascribes the non-resistance of the sinner to the operation of the Holy Spirit. [Calvinism Pure and Mixed, p. 101.]

2. WHICH ONE OF THE TWO IS PRIMARY, COMMON OR SPECIAL GRACE? To this question it must be answered that in a temporal sense neither one of them can be said to be prior to the other. The third chapter of Genesis clearly reveals that both of them go into operation at once after the fall. Logical priority should be ascribed to special grace, however, because common grace is made subservient to this in its operation in the world.

3. DOES COMMON GRACE SERVE AN INDEPENDENT PURPOSE OR NOT? It cannot be doubted that common grace finds its purpose in part in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ; it is subservient to the execution of the plan of God in the life of the elect and in the development of the Church. But in addition to that it also serves an independent purpose, namely, to bring to light and to harness for the service of man the hidden forces of nature, and to develop the powers and talents that are latent in the human race, in order that man may ever-increasingly exercise dominion over the lower creation, to the glory of God the Creator. [Cf. Kuyper, Gemeene Gratie II, pp. 622,628,633; Bavinck, De Algemeene Genade, p. 45.]

4. DO SPECIAL AND COMMON GRACE EACH HAVE A PECULIAR SPHERE ENTIRELY DISTINCT FROM THAT OF THE OTHER? It may be said that in a certain sense special grace has its own peculiar sphere in the organized Church, though it is not necessarily limited to this, and common grace is also operative in the Church for it is granted to all men. Both operate in the world, but while common grace in the more usual sense of the term pertains to the things of the natural world and this present life, special grace bears on the things of the new creation. They cannot but influence each other. Common grace enriches the Church with its blessings; and the Church raises the fruits of common grace to a higher level by bringing them under the influence of the regenerate life.

E. THE MEANS BY WHICH COMMON GRACE OPERATES.

Several means can be distinguished by which common grace effects its work. Calvin suggests some of these when he, in speaking of the restraining influence of common grace says: “Hence, how much soever men may disguise their impurity, some are restrained only by shame, others by fear of the laws, from breaking out into many kinds of wickedness. Some aspire to an honest life, as deeming it most conducive to their interest, while others are raised above the vulgar lot, that, by the dignity of their station, they may keep inferiors to their duty. Thus God by his providence, curbs the perverseness of nature, preventing it from breaking forth into action, yet without rendering it inwardly pure.” [Inst. II. 3,3.] The following are some of the most important means through which common grace effects its work.

1. THE LIGHT OF GOD’S REVELATION. This is fundamental for without it all other means would be impossible, and even if possible, would fail to function properly. We have in mind here primarily the light of

God's revelation that shines in nature and lightens every man coming into the world. It is itself the fruit of common grace, but in turn becomes a means for the further manifestation of it, since it serves to guide the conscience of the natural man. Paul speaks of the Gentiles who do by nature the things of the law, "in that they show the word of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them." Rom. 2:14,15. Calvin in commenting on this passage says that such Gentiles "prove that there is imprinted on their hearts a discrimination and judgment by which they distinguish between what is just and unjust, between what is honest and dishonest." [Comm. on Romans in loco.] In addition to this, however, it may be said that common grace in a more restricted sense also operates in the light of God's special revelation, which is not itself the fruit of common, but of special, grace.

2. GOVERNMENTS. Of these too it may be said that they are at once the fruit and the means of common grace. According to Rom. 13 governments are ordained of God, to maintain good order in society. To resist them is to resist the ordinance of God. The ruler, says Paul, "is a minister of God to thee for good." Rom. 13:4. He finds support in the conscience of man (verse 5) and for the rest "beareth not the sword in vain." On this point the Belgic Confession says: "We believe that our gracious God, because of the depravity of mankind, hath appointed kings, princes, and magistrates, willing that the world should be governed by certain laws and policies; to the end that the dissoluteness of men might be restrained, and all things carried on among them with good order and decency." [Art. XXXVI.]

3. PUBLIC OPINION. The natural light that shines in the hearts of men, especially when re-enforced by the influence of God's special revelation, results in the forming of a public opinion that is in external conformity with the law of God; and this has a tremendous influence on the conduct of men who are very sensitive to the judgment of public opinion. Naturally public opinion will be a means of common grace only when it is formed under the influence of God's revelation. If it is not controlled by conscience, acting in harmony with the light of nature, or by the Word of God, it becomes a mighty influence for evil.

4. DIVINE PUNISHMENTS AND REWARDS. The providential arrangements of God, whereby He visits the iniquity of men upon them in this life, and rewards deeds that are in outward conformity with the divine law, serve an important purpose in curbing the evil that is in the world. punishments have a deterring effect, and the rewards serve as incentives. By these means, whatever there is of moral goodness in the world is greatly encouraged. Many shun evil and seek that which is good, not because they fear the Lord, but because they feel that good brings its own reward and best serves their interests.

F. THE FRUITS OF COMMON GRACE.

In the preceding it was already intimated that what is left to us of the light of nature, is still operative only in virtue of the common grace of God. It is one of the most important fruits of common grace, without which some of the others would not be conceivable. The following fruits may be mentioned here:

1. THE EXECUTION OF THE SENTENCE IS STAYED. God pronounced the sentence of death on the sinner. Speaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He said. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Man did eat of it, and the sentence went into execution to a certain extent, but clearly was not fully executed at once. It is due to common grace that God did not at once fully execute the sentence of death on the sinner, and does not do so now, but maintains and prolongs the natural life of man and gives him time for repentance. He does not at once cut short the life of the sinner, but affords him an opportunity to repent, thereby removing all excuse and justifying the coming manifestation of His wrath upon those who

persist in sin unto the end. That God acts on this principle is abundantly evident from such passages as Isa. 48:9; Jer. 7:23-25; Luke 13:6-9; Rom. 2:4; 9:22; II Peter 3:9.

2. THE RESTRAINT OF SIN. Through the operation of common grace sin is restrained in the lives of individuals and in society. The element of corruption that entered the life of the human race is not permitted, for the present, to accomplish its disintegrating work. Calvin says: "But we ought to consider that, notwithstanding the corruption of our nature, there is some room for divine grace, such grace as, without purifying it, may lay it under internal restraint. For, did the Lord let every mind loose to wanton in its lusts, doubtless there is not a man who would not show that his nature is capable of all the crimes with which Paul charges it, (Rom. 3 compared with Ps. 14:3 ff)."[Inst. II. 3,3.] This restraint may be external or internal or both, but does not change the heart. There are passages of Scripture which speak of a striving of the Spirit of God with men which does not lead to repentance, Gen. 6:3; Isa. 63:10; Acts 7:51; of operations of the Spirit that are finally withdrawn, I Sam. 16:14; Heb. 6:4-6; and of the fact that in some cases God finally gives up men to the lusts of their own hearts, Ps. 81:12; Rom. 1:24,26,28. In addition to the preceding passages there are some which are clearly indicative of the fact that God restrains sin in various ways, such as Gen. 20:6; 31:7; Job 1:12; 2:6; II Kings 19:27,28; Rom. 13:1-4.

3. THE PRESERVATION OF SOME SENSE OF TRUTH, MORALITY AND RELIGION. It is due to common grace that man still retains some sense of the true, the good, and the beautiful, often appreciates these to a rather surprising degree, and reveals a desire for truth, for external morality, and even for certain forms of religion. Paul speaks of Gentiles who "show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them," Rom. 2:15, and even says of those who gave free vent to their wicked lives that they knew the truth of God, though they hindered the truth in unrighteousness and exchanged it for a lie, Rom. 1:18-25. To the Athenians, who were devoid of the fear of God, he said, "Ye men of Athens, in all things I perceive that ye are very religious," Acts 17:22. The Canons of Dort express themselves as follows on this point: "There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and shows some regard for virtue and for good outward behavior. But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God and true conversion that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil. Nay, further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and hinders in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God." III-IV. 4.

4. THE PERFORMANCE OF OUTWARD GOOD AND CIVIL RIGHTEOUSNESS. Common grace enables man to perform what is generally called *justitia civilis*, that is, that which is right in civil or natural affairs, in distinction from that which is right in religious matters, natural good works especially in social relations, works that are outwardly and objectively in harmony with the law of God, though entirely destitute of any spiritual quality. This is in harmony with our Reformed Confession. Art. XIV of the Belgic Confession speaks in its title of man's incapacity to perform what is truly good, says that man retained only small remains of his excellent gifts, so as to render him without excuse, and rejects only the Pelagian error that man can of himself perform spiritual or saving good. The Canons of Dort III-IV, Art. 3, speak in a similar vein: "Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and are by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good" etc. It may be objected that the Heidelberg Catechism speaks in absolute terms when it says in Question 8 that we are incapable of doing any good unless we are regenerated. But it is quite evident from the Commentary of Ursinus himself that he would not deny that man can do civil good, but only that he can perform good works such as are defined in Question 91 of the Catechism. Reformed theologians generally maintain that the unregenerate can perform natural good, civil good, and outwardly religious good.[Cf. Calvin, Inst. III. 14,2;

Van Mastricht, *Godgeleerdheid*, Bk. IV. 4,11,12; Voetius, *Catechisatie I*, p. 168-172; Ursinus, *Comm. on the Catechism*, Lord's Day II, p. 77; Charnock, *On the Attributes II*, pp. 303,304; Brakel, *Redelijke Godsdienst I*, p. 338.] They call attention to the fact, however, that, while such works of the unregenerate are good from a material point of view, as works which God commanded, they cannot be called good from a formal point of view, since they do not spring from the right motive and do not aim at the right purpose. The Bible repeatedly speaks of works of the unregenerate as good and right, II Kings 10:29,30; 12:2 (comp. II Chron. 24:17-25); 14:3,14-16,20,27 (comp. II Chron. 25:2); Luke 6:33; Rom. 2:14,15.

5. **MANY NATURAL BLESSINGS.** To common grace man further owes all the natural blessings which he receives in the present life. Though he has forfeited all the blessings of God, he receives abundant tokens of the goodness of God from day to day. There are several passages of Scripture from which it appears abundantly that God showers many of His good gifts on all men indiscriminately, that is, upon the good and the bad, the elect and the reprobate, such as: Gen. 17:20 (comp. vs. 18); 39:5; Ps. 145:9,15,16; Matt. 5:44,45; Luke 6:35,36; Acts 14:16,17; I Tim. 4:10. And these gifts are intended as blessings, not only for the good but also for the evil. In the light of Scripture the position is untenable that God never blesses the reprobate, though He does give them many gifts which are good in themselves. In Gen. 39:5 we read that "Jehovah blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of Jehovah was upon all that he had in the house and in the field." And in Matt. 5:44,45 Jesus exhorts His disciples in these words, "Bless those that curse you . . . that ye may be children of your Father who is in heaven." This can only mean one thing, namely, that God also blesses those who curse Him. Cf. also Luke 6:35,36; Rom. 2:4.

G. OBJECTIONS TO THE REFORMED DOCTRINE OF COMMON GRACE.

GLOSS Reformed doctrine: teaching grounded in God's sovereign grace and interpreted through the whole witness of Scripture.

Several objections have been and are even now raised by some against the doctrine of common grace as it is presented in the preceding. The following are some of the most important of these:

1. Arminians are not satisfied with it, because it does not go far enough. They regard common grace as an integral part of the saving process. It is that sufficient grace that enables man to repent and believe in Jesus Christ unto salvation, and which in the purpose of God is intended to lead men to faith and repentance, though it may be frustrated by men. A grace that is not so intended and does not actually minister to the salvation of men is a contradiction in terms. Hence Pope, a Wesleyan Arminian, speaks of common grace in the Calvinistic system as "being universal and not particular; being necessarily, or at least actually, inoperative for salvation in the purpose of God," and calls this a "wasted influence." He further says: "Grace is no more grace, if it does not include the saving intention of the Giver." [Christian Theology II, pp. 387 f.] But, surely, the Bible does not so limit the use of the term "grace." Such passages as Gen. 6:8; 19:19; Ex. 33:12,16; Num. 32:5; Luke 2:40, and many others do not refer to what we call "saving grace," nor to what the Arminian calls "sufficient grace."

2. It is sometimes argued that the Reformed doctrine of common grace involves the doctrine of universal atonement, and therefore leads into the Arminian camp. But there is no good ground for this assertion. It neither says nor implies that it is the purpose of God to save all men through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. The objection is based particularly on the universal proclamation of the gospel, which is considered possible only on the basis of a universal atonement. It was already suggested by the Arminians themselves at the time of the Synod of Dort, when they asserted that the Reformed with their doctrine of particular

atonement could not preach the gospel to all men indiscriminately. But the Synod of Dort did not recognize the implied contradiction. The Canons teach particular atonement,[II. 8.] and also require the universal proclamation of the gospel.[II. 5 and III. 8.] And this is in perfect harmony with Scripture, which teaches on the one hand, that Christ atoned only for the elect, John 10:15; Acts 20:28; Rom. 8:32,33; cf. also John 17:9; and on the other hand, that the gospel call must be extended to all men indiscriminately, Matt. 22:2-14; 28:19; Mark 16:15,16. If it be objected that we cannot fully harmonize the indiscriminate and sincere offer of salvation on condition of faith and repentance with the doctrine of particular atonement, this may be admitted but with the distinct understanding that the truth of a doctrine does not depend on our ability to harmonize it with every other doctrine of Scripture.

3. Another objection to the doctrine of common grace is that it presupposes a certain favorable disposition in God even to reprobate sinners, while we have no right to assume such a disposition in God. This stricture takes its starting point in the eternal counsel of God, in His election and reprobation. Along the line of His election God reveals His love, grace, mercy, and longsuffering, leading to salvation; and in the historical realization of His reprobation He gives expression only to His aversion, disfavor, hatred, and wrath, leading to destruction. But this looks like a rationalistic over-simplification of the inner life of God, which does not take sufficient account of His self-revelation. In speaking on this subject we ought to be very careful and allow ourselves to be guided by the explicit statements of Scripture rather than by our bold inferences from the secret counsel of God. There is far more in God than we can reduce to our logical categories. Are the elect in this life the objects of God's love only, and never in any sense the objects of His wrath? Is Moses thinking of the reprobate when he says: "For we are consumed in thine anger, and in thy wrath are we troubled"? Ps. 90:7. Does not the statement of Jesus that the wrath of God abideth on them that obey not the Son imply that it is removed from the others when, and not until, they submit to the beneficent rule of Christ? John 3:36. And does not Paul say to the Ephesians that they "were by nature children of wrath even as the rest"? Eph. 2:3. Evidently the elect can not be regarded as always and exclusively the objects of God's love. And if they who are the objects of God's redeeming love can also in some sense of the word be regarded as the objects of His wrath, why should it be impossible that they who are the objects of His wrath should also in some sense share His divine favor? A father who is also a judge may loathe the son that is brought before him as a criminal, and feel constrained to visit his judicial wrath upon him, but may yet pity him and show him acts of kindness while he is under condemnation. Why should this be impossible in God? General Washington hated the traitor that was brought before him and condemned him to death, but at the same time showed him compassion by serving him with the dainties from his own table. Cannot God have compassion even on the condemned sinner, and bestow favors upon him? The answer need not be uncertain, since the Bible clearly teaches that He showers untold blessings upon all men and also clearly indicates that these are the expression of a favorable disposition in God, which falls short, however, of the positive volition to pardon their sin, to lift their sentence, and to grant them salvation. The following passages clearly point to such a favorable disposition: Prov. 1:24; Isa. 1:18; Ezek. 18:23,32; 33:11; Matt. 5:43-45; 23:37; Mark 10:21; Luke 6:35; Rom. 2:4; I Tim. 2:4. If such passages do not testify to a favorable disposition in God, it would seem that language has lost its meaning, and that God's revelation is not dependable on this subject.

4. Anabaptists object to the doctrine of common grace, because it involves the recognition of good elements in the natural order of things, and this is contrary to their fundamental position. They regard the natural creation with contempt, stress the fact that Adam was of the earth earthy, and see only impurity in the natural order as such. Christ established a new supernatural order of things, and to that order the regenerate man, who is not merely a renewed, but an entirely new man, also belongs. He has nothing in common with the world round about him and should therefore take no part in its life: never swear an oath,

take no part in war, recognize no civil authority, avoid worldly clothing, and so on. On this position there is no other grace than saving grace. This view was shared by Labadism, Pietism, the Moravian brethren, and several other sects. Barth's denial of common grace seems to be following along these same lines. This is no wonder, since for him too creaturiness and sinfulness are practically identical. Brunner gives the following summary of Barth's view: "It follows from the acknowledgment of Christ as the only saving grace of God that there exists no creative and sustaining grace which has been operative ever since the creation of the world and which manifests itself to us in God's maintenance of the world, since in that case we should have to recognize two or even three kinds of grace, and that would stand in contradistinction with the singleness of the grace of Christ. . . . Similarly, the new creation is in no wise a fulfilment but exclusively a replacement accomplished by a complete annihilation of what went before, a substitution of the new man for the old. The proposition, *gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit*, is not true in any sense but is altogether an arch-heresy." [Natur und Gnade, p. 8.] Brunner rejects this view and is more in line with the Reformed thought on this point.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY: Do the Hebrew and Greek words for 'grace' always denote saving grace? Are they ever used as a designation of what we call 'common grace'? Does the doctrine of common grace presuppose the doctrine of universal atonement? Does it imply a denial of the fact that man is by nature subject to the wrath of God? Does it involve a denial of man's total depravity, and of his inability to do spiritual good? Is the good which the natural man can do good only in the sight of man or also in the sight of God? Does the doctrine of common grace destroy the antithesis between the world and the kingdom of God? If not, how do you explain this?