Reformed DOGMATICS

Herman HOEKSEMA

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Volume 1

Herman Hoeksema

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1894 Georgetown Center Drive
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
616-457-5970
www.rfpa.org
mail@rfpa.org

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Footnote Abbreviations

ANF	*The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 10 vols. American reprint of the Edinburgh edition. Revised and arranged by A. Cleveland Coxe. Edinburgh: T & T Clark. Reprinted, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986–1989.
NPNF[1]	*A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Edited by Philip Schaff. 1st series. 14 vols. American reprint of the Edinburgh edition. Edinburgh: T & T Clark. Reprinted, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979–1989.
NPNF[2]	*A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. 2nd series. 14 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.
CC	*The Creeds of Christendom with History and Critical Notes*. Edited by Philip Schaff. Revised by David S. Schaff. 3 vols. 6th edition. New York: Harper and Row, 1931. Reprinted, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983.
RCSC	*Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*. Edited by Arthur C. Cochrane. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

Preface to the First Edition

My beloved father, the author of this work, had frequently expressed the hope that his "Dogmatics" might be published. In God's inscrutable purpose, however, he never lived to see that day. For the Lord took him to his heavenly reward on September 2, 1965. That event also accounts for the fact that I am writing this brief editor's preface. For although publication plans had been completed and partially executed more than a year before his decease, the author had left unfinished this final item of a preface.

Although the author has already produced several other works, among them his ten-volume exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism, I do not hesitate to call this work the major work of his many-sided and busy ministry of almost fifty years. In the first place, this is true because the preparation of this dogmatics spanned more than thirty years of that ministry. During those years the author occupied the Chair of Dogmatics in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches and first prepared his dogmatics in outline form in the Dutch language. In fact, when the undersigned graduated from seminary in 1947, only a part of the first locus had been prepared in its present form. From that time on, over a span of about ten years, the author produced the remainder of his English manuscript, the undersigned serving as his amanuensis. Hence time-wise, this Dogmatics was surely his major work and is also the fruit of many years of instruction, study, and development.

In the second place,—and this is the chief reason,—this is undoubtedly the author's major work because it is the clearest, the most systematic, and the most complete statement of his theology. This also constitutes the chief reason for the publication of this work. The publishers desired to make this thoroughly Scriptural and Reformed exposition of the faith once delivered to the saints more widely available.

My own part in this volume has been strictly editorial. There were the final corrections to be made in the manuscript, and there was the preparation of the Hebrew and Greek quotations that had to be done. Besides, it was felt that the addition of a textual index and index of subjects would enhance the value of the book.

A word of thanks is due to those who assisted me with much of the detail work, and especially to the publishers, both for their undertaking of this project and for their patience with the undersigned during the months spent in preparing the manuscript for publication.

May the Lord our God use these pages for the instruction and enrichment of many in the Reformed faith.

Homer C. Hoeksema

Preface to the Second Edition

As one of the founders and leaders of the protestant Reformed Churches in America, Rev. Herman Hoeksema wrote many published works that have earned respect both in Reformed circles and in the evangelical church world. Time has proven that the Reformed community esteems the work of this gifted theologian. Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics* has long been considered to be his most important contribution to the development of Reformed theology.

Since *Reformed Dogmatics* was originally published in 1966, it has enjoyed a wide circulation and has influenced many in the Reformed community throughout the world. After four printings of the first edition and in response to numerous requests from the reading public, the Reformed Free Publishing Association is pleased to release in two volumes this second edition of Hoeksema's premier work.

Despite its excellent content and the brilliance of its many original ideas, the first edition suffered from deficiencies in its formal aspects, which made it somewhat difficult to understand and use effectively. Hoeksema liberally employed untranslated quotations from languages other than English, including Hebrew, Greek, Latin, German, and Dutch. In a day when many theologians (to say nothing of laymen) have no more than a passing acquaintance with languages other than their own, this usage served in many respects to make the book difficult for many readers. Besides, the clarity of many concepts was diluted by various infelicities of style.

The RFPA solicited and carefully analyzed these criticisms before commissioning the revision of *Reformed Dogmatics*. Lest the reader wrongly assume that the intent is to denigrate the original edition, a word of historical explanation is in order.

Throughout his life, Rev. Hoeksema was affected by a shaking in his hands, a form of Parkinson's disease, which made many activities, including typing, difficult for him. The physical effects of a major stroke in the summer of 1947 left him completely unable to type. From that time forward, he dictated almost all of his work (including *Reformed Dogmatics*), first into a wire recorder and later into a tape recorder, for transcription by his son Homer, who served as his amanuensis, as is noted in the *Preface to the First Edition*.

The result of this situation was that in the original version of *Reformed Dogmatics* we had the literal words of Herman Hoeksema. Without doubt they were the thoughts of a theological genius. They were—unfortunately—transcribed almost literally. However, the differences between the spoken word and the written word are many and significant, especially in areas such as, syntax, word usage, modifiers, and punctuation. These differences sometimes resulted in the use of archaic expressions, indefinite meanings, and unintended implications, as well as long sentences and paragraphs.

In this second edition, a concerted effort has been expended to improve the readability without changing the meaning and substance of Hoeksema's work. Hoeksema remains himself: exegetical, forceful, and clear in his treatment of the tenets of the Reformed faith. Editorial changes and improvements have been made only to the form of the book, leaving its essence unchanged and its unique perspective identical with that of the first edition.

Many scripture references have been added; all scripture references have been moved from footnotes into the body of the text; quotations from the creeds and the church fathers have been uniformly taken from standard sources; as many quotations as possible of the church fathers have been

taken from modern translations that were not in existence when this book was originally written.

For their labors we owe our gratitude to two men who are uniquely qualified with an understanding of the languages and doctrines involved in this book. We thank Rev. Ronald Hanko for translating the foreign languages, assisting in proper attribution and footnoting of quotations, breaking up long paragraphs, and providing chapter subheads. We also thank Mark H. Hoeksema, grandson of Herman Hoeksema, for editing the text proper by correcting the infelicities of grammar, syntax, and usage, judiciously modernizing the language and punctuation, and giving attention to proper form, as well as for compiling improved textual and subject indexes.

In addition, we appreciate the efforts of many volunteer proofreaders regarding both the English text and the foreign languages. Special thanks to Karin Maag of the H. Henry Meeter Center at Calvin College and to Mike Ferrando of the Library of Congress for their individual help in tracking down references that we were unable to find.

We have deemed this second edition of *Reformed Dogmatics* to be worthy of our best effort. Students of the Reformed faith will find it credible and useful. Those who are unfamiliar with the Reformed faith will find it helpful and instructive. The enemies of the Reformed faith will find it indisputable and confounding. It is our hope and prayer that Almighty God will use this exposition of his truth for the edification of many and for the greater glory of his name.

—The Reformed Free Publishing Association

Introduction
to
Dogmatics

Chapter 1

The Name *Dogmatics*

Different Names for *Dogmatics*

Different names have been given to the branch of theological science that is now generally known as *dogmatics*, but which in our country is often called *systematic theology*. Origen wrote his *De Principiis* (*First Principles*),[1] Lactantius his *Divine Institutes*,[2] Augustine his *Enchiridion [Handbook], Addressed to Laurentius*.[3]

Originally the name *dogmatics* was used adjectively. In this sense it occurs in the work of L. Reinhard.[4] Soon after, the term *dogmatics* became the name for this branch of theological science. From the different names used it becomes evident that the science designated by the term *dogmatics* is intended to be theology, knowledge of God; that the purpose is to set forth the *loci* (*divisions*), the *principia* (*principles*), or the ἀρχαί (*first principles*) of this knowledge of God; and that a conscious attempt is made to set forth these principles in a systematic way.

The Name *Dogmatics* Preferred

We prefer the name *dogmatics* to that of *systematic theology* for two reasons. First, *systematic theology* can hardly be a distinctive denotation of this science. To be sure, all theology, and not only dogmatics, is systematic. In fact, this is true of all science. To appropriate the name s*ystematic theology* for *dogmatics* would almost imply an insult for the rest of theology. Second, the name *dogmatics* takes into account the fact that this branch of theological science properly respects the work of the church of the past. It does not simply deal with scripture, but with dogma. A dogmatician is neither an "open Bible" student nor an undenominationalist. He does not approach the Bible for the first time, nor as an individual, but as a member of the church of the past and of a particular church in the present.

It follows that in applying himself to this science, the dogmatician has respect to the generally accepted dogmata of the church catholic and the specific dogmas of his own denomination. By these the dogmatician is freely bound. He is *bound* by them because of his membership in his own particular church. And he is *freely* bound because in the doctrine of that church he finds the purest expression of his own faith.

A dogma may be defined as a doctrine elicited from scripture, defined and officially established by the church. Such dogma cannot bind the conscience. The authority of dogma is never final, but always subject to the authority of scripture itself; hence there can be no unconditional subjection to dogma. For this reason the expression *freely bound* is used.

With this dogma, or system of dogmas, the dogmatician works. He develops it into a logical system. He critically compares it with scripture or sets forth its harmony with the word of God, and by means of the study of scripture, he labors to enrich and to bring the dogma of the church to a fuller development.

Chapter 2

The Definition of Dogmatics

Dogmatics Defined

Dogmatics is that theological discipline in which the dogmatician, in organic connection with the church in the past as well as in the present, purposes to elicit from the scriptures the true knowledge of God, to set forth the same in systematic form, and, after comparison of the existing dogmas with scripture, to bring the knowledge of God to a higher state of development.

A Critique of Barth's Definition

Various other definitions of dogmatics have been given, with which we need not be concerned here. The definition given by Karl Barth, however, may arrest our attention, because it departs fundamentally from the generally accepted conception of dogmatics. According to Barth, dogmatics as a theological discipline is the scientific self-examination of the Christian church with respect to the speech concerning God which is characteristic of or peculiar to her.[1] We note that this definition is closely related to Barth's peculiar conception of the word of God, which we need not discuss in detail here. And it really leaves us without any objective criterion of the knowledge of God. Dogmatics is self-examination on the part of the church: she examines her own speech concerning God. This speech on the part of the church concerning God is the fundamental principle of dogmatics, according to Barth.

This is pure subjectivism. If the church's own speech concerning God must be the principle of dogmatics, no systematic knowledge of God is possible. In this definition of dogmatics, Barth clearly reveals his subjectivism and mysticism.

The Elements of a Proper Definition

In explanation of our definition of dogmatics, we call attention to the following details:

First, *the object of dogmatics is the true knowledge of God*. There has been, and still is, a controversy about this question. According to some, not God but scripture or, in general, revelation is the object of theology and therefore also of dogmatics. Dr. A. Kuyper, Sr., defends this position especially with a view to maintaining that theology is one of the encyclopedic sciences.[2] Bavinck, however, maintains that dogmatics is knowledge of God, and he does not hesitate to make God the object of dogmatic science.[3] We really cannot see that there is any real conflict here and cannot understand why the object of dogmatics cannot be God as he has revealed himself particularly in the scriptures.

It is understood, of course, that God as he is in himself cannot ever be the object of our scientific investigation or knowledge. If we want to make separation between revelation and God, there is no knowledge of God. In a relative sense that is true of all knowledge, as Kant pointed out. We deal with a phenomenal world; if we want to make separation between phenomena and the thing in itself (*das Ding an sich*), there cannot be any knowledge of the world as such. However, we believe that the phenomena are true representations of the objective world. How infinitely much more does this apply

to our knowledge of God. He is the invisible, the imperceptible, in himself. There are no phenomena in God. Even scripture is not God's phenomenon.

No one has ever seen God. Besides, he is absolute, sovereignly above all laws and relationships, while we must forever deal with the relative because we are under the law. He is the infinite, while we are limited and bound on every side. He is the eternal, and we are in time. There can never be any knowledge of him if we must establish the connection necessary for such knowledge and reach out for him as the object of our science. We cannot examine him. But although there is no phenomenon *God*, and although the finite cannot successfully reach out to the infinite, there is a divine revelation, and the infinite did reach out into the finite.

In this revelation we have an adequate medium and a true source through which and from which we derive real and adequate knowledge of God, even though it is finite. Therefore we may certainly say that the object of dogmatics is God as revealed. This is in harmony with scripture, which speaks of the knowledge of God which is eternal life (John 17:3). It is true that in this verse more than dogmatic knowledge of God is meant, but it is equally true that the knowledge of God, which is life, is impossible without the intellectual knowledge of him.

Second, *the subject of dogmatics in a broad sense is the church guided by the Spirit*. It is she who establishes dogma. This does not alter the fact that it is not everyone in the church who develops dogmatics, nor the church institutionally—even though it is she who affixes the seal of ecclesiastical authority to the dogma. Rather, it is the individual dogmatician who occupies himself with the discipline of dogmatical science. This dogmatician is a member of a definite, historically existent church; for that reason he does not approach the study of dogmatics without any prepossessions whatsoever. He is born in and instructed in and by the church of which he is a member, so that he begins his dogmatical labor with a treasure of dogmatical knowledge and principles, and so that through the church of the present of which he is a member he becomes heir of the dogma of the church of the past. He is no undenominationalist, whether he likes it or not. It would be quite contrary to the will and providence of God, who establishes and keeps his church and the knowledge of his covenant in the line of continued generations, should the dogmatician attempt to start his dogmatic career without any prejudice. He must labor with the treasures he has already received and must attempt to enrich them.

Third, *it is the task of the dogmatician to present the truth of God's revelation in a systematic form*. We believe that the truth is more than a system; we also believe that the truth is one, even as God is one. We believe, therefore, that the truth is systematic and that the different truths are related. Chaos is never truth, because God is not chaos. In other words, the logical system is not merely in the mind of the dogmatician, but in the truth (contrary to Kantianism). However, scripture is not a dogmatics. It is rather the record of the historical revelation of God to his people. Hence it belongs to the task of the dogmatician to present systematically the truth as it is in the scriptures.

Fourth, *even though the church sets its seal of authority upon the dogmatic truths elicited from the scriptures so that there cannot be dogmas in the true sense unless they are ecclesiastically established; yet their ultimate basis is not the authority of the church, but that of the scriptures alone*. It follows that it belongs to the task of the dogmatician that he must always compare the results of the dogmatic labors of the church with Holy Writ and that he must be able to demonstrate that his dogma is based on the scriptures. In the last analysis, the labor of the dogmatician must be exegetical in character; in the light of sound exegesis he must pass a critical judgment on all accepted dogma.

Chapter 3

The Methods of Dogmatics

Various methods have been and still are followed by dogmaticians. These methods are usually determined by the attitude that a given dogmatician assumes toward revelation and by his view of Holy Writ.

The Ecclesiastical Method

The *ecclesiastical method* dates from scholasticism, though it was already suggested by Augustine. It is still maintained by the Roman Catholic Church as being the only proper method. The authority of the church is really exalted above the authority of the scriptures. The church institute—the clergy, and especially since 1870, the pope—is infallible.[1]

Therefore, the decrees of the pope are infallible, and the only task left for the dogmatician is to elucidate the truth of what the church decrees and to substantiate it either by reason or scripture or by both. According to this conception, scripture is really subordinated to the authority of the church.

Although it certainly is true that the church is led by the Holy Spirit into all the truth and although this guidance is readily admitted to be infallible; nevertheless, against this method it may be stated that the question whether a certain earthly manifestation of the church was so led by the Holy Spirit in establishing a given dogma can only be answered in the way of a critical comparison of such a dogma with the word of God. Scripture alone must always remain the only criterion and first principle of knowledge (*principium cognoscendi*) of all dogmatics. It is this principle that was emphatically proclaimed by the Reformers.

The Biblical-Theological Method

Radically different from the ecclesiastical method and from the method of the Reformation, is the *biblical-theological method*. The slogan of this method is that we must go back to scripture, by which those who follow this method mean that we must break away from dogmatical decrees as well as from dogmatical terms and simply follow the Bible. They complain that unless this method is followed human philosophy will always be carried into the contents of Holy Writ, and the dogmatician will speak rather than letting the scriptures speak. According to them, existing dogmas plainly show that this has characterized the labors of the church in the past. Hence we must break away from those dogmatic works of the church to return and adhere as closely as possible to scripture itself.

There is an element of truth in this conception of biblical theology. In dogmatizing, the danger of proceeding from human reason rather than from scripture always exists. Even though a basic premise may be derived from the Bible, there is no absolute guarantee that all dogmatic conclusions drawn from such a premise actually follow from it and therefore are true. Besides, the history of dogma will show that there has been a tendency to synthesize the philosophy of the world and the contents of revelation. We will take this warning from those who advocate the method of biblical theology, but we take it as a warning only against the wrong application of the right method and not as a proof that the method itself must be condemned.

Against the biblical-theological method it can be objected that it despises the work of the church in the past and wholly ignores or damns the guidance of the Holy Spirit whereby the church of the past was led into all the truth. It ignores the fact that scripture is not a compilation of ready-made doctrines in systematic form and expressed in dogmatic terms, but that it is revelation, woven into the texture of the earthly and historical development of God's church in the world. And biblical theology is really a condemnation of dogmatics *per se*. Insofar as it does not want to be such a condemnation, it simply deceives itself, for the believers' minds can appropriate the truth of scripture only in the way of logical contemplation. It is therefore the task of the dogmatician and the church to elicit from the scriptures the whole system of the truth, which is certainly present in them, though it is not revealed in systematic form.

The Subjective Methods

Especially since the period of the Enlightenment (*Aufklarung*), several methods have sprung up and have come into vogue, which, though differing one from another in detail, have in common that they make man the creator of his own god, just as they make man the maker of his own world. They are the *subjectivistic methods*. They look for the autonomous man.

Under this general heading we may distinguish among different schools. We distinguish them from one another according as they seek the source of the knowledge of God in the will, in the intellect, or in the emotions and mystical experience of man.

Kant is the chief representative of the first school. He denied revelation. Searching "pure reason" and its operations, he found no God and therefore had no room for him. Pure reason could not contemplate the infinite. But, facing the danger of atheism, he made room for God by his "practical reason" and discovered the voice of God in "categorical imperatives." In reality this simply means that the moral consciousness of the individual and of the community is the fundamental principle of the knowledge of God. Truth is that which is in harmony with the dictates of conscience, and even God is measured by its standard. Accordingly, it is not really knowledge, but goodness, life, that matters.

It is easy to see the fundamental errors of this philosophy. In the Kantian school it is the moral man who makes his own god after his own image. This is a denial of sin, because at the moment one recognizes sin the categorical imperative is not trustworthy, and a god fashioned after the contents of man's moral consciousness is corrupt even as man himself is. This theory is the resurrection of the old principle of the devil in paradise: "ye shall be as gods [God], knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). It is a denial of revelation and of scripture as the word of God, for the moral consciousness of man must determine how much of scripture may be considered valuable and true. This is the *ethical-subjective method*.

Another school in the same general category would follow the *intellectual method*. Hegel may be represented as the head of this school of thought. According to it, the finite mind dialectically postulates the infinite God (dialectics in Barthian theology has a different connotation). Limited as man's mind is, the result is not a god, but an empty conception, a logical conclusion. Man cannot reach out for God; the finite can never touch the infinite. Whenever man makes the attempt in the pride of his mind, the result is as Barth once expressed it: That he imagines that he says *God* when he very loudly says *man*.[2] If man is to know God, God must reach out for him. God must speak; man must listen. He must have revelation.

Finally, there is the *mystical-subjective method*, which is connected with the name of that lovely

infidel who claimed that he could be an infidel with his head and a Christian in his heart, the author of *mediating theology* (*Vermittelungstheologie*), Schleiermacher.[3] According to him and this school, the source of the knowledge of God is to be found in religious experience, especially the religious experience of the church, and particularly in the feeling of dependence.

But the followers of this method deceive themselves, as does Schleiermacher. No knowledge of God is to be derived from the mystical experience of the individual or of the church. In fact, mystical experience has no content unless it is interpreted. That which gives content to this mystical experience in the form of knowledge of God must be either God himself or man's making his own god. There never would have been any knowledge of God in the church or any religious experience except through the scriptures. Of the three subjective methods, Schleiermacher's is not only the loveliest, but also, in the very nature of the case, the most intangible and indefinite.

The Religious-Historical-Comparative Method

In recent years the *religious-historical-comparative method* has become quite popular among modern dogmaticians. According to this method (there is really no dogmatics in this method), religion is simply treated like any other historical phenomenon. The task of the dogmatician, if he may so be called, is to investigate the various religions of the past or present, Christian or pagan, and to determine their relative value.

This method does not proceed from any conception of revelation. There is no objective standard of religious truth whereby the various religions may be judged and evaluated. To be sure, the Christian religion is not the only true religion, though it may be relatively the best. The truth is probably the highest common denominator of all religions. According to this method, it is evident that the dogmatician is himself the measure of the truth.

The Barthian School Method

The *Barthian school* can be classified with the subjective school of thought, in which historically it had its origin, insofar as Barth denies the objective, absolute authority of the holy scriptures as the sole principle of the knowledge of God and of all dogmatics and theology and substitutes the church's speech concerning God as the source of this knowledge. It is true that Barth would deny this, for he insists that the word of God (*das Wort Gottes*) is the only possible source of the knowledge of God. However, Barth's conception of the word is such that it remains no objective criterion for the church's speech about God. Barth believes in revelation through the "moment."

The Exegetical-Synthetical Method

The correct method in all dogmatics must be the one that finds its source of the knowledge of God in the scriptures, acknowledging them as the complete, infallible revelation of God to his people, takes into account the historical origin of the existing dogmas under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, critically demonstrates their relation to the Bible, and aims at synthesizing the truth revealed in the scriptures into one systematic whole. This method can be called the *exegetical-synthetical method*.

Chapter 4

The Systems of Dogmatics

As to the system of dogmatics, we may note that several divisions of the material of dogmatics have been tried, which divisions differ according to the different principle selected. Of these, we mention the following systems.

The Trinitarian System

There is the *trinitarian division*, which was one of the earliest divisions and already suggested by the baptism formula, and which was followed in the instruction given converts to Christendom in the early church and embodied in the Apostles' Creed. The general line of this division is God the Father and our creation, God the Son and our redemption, and God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification, as mentioned in the Heidelberg Catechism.[1] The chief objection to this division is that it is difficult to avoid the danger of separating the three persons of the holy Trinity and their work.

The Christological System

Another system that has been followed is the *Christological system*, which takes its standpoint in Christ. It can be argued in defense of this standpoint and system that we can know God only through Christ and that, therefore, the knowledge of Christ is always the heart of the knowledge of God. Consequently, dogmatics must always be Christological.

There is truth in this contention in the sense that Christ is the mediator of the knowledge of God, the one in and through whom God reveals himself to us. But it also should be self-evident that the medium of revelation cannot be the chief object of dogmatics, which is and remains the knowledge of God. Dogmatics therefore must be theological; Christology can only be a subdivision.

The Covenantal System

There is the division, introduced by Coccejus and some others, that proceeded from the idea of the covenant. Coccejus looked upon the history of the covenant as consisting of a series of covenants, in which the later covenant always abolished the earlier covenant. It was especially his conception of the covenant that caused his division of dogmatics based thereupon to be a failure.[2]

Considered by itself, it would be quite possible to produce a dogmatics from the viewpoint of the covenant. We suggest such main divisions as the following: the covenant God, the covenant creature, the covenant head, the covenant foundation, the covenant realization, the covenant people, and the covenant consummation.

The Kingdom of God System

There is a school, represented by such men as van Oosterzee, which proceeds from the idea of the kingdom of God.[3] The main objection to this system is that the principle of division is too limited and that much of the material of dogmatics proper receives a rather forced position in this division.

The Traditional System

The system that is generally followed today is that of the well-known six loci. As a workable division, this is probably the most preferable. Its weakness, however, stares one in the face. Strictly speaking, one would have to treat the entire dogmatics under the first locus. The five loci following the first can by no stretch of the imagination be called coordinate with it. Nevertheless, if the dogmatician applies a little wisdom and breaks off his discussion of the first locus in time, even though somewhat arbitrarily, the method of division outlined below can still be considered the most practical.

- **Theology**
  - Names
  - Essence
  - Attributes
  - Persons
  - Works
    - Indwelling Works
    - Outgoing Works[4]
      - **Anthropology**
      - **Christology**
      - **Soteriology**
      - **Ecclesiology**
      - **Eschatology**

Chapter 5

The Principles of Dogmatics

The Task of an Introduction to Dogmatics

It belongs properly to the introduction to dogmatics to inquire into the reality, the possibility, and the sources of the knowledge of God and to establish and to set forth the epistemological laws or principles that must underlie all scientific dogmatic investigation. This inquiry, however, may not proceed along rationalistic lines, although this is often done.

The introduction to dogmatics seems to be easily exposed to the danger of becoming a rationalistic critique, whose task it is to establish *a priori* the possibility and right of a dogmatic science. The introduction, or *prolegomena*, then attempts to establish the rationality of the knowledge of God and make plain before the bar of reason, quite apart from scripture, that knowledge of God is possible, that there is indeed an objective principle of knowledge (*principium cognoscendi objectivum*)—revelation—as well as a subjective principle (*principium cognoscendi subjectivum*)—the Christian faith. The conclusion is that faith is quite rational and that, therefore, dogmatics has a right to claim a place among the sciences.

But this cannot possibly be the attitude of a Christian dogmatician even in the introduction. If one should try thus to approach dogmatics, the very fact that he makes this attempt at a philosophical approach spells his doom as a dogmatician; for what one begins rationalistically one cannot possibly conclude according to the method of faith, nor can a philosophical approach ever lead one to the knowledge of God and of revelation.

The introduction, therefore, does not intend to be a defense and justification (*raison d'être*) of dogmatics before the bar of reason. On the contrary, quite in harmony with dogmatics itself, its character and approach are, and must be, strictly theological. In the introduction the dogmatician is not and cannot be without presuppositions. Rather, he proceeds from the principle that scripture is the revelation of God—in fact, that God is, that he has revealed himself, and that therefore he is knowable.

It certainly is the task of the introduction to make evident the possibility of the knowledge of God and, therefore, of dogmatics. However, it does this not before the bar of reason, but before the mind of faith. Even in the introduction the revelation of scripture is our objective principle of knowledge. The approach, therefore, of him who institutes this inquiry into the epistemological principles of dogmatics is, and remains, the approach of faith.

It is quite impossible that the believing dogmatician could set aside his faith and work from another principle in making this inquiry. He is ingrafted into Christ, through whom he has received a new life and by whom his mind is illuminated by a new light. He lives in the wisdom of Christ, and in the sphere of that wisdom, he performs all his dogmatic labors. He clearly discerns that outside of that sphere, all his labors in the interest of the knowledge of God must cease, because outside of the mind of Christ is the natural, and the natural mind does not understand the things of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14).

The Priority of Dogmatics

The fact is, too, that dogmatics does not wait for an introduction, but continues its labors in the

simple faith of the reality of those principles that the introduction is supposed to demonstrate. Even as no science waits until the philosopher has finished his inquiry into the possibility of knowledge and into its basic epistemological principles, but precedes such inquiry, so the church, in developing the system of dogmatics, does not wait until the underlying principles of the knowledge of God have been set forth, but constantly labors at the systematic exposition of the revealed truth.

Dogmatics, therefore, precedes introduction from a principal point of view, and historically it was developed long before any introduction to dogmatics was ever written. Bearing this in mind, however, the introduction to dogmatics certainly fills a need of the human mind and heart and of the believing mind and heart. Always that human mind must inquire not only into the reality but also into the possibility of the knowledge of God—its how and why. Thus in the introduction the question is asked, and an answer is given to it: How is the knowledge of God possible?

Principle 1: God a Knowing God

That God is the essential principle (*principium essendi*) of all theology has been rightly emphasized by all dogmaticians throughout the history of dogma. What is meant by the statement that God is the principle of his own knowledge? How is this to be explained? In answer to these questions, we offer the following explanation.

God is a knowing God. He is not a cold, abstract power, but he is the absolute, perfectly self-conscious, infinite being, who is in himself the implication of all perfections. When we say that he is a knowing God, we mean that he is the self-sufficient one even in his knowledge. He has no need of anyone, of any being outside of himself, to be a knowing God. He is not in need of an object of knowledge outside of his own infinite fullness. In himself he is subject and object of all knowledge. He is the perfect subject as well as the infinitely perfect object of his own knowledge. When we say that God is the principle of all knowledge of God, we mean thereby that in the deepest sense he is also the principle of all knowledge of him that is found in the creature.

If God were merely the object of knowledge anywhere along the line of knowledge, he could not be known: "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Matt. 11:27).

Scripture teaches that God is the living God. This means that he is the covenant God, which in turn implies that he has fellowship in and with himself. It is in the Trinity that the deepest ground, the fundamental principle, of all theology must be found, because the Trinity teaches us that God is a self-conscious God in highest perfection and that he is the subject, the predicate, and the copula of this self-knowledge. For he is one in being, *the* being, other than which there is no being other than existence (there is only one I AM; all other is existence), and he is the implication of all perfections.

This eternal one subsists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This means that the first person is Father, generator, subject, speaker, with all the infinite perfections of the divine being. In the first person God is personally Father, but he is Father in relation to himself as God. The second person is the Son, the predicate, the Word spoken, the infinite, express image of the Father, his complete expression. Hence the Son is, with all the infinite perfections of the Godhead, the Word of God to the Father. In the first person God is the subject; in the second person God is the predicate. In the third person, the Spirit, the predicate, as the Word of God concerning God, returns to God. The Spirit proceeds from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Father. For "the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10). Thus there is in God an infinite, perfect self-

knowledge—God is a knowing God.

Principle 2: God a Speaking God

From this it follows that God is a speaking God. He speaks of himself and to himself. He is the subject and the predicate of all his speech. When we say that God speaks, we should be careful to emphasize that his speech is eternally perfect and that it is not limited by the imperfections of time and change, as is the speech of man. From eternity to eternity, God expresses the entire fullness of his infinite mind and hears his own word. It is undoubtedly this truth that underlies the conception of the divine Wisdom in the Old Testament and the divine Word (*Logos*) in the New Testament. The Word which God addresses to himself from eternity to eternity is the Son, who is always "with God" and essentially is God (John 1:1).

Now it pleased God according to his eternal good pleasure to speak concerning himself outside of himself, to let his word proceed outside of himself (*ad extra*). It should be emphasized that this is not an act of necessity, but of sovereignty, of sovereign freedom, determined by his sovereign, eternal counsel. Perhaps it is dangerous to try to say more about the motive of this speech of God outside of himself. Surely, scripture teaches us that this speech is motivated by God's supreme will to glorify himself. Yet the question remains: Why should God desire to have his speech go forth outside of himself (*ad extra*), seeing that his speech within himself (*ad intra*) is eternally perfect?

Another frequently-asked question arises here: Does God's speech outside of himself add anything at all to his own glory? Can anything be added to that perfect self-glorification which he has through the Word and in the Spirit? Here we stand before the ultimate mystery of the relation between the world and God.

Let it be sufficient to say that all God's works outside of himself are motivated by his works within himself. The Word that he speaks within himself and to himself, the eternal Word (*Logos*), is both the prototype and the motive for the word that he speaks outside himself. Beholding the fullness of his own goodness in the image of his Son and expressing and receiving the fullness of his glory through the eternal Word (*Logos*), God desires and determines to let the uncreated Word also go forth creatively. This is the idea of the objective principle of knowledge (*principium cognoscendi objectivum*), or the objective fountain of the knowledge of God. We must remember that also in this word of God outside himself, he does not speak first to us, but he speaks of himself and to himself. He remains the subject and the predicate also of this knowledge.

This is true of the speech of God in creation. Scripture teaches that all things are made through the Word and that without the Word (*Logos*) "was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3), so that we may say that the universe is the created Word (*Logos*). This Word is not like a dead handwriting, but it is the living Word of God that God continues to speak concerning himself.

It is because God spoke in the beginning that the world received its original existence. It is because God speaks that the world continues to exist, for he upholds all things by the Word of his power (Heb. 1:3). Hence the universe is a speech of God, variegated and differentiated in many words, yet concentrating on one theme: the living God himself. In all its rich and unending variation, the world constitutes the one Word of God created. Therefore, the "heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1) to himself, first of all. God creates the light, and he beholds the light. The light proceeding from him returns to him, and thus all the Word he speaks, and in which he expresses his own perfections, always returns in all its fullness to the subject himself.

Principle 3: God a God Who Reveals Himself

If nothing more could be said, however, there would be no revelation of God, because revelation implies that God speaks not only to himself but also to another outside of himself. In other words, that there is a being who can receive and understand God's speech concerning himself and to himself is implied in revelation. Since such a being does not exist of himself, revelation implies that God creates such a being who is capable of becoming the subject of the knowledge of God.

This being God created when he formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, thus making him a living soul whom God endowed with his own image. In man the light of the Word (*Logos*) shone clearly and brightly. Man was endowed, first, with so-called natural light. His fivefold sensation placed him in contact with the speech of God in the things that were made so that he became a recipient of that speech. By his power of perception, he was able to interpret the sensation and therefore the speech of God in connection with it. Through his intellect he was able to understand the work of God as a whole and come to the knowledge of the one God. This power became manifest in Adam's act of giving names to the animals.

In the light of the scriptural account of man's creation and his relation to all things and to God, the philosophy of idealism must be emphatically condemned. The subject does not create the object, nor can there be any doubt as to the proper correspondence and relationship between subject and object. But through the Spirit, the Word (*Logos*) in man received the true knowledge of and stood in proper relation to the Word (*Logos*) in creation.

Second, this man was endowed with true spiritual light, for the image of God consisted of true knowledge—the knowledge of love, of righteousness, and of holiness (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). Man's knowledge was not a mere theoretical theology. He knew with his whole being, and from his inmost heart he responded in love to the speech of God concerning himself. Man's knowledge was the knowledge of life.

Third, to this creature, who was so endowed with the light of his senses and his perception, and with the spiritual light of the image of God properly functioning, God gave the marvelous gift of intelligent speech. Therefore, man was capable of expressing what he caught in his own soul of the speech of God and of declaring the glory of the name of God. That light in man, who was made after the image of God, was the original subjective principle of knowledge (*principium cognoscendi subjectivum*).

Principle 4: God a God Who Reveals Himself in a Fallen World

However, through sin an important change was caused with respect to both the subjective and objective principles of knowledge. As to the speech of God through the things that were made, it must not be said that it was silenced. The impression is often left that because of sin hardly any or no sound of that speech is heard in creation any more. But the light continues to shine even in darkness, even though the darkness does not comprehend it (John 1:5). And the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood through the things that are made, more particularly, his eternal power and divinity (Rom. 1:20).

God still speaks of himself as the one who must be feared and glorified. But there is another speech of God through the things that are made, a speech that was not heard before sin came, but that must be heard by the creature, for the very reason that after sin entered into the world God always speaks of himself by the speech of his most holy wrath. Death was pronounced as the sentence against the

sinner, and death was executed. Besides, the ground was cursed, and the whole creation was made subject to vanity and is in the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:20–21). The wrath of God is revealed from heaven (Rom. 1:18).

In other words, God still speaks. Speaking concerning himself through a fallen world, he speaks of justice and holiness, of wrath and death. Nor is there any way out: as far as God's speech through the things that are made is concerned, the door is closed; there is neither love nor mercy. God is the terror of the creature who hears his speech.

Also the subject of the knowledge of God was changed through sin, for all the light that was in man became darkness.[1] This does not mean that man became irrational. He retained a few remains of natural light; by the light of these remains, he perceives—and to an extent understands—the things that are made and is able to live his earthly existence.[2] In fact, by the same light he also receives the speech of God through the things that are made (vv. 19–20).

But this light, such as it is in man's present state, is nothing but a very faint glow in comparison with Adam's original light of clear intuition, whereby he was able to perceive and understand the Word of God in creation, as became evident in his naming of the animals. This light is sufficient to leave man without excuse, because he plainly perceives that God is the one who must be thanked and glorified; but it certainly cannot serve as an adequate principle for any kind of natural theology. A theology that ignores the revelation that has now come through Christ Jesus can never be any more than mere philosophy of man, always creating his own god and worshipping an idol.

Principle 5: God a God Who Reveals Himself in Christ

Still another change was introduced through sin, affecting both the objective and the subjective principles of knowledge. This is the revelation of God in Christ Jesus. In Christ, the incarnate Son of God, himself the revelation of the Father, not only in his person but also in all his work, as he died on the cross, was raised on the third day, and was exalted on the right hand of God—in him the Most High reveals himself in the midst of the darkness of sin and death as the God of salvation, who not only calls the things that are not as if they were, but who also quickens the dead (Rom. 4:17), as the God who calls the light out of darkness, righteousness out of sin, life out of death.

In the midst of the condemning and cursing speech of God concerning himself, a new speech was heard, the speech of the gospel of God concerning his Son. It was heard from the beginning: for even in paradise the holy gospel of God was proclaimed, and its speech was heard throughout the ages of history by patriarchs and prophets, in direct revelation as well as in visions and dreams. It was heard through the speech of the Old Testament law, for it spoke through all the shadows of the old dispensation. It was finally realized, spoken to men directly in the Son incarnate, crucified, raised, and exalted. It was heard in the new dispensation by the apostles and evangelists. The contents of this new speech of God the church now possesses in the inspired record of the holy scriptures.

To set forth the meaning of this speech in a systematic form is the task of dogmatics. Hence it stands to reason that for the dogmatician the scriptures are the objective principle of knowledge. It must be emphasized that they alone, and nothing else, are the source of his dogmatic knowledge. This principle does not consist of two elements, a general and a special revelation. It is indeed true that "day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge" (Ps. 19:2); but even this speech of God in creation and history cannot properly be understood, except when it is heard and understood in connection with and is interpreted by the speech of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Even so, all is not said regarding this new work and speech of God concerning himself, for the

natural man can never hear the speech. He has no eyes to see and no ears to hear, and he cannot understand or discern the things of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14). We might say that the theme of 1 Corinthians 2 is that this new speech of God can only be received by the spiritual man and that therefore the real subjective principle of knowledge is the Spirit of God in Christ.

The apostle begins by saying that it was impossible for him to come to the Corinthians with excellency of speech or of human wisdom, with any show of human learning or philosophy, as he proclaimed to them the testimony of God; for this testimony, this new speech of God concerned Christ and him crucified, and this subject did not allow the form of human speech or wisdom. Therefore, the apostle's speech and preaching were not in persuasive words of human reasoning or philosophy, but simply in a demonstration of spirit and power (vv. 1–5).

This does not mean, however, that he and the other apostles did not speak wisdom. They did, but it was not the wisdom of this world or of the rulers of this world (vv. 6, 8). It was a wisdom that belongs to the sphere of the mystery and therefore can only be spoken in that sphere (v. 7). The speaker must move in that sphere of mystery in order to be able to reproduce this new speech of God, because this speech concerns the glory that God has determined before the ages to bestow upon his people. Therefore, it is a hidden speech insofar as this present cosmos is concerned.

That wisdom is not of this world is evident from the fact that the chief of this world crucified the Lord of that glory (v. 8). Besides, this is in harmony with what is written in Isaiah 64:4: "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him." The wisdom that the apostles speak, therefore, is not to be discovered by philosophy, empirical or speculative (1 Cor. 2:8–9).

However, God revealed this hidden wisdom to the apostles through his Spirit (v. 10). This Spirit is the principle of all knowledge of God within the adorable Trinity. The Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. Even as only the spirit of man knows what is in man, so only the Spirit of God knows what is in God (v. 11). This Spirit, not the spirit of the world (*cosmos*), the apostles have received; that is, he dwells in them, he illuminates them, and he so operates upon them that they also become subjects of the knowledge of the new speech of God. The apostle writes that they have received the Spirit in order that they might know the things bestowed upon the church by grace (v. 12).

In the apostles, therefore, in them *as* apostles, the Spirit is the true subjective principle of the knowledge of God. From this it follows, the apostle continues, that they cannot speak as the philosophers do, as they try to find a solution to the problems of the world, either through what they see and hear or through the imaginations and considerations of their own heart. The philosophers speak in enticing words (v. 4). The apostles must speak in words taught by the Spirit (v. 13). By the same token, because this Spirit of God in Christ is the subjective principle of this divine wisdom, the natural man cannot receive it (v. 14). To him the spiritual things are foolishness.

Only the spiritual man can distinguish, discern, and judge of the spiritual things, for he has the Spirit of God, through whom he is brought into contact with the hidden mystery of God, the new speech. While the spiritual man discerns all these things and speaks or witnesses of them, he himself is a mystery to the natural man and is discerned by no one. The conclusion is that only he who has the mind of Christ can know the mind of the Lord and that only he who has the Spirit of Christ can know his mind (vv. 10–16).

It follows, therefore, that also the subjective principle of knowledge is changed. Christ has received the Spirit and is become the quickening Spirit. Through that Spirit he dwells in the church and constantly imparts himself and all his benefits of light and life, of wisdom and knowledge, to all

his own. It is in that Spirit that he testifies through the word of the gospel of the new speech of the God of our salvation concerning himself. Centrally, then, the Spirit of Christ himself is the subjective principle of knowledge; insofar as the church becomes co-worker with Christ through faith, in the Spirit, that faith is the principle by which the church hears and reproduces the speech of God.

THE FIRST LOCUS

THEOLOGY

Chapter 6

God: Incomprehensible, Yet Knowable

The Primary Position of the First Locus

The science of dogmatics must be introduced by the locus theology (*locus de Deo*). It is true that other points of departure have been chosen. Some have treated the doctrine of man as the first locus of dogmatics. Others have conceived of dogmatics as being properly Christocentric. The fact is, however, that the locus concerning God is paramount and should have the first place in a systematic setting forth of the knowledge of God, as revealed in the scriptures and as adopted and confessed by the church of Christ in the world, because, strictly speaking, all dogmatics treats the revelation and knowledge of God.

The first locus, theology, sets forth the doctrine concerning God *per se*, treating his essence, his names, his attributes, his persons, and his works in eternity. The other five loci usually treated in dogmatics also have very really to do with the knowledge of God. Anthropology is concerned with man only as a work of God and man's relation to God, both in man's state of rectitude and in his fallen condition. Christology aims to set forth the knowledge of Christ as the Son of God in the flesh, the revelation of the God of our salvation, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Soteriology is concerned with man's salvation, but only as a revelation of the living God, who not only calls the things that are not as if they were, but who also raises the dead, calls light out of darkness, and changes shame into everlasting glory. Ecclesiology deals with the gathering, preserving, and perfecting of the church as the realization of God's eternal purpose of election, and the perfecting of his tabernacle, the house of God, where he dwells with his people in covenant fellowship forever. Eschatology treats the final revelation of Jesus Christ and the perfect salvation and redemption of all things, but only as the consummation and perfection of the works of God and the revelation of the perfect theodicy.

Everything in the theological discipline of dogmatics, therefore, is to be treated under theology (*sub specie dei*), as a revelation of the living God, and the dogmaticians of the Reformed faith properly placed the doctrine concerning God at the head of the different loci of dogmatics.

The Possibility of the Knowledge of God

Is it possible to begin with the knowledge of God *per se*? Is not God the *Deus absconditus* ("God afar off"—Jer. 23:23), infinitely above the world of our experience? Does he not escape all our attempts to know him, let alone to construe a scientific system of knowledge about him?

Is it not far preferable, or in fact the sole method that can possibly be followed, to take our starting point in the world of our experience and perception and to fix our attention first on the world about us, on man, on the things that are seen, in order thence to ascend to whatever evidences of God may be discovered in that world of our own experience? Does not the dogmatic method—taking for granted *a priori* what must above all be scientifically demonstrated, that is, the existence and knowability of God—forfeit its right to be called scientific? Is not the method of philosophy and metaphysics to be given preference above that of dogmatics? Is not God incomprehensible? And if he is, how can we attain to a knowledge of him at all?

God's Incomprehensibility in the History of Dogma

From the earliest times the church emphasized the incomprehensibility of God and the absolute incapability of man to find God out, to investigate his being, and of himself to say anything about God. God is the invisible. He dwells in a light which no man can approach unto (1 Tim. 6:16). Exactly as *God*, in his infinite majesty, he is not of our world. The world of our experience is the object of our investigation, but who shall search out the living God?

The creature is the object of our perception; God is beyond the scope of the things that are seen. He is the transcendent one, to whom we cannot reach out. He is the eternal; we are held within the limits of time. He is the infinite; we are finite, and the finite cannot comprehend the infinite. He is one; we are many. He is the incomparable: he cannot be classified or defined.

No chain of finite reasoning, be it ever so keen and profound, can hope to attain to him as its conclusion. Man, mere man, by his own power, can neither affirm nor deny God's existence. Man may conclude to a final cause, a Cause of causes (*Causa causarum*), but a cause—even a final cause—still belongs to our world. And God is not the final cause: he is God. Man may conceive of a supreme being, but God is not relatively supreme with relation to the world: he is the Lord, the Being of beings, the Absolute, the Self-existent One, and Jehovah is his name. To conceive of him is to make an idol. To say something about him of ourselves is to deny his infinite majesty.

This truth was acknowledged by the early church fathers, Augustine, the Schoolmen, and the Reformers, and was expressly declared in many symbols of the church.

Clement of Alexandria writes:

> You have, in brief, the professed aim of our philosophy; and the learning of these branches, when pursued with right course of conduct, leads through Wisdom, the artificer of all things, to the Ruler of all,—a Being difficult to grasp and apprehend, ever receding and withdrawing from him who pursues . . . He is in essence remote; "for how is it that what is begotten can have approached the Unbegotten?"[1]

Tertullian speaks thus of God:

> The object of our worship is the One God, He who by His commanding word, His arranging wisdom, His mighty power, brought forth from nothing this entire mass of our world, with all its array of elements, bodies, spirits, for the glory of His majesty; whence also the Greeks have bestowed on it the name of Κόσμος [*Cosmos*]. The eye cannot see Him, though He is (spiritually) visible. He is incomprehensible, though in grace He is manifested. He is beyond our utmost thought, though our human faculties conceive of Him. He is therefore equally real and great. But that which, in the ordinary sense, can be seen and handled and conceived, is inferior to the eyes by which it is taken in, and the hands by which it is tainted, and the faculties by which it is discovered; but that which is infinite is known only to itself. This it is which gives some notion of God, while yet beyond all our conceptions—our very incapacity of fully grasping Him affords us the idea of what He really is. He is presented to our minds in His transcendent greatness, as at once known and unknown.[2]

In his writings against Marcion, Tertullian says:

> You give Him His name indeed, but you deny the essential truth of that name, that is, the greatness which is called God; not acknowledging it to be such as, were it possible for it to have been known to man in every respect, would not be greatness.[3]

Speaking of the efforts of philosophers to discover the truth, Lactantius declares:

> But they did not obtain the object of their wish, and at the same time lost their labour and industry; because the truth, that is the secret of the Most High God, who created all things, cannot be attained by our own ability and perceptions. Otherwise there would be no difference between God and man, if human thought could reach to the counsels and arrangements of that eternal majesty.[4]

Lactantius agrees with Plato in his *Timaeus*, who declares the majesty of God "to be so great that it can neither be comprehended by the mind nor be expressed by the tongue."[5]

Augustine strives in vain to answer the question, "What, then, art Thou, O my God?" In his *Confessions*, while confessing that God is incomprehensible, Augustine piles up superlatives:

> Most high, most excellent, most potent, most omnipotent; most piteous and most just; most hidden and most near; most beauteous and most strong, stable, yet contained of none; unchangeable, yet changing all things; never new, never old; making all things new, yet bringing old age upon the proud and they know it not; always working, yet ever at rest; gathering, yet needing nothing; sustaining, pervading, and protecting; creating, nourishing, and developing; seeking, and yet possessing all things.[6]

At the time of the Schoolmen, although emphasis began to be placed on the proofs for the existence of God, the incomprehensibility of God was not only asserted but also developed into a special doctrine. Already John of Damascus taught that God could not be placed in the category of things. God is altogether exalted above all knowledge and above being. He proposed that we could speak of God only by way of negation.[7]

John Scotus Erigena more audaciously stated: "God does not know himself. What he is, because he is not a 'what,' being in everything incomprehensible both to himself and to every intellect."[8] Anselm, however, correctly maintained that God only knows himself and that the human mind cannot search him out or comprehend him.[9] Albertus Magnus taught that it is possible to reach God intellectually, but not to comprehend him.[10]

A controversy developed between the Thomists and the Scotists about the question whether it is possible for man in himself to have knowledge of God (quantitative or affirmative knowledge). The Thomists denied, but the Scotists affirmed this idea, the result of which was the view that man can have knowledge of the nature of God, but without being able to fathom or comprehend his nature. Alexander of Hales maintained that "we know what God is not in the way of negation, what he is in the way of affirmation. The divine being in its own immeasurability is not knowable with an affirmative knowledge by any rational spirit, but is knowable with a negative knowledge."[11] It is possible to perceive (*apprehendi*) God, but never to comprehend (*comprehendi*) him.

The Reformers took virtually the same position. Calvin writes:

> The doctrine of Scripture concerning the immensity and the spirituality of the essence of God, should have the effect not only of dissipating the wild dreams of the vulgar, but also of refuting the subtleties of a profane philosophy. One of the ancients thought he spake shrewdly when he said that everything we see and everything we do not see is God (Senec. Praef. lib. i Quaest. Nat.). In this way he fancied that the Divinity was transfused into every separate portion of the world. But although God, in order to keep us within the bounds of soberness, treats sparingly of his essence, still, by the two attributes which I have mentioned, he at once suppresses all gross imaginations, and checks the audacity of the human mind. His immensity surely ought to deter us from measuring him by our sense, while his spiritual nature forbids us to indulge in carnal or earthly speculation concerning him. With the same view he frequently represents heaven as his dwelling-place. It is true, indeed, that as he is incomprehensible, he fills the earth also, but knowing that our minds are heavy and grovel on the earth, he raises us above the world that he may shake off our sluggishness and inactivity.[12]

Luther, speaking of God's righteousness in connection with the damnation of the reprobate, writes:

> But here God must be reverenced and held in awe, as being most merciful to those whom He justifies and saves in their own utter unworthiness; and we must show some measure of deference to His Divine wisdom by believing Him just when to us He seems unjust. If His justice were such as could be adjudged just by human reckoning, it clearly would not be Divine; it would in no way differ from human justice. But inasmuch as He is the one true God, wholly incomprehensible and inaccessible to man's understanding, it is reasonable, indeed inevitable, that His justice also should be incomprehensible.[13]

God's Incomprehensibility in the Creeds

This truth of God's incomprehensibility was required and declared by the church in many of her symbols. The Athanasian Creed (erroneously ascribed to Athanasius) asserted: "The Father incomprehensible [unlimited]: the Son incomprehensible [unlimited]: the Holy Ghost incomprehensible [unlimited, or infinite]."[14]

The Longer Catechism of the Eastern Church has the following question and answer:

> Why is faith, and not knowledge only, necessary in religious instruction?
>
> Because the chief object of this instruction is God invisible and incomprehensible, and the wisdom of God hidden in a mystery; consequently, many parts of this learning can not be embraced by knowledge, but may be received by faith.[15]

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith declares:

> The holy Catholic Apostolic Roman Church believes and confesses that there is one true and living God, Creator and Lord of heaven and earth, almighty, eternal, immense, incomprehensible, infinite in intelligence, in will, and in all perfection. [16]

The Second Helvetic Confession declares:

> We believe and teach that God is one in essence or nature, subsisting by himself, all-sufficient in himself, invisible, without a body, infinite, eternal, the Creator of all things both visible and invisible, the chief good, living, quickening and preserving all things, almighty and supremely wise, gentle or merciful, just and true . . . And because God is an invisible Spirit, and an incomprehensible Essence, he can not, therefore, by any art or image be expressed. For which cause we fear not, with the Scripture, to term the images of God mere lies.[17]

The French (Gallican) Confession of Faith says: "We believe and confess that there is but one God, who is one sole and simple essence, spiritual, eternal, invisible, immutable, infinite, incomprehensible, ineffable."[18]

Similarly, the Belgic Confession states:

> We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God; and that he is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good.[19]

Also the first Scottish Confession of Faith speaks of God as "eternal, infinite, immeasurable, incomprehensible, omnipotent, invisible."[20]

And the Westminster Confession of Faith states: "There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible."[21]

There is, therefore, nothing strange or contrary to the faith of the church of all ages in the confession that God is incomprehensible, that the mere human mind can never fathom his essence or search him out. However, this is not the same as unknowability, nor did the church ever teach the unknowability of God.

Modern Rationalism and the Unknowability of God

Modern rationalism substituted the unknowability of God for the incomprehensibility of the divine essence. Kant, who established that time and space are forms of sensation without objective reality and that the categories must be considered as *a priori* modes of thinking, limited all possibility of

knowledge to the world of our experience. Practical reason accomplishes what pure reason can never do and postulates the ideas of God, the soul, and immortality; but these ideas can never become true knowledge, nor is it possible to ascribe to them any objectivity. Knowledge of God is a mere subjective notion, and dogmatics as a scientific exposition of the knowledge of God is impossible. [22]

Positivism proved by strictly logical reasoning that if there is a God, and if he be truly God, he must in the nature of the case remain unknowable, that is, it must remain unknowable whether he is and what he is. Herbert Spencer argues that only three verbally intelligible suppositions regarding the origin of the universe can be made: that it is self-existent, that it is self-created, or that it is created by an external agency.[23]

He then proceeds to prove that, although these hypotheses are verbally intelligible, none of them is actually conceivable, and therefore all must necessarily be relegated to the realm of the unknowable. Spencer states:

> Self-existence, therefore, necessarily means existence without a beginning; and to form a conception of self-existence is to form a conception of existence without a beginning. Now by no mental effort can we do this. To conceive existence through infinite past-time, implies the conception of infinite past-time, which is an impossibility. To this let us add, that even were self-existence conceivable, it would not in any sense be an explanation of the Universe. No one will say that the existence of an object at the present moment is made easier to understand by the discovery that it existed an hour ago, or a day ago, or a year ago; and if its existence now is not made in the least degree more comprehensible by its existence during some previous finite period of time, then no accumulation of such finite periods, even could we extend them to an infinite period, would make it more comprehensible . . .
>
> The hypothesis of self-creation, which practically amounts to what is called Pantheism, is similarly incapable of being represented in thought. Certain phenomena, such as the precipitation of invisible vapour into cloud, aid us in forming a symbolic conception of a self-evolved Universe; and there are not wanting indications in the heavens, and on the earth, which help us to render this conception tolerably definite. But while the succession of phases through which the Universe has passed in reaching its present form may, perhaps be comprehended as in a sense self-determined; yet the impossibility of expanding our symbolic conception of self-creation into a real conception, remains as complete as ever. Really to conceive self-creation, is to conceive potential existence passing into actual existence by some inherent necessity; which we cannot do . . . Moreover, even were it true that potential existence is conceivable as a different thing from actual existence; and that the transition from the one to the other can be mentally realized as a self-determined change; we should still be no forwarder: the problem would simply be removed a step back. For whence the potential existence? This would just as much require accounting for as actual existence; and just the same difficulties would meet us. Respecting the origin of such a latent power, no other suppositions could be made than those above named—self-existence, self-creation, creation by external agency . . .
>
> There remains to be examined the commonly-received or theistic hypothesis—creation by external agency. Alike in the rudest creeds and in the cosmogony long current among ourselves, it is assumed that the genesis of the Heavens and the Earth is affected somewhat after the manner in which a workman shapes a piece of furniture. And this assumption is made not by theologians only, but by the immense majority of philosophers, past and present. Equally in the writings of Plato, and in those of not a few living men of science, we find it taken for granted that there is an analogy between the process of creation and the process of manufacture. Now in the first place, not only is this conception one that cannot by any cumulative process of thought, or the fulfilment of predictions based on it, be shown to answer to anything actual; and not only is it that in the absence of all evidence respecting the process of creation, we have no proof of correspondence even between this limited conception and some limited portion of the fact; but it is that the conception is not even consistent with itself—cannot be realized in thought, when all its assumptions are granted. Though it is true that the proceedings of a human artificer may vaguely symbolize to us a method after which the Universe might be shaped, yet they do not help us to comprehend the real mystery; namely, the origin of the material of which the Universe consists . . . The production of matter out of nothing is the real mystery, which neither this simile nor any other enables us to conceive; and a simile which does not enable us to conceive this, may just as well be dispensed with. Still more manifest does the insufficiency of this theory of creation become, when we turn from material objects to that which contains them—when instead of matter we contemplate space. Did there exist nothing but an immeasurable void, explanation would be needed as much as now. There would still arise the question—how came it so? If the theory of creation by external agency were an adequate one, it would supply an answer; and its answer would be—space was made in the same manner that matter was made. But the impossibility of conceiving this is so manifest, that no one dares to assert it. For if space was created, it must have been

previously non-existent. The non-existence of space cannot, however, by any mental effort be imagined. It is one of the most familiar truths that the idea of space as surrounding us on all sides, is not for a moment to be got rid of—not only are we compelled to think of space as now everywhere present, but we are unable to conceive its absence either in the past or in the future. And if the non-existence of space is absolutely inconceivable, then, necessarily, its creation is absolutely inconceivable. Lastly, even supposing that the genesis of the Universe could really be represented in thought as the result of an external agency, the mystery would be as great as ever; for there would still arise the question—how came there to be an external agency? To account for this only the same three hypotheses are possible—self-existence, self-creation, and creation by an external agency. Of these the last is useless: it commits us to an infinite series of such agencies, and even then leaves us where we were. By the second we are practically involved in the same predicament; since, as already shown, self-creation implies an infinite series of potential existences. We are obliged therefore to fall back upon the first, which is the one commonly accepted and commonly supposed to be satisfactory. Those who cannot conceive a self-existent universe; and who therefore assume a creator as the source of the universe; take for granted that they can conceive a self-existent creator. The mystery which they recognize in this great fact surrounding them on every side, they transfer to an alleged source of this great fact; and then suppose that they have solved the mystery. But they delude themselves. As was proved at the outset of the argument, self-existence is rigorously inconceivable; and this holds true whatever be the nature of the object of which it is predicated. Whoever agrees that the atheistic hypothesis is untenable because it involves the impossible idea of self-existence, must perforce admit that the theistic hypothesis is untenable if it contains the same impossible idea.[24]

Spencer concludes on the basis of the above reasoning and similar arguments that God is the unknowable. But rationalism proceeded still further. It also attempted to prove that the very notion or conception of God contains a contradiction in terms, and thus negates itself. A good sample of this mode of reasoning, representing the theory of Sir William Hamilton, is offered by Mansel (*Limits of Religious Thought*) and is quoted by Herbert Spencer:

> "But these three conceptions, the Cause, the Absolute, the Infinite, all equally indispensable, do they not imply contradiction to each other, when viewed in conjunction, as attributes of one and the same Being? A Cause cannot, as such, be absolute: the Absolute cannot, as such, be a cause. The cause, as such, exists only in relation of its effect: the cause is a cause of the effect; the effect is an effect of the cause. On the other hand, the conception of the Absolute implies a possible existence out of all relation. We attempt to escape from this apparent contradiction, by introducing the idea of succession in time. The Absolute exists first by itself, and afterwards becomes a Cause. But here we are checked by the third conception, that of the Infinite. How can the Infinite become that which it was not from the first? If Causation is a possible mode of existence, that which exists without causing is not infinite; that which becomes a cause has passed beyond its former limits . . ."[25]

Mansel proceeds to show that a similar contradiction is involved in ascribing consciousness to the absolute. On the one hand, it must be admitted that if the absolute is also a cause, it must, in becoming such a cause, operate voluntarily and therefore consciously, for a necessary cause is not absolute. On the other hand, consciousness can only be conceived as a relation between subject and object; therefore, by ascribing consciousness to the absolute, we at the same time assert its relativity, and a relative absolute is a contradiction in terms. Not only is the fundamental conception of a rational theology "thus self-destructive," but also "we may naturally expect to find the same antagonism manifested in their special applications."[26]

Thus Mansel discovers contradictions between infinite power that can do all things and infinite goodness that cannot do evil; between infinite justice that punishes sin and infinite mercy that pardons iniquity; and between infinite wisdom that knows all things and infinite liberty that is free to do or to forbear. Even if human reason could surmount all these contradictions, it still would have done nothing to explain how the absolute could give rise to the relative, the infinite to the finite. He concludes:

> "To sum up briefly this portion of my argument. The conception of the Absolute and Infinite, from whatever side we view it, appears encompassed with contradictions. There is a contradiction in supposing such an object to exist, whether alone or in conjunction with others; and there is a contradiction in supposing it not to exist. There is a contradiction in

> conceiving it as one; and there is a contradiction in conceiving it as many. There is a contradiction in conceiving it as personal; and there is a contradiction in conceiving it as impersonal. It cannot, without contradiction, be represented as active; nor, without equal contradiction, be represented as inactive. It cannot be conceived as the sum of all existence, nor yet can it be conceived as only part of that sum."[27]

In justice to Mansel, it must be stated that it was not his intention that this argumentation should serve the purpose for which Spencer employed it. His purpose was rather to show the limitations of the human mind and to prove that belief cannot be determined solely by reason.

But the fact is that reasonings such as these became a strong incentive to agnosticism. And, strange though it may appear, this same agnosticism, that had its beginning in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and that declared the absolute incapability of the human mind to know anything about God, resulted ultimately in what would seem to be the very opposite: that same limited human reason boldly claimed to be the creator of its own god, so that Fichte—aiming to solve the dualism left by Kant and teaching that the object exists only in the consciousness of the subject and is the subject's own creation—could proudly and blasphemously confront his students with the statement: "Gentlemen, now we will create God."[28]

A Critique of Modern Rationalism

It is not difficult to expose the weakness and vanity of all these rationalistic argumentations. First, rationalism gives its own contents to what is called God, and then it proceeds to demonstrate that this God is unknowable and that its conception of God is full of contradictions. It posits that God is the first cause, the absolute, and the infinite, in order then to analyze these terms and to prove that we can never form any conception of their contents. In so doing rationalism is virtually begging the question, or rather, only destroying its own god, a philosophic idol.

The God of revelation, however, is not a first cause discovered by human reason as the solution of all existence; but he is the creator of heaven and earth, who is at once incomprehensible and knowable, as the one who calls the things that are not as if they were. The God of revelation and of the faith of the Christian church is not a certain abstract infinite, a philosophical idol; but he is presented as the Most High, who in all his virtues is always greater than our ultimate conception of him.

The God of revelation is not a cold absolute who stands in no relation to his creatures. Although he is a God who hides himself (Isa. 45:15), is too great for us to comprehend, too deep for us to fathom, dwelling in a light that no man can approach unto (1 Tim. 6:16), and transcendent above all that is called creature; yet he is also immanent, so that in him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28), and so that he enters into the most intimate fellowship of life and friendship with those who love him.

The god of rationalism is not God, but is a mere abstraction of the human reason. Little does anyone care if Spencer's god remains forever unknowable.

Second, in close connection with the above, rationalism argues that knowability and conceivability are identical. The underlying presupposition of the entire argument of Spencer is really that the inconceivable is unknowable.

Now if this had been true, it also would have been quite superfluous for Spencer to go to the trouble of offering a long argument to prove the unknowability of God, that is, of the infinite, the absolute, the first cause, because a concept of the human mind, even the most universal, is necessarily limited, relative, and subject to the law of cause and effect. Therefore, a god I can conceive is

limited, and is not God.

It is not true that the inconceivable, that is, the incomprehensible, is unknowable. This would be true if human reason must out of itself reach out for the incomprehensible, the finite for the infinite, the relative for the absolute. In that case, the incomprehensible can never be more than a mere negation, whose existence cannot be asserted or denied.

But this is not true if it pleases the incomprehensible to reach out for us, the infinite to speak in finite terms to us concerning himself, and the absolute to come down to the relative. In that case they who hear and believe God's word can positively know that he is, who he is, and what he is. Then they at once know him, and know that he is the incomprehensible. Then they do not conceive of him, yet they do conceive of all it has pleased him to reveal to them concerning himself. In that knowledge of him they have more than a mere philosophical conception: they have eternal life.

Third, from all this it is evident that the deepest error and sin of rationalism is exactly that it sets aside, ignores, denies, and contradicts revelation. Let us beware, lest we pay respect to this deeply sinful attitude and act of all philosophy, for it is an attitude and act of unbelief, and unbelief is sin. Nor let us ever admit that the antithesis between the Christian confession and the conclusions of philosophy is an antithesis between faith and reason, which would be tantamount to an antithesis between grace and nature. It is not that, but it is the antithesis between faith and unbelief, between grace and sin.

The Doctrine of God's Incomprehensibility

"Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out" (Job 36:26). Such is the anthropomorphic declaration of scripture itself. In comparison with all that exists, God is pure being; over against all that is limited he stands as the limitless, the unfathomably deep; in opposition to all the temporal, he is the eternal; infinitely above the many and manifold of the creature, he is the one, the incomparable, the simple being.

Of the creature it may be said that it *exists*, because it never has the ground of its being in itself. The creature exists only in God, in whom also we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). For this reason, all that is called creature is also ever becoming and changing. It appears and disappears; it develops, increases and decreases, grows and decays, and never remains the same. But God *is*.

The creature *is* not, but *exists*. God does not *exist*, but *is*. He did not *become* in time, but *is* eternally. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Ps. 90:2). With him a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (2 Pet. 3:8). Our days are like a shadow that declines; the heavens and the earth shall perish, yea, all of them shall wax old as a garment, and as a vesture they shall be changed. But God endures forever and his remembrance unto all generations. He is the same, and his years shall have no end (Ps. 102:11–12, 25–27). Hence his name is *Jehovah*, I AM THAT I AM, the one who never becomes, the eternal, immutable being (Ex. 3:14).

He was never produced or caused by any power or agency external to himself, but is in his deepest being, nature, and virtues, the independent one, who alone is in and of himself: "Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me" (Isa. 43:10). Hence he is also the one simple being, who is all his perfections, and in whom there is no composition of parts, powers, or virtues.

The creature may be said to live, but God *is* life; the creature may be clothed with righteousness, holiness, and truth, but God *is* righteousness, holiness, and truth. He *is* light, and there is no darkness

in him at all (1 John 1:5). He *is* the Almighty, the implication of all wisdom and knowledge. He *is* love, he *is* light, and he *is* the strength of Israel (1 John 4:8; 1 John 1:5; 1 Sam. 15:29).

Even as God's virtues are not mere attributes of his being, but are identical with his essence, so are all his virtues one in him. Although we do not and cannot comprehend this simple divine essence, and we receive the reflection of this glorious image of God in a multiplicity of colors and scintillations, this does not alter the fact that all God's virtues are one in him. Hence his righteousness is his mercy, his holiness is his grace, and his truth is his love. Therefore, this eternal being, this independent, simple essence that is called God is also the immutable, in whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (James 1:17).

Because God is the eternal implication of all infinite perfections, he is eternally the same, and with him there is no increase or decrease, no mutability of nature, of mind, or of will. The "everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary" There is no searching of his understanding" (Isa. 40:28).

Nor does he who is the strength of Israel ever lie or repent: for he is not a man that he should repent (1 Sam. 15:29). Therefore, the "counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:11). Because he is Jehovah, who changes not, therefore the children of Israel are not consumed and the gifts of grace and calling are without repentance (Mal. 3:6; Rom. 11:29).

Besides all this, God is the immeasurable, the infinitely immense one, who fills all things with his presence, but who cannot be comprehended by all that exists, and who far transcends the finitude of all that is called creature:

> Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee (Ps. 139:7–12).

He is in all things, under all things, above all things, and beyond all things. He is a God who is afar off, who is at hand, and who fills the heaven and the earth (Jer. 23:23–24). Yet all things never comprehend him, and he is not confined to time or space, for the heaven, yea, the heaven of heavens cannot contain him (1 Kings 8:27).

In all his virtues he is ever the infinite, whose being can never be fathomed. "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable" (Ps. 145:3).

> Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? . . . there is no searching of his understanding (Isa. 40:15–18, 28).

Contemplating the revelation of this glorious majesty, the redeemed child of God can only prostrate himself before God in humble adoration and cry out:

> O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen (Rom. 11:33–36).

Such is the language in which scripture speaks of the eternal and infinite God, who is God indeed. It is because the church throughout the ages heard this language and believed it, and not through any

abstract philosophical contemplation or rationalistic argumentation, that she confessed emphatically that God is the incomprehensible. By this she did not express a mere negation, although it was by means of a limiting concept that she expressed herself.

Can the caused fathom the uncaused? Can existence find out the pure being? Can time comprehend eternity? Can the murmuring and meandering brook swallow up the wide and deep ocean? Can the faint light of the candle surpass the glory of the sun? Though this were possible, yet it would be impossible for little man to comprehend God. The eye does not see him, and the ear does not hear him, and in the heart of man he does not arise (Isa. 64:4; 1 Cor. 2:9). "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea" (Job 11:7–9).

Philosophy and God

Not a cold, philosophical negation, placing God forever beyond the reach of human knowledge, but a positive confession of God's immeasurable greatness and man's insignificant smallness, of God's sovereignty and man's utter dependence, a confession that was designed to cast man into the dust in humble worship before the greatness of God's glorious majesty—such is the meaning and intent of the emphasis by the church of all ages on the incomprehensibility of God. It is not a mere denial or negation, but a positive statement concerning God based on his own revelation.

Philosophy, however, is of the natural man, and the natural mind does not understand the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14). "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh . . . For to be carnally minded is death . . . Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:5–7).

This truth, together with the fact that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, explains the failure of philosophy to recognize God and explains its constant attempt to relegate him to the realm of the unknowable, or even to deny his existence. The mind of man is darkened, not naturally—for he has a remnant of natural light—but spiritually, so that he always contradicts the word of God. Man's spiritual darkness makes all natural theology and natural religion impossible.

There is indeed a revelation of God in creation and history. The name of God is excellent in all the earth, and he has set his glory above the heavens (Ps. 8:1). "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge" (Ps. 19:1–2). Moreover, "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead" (Rom. 1:20).

Besides this, there is undoubtedly a testimony of God through the Spirit, binding the truth of God's eternal power and Godhead irrevocably upon the inmost consciousness of every man: "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them" (v. 19). And "when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another" (Rom. 2:14–15).

Not as proofs which man produces, but as evidences of revelation to the believing mind, the so-called proofs for the existence of God, therefore, certainly have weight. But, first, it must be

remembered that this revelation of God in the works of his hands, in history, and in the consciences of men offers neither an abstract, cold, philosophical conception of God nor the necessary materials for such a conception. Revelation is ethical. It is the revelation of the living God, of the Lord, who must be glorified and acknowledged with thanksgiving. The name of God is *excellent* in all the earth. The heavens declare his *glory* (Ps. 8:1; Ps. 19:1). This implies that to sinful man God reveals his righteousness and justice, his holy wrath. Unless this speech of God's holy wrath is understood, God's revelation in the things that are made and in history cannot even be understood.

Second, the natural man stands in enmity over against this speech of God. The natural man does not want this glorious God, this righteous Lord, who always places man under judgment, and whom man is bound to glorify and to acknowledge with thanksgiving. He hates God. He always contradicts him. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good" (Ps. 14:1).

> When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things (Rom. 1:21–23).

This is the explanation of philosophy's attempt, either to deny God or to make its own god, while assigning the living God a place in the regions of the unknowable. The world by wisdom knew not God because its wisdom is from below, is earthly, devilish, even in its most refined form (1 Cor. 1:21; James 3:15). The faith of the church and agnosticism oppose each other, not as faith and reason, but as faith and infidelity. Agnosticism is profoundly and hopelessly irrational.

The Knowability of God

The church announces without hesitation, as the first and chief article of its confession: "I believe in God." The words of Barth cannot be applied to this confession:

> In the name of God! We know not what we should say to this. The believer knows our ignorance. With Job, he loves the God who in His unsearchable eminence is only to be feared: with Luther, he loves the *deus absconditus* [*God afar off*]. To him is manifested the righteousness of God. He shall be saved, and he alone.[29]

Although it is certainly true that the church confesses that God is incomprehensible and transcendent, it is equally true that she knows him as immanent and that she has some very definite statements to make about the living God.

Although God is the incomprehensible, he is yet the knowable. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). All of God's revelation witnesses, and scripture plainly teaches, that God knows himself with a perfect knowledge. He is not a blind, impersonal power, but a personal, consciously knowing and willing being, who, as the triune God, knows himself in an infinitely perfect sense.

Eternally the Father generates the Son. "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (John 5:26). This Son is the "brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person" (Heb. 1:3), reflecting in infinite perfection all the glory and virtues, all the delights and perfections of the Father eternally, for "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

It is in this Word, the eternal Son, that God knows himself and speaks to himself concerning himself

in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son and is the divine bond of knowledge and fellowship within the divine family. The Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God, and knows all that is in God (1 Cor. 2:10). He never speaks of himself, but eternally witnesses of the Son, even within the economy of the Trinity, and glorifies the Son (John 16:13–14).

Therefore, there is an eternally perfect knowledge of God in himself. He alone knows himself perfectly. The eternal God is comprehended only by his own divine, infinite mind. This knowledge stands before his divine consciousness eternally, unchangeably, in infinite perfection. We know in part (1 Cor. 13:12), and even of that knowledge in part we are not always conscious. We speak of that which lies below the threshold of our consciousness at any given moment. But in God there is neither unconsciousness nor a subconscious.

He is light, also in this respect, and there is no darkness in him at all (1 John 1:5). There is in him no difference between the scope of his being (if we may use this anthropomorphism) and the scope of his knowledge, nor between his knowledge and his divine consciousness. The whole of God's infinite being, with all his unfathomable perfection and perfect knowledge, is constantly reflected in his divine consciousness. The Lord our God knows himself, fathoms his infinite essence eternally, and consciously contemplates his own glorious perfections without interruption.

The Knowability of God and Revelation

Even as God alone knows himself with an infinitely perfect and eternally self-conscious knowledge, so also he alone is able to impart his knowledge to the creature, that is, to reveal himself. This must not be misunderstood as if there ever could be formed a creature capable of receiving God's own infinite and eternal knowledge of himself, because such a creature would have to be infinite as God is infinite.

Rather, revelation consists in that God speaks concerning himself and imparts his knowledge in a form the creature can receive, in a creaturely measure. Behind and beyond the plane of revelation, there must always remain infinite depths of divine glories and perfections that we can never fathom.

In revelation God comes down to us; he does not lift us up to his infinite majesty. He gives his word a finite form; he does not communicate to our hearing an infinite capacity. While on the plane of revelation, he reaches out for us and speaks to us in language adapted to our capacity; yet at the same time and through that same medium of revelation, he deeply impresses upon our minds and hearts that he is always greater than his revelation, that while he is revealed, he is still hid, and while he is known, he is still the incomprehensible. If it were not so, we would still worship an idol.

This does not necessarily imply that revelation gives us no adequate knowledge of God, even in the sense that through revelation he reflects all his fullness. In Christ dwells all the fullness of God bodily (Col. 2:9). That we know in part (1 Cor. 13:12) must not be so interpreted that we know only a part of God. But it does mean that beyond and above the divine reflection in finite form there is the reality of the infinite essence, of which we are ever conscious. Even when in glory we shall see face-to-face (v. 12), we shall still forever be conscious that the face we behold is but the presence of him who must remain invisible in his infinite majesty.

We are accustomed to distinguishing between two forms of revelation, a general revelation in nature and a special revelation in scripture. Frequently, these two forms of revelation are presented as if they were two wholly different revelations that are not only distinct, but also separated from each other. General revelation is adapted to reason as its subjective principle of knowledge, and special revelation is adapted to faith. The one is a revelation of God to man in general, the other to

his people in Christ. The one provides man with the necessary material for the structure of a natural theology; the other is the source of Christian dogmatics.

This conception is plainly erroneous. It speaks about general revelation, natural theology, and natural religion as if the original condition of the first paradise still existed. And it completely fails to take into account the important change that was brought about in this general revelation through the fall of man and the curse of God.

Through this fall the recipient of God's revelation was so changed and corrupted that he could no longer truly hear the word of God. He lost the image of God, and all his light was changed into darkness. Although the light still shines in the darkness, "the darkness comprehendeth it not" (John 1:5).

And the medium of revelation, the speech of God through the things that are made, is changed, because the creature is made to bear the curse of God and is subjected to vanity (Rom. 8:20), and man himself pines and dies through the fierce wrath of God upon him. In other words, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men (Rom. 1:18). No natural theology can ever be constructed by that fallen man. So darkened is his understanding that he will always lie about the living God.

There is indeed a revelation of God in all the things that are made (vv. 18–20), but this cannot be understood properly, except through faith in Jesus Christ and in the light of that other, higher, revelation God gave in and through Jesus Christ. There is, therefore, only one recipient of the revelation of God, the new man in Christ Jesus. "In [his] light shall we see light" (Ps. 36:9). Christ not only reveals the Father, but he is also the revelation of the God of our salvation. This revelation we possess in the holy scriptures. In Christ the revelation of God in nature and in scripture is one, even as God is one, but always so that we can receive the revelation of God in nature only in the light of scripture.

Standing by faith and through grace in the light of him who is the light of the world (John 8:12; John 9:5; John 12:46), and therefore taking our firm basis in holy scripture, we can hear and understand the word of God also in all creation and history. Then we not only discern God's eternal power and Godhead (Rom. 1:20) and behold God's wisdom only in the design clearly manifest in all the works of his hands, but we also hear and understand the word of his wrath in all the groaning creation—in the howling storm, in the roaring thunder, in the devastation wrought by earthquake and volcano, by hail and fire, in the silent speech of the barren desert, in the thorn and the thistle, in the din of the battlefield, and in the cry of the suffering and dying man.

Even more, we see the essential unity of the so-called general and the special revelation of God also in that the whole groaning creation as with uplifted head stands in expectation of its own participation in the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:21–22). We see things happening in a parable. Adam is an image of the one who was to come and is to come again. The earthy is a picture of the heavenly. The sower who casts his seed into the ground and the seed that dies and lives again, the sun in the heavens and the stars in multitude, the lion and the lamb, and day unto day and night unto night—all are heard pouring out the same speech: the promise of redemption to be realized in the kingdom of heaven that is at hand. In that kingdom, revelation shall reach its highest possible level in the tabernacle of God. There we shall see him face to face, and know even as we are known.

Chapter 7

The Being of God

Proposed Proofs for the Existence of God

From all that has been said on the knowability and incomprehensibility of God, it must have become quite evident that it is absurd to speak of proofs for the existence of God and that there is no need of them. No one is able to demonstrate with mathematical certainty that God exists, nor can reason reach out for him by means of a syllogism. Whatever can be so demonstrated and proven must belong to the world of our own understanding and experience, and therefore is not God.

"He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). It is faith, which is an evidence of things unseen and the substance of things hoped for, that is able to "understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (vv. 1, 3), and that can approach the incomprehensible God. This is true not only in a spiritual and ethical sense so that we cannot worship him and confide in him without faith, but it is also true in an intellectual sense. One who would speak of the knowledge of God cannot approach his object either with a question whether or not God is, or with an outright denial of his existence. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Without faith it is impossible to find him.

Nor is there need of proof to convince man that God is, for he reveals himself and does not leave himself without witness in the consciousness of any man. It is only as evidences of revelation that the so-called proofs for the existence of God have significance and value.

These proofs are four in number: the cosmological, the ontological, the teleological, and the moral —to which some add a fifth, the historical proof for the existence of God. We will briefly discuss them.

The Cosmological Proof

The cosmological argument proceeds from the law of cause and effect. All things have a cause. This may be regarded as a universal law. Hence also the universe, the cosmos as an organic whole, must have a cause. This cause of the whole universe is the ultimate or final cause, God.

It is not difficult to demonstrate the weakness and fallacy of this argumentation. By this syllogism the human mind can never reach out beyond the world of cause and effect. Suppose that the conclusion as to an ultimate cause of the whole universe were correct. That cause would still belong to the world of our experience and could never be the absolute, for there is a relation of necessity between cause and effect. There is an infinite difference between cause and creator. The creator's relation to the universe is that of freedom and sovereignty, while the relation of a cause is one of necessity and dependency.

A cause is never self-existent; self-existence is one of the chief attributes of God, who is *God*. A cause would not be cause without its effect; God is *God* eternally and remains God, though all the world were to sink into nothingness. Therefore, even if it could be granted that the above argumentation leads us to a final or ultimate cause, the conclusion that this final cause is God is quite arbitrary and wholly unwarranted.

Even the conclusion itself that there must be a final cause of the world is arbitrary. From the major premise that all things have a cause the inference may be drawn that also the world has a cause. But there is nothing in that premise that warrants the judgment that this cause is final, that is, itself uncaused. In fact, strictly speaking, the major premise denies the finality of any cause. One could turn the entire argument in favor of atheism, as follows: All things have a cause, that is, there is nothing uncaused; if there be a God, he must be uncaused; therefore, there is no God.

To be sure, the existence of the world is sure evidence to the believer that God is, and to him it is the height of absurdity to deny God's being as the creator of the universe. However, faith does not reach out for God in the way of a logical argument, but faith hears and believes God's speech in all things that are made. By faith we know that the world is framed by the word of God (Heb. 11:3).

The Ontological Proof

The ontological argument attempts to reason from the idea of God in us to the existence of God. Anselm's method of argumentation on this point, as presented by Dr. A. Kuyper, is rather involved and mechanical: First, something greater than anything conceivable must exist: that which exists in thought and in fact is greater than that which exists only in thought. Second, God is conceived as something greater than which nothing else can be conceived. Third, therefore God exists not only in thought but also in fact.[1]

I do not know whether Kuyper correctly represents Anselm's argumentation, but if he does, it seems to me that we have here merely an illustration of begging the question. Simply and clearly stated, the syllogism runs as follows: God is conceived as something greater than which nothing else can be conceived. Something greater than which nothing else can be conceived exists not only in thought but also in fact. Therefore, God exists not only in thought but also in fact.

Thus stated, the syllogism simply assumes what must be proved, that is, the statement in the minor premise. If it is true that something greater than which nothing greater can be thought or conceived exists not only in thought, but also in fact, the conclusion also follows. But this is exactly what needs proof and is not at all self-evident. Hence the entire argumentation is a form of begging the question.

However, the real ontological argument is much simpler. It argues that we have an idea of God. This idea of God is infinitely greater than man himself. Hence the idea of God cannot have its origin in man; it can have its origin only in God himself. Therefore, God exists. This line of reasoning also is based on presuppositions that require proof. The chief assumption is that there is a real world of being corresponding to our world of thought, that there are real things (*noumena*) corresponding to our ideas of things (*phenomena*), and that the ideas have their origin in the real things.

The believer who proceeds from the basic principle, "I believe in God, creator of all things," has no difficulty here. He believes that God created all things through the Word (*Logos*) and that he also created man's perceptive and cognitive powers in such a way that man's powers correspond to the Word. But pure reason can never establish this truth, as is plainly evident from the history of philosophy from Descartes to Kant. Again, the argument assumes that man has in himself an idea of God from which he can conclude the existence of God himself. But suppose he analyzes his idea of God. Suppose he does discover that this idea of God is greater than himself, and suppose that there were a being corresponding to this idea. Would that being be God? It is evident that he would not. He would be a greater being than man, but still he would not be *God*.

To the believer this argument is quite stringent. He does not proceed from his idea of God, but from faith in the living God himself, who is infinite in power and majesty—not only greater than man but

also infinitely beyond his boldest comprehension. He knows, too, that he does not have this knowledge of God out of himself, but that God himself through his word and Spirit is its author. This knowledge is not of reason and is not attained in the way of logical demonstration, nor does it derive its certainty from a syllogistic argument. Rather, it is derived from revelation and has its immediate certainty through the testimony of the Holy Spirit. To faith it is not only absurd but also *sin* to set aside this testimony.

The Teleological Proof

The richest and most beautiful of all the so-called proofs for the existence of God is the teleological. It means to lead us up not only to a certain superpower over all, or final cause of the world, but also to a personal designer of all things, possessed of intellect and will, of knowledge and wisdom.

In the world about us, as well as in our own being, we see design and purpose everywhere. How beautifully and perfectly all things are adapted to one another so that each creature exists, moves, lives, and acts within the sphere of its own law, and all its needs are satisfied. The fish is adapted to the water, the bird to fly in the air, the beast to roam in the jungle, trees and flowers to grow and flourish in the soil, and clouds, rain, and sunshine to cause the seed to sprout in the earth. The eye is adapted to the light, the ear to sound. The human mind is adapted to interpret the world round about it and to subject all things under it.

Everywhere there is purpose and design, and all things loudly proclaim a designer marvelous in wisdom, goodness, and power. That designer is God. To be sure, the believer loves this argument. He loves to sing with the inspired psalmist: "O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches" (Ps. 104:24). Again, this is the language of faith, not of reason without faith, and it is based on revelation. Faith does not seek to prove the existence of God, but proceeds from the certainty of his existence.

As far as pure or unbelieving reason is concerned, let us note that also this so-called proof proves exactly nothing as to the existence of an intelligent being outside of the world, who is infinite in power and wisdom and the designer of all things. It may as well be employed by pantheistic evolutionism to demonstrate that nature itself is intelligent, that God is the world, and the world is God, reaching his highest consciousness in man.

Moreover, if there is design in the universe, there are also many phenomena that would seem to demonstrate the very opposite of design and purpose. There is friction, conflict, death, destruction, and apparent foolishness everywhere. A babe is born, and its mother dies in the pangs of birth, or the babe itself is snatched away by the merciless hand of death. A tree grows, and the lightning strikes it down. A crop is almost ready for the harvest, and a hailstorm destroys it. The world as we perceive and know it today is so full of phenomena that appear to be foolish, that some have denied the design altogether and have pronounced the universe the worst that anyone could possibly have conceived.

Faith in God's revelation has its answer to these objections, for it knows of God's wrath against sin, and it considers the wisdom of God in the face of Jesus Christ the Lord, in whom the believer finds the solution for all these phenomena and looks in expectation for the final and perfect theodicy in the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. But unbelieving reason that sets aside or contradicts God's own revelation of himself cannot recover God in the way of the teleological argument. As a rational proof it has no power.

The Moral Proof

The moral proof for the existence of God is found in its simplest form in Kant's categorical imperative. Every man has a sense of obligation, of what is right and wrong, together with an undeniable feeling of responsibility to do what is right and a sense of self-condemnation when he commits what is evil. There is in him, as it were, a voice that will not be silenced, ever saying to his inner consciousness, "Du sollst" (*Thou shalt*). This presupposes that there is a speaker and, moreover, one who is Lord and Sovereign. This author of the command "Du sollst" in man's moral consciousness is God.

Again, we admit that man's knowledge of good and evil and his sense of obligation are certainly from God. The heathen, who have not the law, have the work of the law written in their hearts so that their own conscience constantly bears witness, excusing or accusing themselves and one another (Rom. 2:14–15). But it is quite impossible by this argument to prove the existence of God to one who will not proceed from faith in God and his revelation. Spencer demonstrates that this "Du sollst" has nothing to do with the voice of a supreme being and Lord, but that it has its origin in society, limiting on every side and in a thousand ways man's self-love.[2] Humanism develops an ethics of its own, quite divorced from the knowledge of God and his precepts.

The Historical Proof

The same may be said of the historical argument that is sometimes added to the four already discussed. It proceeds either from the general phenomenon of religion among all nations or from the evidently purposeful progress in history. But neither the one nor the other form of argumentation is sufficient to prove God's existence to one who refuses to bow before the revelation of the living God himself and who contradicts his word.

While all of these so-called proofs have their significance and value for one who believes, as so many witnesses of the invisible God; as strictly logical proofs that must convince unbelieving reason, they lack all power. The fool will continue to say in his heart, "There is no God" (Ps. 14:1), and the natural man will still refuse to glorify him and give him thanks. Only faith, humbly listening to God's own word, will be able to confess, "I believe in God."

The Impossibility of Defining God

In the light of what has been said on the incomprehensibility of God, it should be plain that all efforts to give an adequate definition of God must be fruitless. The essence of God cannot be defined in the proper sense of the term *definition*. To define means to limit, as the word itself indicates. When we define any object, we include it in a certain class, place it in the category of a known universal, in order then to distinguish it from other objects in the same class by mentioning its distinguishing characteristics.

It is all but impossible to define the essence of anything for the simple reason that we cannot form a clear concept of the meaning of *essence*. We may say that the essence of a thing is *that which it is*, or its *substance*, or *hypostasis*, the substratum of all the necessary qualities and attributes of a thing, that in which they all subsist. But we feel that all of these attempts at definition do not really succeed in clearly limiting for our mind the concept *essence*, or *being*. The difficulty seems to be that essence must itself be an ultimate concept, than which we cannot find a wider, more comprehensive universal.

How then can we expect to formulate a satisfactory definition of the being or nature of God? God is God. There cannot be a higher concept than our idea of God. There can be no universal in which God may be classified. He cannot be compared: "To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One" (Isa. 40:25). Any definition or description of God that fails to take into account this incomparability of God would thereby destroy the very idea of God. What cannot be compared certainly cannot be defined. Nor is it possible to find the *genus* of such a definition in God himself.

Frequently this has been attempted. Some proceed from the idea of Spirit in order to make of it the genus of their definition; others proceed from the idea of love; still others from the idea of pure being or the idea of God's self-sufficiency (*aseitas*). But all of these attempts, insofar as they purpose to offer a definition of the Most High, suffer shipwreck on the rock of God's simplicity. God is one. He is his virtues. All his virtues, even though they are differentiated in his revelation to us, are one in him. All attempts at defining the essence of the divine being, therefore, must be abandoned as necessarily fruitless. To say that we can define God is to deny his very Godhead.

This does not mean that we cannot describe the divine nature. If we could say nothing about God's being, we would have to fall back into the conclusion of agnosticism. Without claiming to be able to give a logical and comprehensive definition of God's essence, we may clearly circumscribe our conception of God as it is based on revelation in order to express who and what he is, both in himself and in relation to the world, and to do so in distinction from and in opposition to all such conceptions of God that are not based on revelation and are therefore necessarily false. Here again it must be emphasized that all of our descriptions of the nature of God must be based strictly on what God himself has revealed to us concerning his own being and nature.

The Method of Philosophy

Faith cannot for a moment concede to reason the right and capability to say who and what God is. Dogmatics cannot adopt the method of philosophy, which always makes its own god, whether it boldly claims with Fichte that the human reason simply creates him, or whether the true conception of God is determined by a majority vote of humanity. To philosophy it is a problem whether polytheism, monotheism, theism, deism, or pantheism presents the correct conception of God. For the believer, who derives all of his knowledge of God from God's own revelation, this cannot be a question.

Professor G. Watts Cunningham discovers a real problem here, partly because the "religious consciousness" is "equivocal in its pronouncement concerning the object of its faith." He finds that these pronouncements of the religious consciousness are a "veritable Babeldom."[3]

> For some believers there are many gods with widely varying characteristics, for others there is only one God though conceived with an endless variety of qualities; some believe that God is the artificer of the world-process, others identify Him precisely with the world-process; at times He is conceived as a jealous God interested in a chosen few, then again He is supposed to be no respecter of persons; in the faith of some He is a self-conscious personality with a will to accomplish certain ends, while in other faiths He is an unconscious Power, Karma, or Heaven; and so the confusion runs on ad infinitum. Of course, even an inkling of reflection reveals that such confusion is logically intolerable; obviously, not all of these views can be true. What shall we say then? Shall we refrain from questioning, that faith may abound? That is impossible, and the religious consciousness of mankind itself will not tolerate it. Thus out of beliefs in God grows the problem of God; the very diversity of faiths makes the problem an inevitable one.[4]

For the believer this problem does not exist, for the simple reason that he does not derive his conception of God from a study of the various pronouncements of the religious consciousness.

Nor is there a satisfactory solution when the problem of God is thus philosophically stated.

Professor Cunningham, after having eliminated polytheism and deism as possible solutions, arbitrarily decides in favor of theism as offering the true conception of the nature of God:

> The field is thus apparently left to theism and pantheism. What can be said of their relative merits? Here the religious consciousness of mankind does not speak unequivocally. One of the great religions, at least, is thoroughly pantheistic; and it numbers among its devotees a large part of the human race. But Buddhism stands practically alone in this regard; the other great religions, particularly Christianity and Mohammedanism, are predominantly theistic in their view of God. So it would appear that from the standpoint of the religious consciousness the weight of authority lies in favor of theism rather than pantheism; and this is certainly the case if it can be shown (as many hold it can be) that modern Christianity expresses the profoundest insight that the religious consciousness of man has yet attained.[5]

Evidently the weight of authority of which Professor Cunningham speaks is the majority vote cast by the "religious consciousness" of the world, for he speaks of the "weight of authority" of reason:

> Like the religious consciousness reason, too, hesitates between pantheism and theism. But here also the weight of authority would seem to favor the claims of theism. The arguments above enumerated, especially the strongest ones (the epistemological and the moral arguments), lead more directly towards theism; indeed, it would be difficult to reconcile them with a thorough-going pantheistic view of the world. And in the historical development of philosophical thought the greatest thinkers have, on the whole, inclined towards theism rather than pantheism.[6]

The above quotations show clearly that philosophy has no solution to the problem it raises and has nothing positive to say on the question concerning the nature of God.

The Subjective Method of Abraham Kuyper

Nor can the source of our knowledge and description of the nature of God be found in the believer's subjective experience of him, not even as it is aided by revelation. This appears to be the method recommended by Dr. A. Kuyper at the time when he was teaching dogmatics at the Free University of Amsterdam. It may seem almost unbelievable, yet he states:

> If, therefore, it appears from the nature and history of the matter, that the idea of *being* cannot be defined, then the question comes up how we can even treat the idea in theology. In that regard the paragraph says that we, speaking of the nature of God, must never start from our own understanding or abstract thinking. Every attempt to approach that doctrine through abstract reasoning begins out of a false scholasticism or collapses into it. One has solid ground underfoot when one turns to his own inner life and religious impressions and starts there. To speak of "religious impressions" is not to speak of something provided by grace, but of the fundamental, the basic impressions of religious life in our own heart of hearts, thus excluding those impressions which are given by our own self-realization of self-consciousness. The preceding paragraphs call this the "sense of the divine, infixed in the very marrow and viscera of man." If anyone says there is no such thing, then let him renounce all theological endeavor. For even if one has ten Bibles and possesses all possible exegetical knowledge of what is in those Bibles, without an internal connection to the eternal being, he cannot go one step farther.[7]

From this religious experience and these religious impressions, Dr. Kuyper claims that we can rise to the knowledge of an eternal being or Ego, who is one, unchangeable, and who has the ground of his being in himself. Kuyper reminds us that when he speaks of the religious consciousness or experience, he does not mean that of the individual human being, but refers to the universal consciousness of mankind as illuminated by the revelation of scripture:

> If someone asks, then, whether it follows from this, that, observing that [sense of the divine] out of his own self-realization and self-consciousness, every man comes to a confession of that essential I AM of God, then the answer must be: No. Indeed man has a sense of the ideal, but every man has it as a sinful individual in whom everything is abnormal. Not only that, for even if he were not abnormal as a consequence of sin, then it would still not be true that every man would have it as an individual. An individual human consciousness is inconceivable—a man does not exist except in connection with and as a part of the whole organism of the human race. Human consciousness has been given only to the whole

human race . . .

So when we speak of the confession of the divine I AM in God as a Being, then that confession is not found in the individual consciousness of A or B but in the consciousness of humanity conceived as a collection of individuals, and that as we say, in the way of graduation, process, association.

In the second place, we must also speak of man as abnormal in connection with the debilitation that human nature has undergone through the influence of sin. Therefore, God makes Christ, the son of man, the representative of the whole human race, not as an abnormal individual but completely normal. From Christ, therefore, a remnant and witness, as it were, of the normal testimony of the consciousness which resides in the human race comes to us. Scripture is given to clarify our consciousness. And so it is through human consciousness, in degree, process, association, and clarified by the revelation of the Holy Scriptures, that we come to the confession that all the operations within us and around us radiate and come to us from the I AM of God, which exists in distinction from us and which he has in himself.[8]

Kuyper's Error

That Kuyper here dangerously approaches Fichte's pantheistic idealism is evident. That Kuyper is wholly in error is evident not only from scripture but also from the history of philosophy itself. When the natural man from his own experience of God construes a conception of him, he always makes a God after his own heart, or altogether denies that God is. Christ does not appear in the word of God as the representative of the general human consciousness in its pure and normal state, but he appears as coming from above, as the Son of God incarnated, and as the light that shines in the darkness, though the darkness comprehends it not (John 1:5). In Christ we do not have the highest manifestation of the human consciousness in its relation to God, but the highest revelation of God to us: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Heb. 1:1–2).

In Christ, therefore, we do not have the human consciousness' speaking about God, but God's speaking concerning himself directly through the Son in human flesh. Not from philosophy, not from human reason, not from religious experience, and not from the religious experience of the human race, but from revelation alone, that is, from God's own word concerning himself, we must derive whatever description we may be able to give of God's nature.

Deism and Pantheism

If we consult scripture and formulate our description of the nature of God according to its revelation, we find that the word of God reveals him to us as both the transcendent and the immanent one, as the "Wholly Other," as Barth emphasizes that he is; yet also scripture reveals him as the one who is very near us and to whom the creature is so similar that God can be described in terms derived from the creature's existence.

In other words, a description of the nature of God based on scripture must exclude and condemn as false both pantheism and deism. Although emphasis on God's transcendence, on his wholly otherness, on the truth that he is in heaven and we are on the earth, that he is *God*, has its place and merits; yet exclusive emphasis on this side of God's nature completely separates him from us and from the world, makes revelation impossible, and really relegates him once more to the realm of the unknowable. Both his immanence and his transcendence, his likeness and his otherness, are revealed to us in Holy Writ. Both must be maintained in a description of the nature of God. When we do so, both deism and pantheism are excluded from a Christian conception of God.

Deism, a philosophy that originated with the French Encyclopedists and some English thinkers of the eighteenth century, emphasizes exclusively the transcendence of God. God is above the world. He created the universe but does not concern himself with it. He not only formed the substance of the

world but also gave it its laws; now the universe runs by its own power and laws. As a watchmaker fashions a watch, winds it, and lets it run, so God created the world, formed it so that it could run independently of himself, and lets it run without any interference or control on his part.

Pantheism is the diametrically opposite view. According to pantheism, God is not at all transcendent. He is only immanent in the world; or rather, he is identified with the world. All is God, and God is all; but above, beyond, or apart from the world there is no God.

God's Immanence

Scripture maintains both God's immanence and his transcendence by presenting him as very near us, as being so like us, and even like the creature, that he describes himself in terms derived from man's existence as well as from creation in general. Although he who made the world and all things that are therein certainly does not dwell in temples made with hands (Acts 17:24), yet he is "not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being" (vv. 27–28). Directly in and behind all the existence and activity of the creature is God.

The voice of the Lord thunders, breaks the cedars of Lebanon and makes them to skip like a calf, divides the flames of fire, shakes the wilderness, makes the hinds to calve, and discovers the forest. He sits upon the flood, and he gives strength to his people (Ps. 29:3, 5–11).

> The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works. There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength. Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine (Ps. 33:10–19).

"In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land" (Ps. 95:4–5). "His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth" (Ps. 97:4–5). He covers himself with light as with a garment, stretches out the heavens like a curtain, lays the beams of his chambers in the waters, makes the clouds his chariot, walks upon the wings of the wind, and sends the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills to give drink to the beasts of the field; he waters the hills from his chambers, causes the grass to grow, and brings forth food for man and beast, wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face to shine, and bread that strengthens his heart. He makes darkness, and it is night; all the creatures on land and sea and in the air wait upon him that he may give them their food in due season (Ps. 104:2–3, 10–11, 13–27).

He opens his hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing (Ps. 145:16). He executes judgment for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, and sets the prisoners at liberty. He opens the eyes of the blind, raises those who are bowed down, loves the righteous, preserves the strangers, relieves the fatherless and widows; but the way of the wicked he turns upside down (Ps. 146:7–9). He covers the heaven with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, makes the grass to grow upon the mountains, gives to the beast and the crying young ravens their food, gives snow like wool, scatters the hoarfrost like ashes, casts forth his ice like morsels, melts them by his word, and causes his wind to blow and the waters to flow (Ps. 147:8–9, 16–18). He sits upon the circle of the earth, stretches out the heavens as a curtain and as a tent to dwell in, and calls all the host of heaven by name (Isa. 40:22, 26).

He makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust

(Matt. 5:45). He feeds the fowl of the air and clothes the grass of the field with beauty (Matt. 6:26–30). Not a sparrow falls to the ground but with his will, and the hairs of our heads are numbered by him (Matt. 10:29–30). Even the lot that is cast into the lap is completely disposed of by the Lord (Prov. 16:33). The king's heart is in God's hand as rivers of water: whithersoever he will he turns it (Prov. 21:1). God is immanent in all the world; and all the existence and activity of the creature is due to his presence and power.

Not only is God in all things, but there is also a similarity between the creature and himself so that all the *virtues* of the creature are ascribed to him, especially those of man, who is made after God's image. In this respect he is not the "Wholly Other" of Barth.

The truth of God's immanence is the basis of the frequent anthropomorphisms in scripture. God ascribes to himself a face (Ex. 33:20, 23); the psalmist expects to behold God's face in righteousness (Ps. 17:15); the angel of his face (presence) saved God's people (Isa. 63:9). Frequently, the scriptures speak of the eyes of the Lord (Ps. 11:4; Ps. 32:8; Ps. 34:15; Prov. 15:3; Heb. 4:13) and even of his eyelids (Ps. 11:4). They make mention of the apple of his eye, of his ears, nose, mouth, lips, neck, arm, right hand (or simply hand), finger, heart, bowels, bosom, and foot. He is said to rejoice, to be afflicted, to grieve, to fear the wrath of the enemy, to love and to hate, to be merciful and to be angry, to be jealous and to repent, to forget and to avenge himself. He comes down, he looks down, he sits and stands, he works and rests, he comes and goes, he walks and meets men, he passes by and forsakes, he writes and seals, he heals and binds up wounds, he laughs, mocks, speaks, sees, hears, inclines his ear, kills, and makes alive. He is described as a man of war, a shepherd, a strong man, a king, a lawgiver, a builder and artificer, a sun and a shield, a lion, an eagle, a consuming fire, a fountain of living water, a rock, a strong tower, a refuge and shelter, and more.[9] So great is this similarity, and so close this affinity, that it is possible for God to assume human flesh, for the infinite to unite himself with the finite, for the eternal to ally himself to time. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

All of these expressions in scripture that ascribe to God human passions and creaturely virtues, and even members of the human body, are not intended to be understood literally, nor do they ever leave that impression. If this were true, then God would be degraded to the level of the creature, and the distinction between him and the world would be obliterated. The church has always rightly considered these human expressions to be figures of speech, anthropomorphisms.

God is a spirit of infinite perfections. What is present in the creature is always infinitely present in God. Anthropomorphisms are not mere empty figures without a basis in fact. They may not be so understood that the creature is the pattern for God or for our knowledge of him. On the contrary, they are based on the truth that all things are made and sustained by the word of God in such a way that they are a reflection of the nature and glorious virtues of him who called them into existence by his omnipotent will. God is immanent in the world: *He is very near us. In him we live and move and have our being*. There is affinity and similarity between God and the whole creation.

God's Transcendence

If over against the false conception of deism the immanence of God must be maintained, then it is no less important to maintain his transcendence in opposition to pantheism in all its forms. It is not easy to define what is meant by transcendence when the term is used with respect to God. Since Kant, the terms *transcendent* and *transcendental* have acquired a philosophical usage. *Transcendence* was

applied to speculation concerning that which lies beyond the scope of the human understanding, and therefore became synonymous with unknowable, while *transcendental* denotes that which is *a priori* in regard to all human knowledge, that which *a priori* conditions all experience.

In theology, however, *transcendence* is used to denote the supereminence of God above the creature, a supereminence which is not relative, but absolute. Just as God's immanence means that he is in the world and that he is related to the world, so also God's essential transcendence signifies that in himself he is infinitely exalted above the world and that there is an impassable gulf between the world and his infinitely glorious being. He is God. He is the absolute. He transcends all the existence and all the relations of the creature.

It stands to reason that we shall have to speak of this transcendence of God repeatedly when we discuss the names and the attributes of God. In this connection, therefore, we must limit ourselves to a general definition of the term as used here. Perhaps it is not superfluous to warn against the false idea of transcendence that represents God as outside the cosmos, either from the viewpoint of space or of time, in distinction from his immanence according to which he is within the universe. By such a false concept of transcendence, we only infinitely extend the universe and give God a place in that extended universe. Applied to *space*, we then conceive of God as being partly within the limited space of our world and partly outside of that space in an endlessly extended space.

The fundamental error of such a presentation of the relation between God's immanence and his transcendence is evidently that we apply the concept *space* to God. This is impossible. Space itself is a creation. God is not merely outside of our space, but he is transcendent with relation to the essence of space, which means that the idea of space is not applicable to him at all. Even as we may not conceive of the immanence of God as meaning that part of his being is within the scope of the universe, so we may not think of his transcendence as the infinite extension of his immanence in endless space. Even as his immanence signifies that he is wholly, with his infinite essence, *in* the universe and *in* every part, relation, and moment of it, so his transcendence implies that with his whole essence he is *above* the world and *above* all its moments and relations.

The same is true with regard to God's relation to the universe in *time*. We are inclined to conceive of *our* time as being only a part of *all* time, that is, of time extended endlessly both in the past and in the future. God's immanence then means that he is partly in cosmic time, in time extending from the *alpha* of Genesis 1 to the *omega* of the day of Christ, while his transcendence then signifies that he also exists endlessly in time. But again, it must be remarked that time is itself a creature, and it may not be applied to God in any sense. His immanence does not mean that part of his being is in time, because he is the immutable. Rather, it means that with his whole infinite being he is present in every moment of time, while his transcendence denotes that he is essentially exalted above all time and above every moment of time. God is the eternal. He is God.

It is true that scripture frequently describes God in terms that would make us think of him as being infinitely extended both in space and time. He is said to be in heaven as his proper dwelling place: "Is not God in the height of heaven? and behold the height of the stars, how high they are!" (Job 22:12). The heaven, in distinction from the earth, is his throne (Isa. 66:1; Matt. 5:34; Acts 7:49). "Our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Ps. 115:3). We are taught to address God as "Our Father which art in heaven" (Matt. 6:9). Yet the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him (1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chron. 2:6). Sometimes the impression is even left that God is in heaven in distinction from the earth, on which he is not: "for God is in heaven, and thou upon the earth: therefore let thy words be few" (Eccl. 5:2).

From all this we might conclude that God is far above us in the highest heavens, but still within the

created universe and in space, while his essence even extends beyond the utmost reaches of the heavens into some extra-cosmic, endless space. The same is true of God's relation to time. Not only do we read, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Ps. 90:2), but frequently the impression is also left that God changes in and with the ever-changing scenes of time. His counsel is presented as belonging to a period before the foundations of the world. Yet we must not forget that in all such expressions in Holy Writ there is an anthropomorphic element.

There is no human language that can properly express the wholly otherness of God. We must speak of God in terms of space and time. Even the very term *transcendence* is anthropomorphic. But that does not mean that in theology we may so define his transcendence that space and time are applied to him. Even the Heidelberg Catechism carefully avoids any such notion when, in its explanation of the address of the Lord's Prayer, it asks the question, "Why is it added: *Who art in heaven?*" and gives the answer, "That we may have no earthly thought of the heavenly majesty of God, and may expect from his almighty power all things necessary for body and soul."[10]

We must, therefore, conceive of God's transcendence as *essential*, that is, as referring to *the absolute and infinite supereminence of the divine being with relation to all creation*. This refers to the whole divine essence and to all his attributes, not only to those virtues of God that are distinguished as incommunicable.

Especially in speaking of these incommunicable attributes of the divine being, theology has in mind the transcendence of God. The Belgic Confession refers to this: "We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God; and that He is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty."[11]

God's incommunicable attributes cannot be separated from the communicable. Or rather, God's incommunicable virtues or perfections may be said to be attributes also of the communicable qualities. There are no attributes in God that are eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, infinite, and almighty, while other attributes are temporal, comprehensible, visible, finite, and limited. The virtues of his mind, will, and power are characterized by the same infinitude and absoluteness as the incommunicable perfections.

God's transcendence, then, signifies that he is absolutely supereminent in himself and in all his perfections, that he is the absolute in distinction from all relative existence, the timeless and spaceless one in distinction from all limited being, the pure, self-existent being in distinction from all dependent existence, the immutable one in distinction from the ever-changing creature, the one simple being in distinction from all the variety of the universe. Though being very near us in his immanence, he is far from us in his transcendence. Though standing by an act of his own will in immediate relationship to all creation, he remains in himself the absolute. Though being like us, he is the "wholly other." He is God.

God's Spirituality

Two more elements must be taken up in our description of the essence of God: his personality and his spirituality. That God is a spirit is taught in more than one way in the scriptures. Indirectly it is implied in the second commandment: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Ex. 20:4; Deut. 5:8), which is based on God's invisibility and spirituality. It is emphasized to the children of Israel that they saw no manner of similitude, lest they should corrupt

themselves and change the glory of the incorruptible God into the image of the corruptible creature (Deut. 4:12, 15–24; Rom. 1:23). The Lord also directly expresses this spirituality of God in the well-known words: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Everywhere it is emphasized that God is the invisible one (John 1:18; Rom. 1:20; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17), especially where the apostle speaks of him as the one "who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting" (1 Tim. 6:16).

This spirituality of God must be distinguished from the personal subsistence in God of the third person of the holy Trinity. When we say that God is a spirit, we mean that his essence is spiritual. Negatively, *this means that God is not material, like the visible creation and that, therefore, he is not limited by form or extent. It means also that he is the absolutely invisible*, and in this respect even distinguished from the angels. Even though the angels are invisible in relation to our earthly and material vision, they are not invisible absolutely.

Positively, the spirituality of God is closely related to his simplicity. That God is pure spirit means that his perfections do not subsist in another substance by which they are sustained and in which they rest. God *is* his attributes. With us this is quite different. All of our attributes have their substratum in and are limited by the physical-spiritual substance of which we are made. Even of the angels, though God made them spirits, this is true. They are a created spiritual substance, and all their virtues and powers are rooted in this created substance. But God is pure and absolute spiritual being. He *is* light, love, and life. He *is* wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. He *is* justice, righteousness, and holiness. He *is* grace, mercy, and truth. He *is* absolute power and pure activity. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

God's Personality

Lest we fall into the error of pantheism, we must immediately add that God is a *personal* spirit. He is not a vague, unconscious essence that rises to consciousness in the creature, but he is a personal subsistence in himself, or rather—lest we should think of him as a person among persons—he is absolute, self-existent personality. Everywhere in scripture he meets us as the *Ego* (I AM) in whom consciousness and self-consciousness are absolutely one and identical.

This personal subsistence of God assumes the form of the three-personal subsistence of the holy Trinity, of which we must speak later. Yet it must be said immediately that this triune subsistence in God is never such that over against the creature he stands as three, or that he ever addresses us as a plural subject. Within himself he may speak in the plural, as in Genesis 1:26: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." To us he reveals himself and speaks as the absolute *Ego* (I AM). Of the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit, he confronts us in his revelation as the one pure spirit who is the one and only Lord of heaven and earth, the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15).

To this we may add that God's essence is pure perfection, simple goodness, and the implication of all possible perfections and virtues. Jesus asked the young ruler, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God" (Matt. 19:17). "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). This implies that he is absolute goodness in himself and that he is the only criterion, as well as the fountain, of all goodness among the creature.

It is never true that there is a standard of goodness and perfection, of truth, righteousness, and

holiness, either from our perspective, or even above God, and that he is called good because he conforms to this standard. God's goodness is absolute. He is not even the supreme good, the highest good. He is *the* good, the absolute good; in his own essence he is the sole standard or criterion for all goodness. Hence God who is *God*, in distinction from all creatures, is the Holy One. Exactly because he is God, he is self-centered as he is absolutely self-sufficient.

As the only good, the implication of all perfections, he seeks and finds himself; he loves himself and seeks his own glory. He made all things for his own name's sake, even the wicked unto the day of evil. *God is the one, simple, absolute, purely spiritual, personal being of infinite perfections, wholly immanent in all the world, yet essentially transcendent in relation to all things*.

Chapter 8

The Nature of God

Methods of Treating God's Names and Attributes

It has become customary to distinguish between God's names and virtues or attributes and to treat them separately and coordinately in the first locus of dogmatics. Calvin makes no distinction, nor offers a classification of the various perfections of God.[1] Treating of the essence of God, van Mastricht divides the material under the headings names of God and virtues of God.[2] à Brakel distinguishes between names, essence, and attributes of God, but under the names treats only the names *Jehovah* and *Elohim* (the plural form of the name *God*).[3] Kuyper also treats the names and virtues of God separately. Under the heading of the names of God, he treats not only the proper or appellative names of God, but also what he calls God's *essential names* (*wezensnamen*).[4] Under the essential names he develops such conceptions as πνεῦμα (*spirit*), ἀγάπη (*love*), φῶς (*light*), and ζωή, (*life*). Under the heading of appellative, or proper, names of God, he treats the names אֵל (*El*, God), אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*, God), אֲדֹנָי (*Adonai*, Lord), יְהוָה (*Jehovah*), שַׁדַּי (*Shaddai*, Almighty), עֶלְיוֹן (*Elyon*, Most High), צְבָאוֹת (*Sabaoth*, Hosts), פַּחַד (*Fear*—Gen. 31:42, 53), as well as those from the New Testament: Παντοκράτωρ (*Almighty*), Δεσπότης (*Master*), Κύριος (*Lord*), and ὁ Πατήρ (*Father*).

Concerning his treatment of the virtues of God, Dr. Bavinck writes:

> But, though we admit these difficulties, in order to treat the many names ascribed to God we must have a classification. When we summarize what God has revealed concerning himself in his names, the fact that there are two distinct groups of names aside from the group containing the attributes is readily noticeable. First, we have those names by which God is *addressed*, proper names which were specifically indicated as God's "names." Then, those attributes which do not pertain to God's being as such but to *the three persons* in that being form a second group and are called "properties, notions, notional properties, personal properties, relative attributes." They are treated in the doctrine of the trinity. The third large group is composed of those *attributes which describe God's being*. These attributes, taken as a group, have received various names in theological science; such as, dignities, values, thoughts, ideas, concepts, properties, excellencies, notions, qualities, virtues, attributes, perfections, etc. It is extremely difficult to bring about order in the treatment of the numerous attributes which belong to this last group. However, the relation which God sustains to his creatures can serve as a "principle of division." The entire universe reveals God: there is no "atom of the universe" which does not manifest something of his virtues. Nevertheless, all creatures are not the same; each individual creature does not reveal all of God's virtues, neither does each creature show forth God's excellencies in the same degree and manner as do all the others. There is order and gradation; all creatures reveal traces or "vestiges of God," but of all creatures man, he alone, is the image and likeness of God. Not only has he *existence* in common with the *lower creation*, and *life* in common with *higher creatures*, but he is also related to *God* in a very special sense, having been created as prophet, priest, and king, in true knowledge of God, holiness, and righteousness. Hence God, the source of all being, and man's arch-type, is himself all that which creatures share of essence, life, and spirit, of knowledge, of holiness and of righteousness. There is an analogy of God's being present in every creature, but especially in man. But whatever of perfections is found in creatures is present in God in a very unique, original manner; in each of God's virtues both his transcendence and his immanence shine forth; every attribute is in one sense incommunicable, and in another, communicable.[5]

Thus Bavinck treats the virtues of God under the main heading of God's names, distinguishing between proper (*nomina propria*) or appellative names (*nomina appellativa*), essential names (*nomina essentialia*), and personal names (*nomina personalia*). Under the essential names he treats the attributes of God, which he distinguishes as communicable and incommunicable, and under the personal names he develops the doctrine of the holy Trinity.

Other classifications of the virtues of God, which Bavinck treats under essential names, have been tried, such as the divisions into positive and negative, absolute and relative, or natural and ethical virtues. Kuyper proceeds from the principle of the image of God and distinguishes the attributes of God as antithetic attributes (*virtutes per antithesin*), that is, those virtues that reveal God to us in contrast with his image in us, and synthetic attributes (*virtutes per synthesin*), that is, those virtues in which God is revealed as related to us who are made after his image. The antithetic attributes he divides into three groups: those that have reference to time and place (eternity, omnipresence), those that reveal the essence of God (simplicity, oneness, infinity, unchangeableness, immeasurableness), and those that refer to God's relation to the creature (sovereignty).

The synthetic attributes he also divides into three classes, according to the distinction of man's prophetic office (wisdom, omniscience), his priestly office (holiness, righteousness, love, veracity), and his kingly office (omnipotence).[6] It is evident, however, that even though Kuyper employs different terms, he follows the same distinction as that which speaks of incommunicable and communicable attributes.

God's Revelation of Himself in His Names

It must be admitted that the method suggested by Bavinck, and followed by Prof. F. M. Ten Hoor[7]—treating all the attributes of God under the heading of God's names—has in its favor that, according to scripture, the name of God is the revelation to us of his being and nature. God's name is God revealed.

Originally, a name was a sign of the nature or being of anything. This is evident from the fact that Adam in the state of righteousness was able to give the animals their real names:

> And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field (Gen. 2:19–20).

First, from this account it is evident that the real nature or being of the animal is its name, its sense, and its meaning in itself and in relation to all the rest of creation. God had created all things through the Word. They are a reflection of the eternal Wisdom that rejoices in God's presence eternally (Prov. 8:22–31). Hence every individual creature has in it the individualized Word of God and is the embodiment of God's eternal idea. This idea is its real being; this being, as it is revealed and manifest, is its name.

Second, this name of each creature is known to God. He reads and calls all things by their names and glorifies himself in the revelation of his wisdom. In the midst of this creation, God formed a creature that was adapted to bear God's own image and that was originally endowed with that image in true knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness. To this creature, in whose heart was to be the union of all creation with God, he had given the power intuitively to know the meaning of creation about him, as well as within himself, and of each creature in relation to all the rest and in relation to God. In other words, Adam could read the words of God in the things that were made and could discern their real meaning. He looked into their being and knew their names.

Third, Adam was able to express this name of the creature in human language; whatever he called the animals, that was their name, the expression of their inner nature or being in a human word-symbol.

This intuitive knowledge we have lost through sin; hence, our names are mere distinguishing signs.

No longer do we see the essence of things; their true meaning is hid from our knowledge. We do see the difference between one creature and another, because we observe some external attributes of the creature round about us; this difference we denote in the different names we give to the things that we perceive. In scripture, however, the original meaning of a name is often preserved, particularly in those instances in which God himself appoints the name for a person or object.

This is always true of the name of God. The name of God is his being, not as he is in himself, but as he is revealed to us. It is the implication of all his virtues and perfections as they are manifest in the works of his hands. "O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens" (Ps. 8:1, 9). To love the name of the Lord is to love and serve him (Isa. 56:6); to cause his people to forget his name is to make them forget him (Jer. 23:27). To call upon the name of the Lord is to call upon him as he is revealed to his people (Gen. 4:26; Ps. 105:1); and to glory in that name is to boast in him only (Ps. 105:3).

Often that name of God is identified with himself. Israel must fear "this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD" (Deut. 28:58). That name is near (Ps. 75:1). It is holy and great (Ezek. 36:20, 23). It is a strong tower, into which the righteous runs and is safe (Prov. 18:10). The name of the God of Jacob defends those that trust in him (Ps. 20:1). In the tabernacle and temple he puts his name (Deut. 12:5; 2 Sam. 7:13; 2 Chron. 20:9). Always his people are exhorted to trust in that name, to call upon it, extol, glorify, and bless it. Everywhere in scripture it is emphasized that the name of the Lord is God himself, as he reveals himself to us, the implication of all his perfections. Hence it would seem quite natural and scriptural to treat all the perfections and virtues of God under the heading names of God.

The Relation between God's Names, Attributes, and Being

However, a difficulty arises here at once, because we must make a distinction between the essential names and the proper or appellative names. In fact, when in the first locus of dogmatics the distinction is made between the names and the attributes of God, the reference is to the proper names only. This is evident even from Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*. Although he proposes to treat all the virtues of God under the threefold heading of proper, essential, and personal names, yet when he treats the essential names, he no longer speaks of names, but of the virtues or attributes of God, while under the heading personal names he treats the whole doctrine of the Trinity.[8]

The trouble with Bavinck's distinction is that not only the essential names are revelations of the virtues of God; but also the proper names, the names whereby we address God and speak about him, are very definitely revelations of the virtues of God. If we coordinate the proper names with the attributes of God, we must either limit ourselves to an etymological explanation of the names of God or necessarily fall into repetition. To limit ourselves to an etymological explanation of the names of God is hardly possible, and to fall into repetition is not desirable.

For this reason, it appears to us that it is more correct to eliminate this distinction, and to treat the nature and virtues of God as they are revealed to us in his proper or appellative names, and as they are further revealed and corroborated in the rest of scripture. The name of God as the revelation of his being is concentrated on those names by which we may address God and denote him. They are centrally the expression of his adorable virtues, and their meaning is further explained and revealed to us in all that the scriptures make known to us about the nature of God.

Following this method, we might also eliminate the distinction between incommunicable and communicable attributes. More than a working hypothesis this distinction can never be. It is made merely to create some order and classification in the discussion of the virtues of God. Any distinction

we may introduce into the discussion of the attributes of God meets with the difficulty of God's simplicity. God is one. He is not composed. His attributes are all one in him, and he is his virtues. Whenever the distinction between the incommunicable and communicable attributes of God is made for the sake of classification, we immediately are warned that the distinction is defective. All God's virtues are at once incommunicable and communicable, it is said. Whatever may be the truth of this statement, it surely shows that the distinction is not real. Nor is it easy to find another distinction that can be maintained on the basis of scripture. The Bible offers no classification of the perfections of God; it is the revelation of the living God himself.

The Names *Jehovah* and *Holy One*

If we proceed from the proper names of God and from what they reveal to us about the nature and perfections of the Most High, we may take our starting point in two names that the scriptures everywhere place on the foreground as having central significance, and from which all the attributes of God may be deduced. We refer to the names *Jehovah* (יְהוָה) and the *Holy One* (קָדוֹשׁ). Even as we suggest this distinction, we must at once remember that God is one; therefore, as Jehovah, he is the Holy One, and as the Holy One, he is Jehovah. He is the holy
I AM and the absolute Holy One. Yet it seems to us that these two names are presented as having central significance in Holy Writ and that they denote two aspects of the being of God that imply all his glorious perfections.

That these two names of God indeed are presented as having central importance in scripture is not difficult to show. With respect to the name *Jehovah*, or *Jahweh*, this is evident already from Exodus 3:13–14:

> And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

It is with reference to the name I AM that God says, "this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations" (v. 15).

The meaning of this is plain. The name *I AM THAT I AM* or, briefly, *I AM*, which is an explanation of the name *Jehovah*, by which God was already known to the fathers, is here designated as *the* name of God, the name above all others, in which God's nature is revealed in the highest sense, and by which he is distinguished forever even from the deities of the heathen. This is corroborated by other passages of Holy Writ. When the son of the Israelitish mother and the Egyptian father blasphemed the name of the Lord, we simply read that he blasphemed "the name" (Lev. 24:11); verse 16 says, "he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name, shall be put to death." Again: "That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth" (Ps. 83:18). It is particularly of the name of Jehovah that the psalmist of Israel sings and the prophets speak, and in which the people trust, believe, and find a safe retreat.

The same can be said of the name *Holy One*. That God is holy has everywhere a particular emphasis in scripture. The priest that "offereth the bread" of God must sanctify himself, "for I the LORD, which sanctify you, am holy" (Lev. 21:8). To the whole congregation of Israel, as well as to the church of the new dispensation, it is said, "Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:15–16; 1 Pet. 2:9). Hannah, rejoicing because the Lord has heard her prayer, sings:

"There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee" (1 Sam. 2:2). The people are exhorted to exalt the Lord and to worship at his footstool, "for he is holy" (Ps. 99:5). The seraphim in God's holy temple cry out: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come" (Rev. 4:8).

Scripture particularly emphasizes that the name of God is holy: The people of Israel are especially admonished that they shall not profane the holy name of the Lord (Lev. 22:2, 32). They trust in his holy name, and they praise his terrible name, for it is holy (Ps. 33:21; Ps. 99:3). Holy and reverend is his name (Ps. 111:9). He is the lofty one, whose name is holy (Isa. 57:15). He will make his holy name known in Israel and not let them pollute his holy name any more (Ezek. 39:7). What is more, God is called the Holy One, as if it were a proper or appellative name (Job 6:10; Isa. 10:17). This name is used especially in close connection with his incomparable divinity: "to whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One" (Isa. 40:25). He is "the LORD, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King" (Isa. 43:15). Thus he is also called the Holy One of Israel (2 Kings 19:22; Ps. 71:22; Ps. 89:18; Isa. 1:4; Isa. 5:19, 24; Isa. 10:20; Isa. 12:6; Isa. 17:7; Isa. 29:19; Isa. 30:11–12, 15; Isa. 31:1; Isa. 41:14, 16, 20; Isa. 45:11; Isa. 47:4; Isa. 48:17; Isa. 49:7; Isa. 55:5; Isa. 60:9, 14; Jer. 50:29; Jer. 51:5; Ezek. 39:7).

Even as the name of the Lord above all others is *Jehovah*, which is interpreted as meaning I AM THAT I AM (Ex. 3:14), so also the chief characteristic of that name, that in which all the ethical virtues of the name of the Lord are implied, is that it is holy. In describing the nature of God, and in discussing his perfections as they are revealed unto us, we shall do well, therefore, to proceed from these two names, the one revealing to us the essential virtues of the divine being, the other describing him to us in his absolute and incomparable ethical perfection.

The Meaning of the Name *Jehovah*

The name *Jehovah* is derived from the Hebrew verb הָיָה or הָוָה (*to be*). The form is an imperfect, either in *kal* or in *hiphil*.[9] The former is most probably the case, for a *hiphil* form of this verb never occurs; besides, this is in accord with Exodus 3:14: "I AM THAT I AM."

The Lord said to Moses, "And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty [*El Shaddai*], but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them" (Ex. 6:3). This cannot mean that the name *Jehovah* as such was not known to the fathers before Moses, for it is evident from the rest of scripture that the fathers had used this name of God; besides, Exodus 3:14 would seem to rest on the supposition that it was not unknown to Israel in Egypt. The meaning must be that while God revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in those virtues that are expressed in the name *God Almighty*, he will now especially reveal that he is the eternal and unchangeable I AM.

It is well-known that the Jews considered the name *Jehovah* too exalted and holy to be pronounced by human lips. Whether this consideration was based on an erroneous interpretation of Exodus 3:15, Exodus 20:7, and Leviticus 24:11, 16 or on some superstition that developed among them in their later history, the result was that in reading the sacred scriptures, they substituted for Jehovah the name אֲדֹנָי (*Adonai*, Lord), and in writing the name the vowels of אֲדֹנָי (*Adonai*, Lord) were written in Hebrew under the four-letter name יהוה (*Jehovah*), with the difference that the initial *yodh* received the simple *shewa*[10] instead of the composite one. This practice also undoubtedly explains the fact that the Septuagint uniformly translates *Jehovah* by *Lord*.

Hence the question arises as to the proper vocalization and pronunciation of the name. The answer to this question can only be conjectured, and Hebrew scholars have suggested different possibilities.

Without pretending to be able to solve this problem, we regard it not improbable that the original pronunciation of the name was *Jahweh* (יַהְוֶה).

As to the meaning of the name *Jehovah*, along with many early fathers, with whom also Kuyper agrees,[11] we regard Jehovah as being expressive of God's aseity (*absolute essence* or *independence*). Bavinck is afraid that by finding this fundamental significance in the name *Jehovah* we ascribe to it a rather abstract, philosophical meaning that is not in harmony with the simple purpose of its revelation to Moses, according to Exodus 3:14–15. There Bavinck finds that the Lord wanted to convey the truth of his unchangeable faithfulness as the covenant God. With the fathers God had established his covenant; he had given them the promise that he would surely deliver them and give them the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. However, the people of Israel suffered and groaned in the bondage and under the oppression of Egypt, and they cried unto their God in their affliction. Then God revealed himself to them as Jehovah, the I AM THAT I AM, who is faithful and true and ever remains the same in his relation to his covenant people.[12]

But Bavinck admits that "Hence, in that respect aseity [*absolute essence*] may be called the primary attribute of God's being."[13] Later, when he treats the so-called incommunicable attributes of God, he writes:

> He has a distinct being, a distinct "nature, substance, essence," not apart from his virtues, but revealed in all his virtues and perfections. He has proper names that do not pertain to any creature. Among all these names the name "Jehovah" stands out pre-eminently, Ex. 3:14. By means of this name he is designated as the One who is and will be what he was; i.e., who remains eternally the same in relation to his people. He has the ground of his existence in himself. He existed before all things, and all things exist through him, Ps. 90:2; 1 Cor. 8:6; Rev. 4:11.[14]

It appears that Bavinck cannot escape the conclusion that the fundamental meaning of the name *Jehovah* is, indeed, that God is of and through himself. Further, even though in Exodus 3:14–15 the application of the name is such that it emphasizes God's immutable truth and faithfulness to his people, this application reveals only one aspect or connotation of the name *Jehovah*, while its most fundamental significance, that from which all the various connotations may be explained, is undoubtedly the aseity of God. This is the deepest meaning of the explanation of the name *Jehovah* that God himself gives in Exodus 3:14: "I AM THAT I AM" or, simply, "I AM."

God's Aseity

The aseity of God, also called his independence, is that virtue of God according to which he is of and in and through himself, has the eternal ground and fountain of his being within himself, is not caused by or dependent on any being outside of himself, and is therefore the absolute, pure being, who is also perfectly self-sufficient, and who has no need of any being outside of himself. In this virtue he is wholly different from the creature, for he is the creator, and therefore the Sovereign, the Lord, the Lord of all, of whom, through whom, and unto whom are all things. He *is*; the creature exists. This aseity or independence is true of God in his whole adorable essence, nature, virtues, and life. In all his virtues he is of himself, the Absolute. In his essence he is the I AM THAT I AM (Ex. 3:14). He has life in himself (John 5:26). He is independent in his counsel, mind, and will (Ps. 33:11; Isa. 40:13; Isa. 46:10; Rom. 11:34–36). He is the Lord of heaven and earth, who is not served by men's hands, as though he needed anything (Acts 17:25). He is the uncaused creator of the heavens and the earth, the absolute Lord, who has within himself the power and the prerogative to rule all things according to the counsel and purpose of his own will (Eph. 1:5, 11).

God's Sovereignty

As already suggested, from this aseity of God as the fundamental concept expressed by the name *Jehovah* follows the idea of absolute sovereignty, denoted by the name *Lord* (אֲדֹנָי—*Adonai*) and emphasized by many passages of scripture. Only he who is self-existent and absolutely independent is absolute Lord, for absolute sovereignty is not merely supreme or highest lordship; *it is that virtue according to which God is sovereign in himself. His is the only sovereignty; there is no sovereignty anywhere except it is derived from his lordship*. His is the sole prerogative to establish the law for all the universe, to judge the creature, and to execute his will. There is no criterion above or next to God whereby he can be measured or judged, to which he must conform himself. There is no law to which he is subject, no tribunal to which he is responsible. He alone is the sole standard for all law, righteousness, and justice. He is the sole high one.

This is the meaning of the name *Lord* (אֲדֹנָי—*Adonai*), as well as of the name *Most High* (עֶלְיוֹן—*Elyon*). אֲדֹנָי (*Adonai*, Lord) is derived from דוּן, which as an intransitive means "to be low, to be in subjection," while in its transitive meaning it signifies "to make low, to subject to oneself, and, therefore, to be lord and sovereign." Thus also עֶלְיוֹן (*Elyon*, Most High), derived from עָלָה (*to go up, be high*), refers to God as the Most High, the one who alone is "the high and lofty One" (Isa. 57:15). All creation is low with respect to him. עֶלְיוֹן (*Elyon*, Most High) is used alone and absolutely as a proper name of God, or in connection with אֵל (*El*, God—Gen. 14:18), or with Jehovah (Ps. 7:17), or with אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*, God—Ps. 57:2).

In this connection may also be mentioned the name צְבָאוֹת (*Sabaoth*, Hosts), which occurs with God (Ps. 80:14), Jehovah God (Ps. 59:5; Ps. 80:4; Jer. 5:14; Jer. 15:16), and often with Jehovah. Especially in the prophetical books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Malachi, *Sabaoth* (*Hosts*) occurs very frequently. It certainly does not mean that Jehovah is a God of war. Nor is there sufficient reason to limit the scope of this name to the host of Israel or to the host of the angels in heaven. The name is derived from צָבָא (*host*). It is used to denote the host of heaven (1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 18:18), and then it refers either to the angels that surround the throne of God or to the heavenly luminaries (Isa. 34:4; Isa. 40:26). In Genesis 2:1 it is even used for all creation, that is, for all the creatures that are contained in the heavens and in the earth. It appears to us, therefore, that with application to Jehovah, the term may be understood in the widest possible sense: He is the God of all the host of the universe, of all creatures considered as a battle host, which he employs for the execution of his sovereign will and the realization of his eternal purpose. In all these names, then, Jehovah reveals himself as the only high one, who has sovereignty in himself, and who is the Lord of all. Even as he is self-existent in his essence, so he is sovereign in himself, the sole and absolute Lord.

This absolute sovereignty of Jehovah is emphasized throughout the holy scriptures. That he might reveal himself as the Lord of all the earth and make his power known, he delivered his people Israel with a mighty hand from the house of bondage (Ex. 8:22; Ex. 9:14–16; Ex. 14:18). He sits in the heavens as the independent sovereign and laughs at the futile rebellion of the kings and rulers who are trying in vain to dethrone him (Ps. 2:1–4). He is the Lord of hosts, the King of glory (Ps. 24:7–10). He stands in the congregation of the mighty and judges the earth (Ps. 82:1, 8). The Lord reigns; he is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength. His throne is from everlasting (Ps. 93:1–2). He is "a great King above all gods. In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also" (Ps. 95:3–4). He reigns. Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne (Ps. 97:1–2). He rules over the heavens above and over

all the works of his hands below (Ps. 104).

He is in the heavens and does whatsoever he pleases (Ps. 115:3). He shall reign forever (Ps. 146:10). He is the first and the last, and besides him there is no god. He is the Lord, and there is none else (Isa. 44:6; Isa. 45:5–6; Rev. 1:8). He forms the light and creates darkness; he makes peace and creates evil; he, the Lord, does all these things (Isa. 45:7). He is a Lord of kings, and his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation (Dan. 2:47; Dan. 4:3, 34). "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Dan. 4:35). The "LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth be silent before him" (Hab. 2:20). He is merciful to whom he will be merciful, and whom he wills he hardens. He is the sovereign potter who has power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor (Rom. 9:18, 21). He is the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 1:17; 1 Tim. 6:15). God is the Lord. His alone is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever (Matt. 6:13).

God's Simplicity

The name *Jehovah* also reveals God to us as the one and simple being, who alone is God, besides whom there is none other, who is what he is, and whose attributes are all one in him. This simplicity of God is not contradicted by the plural אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*, God). The simple Hebrew name for God is אֵל (*El*, God—singular form) derived probably from אוּל (*strength*). In Hebrew prose the name אֵל (*El*, God) never occurs alone, but always with some qualifying word when the reference is to God, such as God Most High, God Almighty, Jehovah God of gods, or God of gods. In it God reveals himself as the mighty one to whom all excellencies are ascribed.

אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*, God) is a plural of אֱלוֹהַּ (*Eloah*, God—singular). Various explanations have been offered of this plural form. The explanation of historical evolutionism would have it that also in the holy scriptures there is an advance from polytheism to monotheism and that, therefore, the plural אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*, God) has its origin in the age when men were still polytheists. Needless to say, we can accept this explanation. Not only is this view in direct conflict with the idea of revelation—according to which it is not men who invent names of God, but God who reveals himself in those names that he himself gives to us—but it is also a very arbitrary view that is violently imposed upon scripture, rather than being based upon it. Though it certainly is true that even the people of Israel often served many gods, polytheism is everywhere strongly condemned in scripture. Besides, the noun אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*, God) everywhere takes a singular form of the verb.

Others have suggested that in אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*, God) we have a plural of majesty (*pluralis majestatis*). Against this idea it must be objected that such a plural usually is found of pronouns rather than of proper nouns. Besides, the plural of majesty was unknown among the Hebrews. Still others explain *Elohim* as a plural of intensity. It may be considered questionable whether other instances of such a plural can be found in scripture. However, the truth of the matter must undoubtedly be sought in this direction. When God most frequently revealed himself through the name אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*, God), while also making himself known as the one God, he taught his people that he is the implication of all perfections and excellencies. Even as God is one in all his virtues, but we cannot know him except in the manifold revelation of his several glorious attributes, so the name אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*, God) meant to reveal God as the absolutely excellent one, whose glory we can only know in the revelation of his many wonders. Perhaps, therefore, it would be preferable to say that the name אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*, God) is

a plural of excellence (*pluralis excellentiae*), as also Gesenius suggests.[15]

In himself, however, God is a simple being. He is the I AM THAT I AM. This means, first, *that God is one*. This is to be maintained over against all polytheistic conceptions of God that divided the Godhead into many gods, frequently in conflict with one another. He is the I AM. He speaks of himself in the singular. This oneness necessarily follows from his aseity, his self-existence, his independence, his absoluteness. More than one self-existent and independent being, more than one absolute Lord and sovereign, are inconceivable. This oneness of God, the truth that God is one simple being who cannot be divided, is also strongly emphasized in scripture. Over against the polytheistic conception and worship of paganism, Israel must attend to the word of their God: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deut. 6:4). Therefore, they cannot divide their love and service, but they must love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their mind, and with all their soul, and with all their strength (v. 5). He is the one God, besides whom there is none other (Isa. 45:5). God is one (Gal. 3:20), and there is one God and Father of all (Eph. 4:6).

Second, *God's simplicity also signifies that God is not composed, that his essence and his virtues are identical, that he is his virtues, and that all his virtues are absolutely one in him*. God is absolute goodness, perfection. There is none good but one, that is, God (Matt. 19:17). He is the God of truth; truth is his very essence (Jer. 10:10); he is the God of all grace (1 Pet. 5:10); he is the God of peace (Heb. 13:20). "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). The Lord Jesus declares, "I am the resurrection, and the life," implying the identity of the divine essence and nature with life itself (John 11:25). He is the truth and the life (John 14:6). He is the true light, "which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9). And God is love (1 John 4:8).

This implies that he is all his attributes, for they are all implied in the figure of light. God's virtues cannot be separated. His being is righteousness, holiness, justice, power, might, love, grace, mercy, and so forth. Of the creature, who has a dependent existence, it may be said that it possesses certain virtues, though only as a reflection of the perfections of God. But God *is* pure perfection; he is goodness in his very essence; his very being is virtue. He is the one pure beam of perfect light that reveals itself to us through the prism of his revelation in his manifold perfections and beauties. Therefore, it follows that all God's perfections are one in him.

There is no division or conflict in God. He is the one adorable and infinite fullness of glorious perfections and virtues. Even as God is love, light, life, righteousness, holiness, mercy, grace, justice, and truth, so it may be said that his righteousness is his love, his justice is his mercy, his holiness is his grace, and so forth. His righteousness is a loving righteousness; his mercy is a just mercy. Never may these attributes of God be separated or presented as if they were in conflict with one another and mutually exclusive. God is one, and his essence is infinite and simple perfection. Purest goodness is he.

God's Infinity

Moreover, in the name *Jehovah* is revealed God's infinity in comparison to both time and space. He is the eternal one. Only the eternal one can possibly say, "I AM." He is infinite in all his virtues, in his very essence, but for that very reason he is infinitely exalted above all time and space. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night" (Ps 90:2, 4). All things shall change and wax old as a garment,

but "thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end" (Ps. 102:26, 27). It is impossible adequately to express this eternity of God; therefore, the scriptures describe it paradoxically: "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8).

God is the eternal one. This may not be conceived in terms of time, as if eternity were time without beginning and without end, because eternity is not time. There is a qualitative difference between time and eternity. The difference consists partly in that time has a beginning and in a sense always has its end within itself, and in that time can be measured in periods, ages, centuries, years, months, and days, each with its beginning and its end, while eternity is "from everlasting to everlasting" (Ps. 90:2). But it also means that time is a creature and the form of existence for every creature, while God is the self-existent one.

Change, flux, succession of moments, the constant becoming—these are essential to time. The creature lives and exists only at the moment that ever moves out of the future into the past, and at that moment he lives and is only in part. What he was in the past, he is no more; what he is at the moment, he will no longer be the next moment. He exists, he moves, he lives, he speaks, he acts only in the moment. Never can he say, "I AM." But time is not a form for God's being and life. There is no time for God. He is infinite and constant fullness, constantly is all that he is, and constantly lives all his infinite life with perfect consciousness. He alone is the eternal I AM.

God's Omnipresence

Closely related to the concept of time is the concept of space. Even as God is the eternal one, exalted above all time, so he is also the omnipresent, the immense, the immeasurable one, essentially different from and exalted above all space. Solomon prayed, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" (1 Kings 8:27). God is "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto" (1 Tim. 6:16). He is the "Lord of heaven and earth," and he "dwelleth not in temples made with hands"; yet he is "not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:24, 27–28).

Even as we may not conceive of God's eternity in terms of time, as if it were mere time without beginning and without end, so we may not conceive of God's omnipresence in terms of limitless space. Even as there is a qualitative difference between time and eternity, so there is an essential difference between space and that virtue of God which we try to express by the term *omnipresence*. Even as time, so space is created and is a necessary form of existence for all that is called creature. In contrast, God's immensity is uncreated: space is no form of existence for him.

God's omnipresence does not mean that he fills the space of the entire universe and that, besides, he extends infinitely beyond all space; it means rather that God is essentially above all space so that the essential characteristics and laws of space do not apply to him at all. Essential to space are the attribute of distance (*locus extrinsicus*, extrinsic location) between one point and another, one line and another, one body and another, and the attribute of extension or dimension, the space occupied by the bodies themselves (*locus intrinsicus*, intrinsic location), and therefore form and measurableness. These attributes are not applicable to God. He is not contained in space: one cannot measure the distance from God to the world or to any point in the world; nor does he occupy space.

He has neither dimension nor form. He is the immeasurable one, transcendent above all space, the wholly other; yet not only with his power, but also essentially, he is in all creation, in every creature, and in every point of creation, existing in space with his whole infinite being. He is both transcendent

and immanent. As the transcendent one, he is the immanent one; as the immanent one, he is the transcendent one. Only thus do we stand opposed both to deism that denies his immanence, and to pantheism that rejects both his immanence and transcendence and identifies God with the world. The heaven of heavens cannot contain God, yet in him we live and move and have our being. He is the immense, the omnipresent, the immeasurable God, to whom we may never ascribe limit or form.

God's Immutability

In these attributes of eternity and immeasurableness, the idea of constant fullness, of infinite constancy, is essential. Therefore, the attribute of God's immutability is implied in them. Immutability also is revealed in the name *Jehovah:* *I AM THAT I AM*. The eternal I AM is he. The creature that exists in time and space can never say, "I am," because the moment he attempts to say it, he has already moved on and is no more what he was. But God is the immutable one and therefore the I AM: "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6). "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end" (Ps. 102:25–27; Heb. 1:10–12).

God is "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). God is immutable: *He is what he is in all the infinite and constant fullness of his being. He does not grow older; he does not increase or decrease in being or power; he is from eternity to eternity the same in essence, in all his virtues, in his mind and will, in his love and life; he is the absolute fullness and the self-sufficient God.*

When we read in the scriptures that God repents (Gen. 6:6–7; Ex. 32:12–14; Judges 2:18; 1 Sam. 15:11, 35; 2 Sam. 24:16; and other passages) or speaks a word that at a later moment is changed into the very opposite—as in the case of Hezekiah's sickness (2 Kings 20:1–11; Isa. 38:1–8) or of Jonah's commission concerning the destruction of Nineveh (Jonah 1:1–2; Jonah 3:10; Jonah 4:10–11)—these instances may never be explained as presupposing a change in God.

Rather, we must remember that the eternal and immutable God reveals himself in time, and that which is thus revealed to us in a succession of moments is eternally and unchangeably in the mind of God. The same is true with respect to God's relation to the "in the beginning" of Genesis 1:1. Creation does not add to God's infinite fullness, nor does the "beginning" presuppose a change in him, because the fullness of all the universe, of all that exists and develops in time, is eternally in him alone. In himself he does not become, but he is the creator, sustainer, and governor of all things, the sovereign Lord, from everlasting to everlasting (Prov. 8:22–31). Thus Jehovah is God indeed, essentially and infinitely different from all that is called creature; he is the independent, self-existent, eternal, immeasurable one, the immutable Lord of lords and King of kings. Jehovah is his name.

God's Omnipotence

Inseparable from his lordship and absolute sovereignty is the virtue of God's power or omnipotence. His is all the authority to rule, to declare and impose his will upon all the creature, to realize his will, and to execute judgment. His name is the Lord. He is the Lord of lords and the King of kings. This authority presupposes power, strength, and ability (*potentia*) to accomplish all things. Power without ability (*potestas* without *potentia*), ἐξουσία (*power* in the sense of authority) without

ἰσχύς (*ability*), κράτος (*strength*), ἐνέργεια (*energy*), δύναμις (*dynamism*), is vain, helpless, cannot be exercised, and cannot maintain itself. The sovereign Lord of all the universe is God omnipotent.

Everywhere the Bible emphasizes this truth that God is the omnipotent one who accomplishes whatsoever he pleases. Omnipotence is implied in the name *Jehovah*, for eternal and unchangeable self-existence presupposes ever-enduring and independent power. It is expressed by the name אֵל (*El*, God) and by the name אָבִיר (*Mighty One*—Isa. 1:24). Especially is this virtue revealed in the name שַׁדַּי (*Shaddai*, Almighty) or in the name אֵל שַׁדַּי (*El Shaddai*, God Almighty). Frequently, the name שַׁדַּי (*Shaddai*, Almighty) not only stands alone (Gen. 49:25; Ruth 1:20–21; and often in Job), but it is also preceded by אֵל (*El*, God—Gen. 17:1; Ex. 6:3). Like אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*, God), the name שַׁדַּי (*Shaddai*) is a plural of excellence of שַׁד (*shad*), meaning "mighty, powerful."[16] In the New Testament God is also called the Παντοκράτωρ (*Almighty*—2 Cor. 6:18; Rev. 1:8; Rev. 4:8; Rev. 11:17). And he is the μόνος Δυνάστης (*only Potentate*—1 Tim. 6:15).

What is revealed in these names of God is corroborated everywhere in those passages of Holy Writ that speak of the power of God. Rather than speaking in the abstract of the infinitude of God's omnipotence, scripture reveals to us concretely the mighty power of God as it is manifest in the works of his hands. Scripture also speaks of God's unlimited power and emphasizes that nothing is too hard for him (Gen. 18:14; Jer. 32:27); that what is marvelous in the eyes of men is not too marvelous for God; that he is able to raise up children unto Abraham out of stones; that with him all things are possible and that nothing is impossible for him (Zech. 8:6; Matt. 3:9; Matt. 19:26; Luke 1:37; Luke 18:27). But usually the Bible speaks of the eternal power of God as it is witnessed by the works of his hands, both in creation and in salvation: He "calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth" (Isa. 40:26). He, "the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary" (Isa. 40:28; cf. Isa. 42:5; Isa. 44:24; Isa. 45:12).

In distinction from the vanities of the heathen, he is the true and living God who made the earth by his power, established the world by his wisdom, gathers the waters in the heavens by uttering his voice, causes the vapors to rise from the ends of the earth, makes the lightning with the rain, and brings forth the wind out of his treasures (Jer. 10:10–13). All glory, honor, and power must be ascribed to him, for he created all things (Rev. 4:11). He does great and marvelous things without number: He gives rain on the earth, sends water upon the fields, exalts the lowly, brings to nothing the devices of the crafty, takes the wise in their own conceit, and saves the poor (Job 5:9–16; cf. Job 38–41). His voice is powerful and full of majesty; it breaks the cedars of Lebanon, makes Lebanon and Sirion skip like a young unicorn, divides the flames of fire, shakes the wilderness, makes the hinds to calve, and discovers the forests (Ps. 29:4–9). He spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast. He brings the counsel of the heathen to nothing, but his own counsel stands forever; he has done whatsoever he has pleased (Ps. 33:9–11; Ps. 115:3; Ps. 135:6). He forms the light and creates the darkness; he makes peace and creates evil (Isa. 45:7). He created the waster to destroy (Isa. 54:16). There is no evil in the city that he has not done (Amos 3:6). He kills and makes alive, and there is no one who is able to deliver out of his hand (Deut. 32:39).

Not as abstract omnipotence, but as a living energy, as ability to accomplish things, as energy (ἐνέργεια) and power (δύναμις), as strictly unique and divine energy and power, the Bible presents the power of God. It is clearly distinct from any power in the creature. It always performs what is impossible for the creature to accomplish and what is marvelous in his eyes; it is characterized by absolute freedom and sovereignty, unrestricted by any power outside of himself; it is causal and creative. God calls the things that are not as if they were (Rom. 4:17). He accomplishes exactly whatsoever he pleases (Ps. 115:3); nothing is too wonderful for him (Gen. 18:14). All this is clearly

manifest in the works of creation; his eternal power is clearly seen in the things that are made (Rom. 1:19–20).

This altogether unique and strictly divine power of omnipotence is still more wonderfully revealed in the marvelous work of salvation, the wonder of grace, as grounded in the mystery of the incarnation and revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and in his exaltation at the right hand of God—a power that is further manifested in the salvation of the elect and the final redemption and glorification of all things. The apostle's prayer for the church is

> That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come (Eph. 1:17–21).

The greatest measure of the omnipotence of God is revealed to us in the distance from the depth of hell into which the Lord Jesus Christ descended to the height of power and glory to which God exalted him. God's power is, indeed, revealed in the creation of the world and in his providential government of all things, but it is revealed to still a greater degree in the resurrection of Christ from the dead and his exaltation at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. He is the Lord of creation; he is also the Lord of life and death. He calls the things that are not as if they were; he also quickens the dead (Rom. 4:17).

Hence we may define God's omnipotence as *that virtue according to which he is able to accomplish whatsoever he pleases*. This may also be regarded as a sufficient answer to the question that often has been raised in this connection, whether the omnipotence of God means that he is able to do everything without any limitation whatsoever.

God's Omnipotence in Scholastic Theology

Like so many questions of this nature, this one was raised, busily discussed, and, especially in its later period of decline, reduced to absurdity by scholasticism. The Schoolmen asked such questions as, "Is the proposition possible: God the Father hates the Son? Could God have been a woman, a devil, an ass, a cucumber, a flint?"[17] Or it was asked whether God could undo what was done, whether he could change a harlot into a pure virgin, and whether he could create two mountains without a valley in between.

Some of the scholastics, especially among the nominalists, insisted that God's power could not be limited by anything whatsoever, which implied that he is able to will all things without any limitation. But the better of the Schoolmen discerned that all the virtues of God are one in him and that, although all his attributes are infinite, they are all in harmony with his own perfect being. In this they usually followed Anselm. In answer to the question whether God could lie if he wanted to, Anselm wrote:

> For if God wishes to lie, we must not conclude that it is right to lie, but rather that he is not God. For no will can ever wish to lie, unless truth in it is impaired, nay, unless the will itself be impaired by forsaking truth. When, then, it is said: "If God wishes to lie," the meaning is simply this: "If the nature of God is such as that he wishes to lie."[18]

Again:

> In fine, God does nothing by necessity, since he is not compelled or restrained in anything. And when we say that God does

> anything to avoid dishonor, which he certainly does not fear, we must mean that God does this from the necessity of maintaining his honor; which necessity is after all no more than this, viz., the immutability of his honor, which belongs to him in himself, and is not derived from another; and therefore it is not properly called necessity.[19]

Anselm argued that when we deny anything to God's ability, we do not ascribe to him impotence, but rather the greatest power: "For when we say that God cannot do a thing, we do not deny his power; on the contrary, we imply that he has invincible authority and strength."[20] There is a wide difference between asserting that someone is unable to do something by constraint from without and saying that he is incapable to do something by virtue of something within himself. The former is impotence; the latter is power.

Anselm used the following illustration:

> Thus we say: "Such a man can be bound," instead of saying, "Somebody can bind him," and, "He cannot be bound," instead of, "Nobody can bind him." For to be able to be overcome is not power but weakness, and not to be able to be overcome is not weakness but power.[21]

So he concluded:

> For, when we affirm that it is necessary for God to utter truth, and never to lie, we only mean that such is his unwavering disposition to maintain the truth that of necessity nothing can avail to make him deviate from the truth, or utter a lie.[22]

In this even Abelard agreed with Anselm. Discussing the question, "How is he truly called omnipotent, if he is not able to do all things, or how is he able to do all things, if we are able to do some things, which he himself is not able to do?" Abelard showed that this is by no means imposing a limitation on God's power, but rather denying to his power the limitations that constrain the creature. Abelard concluded: "So God is said to be able to do all things, not in the sense of undertaking all actions, but in the sense that in all that he wills to happen, nothing is able to resist his will."[23]

All the Schoolmen who took this view of the matter argued that to deny certain things to the power of God was not to minimize, but rather to enhance and to emphasize his power of omnipotence. Hugo of St. Victor argued that "God is able to do all things, and yet he is not able to destroy himself. This being able, however, would not be ability, but inability. So God is able to do all things which he is able to do."[24]

In the same vein Peter Lombard wrote: "God is certainly not able to suffer anything, and is able to do all things except those only by which his glory might be violated, and his excellency lessened. In this however he is not the less omnipotent: this ability, however, is not ability, but inability."[25]

Even so the question arose and divided the Schoolmen, whether the things God actually accomplishes reveal the measure of his power, or whether his omnipotence far exceeds his actual works. The distinction was made between the absolute and the ordained power of God (*potentia Dei absoluta et potentia Dei ordinata*). On the basis of this distinction, a threefold division arose among the scholastics. Some insisted that according to his absolute power God is able to do everything without any limitation whatsoever. Others limited this absolute power by God's own being and will, but agreed that God could do more than that which he actually accomplished. Still others argued that God actually accomplished whatsoever he willed and that, therefore, the power of his omnipotence is exhausted and completely revealed in the things he did and still does.

The last position is that of Abelard, who reasoned:

> So God does all things that He is able to do, and whatever He is able to do He does well . . . It follows that He should will everything that He wills; but neither can His will be ineffective; it follows, therefore, that whatever He wills He performs,

since we take that will clearly as pertaining to His decree.[26]

God's Omnipotence in Scripture

If we consult scripture, there can be no doubt that there are many things that God cannot do: he cannot do that which is contrary to his own being or in conflict with the rest of the divine attributes. To speak of absolute power in God in the sense in which some of the nominalists among the Schoolmen employed the term, as if God is able to will and to do anything, is certainly contrary to scripture: "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent" (Num. 23:19); "the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent" (1 Sam. 15:29); that "by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation" (Heb. 6:18). God cannot be tempted with evil, nor is it possible for him to change (James 1:13, 17). "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. 2:13).

All these passages simply teach that God's omnipotence may not and cannot be divorced from his being and from the rest of his perfections. Nor, as the Schoolmen pointed out, is the ability to lie, to repent, to change, to deny oneself, *power*, but is rather *lack of power*: "this ability, however, is not ability, but inability."[27] Even the statement that God can do infinitely more than he actually accomplishes is a pure abstraction. Probably we should state the matter thus, that the problem involved is incorrectly presented. Bavinck, in taking this position regarding God's power, appeals to such passages as Genesis 18:14; Jeremiah 32:27; Zechariah 8:6; Matthew 3:9; Matthew 19:26; Luke 1:37; Luke 18:27.[28] Yet if all these passages that speak of God's unlimited power are studied in their contexts, it will become evident that they one and all refer to God's ordained power, to that which he actually wills according to his counsel.

It surely must be maintained that while God's omnipotence is not limited by anything outside of himself, yet that his omnipotence (like all his other virtues) is infinite, and the revelation of it and all his virtues in the works of his hands is necessarily finite, but in such a way that this revelation clearly testifies of the infinity and eternity of the Godhead and all the divine perfections. If by God's absolute power is meant that he could just as well have created an infinite number of different worlds, we object that his absolute power and his ordained power are confused. Therefore, what applies only to the infinite power as it is in God in the abstract is applied to the power he actually reveals in the things that are made.

There is truth in the statement of Abelard: "So God does all things that he is able to do, and whatever he is able to do he does well."[29] If the power of God is always in harmony with the rest of his virtues, then it certainly follows that it is in accord with infinite wisdom. If his power is in harmony with infinite wisdom, then it is the sole purpose of all the works of God to reveal his own glory in the highest possible degree, and to do so through the best means. And if this is true, it follows that the actual works of God are the best means unto that highest end: the revelation of the fullest glory of God. Thus conceived, it may safely be stated that the present universe and all that God conceived and decreed in his eternal counsel concerning it, even unto the unification and glorification of all things through Jesus Christ his Son, is also the highest possible revelation of the power and wisdom of God. His infinite power is revealed in the highest degree in the actual works of his hands.

God's Omniscience

God is not some vague, impersonal power, nor a being without self-consciousness, but a personal

essence. He is absolute personality. This truth is implied in the very idea of revelation. Revelation means that God speaks concerning himself to the creature. This speech concerning himself to us presupposes that he speaks eternally to himself through his infinite Word. Again, this eternal Word of God signifies that God, even apart from any relation to the creature, knows himself. God's nature is personal. He is *the* Person in the absolute sense. This is expressed in his name *Jehovah*, I AM THAT I AM. The very fact that God reveals himself as the I AM implies that he is the eternally self-conscious being.

This is corroborated by God's witness of himself in the consciousness of every man. God confronts man as Lord and Judge, not as an impersonal power. Even the Gentiles "shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another" (Rom. 2:15). Throughout scripture God is revealed to us as the absolute Person. He sees, hears, and searches; he rules and judges; he thinks and wills; with him there is wisdom and understanding, counsel, and purpose (Job 12:13; Prov. 8:14). He does whatsoever he has pleased (Ps. 115:3), and he judges every man according to his works (1 Pet. 1:17). With God is infinite knowledge and understanding, and his is the absolutely sovereign will.

Frequently, the scriptures speak of God's knowledge. For "the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed" (1 Sam. 2:3). Job asks the rhetorical question, "Shall any teach God knowledge?" (Job 21:22). "He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know? The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity" (Ps. 94:10–11). "Out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding" (Prov. 2:6). "The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew" (Prov. 3:19–20). Never took he counsel with anyone, nor did anyone ever teach him the path of judgment and knowledge or show him the way of understanding (Isa. 40:14). The apostle Paul exclaims, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom. 11:33).

Scripture speaks of the mind of God: "For who hath known the mind of the Lord?" (Rom. 11:34; 1 Cor. 2:16). Often it mentions God's understanding. The author of Psalm 139 is amazed at the profound knowledge of God, who understands his thoughts afar off. The Lord searches the hearts and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts (1 Chron. 28:9), and by his understanding he smites the proud (Job 26:12). His understanding, moreover, is infinite, and there is no searching of it (Ps. 147:5; Isa. 40:28). Scripture speaks of his thoughts: "The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:11). The servant of the Lord, praising his name in the great congregation, exclaims, "Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward . . . they are more than can be numbered" (Ps. 40:5). Contemplating the marvelous judgments of God in the world, the author of Psalm 92 exclaims, "O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep" (v. 5). The poet of Psalm 139 finds that the thoughts of Jehovah are very precious to him (v. 17). God's thoughts, however, are not man's thoughts: for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are the thoughts of God higher than the thoughts of mere man (Isa. 55:8–9).

Often the scriptures make mention of the counsel of God. His counsel stands forever (Ps. 33:11). He is wonderful in counsel (Isa. 28:29); he is great in counsel and mighty in work (Jer. 32:19). He works all things according to the counsel of his own will (Eph. 1:11); he shows the immutability of his counsel (Heb. 6:17). It is by the determinate counsel of God that Christ is delivered (Acts 2:23). Paul is not ashamed to declare the full counsel of God (Acts 20:27). God's counsel shall stand, and he will do all his good pleasure (Isa. 46:10).

Also of the will, the purpose, the good pleasure of God, the scriptures speak frequently. The apostle Paul intercepts an objection to his doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty in the matter of

salvation when he writes: "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" (Rom. 9:19). All things God works after the counsel of his own will; according to the good pleasure of his will, he predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself; he also made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself (Eph. 1:11, 5, 9).

This will is also his purpose according to which he calls his people (Rom. 8:28; 2 Tim. 1:9), and his purpose according to election must stand (Rom. 9:11). Moreover, the will of God is also the standard of living for his moral creatures; he that doeth the will of the Father in heaven shall enter into the kingdom of heaven and abide forever (Matt. 7:21; 1 John 2:17). The Spirit also makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God (Rom. 8:27). We must prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:2). Indeed, the divine nature is a personal nature with intellect and will.

When we speak of the personal nature in God, of his intellect and will, his knowledge and wisdom, it is important for us to bear in mind all the essential virtues of God that we have thus far discussed, lest we conceive of these divine powers as mere faculties. Man has the faculties of mind and will, but we cannot speak of God as possessing these powers in the same sense. God is self-existent and independent; he is eternal and infinite and so are his knowledge and volition. He is immutable; his mind and will are unchangeable. Above all, we must remember his attribute of simplicity, implying that God is one, that he is without division or composition, that all his virtues and powers are one in him, and that he *is* all his attributes.

Remembering all this and applying it to God's knowledge and volition, we come to the conclusion that to speak of God's mind is to speak of the eternally, independently, immutably knowing, understanding, and thinking God. The knowledge of God is the knowing God; the intellect of God is the thinking God. God is eternal and absolute understanding. There is no limit not only to the power of his understanding, but also to the actual content of his divine mind. His understanding is infinite (Ps. 147:5). There is no change in the activity and content of God's knowledge, no increase or decrease: with infinitely perfect, eternally active knowledge God knows himself and all things.

With man one may distinguish between the part of his knowledge that at a given moment is actually before his consciousness and the other part that remains below the threshold of his conscious mind. But with God there is no such distinction. There is no subconsciousness in him. With respect to his knowledge, he is pure activity.

Nor is there any time element in God's knowledge. Man reasons from premises to a conclusion, but with God all the premises and conclusions are eternally before his divine mind in their proper logical relation. Thus the knowledge of God is self-existent and independent. He does not derive knowledge from the things that are, but instead knows all things in their very essence and all their relations from himself. The same is applicable to the will of God. The will of God is the willing God. This will is eternal, all-comprehensive, infinite, unchangeable, independent, and self-existent. God wills himself and all things for his name's sake forever and ever.

Hence this eternally and perfectly knowing and willing God, whose infinite knowledge and volition are concentrated in and consecrated to himself as the only good, is the Holy One of Israel, who as the Holy One is love, truth, righteousness, justice, mercy, grace, longsuffering, and lovingkindness in his personal nature. In this manner we must conceive of the ethical virtues of God, both as they are in him and as they are revealed in relation to the creature. Then we can somewhat understand that God is God indeed, the self-sufficient one, of whom, through whom, and unto whom are all things, and to whom must be the glory forever and ever (Rom. 11:36).

Necessary and Free Knowledge

From antiquity theologians have made a distinction in the knowledge of God, which was expressed in the terms *natural knowledge of God* (*cognitio Dei naturalis*) or *necessary knowledge of God* (*cognitio Dei necessaria*) and *free knowledge of God* (*cognitio Dei libera*) or *contingent knowledge of God* (*cognitio Dei visionis*). By natural (*naturalis*) or necessary (*necessaria*) knowledge is meant the knowledge and understanding God has of himself and of all things possible and conceivable with himself. By free (*libera*) or contingent (*visionis*) knowledge is meant the knowledge of God concerning all things as conceived in and determined by his eternal counsel and decree.

The former is called natural knowledge, because it is given with the nature and self-consciousness of God, or necessary knowledge, because it is necessarily connected with God's very essence and not the result of a free determination of his will. The latter is called free knowledge, because it has for its object that which God freely and sovereignly determined by his decree, or contingent knowledge, because it concerns the things God actually beholds not only in his decree but also in the world outside of his essence.

Kuyper tries to introduce a second distinction, for which he suggests the terms *necessary knowledge* (*cognitio necessaria*) and *experiential knowledge* (*cognitio experimentalis*), while for the distinction between the knowledge God has of himself and the knowledge he has of all things, Kuyper uses the terms *natural knowledge* (*cognitio naturalis*) and *free knowledge* (*cognitio libera*). [30] By the terms *necessary* and *experiential* he refers to the knowledge of God as contained in his counsel and determined by his decree, and he calls this the necessary knowledge because it is fixed and cannot be changed. The knowledge of God as he actually beholds and takes cognizance of the things that are made in the created universe Kuyper designates as the experiential knowledge.

His attempt, however, is not very successful, but rather confusing. One receives the impression that this confusion is the result of a misunderstanding, either on the part of the student editor of the notes of Kuyper's lectures or on the part of Kuyper himself. In the reference from *Dictaten Dogmatiek* cited immediately above, not only is what is called free knowledge on page 344 changed to experiential knowledge on page 348, and what is designated as necessary knowledge on page 344 denoted as free knowledge on page 348, but also the knowledge of God's counsel is explained as both free and necessary. It is necessary because it is fixed and unchangeable; it is free because God freely determined its contents out of an infinite number of possibilities. Hence we do better to discard Kuyper's added distinction and limit ourselves to the distinction between the necessary or natural knowledge of God and the free or contingent knowledge of his decree.

This distinction has its merits insofar as it presents the knowledge of God concerning all things outside of himself as the result of a sovereign determination of his will. Even as the world does not necessarily and pantheistically emanate from God's essence, so the knowledge of God's decree is not the inevitable effluence of his self-knowledge and self-consciousness, but is the result of a sovereign determination of his mind and will. It is, therefore, free knowledge. But the knowledge God has of himself is not in the same sense determined by his will, but is spontaneously given with his essence; therefore in this sense it is necessary.

However, it may be appropriate to add that in another sense the necessary or natural knowledge is also free in the highest sense: for God wills to know himself as the triune God, and with perfect and infinite delight the Father gives life to and objectifies himself in the Son; the Son wills to be generated by the Father; the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. There is no

necessity in God other than that which flows from his own infinitely perfect being, and that necessity is freedom in the absolute sense. God's will and his being are one. Even though the decree of God is absolutely sovereign, and although in the abstract it may be granted that God could have determined upon an infinite number of other universes (nor did he need to determine upon any world at all); yet the world as decreed is nevertheless the full and highest revelation of himself, and his decree is characterized by highest wisdom.

Moreover, it must never be forgotten that the decree of God is eternal and that the decree of God is God decreeing (*decretum Dei est Deus decernens*). God is eternally a decreeing God. Although, therefore, the decree is the free determination of his mind and will, God can never be conceived of without his decree; in this sense the free knowledge is also necessary, but with a necessity that flows from the perfection of his own will.

The Jesuit Theory of Middle Knowledge

The Jesuits introduced the theory of a *middle knowledge* (*scientia media*) in God, which was really an attempt to maintain their conception of the freedom of man's will in the light of God's omniscience. God's knowledge is omniscient, which implies that he knows all things, real and possible, past, present, and future. He knows them, not by observation or experience, but sovereignly, of himself. In this sense God's knowledge is also foreknowledge (*praescientia*), a knowledge that is before things. This is not to be understood as if God by some mysterious or magic faculty is able to foresee the events of this world, as if he were a clairvoyant, but in the sense that his knowledge is eternal and determinative. God knows all things from his own decree and counsel.

But the Jesuits perceived that this omniscience and prescience of God implies the notion of necessity. Either God knows all things before they come to pass, and then their realization is certain and necessary, or there is no necessity in the occurrence of things and the chain of events in history, but then God cannot certainly know all things. Again, they perceived clearly that if God knows all things before they are historically realized, and this foreknowledge of the Most High is applied also to the deeds of men, then their Pelagian conception of the freedom of man's will could not possibly be maintained. This conception of man's freedom was such that it could not tolerate the idea of man's acts being in any wise determined by God's knowledge or decree. Hence they developed their notion of the middle knowledge, a theory adopted—in part, at least—also by Lutherans and Remonstrants, and which is not unlike the Remonstrants' conception of election according to foreknown faith (*ex praevisa fide*).

This knowledge of God is called *middle* because it is conceived as being between the necessary knowledge and the free knowledge in God. Its object is the whole of contingent possibilities; in his decree God takes account of them all, determines them all, and makes provision for them all. He knows what to do if certain conditions are fulfilled, especially by man. His decree is always ready. For all possibilities the decreeing God prepared himself before the foundation of the world.

Chiefly and first, this notion of middle knowledge is applied to Adam. Adam was so created that he was a free moral agent. This implies that he could either remain upright and continue in his state of rectitude or that he could fall. Here God confronted a contingent possibility, or rather, two possibilities contingent entirely upon the will and choice of man, which God could not certainly foreknow. Had he foreknown that Adam would fall, the fall would have been inevitable, and man would not have been free. Although the fall was not an object of God's certain foreknowledge, in his decree he had taken into consideration both possibilities and had determined what he would do in

either case.

Although this middle knowledge is applied first to Adam and the fall of man, it stands to reason that it cannot stop there. It must be applied to all the acts of all men individually and collectively. This theory of middle knowledge implies that God knows all the possibilities and all the conditions given with the moral freedom of man; that in his counsel he made provision for them all; that he is ready to act, whatever conditions man may choose to fulfill. All that is left of God's foreknowledge is a kind of magic foresight of what man will do under certain conditions.

This theory of the Jesuits is supposed to be based on scripture. They appeal to such passages as Exodus 3:19, which they explain as meaning that while God conceives of the possibility that the king of Egypt will obey his command to let Israel go, in his foreknowledge he is sure that the king will refuse; accordingly, he makes his arrangements. They also appeal to Deuteronomy 7:3–4, which, according to their view, means that God in his middle knowledge conceives of the possibility of Israel's being seduced through intermarriage with the heathen nations, in which case the anger of the Lord will be kindled against them. Another passage is 1 Samuel 23:10–13, where David, from the source of God's middle knowledge, is informed that the men of Keilah will certainly deliver him up to Saul, a possibility which is frustrated by David's flight from the place. Still another passage is Psalm 81:13–16, where the Lord declares from his middle knowledge what he would have done to Israel and how he would have blessed them if they had walked in his way. Further, they appeal to Jeremiah 26:2–7, where the Lord promises that he will repent of the evil he purposed to inflict upon Judah if they will hearken to his word through Jeremiah, apparently adapting his action to theirs. They make an appeal to the statements of Jesus concerning Tyre, Sidon, Sodom, and Gomorrah, concerning which Jesus declares that they would have remained until that day and would have repented if the mighty works that had been done in Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum had been done in them (Matt. 11:21–24). Finally, they refer to the shortening of the days of tribulation for the elect's sake (Matt. 24:22).

A Critique of Middle Knowledge

However, all these texts prove not that anything is conditional and uncertain before God, but that this is certainly true with respect to the acts of men. When God reveals to David that the men of Keilah will surely deliver him up to Saul, he does not declare to his servant what will surely come to pass, but what God knows to be the purpose of the men of Keilah. Tyre and Sidon would have remained until that day if the mighty works had been done in them that were done in Chorazin and Bethsaida; but the fact is that these works were *not* done in them, according to God's own decree, and they did not remain. That God places Pharaoh before the command to let the people go certainly means that he deals with the king as a rational, moral being, whose destruction can come only in the way of his disobedience. But the disobedience and the destruction were, nevertheless, certain and determined.

Two errors are very evidently implied in this theory of the Jesuits. The first is that it is a denial of God's omniscience and therefore of his sovereignty in relation to the moral creature, as well as to the whole universe and its history. There is nothing certain about this middle knowledge: a knowledge that is not certain is no knowledge. Instead, it is a knowledge of ever-recurring and ever-multiplying possibilities and conditions that is contingent upon man's will and choice. As is always the case with conceptions in which man is presented as sovereignly free, the notion of a middle knowledge makes God dependent upon man, dethrones him to put man on the throne, and takes the reins of government

out of his hands to give them to mere man.

God makes his decrees and determinations, but in making them he must wait to see what man will do. There is nothing certain before God. He never knows what man will do next and what decree—whether this or that—he must carry out. He does not know whether Adam will fall, whether he will have to send his only begotten Son into the world, whether Herod will kill him, whether the Nazarenes will cast him down from the precipice, whether Judas will betray him, whether Pilate will condemn him to be crucified. The world is really left to man's whims and fancies. Not God, but man, governs all things: man takes the lead and God follows. What is worse—if there can be anything worse than a world governed by man—the government of the world is delivered over to the arbitrary will of every individual man or, perhaps, to the will of the mob. Since God cannot be sure of the outcome of it all, no one can be certain whether God or the devil, righteousness or unrighteousness, will triumph in the world.

Such is the ultimate conclusion to which the Jesuit attempt to save man's freedom by denying God's omniscience must lead. It denies that God is the Lord: for a God who does not know what will become of his universe or what his own creature will do is not Lord. Scripture, however, reveals God as the Lord, standing in relation of absolute sovereignty to the world, whose will no one ever resists (Rom. 9:19), who hath done whatsoever he hath pleased (Ps. 115:3), and who declares the end from the beginning with absolute certainty (Isa. 46:10).

The second error of the Jesuits, closely related to the first and, in fact, its occasion, is the false conception of the freedom of man. Man is, indeed, a free moral agent according to his creation. Although he lost his true freedom, consisting in harmony with the will of God—a freedom that can never be regained except through Jesus Christ—he is still free in the formal sense that he remains the rational and moral subject of his own actions and is responsible for them.

But it should never be forgotten, as it is forgotten and denied by the inventors of middle knowledge, that man is not *sovereignly* free. He is and remains a creature, dependent, utterly dependent upon the will of his sovereign Lord. True, man is the conscious and willing subject of his own actions. In this sense he is free. He chooses, determines, and acts in accord with his inner nature. But this freedom is circumscribed and circumvented on every side by the will of God upon which man is dependent. All of man's actions, though determined upon by his own choice from within, are known and determined by the omniscient Lord of heaven and earth who does all things after the counsel of his own will (Eph. 1:11).

In attempting to harmonize God's omniscience with the freedom of man, we must not destroy God's omniscience to maintain man's sovereignty, but rather conceive of man's sovereignty as it actually is—a dependent and creaturely freedom, moving and operating within the scope of the sovereign decree of the omniscient Lord of heaven and earth.

God's Ethical Attributes

In discussing the perfections of God as a personal, intellectual, and volitional being, the distinction is usually made between those virtues that may be considered as belonging to the divine intellect and those that are conceived as attributes of his will. However, it is better not to make this distinction, but simply to speak of the perfections of God's personal nature or being, because although we may distinguish between the divine intellect and the will of God, they may never be separated.

Even in man the two are inseparably united. There is no pure intellect without the will, nor a will without the intellect. Always the intellect is volitional, and the will is rational. A purely intellectual

virtue or act that is not also volitional does not exist, nor is there an attribute of the will or a volitional act that is not intellectual or rational. If this is true of man, it is infinitely more true of God, who is a simple spiritual being, whose attributes are all one in him. All his ethical virtues are both intellectual and volitional. To classify them so as to bring them under the category of either his intellect or his will is not only to separate them, but also to make it impossible for ourselves to conceive properly of these wonders and riches of the divine essence. Hence we prefer to speak simply of God's ethical perfections without further distinguishing them as those that belong to his intellect and those of his will.

Even so, we must constantly bear in mind that the term *ethical* dare be employed only for want of a better term, as an anthropomorphism, and that the term is, strictly speaking, not applicable to God, but only to the rational, moral creature who stands in relation to God as a servant to his Lord. *Ethical* is that which conforms to certain standards, principles, laws. It presupposes and tacitly assumes that there is such a standard, a law above the ethical being, and that the ethical being is obliged to be and to act in conformity with that standard. As law presupposes a lawgiver, the term *ethical* implies that there is a Lord whose will the ethical being performs and is obliged to perform.

Law and obligation, lordship and willing subjection, conformity to objective standards and fixed principles—these are ideas implied in the term *ethical*. But all of this is not applicable to God, who is the sole, absolute, and ultimate Sovereign in himself, besides whom there is none, and above whom there is no law or standard. He is *the* Lord. He does not conform himself to any other, nor is the term *obligation* applicable to him. He is in the heavens, and he does whatsoever he pleases.

Strictly speaking, therefore, one cannot refer to God's perfections as ethical, as this would carry the idea of relativity into the notion of God's goodness. However, this difficulty we always confront when we speak of the eternal and incomprehensible one. Only in finite terms can we speak of the infinite; in relative terms we must speak of the absolute. What the word of man declares about God can only be understood as an anthropomorphistic, creaturely description of the infinite virtues of the creator. When, therefore, we speak of God's ethical virtues, we must constantly bear in mind that God is the Lord and that the term *ethical* with application to God may be understood only as the conformity of God's nature and activity to his own infinitely perfect being.

God's Goodness

Various scriptural terms summarily express these ethical attributes of God. One of these is the word *goodness*. The Lord is good (טוֹב—Nah. 1:7; ἀγαθός—Matt. 19:17). It is true that the word *goodness* may have, and in scripture frequently does have, a different connotation from that of ethical perfection. God is good in the sense that he is benevolent, charitable, filled with lovingkindness and tender mercies to those that fear him. He is the overflowing fountain of all good. There are pleasures forevermore at his right hand (Ps. 16:11), and all blessings flow from him alone. Joy and peace and bliss are found in him alone; it is unspeakably blessed to dwell in his house and to enjoy the intimacy of his friendship. To know him is, therefore, eternal life (John 17:3).

Nevertheless, it should never be forgotten that this benevolence of God is not common and that it may not and cannot be separated from his goodness as perfection. Only as the ethically perfect one is God the benevolent one. Because this is true, his goodness reveals itself as wrath and anger, as a consuming fire, to those that love iniquity.

Moreover, the word *good* is also used in scripture in the absolute sense and with reference to God's ethical perfection. Thus it undoubtedly occurs in Matthew 19:17 where Jesus says to the young

ruler, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God." It is evident that the Savior here employs the term *good* in a sense quite different from that in which the young ruler uses it when he approaches Jesus with the question, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (v. 16). The easy way in which the young man uses the word *good* in his question makes it necessary for the Lord to impress upon him the tremendous implications of his question if he would but use the word *good* seriously. Hence the Lord employs the term in the absolute sense: "No one is good—no man, no creature, not even the 'Good Master,'" as the young man evidently conceives of him. "No one is good but one, that is, God."

Here the word *good* means that God is absolute goodness, the implication of all infinite, ethical perfections, such as truth and wisdom, righteousness and holiness, mercy and grace, and faithfulness and lovingkindness. He *is* goodness. His essence *is* virtue. His nature *is* ethical perfection. He *is* righteousness, holiness, and truth. He is good in his whole nature, in all his divine thinking and willing; all his works, within and without himself, are done in truth and righteousness (Deut. 32:4). "Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way" (Ps. 25:8). He is purer of eyes than to behold evil, and he cannot look on iniquity (Hab. 1:13).

Another general term used in scripture to denote God's ethical perfection is the figurative expression *light*. "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). The figure of light applied to God does not refer merely to his perfect knowledge and self-consciousness. True, also in this sense God is a light, and there is no darkness in him at all. Into the infinite depths of his being he penetrates, and his Spirit searches the deepest recesses of his essence so that nothing is hid from the divine self-consciousness.

Rather, the term *light* usually has an ethical significance. It stands opposed to darkness, its antithesis. Darkness denotes all that is ethically evil and corrupt. When men love darkness rather than light, it is because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God" (vv. 20–21). Christ is the light of the world, and he who follows him shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life (John 8:12). Believers must walk as children of light; they must let their light so shine before men, that they see their good works and glorify their Father who is in heaven (Eph. 5:8; Matt. 5:16).

Darkness is the lie, light is the truth; darkness is iniquity and corruption, hatred and envy, adultery and uncleanness, covetousness and idolatry; light is righteousness and goodness, love and holiness, the implication of all ethical purity and perfection. When, therefore, scripture emphasizes that God is a light and that in him there is no darkness at all, it denotes that God is essentially goodness, perfection, and that there is no evil, no imperfection, in him whatsoever.

God's Holiness

The concept of ethical perfection as divine perfection is especially expressed in the terms קָדוֹשׁ (*holy*), ἅγιον (*holy*), and ἁγιωσύνη (*holiness*). The root meaning of קָדוֹשׁ (*holy*), from קָדַשׁ (*to be holy*), appears to be "purity, cleanness, freedom from moral defilement." Frequently and with special sense and emphasis, it is used of God. He is the Holy One above all others, in the absolute and exclusive sense.

It is especially in his holiness that the incomparable character of God's being appears and in which he is distinct from all creatures: "To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy

One" (Isa. 40:25). Notice that this rhetorical question emphasizes that God is the incomparable one: "To whom then will ye liken me?" He stands alone. He cannot be classified. He is by and of himself. Never can the comparison of him so be made that he stands on a par or on the basis of equality with the creature: "Shall I be equal?" We may notice that this incomparability of God is especially revealed in his holiness. It is in and through his holiness that he is the incomparable one and, therefore, absolutely distinct from all other beings.

Hence the word קָדוֹשׁ (*Holy One*) may be and is used here absolutely as a name of God. In his holiness he is God. He is the Holy One. To say "the Holy One" is to speak of God in his incomparable majesty, sovereignty, and glory. In the same absolute sense, as a name interchangeable with God, the *Holy One* occurs in Habakkuk 3:3: "God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran." In the context the holiness of God is presented as closely related to his glory, his majesty, and his sovereignty, for when he came as the Holy One from Mount Paran, his brightness was as the light, his glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise (vv. 3–4).

This conception of the holiness of God as his divine ethical virtue *par excellence* is strongly emphasized in Isaiah 6:1–5:

> In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

The seraphim give expression to what is evidently their main and combined impression of the revelation of God, as they stand in his presence. All that he reveals of himself to them here is expressed in the one word *holy*. They express this impression emphatically by its threefold repetition, and they reflect it in their attitude, as they cover their feet and their faces with their wings. God is glorious in his holiness. The divine holiness and glory are inseparably connected. His holiness is his glory. So they add to their praise: "the whole earth is full of his glory."

From this we may conclude that God's holiness is his infinite, divine, ethical perfection, concentrated in and consecrated to himself, that is, that divine virtue according to which he eternally wills and seeks and is consecrated to himself as the only good. This is further corroborated by the attitude of the prophet who receives this vision of the majesty and glory of the Holy One. In the presence of and at the sight of the holiness of the Sovereign of heaven and earth, he is wholly perplexed and amazed, realizing that he is but a sinful man.

God's Holiness in the Old Testament

God is frequently called "the Holy One of Israel," denoting that he is God alone in distinction from the abominations of the heathen and that his incomparable divinity is revealed summarily in his holiness, his infinite ethical perfection.

Significant from this viewpoint is Isaiah 10:17: "And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day." God is both the light and the Holy One of Israel. As we have seen, light is a figure denoting the implication of all ethical perfection in God, which is here used as a synonym for holiness. The Holy One of Israel is Israel's light. As the Holy One he is a light, and there is no darkness in him at all. According to this prophecy, the destruction which God as the Holy One shall cause by fire and flame is to be wrought

among the Assyrians who, according to the context, had denied that the God of Israel is truly sovereign and had boasted in their own strength and work, although they were but the axe in the hand of Israel's God. The Holy One, in the capacity of being holy, maintains himself in his glory and sovereignty and divine perfection over against the enemy of his name. What is once more emphasized here is not only that God's holiness is ethical perfection, but also that exactly in his divine perfection he stands alone and incomparable. While in all the creature its goodness consists in its being consecrated to God and his glory, God's holiness is his absolute self-consecration: he seeks himself as the only good and all creatures for his own name's sake. That is his glory and majesty, and in this he is truly Lord.

It is the meek who shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor of men shall rejoice (Isa. 29:19). Meekness and humility are the only proper attitudes that dare be assumed toward him, who as the sole good seeks his own glory. While the wicked, who love darkness rather than light, must say to the prophet of Jehovah, "Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us" (Isa. 30:11), God's children, the work of his own hands, shall sanctify Jehovah's name, sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and fear the God of Israel (Isa. 29:23).

This Holy One of Israel, who is emphatically the Holy One, is the redeemer of Jacob (Isa. 41:14). When the Lord shall have redeemed his people and shall have destroyed all their enemies, his people shall rejoice and glory in the Holy One of Israel (v. 16). Against the pride of Babylon that shall be brought low, God's people shall say, "As for our redeemer, the LORD of hosts is his name, the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 47:4). This redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, shall be called the God of the whole earth (Isa. 54:5). Even as he revealed his name *Jehovah* to Moses, so he calls himself the Holy; as the Holy, he is the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity. Yet for that very reason, while he himself dwells in the high and holy place, he also dwells with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones (Isa. 57:15).

Throughout the Old Testament, but emphatically in the prophecy of Isaiah, the holiness of God stands out as his ethical virtue above all others, as *divine* ethical perfection that distinguishes him from all creatures, according to which he is wholly consecrated to himself as the sole good. Therefore, as the Holy One, he is glorious in majesty and power, an inaccessible light, dwelling with the meek and lowly, but consuming the proud and all the workers of iniquity.

Corresponding to the Hebrew קָדוֹשׁ (*holy*) is the Greek word ἅγιος (*holy*). It is derived from τὸ ἅγος, which means "religious reverence and awe." It denotes the quality of being set aside for reverence, or the object to be revered. It stands opposed to κοινός (*common*), even as קָדוֹשׁ (*holy*) stands opposed to חֹל (*common, profane*).

Instructive in this respect is Ezekiel 22:26: "Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them." In this passage "clean and unclean" (הַטָּמֵא לְטָהוֹר—in the Septuagint: ἀκαθάρτου καὶ τοῦ καθαροῦ) must be regarded as a further definition of "the holy and the profane" (קֹדֶשׁ לְחֹל—in the Septuagint: ἁγίου καὶ Βεβήλου). This is important because it gives content to the formal concept "that which is holy." "The holy" is that which is consecrated to God, set aside for reverence, separated from the common or from the unclean. The reason or ground of this distinction and separation lies in its being clean or pure.

The same thought is expressed in Leviticus 10:8–10, where Aaron and his sons are forbidden to drink wine or strong drink when they go into the tabernacle of the Lord, in order that they may distinguish between the holy and the unholy, between the unclean and the clean. Here again the

Septuagint uses βεβήλων (*profane*) instead of κοινῶν (*common*) as standing in opposition to ἁγίων (*holy*). The point is that the holy is also clean: it is separated and consecrated exactly because it is pure.

God's Holiness in the New Testament

This idea is also evident from various passages in the New Testament, which place in the same categories, respectively, the common and unclean on the one hand and the holy and clean on the other hand. The common is unclean; the holy and consecrated is clean and pure. In this way the apostle Peter uses the terms when in a trance he is invited to "kill, and eat," and he answers, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean," whereupon the Lord answers, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." The answer implies that what is cleansed is thereby consecrated to the Lord (Acts 10:9–16).

The same thought is implied in Hebrews 9:13–14: "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth [consecrates] to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" The unclean are the common, and they are common because they are unclean; as such they cannot be consecrated to God. However, by the process of sanctifying through the sprinkling of the blood of bulls and goats, they become both clean and consecrated to God: they are sanctified to the purifying of the flesh. All this is realized in the blood of Christ. It cleanses us *ethically*, that is, from dead works. Being thus cleansed, we are also sanctified, consecrated "to serve the living God." The ethically clean is holy, consecrated to God.

Hence even as קָדוֹשׁ (*holy*) in the Old Testament, so ἅγιος (*holy*) in the New Testament is used absolutely of God. He is called the "Holy Father" in John 17:11: "And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are." God is the absolutely Holy One, separated from the common and unclean world, for as the Holy One he is absolutely consecrated to himself only. Because the world is not consecrated to him, it is common and unholy. In this world are the elect, the saints, who are called to be holy and to walk in holiness even in the midst of the unholy world. Hence they must be kept "in the name" of the holy Father, that is, in the sphere of the revelation of the Holy One, that to him they may be consecrated, separated from the world, and in this consecration may be one.

Also in 1 John 2:20 God is called the Holy One absolutely: "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." The idea is that God is absolutely holy, the one who is consecrated to himself. Hence only when we are anointed by him with the spiritual ointment that causes our hearts and minds to be consecrated to him can we know all things (or, according to another reading, can "we all know"), that is, are we able rightly to discern the truth of God. Without this unction from the Holy One, we love the lie and are incapable of knowing the truth.

This is certainly the thought in 1 Peter 1:15–16: "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." Here also the fundamental idea is that God is the absolutely Holy One: he is consecrated to himself as the only good. When he calls, that calling is necessarily a calling unto himself, and therefore unto holiness, to consecration to God. Even as holiness in God is the virtue according to which he seeks and finds himself, is consecrated to himself, and according to which he desires and wills all things for his own

name's sake, so holiness in the creature must consist in that he seeks and is consecrated to God alone in his whole being, nature, and walk.

Because God is holy, consecrated to himself, his people must be holy, consecrated to him. Because God is self-centered, the creature must be God-centered. Hence also the Spirit of God, the third person in the holy Trinity, is called the Holy Spirit. As he is spirited forth and proceeds from the Father to the Son, and again proceeds from the Son to the Father, he is the very principle of divine self-consecration. Of the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit, the triune God is consecrated to himself, is absolutely self-centered, as the only good.

The Holiness of Christ

Christ, as the Servant of Jehovah, is "the Holy One of God" in the highest and perfect sense. According to the narrative in Luke 4:34, it is remarkable that it was the man who had a spirit of an unclean devil who cried out, "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God." Profoundly, the unclean spirit realizes that there is nothing common between him and the Lord; this antithesis is rooted in the fact that Jesus is "the Holy One of God," that he is wholly and perfectly consecrated to God and his cause and, therefore, must destroy the house of Satan.

Even as the unclean spirit apprehends the holiness of Christ by way of antithesis, so the disciples discern through the Spirit that Christ is "the Holy One of God." They call him this according to a well-established reading of John 6:69. They are attracted to him because they discern that he speaks the words of eternal life; for to know the Holy One, God, is eternal life. He who is the Holy One of God speaks words of eternal life; the disciples, having acknowledged this, cannot go away.

Christ is "the Holy One of God" because the Father sanctified him, separated him from the common, sinful world, that he might be wholly consecrated to God. Even from and through his very conception he was so sanctified; for the "Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35; cf. Acts 3:14; Acts 4:27, 30).

The verb ἁγιάζειν (*to sanctify, make holy*) has the meaning of consecration to God, or of separating and reverencing that which is holy. Thus it is surely used in the first petition of the Lord's prayer: "Hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2). God's name is gloriously distinct from all other names. It stands apart, absolutely by itself, exactly in that it is the name of him who is holy, consecrated to himself as the ethically perfect. To acknowledge this, to set this name apart in our consciousness and in our life, is to sanctify or hallow that name.

Sanctify has the same meaning in 1 Peter 3:15: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts," which is to give to God a separate and central place in your heart so that all the issues of your heart may concentrate on him in holy consecration, and your heart may be the sanctuary of the Lord. Perhaps the same meaning may be found in John 17:19, where Jesus prays to his Father: "For their sakes I sanctify myself," that is, "I set myself apart from all men in holy consecration unto thee in word and work, even in my suffering and death, in order that they also may be consecrated unto thee and separated from the world."

This separation from the world and unto God always takes place through ethical purification. "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate" (Heb. 13:12). Like the Old Testament sin offering, whose blood was carried into the holy of holies, and whose body was burned without the camp as having contracted all the sin of the people,

so Jesus died outside of Jerusalem, carrying his own blood into the inner sanctuary and leaving his body to be destroyed on Calvary, that he might sanctify, cleanse, and thus separate his own people from the world unto God in holy consecration. So he loved the church and gave himself for it that "he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:26–27). By being washed and purified the church is set apart, holy unto God. A similar significance, though with emphasis on the idea of purity, has the word ἁγνός (*chaste, pure*—2 Cor. 11:2; 1 Tim. 5:22; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:2; James 3:17).

God's Holiness Defined

From our study of the various passages from the Old and the New Testaments, the following becomes evident. First, holiness is primarily a divine attribute. God is holy: he is the Holy One in the absolute sense. Second, especially in his holiness God is *God*, the one who is of and by himself and who is distinct from all creatures. The reason for this is that holiness denotes that he is the sole good, the implication of all perfections, and that as such he seeks himself, is consecrated to himself, the absolutely self-centered one. Third, as the Holy One he is also the absolute sovereign. Being ultimate goodness in himself and consecrated unto himself, he seeks himself and his glory also in all creation and is its absolute Lord, having the sole prerogative to declare what is good and to impose his will upon every creature. Fourth, especially the revelation of God's holiness as divine holiness is his glory. Fifth, for this very reason, man's holiness can only consist in being God-centered and consecrated with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength to the living God.

We conclude that *the holiness of God is that wonder of the divine nature according to which God is absolute, infinite, eternal, and ultimate ethical perfection, himself being the standard, motive, and purpose of all the activity of his personal nature so that he is eternally consecrated to himself alone as the only good*. Thus conceived and defined, the holiness of God may be considered to be the ethical virtue of God *par excellence*, under which all the other ethical attributes may be subsumed and of which they are aspects.

God's Wisdom

One of the ethical attributes subsumed under holiness is the wisdom of God. The scriptural conception of wisdom is not the same as that of philosophy. Unlike the philosophical idea of wisdom, the scriptural concept is not abstractly intellectual, but profoundly practical; it is not natural and earthly, but ethical and spiritual. In general, wisdom is the proper apprehension of and adaptation of oneself to reality. To express this thought, the Old Testament uses the verb חָכַם (*to be wise*), the adjective חָכָם (*wise*), and the noun חָכְמָה (*wisdom*), while the New Testament expresses the same concept by the terms σοφία (*wisdom*) and σοφός (*wise*).

That wisdom is a practical rather than an intellectual idea appears from many passages of Holy Writ. The sluggard is enjoined to go to the ant, consider her ways, and be wise (Prov. 6:6). What are the ways of the ant? The wise man explains: The ant gathers her food in the time of harvest and provides her meat in summer. She apprehends reality: there is food for her in summer, not in winter. She adapts herself to that reality by gathering her food when it may be had, thus providing for the time when food cannot be gathered. In contrast with this wisdom of the ant, the sluggard is the fool, who faces the same reality, fails to apprehend it and adapt himself to it, and therefore is put to shame and

destroyed by that reality (vv. 7–11).

The Lord Jesus contrasts the wise and the foolish man in his figure of the two builders. The foolish builder builds his house on the sand, failing to adapt himself to the reality of rains, storms, and floods; the result is that this reality destroys his house. The wise builder is he who properly discerns reality, adapts himself to it, and builds his house upon the rock, the result of which is that his house stands in spite of floods and storms (Matt. 7:24–27).

Hence wisdom is also skill. Solomon sent to Huram, the king of Tyre, for "a man cunning [חָכָם, *wise*] to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in iron, and in purple, and crimson, and blue, and that can skill to grave with the cunning men that are with me in Judah and in Jerusalem, whom David my father did provide" (2 Chron. 2:7). In the same sense the word is used in Isaiah 40:20: He "seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved." And the men that were to make the tabernacle, its furniture, and the high-priestly garments are called "wise hearted" (חֲכַם־לֵב), men to whom the Lord gave wisdom (חָכְמָה) and discernment (תְּבוּנָה) "to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary" (Ex. 36:1–2).

The Spiritual Nature of Wisdom

In the highest sense, however, wisdom is spiritual, ethical. The ultimate reality is the living God. To love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength is to know him and to adapt ourselves to him: to do this is life. Hence the people of Israel are called wise and understanding and shall be known as such when they observe the statutes of the Lord to do them: "Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (Deut. 4:6).

The meaning is evidently that in these statutes they have the revelation of the will of God. In these God himself is "nigh unto them" (v. 7). To walk in the way of these statutes is salutary for them, because it is the assumption of the proper attitude toward the highest reality, the only good, Jehovah himself. For the same reason, if they corrupt themselves and become a crooked and perverse generation, they shall be called a "foolish people and unwise" (Deut. 32:6). Hence the "law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple" (Ps. 19:7). It is the fool who "hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Ps. 14:1).

This ethical, spiritual significance of wisdom is frequently implied in the noun חָכְמָה (*wisdom*). Wisdom and discernment (תְּבוּנָה) are closely related: discernment is true, spiritual discernment; wisdom is the application of discernment. Thus the beautiful and profound eighth chapter of Proverbs is introduced by the question, "Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice?" (v. 1). The content of her cry is set forth in the rest of the chapter. She is the implication of the whole counsel of God as it has its prototype and personal subsistence in the Son of God. The Lord possessed this wisdom as the beginning of his way, before his works of old; before all things she was by him, as one brought up with him; she was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him (vv. 22–31). She calls to the simple, the inexperienced, and urges them to learn wisdom, and to the fools to be of an understanding heart (v. 5). She speaks excellent things, and wickedness is to her lips an abomination. Right things and truth she speaks. All her speech is in righteousness, and in her words there is nothing perverse or froward (vv. 6–8). She declares that the fear of the Lord is to hate evil; she hates pride, arrogance, and the evil way (v. 13). Counsel is hers, and sound wisdom. She is understanding, and she has strength. Kings reign by her, and princes decree justice when they are governed by her counsel. True prosperity is in her way, riches and honor, durable riches and righteousness. Her fruit is

better than gold and her revenue than choice silver. Leading men in the way of righteousness and in the midst of the paths of justice and judgment, she causes those that love her to inherit substance and fills their treasures. Blessed are they that keep her ways and that hear her, for they that find her find life and shall obtain favor of the Lord. But they that sin against her wrong their own souls, and all that hate her love death (vv. 14–21, 32–36).

Clearly, the scriptural concept *wisdom* has nothing to do with what the world calls philosophy. Wisdom is an ethical idea. It is the discernment of the way of the Lord as the highest reality and the adaptation of oneself with one's whole nature and life to it. Hence the fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy is true understanding (Prov. 9:10). Everything else is fundamentally foolishness. The wisdom of the world "descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish," engendering confusion and every evil work; but the "wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:15–17).

Throughout scripture wisdom is ascribed to God. In fact, he is called the only wise (μόνος σοφός) God (Rom. 16:27; 1 Tim. 1:17). All wisdom is his. He is wise in heart and mighty in strength (Job 9:4; Job 12:13, 16). This wisdom is revealed in all the work of creation; for with wisdom he has made all things, and the earth is full of his riches (Ps. 104:24). This wisdom was with him before the foundation of the world (Prov. 8:22–31). Especially in the marvelous work of salvation are the depths and riches of God's wisdom revealed (Rom. 11:33). By this wisdom he has made foolish the wisdom of the world (1 Cor. 1:18–31). Unto the principalities and powers is made known by the church the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10).

From Proverbs 8 and from the whole word of God, it is evident that with God wisdom is more than mere Platonic idealism, but is rather an aspect of his holiness, according to which he seeks himself and is consecrated to himself as the sole ethical good. God *is* wisdom. With him wisdom is absolute, self-existent, eternal, infinite, immutable. He is its subject and object. With him wisdom is infinite understanding of himself and adaptation of all things to one another and to himself as the only good.

That virtue of God according to which he lives his own divine life within himself as the triune God with perfect adaptation to his infinite blessedness as the Holy One, and according to which he is able to adapt his whole counsel and all things to the attainment of the highest purpose, and to adapt all things to one another with a view to that purpose, his own glorification—that is the unsearchable wisdom of God.

God's Love

That also the love of God may be considered under the general heading of God's holiness may easily be recognized. God's absolute and pure self-centeredness is expressed and manifest especially in his love, for God is love (1 John 4:8). Especially of love it may be said with emphasis that "of him, and through him, and to him are all things" (Rom. 11:36).

Herein is love, and herein one may find the very essence of love: not that we love him, but that he loved us (1 John 4:10). In God love has its source, and out of him, as its source, love operates in and through us to return unto God. Love is of God; that is, all true love, wherever it may be found, has its source in him (v. 7). It is his love above all that God reveals in the sending and delivering of his only begotten Son. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, that he sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him (v. 9): "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John

3:16).

Because love is so uniquely divine, love on our part is the surest evidence that we are of God. He who hates is in darkness, but he who loves his brother is in the light (1 John 2:9–11). Everyone who loves is born of God (1 John 4:7). Love is, therefore, the greatest of all, greater even than faith and hope, more sublime than all the gifts of knowledge and prophecy (1 Cor. 13:2, 8, 13). God is love.

The Old Testament uses especially two words for love: חָשַׁק and אָהַב. The Hebrew word חָשַׁק seems to denote love as a bond of union or fellowship. Its root meaning is "to fasten, to bind, to join together." It is also used intransitively with the meaning of "to adhere, to stick together." Besides, it implies the idea of delight. Applied to love, the idea of delight is probably related to that of joining together as cause to the effect. One delights in another, longs for him, seeks him, and cleaves to him in love. According to the meaning of חָשַׁק, love is the bond of fellowship that unites two parties who have a delight in each other. The word is used in Deuteronomy 7:7 of the love of God to his people: "The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people" (cf. Deut. 10:15; Deut. 23:5; Ps. 91:14).

The Hebrew word אָהַב refers to the living action of love rather than to the essence of it as a bond of fellowship. It has the root meaning of "to breathe after, and thus to long for, strongly to desire." Deuteronomy 6:5 uses this word: "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." God, as the sole good, the implication of all perfections, must be the object of our strong desire and the longing of our whole being. It is the language of love that is heard in Psalm 73:25: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." It is the strongest expression of love that is employed in the figure of Psalm 42:1–2: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"

In Deuteronomy 4:37 the word is also used to denote the love of God for his people: "And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt." Again, in Isaiah 63:9: "In his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." Love as denoted by these two Old Testament terms is a spiritual bond of fellowship by which two parties cleave to each other and long after each other with mutual delight.

The New Testament has the words ἀγαπᾶν and φιλεῖν (both translated "to love"). Only ἀγαπᾶν needs to be considered here, because it and the corresponding noun ἀγάπη (*agape*) are the only terms that the New Testament uses to express the love of God. φιλεῖν is much weaker and denotes a tender affection, an affection that is emotional rather than volitional.

It is well-known how the two words are characteristically used in John 21:15–17, the passage that narrates the restoration of Peter at the Sea of Tiberias after the resurrection of the Lord. Three times the Lord asked his humiliated disciple whether he loved him. Twice the Lord employed the stronger word ἀγαπᾶν. The apostle, however, conscious of his recent boast and miserable manifestation of his weakness and unfaithfulness, did not dare to use the stronger word ἀγαπᾶν; in his reply to the Lord's questions, he constantly employed the weaker word φιλεῖν. The third time the Lord took over the weaker word that had been used by the apostle, as if the Lord meant to remove the last vestige of Peter's self-confidence and to make him reflect whether even this were true: that Peter loved the Lord with that weaker affection that is denoted by the word φιλεῖν. Although this passage clearly brings out that there is a sharp distinction between ἀγαπᾶν and φιλεῖν and that the former is undoubtedly the stronger word, it does not inform us about the true meaning of ἀγαπᾶν. For this we shall have to turn to other passages of the New Testament.

An important passage in this connection is Colossians 3:14. Here love is called "the bond of perfectness." We would probably be overstating the matter if we would call this a definition of love; yet it would seem to approach the nature of a definition. By "bond of perfectness" I understand a bond or union that is characterized by perfection in the ethical sense, such as truth, righteousness, and justice. According to this phrase, then, love is a bond that can exist only in the sphere of moral perfection. There is no love in the sphere of darkness. They who love darkness cannot love one another in the true sense.

Love is profoundly ethical. If, as we have gathered, love is the bond or fellowship that is caused by the mutual delight of two parties in each other, by their longing for each other and seeking after and finding of each other, then we learn from Colossians 3:14 that the cause of this delight and longing must be found in the ethical perfection of the loving parties. He who loves in the true sense has his delight in ethical perfection, in moral goodness, and in truth and righteousness, and he moves in the sphere of the light. Both he who loves and he who is loved must be perfect. Since love is the bond of perfectness, it is the bond that unites ethically perfect parties only. Love is an ethical and, therefore, a personal virtue. It can exist only between personal beings, and these personal beings must be perfect.

It is true that the word is used in scripture as referring to the very opposite of ethical perfection for its object when scripture speaks of men who love darkness rather than light (John 3:19) and who love the glory of men more than the glory of God (John 12:43). But this merely emphasizes the perversion of love in the natural man, even as it is not love, but adultery, when a husband is unfaithful to his wedded wife and is said to love another woman.

Love is profoundly ethical and is a bond that unites only the ethically perfect. It implies a definite choice of the will and is the very antithesis of hatred. A man cannot serve two masters: for he must love the one and hate the other (Matt. 6:24). God loved Jacob, but Esau he hated (Rom. 9:13). Love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:10). The love of God is the first and great commandment, while the love of the neighbor is like unto it. For this reason the Lord emphasizes that he who loves him does keep his commandments, while he who loves him not will not keep his sayings (John 14:23–24). The ethically perfect character of love constitutes the basic note of that well-known eulogy of love found in 1 Corinthians 13. Love rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth (v. 6).

If we bear this in mind, we can easily understand that scripture emphasizes that God is love (1 John 4:8). Love is always of God; wherever you may find love, even among men, its source is always in God (v. 7); God is a God of love (2 Cor. 13:11). He is pure perfection as the Holy One who is consecrated to himself as the sole good. His very essence is holiness and is the bond of perfectness. He is a light, and there is no darkness in him at all. He is righteousness, he is truth, he is justice, he is the implication of all infinite perfections.

Hence God loves in himself, of himself, through himself, and unto himself. He loves himself. All the love and delight of his divine nature is directed toward his own infinite perfections. Also in his love God is perfectly self-sufficient. He has no need of men's hands, to be served; he is not in need of a man's heart, to be loved; he needs no object outside of himself to love, because, let us remember here, God is triune. He is one in being, but three in persons. He knows himself as Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit. Constantly, eternally, he beholds himself, contemplates himself with infinite delight in his own perfections. Hence the three persons of the holy Trinity are united in the bond of perfectness and live the life of infinitely perfect love. The Father loves the Son (John 3:35), and the Son would have the world know that he loves the Father (John 14:31).

God's Love Defined

Recapitulating, we may state that the following elements are essential to love. First, love is a bond of fellowship, a virtue and power that unites, draws, fastens. Second, love is ethical in character and therefore requires an ethical object and an ethical subject. Animals or inanimate objects cannot properly be the objects of love. Third, love can exist only in the sphere of ethical perfection. Love requires an ethically perfect subject as well as an ethically perfect object. When scripture admonishes us to love our enemies, those who persecute us as children of light, the act of love must be onesided. The meaning in that case cannot possibly be that we must exercise fellowship with those who are ungodly, but that we shall bestow such acts on them as will manifest that we live in the sphere of perfection: we shall bless them and pray for them. Only in those cases in which this blessing and praying becomes effective can the fellowship of love be established. Fourth, love as an act of the perfect subject in relation to the perfect object is delight in perfection; love is therefore the longing of the perfect subject for the perfect object and their cleaving to each other in the sphere of perfection.

We may define love as the spiritual bond of perfect fellowship that subsists between ethically perfect, personal beings, who, because of their ethical perfection, have their delight in, seek, and find one another. The love of God is the infinite and eternal bond of fellowship that is based upon the ethical perfection and holiness of the divine nature and that subsists between the three persons of the holy Trinity.

God's Grace

As the Holy One, God is gracious. The term *grace* as it occurs in Holy Writ has many different connotations. Its basic notion, from which all the other meanings may readily be derived, is that of gracefulness, pleasantness, attractiveness. The Hebrew word חֵן (*grace*) is derived from the verb חָנַן, which means "to incline" and in *piel*[31] signifies "to make fair, pleasant, gracious." The noun occurs in Proverbs 22:11: "He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend."

This passage is significant because grace here evidently has the meaning of pleasantness. The man of a pure heart speaks pleasant words; his speech is graceful so that for its sake the king delights to have him around and to commune with him. But the passage also informs us that this pleasantness and gracefulness of speech is not a superficial beauty, not the pleasantness of flattery, but the attractiveness and gracefulness of ethical goodness and purity. The "grace of his lips" has its roots in pureness of heart. An ethically pure speech is truly graceful. Similarly in Psalm 45:2: "Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever." Here, too, "grace" is used to denote attractiveness and beauty of speech that is rooted in ethical goodness. In Proverbs 31:30 the word is employed to denote the outward gracefulness and beauty of bodily form, which is said to be vain in itself.

The Greek word corresponding to the Hebrew חֵן (*grace*) is χάρις (*grace*). It is derived from χαίρειν, which means "to rejoice, to be glad." Accordingly, grace denotes that which affords joy and delight: charm, loveliness, gracefulness, pleasantness. Of the Lord we read that all bore him witness and wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth (Luke 4:22), by which is meant that the speech of the Lord was remarkably pleasant and that he was a charming speaker.

In Colossians 4:6 the apostle admonishes believers that their speech must always be with grace, seasoned with salt, in order that they may know how they ought to answer every man. Their conversation must be characterized by the gracefulness of ethical purity and sanctification. Similarly,

in Ephesians 4:29: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." Speech that gives grace to the hearers, that is pleasant and attractive to them, here stands opposed to "corrupt communication," from which it is evident once more that grace denotes a beauty that is rooted in ethical soundness and purity.

The apostle Peter writes: "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God" (1 Pet. 2:20). The Greek for that last expression is τοῦτο χάρις παρὰ Θεῷ (*this is grace toward God*). The meaning is that suffering for righteousness' sake is beautiful and pleasant in the eyes of the Lord. Both in the Old and New Testaments, therefore, grace denotes the attribute or virtue of beauty, pleasantness, charm, and more especially the charm and beauty that is rooted in true goodness, the expression of ethical perfection. Only what is truly good is beautiful. All that is corrupt must be condemned as ugly and repulsive. Only in the world of sin, by the sinful perception and judgment of a corrupt heart, can the ethically corrupt be considered attractive and pleasant.

In close connection with this objective significance of the word *grace*, it is used in scripture in the subjective sense to denote an attitude of gracefulness or pleasantness, a graceful disposition, a friendly inclination of the heart that one may reveal toward another. This is undoubtedly the meaning of the word in the frequently occurring phrase: "to find grace in the eyes of [someone]." One who finds grace in the eyes of another, usually of a superior, reads in his eyes that he is favorably or graciously disposed toward him, looks upon him with favor.

In the same sense of gracious disposition, grace is used in Luke 1:30, where Gabriel addresses the mother of the Lord: "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour [grace] with God." God is favorably inclined, graciously disposed, toward Mary. The expression is used similarly in Acts 7:46, where Stephen declares that David found favor, or grace, before God and desired to build a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. In Acts 14:26 we read: "And thence [Paul and Barnabas] sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled." Also in Romans 5:15 the word has the meaning of gracious disposition: "Much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many." Objectively, then, the word *grace* denotes beauty or gracefulness; subjectively, it denotes a gracious disposition or favorable attitude toward someone.

Therefore, it is easy to see how the meaning of *grace* most familiar to the mind of the believer—that of undeserved, or forfeited, favor—is derived. Grace in this sense has essentially the same significance as the favorable disposition discussed above, but with emphasis on its undeserved or gratuitous character. The word still has the meaning of friendly, favorable, or gracious disposition, the attitude of grace which God assumes toward his people, but now the freedom and sovereignty of the grace of God appear and are emphasized by the state and condition of the objects of his grace and the subjects who receive and experience this favor of God.

Grace is always sovereign and free. Always it has its basis only in God. But the freedom and independence of this grace are revealed more clearly when the recipient of that grace is in himself a sinner who has forfeited every claim to the favor of God and deserves only his wrath and displeasure.

Hence the word of God uses the term *grace* as opposed to debt, obligation, or work. When anything is out of works or according to works, it is not out of grace or according to grace; when it is out of grace, it cannot be out of works: "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt" (Rom. 4:4). The wage earner does not receive a token of his employer's gracious disposition when he is paid his wages. The payment of wages is out of debt.

In contrast, we are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). In our justification we have a revelation of the free and sovereign gracious disposition of God toward us. Hence if it is "by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work" (Rom. 11:6). We have redemption through the blood of Christ, the forgiveness of sins, not according to works, which would be impossible, but according to the riches of his grace (Eph. 1:7). In this sense, then, grace is such a favorable disposition or friendly attitude of God that is revealed even to those who are wholly undeserving in themselves, yea, who have wholly forfeited his kindness and favor and are worthy of wrath and damnation.

Hence the word *grace* in scripture denotes the power of God whereby the sinner is actually saved and delivered from the bondage of sin and corruption and made pleasant in the sight of God. Grace is the operation of God's friendly disposition upon and in its objects, as well as the implication of all the spiritual blessings and virtues that are thus bestowed upon the objects of God's favor.

Important in this connection is the passage in 1 Peter 5:10, where the term *grace* is used in its all-comprehensive sense: "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." God is the God of all grace.

This text implies that God is gracious in himself: he is the all-gracious God. Further, it means that he is the source and author of all grace: wherever you may find grace, it is the grace of God. Finally, it implies that he is the sole and the only author of grace: apart from him there is no grace. He works it, and he bestows it as a manifestation of his own gracefulness.

This connotation of grace as a power and blessing of salvation the word has also in the apostolic benedictions: "Grace be to you" (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2) and, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you" (Rom. 16:24; 1 Cor. 16:23; 2 Cor. 13:14), which can only mean that God in his grace, through Christ, may graciously work in and upon the church, may bestow his grace upon believers, and may make them partakers of all the blessings of grace and salvation. When God is graciously inclined toward men, he blesses them, and the content of that blessing is his grace, even as when he is displeased and unfavorably inclined to men, he curses, and the result is misery and death. Thus the word is very often employed in scripture. It is by grace that we are saved (Eph. 2:8). The apostle writes in 1 Corinthians 15:10: "But by the grace of God I am what I am," evidently meaning that the power of God's grace has made him what he is. Grace in 1 Peter 1:13 refers to all the blessings of salvation that are to be showered upon the church in the day of Christ: "Hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Thus it can be understood that the word *grace* in scripture also has the meaning of thanks. Where we read in our English Bible, "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Rom. 6:17), the original has literally, "But grace be to God. . ." When the apostle exclaims in Romans 7:25, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord," the Greek has, "Grace be to God." The original of the well-known doxology of 1 Corinthians 15:57 is, "Grace be to God, who giveth us the victory . . ." The same expression can be found in other passages (2 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 9:15; 2 Tim. 1:3). The meaning is most probably that grace is ascribed to God by those who are the objects of and who have experienced the power of his grace, in order that he may receive the praise as the God of all grace.

Scripture emphasizes everywhere that God is gracious. He is the God of all grace, the all-gracious God. He is gracious in himself apart from any relation to the creature. Also here we must remember that God is the independent, the self-existent, the self-sufficient one. He is not in need of the creature.

He does not become richer through the existence of the creature. In and through the creature he only reveals himself and glorifies himself in his riches, that also the creature may glorify him. Thus all the virtues of God are in him independently and absolutely.

This also applies to the virtue of grace. God is eternally a God of all grace. He *is* grace. Graciousness is an attribute or perfection of his very being. Grace belongs to God's holy name. Thus on the mount "the LORD passed by before [Moses], and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Ex. 34:6). David says, "But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth" (Ps. 86:15). The psalmist sings, "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" (Ps. 103:8) and exclaims, "Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful" (Ps. 116:5). In and of himself God is gracious.

God's Grace Defined

We must remember the fundamental meaning of the word *grace*. It is the virtue of being pleasant and attractive, beautiful and graceful, with a beauty that is rooted in and based on ethical perfection. In this sense one can readily understand that God is gracious, for he is the Holy One. He is the implication of all goodness, of all ethical perfections. Goodness is his very being. He is a light, and there is no darkness in him at all. He is righteousness, justice, truth, peace, love, and life. He is the only good. For that reason God is also infinitely beautiful, charming, pleasant, attractive. Even as the ethically corrupt is repulsive and ugly, so the ethically perfect is truly beautiful and pleasant.

In the absolute sense, therefore, grace in God is the beauty of his infinite perfections, the charm of his divine goodness, as Psalm 27:4 expresses: "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple." The inspired poet exults: "In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11) and, "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined" (Ps. 50:2). God as the Holy One, as the absolutely perfect one, as the one consecrated eternally unto himself, is altogether lovely; he is absolute loveliness. All that is in God is truly attractive and charming.

But this is not all. The above description conceives of the grace of God only in the objective sense, as an attribute of loveliness. However, we may also apply the subjective meaning of the word *grace*, that of a gracious disposition, to God in himself without any relation to the creature outside of him. In other words, God is gracious as the Holy One, as the one who is self-centered and is consecrated to himself, who seeks and finds himself in love. God is attracted by himself, and he is graciously disposed to himself. He is charmed by his own loveliness. He delights in his own infinite beauty, for he is the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Son is the Word, the express image of the Father's substance; in him the Father expresses all the beauty of his image. In the Spirit the Son returns to the Father, and the Father contemplates himself in the loveliness of his infinite perfections. Of the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit, the triune God knows himself and contemplates himself in his perfect gracefulness and charm with infinite delight. He is graciously inclined to himself.

As an attribute of God, grace is that divine virtue according to which God is the perfection of all beauty and loveliness and contemplates himself as such with infinite delight.

God's Mercy

Also the attribute of the mercy of God may be considered as an aspect of his holiness. The Holy One is consecrated to himself and centered in himself as the only good. But even as the good is also beautiful and graceful, so he who is in himself the only good and the fountain of all good, is also the absolutely blessed, and wills to be the most blessed one, as well as to reveal himself as blessed in blessing his creatures. This is God's mercy.

The term most frequently employed in the Old Testament to express the concept of mercy is חֶסֶד (*mercy*), and it is often used in connection with רַחֲמִים (*bowels, mercies*), the plural of רֶחֶם (*the womb, the inner parts as the seat of tender affections*), equivalent to the Greek τὰ σπλάγχνα (*bowels, mercies*), but often translated in the Septuagint by οἰκτιρμοί, (*mercies*). Psalm 25:6 and Psalm 40:11 use חֶסֶד (*mercy*) and רַחֲמִים (*bowels, mercies*) as synonyms. "Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old" (Ps. 25:6). Here the Hebrew of "thy tender mercies" is רַחֲמֶיךָ, and "thy lovingkindnesses" is the rendering of the Hebrew חֲסָדֶיךָ. The Septuagint translates רַחֲמִים (*bowels, mercies*) by οἰκτιρμοί (*mercies*), the Vulgate by *miserationes* (*compassions*), the English by *tender mercies*, the German by *Barmherzigkeit* (*mercy*), the Dutch also by *barmhartigheid* (*mercy*), while the French has *miserecordes* (*compassions*). חֶסֶד (*mercy*) is rendered by ἔλεος (*mercy*) in the Septuagint, while the Vulgate has *misericordia* (*mercy, pity*), and the English has *lovingkindnesses*. The German, however, renders *Gute* (*goodness*), while the Dutch has *goedertierenheid* (*benevolence, lovingkindness*), and the French has *graces* (*graces*).

In Psalm 40:11 we read: "Withhold not thou thy tender mercies [רַחֲמֶיךָ, *thy bowels, mercies*] from me, O Lord: let thy lovingkindness [חֲסָדֶיךָ, *thy mercies*] and thy truth continually preserve me." Here the Septuagint renders רַחֲמִים (*bowels, mercies*) by οἰκτιρμούς (*mercies*) and חֶסֶד (*mercy*) by ἔλεος (*mercy*). The Vulgate translates the two words by *miserationes* (*compassions*) and *misericordia* (*mercy*) respectively, the German by *Barmherzigkeit* (*mercy*) and *Gute* (*goodness*), the French by *campassions* (*compassions*) and *bonte* (*goodness*), while the Dutch has *barmhartigheid* (*mercy*) and *weldadigheid* (*beneficence*). There is, therefore, a very close relation between the two words. Fundamentally they express the same idea. Both refer to the affections and express the notion of the desire to make blessed and happy.

Without apparent reason the Septuagint translates חֶסֶד (*mercy* or *kindness*) by δικαιοσύνη (*righteousness*) in Genesis 20:13 and Genesis 21:23. In both cases the word ἔλεος (*mercy*) would have been more suitable, for the Hebrew word denotes a concrete manifestation or token of affection and kindness. The same is true of Exodus 15:13, where חֶסֶד (*mercy*) evidently refers to the deep affection of God for his people revealed in his deliverance of them from the bondage of Egypt.

Interesting is Isaiah 40:6: "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field." The Hebrew has חֶסֶד (*mercy*) for "goodliness." The Septuagint, however, translates *mercy* by δόξα (*glory*), and the Vulgate has *gloria* (*glory*), the German *Gute* (*goodness*), the French *grace* (*grace*), and the Dutch *goedertierenheid* (*benevolence, kindness*). Here חֶסֶד (*mercy*) reveals affinity with חֵן (*grace*) in the sense of beauty, gracefulness, as the comparison with the flower of the field shows plainly. Perhaps the connection must be found in the fact that the tender affections are beautiful in their manifestation.

Important also is Jeremiah 31:3: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Here the close relation between חֶסֶד (*mercy*) and the love of God (אָהַב—*to long after*), as its deepest source, is emphasized. The translation of מְשַׁכְתִּיךְ חָסֶד (*with lovingkindness have I drawn thee*) is somewhat difficult. מָשַׁךְ חֶסֶד really means "to draw out, to prolong mercy," as in Psalm 36:10: "O continue thy lovingkindness unto them that know thee; and thy righteousness to the upright in heart." In Psalm

109:12 the same expression occurs with a somewhat different connotation: "Let there be none to extend mercy unto him." Here the meaning is probably "Let no one cause his mercy to reach out for him." The difficulty in Jeremiah 31:3 is the double accusative, מְשַׁכְתִּיךְ (*thy prolonging*) and חֶסֶד (*mercy*). The meaning is probably "I prolonged thy existence as I reached out to thee in my mercy." The source of this act of mercy is God's sovereign and unchangeable love to his people. He loved Israel; therefore, his mercy reached out for them as they sank more deeply into misery; thereby they are preserved, and their existence is prolonged, continued. The Septuagint here translates חֶסֶד by οἰκτίρημα (*mercies*). In eternal love God is tenderly affected toward his people, moved by the will to bless them. That is his mercy.

Beautiful, too, is Jeremiah 31:20: "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." The affection of Jehovah for his people is very strongly expressed here. The original for "I will surely have mercy upon him" is רַחֵם אֲרַחֲמֶנּוּ (*with mercy I will mercy him*), which the Septuagint translates by ἐλεῶν ἐλεήσω αὐτὸν (*with mercies I will show mercy to him*).

In Isaiah 63:7 the two terms חֶסֶד (*mercy*) and רַחֲמִים (*bowels, mercies*) occur together with very little difference in meaning. But both the context and the text emphasize that the mercy of Jehovah and his great lovingkindness are the divine motive for blessing his people and destroying their enemies. It is that tender affection toward Israel, that will to bless them, that desire of Jehovah's heart to see Israel blessed and happy, that is the positive reason for his anger of which the entire preceding context speaks. For when the "year of [his] redeemed is come," Jehovah saw that there was none to help; therefore, his own arm brought salvation unto him, and his fury upheld him. He will tread down the people in his anger, make them drunk in his fury, and bring down their strength to the earth (vv. 4–6). But as to his people, "in all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old" (v. 9). Remembering this, the prophet exclaims, "I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses" (v. 7). Jehovah's mercy is his tender affection over his people and his will to bless them and to bestow upon them all good.

חֶסֶד (*mercy*) is used in connection with בְּרִית (*berith, covenant*), the everlasting covenant of God with his people, as in Deuteronomy 7:9: "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations." And in Psalm 89:28: "My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him." The thought is that God's covenant and his mercy are inseparable. His covenant is a covenant of mercy. It is in and according to his covenant that he is merciful to his people and that he blesses them with all the blessings of salvation in Christ.

This is also the thought of New Testament passages that mention the mercy of God, such as 1 Peter 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Notice that here mercy is the standard of the great salvation God works for his people and of the abundant goodness he bestows upon them in leading them out of misery to the glorious inheritance prepared for them. This mercy is called "abundant" because of the depth of misery from which it saves and because of the height of glory to which it leads the people of God. Hence mercy is a strong affection of love toward his people in misery and a mighty desire to make them blessed in the highest possible

degree. The same thought is expressed in Jude, verse 21 and in 1 Timothy 1:16, although in 1 Timothy 1:16 the verb is used. In Ephesians 2:4–5 the verb is used also, and especially the power of divine mercy as God's will to bless is strongly emphasized. God is said to be rich in mercy. Being rich in mercy, he quickened us together with Christ, that so he might satisfy the demands of his own love wherewith he loved us. Especially the context emphasizes the idea that mercy is the strong desire to render its object blessed in the highest possible degree: though we were dead through trespasses and sins, by the mercy of God we are raised with Christ and made to sit together with him in heavenly places (v. 6). Beautiful in this respect is Romans 9:23, where those who are ordained to eternal glory are called "the vessels of mercy," upon whom God, by realizing them as vessels of mercy, reveals the riches of his own glory (cf. Luke 1:50, 54, 58, 72, 78; and note the term *mercy* in the apostolic blessing, Gal. 6:16; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; 2 John, v. 3; Jude, v. 2).

God's Mercy Defined

We find, then, the following elements in the scriptural conception of the mercy of God. Mercy has its seat in the will, particularly in the affection of God. It is a divine affection. Mercy has its purpose in glory and blessedness. It is such a divine affection as desires to render its object perfectly blessed in the highest possible degree. When this affection is directed toward an object that is in misery, it reveals itself as commiseration and compassion and as power to deliver from deepest woe.

Even of mercy it must be said that it is an attribute of God in the absolute sense. God is rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4), not because of or through any relation to us, but absolutely and in himself.

As an attribute of God, *mercy is the attribute or virtue of God according to which he is tenderly affected toward himself as the highest and sole good and the implication of all perfections, and as the triune God knows and wills himself as the most blessed forever.*

With respect to his people, *mercy is the virtue of God according to which he wills them to be perfectly blessed in him and to taste his own blessedness, and according to which he leads them through death to the highest possible life of his covenant friendship*.

We may add that there is not only a close relation, but also a clear distinction, between love, grace, and mercy. Love is the bond that unites the ethically perfect. Grace is the objective pleasantness and the subjective attraction of the ethically perfect. Mercy wills and desires the ethically perfect to be blessed. It should be evident from this that God cannot be merciful to the reprobate wicked and that his mercy toward his people must be founded in his sovereign election, according to which he beholds them eternally as perfectly righteous in the beloved.

God's Longsuffering

Closely related to God's virtues of love, grace, and mercy is the attribute of longsuffering. In fact, it may be viewed as an aspect or operation of these virtues. In the New Testament we have the terms μακροθυμεῖν (*to be longsuffering*) and μακροθυμία (*longsuffering*) to denote the idea of longsuffering. In the Old Testament the term that most nearly approaches this idea is אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם (*long* or *slow of anger, patient*).

אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם occurs in Exodus 34:6: "And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." From verse 5 we learn that the Lord here proclaims his name before his servant Moses. In Numbers 14:18 Moses appeals to this name of Jehovah in his prayer that God may pardon the iniquity

of his people, whom he had threatened to destroy: "The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." Here אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם is used in close connection with the mercy of Jehovah.

Similarly, אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם occurs in Psalm 86:14–16:

> O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul; and have not set thee before them. But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid.

Not only does "longsuffering" occur here in close connection with God's grace and mercy, but the poet also appeals to this longsuffering as he is threatened with destruction by the enemies who encompass him and seek after his soul. In all these passages "longsuffering" denotes an attitude of God toward his people, whom in his sovereign mercy he desires to save.

Striking is the passage in Jeremiah 15:15: "O LORD, thou knowest: remember me, and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors; take me not away in thy longsuffering: know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke." Evidently, the prophet here conceives of God's longsuffering as an attitude of God toward Jeremiah, as he is surrounded by his enemies who seek to destroy him. God's longsuffering is even conceived as the ultimate cause or reason for his suffering at the hand of the wicked. The meaning of the prayer is "Do not, in thy longsuffering over me, permit the enemy so long to persecute me that they succeed, and I am taken away."

Luke 18:7 expresses the same idea: "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?" The reading μακροθυμῶν (*being longsuffering*) is preferred to μακροθυμεῖ (*is he longsuffering*). Μακροθυμῶν (*being longsuffering*) is the more difficult reading, and μακροθυμεῖ (*is he longsuffering*) may easily have been substituted to simplify the meaning according to the idea of the copyist. Besides, μακροθυμῶν (*being longsuffering*) expresses the idea that is in harmony with the context. Μακροθυμεῖ (*is he longsuffering*) would deny that God is longsuffering over his people, while in the context emphasis falls exactly on the idea that God *is* longsuffering over them. The substitution of the indicative form of the verb may be explained from the attempt to remove the apparent conflict with verse 8, where we are emphatically assured that God will avenge his people speedily. We must maintain, therefore, that the participle gives the correct reading.

Moreover, sound exegesis forbids explaining "with them" as referring to the enemy who hates and persecutes the church and causes the elect in the world to suffer. The enemies are not mentioned here. The Lord is speaking of the elect who suffer persecution in the world, who are exhorted always to pray and never to faint, and who are presented here as crying unto God day and night. In Luke 18:8 the Lord assures us that God will avenge them speedily. In the midst of all these assertions concerning the elect, we read that God is longsuffering "with them" (*over them*). It would be in violation of all sound exegesis to refer this phrase to the enemies of the people of God.

The idea in Luke 18:7 is, therefore, the same as the idea in Jeremiah 15:15, except that Luke 18:8 adds that God will quickly avenge his people. The longsuffering of God is surely an aspect of his mercy toward his elect. By the addition of the promise that he will speedily avenge them, the idea that he will permit them to suffer needlessly is excluded. From Luke 18:7–8, as well as from Jeremiah 15:15, we learn that God's longsuffering is an aspect or operation of his mercy over his people, conceived of as being objects of hatred and persecution in the world.

The same thought is expressed in 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as

some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." With a view to the glorious hope of the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, believers are exhorted to account the longsuffering of God as salvation (v. 15).

In the epistles of Peter, the church is conceived as the company of strangers and sojourners in the world, who have the promise of final salvation and hope for the realization of that promise, but who, while in the world, must suffer for Christ's sake. Especially because of their present state of distress and tribulation in the world, they fervently long for the realization of the promise and for the coming of the Lord in glory. Undoubtedly, they had expected the coming of the Lord at an early date, forgetting that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day. Under all these circumstances they began to be impatient. Their condition was aggravated by the scorn of the mockers, who pointed to the patent fact that all things remained as they had been from the beginning. Thus the saints considered it slackness that the Lord had not yet fulfilled his promise.

But the apostle explains that this apparent tarrying of the Lord is not to be looked upon as slackness. This is only a negative way of saying that he will come as soon as possible for the salvation of his elect. As the Lord expressed it at the close of the parable of the unjust judge, he will avenge them speedily. The fact that he is still tarrying must be accounted as his longsuffering toward the elect. They must all be saved. He is not willing that any of them should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Only after the number of the elect is full can the promise of God be finally and completely realized. It is not necessary to add that the interpretation that explains the term *all* as referring to all men is utterly impossible.

Longsuffering and Forbearance

In Romans 9:22 the concept *longsuffering* occurs in close connection with the concept *forbearance*: "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." In the Old Testament the same term אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם (*long* or *slow of anger, patient*) is used to denote not only an attitude of God toward his people and the operation of his love and mercy toward them but also an aspect of his fierce wrath toward his enemies. Longsuffering in the sense of God's fierce wrath toward his enemies appears to be the meaning in such passages as Nahum 1:3: "The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet."

However, in the New Testament there are two different terms for longsuffering and forbearance. The words μακροθυμεῖν (*to be longsuffering*) and μακροθυμία (*longsuffering*) express God's longsuffering, the attitude of his mercy toward his elect. God's forbearance is expressed by ἐνεγκεῖν (*to endure*) and ἀνοχή (*forbearance*), denoting his suspended wrath and judgment over his enemies. In Romans 9:22 these two terms occur together: God "endured" (ἤνεγκεν) the vessels of wrath "with much longsuffering" (ἐν πολλῇ μακροθυμίᾳ). It would seem that at least in this passage, the term *longsuffering* is used to denote an attitude of God toward the wicked.

However, this is not necessarily the case, and in view of the fact that in other passages of the New Testament *longsuffering* is uniformly used to denote God's attitude of mercy toward his people, we prefer another interpretation in this instance. God bears the vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction, and he does this with much longsuffering. We may note here that the phrase "with longsuffering" is circumstantial: while God bears the vessels of wrath, he also reveals his longsuffering; while he is

longsuffering over his people, he bears the vessels of wrath. Longsuffering and forbearance, therefore, occur together. The reason is that God's people live in the midst of these vessels of wrath, and they oppress and persecute God's people. This was plainly the case with the people of Israel in Egypt, a situation that the apostle has in mind according to the context of Romans 9:22. It follows, then, that while God bears the vessels of wrath who cause his people to suffer in the world, he must reveal his longsuffering over his people. He will, indeed, speedily redeem them and quickly avenge them, but he is longsuffering over them with a view to the end.

Not so easy to interpret is Romans 2:4, where the two terms, *forbearance* and *longsuffering*, also occur side by side: "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" The text does not seem to convey any definite notion of the term *longsuffering*. It is merely mentioned here as one of the virtues of God that is despised by the impenitent. Longsuffering and forbearance are mentioned here in the same breath, as if they are simply synonyms, have the same object, and spring from the same motive in God. The text appears to lend support to the theory of common grace and has been quoted in proof of common grace. It appears that the goodness of God is intended to lead man to repentance. Yet the result does not correspond to the intention, for he who is supposed to be led to repentance despises the goodness, longsuffering, and forbearance of God and knows not that his goodness should lead man to repentance and salvation. God's purpose is apparently frustrated by the unbelief of man.

This interpretation, as well as any other Arminian exegesis of the text, is excluded by the passage itself. We dare not overlook that the text does not speak of an intention of God that is frustrated by man. In that case it should have stated that the revelation and operation of the virtues of God that are mentioned here *should* or *ought to* lead man to repentance as far as God's intention is concerned.

However, Romans 2:4 states a fact: "the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." Therefore, the question is, How can it be said of the same subject that God's goodness actually leads him to repentance, while yet that subject is ignorant of this effect of God's goodness upon him, despises it, and thus heaps up for himself treasures of wrath? The answer is that "thee" (or *man*) in the text does not refer to a particular individual, but rather to a class, to man in general. The apostle is not addressing a particular individual, but man in general. It makes no difference whether the apostle has in mind the Jews, or both the Jews and Gentiles. Of this *man* it may be said that God's goodness actually leads him to repentance, as is clearly evident in the case of the elect. Yet, it may also be said of *man* that he despises the goodness of God and does not know by actual experience that it leads him to repentance, as is evident in the case of the reprobate who rejects the gospel and thus aggravates his condemnation. This may also explain why the terms *longsuffering* and *forbearance* are used here in close conjunction with each other.

Interesting for our understanding of the concept *longsuffering* is James 5:7–9:

> Be patient [μακροθυμήσατε] therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience [μακροθυμῶν] for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient [μακροθυμήσατε]; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.

It is evident that this passage does not speak of the longsuffering of God, but of believers in the world. Nevertheless, the idea of longsuffering is here most clearly and beautifully set forth in a very direct manner.

God's people are oppressed, defrauded, condemned, and killed. They are admonished to endure their suffering with a view to the end, the reward that shall be theirs when the Lord shall come for

their final redemption. This coming of the Lord is presented as near, for the Lord will speedily come and avenge them. The idea of longsuffering is also set forth by the figure of the husbandman and his attitude towards the fruit of the earth. He longs for the day when he shall be able to gather in the harvest. But he permits it to be exposed to the early and the latter rain, and he waits until the harvest is ripe. Here God's people are exhorted to imitate God's own longsuffering. He is longsuffering over them with a view to their final salvation; they, too, must endure until the end and be patient that they may receive the inheritance.

God's Longsuffering and Forebearance Defined

We may conclude, then, that in the scriptural conception of God's longsuffering there are the following elements. First, there is an object which the longsuffering God has in mind, the attainment of which is the final goal of his longsuffering. This object is the full realization of the promise, the final glory in all its riches of perfection, the inheritance which God has prepared for those who love him and which is a reflection of his own infinite perfection. Second, there is the divine mercy, the constant, eternal, and unchangeable affection and will of God to lead his people to that highest perfection of glory. Third, there is the measure of suffering which God's people in this world must fill before they can enter into the glory of the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that never fades away.

We may define the longsuffering of God with respect to his people as the perfection of God's love and mercy, according to which he constantly and unchangeably wills the final perfection of their glory in Christ, even in the way of their suffering, and wills their suffering as a necessary means unto that final perfection in all its fullness.

The question might be asked whether there is a basis for this longsuffering in God himself, or whether we can at all conceive of longsuffering as a virtue in God apart from his relation to his people. In answer, we may postulate that there must be such a basis of longsuffering in the eternal one. God is self-sufficient. He is the unchangeable one. He does not become anything by his relation to his creature that he is not in himself eternally. It is another matter, however, whether we can conceive of this. It stands to reason that the notion of time must be eliminated from the concept of longsuffering conceived absolutely. God's slowness to anger, his longsuffering, then becomes an eternal and unchangeable passion. God never grows weary of his perfect delight in himself. The divine archetype of his longsuffering as revealed to us in time is the unchangeable delight in the infinite fullness of his own perfections.

Of this longsuffering of God with respect to his people in the world, his forbearance is, strictly speaking, the very antithesis. It is that perfection of God according to which he wills the complete destruction and desolation of all who deny him, in the way of their sin and of their prosperity in the world as a means for their ultimate damnation. The vessels of wrath are fitted unto destruction. The wicked flourish that they may be destroyed forever. In his forbearance he sets them on slippery places that they may come to desolation as in a moment (Rom. 9:22; Ps. 73:18; Ps. 92:7).

God's Righteousness

Directly from the concept *holiness* in scripture follows the concept of the *righteousness* of God. The Hebrew uses the following words for the concept of God's righteousness: צַדִּיק (*righteous*); the adjective צֶדֶק (*righteousness*); the masculine noun צְדָקָה (*righteousness*); the feminine noun; the verb

צָדַק (*to be right* or *straight*), in *hiphil* meaning "to make right," and both in *piel* and *hiphil*[32] meanir "to pronounce right." The Greek uses the adjective δίκαιος (*righteous*); the nouns δικαιοσύνη (*righteousness*), δικαίωμα (*righteous judgment* or *act*), and δικαίωσις (*justification*), as well as the verb δικαιοῦν (*to declare righteous, to justify*). The Greek terms appear to be related in such a way that δίκαιος (*righteous*) denotes adjectivally the quality of being just or righteous; δικαιοσύνη (*righteousness*) is the very essence of the δίκαιος (*righteous*); δικαίωσις (*justification*) is the action of δικαιοῦν (*to declare righteous, to justify*); δικαίωμα (*righteous judgment* or *act*) is the result of the action expressed by the verb δικαιοῦν (*to justify*).

Important for the concept *righteous* is the passage in Deuteronomy 32:4: "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." The Septuagint translates: Θεός, ἀληθινὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ, καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ κρίσεις. Θεὸς πιστός, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀδικία, δίκαιος ὅσιος Κύριος (. . . *God, his works truth, all his ways judgment. A faithful God, and without iniquity, a righteous and holy Lord*). It cannot escape our attention that the main idea of this text is that of an unchangeable criterion. This is denoted by the chief word in the text, *Rock*. All the other qualifications merely serve to qualify and explain the contents of that figurative term. For that reason, perhaps, the Septuagint simply renders it Θεός (God). The Vulgate, rather lamely, and failing to catch the chief idea of the text, translates: "*Dei perfecta sunt opera*" (*the works of God are perfect*).

The main idea of the rock in scripture is firmness, stability, durableness, unchangeableness; the article adds the notion of exclusiveness and absoluteness. God is the Rock: he is the only, abiding, firm, unchangeable reality, the standard, the criterion of all things. On that Rock must be smashed all that comes against it, while all that clings to it shall surely be saved. For this reason all his works are sound and whole, blameless, and in that sense, perfect. For the same reason all his ways are judgments: wherever he walks with the children of men and leads them, he always judges. He is always the direction in which they must go. Materially this is true because he is "a God of truth and without iniquity." He is not a lie, a vanity, something that is not "without iniquity," but he is ultimate reality, and he knows himself as he is, that is, as the highest good. He has no false conception of himself. Therefore, he is just and right, straight and upright, always willing that which is in harmony with his conception of himself. *Just*, therefore, here expresses the quality of being in conformity with an unchangeable and absolute criterion of righteousness.

Important, too, is the text in Nehemiah 9:8, the immediate context of which mentions the promise of God to Abraham and his seed concerning the land of Canaan, whereupon the Levites praise God, saying, thou "hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous." *Righteous* here approaches the meaning of faithfulness. The Lord gave his promise and fulfilled it; the reason ascribed for this is that he is righteous. It will be evident that the underlying idea is the same as before: to be righteous is to conform to an unchangeable criterion of right. The unrighteous cannot be expected to fulfill what he promises. There is no conformity between his words and his inmost thoughts and, therefore, between his actions and his words. But God is righteous. When he speaks, he does so in harmony with his absolutely good being; hence he performs all his words.

Perhaps Isaiah 45:21 expresses the same idea: "Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me." Notice the connection here between God's being righteous and his being a Savior: "a just God and a Saviour." According to the context, the Lord declares that Israel shall be saved with an everlasting salvation. This he hath declared from ancient times, not in secret places, but openly. The reason is that

he speaks righteousness: he will surely realize his word to save, for he is righteous and, therefore, a Savior.

Beautiful is the passage in Jeremiah 12:1: "Righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?" Often in the government of God in the earth there is an element that the prophet cannot understand, something that confuses him. It is that the wicked prosper. Of this he would desire an explanation. He talks, strives, and pleads with God concerning his judgments. But notice that the prophet proceeds from the firm starting point that God *is* righteous. This is established before all else. To him the appearance of things to the contrary does not tempt him to doubt or to impugn the righteousness of God. This would be folly, for God is righteous in the ultimate and absolute sense. He cannot be summoned before any bar of justice. This ultimate righteousness is the conformity of his will with his nature as the ultimate standard of all that is right. But proceeding from this righteousness, the prophet would nevertheless see this righteousness in God's judgments. Therefore, he pleads with God.

Significant, too, especially in light of its context, is Psalm 145:17: "The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." This truth is explained in the verses that follow. He is nigh unto all who call upon him in truth, fulfills the desire of those who fear him, hears their cry, saves them, and preserves all who love him; but all the wicked will he destroy. Such is the righteousness of Jehovah in all his ways. As his own nature is the standard of his will, so his will is the sole standard for his dealings with the children of men. He blesses those who fear him and destroys his enemies. He is righteous and just in all his ways.

As might be expected, the word *righteous* is used not only with respect to God, but also very often for men. The righteous are often contrasted with the wicked, as in Genesis 18:23: "And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" Here righteous is contrasted with wicked; *the wicked* is the impious, the ungodly, and therefore, the evildoer. In opposition to this, *the righteous* denotes him who in his outward acts and inward thoughts and desires, and therefore in his inmost heart, is in conformity with the will of God. He is one whose nature is in conformity with the will of God, who wills and performs that divine will, according to the righteous judgment of God. According to the judgment of God, he is righteous who is in harmony with God's will.

In this same sense the word *righteous* occurs very frequently in the Psalms. In Psalm 1:6 the subject is *the righteous ones*. Of them it is said, "the LORD knoweth" (*loveth, hath regard to*) their way of being in conformity to his will. But sinners shall not stand in the congregation of the righteous (v. 5). The *sinners* are they who miss the mark; they are the ungodly, the evildoers, and the mockers. The *righteous* man delights in the law of the Lord, and he meditates on that law day and night (v. 2), because that law is the revelation of God's will.

So it is very frequently in the Psalms. Of the righteous it is said that he shows mercy and gives (Ps. 37:21) and that his mouth speaks wisdom (v. 30). He rejoices when he sees vengeance upon the wicked, because he shall say that there is a reward for the righteous and that God judges in the earth (Ps. 58:10, 11); the righteous are glad in the Lord and trust in him (Ps. 64:10); they give thanks to the name of the Lord (Ps. 140:13).

Proverbs, which constantly draws the antithesis between the righteous and the wicked, expresses the same idea of righteousness, that is, of being in harmony with God's will. As to the righteous, his labor tends to life (Prov. 10:16); his lips feed many (v. 21); he is an everlasting foundation (v. 25); his lips know what is acceptable (v. 32); his desire is only good (Prov. 11:23); his thoughts are right

(Prov. 12:5); his heart studies to answer (Prov. 15:28); he runs into the strong tower of the name of the Lord and is safe (Prov. 18:10); he gives and spares not (Prov. 21:26); he is bold as a lion (Prov. 28:1); he considers the cause of the poor (Prov. 29:7).

The same denotation of the righteous we find in the prophets throughout (Isa. 3:10; Isa. 5:23; Isa. 24:16; Isa. 26:2; Isa. 57:1; Isa. 60:21; Jer. 20:12; Ezek. 13:22; Ezek. 16:52; Ezek. 18:20; Ezek. 33:12–13; Amos 2:6; Hab. 1:4; Mal. 3:18).

Also the New Testament uses the word *righteous* for both men and God. Interesting in this connection is Matthew 9:12–13. In the context we read that the Pharisees upbraided the Lord with his disciples because he ate with publicans and sinners. "But when Jesus heard that, he said unto [the Pharisees], They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." The underlying connection is plain. The Pharisees were offended with the Lord because he had fellowship with publicans and sinners, and by clear implication, not with them, who were righteous in their own estimation. The Lord treats them according to their own estimation. After all, he was the physician who sought the sick, not the healthy: publicans and sinners, not the Pharisees. But the Pharisees were righteous not in reality, but only in their own estimation. This self-esteem was not based on anything truly ethical, but on external form, sacrifices, and ritual. Hence they were really sick if they would compare themselves with God's standard of righteousness: mercy I will, not sacrifice. If they would only proceed to learn the meaning of that saying, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice," then they would discover that they were sick, unrighteous sinners, and the physician would call them, too, as well as the publicans and sinners. That the Lord did not eat with them was due to their mistaken self-righteousness, for he came to call sinners, not the righteous, to repentance.

About the concept *righteousness* we learn that it is conformity to the criterion of the will of God, that it is opposed to sinners who miss the mark, and that this conformity is not merely external, but is an inner, spiritual, ethical harmony with the will of God: "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice."

The inner, spiritual, ethical character of *the righteous* is clearly brought out in Matthew 23:28: "Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." The plain implication is that the righteous is inwardly not full of iniquity and lawlessness. He is in harmony with the law of God. The law of God is in his heart. The implication is that the Pharisees and scribes outwardly conformed to the law of external rites, while they hated the essence of the law. There was conflict between their outward appearance and their inmost heart; this was why their hearts were also full of hypocrisy.

The righteous, then, is he who according to the judgment of God has been and is in his whole life, inward and outward, in conformity with the law of God according to its spiritual, ethical essence, the law of love.

Righteousness as an Attribute of God

God is the absolutely righteous, according to Romans 3:26: "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just [δίκαιος, *righteous*], and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." 1 John 2:29 expresses the same truth: "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him." That God is the only criterion and absolute standard of righteousness is manifest from the fact of his justice, according to which he renders to every man according to his works. Scripture very frequently expresses this, as in Revelation 16:5 in connection

with the pouring out of the third vial: "And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus." The same idea is implied in John 17:25: "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me." This implies that the "righteous Father" makes a distinction between the world and the disciples of Christ (John 5:30; John 7:24; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 15:3; Rev. 16:7; Rev. 19:2). The just judgment of God, therefore, is a manifestation of his absolute righteousness.

The nouns scripture uses to denote the state or quality of one who is צַדִּיק (*righteous*) or δίκαιος (*righteous*) are: צֶדֶק (*righteousness*) and צְדָקָה (*righteousness*) in the Old Testament and δικαιοσύνη (*righteousness*) in the New Testament. The Septuagint generally translates צֶדֶק and צְדָקָה by δικαιοσύνη (*righteousness*), although a few cases occur in which δικαιοσύνη is atranslation of חֶסֶד (*mercy, kindness*).

The words for *righteousness* occur in Psalm 11:7: "For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright." The Lord is righteous: he loves righteousness. His whole nature delights in the upright; for that reason he looks with pleasure and delight upon those who are upright. The psalmist says, "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Ps. 45:7). In this passage, "righteousness" occurs as the antithesis of wickedness in the sense of crookedness, that which is not in harmony with a given standard. Righteousness, therefore, is that ethical virtue according to which one is what he ought to be. As God is righteousness, in him righteousness is that virtue according to which his willing and acting is eternally in harmony with his own infinitely perfect being.

Therefore, salvation can come only in the way of the vindication of God's righteousness:

> And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak (Isa. 59:16–17).

In the context God's people are pictured in their sin. Vividly the text pictures that there is no one among them who can appear as intercessor. Hence God himself intercedes: he comes to save his people. In saving them it is his righteousness—his virtue according to which his will is always in harmony with his perfect being—that sustains him in the battle with the powers of darkness, from which he saves his people. His righteousness serves as a breastplate, making him invulnerable in his perfection.

It follows that there is an intimate relation between God's holiness and his righteousness: "But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness" (Isa. 5:16). The meaning is that God as the Holy One shall be sanctified and acknowledged as the Holy One in the manifestation of his righteousness. If God's holiness is his absolute ethical perfection so that he himself is the motive of all his divine acts, then his righteousness is that virtue according to which his ethical perfection is the standard of all his willing and acting. Hence in the manifestation of his righteousness, he will be acknowledged as the Holy One.

As to the term *righteousness* (δικαιοσύνη), it certainly occurs emphatically as an attribute of God in Romans 3:25–26:

> Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Without entering into a detailed exegesis of this text, we note, first, that the apostle is speaking of sins that had occurred in the old dispensation. These sins had been passed by in God's forbearance; they had not been punished, although they had not been blotted out. These sins God had openly passed by (not ἄφεσιν, *forgiveness*, but πάρεσιν, *passing by, remission*, is used). This implies more than that these sins had not been punished; it signifies that God had acted with respect to them as if they had not been committed. Therefore, the reference is not to the sins of the whole world, but to the sins of the saints who had been the object of God's favor all through the old dispensation and had been received in glory. God had passed by their sins in his forbearance, with a view to the coming outpouring of his wrath upon Christ.

Second, God's righteousness must be maintained and practically demonstrated, even when he justifies him who is of the faith of Jesus. The question in the text is not, How is God's righteousness satisfied? But the question is, How is God's righteousness vindicated, convincingly demonstrated before the consciousness of all the moral world, in view of the fact that he passed by the sins of the Old Testament saints and justified him who is of the faith of Jesus? It was God's purpose to furnish a convincing practical demonstration of this righteousness.

Third, for this purpose God set forth Christ as the expiation. The emphasis is not on ἱλαστήριον (*propitiation*), but on προέθετο (*set forth*), just as the emphasis is not on the justification of the believers, nor even on God's righteousness in so justifying them, but on the *declaration* or practical demonstration of his righteousness. Hence the προ- (*pro–*) in προέθετο (*set forth*) is not temporal, but local. Before the eyes of the whole world, God set forth Christ as propitiation: God poured out on the head of Christ the vials of his wrath against the sins of his people, even those sins he had passed by in the old dispensation; that moment of the cross was the judgment by which God's righteousness was openly and convincingly demonstrated.

Fourth, as to the concept *righteousness*, we learn from all of this that it is the virtue of being righteous: "That he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (v. 26). This is evidently the result and the purpose of the "setting forth." The text also plainly indicates that righteousness is that virtue of God according to which his own divinity, his own holiness of being, is always the standard of his willing and acting. The demonstration of his righteousness in this case means the setting forth of his act of justifying the ungodly out of faith as wholly in harmony with his holy being. Zion is manifestly redeemed in the sphere of the judgment, by which the righteousness of Jehovah is revealed.

Recent expositors claim that the phrase "righteousness of God" in the epistle to the Romans has the significance of righteousness as an attribute of God in other passages, such as Romans 3:21–22 and Romans 10:3, and that this must be regarded as the chief denotation wherever the phrase occurs. This contention, however, can hardly be maintained, as is plain from Romans 3:21–22: "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference." It is evident that in both parts of these verses *righteousness* has the same significance. It is also clear that the second righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all that believe, stands in apposition to the first.

The sense is, therefore, not that the righteousness of God considered as an attribute has become manifest through faith, but that the righteousness of God without the law, the righteousness of God, which is through faith of Jesus Christ, has been manifested. It is also evident that even there the phrase cannot have the meaning of righteousness as a divine virtue, but must have some other significance. Even in Romans 10:3 the above contention finds no support. The apostle is speaking of

the zeal of God which Israel had, a zeal which is not according to knowledge. The phrase "not according to knowledge" he explains in verse 3: "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." The first part of this text certainly cannot mean to state that Israel was ignorant of the fact that God is righteous. Besides, both instances of the righteousness of God in this text stand in direct contrast to their seeking to establish their own righteousness. As they sought to establish their own righteousness by the works of the law, they were ignorant of the righteousness of God by faith, and therefore did not submit themselves to God's righteousness. Also verse 4 plainly informs us what righteousness of God the apostle is speaking of in verse 3 when Paul states: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Hence in this verse the apostle is not speaking of the attribute of God's righteousness, but of a righteousness that somehow becomes the possession of the believer.

Other passages establish beyond all doubt that the apostle uses the term *righteousness of God*, or *God's righteousness*, not as referring to an attribute of God, but as a gift of God's grace to his people, to everyone who believes. The gospel is a power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. The reason is that "therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith" so that the righteous by faith shall live (Rom. 1:16–17). From the entire context of Romans 1 it is plain that this cannot mean that the gospel reveals the fact that God is righteous, for how then would the gospel be a power unto salvation unto the world as Paul pictures it in verses 18–22? It is evident that no gospel is needed to reveal that God is righteous and that a mere revelation of the attribute of righteousness is a revelation of wrath. Nor is the revelation of the gospel necessary to convince men that God is righteous. Men know the judgment of God that they are worthy of death (v. 32).

We are constrained to conclude that the apostle is speaking of a righteousness which has its origin wholly in God (Θεοῦ—of God—is a genitive of origin) and which becomes man's through the faculty and the act of faith (Rom. 4:3, 5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9).

God's Righteousness Defined

From all these passages we conclude that the term *righteousness of God* frequently has the meaning of a righteousness of which God is the author and which he imputes unto men out of mere grace. This righteousness is of God, because he conceived it in his eternal counsel, objectively realized it in Christ through his death and resurrection, bestows it on the elect by giving them faith, and finally shall realize it in the day of the revelation of his righteous judgment.

However, the term *righteousness* applied to man does not always denote this imputed righteousness. Often the term is left without further definition and at least includes the idea of ethical harmony with the will of God. Sometimes it denotes only the concept of ethical harmony with the will of God. In this sense it occurs in Matthew 5:6: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." "Righteousness" here means the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven, which includes not only imputed righteousness with the forgiveness of sins, but also ethical perfection bestowed through grace on the subjects of the kingdom (Matt. 5:10; Acts 13:10; Rom. 6:13, 16, 18–20; Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 6:7, 14; 2 Cor. 11:15; Eph. 5:9; Eph. 6:14; Phil. 1:11; Titus 3:5; Heb. 1:9; Heb. 12:11; James 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:14; 2 Pet. 2:5, 21; 2 Pet. 3:13). Further, we must remember that even in those passages that speak of the righteousness of God imputed to the believer, the real content of the term remains really unchanged. It always denotes harmony with God's will, whether this is imputed on the basis of the work of Christ or actually present in the subject who is judged to be

righteous.

On the basis of all the foregoing, we may conclude with the following definitions.

First, *righteousness in the absolute sense is the virtue of God according to which all God's willing and acting are, according to his own infinite, perfect judgment, in harmony with his holiness, or the infinite ethical perfection of his being.*

Second, *righteousness as an ethical perfection in man is the virtue according to which man in all his thinking and acting is, according to the judgment of God, always in harmony with God's righteous will as revealed to man and known by him.*

Third, *righteousness, as imputed to the elect sinner in Christ, is the gift of God's grace conceived in eternity, realized in Christ, bestowed on the elect through faith, and perfected in the day of judgment, whereby the elect sinner is translated from a state of condemnation into a state of justification and in Christ judged to be in perfect harmony with the will of God, on the basis of which he obtains a right to eternal life.*

Chapter 9

The Holy Trinity

The Historical Development of the Doctrine

When the church of our Lord Jesus Christ confesses her faith with respect to the most high and incomprehensible God, she declares that God is one in essence and three in persons. This truth, although it is a profound mystery, we must nevertheless understand as a doctrine. Even though it is true that the triune God far transcends our understanding, the doctrine of the church concerning this mystery is not contrary to our reason and is capable of being expounded and understood.

The doctrine that God is one in essence and subsists in three persons was one of the first dogmas established by the church. As is usually the case, the final formulation and adoption of this doctrine was attained only in the way of a struggle with opposing heretical views. The controversy centered around the question of the proper deity and distinct personality of the Son.

Even before the church was disturbed by the Arian controversies, there were those who denied any hypostatical distinction in the Godhead. The Patripassionists held that God is one: the Father. This one God is Father in his indivisible essence, but he is Son in his revelation. In the incarnation this Father-God animated a human body, and in that body he suffered and died on the cross; hence their name *Patripassionists*, which denotes their peculiar view that the Father suffered.

Others are known as nominal Trinitarians, in distinction from those who confessed the ontological Trinity. They, too, denied the personal subsistence of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. According to their view, from one God, the Father, emanate two powers or effluences: the illuminating power, wisdom, or the Logos; and the quickening or enlivening power, called the Spirit.

Both of these heretical conceptions still ascribed a certain divinity to Christ, although they denied his proper deity. Arius, however, denied both. According to him, Christ is a mere man, not divine in any sense, although he is the first and highest of all creatures. It was especially the Arian controversy that led first to the convocation of the Council of Alexandria in A.D. 321, where the Arian heresies were condemned, and soon after to the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, where the positive doctrine concerning the Trinity was established and officially adopted in a creed, the Symbol of Nicea.

The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Creeds

This Nicene Creed reads as follows:

> I believe in one God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.
>
> And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds [God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [essence][1] with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again, according to the scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.
>
> And [I believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets.[2]

The original version of the Nicene Creed included the words: “But those who say: ‘There was a

time when he was not;' and 'He was not before he was made;' and 'He was made out of nothing,' or 'He is of another substance' or 'essence,' or 'The Son of God is created,' or 'changeable,' or 'alterable'—they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church."[3]

From the Nicene Creed it is evident that theological thinking of the time was concentrated on the person of Christ and his relation to the Godhead. On the one hand, the creed maintained that the Son of God was not a mere emanation or personal effluence from the Godhead, but a distinct *hypostasis*, or person. On the other hand, equal emphasis was placed upon the truth that the Son was not created, but begotten of the Father in such a way that he is very God, of the same essence of the Father, having personal subsistence with the divine being through eternal generation.

Perhaps it is partly due to this strong concentration upon the question of the deity of Christ and his personal relation to the Godhead that the Nicene Creed is remarkably silent on the deity and personality of the Holy Ghost and his relation to the Father and the Son. But the Arians were just as heretical in their views on the Holy Spirit as they were in their teachings respecting the Son. Soon after the Council of Nicea, some of the semi-Arians, who were willing to concede a certain divinity (not deity) to Christ (*homoiousion, of similar essence;* not *homoousion, of the same essence*), openly denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. These semi-Arians were called Macedonians after their leader, a certain bishop Macedonius. According to them, the Holy Spirit is not co-equal with the Father and the Son, but rather a minister, or servant.

They argued that if the Holy Spirit were begotten, he must be begotten either of the Father or of the Son. If begotten of the Father, there are two Sons in the Godhead, and they are brothers. If begotten of the Son, the Holy Spirit is a grandson of the Father. Superficial and profane though this form of reasoning was, it was evident that the brief declaration concerning the Holy Spirit made by the Council of Nicea was not sufficient. The deity and personal subsistence of the third person of the Trinity, as well as that of the second person, needed to be established.

This clarification was accomplished by the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381. It enlarged upon the article concerning the Holy Ghost: "And in the HOLY GHOST, the Lord and Giver of life; who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets."[4]

Although in this elaboration upon the doctrine of the Holy Ghost, the essential deity and personal relation of the third person to the Father are clearly established, the creed is silent with respect to his relation to the Son. It neither affirms nor denies the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Son.

This gave rise to the controversy concerning the word *filioque* (*and the Son*), the question concerning the double procession of the Spirit. It was the Western Church, perhaps under the powerful influence of Augustine, that inserted the phrase "and of the Son" in the creed that had been adopted at Constantinople, thus separating itself in principle from the Eastern Church, which refused to confess the double procession of the third person of the Holy Trinity.

Somewhat dialectic in form, and perhaps on that very account beautiful, is the Athanasian Creed (*Symbolum Quicunque*), which is often, though erroneously, ascribed to Athanasius:

1. Whosoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith:
2. Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.
3. And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;
4. Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance [Essence].

5. For there is one Person of the Father: another of the Son: and another of the Holy Ghost.
6. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal.
7. Such as the Father is: such is the Son: and such is the Holy Ghost.
8. The Father uncreate [uncreated]: the Son uncreate [uncreated]; and the Holy Ghost uncreate [uncreated].
9. The Father incomprehensible [unlimited]: the Son incomprehensible [unlimited]: and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible [unlimited, or infinite]. [The Latin here has *Immensus Pater (the Father immense)*, etc.—H.H.]
10. The Father eternal: the Son eternal: and the Holy Ghost eternal.
11. And yet they are not three eternals: but one eternal.
12. As also there are not three uncreated: nor three incomprehensibles [infinites], but one uncreated: and one incomprehensible [infinite].
13. So likewise the Father is Almighty: the Son Almighty: and the Holy Ghost Almighty.
14. And yet they are not three Almighties: but one Almighty.
15. So the Father is God: the Son is God: and the Holy Ghost is God.
16. And yet they are not three Gods: but one God.
17. So likewise the Father is Lord: the Son Lord: and the Holy Ghost Lord.
18. And yet not three Lords: but one Lord.
19. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity: to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord:
20. So are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion: to say, There be [are] three Gods, or three Lords.
21. The Father is made of none: neither created, nor begotten.
22. The Son is of the Father alone: not made, nor created: but begotten.
23. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son: neither made, nor created, nor begotten: but proceeding.
24. So there is one Father, not three Fathers: one Son, not three Sons: one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts.
25. And in this Trinity none is afore, or after another: none is greater, or less than another [there is nothing before, or after: nothing greater or less].
26. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal.
27. So that in all things, as aforesaid: the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshiped.
28. He therefore that will be saved, must [let him] thus think of the Trinity.[5]

We note that in this confession the double procession of the Holy Ghost is clearly and definitely confessed in Article 23.

The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Middle Ages and at the Reformation

The confession concerning the holy Trinity contained in the *Symbolum Quicunque* was never

altered. The Nicene Creed is still the expression of the faith of the entire church of Christ in the world. The church of the Middle Ages adopted this truth, and the great minds of scholasticism did not alter it either in form or content. It is true that there were always individual thinkers who departed from the line of this fundamental doctrine. Old heresies occasionally were revived and appeared in new form. Some, such as Scotus Erigena and Abelard, presented views that were reminiscent of nominal trinitarianism. Others separated the persons of the Godhead and were inclined to tritheism or even to tetratheism. But all such deviations were regarded by the church as heretical, and never was she seriously disturbed by any of them.

The same is true of the period of the Reformation. The Reformers taught the same doctrine as did Athanasius, Hillary, and Augustine before them. Calvin wrote extensively on this subject in his *Institutes*. He insisted that the word of God teaches that in God there are three substances, subsistences, *hypostases*—a concept which was properly expressed by the Latin Church in the word *personae* (*persons*).

> When the Apostle calls the Son of God "the express image of his person" (Heb. 1:3), he undoubtedly does assign to the Father some subsistence in which he differs from the Son. For to hold with some interpreters that the term is equivalent to essence (as if Christ represented the substance of the Father like the impression of a seal upon wax), were not only harsh but absurd. For the essence of God being simple and undivided, and contained in himself entire, in full perfection, without partition or diminution, it is improper, nay, ridiculous, to call it his express image (χαρακτήρ). But because the Father, though distinguished by his own peculiar properties, has expressed himself wholly in the Son, he is said with perfect reason to have rendered his person (hypostasis) manifest in him. And this aptly accords with what is immediately added—viz. that he is "the brightness of his glory." The fair inference from the Apostle's words is, that there is a proper subsistence (hypostasis) of the Father, which shines refulgent in the Son. From this, again, it is easy to infer that there is a subsistence (hypostasis) of the Son which distinguishes him from the Father. The same holds in the case of the Holy Spirit; for we will immediately prove both that he is God, and that he has a separate subsistence from the Father. This, moreover, is not a distinction of essence, which it were impious to multiply. If credit, then, is given to the Apostle's testimony, it follows that there are three persons (hypostases) in God. The Latins having used the word *Persona* to express the same thing as the Greek ὑπόστασις, it betrays excessive fastidiousness and even perverseness to quarrel with the term. The most literal translation would be *subsistence*. Many have used *substance* in the same sense. Nor, indeed, was the use of the term Person confined to the Latin Church. For the Greek Church in like manner, perhaps for the purpose of testifying their consent, have taught that there are three πρόσωπα (*aspects*) in God. All these, however, whether Greeks or Latins, though differing as to the word, are perfectly agreed in substance.[6]

Our attention is drawn to the fact that Calvin here appears to use the words *person* (πρόσωπον), *hypostasis*, and *subsistence* promiscuously, as referring to the same thing. He is aware of the fact that especially by the use of the term *subsistence*, or *substance*, he exposes himself to the indictment of teaching tritheism. But he refuses to strive about mere words, if only it is established that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are the one true God, yet in such a manner that they are distinguished in respect to their personal properties. The Latin, he writes, translated the term *homoousios* (*of the same essence*) by *consubstantialis* (*consubstantial*), and therefore used the word *substance* to denote being. Jerome considered it blasphemy to say that there are three substances, or subsistences in God; yet one will find that Hillary declares more than a hundred times that there are three substances in God. Even though the terms employed may not be above reproach, Calvin reminds us that it is necessary to employ these terms because the truth of the Trinity must be maintained over against such heretics as Arius and Sabellius.[7]

Speaking for himself, Calvin delineates the idea of *person*:

> But to say nothing more of words, let us now attend to the thing signified. By *person*, then, I mean a subsistence in the Divine essence,—a subsistence which, while related to the other two, is distinguished from them by incommunicable properties. By *subsistence* we wish something else to be understood than *essence*. For if the Word were God simply, and

had not some property peculiar to himself, John could not have said correctly that he had always been with God. When he adds immediately after, that the Word was God, he calls us back to the one essence. But because he could not be with God without dwelling in the Father, hence arises that subsistence, which, though connected with the essence by an indissoluble tie, being incapable of separation, yet has a special mark by which it is distinguished from it. Now, I say that each of the three subsistences while related to the others, is distinguished by its own properties. Here relation is distinctly expressed, because, when God is mentioned simply and indefinitely, the name belongs not less to the Son and Spirit than to the Father. But whenever the Father is compared with the Son, the peculiar property of each distinguishes the one from the other. Again, whatever is proper to each I affirm to be incommunicable, because nothing can apply or be transferred to the Son which is attributed to the Father as a mark of distinction. I have no objections to adopt the definition of Tertullian, provided it is properly understood, "that there is in God a certain arrangement or economy, which makes no change on the unity of essence."—Tertull. Lib. contra Praxeam.[8]

The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Reformed Creeds

The doctrine of the Trinity has found a place in all the main creeds of the protestant churches. The Roman Catholic Church dared not differ from them in this respect, although the declarations of the Council of Trent take issue with the protestant faith on many other points. The Heidelberg Catechism is very brief on the doctrine of the Trinity, but in connection with the division of the articles of the Apostles' Creed, the catechism explains:

> How are these Articles divided?
> Into three parts: The first is of *God the Father* and our *creation*; the second, of *God the Son* and our *redemption*; the third, of *God the Holy Ghost* and our *sanctification*.
> Since there is but one Divine Being, why speakest thou of three, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost?
> Because God has so revealed himself in his Word that these three distinct Persons are the one, true, eternal God.[9]

The answer to the twenty-fourth question of the Heidelberg Catechism, as also the first part of the Reformed "Form for the Administration of Baptism" may easily lead to the impression that the doctrine of tritheism was taught in them. The baptism form states:

> Holy baptism witnesseth and sealeth unto us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. Therefore we are baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. For when we are baptized in the name of the Father, God the Father witnesseth and sealeth unto us, that he doth make an eternal covenant of grace with us, and adopts us for his children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing, and avert all evil or turn it to our profit. And when we are baptized in the name of the Son, the Son sealeth unto us, that he doth wash us in his blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of his death and resurrection, so that we are freed from all our sins, and accounted righteous before God. In like manner, when we are baptized in the name of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost assures us, by this holy sacrament, that he will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, applying unto us, that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins, and the daily renewing of our lives, till we shall finally be presented without spot or wrinkle among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.[10]

These words seem to ascribe a distinct part of the work of salvation to each of the three persons of the Trinity in exclusion from the others. To the Father is ascribed the work of establishing his covenant with his people and their adoption unto his children and heirs. To the Son is ascribed the work of redemption, the washing away of their sins and their justification. To the Holy Spirit is ascribed the work of sanctification or the application of all the blessings of salvation in Christ to the elect. If this were understood in the strict and exclusive sense, tritheism would be the result. The same is true of the twenty-fourth question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism. The work of creation seems to be attributed solely to the Father, the work of redemption solely to the Son, and the work of sanctification solely to the Holy Spirit.

That this is not the meaning of the words either in the "Form for the Administration of Baptism" or in the Heidelberg Catechism is plain from the *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* by Ursinus

himself. There he recognizes the following objection:

> Creation is here attributed to the Father, redemption to the Son, and sanctification to the Holy Ghost. Therefore the Son and the Holy Ghost did not create heaven and earth; neither did the Father and the Holy Ghost redeem the human race; nor do the Father and the Son sanctify the faithful.[11]

To this objection he gives the following answer:

> We deny the consequence which is here deduced, because the creed attributes creation to the Father, redemption to the Son, and sanctification to the Holy Ghost, not exclusively, or in such a manner as that these works do not belong to all the persons of the Godhead . . . In making this distinction, however, we must not overlook the distinction and the order of working which is peculiar to the persons of the Godhead. The work of creation is attributed to the Father, not exclusively, nor to him alone, but because he is the fountain of Divinity, and of all divine works, and so of creation; for he created of himself all things by the Son and Holy Ghost. Redemption is attributed to the Son, not exclusively, nor to him alone, but because the Son is that person who immediately performs the work of redemption; for the Son alone was made a ransom for our sins. It was the Son, and not the Father, or the Holy Ghost, that purchased us by his death upon the cross. So in like manner sanctification is attributed to the Holy Ghost, not exclusively, nor to him alone, but because the Holy Ghost is that person who immediately sanctifies us, or because it is through him that our sanctification is immediately effected.[12]

In reply to a similar objection he writes:

> The works of the Trinity are indivisible, but not in such a sense as to destroy the order and manner of working peculiar to each person of the Godhead. All the persons of the Godhead perform certain works in reference to creatures, but yet this order is preserved, that the Father does all things of himself through the Son and Holy Spirit; the Son does all things of the Father through the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit does all things of the Father and the Son through himself. In this way, therefore, that all the persons of the Godhead create, redeem, and sanctify; the Father mediately through the Son and Holy Spirit; the Son mediately through the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit immediately through himself, but mediately through the Son, as he is the Mediator.[13]

It is plain, therefore, that our fathers did not think of teaching that the outgoing works of God are divided or apportioned among the three persons of the Godhead so that the Father creates, the Son redeems, and the Holy Ghost sanctifies. God triune is the author of all his works in such a way that the relation of the three persons to one another within the divine being is maintained and revealed in the works of God outside of himself (*ad extra*). The truth is that while all the works of God are the works of one God, in them the first person is always operating as Father, the second person as Son, and the third person as the Holy Ghost. While the three persons appear as essentially coequal in all the outgoing works of God, their personal relation to one another never alters.

The Belgic Confession plainly teaches the doctrine of the Trinity:

> According to this truth and this Word of God, we believe in one only God, who is one single essence, in which are three persons, really, truly, and eternally distinct, according to their incommunicable properties; namely, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The Father is the cause, origin, and beginning of all things, visible and invisible; the Son is the Word, Wisdom, and Image of the Father; the Holy Ghost is the eternal Power and Might, proceeding from the Father and the Son. Nevertheless God is not by this distinction divided into three, since the holy scriptures teach us that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost have each his personality, distinguished by their properties; but in such wise that these three persons are but one only God. Hence, then, it is evident that the Father is not the Son, nor the Son the Father, and likewise the Holy Ghost is neither the Father nor the Son. Nevertheless these persons thus distinguished are not divided nor intermixed; for the Father hath not assumed the flesh, nor hath the Holy Ghost, but the Son only. The Father hath never been without his Son, or without his Holy Ghost. For they are all three co-eternal and co-essential. There is neither first nor last; for they are all three one, in truth, in power, in goodness, and in mercy.[14]

The overwhelming testimony of the church, therefore, brands the Unitarians as heretics and as being outside of the Christian church. Servetus launched a violent and blasphemous attack upon the

most fundamental of Christian truths, and it cost him his life. Yet the fathers of modern Unitarianism and of modern rationalism were uncle and nephew, Laelius and Faustus Socinus. They agreed in denying the Trinity, and they succeeded, where Servetus failed, in founding a sect of their own. They founded an asylum in one of the Polish Palatines, produced a number of theologians, and formulated a creed of their own. From there their heresy made inroads into other parts of the world, especially England and America, while on the continent it found a powerful ally in rationalistic philosophy. But in its anti-trinitarian position it stands condemned by the entire church of all ages, because the Spirit who leads into all the truth constantly taught her through the holy scriptures to confess that God is one in essence, distinct in three persons, and that these three persons are the one only true and eternal God, whom to know is eternal life.

The Doctrine of the Trinity in Scripture

The doctrine of the Trinity is a profound mystery. We can know it only from the revelation of the triune God in scripture. This does not mean that the doctrine of the Trinity *per se*, in the sense of a dogma, can be found in the Bible. The scriptures do not speak of the Trinity, of three persons in one essence, nor do they directly explain the relation of the three persons to one another. Scripture is not a system of doctrine from which one may simply quote literally in order to prove the truth of a certain dogma.

Scripture is the revelation of the living God. God came down to speak concerning himself to us on our own level in language we can understand. When he so reveals himself, speaking of his glorious majesty, his works, and his virtues, he stands before us as the triune God who is one, yet also three, who through his three persons makes himself known as the one true and eternal God. The written record of that revelation of the living God we have only in the holy scriptures. Hence even though a ready-made dogma of the Trinity is not to be looked for in the Bible, it should not be difficult to demonstrate that God has indeed revealed himself to us in his word as the God who is one in essence and three in persons.

The Oneness of God

The scriptures reveal everywhere that God is one, a fact to which we have already referred in connection with the discussion of God's virtue of simplicity. Universally, this oneness of God is emphasized in opposition to the polytheism of the heathen nations: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deut. 6:4). His name is Jehovah, the I AM (Ex. 3:14), the one who exists of and by himself, the being of beings, the unchangeable, the eternal, the infinite God, the incomparable Holy One of Israel. He, therefore, is God alone. Two or more independent beings, each possessing infinite properties, would imply a contradiction in terms.

Without expressly declaring the unity of God, the scriptures deeply impress upon our minds the oneness of God whenever they speak of the infinite attributes or virtues of God. The Bible teaches that he is the one God, besides whom there is none other, who alone is worthy of all praise and adoration, whose name is excellent in all the earth, and who set his glory in the heavens (Ps. 8:1). He reveals his eternal power and Godhead in order that men should glorify him as God and be thankful to him alone (Rom. 1:19–21).

He speaks to us as the one only true God and insists that there is no God besides him: "I am the LORD thy God" are the introductory words of the Decalogue (Ex. 20:2; Deut. 5:6). Heading all the

commandments stands the first: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3). In the prophecy of Isaiah the first personal pronoun with reference to God often occurs with great emphasis:

> I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee . . . For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him . . . Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour. I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God. Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it? . . . I am the Lord, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King (Isa. 43:1–7, 10–13, 15).

God is one (Gal. 3:20); there is “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:6).

The Belgic Confession expresses the same truth: “We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God.”[15] There are not three Gods; there is only one God. This we maintain over against all polytheism. To this one being belong all the essential divine attributes. This one God is self-existent, infinite, eternal, immutable, transcendent, omnipresent, omniscient, all-wise, good, righteous, holy, gracious, merciful, infinitely glorious and blessed, all-powerful, the one sovereign Lord. There are not three divine minds, but there is only one divine mind. There are not three divine wills, but there is only one divine will. There are not three divine powers, but there is only one divine power.

This one God is one in himself so that all his virtues, although reflected and revealed to us in their manifold riches, are one in him. He is his virtues. He is love and truth, knowledge, wisdom, and power, righteousness and holiness, mercy and grace. Nor is there any division or conflict between these various divine attributes. They are absolutely one so that his righteousness is his love, and his mercy is his holiness, and his grace is his truth. This one, only, simple, spiritual essence, whom we call God, who is the incomprehensible, and who dwells in the light no man can approach unto (1 Tim. 6:16) revealed himself as the one Lord (Deut. 6:4) in order that he might be glorified as God and as the sole object of all our adoration and worship, of all our confidence and hope, so we might know him and have fellowship with him, and in that fellowship and adoration of the living God be blessed forever.

The Plurality of Persons in Scripture

The Bible reveals this one God as subsisting in three persons. Although there is progress in the revelation of the Trinity in scripture, yet this plurality of persons in God is revealed in the whole of scripture, in the Old Testament as well as in the New. Even in the very first chapter of scripture, this plurality in the oneness is plainly indicated: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). In this verse God is addressing himself, as is evident from the very contents of his speech. To no one besides himself could he ascribe the work of man’s creation or any participation in that work. He is the one God speaking: “God said . . .” To this it dare not be objected that the plural form for *God* in the Hebrew, אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*), implies a plurality of gods, for the Hebrew form of the verb *said* (וַיֹּאמֶר) is in the

singular. Nevertheless, by the plural pronouns *us* and *our* plurality is ascribed as subsisting in the one divine essence. God is one, and his image and likeness are one. Yet he is in some sense more than one, and more than one in such a manner that he is able to speak to himself, suggesting a plurality of personal subsistences.

This plurality is also evident from the mention of the Angel of Jehovah in the Old Testament. This Angel of Jehovah is himself God, even though he is also distinct from God. He speaks as God to Hagar in the wilderness: "I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude" (Gen. 16:10). Hagar recognizes him as God, for she "called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me" (v. 13). It is with reference to this same Angel of the Lord that we read: "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven" (Gen. 19:24).

Moreover, we learn from the scriptures that in all his works God reveals himself as acting in three persons: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath [literally, "by the spirit"] of his mouth" (Ps. 33:6). Calling the things that are not as if they were (Rom. 4:17), God speaks creatively, and scripture comments upon this divine work as follows: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:1–3). Besides, Genesis 1:2 says that the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. Psalm 110:1 puts the following words in the mouth of the inspired author: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand," where David calls the Christ his Lord (Matt. 22:41–45). In the synagogue of Nazareth, the Savior quotes the words of Isaiah 61:1 with application to himself: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me" (Luke 4:18). It is the same Spirit of the Lord that renews the face of the earth (Ps. 104:30).

The Divinity of the Son

Although the plurality of persons in God and the three persons in the divine essence are distinctly mentioned in the Old Testament, yet, as we might expect, in the New Testament the Trinity is much more clearly revealed, for in the new dispensation the Father sends the Son into the flesh, and the Spirit is poured out into the church. This Son of God is very God himself, for the "Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). He is "the only begotten [God—μονογενὴς Θεός], which is in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:18). He is called "the true God, and eternal life" (1 John 5:20). He declares of himself that he is one in essence with the Father: "I and my Father are one" (ἕν, *one essence*—John 10:30). Scripture throughout ascribes divine names, virtues, works, and honors to the Son.

For the application of divine names ascribed to Christ as the Son of God, confer Isaiah 9:6, Jeremiah 23:5–6, Joel 2:32, Romans 9:5, 1 Timothy 3:16, and 1 John 5:20. As to the divine attributes, the Bible ascribes to the Son eternal existence (Isa. 9:6; John 1:1–2; Rev. 1:8); omnipresence (Matt. 18:20; John 3:13); omniscience (John 2:24–25; John 21:17; Rev. 2:23); omnipotence (Isa. 9:6; Phil. 3:21; Rev. 1:8); unchangeableness (Heb. 1:10–12; Heb. 13:8). The Bible also ascribes to him divine works. In John 1:3, 10, Colossians 1:16, and Hebrews 1:2, 10 creation is ascribed to the Son. Luke 10:22, John 3:35, John 17:2, Ephesians 1:22, Colossians 1:17, and Hebrews 1:3 attribute the work of providence to the Son. Matthew 9:2–8, Mark 2:5–11, and Colossians 3:13 ascribe to the Son the power to forgive sins. Matthew 25:31–46, John 5:19–30, Acts 10:42, Acts 17:31, Philippians 3:21,

and 2 Timothy 4:1 ascribe to the Son the divine works of the resurrection from the dead and judgment. Finally, the Scriptures attribute to the Son divine honor in Matthew 28:19, John 5:22–23, John 14:1, 1 Corinthians 15:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14, and Hebrews 1:6.

The Divinity of the Holy Spirit

Scripture also teaches the divinity of the person of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not an impersonal power, but everywhere he appears as a person who comforts (John 14:16); who teaches all things and brings to remembrance the words of Christ (v. 26); who reproves the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8); who speaks not of himself but speaks whatsoever he hears; who shows things to come (v. 13); who works all the several gifts of grace, dividing unto every man severally as he will (1 Cor. 12:11).

To the Holy Spirit, as well as to the Son, are ascribed divine works, attributes, names, and honors. The Holy Spirit is called God (Acts 5:3–4, 9). He searches all things, even the deep things of God, and he alone knows the things of God (1 Cor 2:10–11). He participates in creation (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 33:6). He is the Spirit of life, the Spirit of the resurrection, and the Spirit of the adoption unto sons of God (Rom. 8:2, 11, 15). He is the Spirit in whose name, as well as in the name of the Father and of the Son, we are baptized (Matt. 28:19), and through the Holy Spirit the blessings of grace are bestowed upon the church (2 Cor. 13:14).

The Personal Properties of the Three Persons

There is one divine essence. God is one with respect to his being. But in that one divine being there are three subsistences, *hypostases*, persons. In order for us to understand somewhat the doctrine of the Trinity, three questions require answers. What is meant by *person*? What is the relation of the three persons of the Trinity to the divine essence? What is the relation of the three persons in the Trinity to one another?

What is a person? *A person is often defined as an individual subsistence existing in a rational, moral nature*. In man his person is that which he calls his ego, his "I." It is the subject of all his actions, and it remains the same through whatever changes he may pass in life or in death. I think; I desire; I speak; I see; I hear; I eat and drink; I rejoice and sorrow; I love and hate; I sing and weep; I suffer and die; I am raised from the dead. In all these actions and experiences the person is the subject who performs and experiences and who remains the same throughout. From infancy to old age, we remain the same individual subjects. In death the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, yet it is the same person who passes through death and into his eternal home.

A person, then, is the subject of all actions and experiences in a moral, rational nature. A tree may be an individual tree, and a cow may be an individual cow, but neither the tree nor the cow is a person. They possess no rational, moral natures. A human nature is rational and ethical; the individual in that nature is a self-conscious person, a rational, moral subject, acting through mind and will. When we assert, according to the doctrine of the Trinity, that there are three persons in the Godhead, we mean that in the one spiritual nature of God there are three subjects, three who say "I," distinct from one another in personal properties, but subsisting in the same divine essence and eternally remaining the same in their distinct subsistence.

The Personal Property of the Father

The distinct personal properties of the divine persons are indicated by their names: *Father, Son*, and *Holy Ghost*. The Father is the subject of all the divine, essential properties and of all the divine works as Father. He thinks, wills, loves, counsels, decrees, creates, and saves as Father—never as Son nor as the Holy Spirit. The personal property of the Father is that he generates the Son and that he spirates the Holy Ghost. When in this sense we speak of the Father, it must be understood that we refer to him only as the first person of the holy Trinity in distinction from the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Besides being used to describe the first person of the Trinity, the name *Father* is also applied to the triune God as the origin and sustainer of all created things (Eph. 3:14–15; Heb. 12:9; James 1:17). The name *Father* is further used to refer to the triune God as he stands in relation to Israel as his Old Testament people (Deut. 32:6; Isa. 64:8; Mal. 1:6; Mal. 2:10). The name *Father* in the New Testament is used to refer to the triune God as the Father of all his spiritual children, for instance, in the address of the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father who art in heaven." But distinct from all these uses of the name *Father* is the name as it refers to the relation of the first person to the second person in the holy Trinity (John 1:14, 18; John 5:17–26; John 14:12–13). It is in this sense that we speak of the personal property of the Father as consisting in the eternal generation of the Son by the Father.

The Eternal Generation of the Son

The personal property of the Son is that he is generated by the Father, to which we may add that the Son also spirates the Holy Ghost. The Son is the subject of all the essential divine attributes and of all the divine works as Son—never as Father nor as the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of eternal generation of the Son by the Father is clearly taught in scripture. It follows from such passages as Psalm 2:7, although it cannot be said that this text proves directly the doctrine of eternal generation. This text undoubtedly refers first to David as the theocratic king and second to the resurrection of Christ, according to Acts 13:33.

Yet there can be no doubt about the fact that in the last analysis Psalm 2 speaks of the eternal Fatherhood of God and the eternal generation of the Son, for the Fatherhood of God with relation to the holy child Jesus has its root and basis in the eternal Fatherhood of the first person in relation to the second person. This follows from the fact that by his relation to the creature, God does not become what he is not eternally in himself. That would make God dependent upon his own creation. He is absolutely self-sufficient. He has no need of the creature in any sense. Whatever he is in relation to the creature, he is first and eternally in himself. This also is true of his Fatherhood. He did not become Father through his relation to Christ as the mediator, nor through his relation to creation in general, nor through his relation to his people in Christ Jesus. He is Father eternally, perfectly, within his own being. All other Fatherhood of God is only a reflection of his own divine and eternal Fatherhood.

It is this truth which the church sought to maintain and to express when she spoke of eternal generation and which is also abundantly evident from other parts of Holy Writ, for instance, in John 1:1–3: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." In this passage the second person of the holy Trinity is evidently called the *Word of God*. Notice the significance of this term.

First, with God is "the Word," the one expression of the divine fullness, of all that is in God. God conceives his own glorious, infinite fullness, and that divine conception is expressed in "the Word."

Second, with God, the Word is the speech concerning God. Of whom shall the eternal, self-

sufficient God speak but of himself? Even creation is God's manifold speech concerning himself. But the Son of God is his eternal, infinite Word, which God speaks of himself and unto himself. That one, eternal Word is the Word that God addresses unto himself and which only he can hear and understand. This idea is beautifully expressed in John 1:1: "And the Word was with God." The Word was eternally *toward* God. The Son is the Word who faces God (πρὸς τὸν Θεόν literally, "toward the God").

Third, with God, his speech is eternal. The Word is spoken within the divine being, for the Word was God. The Word is therefore spoken eternally, and it is the Word exactly by virtue of its being spoken constantly. It is eternally perfect, full, complete; yet never in such a way that it exists apart from the speaker, because with God the Word is causative, the Word that brings forth, that gives subsistence, life. God so speaks that the Word is also God and, moreover, a subsistence, a *hypostasis*, a person, who himself speaks, creates, and lives (John 1:3–4). In this term *the Word*, therefore, we have an indication of an act that is performed within the divine being, a necessary act, an eternal act, which is always perfect and complete, yet never ceases to be performed and through which someone receives subsistence as God and with God. This is exactly what is meant by the eternal Fatherhood of God and by the eternal generation of the Son of God.

The Name *Only Begotten Son*

Important for the truth of eternal generation is the expression *only begotten Son* (John 1:14; John 3:16). It is even very probable that John 1:18 should be read as follows: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten *God*, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (cf. John 3:18). These passages are important because they teach, first, that in distinction from all other sonship, there is one Son who is begotten by a unique act of the Father. What is it to beget? It is to bring forth a being like unto oneself. Adam was the son of God by reason of the fact that God begat him, that is, he created him after his own image (Luke 3:38). There was a creaturely likeness of God in man. Of Adam we read: "And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth" (Gen. 5:3). The idea of generation is that of an act of love whereby one reproduces himself in another, begets an individual like unto himself, in his own image.

There is an infinite difference between God's act of begetting, or generation, and that of man's. Fatherhood among men cannot function alone; it requires motherhood. But the Fatherhood of the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is perfect in itself. The Father begets or generates the Son of himself. With us the act of generation is but for a moment, and the son we beget does not receive his continued subsistence by a continued act of generation on our part. But God is eternally Father. He generates the Son by an act of infinite love from everlasting to everlasting. Not for one moment does the first person of the holy Trinity cease to be Father.

With us the likeness of the being to which we give subsistence through generation is very imperfect and very much in part. But the likeness produced through God's act of eternal generation is complete and absolutely perfect. With us generation means not only that we produce another *person*, but also that that person is a separate *being*. With God, however, an act of generation takes place *within the divine being*, and the person of the Son is essentially one with the Father and never separated from him. He is in the bosom of the Father. He is the only begotten God.

Second, John 1:14 and John 3:16 teach that in the act of generation of this only begotten Son, the whole infinite being of God is active. The first person is the Father in the whole divine nature with all

its infinite perfections. God is wholly Father, just as he is wholly Son and wholly Spirit, yet in such a way that God the Father is never God the Son nor God the Spirit.

Scriptural Proof for the Eternal Sonship

Christ, the Son, is also called the "image" of God, the "brightness of his glory" and the "express image of his person" (Heb. 1:3). These terms are significant for the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God and the eternal generation of the Son. The Son is the brightness of the glory of God. The glory of God is the radiance of all his infinite virtues. God is infinitely good and the implication of all infinite perfections. The radiance of his infinite perfections is called glory. Of this glory and of all the divine perfections, Christ is said to be the brightness.

The original word here is ἀπαύγασμα. The word may mean either the emitting of light or brightness, as the rays of the sun are the brightness of the sun, or it may signify the reflection caused by that emitted light in the sense of effulgence or refulgence, radiance or reflection. The latter is probably the correct interpretation of the term. But whatever may be the meaning of the word, it certainly suggests the act of eternal generation. With respect to the Son, ἀπαύγασμα expresses the idea of distinct personal subsistence. The Son subsists as the reflection of the Father's glory. The term also expresses the idea of perfect and complete resemblance. The Son is the reflection of the glory of God, and all the divine perfections are reflected in him. And the term expresses the idea of constant derivation, for the reflection is caused by the constant emission of the light it reflects. Especially this latter idea signifies that from the Father proceeds his constant radiance that is reflected in the Son. Just as the light radiates constantly from the sun and reflects itself in many objects, so the glory of God radiates eternally from the Father and causes the perfect and infinite reflection which is the Son. The Son, therefore, with relation to the Father, is light of light; the shining forth of that light within the divine essence that gives subsistence to the reflection in the person of the Son is called eternal generation.

Somewhat different is the idea expressed by the words "the express image of his person." Perhaps it is better to translate, "the express image of his essence." The word ὑπόστασις assumed the meaning of *person* or *subsistence* in the language of the church in later ages, but it is at least doubtful whether it had this connotation in the usage of the apostles. The meaning, therefore, is that Christ is the express image of the being of God. The word used for "express image" is χαρακτήρ (*character*), which means "an impress made in wax." Although this term does not suggest the act of eternal generation on the part of the Father as beautifully as that of "the reflected brightness of his glory," yet it expresses that the Son is the full and exact image of the Father and that the Son derives his personal subsistence as the image of God within the divine essence from the Father, who makes the impress. God, therefore, is the eternal Father apart from any relation to the creature, and from everlasting to everlasting he beholds his own image and reflection in the person of the Son.

In connection with the name *Son of God*, we call attention also to Philippians 2:6–8:

> Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

We now have to do primarily with the first part of this passage, "Who, being in the form of God . . ." The text speaks of the perfect humiliation, the utter self-negation of this Son who was in the form of God. In order to visualize a little of the awful self-humiliation of Christ described in these verses, we

must not carry any time element into this expression, as if Christ once *was* in the form of God, and at his incarnation discarded that form. That, of course, is impossible. No, Christ is and eternally subsists in the form of God, in the divine nature. He did not cease to be in that form of God at the moment of his incarnation, even though then he also appeared in the form of man, for the Godhead is immutable.

According to the divine nature, he is in the form of God when as a little babe he lies in Bethlehem's manger, when he walks about in the form of a servant, when he is seen in the likeness of men, and when he is abused, mocked, maltreated, spit upon, captured, scourged, condemned, and crucified. Being in the form of God in the divine nature, eternally being in the bosom of the Father, he empties himself completely in the human nature and becomes obedient unto the death of the cross. He *is* in the form of God.

That term "form of God" expresses approximately the same idea as the ἀπαύγασμα (*reflection*) and the χαρακτήρ (*express image*) of Hebrews 1:3. It is the being reflected. It is the form that presupposes the being and which is the expression of the being. As being and form belong together, as the one is the expression of the other, so the Father and the Son belong together as two subsistences in the same essence. The Father is he who eternally *forms*; the Son is he who eternally *is formed*. Yet, although the Father forms eternally, the act of formation is eternally perfect and complete. And although the Son is eternally formed, yet the form of the Son is eternally finished by the eternal act of the Father's formation. God is the eternal and infinitely perfect Father in himself with relation to the eternal and only begotten God.

One more passage is important as a proof for the eternal sonship and the eternal generation by the Father of the Son: "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (John 5:26). Also these words have reference to an eternal act of the Father with relation to the Son within the divine essence. It is true that some have denied this and have explained the words as if they had reference to God's giving life to the mediator in the human nature. They point especially to the following verse, which speaks of the Father's having given Christ, as the Son of man, authority to execute judgment. Although it may be granted that verse 27 refers to Christ in the human nature, this cannot possibly be adduced as a ground to interpret verse 26 as also referring to the Son of man. The two verses yield very natural sense when verse 26 is understood as referring to the act of the Father whereby he eternally gives life to the Son, while verse 27 is explained as referring to God's gift of authority to execute judgment bestowed upon Christ in the flesh. The one is the eternal background of the other. However, what decides in favor of the explanation that in verse 26 there is mention not of bestowing creaturely life upon the human nature of Christ, but of imparting divine life to the Son of God, is the expression "to have life in himself." The creature has life, but never in himself. God only has life in himself, for he is life. The text, therefore, speaks of a bestowal of life by the Father upon the Son, the result of which is that the Son is equal with the Father, has life in himself within the divine essence.

We conclude that everywhere and in many ways scripture reveals to us that God is an eternal Father with relation to the Son. The Father is the begetter; the Son is the begotten. The Father is the radiating light of glory; the Son is the light reflected. The Father is God forming; the Son is God formed. The Father is God impressor; the Son is the impress. The Father is God effulgent; the Son is God refulgent. The Father is the eternal subject, the speaker; the Son is the eternal predicate, the Word of God. God is the all-sufficient one in himself. He has no need of the creature, even to rejoice in his glorious and eternal Fatherhood. He loves the Son forever.

The Double Procession of the Holy Spirit

The personal property of the Holy Spirit is that he proceeds from the Father and the Son. This is already indicated by the name Πνεῦμα (*Spirit*), that is, "breath." It is further indicated by the use of the genitives "of the Father" (Matt. 10:20; cf. Acts 1:4) and "of the Son" (Gal. 4:6), and it is literally expressed in John 15:26: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me."

As is well-known, there was a long controversy about the question of the *filioque* (*and the Son*), that is, about the question whether the Spirit proceeded only from the Father or also from the Son. This controversy was finally settled by the Synod of Toledo in A.D. 589. At this synod the word *filioque* ("and the Son") was added to the Latin version of the Constantinopolitan Creed concerning the Holy Spirit so that it read: "And [I believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son]."[16]

This double procession is taught in scripture, as for instance in John 15:26, which teaches that Christ will send the Comforter who proceeds from the Father. Besides, the Spirit is mentioned in one breath as the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ in Romans 8:9: "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." In Galatians 4:6 he is called the Spirit of God's Son: "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." This double procession must not be understood in such a way that there are two Spirits, one proceeding from the Father and another Spirit proceeding from the Son, but rather in the sense that the one Spirit proceeds from the Father to the Son and returns as the Spirit of the Son to the Father.

The Relationship of the Three Persons of the Trinity

As to the relation of these three persons to the essence of the Godhead, we must state that there is no division, no separation, and no subordination among the three persons, but all are equally God in the one being. It is not true that the divine essence is divided among the three persons so that each of the three persons subsists in part of the divine being or so that the three persons are of different rank, subordinated to one another. That would lead to tritheism, the doctrine of three gods.

On the contrary, all three persons of the Trinity subsist in the whole divine essence and equally possess all the divine properties of the Godhead. All are equally infinite, eternal, immutable, almighty, wise, and good. All three persons live and act, so to speak, on the same plane of the infinitely perfect being of God. The Father is not the chief God, the Son is not God in a secondary sense, and the Holy Spirit is not God in a still more subordinated sense. These three distinct persons are equally the one true and eternal God. So the relationship of the three persons of the holy Trinity to one another is such that God is the living God and that he lives the life of infinitely perfect friendship.

The doctrine of the Trinity implies that God is the living God. He is life, and he lives in and through himself. Life is energy, expressing itself in perfect activity, and it presupposes harmonious relationship. To live is to act and react normally in that relationship. Life cannot be in solitude; it is always some kind of communion of fellowship. God is the implication of infinite energy; in him there is an infinite depth of divine power, wisdom, righteousness, holiness, goodness, love, mercy, and truth, incessantly active. In the triune God there is also the infinitely perfect relationship and harmony for this energy to express itself into constant activity, for he is one, and this oneness is the eternal basis of the divine unity and harmony.

In God there is no discord, no conflict, no dissonance, no disagreement; he is eternally in harmony with himself. Yet he is not alone, though he is one. Were he alone, he could not be the living God in

himself. But the one God subsists in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who sustain the relationship of perfect harmony to one another and who react upon one another with all the energy of the divine nature in knowledge and wisdom, in righteousness and holiness, in infinitely perfect love. There is a continuous current of divine energy, of infinitely perfect divine self-consciousness and joy, a glorious stream of life from the Father to and through the Son and in the Holy Spirit.

God is life; he lives in himself. As the living God he is perfectly self-sufficient. He is in need of no one besides himself. Of the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, he knows and is known, he loves and is loved, he adores and is adored, and he glorifies and is glorified in himself. The truth of the Trinity means that God is the living God.

As the living God he is the covenant God. The idea of the covenant is not that of an agreement, pact, or alliance. It is a bond of friendship and living fellowship. Friendship is that bond of fellowship between persons, according to which and by which they enter into one another's life in perfect knowledge and love so that mind is knit to mind, will to will, heart to heart, and each has no secrets from the other. It presupposes a basis of likeness, of equality, for only like knows like. On that basis of equality, it requires personal distinction: for without this there is only sameness; there can be no fellowship. Both the equality and the personal distinction are in God because he is triune; the most absolute equality exists between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for these three are one in essence. In him there is the personal distinction between the three persons subsisting in the one essence.

Thus the three persons of the holy Trinity completely and perfectly enter into one another's life. Their fellowship is infinitely perfect. They have no secrets from one another. There is no conflict between them. Their relationship is one of perfect harmony: the Father knows and loves the Son in the Spirit; the Son knows and loves the Father in the Spirit; the Spirit knows and loves the Father through the Son in himself. The living God is the covenant God. That is the great significance of the truth that God is triune and that these three distinct persons are the one, only, true, and eternal God.

Chapter 10

God's Eternal Counsel

The Eternally Active God

God is an eternally active God. His works are not only known unto him from all eternity, but in him they are also eternally perfect: "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deut. 32:4). According to the words of the Savior, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). All the perfections that are inherent in God's divine being must, according to scripture, also be ascribed to his works. As God is, so are his works.

We must not imagine that God the Lord began to be active when in the beginning he created the heavens and the earth, while before the creation he was completely idle and inactive. If we do this, then we make the ever-blessed God dependent upon the creature, because then he was not rich in himself but became rich through his works in time, through the existence of the world. Then we must come to the conclusion that the creator has need of the creature and that especially man is able to add something to the living God. And then we present God as pantheistically developing himself and gradually reaching consciousness and knowledge of himself through the creature.

Neither must we apply to the work of the eternal one the limitation and imperfection that always characterizes our work. Our work is always limited by time and change. We begin with a certain work; only after much labor and exertion do we reach its completion and enter into the rest of the perfect work. Moreover, we change from one work into another. Now we work with our head; then again with our hands; now we think; then we decide; finally, we act. Our work is never complete and never perfect. Labor and toil, loss of powers, and recuperation through rest are inseparably connected with all our works.

This, however, is not the case with the Lord our God. He is in himself the perfectly blessed God, and he has no need whatever of the creature. His works are from eternity to eternity perfect in himself, and with all his infinite divine being he works eternally and unchangeably. He is called "Purest Activity" (*Actus Purissimus*). As the working God he is also the simple and the unchangeable God. In him there is no variableness nor shadow of turning. Therefore, as the eternally working God he is at the same time in everlasting rest. The everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is ever weary (Isa. 40:28). From eternity to eternity he rejoices in all his works, which are perfect in him.

Only in the light of this confession can we understand that the creature has no significance before God whatsoever. God is all, and we in ourselves are nothing. It is only the proud vanity of sin that causes man to imagine that he can add anything to the living God. He only is the overflowing fountain of all good; we can be only the little vessels that must be filled from this overflowing fountain but that can never add to this fountain. He is the ever-giving God; the creature is always at the receiving end. Even if there never had been a creation, the Lord God would nevertheless have been the most blessed in himself and would have rejoiced in his works. To deny this is the profound principle of sin. To acknowledge this is the heart of all true religion.

Distinctions in God's Works

With a view to this confession, theologians have always distinguished between the works of God that are purely immanent in himself (*opera ad intra*) and the works of God that have reference to the creature (*opera ad extra*). Others distinguish between God's immanent works (*opera immanentia*) and the outgoing works (*opera exeuntia*). The immanent works (*opera immanentia*) are further distinguished as the immanent works as such (*opera immanentia per se*) and the immanent works destined to be outgoing (*opera immanentia donec exeunt*). The immanent works as such are God's personal works (*opera personalia*), which include the Father's generation of the Son, the Son's being generated by the Father, and the procession of the Holy Spirit. The immanent works destined to be outgoing are the essential works (*opera essentialia*), that is, the works of the triune God that are immanent in God, but which are destined to be revealed and realized in the works of creation and providence and redemption. To these works of God, immanent but destined to be outgoing (*immanentia donec exeunt*), belongs the counsel of God. Although this counsel is revealed in the outgoing works of God, the counsel as such is nevertheless immanent in God himself.

God's Counsel in Scripture

It is especially this eternal counsel of God that presents the Lord God as the absolutely blessed and self-sufficient Lord of heaven and earth who "dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:24–25). He is the living God, distinct from all idols. This counsel of God may not be compared with a dead plan, such as an architect makes of a house or any other edifice. In the case of such a plan, the realization of the plan is always better and more glorious than the original conception. But *the counsel of the Lord is his eternal good pleasure, according to which he willed and conceived all things that are ever realized or occur in time*.

In that counsel he eternally has all things with himself and rejoices perfectly in all the works of his hands. The counsel of God is the eternal reality of all things in God's conception, of which the creatures are but the revelation in time and space. Known unto God are all things from everlasting to everlasting, and in his eternal counsel he rejoiced in all his works even before the world was. He is God, and there is no one besides him, the eternally self-sufficient and most blessed Lord of all.

For this reason the scriptures emphasize very strongly this counsel of the Lord and witness of that counsel practically on every page of Holy Writ. God's counsel is called the "decree." "I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession" (Ps. 2:7–8). It is the decree whereby he set bounds, bars, and doors for the sea, and whereby he said, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed" (Job 38:8–11). It is the decree that shall "be far removed" and by which the walls of Jerusalem shall be rebuilt (Micah 7:11). The Hebrew word here is חֹק (*decree*). It is the decree of God according to which the Son of man goes: "And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!" (Luke 22:22). The original for "determined" here has ὡρισμένον, from ὁρίζειν, which means first "to mark the boundaries," and therefore, "to appoint by divine decree."

God's counsel is his purpose according to which he does all things: "For thus hath the Lord said, The whole land shall be desolate; yet will I not make a full end. For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black: because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it" (Jer. 4:27–28). The word for "purpose" in the original is זַמֹּתִי. It is the purpose of God according to which the elect are called unto salvation and according to which all

things will work together for their good (Rom. 8:28); according to which Jacob, the younger, was served by Esau, the elder (Rom. 9:10–13); according to which the people of God "have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11); according to which "unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:10–11); according to which he "hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9). In all these passages the word used for God's decree is πρόθεσις, meaning "the setting forth of anything before the divine mind."

Another word in the Old Testament for the counsel or decree of God is עֵצָה, which means "counsel, purpose, plan, or good pleasure," emphasizing counsel as a quality of mind, deliberation, prudence, and wisdom. The word is used in Isaiah 46:10: "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." The same verse also has the term חֵפֶץ, which means fundamentally "delight, pleasure," therefore "desire, wish, will," and which is often translated "good pleasure." The same word is used in Isaiah 48:14: "He will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans." The corresponding Greek term is εὐδοκία (*good pleasure*), as in Luke 12:32: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." It is also the Father's good pleasure to hide the things of the kingdom of God from the wise and the prudent and to reveal them unto babes: "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Matt. 11:25–26). It pleased (εὐδόκησεν) the Father that in Christ should all the fullness dwell (Col. 1:19).

Psalm 33:11 also uses the term עֵצָה: "The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations." And Psalm 73:24: "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." The corresponding New Testament Greek term is βουλή, which occurs in Acts 2:23: Jesus, "being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." The term used for the "determinate counsel" is τῇ ὡρισμένῃ βουλῇ. Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, rose against the holy child Jesus for "to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:28). Ephesians 1:11 teaches that God works all things according to the counsel of his own will: "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

The Eternity of God's Decree

The Bible always emphasizes the fact that God ordained all things and knew them from before the foundation of the world. God knew his own and ordained them to be conformed according to the image of his Son before the foundation of the world (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:3–4). When presently they inherit the kingdom, it will have been prepared for them from before the foundation of the world. When all things in heaven and on earth will be united in Christ, it will be nothing but the perfect realization of the counsel of him who works all things according to that same counsel (Eph. 1:10–11).

This counsel of God is eternal, as God is eternal. Never was the Lord without his counsel. Indeed, the counsel of God is free and sovereign, an act of his own will. In the abstract it may possibly be said that before the infinite God there existed an infinite number of possibilities in regard to a world that was to be created, and that the sovereign God with an absolutely free dispensation of his will

determined to create the world as it actually exists and develops. But however this may be, God's counsel may never be presented as if there were ever in God a period in which he was without his decree and only with infinite riches of thoughts and conceptions, from which at a later period he chose or decided to realize that counsel in creation and glorification. On the contrary, known unto God are all his works from eternity (Acts 15:18). The decree of God is as eternal as the eternal God himself.

The All-comprehensiveness of God's Decree

This decree of God is strictly all-comprehensive: nothing ever escapes the determination of that counsel of God. Even the hairs of our head are all numbered (Matt. 10:30; Luke 12:7). Not a sparrow falls but by the will of our heavenly Father (Matt. 10:29; Luke 12:6). Not only is this counsel of God all-comprehensive in regard to all things in time, small or great, but it also includes the rational, moral deeds of men and angels.

This also must be emphasized, because unless this is strictly maintained, the sovereignty and lordship of God cannot be confessed in accordance with scripture. All the thoughts and intents, the desires and aspirations of the heart of man are included in and determined by the counsel of God. God is the Lord over men, over angels and devils, and over the righteous and the unrighteous alike. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1). Assyria is the rod of God's anger to chastise his people Israel. The haughty ruler of the world power knows nothing of the Lord's purpose. On the contrary, he even boasts of his own strength and glory when the Lord uses him to cut off nations not a few. He sets himself to destroy Jerusalem and the people of God. Yet he is only the axe that boasts against the hand that hews therewith, and the saw that magnifies itself against the hand that draws it (Isa. 10:5–19).

Surely, the Lord Jesus was taken and crucified by wicked hands, but only through the determinate counsel of God (Acts 2:23). When Peter and John were released by the rulers of the Jews and returned to their own company, the church with one accord glorified the Lord of all:

> Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done (Acts 4:24–28).

God's Alleged Permissive Will

With regard to the sinful deeds of men and devils, we must not speak only of God's permission but also of his determination. Holy scripture speaks a far more positive language. We realize that the motive for speaking of God's permission rather than of his determined will regarding sin and the evil deeds of men is that God may never be presented as the author of sin. But this purpose is not reached by speaking of God's permission or his permissive will: if the Almighty permits what he could just as well have prevented, it is from an ethical viewpoint the same as if he had committed it himself. In this way we lose God and his sovereignty: permission presupposes the idea that there is a power outside of God that can produce and do something apart from him, but which is simply permitted by God to act and operate.

This is dualism, and it annihilates the complete and absolute sovereignty of God. We must maintain that also sin and all the wicked deeds of men and angels have a place in the counsel of God, in the

counsel of his will. This is taught by the word of God. It is certainly according to the determinate counsel of God that Christ was nailed to the cross and that Pilate and Herod, with the Gentiles and Israel, were gathered together against the holy child Jesus (Acts 2:23; Acts 4:24–28). Therefore, it is much better to say that the Lord in his counsel not only hates sin, but has also determined that that which he hates should come to pass in order to reveal his hatred and to serve the cause of his covenant.

The Immutability of God's Decree

The counsel of God is immutable. Man's counsel is often brought to nought by various circumstances; he changes his mind and alters his course for various reasons. But this is not the case with the counsel of God. He knows all things, and nothing can resist his will (Rom. 9:19). Therefore, the counsel of God is also absolutely efficacious: "He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Ps. 115:3) and nothing can ever thwart his purpose. The counsel of God is perfect, wise, and good. He determines not simply the things that are, but also the things that develop and the entire history of man and creation as it must lead in the way of sin and death to the perfection of his eternal kingdom. In all this the perfect and adorable wisdom of God is manifest: with the most effective and proper means God leads all things to the final end which he has conceived from eternity in his counsel. In a word, all the so-called incommunicable, as well as the communicable, attributes of God must be ascribed to the counsel of the living God.

The Oneness of God's Decree

It follows from God's oneness and simplicity that also the counsel of God is one. This oneness and simplicity of God's counsel must not be conceived as dead uniformity and monotony, but rather as beautiful harmony manifesting the manifold wisdom of God. For that reason we may never separate the counsel of God into various parts as a mechanical whole may be divided. Nevertheless, we certainly can distinguish between the various moments in the counsel of God and contemplate the relation of those various moments in the one divine conception. The counsel of God concerns Christ and his people, angels and men, elect and reprobate; it concerns the stars in their courses, the beasts of the field and the lilies of the valley, health and sickness, fruitful and unfruitful years, war and peace, and all the tumult of the world; the history of every man and the lot of all, as well as their destination, are fixed by the counsel of God.

Hence the distinction was made in that decree of God between the counsel of providence and the counsel of predestination. By predestination was meant God's decree concerning the eternal destiny of his rational, moral creatures. This counsel of predestination was further distinguished according to its different objects as the counsel of election and the counsel of reprobation. Although the distinction between the decree of providence and the decree of predestination may be maintained in a certain sense, it is nevertheless defective, because the counsel of God is one, and because, according to scripture, all things in that counsel serve the glory of God in Christ and his church.

Election and Reprobation

As to the scriptural terms for election, the Hebrew has the verb יָדַע (*to know*), and the Greek has the verbs γινώσκειν (*to know*) and προγινώσκειν (*to foreknow*) and the noun πρόγνωσις (*foreknowledge*).

יָדַע

means "to know," but it may also mean "to know in love." This is the meaning in the following verses: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:19). "Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:1–2). "Yet I am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me. I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought" (Hosea 13:4–5).

The word πρόγνωσις (*foreknowledge*) often denotes not only prescience but also a knowing before in love. This is undoubtedly the meaning in Romans 8:29: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." The word has the same meaning in Romans 11:2: "God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew," and in 1 Peter 1:2: "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." That this is a distinctive knowledge and, therefore, a knowledge in love and not simply prescience is evident from the fact that the objects of this foreknowledge are the people of God, while all men are the objects of the foreknowledge of God in general (1 Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:9).

Further, the Hebrew has the word בָּחַר. The primary meaning of this verb seems to be that of rubbing upon the touchstone; hence it means "to prove, to try, to examine." It has the connotation of "to approve, to choose, to select." The word occurs in Deuteronomy 7:6–7: "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people." Yet again, in Deuteronomy 14:2: "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth."

The Greek has the verb ἐκλέγεσθαι (*to elect, choose*) and the noun ἐκλογή (*election*). These words express choice or selection on the part of God, accompanied by preference. The noun occurs in the well-known words of Romans 9:11: "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth" (cf. Rom. 11:5). The verb occurs in Ephesians 1:4: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."

Further, there are the verb προτίθεναι (*to purpose*) and the noun πρόθεσις (*purpose*). The noun occurs in Romans 9:11 in the phrase, "the purpose of God according to election" (cf. Eph. 1:11). The verb occurs in Ephesians 1:9: "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself" (cf. 2 Tim. 1:9).

Finally, there are the verb προορίζειν and the noun προορίσμος, which is not found in the New Testament. The verb signifies "to predetermine, to decide beforehand, to predestine, to foreordain." It is used in the sense of predetermining by God's counsel in Acts 4:28: "For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." But in Romans 8:29 it is used for predestination unto salvation: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." (cf. 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5, 11).

As to reprobation, there is no verb that expresses directly the concept of sovereign, eternal rejection unto damnation. The adjective ἀδόκιμος (*reprobate, rejected*) occurs, but rather denotes a moral idea, that which in a moral sense is not approved (1 Cor. 9:27; 2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:16). Nevertheless, the idea of reprobation is very clearly and emphatically expressed, even apart

from the fact that election presupposes reprobation. It is expressed in Malachi 1:2–4 (cf. Rom. 9:10–13); Isaiah 6:6–13; Matthew 11:25–27; Mark 4:8–12; John 10:26; John 12:37–41; John 17:9; Romans 9:18, 21–23; 1 Peter 2:6–8, and other passages).

Election and Reprobation Defined

Election may be defined as the eternal and sovereign decree of God to lead the church as the body of Christ, with all its individual members, each in his own position, to eternal salvation and glory.

Reprobation is the eternal and sovereign decree of God to determine some men to be vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction in the way of sin, as manifestations of his justice and to serve the purpose of the realization of his elect church.

It must be remembered that the objects of predestination are not only men, but also all the rational creatures of God, including angels. But we are dealing more especially with Christ and his elect church, as the object of election, and with the wicked as serving the realization of the purpose of election, as the objects of God's eternal reprobation.

Lapsarianism

In regard to the doctrine of predestination there has always been a difference of viewpoint, especially since the time of the Reformation and soon after. We are thinking of the difference between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism. Supralapsarianism presents the order of the decrees of God in such a way that the decree of election precedes the decree concerning creation and the fall. The order therefore is this:

1. The glory of God in Christ and his church.
2. The election of Christ as the head of the church.
3. The elect church in Christ (and reprobation).
4. The fall of all men.
5. The creation of the world and man.

Infralapsarians turn this order around. They also proceed from the glory of God as the purpose of all things; but after that they have the following order:

1. The creation of the world.
2. The fall of man.
3. The election unto salvation of some, together with the passing by of others.
4. Christ as the mediator to realize the redemption of the elect.

The big problem that concerns *supra-* and *infra-* is whether God has chosen and reprobated either creatable (*creabile*) and fallible (*labile*) men or created and fallen men. *Supra-* maintains the former; *infra-* maintains the latter.

The infralapsarians lodge several objections against the standpoint of the supralapsarians. First, they maintain that scripture itself places us on the infralapsarian standpoint. This may be admitted as far as the historical viewpoint of the matter is concerned, but this historical viewpoint of scripture may undoubtedly be explained from the fact that what is first in the decree is last in the execution of it. It is in the nature of the case that in the historical sense creation and the fall precede the execution of election. So it is always with the execution of a decree or a plan and the plan itself. When I make a

plan of a house, the very first element in the plan is my purpose to live or to dwell in the house; next, where and in what way I want to live; next, the arrangement of the house in which I want to live; finally, how the foundation of the house must be suitable to carry the house itself. That is the *supra-* order of the plan of a house. But in the execution of that plan the order becomes naturally *infra-*. I first lay the foundation of the house; next, I build the house; lastly, I dwell in it. The last element of the plan is first in the execution.

So it is also in regard to the decree of God and the execution of the decree in time. Historically, creation is first, followed by the fall; next is the distinction between election and reprobation and Christ's coming to realize God's election, and finally, the consummation of all things and the eternal separation between the wicked and the righteous. But the infralapsarian conception can easily be turned into an argument favoring the supralapsarian standpoint. History presents to us the picture of God's eternal decree in reverse order, and if, according to this principle, I reverse the historical line, the result is the *supra-* order in the decree of God.

Nor is this all that can be said. As often as scripture explains the infralapsarian history from the decree of God, it does so in the supralapsarian manner. This is most beautifully expressed in Romans 9. The potter has power over the clay, to make of the same lump vessels unto honor and vessels unto dishonor (v. 21). Note that to the questions of the opponent "Is there unrighteousness with God?" (v. 14) and "Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" (v. 19), the apostle does not say, "Who art thou, O sinner, that answerest against God? We have all fallen into sin and have no right to life and to salvation. God, therefore, can justly reject us all." Had he so answered, the apostle would have had to answer on the standpoint of infralapsarianism. Instead he appeals to God's absolute sovereignty and employs the figure of the potter and the clay. Sovereignly, the potter makes out of the same lump vessels unto glory and vessels unto dishonor. This is also the presentation of scripture when it teaches that God has made all things for his own name's sake, even the wicked unto the day of evil (Prov. 16:4), and that he raised up Pharaoh sovereignly in order to reveal in him his name and his power (Ex. 9:16; Rom. 9:17).

Infralapsarianism and the Creeds

The infralapsarians also appeal to the confessions and maintain that the confessions, on the whole, defend the infralapsarian standpoint. This may be admitted, although it must be remembered that the Heidelberg Catechism does not enter into the problem at all, while the Belgic Confession views the doctrine of election entirely from a historical point of view:

> We believe that all the posterity of Adam, being thus fallen into perdition and ruin by the sin of our first parents, God then did manifest himself such as he is; that is to say, MERCIFUL AND JUST: MERCIFUL, since he delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom he, in his eternal and unchangeable council [*sic*], of mere goodness hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works: JUST, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves.[1]

The Canons of Dordt are more definitely infralapsarian:

> The good pleasure of God is the sole cause of this gracious election; which doth not consist herein that God, foreseeing all possible qualities of human actions, elected certain of these as a condition of salvation, but that he was pleased out of the common mass of sinners to adopt some certain persons as a peculiar people to himself, as it is written, 'For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil,' etc., 'it was said [namely, to Rebecca] the elder shall serve the younger; as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated' (Rom. 9:11–13); and, 'As many as were ordained to eternal life believed' (Acts 13:48).[2]

The Canons speak of reprobation thus:

> What peculiarly tends to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election is the express testimony of sacred Scripture, that not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree; whom God, out of his sovereign, most just, irreprehensible and unchangeable good pleasure, hath decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have willfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but permitting them in his just judgment to follow their own way; at last, for the declaration of his justice, to condemn and punish them forever, not only on account of their unbelief, but also for all their other sins. And this is the decree of reprobation which by no means makes God the author of sin (the very thought of which is blasphemy), but declares him to be an awful, irreprehensible, and righteous judge and avenger.[3]

The Canons, therefore, present very decidedly the infralapsarian viewpoint. However, it must not be forgotten that the Reformed fathers never condemned the supralapsarian standpoint and that they certainly did not regard it as inconsistent with Reformed theology.

The infralapsarians have still other objections and arguments against the supralapsarian standpoint. They allege that the supralapsarian standpoint is very hard and cruel; the infralapsarian standpoint is much milder in its presentation of the decree of predestination, especially of reprobation. According to supralapsarians, God destined certain men to damnation. According to infralapsarians, God merely passed them by in his eternal decree of election, determined to leave them in the common misery into which they had willfully plunged themselves, and determined not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion, but, as the Canons express it, permitted them in his just judgment to follow their own ways. Infralapsarianism is, therefore, merely negative. Even apart from the fact that these are mere human considerations, not based upon scripture, the argument does not present more than a semblance of truth. A God who leaves men in their sin and damnation is no less hard and cruel, according to any human consideration and argument, than a God who determined them unto damnation. In reality infralapsarianism cannot find an answer to reprobation. According to the infralapsarian presentation, God is arbitrary: he was able to save all men, but in his good pleasure he determined to leave some in their sin and damnation.

All other arguments, such as that the supralapsarians present God as the author of sin, and others, we have already answered.

Supralapsarianism Preferable

We place ourselves without reservation on the standpoint of supralapsarianism and maintain that it is the scriptural and the only consistent presentation of the decree of God's predestination. But we would like to modify this supralapsarian view in such a way that it is in harmony with our organic conception of things. We must emphasize not so much what is first or last in the decree of God, but rather place ourselves before the questions: What in those decrees is conceived as purpose and what as means? What is the main object in those decrees, and what is subordinate and subservient to that main object?

In this way we escape the danger of leaving the impression that there is a temporal order in the decrees of God. In addition, according to our way of presenting the doctrine of predestination, we may open the way to find an answer to the question, Why is there a reprobation? It is true that supralapsarians give a partial answer to this question when they assert that God also has willed the ungodly for his own name's sake and for the manifestation of his righteousness, justice, power, and wrath. But this is by no means the final answer that may be given to this question, nor does it satisfy us, because in this way we still cannot escape the impression that there is arbitrariness in God. The

reprobate are evidently not necessary to reveal God's power, wrath, and righteousness, for these virtues certainly never came to a clearer, more definite revelation than at the cross of Jesus Christ. He certainly satisfied the justice and the righteousness of God and bore all his wrath.

Therefore, we would like to present the matter of God's counsel of predestination as follows: God conceived and willed all things in his eternal decree for his own name's sake, that is, to the glory of his name and the reflection of his divine, infinite virtues and life. As the highest in God is his own covenant life, he willed to establish and to reveal his covenant in Christ, and all other things in the counsel of God are related to that main purpose of God as means. Hence we obtain the following order of the decrees:

1. God wants to reveal his own eternal glory in the establishment of his covenant.

2. For the realization of this purpose, the Son becomes the Christ, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature, that in him as the first begotten of the dead all the fullness of God might dwell.

3. For that Christ and the revelation of all his fullness, the church is decreed, and all the elect. In the decree of God, Christ is not designed for the church, but the church for Christ. The church is his body and serves the purpose of revealing the fullness there is in him.

4. For the purpose of realizing this church of Christ and, therefore, the glory of Christ, the reprobate are determined as vessels of wrath. Reprobation serves the purpose of election as the chaff serves the ripening of the wheat. This is in harmony with the current thought of scripture. We find it expressed literally in Isaiah 43:3–4: "For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life."

5. Finally, in the counsel of God, all other things in heaven and on earth are designed as means to the realization of both election and reprobation and, therefore, of the glory of Christ and his church. Because in the decree of God all things are conceived in this manner, all things must work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose. In this light we can also understand scripture when it teaches that "all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:21–23).

THE SECOND LOCUS

Anthropology

Chapter 11

God's Work of Creation

Creation and Faith

"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. 11:3). By faith we understand that the world is not eternal but had a beginning, and that this beginning can be explained only from the omnipotent will of God, who calls the things that are not as if they were (Rom. 4:17). The unbelief of the natural man does not and cannot understand the origin of all things, nor will the natural man ever succeed in explaining this origin in the way of reason. Reason can never fathom the truth that things which are seen are not made of things that do appear. Unbelief, which despises the revelation of God, has made various attempts to explain the origin of the world. But without the light of revelation the question is unanswerable. The necessary data for a solution to this problem does not lie within the scope of experience or reason. Therefore, all mere human theories concerning the origin of things are, and necessarily must be, mere conjectures.

Evolutionistic theories attempt to explain the world from the basis of self-development. Dr. Hodge remarks concerning them:

> It is enough to remark concerning these theories, (l.) That they leave the origin of things unaccounted for. Whence came the matter, which the theory in one form assumes? Whence came its physical properties, to which all organization is referred? And as to the other doctrine, it may be asked, Whence came the living germs of plants and animals? To assume that matter in a state of chaos is eternal; or that there has been an endless succession of living germs; or that there has been an eternal succession of cycles in the history of the universe, chaos unfolding itself into cosmos, during immeasurable ages, are all assumptions which shock the reason, and must of necessity be destitute of proof.
>
> (2.) These theories are atheistic. They deny the existence of a personal Being to whom we stand in the relation of creatures and children. The existence of such a Being is an innate, intuitive truth. It cannot be permanently disbelieved. And, therefore, any theory which denies the existence of God must be not only false but short-lived.[1]

In principle unbelief denies God, does not find him, and for that reason cannot understand how the world is framed by the word of God and how the things that are seen are not made of things that do appear (Heb. 11:3). Faith, however, understands this truth, clings to the living God, and believes and trusts in his revelation. In the midst of all temporal and perishable things faith clings to the eternal one, and does not look "at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18).

Faith, therefore, does not object to believing that the origin of things and of history begins where scripture starts in Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Nor does faith object to John 1:1–3: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." Before all things God is. He is the eternal and the all-sufficient in himself. Before the beginning of Genesis 1:1 there was no creature; nor was there anything out of which the Lord, outside of himself, could form creation. He himself is before all things, and creation can be explained only from his omnipotent will.

The Idea of Creation

It is not correct to say that to create is to make something out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). As a definition this is very defective and incorrect because such a definition cannot be applied to all the various acts of God that constitute the one mighty work of creation, nor is the real idea of the work of creation expressed in this definition. It leaves the impression that the origin of things must be sought in nothing. The idea of a creation out of nothing is entirely foreign to scripture. The word of God explains the origin of things according to the counsel of God from his omnipotent will and tells us that God calls the things that are not as if they were (Rom. 4:17).

The words that occur in scripture to denote the creative act of God certainly do not express the idea of making something out of nothing, although they do express very clearly, when understood in their proper context, that creation is exclusively a divine work. The words in Hebrew are: בָּרָא (*to create*), יָצַר (*to form*), and עָשָׂה (*to make*). In the Greek we find the corresponding terms: κτίζειν (*to create*), πλάσσειν (*to form*), and ποιεῖν (*to make*).

The idea expressed by the term בָּרָא (*to create*) is most probably that of separation, of cutting off, and in this way giving separate being and form. Out of his eternal counsel, God separated the things and all creation by an act of his almighty will and gave them existence, not in themselves, but existence that is essentially distinct from his own being. He separated and defined the several creatures also in relation to one another so that each creature is distinct from all other creatures, even though the creatures together express the harmony and the unity of God's thoughts.

The Hebrew verb יָצַר (*to form*) and the Greek πλάσσειν (*to form*) denote the same idea of giving distinct form to anything outside of God. The verbs עָשָׂה (*to make*) and ποιεῖν (*to make* or *to do*) denote the general idea of giving existence or being to anything.

The work of creation is always ascribed in scripture to the act of God's almighty will. Before the beginning there was nothing outside of him. He alone is from eternity. Besides, he is not a needy God, who became rich through the creation of the world, for he is the all- and self-sufficient, who has no need of anything, and to whom no creature can add anything that would make him richer. He is the triune God, who even without the world lives in himself a perfect covenant life of friendship. He knows himself in the Son, the eternal Word, who is the express image of his substance (Heb. 1:3). Not only does God know himself through his Son and in the Spirit, but also all his works are known unto him from eternity (Acts 15:18). The Son is the Word and Wisdom of God, the fullness of all his thoughts, and in his counsel God conceived and willed all things that will ever be or become.

This counsel is the implication of all the thoughts of God with regard to all that exists, not only as it was formed from the beginning but also, according to the purpose and intention of God, as it will be when all things both in heaven and on earth will be united in Christ Jesus our Lord. Not only are the beginning and the end eternally established by the Lord in his eternal counsel, but also the connection and the relation of that beginning and end of all things stand eternally before his divine consciousness. He knows the becoming and the history of all things, the course of their development along the way of sin and grace, of curse and death, and of glorification.

In this sense the eternal reality of all things is certainly with God in the counsel of the Most High; he rejoices in and glorifies himself in his own decree from eternity to eternity. Therefore, even though the things are executed in time, and although he gives them all existence in time, outside of and in distinction from himself, yet he is eternally the creator of all things. In God there is no variableness or shadow of turning (James 1:17).

Creation Defined

Creation may be defined as that act of the almighty will of God whereby he gave to the things that were eternally in his counsel existence in distinction from himself.

God accomplishes this act through his word, that is, through an almighty calling, for God calls the things that are not as if they were (Rom. 4:17). "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth . . . For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Ps. 33:6, 9). "Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together" (Isa. 48:13).

In creation God reveals himself as God. He speaks and calls in an entirely different way than the creature ever can. With us, things exist before we can ever call them, and our calling brings nothing into existence. But the Lord calls things before they exist, and through his almighty calling the things that he conceived and willed in his counsel receive existence. From eternity to eternity he speaks as the Father and generates the Son, the eternal Word. He also speaks from eternity to eternity in his eternal counsel and has all things in his divine conception in an infinitely higher sense than an artist conceives of his production before he realizes it. And he speaks creatively through the Word so that the things that are made and that are conceived in his counsel receive existence in distinction from himself.

Creation and the Will of God

Creation can be explained only from the almighty will of God. This is true not only of the existence of things themselves, but also of their existence in distinction from one another:

> Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding? . . . Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth (Isa. 40:12–14, 26).

The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne and worship, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11).

That creation is the product of the almighty will of God must be emphasized in distinction from the theory of emanation. God does not emanate in creation. The creatures are not parts of God. There is and there remains forever an infinite difference between the creator and the creature. The whole creation is his work, called by his creative word, created by his sovereign will.

At the same time every thought must be excluded that in the conceiving, the willing, and the forming of his creation, God was limited to anything outside of his own being. This is indeed the case with the creature whenever he forms anything: he is limited in every way to the material, to the nature and the quantity of the material out of which he makes anything. His production is never a creation. Never is his production purely the result of his own will and wisdom. But with the Lord our God this is different.

It has been presented as if God were limited to a certain eternal matter out of which he formed the world. The evil in the world was then explained out of that matter, which was evil in itself. In the way of a tremendous conflict the good God finally overcame the evil. But such dualism is positively excluded by the presentation of scripture, according to which the world does not have its origin in a necessary emanation of God, nor in anything that existed outside of himself, but purely, simply, and

only in the almighty will of God. This is applicable to the whole creation in its harmony and unity, as well as to the separate creatures.

The Beginning

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). This denotes at once the unity of creation; according to the will and counsel of God, all things in heaven and on earth are one. This first verse of Genesis 1 also denotes the very first act of God's creative will, by which he gave existence to the so-called chaos, the unformed world. That chaos, or unformed world, came into existence only by his almighty word and calling. He called the different creatures from that unformed creation not through a process of development or evolution, the power of which would have been laid in that original chaos, but only through the powerful, creative word of the same almighty will of God, who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth.

All this took place "in the beginning" (בְּרֵאשִׁית). This may not be conceived in such a way that this beginning had an existence without the will and creative power of God, but rather it must be conceived in such a way that when the first creative word proceeded out of the mouth of God, also the beginning of time was created.

God alone is the eternal. Time is a creature, and time is a necessary form of existence for all creation. The creature moves and develops itself according to the counsel of God, changes, increases and decreases, develops and disappears according to that counsel. Time, therefore, may never be presented as if it were a part of eternity, however small. Eternity and time are two incomparable entities. The "beginning" of Genesis 1:1 did not exist outside of God, as if the eternal and decreeing God would have waited for the moment of that beginning, but it was created together with the first word of God.

"In the beginning" also indicates that according to the counsel and will of God creation shall run through a course of history. It is true that creation was finished on the seventh day and appeared at once as one harmonious whole, beautiful and glorious in its rich variation of creatures, ascending from inorganic matter, from creature to creature, until it reached its climax in man, created after the image of God. But this does not remove the fact that God in his eternal counsel had prepared a higher purpose and glory for the works he created in the beginning. Creation's history cannot come to its rest before God's will with regard to its final purpose has been completely executed along the way of sin and grace so that all things both in heaven and on earth are united in Christ as the glorious head of all creation.

Creation and God's Final Purpose

Creation is from the beginning adapted to the final purpose of God's counsel, and every single creature is so formed that it must serve God in the accomplishment of that counsel. At the creation of every separate and individual part of creation and again at the finishing and perfecting of the whole creation, God's declaration that what he had made was very good (Gen. 1:31) does not simply denote that there was no imperfection in the work of God as it stood at that very moment before his face, but denotes also that everything was adapted to the final purpose unto which God from the very beginning had created all things.

Creation as a whole, heaven and earth and all that they contained, stood there according to the counsel and will of God, according to which he had also determined the end from the beginning.

According to God's counsel and will, it is indeed true that the original creation was one. One creature was adapted to the other, and all things, finally, through man, were adapted to God as the covenant friend of man. According to the same counsel, all creation was also formed in such a way that it could become the stage for the tremendous battle of sin and grace and for the higher revelation and glorification of the virtues of God, and in such a way that everything finally could tend to the highest revelation of God's covenant in the Beloved in his eternal tabernacle. For this purpose every creature —the sun, moon, and stars in the firmament, the cedars of Lebanon and the beasts of the field, the hidden powers of brute creation, the angels in heaven, and man on the earth—all must serve God. Everything is good; therefore it is adapted to be subservient to the counsel of God and its final realization.

Because this is true, creation is an image of the re-creation or regeneration of all things. The earthly is image of the heavenly. The temporal is image of the eternal. The first man, who is of the earth, earthy (1 Cor. 15:47), is indeed the lord of the earthly creation under God, servant of the Lord, his covenant friend: he is prophet, to know him and to proclaim his virtues, to declare and glorify his name; priest, in order to love him from the heart and with all his powers; king, to rule over all creatures in God's name and under him. The first man is also an image of him who was to come, the Lord out of heaven (v. 47), through whom man, recreated in him, will presently rule in heavenly glory.

The first paradise is the image of the eternal paradise of God that will presently be revealed in the new heavens and the new earth. The tree of life in the first paradise is an image of the eternal tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God (Rev. 2:7). The whole creation is a revelation of God: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge" (Ps. 19:1–2). Not only does all creation show the power and wisdom of God, his eternal power and Godhead (Rom. 1:20), but for the one who has eyes to see and behold all things in the light of God's revelation, it also points to the final accomplishment of the counsel of God in eternal glory. In the brilliant light of the sun and its reflection in the pale light of the moon, in the twinkling of the stars, in the dying of the seed in the earth and in its sprouting into new life, in the mighty ocean, in the majestically flowing river, in the cedar and the oak, in the appearance of the proud lion and of the humble and meek sheep, of the royal eagle and the crawling serpent, in the soft whisper of the zephyr and in the roaring of the terrible storm, yea, also in the lives of the children of men, of king and subject, of lord and servant, of father and child, of mother and suckling—in all these we have so many images testifying of a better fatherland which is to come.

For this reason, according to scripture, the groaning of the whole creation points forward to the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:21–22). For this same reason the Savior is able to say so significantly that the things of the kingdom of God take place through parables (Mark 4:11). The earthy, according to the will of God, is adapted to the heavenly; the earthy is image of the heavenly.

The Creator

The creator, as the willing fountain of all things, who formed all things for his own name's sake in order that they should serve him in the realization of his eternal covenant, is God and is one. Yet also as the creator he is the triune God, and in the one creative work of God we can distinguish between the work of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We must not present this as if there were three divine factors next to one another in the one work of creation; nor may we ever separate the three persons of the Trinity from one another, but we must always maintain that the three persons,

even by their personal distinction, are nevertheless one in being. Nor may we so separate the works of God outside of himself (*ad extra*), as if one part were to be attributed to the Father, another part to the Son, and the third part to the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, even as the one triune God exists in himself in the threefold relation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so he also reveals himself in his works outside of himself.

It is better, therefore, to present the work of creation as being out of the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. Just as in the Trinity the Son returns to the Father in the Spirit and in the Spirit faces the Father from eternity to eternity, so also the Word of God in creation, the revelation of the eternal thoughts of God, returns in the Spirit to God himself.

The relation of the Son, or the eternal Word, to creation is very clearly revealed in Holy Writ. Already in Genesis 1 the speech of God denotes the creation of all things through the Word, as the apostle John in the prologue of his gospel narrative writes: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:1–3). The Son is the Word, the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of his person (Heb. 1:3). He whom God hath appointed heir of all things is the same by whom he made the worlds (vv. 1–2). "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him" (Col. 1:16). The same thought is expressed in the well-known eighth chapter of Proverbs, which speaks of the eternal wisdom that was with God before the world was and that was present when he created the world (vv. 23–31).

The relation of the Son to creation is, first, that the Son is the eternal, infinite, and divinely perfect expression of the adorable image of God. The Son is in God himself the express image of his substance (Heb. 1:3), the perfect image of the invisible God. Second, all the thoughts of God in relation to all things are taken through and out of the Son so that also the works of God outside of himself (*ad extra*), as he conceived of them in his counsel, are a reflection of that adorable image of the Most High. Third, when God through that same Word creates all things, this denotes nothing less than that by his powerful, creative word he gives existence outside of himself to all creation, which is the revelation of his eternal thoughts which through the Son he conceived in himself from eternity to eternity.

Creation, then, is a thought of God, a creative word of God, and all creatures are individual thoughts or words of God, which together reveal the perfect and infinite wisdom of the Most High. We must remember that creation is not only given existence through the Word of God, but also through the same Word the world is sustained, for God bears all things by the Word of his power. For the same reason that Word is also the light of men, although the darkness did not comprehend that light (John 1:4–5).

Even as the light and the thought of God in creation is through the Son, so also the scintillation of life, the harmony and the communion, and the bond of life which unites the whole creation in fellowship with God, are through the Holy Spirit. In the beginning the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2). "By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens" (Job 26:13), and he created all the host of the heavens by the breath (literally, the Spirit) of his mouth (Ps. 33:6). By breathing the Spirit into man, God made him a living soul, who in his entire life is adapted to God himself. Although through sin our hearts turn away from God with all things, yet through the Spirit of God, now as the Spirit of Christ, our hearts return again in love unto the living God. Of the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit are all things created.

The finished creation was a rich revelation of the wisdom of God, scintillating with life in all its parts and in all its creatures, striving on high and turning itself with its face to the God of the covenant to glorify him and to rejoice in his everlasting favor. Therefore, it is always true that "of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

Chapter 12

The Creation Week

The Day-Age Theory

In connection with the *hexahemeron*, the six-day period of the creation week, the question is, How must we conceive of the days of Genesis 1? Must we think of those days as long periods or of six days as we know them, days of twenty-four hours?

This question is not an exegetical one. It did not arise out of the exegesis of Genesis 1. It was rather motivated by the desire to give some satisfaction to the science of modern times. This science came with facts, and facts cannot be denied. Those facts bore a certain testimony. This testimony was so overwhelming that apparently the conception that the world existed for only a few thousand years and is the product of six days of divine work must be deemed untenable.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, those who otherwise reverently bowed before the testimony of Holy Writ became afraid in the light of this testimony of history, especially in the light of the testimony that was borne by the earth's strata. Under the impulse of this fear, they once more turned to the first chapter of Genesis. By this time the question was no longer one of unprejudiced exegesis of the text in Genesis 1, but rather the question was whether the first chapter of Genesis could be explained so as to bring it into harmony with the facts of modern science. In fact, no attempt was even made to let the light of scripture shine upon the scientific facts. On the contrary, the text, if necessary, had to be so distorted that it was brought into harmony with science. From this it is to be explained that many theologians, even among the Reformed leaders of the Netherlands, as well as others, accepted the theory of the periods, that is, they defended the proposition that the week of creation (*hexahemeron*) was really a sixfold period of thousands, perhaps millions of years.

It is important to take note of the fact that exactly in this way the theory of the periods came into vogue. It is not a product of serious exegesis of Holy Writ. It does not proceed from the certain testimony of scripture. Rather, it is a very weak and defective apologetic attempt to maintain the reasonableness of faith in the light of the facts of science. This method does not plead for the truth of the period theory. Believers in Holy Writ want to maintain scripture's testimony above all. For that reason believers cannot go along with this method, which tries to listen first to the testimony of science, in order then to distort the testimony of scripture to bring it into harmony with science.

This method is not the method of faith, but that of the wisdom from below, which is earthly (James 3:15). Even dogmatics may not dominate exegesis of scripture—much less modern science. Even though it were true that science cannot be satisfied with an honest explanation of Genesis 1, and although it is certainly true that we will not be able to reconcile every contradiction or problem between scripture and science, yet we always must proceed from the clear expressions of Holy Writ and in its light develop a believing conception of the origin of the world.

Creation in Six Days

The attempt to explain Genesis 1 as presenting the creation of the world in a sixfold period of thousands or millions of years is, from an exegetical viewpoint, to be considered a total failure. For this we have the following grounds.

First, the term יוֹם (*day*) in Genesis 1 is definitely presented not as a long period, but as a day of twenty-four hours. A day is certainly not to be conceived of as a long period or as a period at all. A period consists of many days, years, seasons, and centuries, with manifold variations of day and night, cold and heat, and winter and summer. But in Genesis 1 the period that is called a "day" is definitely limited by evening and morning. At the end of every creation day, it is definitely expressed: "And the evening and the morning were the first day . . . second day . . . third day . . ." (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). Exegetically, it is quite impossible to render the term יוֹם (*day*) in such a way that it can represent long periods. Certainly, the days of Genesis 1 were definitely limited by evening and morning. Whether one limits this day to fifteen minutes or a thousand or a million years, it is still a day. There is no reason at all to extend the day of creation week over thousands of years.

Second, according to the period theory, one is compelled to make a distinction between the days that were before and the days that followed the creation of sun, moon, and stars on the fourth day. The change of day and night during the last three days of creation week was determined by the rotation of the earth around its axis. The last three days of creation week, therefore, cannot possibly have been long periods. Dr. A. Kuyper, Sr. suggests the possibility that the earth during the last three days of creation may have rotated much more slowly; but fortunately, he immediately adds that we know nothing about this possibility.[1] The fact is that we know nothing of the days of creation except through unprejudiced exegesis of Genesis 1.

Scripture does not give a single indication that the relation of things in the world was changed after the sixth or seventh day. Besides, it stands to reason that on the supposition of such a slow rotation of the earth, whereby each day was extended over thousands of years, a tremendous change must be presupposed in the relation of plants, animals, and men. According to scripture we may regard as an established fact that the last three days were common days as we know them. If this is true, one of the most important ground rules of all healthy exegesis must be trampled under foot in order to present the first three days as long periods. The fundamental rule is that the same word in the same context must have the same meaning unless the text itself gives a clear indication to the contrary. There is no indication in Genesis 1 that with the commencement of the fourth day, different days from those of the first three days of creation week are introduced.

Third, according to the theory of periods, and proceeding from the supposition that Adam was created on the morning of the sixth day, he must have been millions of years old when he fell. This is impossible. If Adam had been millions, or even thousands, of years old at the time of the fall, an entire human race would already have developed out of him on the sixth day, which, with a view to the fall, would have been inconceivable and impossible. Besides, this would also have been impossible from a spiritual, ethical viewpoint. Adam was living in the first paradise. In that paradise he immediately stood as the friend of God, confronting the antithesis. If Adam had been obedient for some thousands of years, he would by that time certainly have reached the state of being "not able to sin" (*non posse peccare*)[2]

Fourth, it has sometimes been alleged that the seventh day, the day of God's rest, must have been a period longer than twenty-four hours, since the Lord God was still resting from his work of creation, and that therefore it is exegetically very well conceivable that also the six days of creation were long periods. However, this argument annihilates itself. If this were the significance of the seventh day, then the seventh day lasted forever. God never creates again. If the seventh day lasted forever, then also the other days of the creation week were everlasting, and this, of course, is nonsense. Further, an everlasting seventh day certainly is not the significance of God's rest on the seventh day. This rest was a hallowing through which the Lord God, together with his creature that was created in his

image, rejoiced in all the works of his hands. This certainly was not an everlasting day, although the rest of God was image of the eternal rest in his tabernacle. But the day itself was twenty-four hours. Also the first sabbath was a common day.

Fifth, it must not be overlooked that our week, as we have it today, was created by God during the week of creation. This is also plainly indicated in the fourth commandment:

> Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it (Ex. 20:8–11).

The sequence of the six days and the one, of the week and the sabbath, was created by God in the week of creation.

Sixth, on the standpoint of the theory of periods, one must necessarily so distort the spoken, creative word of God that one falls into the error of evolutionism. What a strange way of speaking it is to say that God's creative word is extended over thousands and millions of years. Scripture gives an entirely different impression of God's creative word:

> And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. (Gen. 1:3, 6–7, 9).

So it was with all the six days of the creation week: "For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Ps. 33:9).

Finally, on the basis of Holy Writ, as well as on the ground of every reliable history, there can hardly be reasonable doubt that the earth is about six or seven thousand (or, according to others, ten thousand) years old. On the basis of Holy Writ, we may well accept the fact that the end of all things does not lie many thousands of years in the future. If we proceed from the thought that the incarnation of the Word of God must be about in the center of history, and if we take note of the very fast development of all things, especially in the last years, we get the impression in the light of holy scripture that the return of the Lord cannot be far distant.

What a strange conception of the works of God, of the world, and of creation we receive from the theory of periods: the Lord builds a foundation thousands of feet deep in order to build a very little house of one story high on top of it. He works millions and millions of years to form the world, in order then to destroy it in a comparatively few years. No man works this way—certainly not the Lord our God.

The Centrality of the Earth

In order to form a clear conception of God's different creative acts in the six days of the creation week, we must take into account the viewpoint from which scripture presents to us the creative work of God. We must take our standpoint on this earth without a telescope, in the proximity of the original paradise. There we must read the narrative of creation in Genesis 1. According to the word of God, the earth is the very center of the universe, around which all things are created and about which they all move. This is not to be conceived in a local and physical sense, for the earth is undoubtedly one of the smallest bodies that moves about in space. Besides, not the earth, but the sun is the center of the

solar system. But all this does not affect the truth or the reality of this scriptural point of view.

Scripture does not measure the significance of the creature according to size, weight, or distance, as we are inclined to do, but according to its spiritual place in the universe. From that point of view, it is not difficult to understand that the earth is indeed considered the center of the cosmos: for the earth is destined to become the stage, not only for the dwelling place of man, the highest creature of God, but also and especially for the development of the covenant of God through the tremendous battle of sin and grace. On this earth the Son of God in human nature is presently born. That incarnated Word of God is the head of God's creation, in whom all things in heaven and on earth are destined to become united. It is not strange, then, when the narrative of creation places us on this earth in order to show us from our earthly viewpoint how the Almighty created all things.

For that reason the earth is presented in Genesis 1:2 as being already separated from the rest of the unformed world-matter. Scripture does not occupy our attention in detail with the formation of the things that are above, except we are told that on the fourth day the Lord established the lights in the firmament; even then the viewpoint is entirely earthy. In Genesis 1 there is not even mention of the creation of the angels; still less are we given a glimpse of things in the highest heavens. But the formation of the earth and all that belongs to the earthly creation are described in detail.

The earth was without form and void (תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ) and the Spirit of God moved or brooded upon the waters. Scripture gives us the impression that through this twofold factor or working of God, namely, the quickening brooding of the Holy Spirit and the forming speech of God, each separate creature received existence and form, life and place, in the beautiful whole of God's mighty work of creation. We may note, too, that these different creatures were called and formed in a very definite order. There was a very definite, regular, and gradual ascent in the work of God's creation, from the inorganic to the organic, from the plant to the animal, and from the animal to man, in whom the temporal, earthly creation reached its climax.

The First Day

God first created the light, for "darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Gen. 1:2), that is, over the tremendous space of the universe. There was as yet no light, nor was this darkness the same darkness of our present night. Our darkness is a creature: God forms the light and creates the darkness (Isa. 45:7). But the "darkness upon the face of the deep" was absolutely negative; it was the absence of all life and of all movement. Our night is only a shadow; the original darkness was absolute. For that reason God first created the light. Light is life (John 1:4). Physical light is the life of matter. It is movement, vibration.

How must we conceive of the operation of that light as God created it on the first day? Was that light, even as the light of our sun today, concentrated in a certain center? On that first day did the earth rotate on its axis causing the change of day and night, as it does today? Were all things still without movement, and did God call the light in the morning of each of the first three days, and did he recall it in the evening? Many expositors of scripture prefer this view, and scripture itself does not give us a definite answer; yet for several reasons we prefer the view that the earth rotated, causing the change of day and night.

First, if the light were recalled at the end of every day, there would really have been no night and no change of day and night proper, but a sinking back of the universe into the original, absolute darkness—something that is not acceptable. Second, light is a creature of God that certainly was not annihilated at the end of every day, but the light received existence through the word of God, and

through that word the light was undoubtedly preserved from the very first day of creation. Third, on the fourth day the heavenly bodies were created as bearers and centers of the light that had been created on the first day so that in those heavenly bodies the light was concentrated; yet on the fourth day no other light was created than was created on the first day. The light that was created on the first day is the same as we know it and undoubtedly was also on that first day concentrated in a certain center. Through that first concentration of the light, the change of day and night was created, the night being really nothing else than a shadow of turning.

This also means that on the first day heat was created. Light and heat are closely connected with each other. The chaos was darkness, and with that darkness there also reigned absolute cold. With the light, the heat was also formed, the heat which is one of the indispensable conditions for all life. Both light and heat are indispensable. They are the life of matter, revealing themselves in electric and magnetic powers; they are also indispensable for the life of plant, the animal, and above all for man.

Light is also the basis of fellowship in the entire creation of God. Through the light, creation stands in fellowship with God. God saw the light, and he judged that it was very good (Gen. 1:4, 31). It proceeded from him, but it also returned to him. In returning, it carried the image of creation to the eye of the creator. This is the unique characteristic of the light, that it emanates and casts its rays upon the things that are seen, reflects from those things, and carries the image of those things to the eye that perceives them. Light is the basis and indispensable condition not only for the fellowship of creation with God, but also for the bond of fellowship among the creatures mutually. Light moves with a velocity of 186,000 miles per second, returns from the object that it reaches, and carries the image of that object to the eye of animal and man. In the light we see light (Ps. 36:9). In the light, heaven and earth, men, animals, and plants have fellowship with one another. The light is the life of the creation of God.

For that reason this physical light is both the indispensable condition and the image of a higher light. To that higher light man was originally adapted. The eternal Word, who is the light of the world and in the world, is the emanation and revelation of the thoughts of God in his creatures. That eternal Word also was the life of man, the one who enlightened man's intellect. Through that light, of which sinful man has only a very small remnant, man was able not only to perceive things by means of the physical light, but by that higher light he could also know the things and contemplate the thoughts of God in all creation. That light of creation is also the image of the spiritual light, the light of love, poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit so that we can know God in love, bear his life within us, have fellowship with him in true knowledge, and presently know him even as we are known.

The Second Day

On the second day God created the firmament, the רָקִיעַ, which made separation between the waters above and the waters below:

> And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day (Gen. 1:6–8).

Notice that scripture states emphatically that God *made* the firmament. We conceive of the situation on the second day in such a way that the separation between the heavens and the earth, between the waters above and the waters below, was not made for the first time on the second day, but that on that

day the firmament was created, and that from then on that firmament must serve as a means to establish, to cause, and to maintain that separation. Even as on the fourth day the light was not created, but only the light bearers as instruments for the radiation of the light, so also on the second day the firmament was created to be a means to separate the waters above from the waters below.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). God immediately created the chaos of the world above and the world below, of the heavens and the earth. From the beginning there must have been a certain separation between the things above and the things below. The earth was covered with water, that is, the water which was below. To this water belong the oceans, seas, rivers, and lakes, as well as the entire atmosphere that encircles the earth. The clouds, therefore, do not belong to the waters that are above, as many think, for the simple reason that the waters that are above are presented in the text as being above the firmament. Even as the chaotic earth was covered with water, so also the heavens were covered with the same chaotic waters. These waters below and above were separated. Before the firmament was formed, they were kept separated by the immediate power of God. On the second day God formed a means whereby the things above and the things below remain separated until the end of the world. That means is the firmament, the beautiful blue ocean of the heavens, as we can view it with our eyes on a clear day.

Science tells us that this wonderful and beautiful ocean, this splendid dome of the heavens, consists indeed of a very fine matter. Nowhere in all space is there an absolute vacuum. The entire universe is filled with a certain matter. Also the blue firmament is nothing else than a deep and wide ocean of ether. Thus the scripture teaches that the original word for *firmament* (רָקִיעַ) has the meaning of "that which is beaten out, spread out." It is very well possible that the Lord created the firmament by spreading out, or beating out, the waters below and the waters above, thus creating that very fine and invisible matter that we call ether, which fills the entire universe.

The conception that the earth is flat and covered with a dome, from which proceeds the rain, is certainly not according to scripture. Already the prophet Isaiah spoke of the circle of the earth (Isa. 40:22). Nor does Genesis 1 support the idea that the earth is flat. Scripture reveals to us the formation of the heavens and the earth as they really exist. This is very beautifully expressed in regard to the firmament in Job 37:18: "Hast thou with him spread out the sky, which is strong, and as a molten looking glass?"

Rather, we conceive of the firmament as the ocean in which the heavenly bodies move and are kept in their own orbits. The presentation of scripture is not that the heavenly bodies are kept in their orbits by means of the power of gravity, but instead by means of the power of the firmament, which encircles the earth and all the heavenly bodies on every side. Space is not empty, but completely filled. In that full space one body is separated from all others by means of the firmament that God put in the midst of the waters to make separation between the waters above and the waters below.

This is also the presentation of Revelation 6:14: "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places." When the end of all things is reached, the Lord removes the firmament which he made in the beginning to make separation between the things above and the things beneath. The firmament departs. When it departs, the stars fall from heaven, and everything is removed out of its place.

The Third Day

The act of creation on the third day was twofold. God caused the dry land to appear out of the

waters that were below, and he created the world of plants. Of the creation of the dry land, Genesis 1:9–10 says:

> And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.

Scripture does not offer the conception that the solid earth, in distinction from the waters, was created for the first time on the third day. The text does not state that the Lord created the earth out of the water, but that he commanded the waters to be gathered into one place and called the dry land to appear (וְתֵרָאֶה הַיַּבָּשָׁה). We therefore get the impression that on the third day the Almighty, through his word of power, wrought in the inmost bowels of the earth and caused the earth's crust to rise upward, while causing the bottom of the sea to sink down. The waters were gathered into one place, while the dry land appeared from out of the shoreless waters.

According to the presentation of scripture, it should also be noted that the Lord did not create many oceans, seas, and continents, as we know them now, but he gathered the waters into one place and formed originally only one continent. We conceive of this part of the work of creation on the third day in this manner for more than one reason. First, this is actually the presentation of Genesis 1:9: "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear." Second, as yet there was no need of many continents or of a very large continent of dry land, because man and animals had not yet developed. Third, 2 Peter 3:5 gives us the same impression, namely, that before the flood the dry land was much more limited than it is at present: "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water."

The apostle Peter is speaking about the first world as it existed before the flood. He describes that world with a view to the mockers who will arise in the latter days with their scornful remark, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (v. 4). The idea is that these mockers deny the return of Christ and the destruction of this first world. The apostle replies that these mockers are willingly ignorant, because it is not true that this world, as we know and see it at present, is the world as it was created in the beginning. The first world existed in and out of the water. We get the impression that the first world not only arose out of the water by the powerful, creative word of God, but also that in that first world the dry land was surrounded by water on every side. The dry land, therefore, was very limited. At the time of Noah, there were mockers who simply denied that the world could ever perish by a flood, even though they were surrounded by water. The apostle continues: "Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished" (v. 6). Of the present world and its end he writes: "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (v. 7).

Also today there are mockers. Even as the mockers of the time before the flood were surrounded by the water that presently would become their grave, so the mockers after the flood walk in the midst of the fire that will consume the ungodly. So we get the impression that the world as it existed before the deluge differed considerably from the present earth—a difference that evidently consisted in that the first world had much more water than the present, while the dry land was much more limited.

Besides, in the light of such an idea of the first world, it is also possible to explain many other things. For instance, we are able to form a proper conception of the deluge. It becomes clear that the flood indeed could have covered the entire earth—a fact that many still seek to deny, in spite of the

clear language of scripture to the contrary. In this light we are also able to form some conception of the way in which the flood took place. Genesis 7 speaks not only of the rain that was upon the earth forty days and forty nights, but also of the fountains of the great deep that were broken up and the windows of heaven that were opened (vv. 11–12).

All of this indicates that at the time of the flood tremendous changes were wrought in the earth's crust. In the deluge parts of the earth's crust were raised by the almighty power of the Lord, and continents other than that which was formed on the third day came into existence. By means of the raising of the earth's crust, whereby other continents were formed, the water was cast by tremendous tidal waves over the entire dry land, as it was formed on the third day, so that for a time the whole earth was covered again with water. In this vein, we would also like to explain that with the flood the rain cloud was formed, so when the sun shone through the glistering drops of water, the rainbow was seen in the heavens. Before the flood there was no rainbow for the simple reason that the Lord God watered the face of the ground by a mist that arose from the earth (Gen. 2:5–6)—something that is in harmony with the fact that the dry land in the first world was very limited and was surrounded by water on all sides.

The Lord God created more on the third day. Not just the bare land, but also the grass-covered field and the earth, as it was adorned with trees and herbs, was prepared on the third day by the word of the Lord. Of the creation of the vegetable world, Genesis 1:11–13 states:

> And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day.

First, with respect to the creation of the plant world, scripture presents the earth itself as producing the plants through the powerful and creative word of God and through the quickening influence of the Holy Spirit. Not the seed is first, but the plant itself. This has nothing to do with the theory of evolution, as if the earth itself produced seed and plant. This is a work of creation. God himself called forth the plant through his creative word. The plant is a living creature. It breathes, lives, is active, and takes unto itself materials from the world about itself—from the ground, from the air—and it changes these and produces the ripe fruit. Yet it is the lowest kind of living creature. In it there is no breath of life. It is entirely earthy. The plant is taken from the earth and is bound to the earth. It is not free, but is rooted in the ground whence it is taken. In this respect it is distinguished from the animal.

Second, Genesis 1 presents the world of plants as being divided into three classes. First, there is the דֶּשֶׁא (*grass*), from דָּשָׁא (*to sprout*). Second, there is the עֵשֶׂב (*herb*), indicating generally the plants that are nourishment for the animals and man. Third, there is the עֵץ פְּרִי (*fruit tree*). By means of the constantly repeated phrase "after his kind," these classes or families of plants are presented as being distinct and incapable of intermixing:

> And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:11–12).

All intermixture of the different kinds of plants is here excluded. The plant bears its own seed. The fruit tree brings forth fruit after its kind and has its own seed in itself.

Third, concerning the significance of the world of plants, we observe that it is a means of communication between the lifeless earth, the ground, and the moving creature, man and beast. Man

and beast live out of the earth, as do the plants, but not directly. Man cannot eat the ground any more than the animal can, neither can they develop and grow out of the ground. The plant offers man and beast the fruit of its labor. Especially the fruit tree is a beautiful image of this truth. It stands as a servant of man and beast with outstretched arms to offer them the fruit of its labor. The plant prepares from the earth the fruit necessary for the nourishment of the moving creatures.

Besides, the plant makes the earth a fitting dwelling place. It adorns the earth with its beauty, spreads a soft carpet over her surface, and offers the moving creature its refreshing shadow. The desert is no dwelling place. In the sprouting earth is life and beauty.

The plant also has a rich symbolical significance. It longs for, turns to the light, and strives on high, to the heavens. In this it symbolizes the seeking of the things above. The world of plants summons us to seek not the things that are on the earth, but the things that are in heaven, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1). Finally, the plants, according to scripture, have a rich individual symbolism: the vine and the cedar, the oak and the mustard seed, the seed of grain that dies in the earth and is quickened again, the thorn and the thistle—all these are in their lives and mutual relationships so many images of the kingdom of heaven.

The Fourth Day

The creation week can be divided in such a way that during the first three days God prepared a dwelling place for the living creature that he created in the last three days. As the first three days are introduced by the creation of the light, so also the second group of days is introduced by the formation of the light bearers in the firmament.

> And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day (Gen. 1:14–19).

No one, according to human wisdom, would have thought of presenting the order of creation in such a way that the light appeared on the first day of creation, but the heavenly bodies, the light bearers, were not formed until the fourth day. If the narrative of creation were not revelation, given to God's people by him who created all things and who alone can inform them how all things were formed, but were the product of human reflection and philosophy, the sequence would certainly have been presented in reverse order. But in reality the light and the light bearers were called into existence as scripture presents the order to us.

The theory that unbelieving scientists offer us as having preference over the presentation of Genesis 1 must not only be definitely rejected, but also cannot be compared, from the viewpoint of wisdom and beauty, with the presentation of Holy Writ. According to their theory, all things must be explained from an original fiery mist that gradually cooled off in a mysterious way, cooled off in a still more mysterious way in one place faster than in another, through which cooling-off process it lost its balance, began to rotate and turn, separated from itself tremendously large lumps that in their turn rotated, cooled off, and became stars and planets that moved about fixed centers of the original fiery mist. But this foolishness of human wisdom and science leaves all the main questions unanswered. Whence was that fiery mist? How did it happen that it cooled off? Why did that fiery mist cool off in such a way that this cooling-off process occurred in one place faster than in another so that rotation

was caused?

Scripture, however, gives us an entirely different conception of things. Not a fiery mist, but God is the author of all things. In the very first beginning there was no light glowing from a fiery mass, but the original darkness was over the deep. Not the heavenly bodies, the stars and planets, but the light was first created by God in order to form the earth in that light and to stretch the firmament. Only on the fourth day were the light bearers—sun, moon, and stars—given a place in the firmament.

The presentation of scripture is that the light was not caused by sun, moon, and stars, but that it was concentrated in the heavenly bodies in order that it might beam forth from fixed centers in the firmament. Light itself was created independently of the heavenly bodies as we know them and as they shine in the firmament. Nor was the light as it was created on the first day annihilated on the fourth day in order to make place for another light; but the originally created light was on the fourth day separated, divided, spread, and fixed in special light bearers in order that they should cause separation between light and darkness, between day and night. On the first day God created the light, and on the fourth day he created the light bearers and fixed centers for the light that already existed.

We must remember that the viewpoint from which Genesis 1 narrates the creation of the light bearers is entirely earthy. Scripture speaks of two great lights, of which the one is called the greater, the other the lesser light. Science assures us that there are lights in the firmament that are so tremendously remote from the earth that thousands of years are necessary for their light to reach the earth, though light has a velocity of 186,000 miles per second. Some of these heavenly bodies, science assures us, are much greater than our sun. We have no objection: gladly we will believe the scientists who investigate the heavens and take them at their word. God is great, and he creates great things. But we protest as soon as the men of science present these facts in order to prove that the creation narrative which speaks of two great lights, our sun and moon, cannot be correct. It may be ever so true that there are greater lights in the firmament than our sun and moon. It is equally true that from the viewpoint of the earth, the sun and the moon are the two great lights. They are nearest to the earth, and they shed most clearly and most strongly their light upon all of our earthly life. They dominate day and night.

The Fourfold Purpose of the Heavenly Bodies

Scripture tells us the purpose for which the Lord God put these light bearers in the firmament of the heavens. They are there, first, in order to give light upon the earth, and, second, to make separation between light and darkness and between night and day. Through the concentration of the light in definite centers in the universe, a certain antithesis is created in nature, which is an image of the spiritual antithesis between light and darkness. If the light were simply spread through the firmament instead of being concentrated in definite heavenly bodies, there would have been nothing else than light. Day and night, the antithesis of light and darkness, would not exist. But this is not reality. The light is concentrated in definite bodies, light bearers, in the firmament; and through the rotation of the earth, whereby it turns first the one side and then the other toward the light, the contrast is caused between day and night. Thus everywhere in the firmament the antithesis is created; God creates the light and forms the darkness (Isa. 45:7).

This darkness is not to be confused with the original darkness over the deep. In that darkness there was neither light nor life; it was the darkness of the absence of all being. In nothing there is no movement, no light, and no life. That, however, is not the case with our night. Not only do the heavens in the glorious and rich night declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1); not only do they pour forth

abundantly the speech concerning God; not only is the clear canopy of heaven sown with rich and gloriously scintillating diamonds of light; not only does the moon pour forth her mellow light over the earth, but also the night is nothing else than a deep shadow caused by the miracle of the earth itself. In the night the sun shines indeed, but we stand in the dark shadow of the earth. Actually the night is nothing but a shadow of turning. The clear night is glorious. Whether in the new creation there will be no night at all; whether there will never be a shadow of turning, nothing else than the eternal light; whether the expression, "there shall be no night there" (Rev. 21:25), must be understood literally is for us a question. In any event, day and night are beautiful, each in its own way.

Third, the Lord put the lights in the firmament not only to give light on the earth and not only to make separation between light and darkness, between day and night, but also for signs (Gen. 1:14). Scripture does not mean that these lights are signs in the sense in which the heathen magi viewed them. They looked into the starry heavens in order to read the future and to discern from the stars the success of their own enterprises. Holy scripture, however, always warns the people of God against such superstitions. God's people must not walk in the darkness of the lie but in the light of revelation. Yet the great lights in the firmament and the stars of heaven are in many ways images and signs of spiritual things. The earthly is the image of the heavenly; the temporal is the image of the eternal. The natural antithesis of light and darkness is an image of the spiritual antithesis between grace and sin, between God's people and the world, and between Christ and Belial.

As scripture teaches in the clearest language, the sun is the image of God, who is light and in whom there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5), and the image of Christ, the Sun of righteousness, who arises in the night of sin and misery (Mal. 4:2). The night, in its darkness and deep shadow, is the image of the night of sin which is spread in all its horror over the cursed earth. In that evil sense there certainly will be no night in the new creation. Even so, the night is still glorious. Never is the night absolute darkness. The outer darkness mentioned in scripture is not represented by the night. The soft light of the moon proclaims ever again that, although the sun has sunk below the western horizon so that we cannot see it, and the shadow of the night has covered us, the sun will presently rise again in the east, for the moon borrows the light from the sun in order to reflect the sunlight to the earth in the depth of the night. The moon is proof of the presence of the sun, even when in the night the sun has disappeared from sight. Therefore, the moon in the night is an image and sign of the promises of God, which assure us in the night of misery and death that presently, at the consummation of all things, the Sun of righteousness shall arise in order never again to disappear, but to inaugurate an eternal day of glorious, eternal life.

In many ways the stars, too, are signs of the kingdom of God. In their multitude is an image of the multitude which no man can number. In their glory they are images of the glory of the children of God, while in their constellations and numbers they proclaim loudly the things of God's covenant. The numbers one, three, four, and seven are displayed before our eyes in that glorious firmament, and they speak to us of God in his oneness and his three persons, of the world, of God's covenant, and of his everlasting kingdom. Indeed, "night unto night sheweth knowledge" (Ps. 19:2). The lights in the heavens, the lesser and the greater, and the stars in the firmament are put there as signs of the everlasting kingdom and covenant of God.

Fourth, scripture teaches that these lights serve the purpose of ruling over the day and the night (Gen. 1:16–18). They do this because they determine definite seasons, days, months, and years. Through them the existence of man and beast is regulated, divided, and ordered. It is very evident that the sun rules by its light during the day, and the moon rules during the night. Man and beast and plant turn themselves to the light, and everything has life and glory in that light. When the evening falls, the

flower closes, the beast turns to its stable, and man rests in sleep from the toil of his labor. Then the colors grow dim, and the glory of creation disappears.

Everything strives for the light. Even the bosom of the ocean lifts itself up in the tides to the light of the sun and moon. The lights rule in every way the life of plants, animals, and man. On the evening of the fourth day a rich part of the work of creation was finished. Everything then awaited the creation of the living creature, the living soul, especially man, to view all the riches of this glory, to rejoice in it, and to glorify and praise God the creator.

The Fifth and Sixth Days

The creation of the animals took place on the fifth and sixth days. On the fifth day fish and fowl were created, and on the sixth day the cattle, the creeping things, and the beasts of the earth:

> And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day. And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:20–25).

It draws our attention here that the animal is called a "living soul" (נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה). In this respect the animal is different and distinct from the plant, which is not a living soul, although indeed it is a living creature. In the animal the work of creation ascends to the living soul. In being a living soul, the animal, especially the higher animal, is related to man. It approaches man most closely. Indeed, the soul of the animal is different from the soul of man; this is evident from the origin of the animal, from the way in which it was created. By the creative word of God the animal was produced from the water and from the earth. It was not, as man, formed by the very hand of the creator, nor was the breath of life breathed into its nostrils.

The soul of the animals is in their blood. The living soul (*anima*) of the animals is not a spiritual entity, but is one with their material existence. This does not alter the fact that in the animal we meet for the first time the living soul in the creation of God. In a way, we may say that the animal in this respect is created after the image of man. Much of the life of man is reflected in the life of the animal, especially in the animal that lives closely to man. First, in distinction from the plant, the animal is free from the earth; the animal is not bound to the soil but moves freely about. Second, the animal has senses and with them, though in a lower and different sense from that which is the case with man, the animal perceives the world around him. The animal can see, hear, feel, taste, and smell. With some animals these senses are even much more sharply developed than with man. Third, it cannot be denied that in the animal there is clearly discernible the action of a living soul.

For want of a better term, we usually denote this psychological action by the word *instinct*. This instinct, this action of the animal as a living soul, is very rich and shows a good deal of similarity with the psychological action of man. To a certain extent the animal can discern and know the world about him; he perceives the things around him and distinguishes them. A dog knows its master and distinguishes him from all other men. A horse knows its rider. The bird knows its nest. It is a well-known fact that some kinds of animals, for instance, the ants, often manifest a keen ingenuity and not infrequently display a certain sagacity in their work. Besides, the animal has memory. There are

certain animals that never forget when one offends them or does them harm. There is even discernible in the animal a certain higher life, a reflection of the moral life of man. How thankful, for instance, can a dog be for the food that is set before him by his master. How faithfully he can be attached to his master, even to the extent that he gladly gives his life for him or lets himself be starved on the grave of his master. Moreover, the animal shows love to its young, and when danger threatens, he gives his own life for them. We even do not say too much when we assert that in some kinds of animals there is manifest a certain consciousness of guilt. These are but a few phenomena in which the life of the animal as a living soul is revealed, and in which he becomes manifest as created according to the image of man.

It is not surprising, therefore, that modern unbelief draws from this similarity the conclusion that man has developed himself from the animal. As long as we consider that which is purely earthly in the life of man and animal, this conclusion seems to be quite warranted. However, as soon as we call attention to the higher, spiritual life of man, the difference between him and the animal is very striking. The animal was not created after the image of God. The animal speaks to us and looks up to us, but it does not have any knowledge of God and cannot live in communion with him. For that reason we do not speak of a rational and moral life of the animal.

The truth is that man was called to appear and act as priest-king of the animal. Sin spoiled and marred this relation so that the animal does not know man anymore, and man does not know the animal as Adam did in the state of righteousness. But by grace the righteous again knows the life of the beast. God's child, therefore, will never maltreat the animal and will not beat it or curse it when it does not immediately obey his will, but much rather will care for it as priest-king of creation. That is his calling, for God created living souls when he formed the animals.

Further, with regard to the creation of the animals we note, first, their creation from the respective elements in which they move and live. Fish and fowl were evidently created from the waters. The creation of the fowl from the waters evidently points to the fact that the firmament was formed from the waters. The land animals were created out of the earth.

Second, as with the creation of the plants, so also of the animals, it is said that they were created after their kind. The animals, therefore, are definitely limited to their own species. There is separation and distinction.

Third, Genesis 1:20–25 distinguishes these different kinds of animals: All the animals that live in the waters, including not only the great sea monsters (הַתַּנִּינִם הַגְּדֹלִים), but also every living soul that lives in the waters (כל־נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה הָרֹמֶשֶׂת אֲשֶׁר שָׁרְצוּ הַמָּיִם); the birds, every winged fowl (כָּל־עוֹף כָּנָף); the land animals, who are mentioned in the order according to which they live nearer to man or are more remote from him: the cattle (בְּהֵמָה), the creeping thing (רֶמֶשׂ), and the beast of the earth (חַיְתוֹ־אֶרֶץ), which is the wild beast that lives in the jungle.

Fourth, the Lord blesses these living creatures and addresses them. This is entirely in harmony with the fact that these creatures must develop themselves consciously. The will to do this, the urge to develop themselves, is put into their nature by the blessing word of the Most High.

Fifth, the land animal was not created together with the fish and fowl on the fifth day, but together with man on the sixth day. The reason for this is undoubtedly that the land animal stands most closely related to man. The narrative of creation culminates in the creation of man in the image of God.

Chapter 13

The Creation of Man

Man as the Crown of Creation

It stands to reason that special attention is given in scripture to the creation of man, the crown of the earthly works of God. Of the creation of all other creatures, scripture says merely that God called them into existence by the word of his power. But before the creation of man there appears a significant pause: God takes counsel with himself, saying, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Gen 1:26). Then follows the actual statement of man's creation: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (v. 27).

The very form of the creation narrative, therefore, emphasizes the importance of man in relation to God and to all the earthly creation. Man is made the servant-friend of God, and as such he is to be the lord of creation. In him the whole creation is concentrated as in a focal point; through him, in his heart, all the earthly creation is united with the heart of God. All creatures must serve man in order that he can serve his God. Once more our attention is called to man's creation: "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). From the viewpoint of man's creation, the apostle Paul makes a very significant comparison between Adam and Christ: "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45).

The Unity of Man's Creation

From the text in Genesis we learn that the one creative act whereby God gave being to man had two aspects, indicating the two sides of man's nature: the physical and the spiritual. Man is created not by two separate acts of God, but by one creative act, even though this act of God is twofold, or has two aspects.

Often the creation of man is presented as having been accomplished in two distinct stages, by two separate acts of God, the one following the other in time. According to this conception, Genesis 2:7 should read: "God formed a material body out of the dust of the ground; he made it alive by breathing a soul into it; and man became a living soul." In this view man is really two distinct entities or two distinct beings: a physical and a spiritual being, the two being rather mechanically united for a time. Man is really a spirit living in a body. The spirit is the life of that body. In death the spirit departs from the body, and as a result the body dissolves. This crude and philosophical conception is even applied to the birth of each individual human being when it is presented as if the body is born from the parents while God creates the soul. Man, according to this view, is really not one being, but two, even as he was created by two distinct acts of the creator.

It is true that the Bible distinguishes between man's body and his soul. It is not correct to assume that the word *soul* always has the same connotation in scripture. Sometimes it denotes the whole man, as in Genesis 2:7 and many other places. Sometimes it denotes man's earthly life; often the original word for *soul* is rendered by *life* in our English Bible. Sometimes it denotes the seat of our earthly

life, of our thinking and our willing, and of our earthly emotions. It also denotes the personal spirit, that aspect of our being that continues to exist even through physical death. Does not the Lord admonish us: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul" (Matt. 10:28)? Does not the wise man teach us that the dust shall return to the earth, "and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7)? Does not the rich man in the parable open his eyes in hell, even when his body is being buried? Is not Lazarus carried into Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:22–23)? And does not the apostle John on Patmos behold "the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God . . . and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4)?

All these passages plainly show that we can make a distinction between man's body and his soul. They prove, too, that man's body can be and is dissolved in death, while the spiritual soul continues to exist, and they prove that even after death the spirit of man continues to exist consciously. There is no such thing as a soul sleep. It is true that death is often called *sleep* in scripture, and sleep it is, from the viewpoint of the body and earthly things and with respect to the coming resurrection when the body shall be raised from the sleep of death. But the soul, or spirit, of man cannot sleep. Even when at night the body relaxes in the repose of sleep, the soul is not sleeping, but is frequently very busy. Sleep is a physical phenomenon. Though in physical death man may fall into his long sleep as far as the body is concerned, his spirit is conscious through it all. The malefactor on the cross receives the promise that he shall be with Christ in paradise that very day (Luke 23:43), which is different from a promise that he should fall asleep. Luke 16:22–31 presents Lazarus and the rich man as existing consciously after their deaths, each in his respective place. The apostle Paul teaches that when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, we shall have a house with God "not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1). The apostle expects to be with Christ when he departs (Phil. 1:23). Everywhere the Bible pictures heaven not as a dormitory of sleeping souls, but as resounding with the praise of the spirits of just men made perfect.

Man as a Living Soul

All of this, however, does not alter the fact that man is not two, but one being. By the one act of God, man's physical and psychical are so closely connected with his spiritual parts and so delicately intertwined that he is one personal, intellectual, volitional, rational, and moral creature.

It is in this manner that Genesis 2:7 presents the creation of man. Notice that this passage does not merely refer to man's spiritual being, but that it calls the whole man "a living soul." The passage does not tell us how God created man's body and how God made man's soul, but it instructs us that God formed the whole man. God formed man out of the dust of the ground; he breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. The whole man, therefore, is a living soul. By the expression "living soul" man is put in the same class as the animals as far as his physical existence is concerned. The animals are called living souls; man, too, is a living soul and is classified from his physical side with the animals.

What is meant concerning the nature of man by the expression "living soul"? That man is a living soul means that he is a being who moves freely upon the face of the earth, as do the animals. The plant is not a living soul: it is rooted in the soil. It is not a moving creature. Living souls are those that move upon the earth by an impulse from within. When scripture calls man a living soul, it emphasizes that he is of the earth, earthy. Fish and fowl are produced by the waters through the creative word of God: they are earthy. The animals are called forth out of the ground by the almighty word of God: they, too, are earthy. Man is formed from the dust of the ground: therefore, he also is presented as

earthy. A living soul is an earthy creature. This is emphasized elsewhere in scripture. In 1 Corinthians 15:47–48, after he has called attention to the fact that the first man Adam was made a living soul, the apostle writes: "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly."

On his physical side, man is closely related to the earth whence he is taken. He lives an earthly life. He cannot reach to heaven. He is dependent on the earth for his very subsistence. From the earth his life must be constantly sustained and replenished. He has earthly sensations and perceptions: an earthly eye, with which he perceives earthly things; an earthly ear that can hear earthly sounds; earthly senses of taste, touch, and smell that can bring him into contact with earthly objects. He is bound by ties of earthly love and friendship. Even his thinking and willing assume earthly forms, in contrast to those things which eye cannot see, ear cannot hear, and which cannot arise in the heart of man, but which only the Spirit of God can reveal unto him (1 Cor. 2:9–10). This also implies that man is mortal, although as he came forth from the hands of his creator death had no dominion over him. Yet he was not beyond the reach of death. He was not created in the state of immortality. It was possible for him to fall and to die. In this sense man was made a living soul.

It is important that we understand this, because it will clarify many things that are otherwise difficult to explain. It explains, for instance, why God's revelation of the things of the kingdom of heaven must come to us in the form of human language and an earthly Bible. It can make us understand why in the Bible the heavenly things are pictured to us in earthly form; for example, the heavenly Jerusalem is pictured as a huge city with a golden street and pearly gates (Rev. 21:10–27).

It explains, too, why we must be changed in order to inherit the kingdom of God. That kingdom of God is heavenly, but we are earthy, and "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50). This mortal must put on immortality; this natural, or psychical, must put on the spiritual; this earthy must put on the heavenly before we can possibly inherit the eternal kingdom of glory (vv. 42–44, 53). It also explains why spiritually healthy children of God, who live in hope and seek the city that hath foundations (Heb. 11:10), are nevertheless frequently reluctant to depart from this present life. Often, even in old age, if you inquire of them whether they would not rather go to heaven, they will reply that their earthly life is still sweet to them. The Christian is betwixt two, the earthy and the heavenly. In regeneration he receives the beginning of a new life, which is both holy and heavenly. But as long as he is in the body, he is earthy and bound to the earth with a thousand ties, the severing of which is painful. "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. 5:4). Yet it is quite necessary that we be unclothed in order that we may be clothed in our heavenly house, for man was made a living soul, and as a living soul he cannot possibly inherit the kingdom of God.

Man's Excellence

Let us also note the distinctiveness, the great excellence, of this living soul that is called man. This is indicated by the twofold creative act that called him into being. Although he is of the earth, earthy, yet the earth did not simply produce him; neither was he merely called forth from the earth, as were the animals; nor is there a continuous line of evolution from the lower creation to him. He cannot be explained from the animals. The scriptural narrative of the creation of man stands directly opposed to the Darwinian theory of the descent of man, because not only are the animals all created after their kind, but also the very way in which man was created separates him from the animals, even while it

relates him to them.

There is an ascending scale of creatures, but each species is created after its own kind. There is no gradual transition. The missing link is indeed missing. We can even say that in the animals there is a certain prefiguration of man. In a certain sense the animal is created in the image of man, as we have explained before. Within their limited sphere the animals evince a reflection of the psychical, rational life of man. But withal there is no gradual transition from the animals to man. There is a sharp boundary between the one and the other, fixed immutably by their creation. The animal is called out of the ground. Man is formed out of the dust of the ground by the very fingers of God, and God spirated into his nostrils the breath of life. Thus man became a living soul (Gen. 2:7).

As to man's physical side, he is formed by God's hand, which is an indication of man's excellence. The animals are produced by the earth; man is formed by God's creative skill. The living soul that is called man—Adam—is related to the earth and taken from the dust; but by the creative act of God, man is elevated above the earth. Even though through man's bodily organism, being closely related to the earth because he is formed of the same substance, he is capable of living and moving on the earth, has direct contact with it, can enter into communion with its creatures, share his life with them, use their resources as a means to labor with them, and have his own life supported and replenished from the earth—yet by the very fact that he is formed by the fingers of God and not merely called out of the ground, man is separated from the earth and is exalted above it.

Man's relation to the earth is one of freedom, for he is designed to be lord over the earthly creation. Even his physical organism is constructed to be adapted to this lordship. He is made a little lower than the angels, yet over all the earthly creation he must have dominion. He is made mortal in the sense that he is capable of returning to the dust; yet even here he is created in freedom, for death has no direct dominion over him, and he does not have to subject himself to its power. He is limited to the scope of the earthy, and he cannot transcend it; yet within that sphere of things earthly, he stands at the very pinnacle of created things: he is lord. That his physical organism is delicately formed by the fingers of the Almighty, sculpted out of the earth, signifies that it is created as an instrument and manifestation of this lordship. His noble form and his upright position bespeak royalty. His finely shaped hand is formed to sway the scepter. His face—yes, especially his face—distinguishes him from every other creature: it is the face of a king. Even as to his physical side, man was so created by the Almighty that he was capable of bearing the image of God.

There is another distinction between the creation of the animal and that of man. This noble, royal form of man produced by God's own fingers would be meaningless, void of life and contents, except for God's breathing into man's nostrils the breath of life. Man was formed out of the dust of the ground as to his physical side, and at the same time he was formed into a personal, rational, and moral being by the breath of the Holy Spirit into him. In this manner man became a living soul (Gen. 2:7).

This second part of God's creation of man is altogether absent from the creation of the animals. The animals were simply called forth from the ground; nothing more can be said of them. They are material living souls, whose souls are in their blood (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:11). Not so with man: he was made a psychical body, a body that is so delicately constructed that it is fit to be the instrument for a personal spirit. He is formed into a personal, rational, moral spirit by the inbreathing of the Spirit of God. While God with his own hands formed man from the dust of the earth, he at the same time so wrought upon man by the Spirit that this particular living soul, the first Adam, became a personal being with intellect and will, a rational and moral nature, capable of standing in a free covenant relationship of friendship to the living God, capable of being adorned with the image of God "that he

might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love him, and live with him in eternal blessedness, to praise and glorify him."[1] By the two-sided act of God, that of forming man out of the dust and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life, man was so created that he was capable of occupying his position as lord of the earthly creation and servant of the living God.

Man's Limitation

This is not only man's nobility insofar as his creation is concerned, but also his limitation. He is one physical-psychical, personal being. He is related to God, yet he is earthy. He is lord over the earthly creatures, yet his life is dependent on the very creation over which he has dominion. He is free, yet capable of falling into the bondage of sin and death. He lives and is able to live, but is also mortal and capable of dying and returning to the dust. The first man Adam was made a living soul (Gen. 2:7). He was not the last man. He was not a quickening spirit. Far above the first man Adam is the last man Christ—as far as the spiritual is above the natural, the incorruptible above the corruptible, the immortal above the mortal, the heavenly above the earthy (1 Cor. 15:42–45).

Nor is there a continuous process of evolution from the first man into the last man. Between the first man Adam and the last man Christ lies the deep, dark way of sin and death, and between them operates the wonder of God's grace. The first man Adam, who was made a living soul, disregarded his honorable position, violated the covenant of God, and fell into the abyss of sin and death, dragging with him all who bear the image of the earthy. But God in his inscrutable purpose of election and redemption had provided some better thing for his people. Even the fall of the first man must serve the purpose of election and redemption, for it must make room for the coming of the last man, a quickening Spirit (v. 45). He came in the fullness of time, the Lord from heaven sent by the Father, God and man united in the divine person of the Son of God. He is the Lord from heaven. He will make us like unto himself so that through his power this mortal will put on immortality, this corruptible will put on incorruption, and we shall be able to inherit the kingdom of God. As we have borne the image of the earthy, so we shall also bear the image of the heavenly through our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 49).

Chapter 14

Created after the Image of God

The Idea of the Image of God

> And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (Gen. 1:26–27).

What do these verses imply regarding the image of God?

The general meaning of the phrase "image of God" is clear enough. *The image of God signifies that man was so created that there was a creaturely likeness of God in man, that there was a reflection of the perfections of God in man*. This is plain from Genesis 1:26: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

There is an interpretation that would read this text as if it intended to make a distinction between *image* and *likeness* in such a way that image refers to the body, while likeness refers to the soul of man. But this distinction is arbitrary. It is much more natural to understand that likeness is meant as a further definition of image; therefore, the text means "Let us make man in our image, in such a way that the image is also a likeness." All images are not likenesses. There are images that only represent the objects for which they stand. For instance, the images of the cherubim in the holy of holies were representative images, but not necessarily meant to be likenesses of spiritual beings. But man is so made in the image of God that the image is also a likeness; man's very nature reflects some of God's own perfections. There is, therefore, a creaturely likeness of God in man.

The Image of God in the History of Dogma

Just what belongs to this image of God in man? This question is not always answered in the same way. Augustine made a distinction between image and likeness and explained that the image consisted especially in the knowledge of the truth, while the likeness implied the love of virtue.[1] This is an arbitrary distinction.

Later, during the time of scholasticism, the image was explained as referring to mere natural attributes of the soul, such as reason and knowledge, intellect and will; while likeness was a spiritual, ethical concept, including righteousness, holiness, and true spiritual knowledge of God.

This led to the Roman Catholic theory of the image of God as a *donum superadditum* (*super-added* or *extra gift*). According to Rome, man is *naturally* good, and man with the additional gift of the likeness of God, according to which he is able to seek the higher, spiritual things of God, was spiritually perfect. Man, therefore, can lose the image of God and still be naturally good, although he is no longer able to perform spiritual works. That this theory is very closely related to the theory of common grace goes without saying.

Others identified image and likeness and taught that the image of God included both natural endowments—man's rational and moral nature, his conscience and will, his freedom and immortality—as well as man's original righteousness and holiness, his conformity to the will of God. Some, especially among the Greek theologians, even went to the extreme of letting the image of God consist

exclusively in the natural gifts of man's rational and moral nature.

The Remonstrants and Socinians identified the image of God in man with the dominion God gave him over all the earthly creation. The Reformers, it seems, were inclined to limit the image of God to man's original integrity, his true knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness. Especially Lutheran theologians were very explicit on this point. They denied that the rational soul of man is part of the image of God, and they argued that man's reason and will cannot be lost; while plainly, according to the Bible, man lost the image of God, from which it follows that man's reason and soul cannot possibly belong to that image that was lost through sin.

It is sometimes suggested that Calvin includes more in the image of God than what belonged to Adam's original rectitude, because he speaks of the image as being nearly wiped out after the fall. To say the least, this is very doubtful, because he writes:

> But our definition of the image seems not to be complete until it appears more clearly what the faculties are in which man excels, and in which he is to be regarded as a mirror of the divine glory. This, however, cannot be better known than from the remedy provided for the corruption of nature.[2]

Later in the same paragraph Calvin refers to the contents of this restored image by quoting from Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:24 and explaining:

> We must now see what particulars Paul comprehends under this renovation. In the first place, he mentions knowledge; and, in the second, true righteousness and holiness. Hence we infer, that at the beginning the image of God was manifested by light of intellect, rectitude of heart, and the soundness of every part.[3]

Those who suggest that Calvin includes more in the image of God than what belonged to Adam's original rectitude sometimes find evidence in the fact that Calvin speaks of the image of God as being "almost destroyed" (*prope deleta*) after the fall. But the occurrence of "almost destroyed" in the following sentence explains Calvin's meaning:

> Therefore, as the image of God constitutes the entire excellence of human nature, as it shone in Adam before his fall, but was afterwards vitiated and almost destroyed, nothing remaining but a ruin, confused, mutilated, and tainted with impurity, so it is now partly seen in the elect, in so far as they are regenerated by the Spirit.[4]

Calvin certainly teaches here in the strongest terms that what is left of the image of God in man is nothing but miserable ruins and corruption. That man's body and his rational soul belong to this image of God cannot be found in the *Institutes*.

The Image of God in a Wider and Narrower Sense

Later Reformed theologians made a distinction that has found its way into the Reformed churches through preaching and instruction, and that is rather generally accepted as belonging to Reformed doctrine. The distinction is between the image of God in a wider sense and the image of God in a narrower sense. To the image in the wider sense belong man's rationality, morality, and so-called immortality; to the image in the narrower sense belong his true knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness. The wider sense implies all that distinguishes man from the lower animals; the narrower sense is his original state of righteousness. The image in the narrower sense was lost through the fall; the image in the wider sense was retained. Man still possesses the image of God in a wider sense, though he no more possesses his original integrity.

It must be remembered that this distinction is not confessionally Reformed. The Three Forms of

Unity instead leave the impression that they favor the idea of the image of God as limited to man's original integrity: true knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness. The Heidelberg Catechism asks and answers the question:

> Did God create man thus wicked and perverse?
> No; but God created man good, and after his own image—that is, in righteousness and true holiness.[5]

This certainly leaves altogether out of view the image of God in a wider sense and confines the scope of that image to true righteousness and holiness. The Belgic Confession limits the image of God in the same fashion:

> We believe that God created man out of the dust of the earth, and made and formed him after his own image and likeness, good, righteous, and holy, capable in all things to will agreeably to the will of God.[6]

The Canons of Dordt say this about the subject:

> Man was originally formed after the image of God. His understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator, and of spiritual things; his heart and will were upright, all his affections pure, and the whole Man was holy.[7]

The distinction between the image of God in a narrower and in a wider sense, therefore, even though it is embodied in many works on dogmatics and is commonly taught through the media of question books in catechism classes, as well as from the pulpit, has never received official standing in Reformed churches.

This distinction is neither innocent nor without danger to true doctrine. It is dangerous because it prepares room for the further philosophy that there are remnants of the image of God left in fallen man, and that therefore the natural man cannot be wholly depraved. The argument is that man lost the image of God in a narrower sense, but he retained that image in a wider sense. By the wider sense is usually meant that man, in distinction from the animals, still has an immortal, rational soul.

Except for this heresy about man's "immortal soul," very little harm results as long as nothing more is said and as long as it is strictly remembered that nothing of man's original righteousness is contained in this image of God in a wider sense. But the trouble is that words have meaning and that the real meaning of words will assert itself regardless of false distinctions we may try to maintain. The term *image of God* conveys a meaning that cannot very well be applied to a man who is changed into the image of the devil. The concept *image of God* carries a favorable connotation. It denotes goodness—moral, ethical, spiritual integrity. To state that man after the fall is an image bearer of the devil and at the same time to maintain that he still bears the image of God or a remnant of it does not harmonize and is flatly contradictory. So it happens that the distinction between the image of God in a narrower sense and in a wider sense gradually but irresistibly is used to teach that there is still a remnant of man's original righteousness and integrity in fallen man and that he is not totally depraved. It is a distinction that lends itself very easily to support the view of those who insist that there is a certain common grace, by virtue of which natural man is not so depraved as he would have been without that grace. If this is not a denial of the doctrine of total depravity, then words certainly have lost their plain meaning.

The Immortality of the Soul

It may not be superfluous to insert a paragraph here about the so-called immortality of the soul. This is an error that scripture certainly condemns throughout and for which the word of God gives no

iota of proof. It is one of those doctrines that has been inherited by the church from Platonic philosophy, that has simply been received without criticism and without being judged in the light of scripture, and that has been accepted by the church ever since. It has become a generally current opinion that man has an immortal soul. The trouble is that immortality is usually identified with unending existence. When philosophy speaks about immortality, it does not take eternal death and hell into consideration. According to its view, man is either immortal—the soul continues to exist after this life—or physical death ends it all. However, this is not the view of scripture.

Surely, there is continued existence after temporal death, but this is not the same as immortality. The term *immortality* in scripture signifies the state in which man is exempt from death, the state of incorruptibility, of eternal life, which state can be attained only in Christ. No man is by nature immortal, either as to body or soul. No man outside of Christ has an immortal soul. Although it is certainly true that the soul of every man will continue to exist and that the body of every man will be raised from the dust, neither this continued existence nor this resurrection means that he is or will be immortal. The wicked shall suffer eternal death, both in soul and body. Only the righteous shall be raised incorruptible in Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore, we should not follow the language of philosophy, and we should refuse to adopt its terminology. The truth is that man is mortal; he has a body that can die, and so he has a perishable soul. God can destroy both soul and body in hell. *Immortality* is a word that can be applied only to the state of the glorified saints in Christ.

The Image in a Formal and in a Material Sense

If a distinction is to be made in the image of God after which man was created, we prefer to make the distinction between the image in a formal and in a material sense. By the formal sense is meant the fact that man's nature is adapted to bear the image of God. Not every creature is capable of bearing God's image and of showing forth the reflection of God's own ethical perfections of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. It is evident that it requires a rational, moral nature to bear that image of God. By the image of God in a material sense is meant that spiritual, ethical soundness of the human nature according to which man actually shows forth the virtues of knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness. We may distinguish between man as the image bearer, that is, as being *capable of bearing* the image of God, and man as *actually bearing* God's image.

By virtue of his creation, God's breathing into his nostrils the breath of life (Gen. 2:7), man's whole nature became adapted to be the bearer of God's image. This is not the same as saying that he *is* the image of God. But it does mean that he is a personal being with a rational, moral nature, capable of standing in a conscious, personal relation to God, capable of knowledge of God, of righteousness, and of holiness. This capability of being endowed with God's image we would prefer to call God's image in a formal sense. No matter what becomes of man—whether he actually shows forth the beauty and glory of the image of God, or whether he turns into the very opposite and reveals the image of the devil—he can always be distinguished as a creature who ought to show forth God's image. Always he remains the living soul formed by God's fingers out of the dust of the ground and into whose nostrils God breathed originally the breath of life. Always he remains a personal, rational, and moral being, who ought to live in covenant fellowship with the living God.

The Elements of the Image of God

Man was originally created so that he actually possessed the image of God. He was not only

formally adapted to bear God's image, but he was also materially endowed with the spiritual, ethical virtues of that image. These virtues, usually distinguished as true knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness, are often expressed in the one term, *man's original righteousness. This righteousness is the original goodness of man's nature, according to which it was wholly motivated by the love of God, and according to which with all its faculties and powers it moved in the direction of God so that the operation of man's heart, soul, mind, will, and all his strength were in accord with the will of God*. This one virtue of complete integrity is distinguished as true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

That this is the content of the image of God is directly taught in scripture. The Bible presents man's redemption and deliverance from sin as the restoration of the image of God in him, and that image of God, as restored in the redeemed sinner, is said to consist of this true knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness. The apostle tells us in Ephesians 4:23–24 that believers have so learned Christ and are so instructed by the truth as it is in Jesus that they are renewed in the spirit of their mind and that they "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." The admonitions to the believers in Colossians 3:5 are based on the fundamental truth that they "have put off the old man with his deeds" and "have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:9–10).

This idea of the image is confirmed by all the rest of scripture insofar as it has reference to the renewal of man through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Believers are called to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, and not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their mind, that they may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1–2). They must cleanse themselves "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). They were sometime darkness, but now they are light in the Lord, and as children of light they must walk (Eph. 5:8). The Father bestowed great love upon them that they should be called the children of God; now they are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what they shall be; but when it shall be manifest, they shall be like God, for they shall see him as he is (1 John 3:1–2). Everywhere the Bible teaches that redemption and deliverance from sin restores the likeness of God in us and that this likeness consists in a reflection of God's ethical perfections, particularly those of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

By these three spiritual virtues that originally adorned the nature of man, the rectitude of his whole being in relation to God and all things is denoted. *By holiness is meant* not any acquired purity, but *that original rectitude of his nature according to which he was consecrated to God in love with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength*. Adam's whole soul yearned after the living God and had its delight in his favor and fellowship. Man's righteousness was not an imputed righteousness, nor was it acquired. Rather, *man's righteousness was the virtue of his whole nature by which, according to the judgment of God, he was wholly in harmony with the will of God; he was fully capable of doing the will of God, and doing God's will was his delight*. Man's knowledge of God was not a mere intellectual or natural knowledge of the Most High so that he knew who and what God is, nor was it a ready-made system of theology or dogmatics with which Adam was endowed from the beginning. Instead, *man's knowledge of God was that original rectitude of his mind by virtue of which he immediately and spontaneously knew God, both through the revelation of all the works of God round about him and through the direct word of God addressed to him in paradise*. Through this positive knowledge of God, Adam had a living contact with the Most High, the fellowship of

friendship that was his life.

In one word, Adam was good. He was so made that he was quite capable of serving the Lord his creator, of being his representative in all the world—his prophet, to know and to glorify him; his priest, to consecrate himself in all things unto him; his servant-king, to rule in righteousness over the works of God's hand—and of living in perfect fellowship with the Most High.

In this respect the truth differs radically from the Pelagian error. According to the Canons of Dordt, the Pelagians teach:

> . . . that the spiritual gifts, or the good qualities and virtues, such as: goodness, holiness, righteousness, could not belong to the will of man when he was first created, and that these, therefore, could not have been separated therefrom in the fall.
> . . . that in spiritual death the spiritual gifts are not separate from the will of man, since the will in itself has never been corrupted, but only hindered through the darkness of the understanding and the irregularity of the affections; and that, these hindrances having been removed, the will can then bring into operation its native powers, that is, that the will of itself is able to will and to choose, or not to will and not to choose, all manner of good which may be presented to it.[8]

The fundamental error of Pelagianism in all its forms is always that it denies any other righteousness and holiness than that which is the result of the choice and act of the will of man. Hence righteousness and holiness cannot be virtues with which the nature of man was originally endowed. Man could be either righteous or unrighteous, holy or unholy, according as he chose to be. Only the *deed* of righteousness makes a man righteous. According to the same fundamental principle, man could never become corrupt in nature. It may have become more difficult for him to choose for righteousness and holiness because of the fall; but essentially he is the same as he was before the fall, a being who can be either righteous or unrighteous by the choice of his own free will. Grace may "give him a lift" in his efforts to be righteous after the fall, but never is it a radical change of his nature. Over against this Pelagian corruption, which is as superficial as it is pernicious, stands the plain truth of the word of God that God created man after his own image, in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

Adam's Freedom

The question concerning what became of the image of God in man must be discussed in another connection, but already here we are reminded of two facts. First, man did not possess the image of God as a treasure that could not be forfeited and lost: it was amissible. Man was created lapsible. He was indeed the son of God by creation, but he was not the Son of God in the flesh. He could fall. He was free, but he had not attained to the highest freedom. Second, it is not enough to say that man merely lost this image of God. We must add that through the fall the image was changed into its very opposite.

In general, *freedom is the state in which a man's inner nature is in perfect accord with the law of God*. Spiritual, moral freedom does not consist in the fact that man emancipates himself from God and his law, that he declares his independence from the Lord of all, and that he thinks as he pleases, wills as he pleases, and acts accordingly. This is not freedom, but licentiousness. In such a state man proposes to make his own god and to determine for himself what is good and what is evil. True freedom is the inner harmony of man's heart, mind, will, and whole life with the law of God. That man is truly free who has the law of God written in his heart, whence are the issues of life, who has his delight in that law, whose thinking and willing, whose longing and desires, and whose words and deeds are in perfect accord with that law. As the poet of Psalm 119 expresses it, "And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments. So shall I keep thy law

continually for ever and ever. And I will walk at liberty; for I seek thy precepts" (vv. 43–45).

When we speak of the law of God, we must not think of a written code of precepts which we may violate with impunity as long as there is no representative of the law to arrest us and inflict the proper punishment. That may be true of human law; it is never true of the law of God. There may be a law that you drive your car no faster than twenty-five miles per hour, and you may drive it forty miles per hour; if there is no traffic officer, you may get away with it. But the law of God is not a mere code: it is the living will of God for the creature. According to that will, God always acts and deals with that creature, blessing it as long as it remains within the boundaries of that law, cursing it the moment it transgresses. That law or living will of God is in harmony with the very nature of each creature.

There is a law for the fish that it shall live in the water; for the bird that it shall fly in the air; for the tree that it shall be rooted in the soil. There is a law for the beat of your pulse, for the temperature of your body, and for the pressure of your blood. There is also a law for man, who was created a personal, rational, and moral being, consciously and willingly determining his own action. The law of God for that creature, the law that is entirely in harmony with the nature of that free agent, is that he shall love the Lord his God with all his heart, mind, soul, strength, and his whole being. The word of God to him is, "Love me." That living will of God surrounds him, follows him, and besets him from all sides. He cannot escape it; not for a moment can he violate it with impunity. It blesses him as long as he stays within its limits. It makes him utterly miserable the moment he trespasses its boundary. That man is free whose inmost heart is in accord with this law of God, and who is motivated by the love of God in all his thinking and willing and in his whole life.

As we stated, Adam in paradise was certainly free, that is, he possessed what is called the "ability not to sin" (*posse non peccare*).[9] His freedom did not consist in that he could either sin or not sin, but exactly in the fact that he stood in perfect righteousness, in harmony with the will of God so that he loved the Lord his God with his whole heart. But Adam was created lapsible. He had not attained to the highest freedom. He indeed was capable of performing the will of God. Nevertheless, by an act of his own will, he could turn about and subject himself to the slavery of sin. The highest freedom is the state in which it will be forever impossible for man to choose contrary to the will of God, but this is attainable only in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God united with our human nature. Adam, therefore, could lose the image of God.

We also said that it is not enough to say that man merely lost this image of God. Surely, he did lose it, and lose it completely. There is nothing left of man's original integrity, of his knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness. It is equally true that through the fall, man's rational, moral nature became wholly corrupt. The spiritual, ethical operation of his heart and mind and will and strength was put into reverse: his knowledge became darkness and love of the lie; his righteousness became rebellion and iniquity; his holiness became aversion to God and impurity in all his affections. The being who was designed to be the image of God changed into the image of the devil. It is only through the grace of Christ that the image of God is restored and raised to a higher, heavenly level and glory that can be lost nevermore.

Chapter 15

The Covenant with Adam

The Covenant of Works

The original relation between God and Adam is called a covenant relation. The Reformed confessions, the Three Forms of Unity, never speak of a covenant of works; of a so-called covenant of works, these confessional standards certainly know nothing.

A brief statement concerning this covenant is found in the Irish Articles of Religion:

> Man being at the beginning created according to the image of God (which consisted especially in the wisdom of his mind and the true holiness of his free will), had the covenant of the law ingrafted in his heart, whereby God did promise unto him everlasting life upon condition that he performed entire and perfect obedience unto his Commandments, according to that measure of strength wherewith he was endued in his creation, and threatened death unto him if he did not perform the same.[1]

The Westminster Confession also expressed itself on the covenant of works:

> The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.[2]

In these confessions, therefore, we meet with the idea and the term *covenant of works*.

Hodge's View of the Covenant of Works

Although this idea of a covenant of works was not incorporated into the Reformed standards, it has become a common term, and the doctrine represented by it was developed in several works on dogmatics. It is common to speak of the relation of Adam to God as being that of a covenant of works. An elaborate discussion of this covenant is found in Dr. Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology*. He writes:

> God having created man after his own image in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience, forbidding him to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil upon the pain of death.[3]

He admits that this statement does not rest upon any express declaration of the scriptures, but he argues:

> It is, however, a concise and correct mode of asserting a plain Scriptural fact, namely, that God made to Adam a promise suspended upon a condition, and attached to disobedience a certain penalty. This is what in Scriptural language is meant by a covenant, and this is all that is meant by the term as here used. Although the word covenant is not used in Genesis, and does not elsewhere, in any clear passage, occur in reference to the transaction there recorded, yet inasmuch as the plan of salvation is constantly represented as a New Covenant, new, not merely in antithesis to that made at Sinai, but new in reference to all legal covenants whatever, it is plain that the Bible does represent the arrangement made with Adam as a truly federal transaction. The scriptures know nothing of any other than two methods of attaining eternal life: the one that which demands perfect obedience, and the other that which demands faith. If the latter is called a covenant, the former is declared to be of the same nature.[4]

The elements of this covenant of works, according to Hodge, are the usual condition, promise, and

penalty. He writes:

> The reward promised to Adam on condition of his obedience was life. (1.) This is involved in the threatening: "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." It is plain that this involved the assurance that he should not die, if he did not eat. (2.) This is confirmed by innumerable passages and by the general drift of scripture, in which it is so plainly and so variously taught, that life was, by the ordinance of God, connected with obedience. "This do and thou shalt live." "The man that doeth them shall live by them." This is the uniform mode in which the Bible speaks of that law or covenant under which man by the constitution of his nature and by the ordinance of God was placed. (3.) As the scriptures everywhere present God as a judge or moral ruler, it follows of necessity from that representation, that his rational creatures will be dealt with according to the principles of justice. If there be no transgression there will be no punishment. And those who continue holy thereby continue in the favor and fellowship of him whose favor is life, and whose lovingkindness is better than life. (4.) And finally, holiness, or as the Apostle expresses it, to be spiritually minded, is life. There can therefore be no doubt, that had Adam continued in his holiness, he would have enjoyed that life which flows from the favor of God.[5]

The life that was promised to Adam, according to Hodge, was "the happy, holy, and immortal existence of the soul and body."[6] Nor would perpetual obedience have been necessary as a condition of the covenant. He writes:

> The question whether perpetual, as well as perfect obedience was the condition of the covenant made with Adam, is probably to be answered in the negative. It seems to be reasonable in itself and plainly implied in the scriptures that all rational creatures have a definite period of probation. If faithful during that period they are confirmed in their integrity, and no longer exposed to the danger of apostasy. Thus we read of the angels who kept not their first estate, and of those who did. Those who remained faithful have continued in holiness and in the favor of God. It is therefore to be inferred that had Adam continued obedient during the period allotted to his probation, neither he nor any of his posterity would have been ever exposed to the danger of sinning.[7]

According to the presentation of Hodge, there would have come a moment in Adam's life, had he not sinned—when the period of probation would have been finished and when the promise would have been fulfilled to him—that he would have entered into immortality and eternal life. He would have been changed. What Hodge understands by this promised change can be gathered from his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:45, where Paul compares Adam as a living soul with Christ as the quickening Spirit. Writes Hodge:

> From what the apostle, however, here says of the contrast between Adam and Christ; of the earthly and perishable nature of the former as opposed to the immortal, spiritual nature of the latter, it is plain that Adam as originally created was not, as to his body, in that state which would fit him for his immortal existence. After his period of probation was past, it is to be inferred, that a change in him would have taken place, analogous to that which is to take place in those believers who shall be alive when Christ comes. They shall not die but they shall be changed. Of this change in the constitution of his body, the tree of life was probably constituted the sacrament.[8]

Here we have a clear and comprehensive exposition of what is commonly meant by the covenant of works. We can summarize its various elements as follows:

First, the covenant of works was an arrangement or agreement between God and Adam entered into by God and established by him after man's creation. It was not given with creation, but was an additional arrangement.

Second, it was a means to an end. Adam had life, but did not possess the highest, that is, eternal life. He was free, but his state was not that of highest freedom. He was lapsible. The covenant of works was arranged as a means for Adam to attain to that highest state of freedom in eternal life.

Third, the specific elements of this covenant were a promise (eternal life), a penalty (eternal death), and a condition (perfect obedience).

Fourth, in this covenant Adam was placed on probation. There would have come a time when the

period of probation would have ended and when the promise would have been fulfilled.

Fifth, at the end of the period of probation, Adam would have been translated into a state of glory analogous to the change of believers who will be living at the time of Christ's second advent.

Sixth, the fruit of this obedience of Adam would have been reaped by all Adam's posterity.

Objections to the Covenant of Works

Many and serious objections can be raised against this generally accepted doctrine of the covenant of works. That the relation between God and Adam in the state of righteousness was a covenant relation, we readily admit. But that this covenant should be an established agreement between Adam and his creator, consisting of a condition, a promise, and a penalty, and that it was essentially a means whereby Adam might work himself up to the highest state of eternal life and heavenly glory that is now attained by the believers in Christ, we deny.

First, there is the chief objection that this doctrine finds no support in scripture. We do read of the probationary command, prohibiting man to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and of the penalty of death threatened in case of disobedience. However, we find no proof in scripture for the contention that God gave to Adam the promise of eternal life if he would obey that particular commandment of God. It is true, of course, that Adam would not have suffered the death penalty if he had obeyed. But this is quite different from saying that he would have attained to glory and immortality. This cannot be deduced or inferred from the penalty of death that was threatened. Adam might have lived everlastingly in his earthly state. He might have continued to eat of the tree of life and live forever, but everlasting earthly life is not the same as what scripture means by eternal life. The scriptures nowhere suggest that Adam would have attained to this higher level of heavenly glory and that there would have come a time in his life when he would have been translated.

Besides, this giving of the probationary command and this threat of the penalty of death are no covenant or agreement, and constitute no transaction between God and Adam. Adam simply receives a command and is threatened with just punishment if he disobeys. Such a command might conceivably be connected with the covenant relation, but that it *is* the covenant scripture does not even suggest. A command is no covenant; nor is the command imposed on man in the form of a condition unto eternal life. It is true that elsewhere in scripture it is emphasized that obedience and life are inseparably connected: "The man that doeth them shall live in them" (Gal. 3:12). But even this does not mean that man by the keeping of the law could ever attain to the higher level of heavenly life and glory. In vain does one look in the word of God for support of this theory of a covenant of works.

Second, it is impossible that man should merit a special reward with God. Obedience to God is an obligation. It certainly has its reward, for God is just and rewards the good with good. Obedience has its reward in itself: to obey the Lord our God is life and joy. Sin is misery and death. Life and joy there are in obedience. To keep the commandments of God and to serve him is a privilege. But the covenant of works teaches that Adam could merit something more, something special, by obeying the commandment of the Lord. This is quite impossible.

What the Lord says to his disciples is always applicable to man in relation to God: "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10). Adam was God's with all his being and life in the world. To consecrate himself with all things in love to the living God was simply his obligation. He could do nothing for God. He could work no overtime with God. He could never earn anything extra. The privilege of serving God was all his.

Nor could Adam have expected such an extra reward on his obedience. Suppose that he had served the Lord in perfect obedience a thousand years: could he possibly have felt that it was about time that his God should reward him with something special? Suppose the Lord had inquired of him at that time: "Adam, thou hast served me faithfully all these years. How much do I owe thee?" What would Adam have answered? He would have said, "Thou owe me, O Lord my God? All these thousand years thou hast filled me with thy goodness. Pure delight it was to me that I might live before thee and serve thee in love. I owe all to thee; but thou canst not possibly owe me anything at all."

Suppose this conversation had continued, and the Lord had inquired of Adam: "But wouldest thou not rather be taken out of thy earthly paradise and be translated into another glory?" What would the earthy first man have answered? Conceivably this: "No, Lord; I do not like to be unclothed. I am perfectly satisfied here in the earthly paradise; and I am serenely happy here by the tree of life. I cannot long for anything else than that I may stay here forever and live with thee in the friendship of thy covenant."

Suppose further that the Lord had asked: "But hast thou not merited another thousand years in this earthly paradise by thy faithful obedience?" What would have been the inevitable answer? This: "Thou, Lord, art my benefactor every day anew. Surely, I could never earn my next breath. If thou shouldest drop me back into nothingness, thou wouldest do me no injustice."

To be sure, as long as Adam obeyed God, the Most High in justice could not inflict upon him the suffering of death. But this does not mean that he owed to his creature another moment of existence at any time of his life. Never can man merit anything with God. Nor is there any indication in scripture that God voluntarily placed man in a position in which he could merit eternal life.

Third, how must we conceive of this promise of eternal life to Adam? Suppose that Adam would have obeyed the commandment of God. Then, according to the idea of the covenant of works, he would have been glorified and raised to a heavenly plane of immortal life. The question arises, When would this have happened?

The usual answer is that the matter would have been decided in a comparatively short time, perhaps soon after Adam and Eve had resisted the temptation of the devil. It is usually supposed that this moment of Adam's reward would have come before there would have been descendants, because Adam stood in paradise as the representative of the whole human race.

What then? Adam and Eve would have been translated to a kind of immortal, heavenly glory. Would they have brought forth the human race in that state of glory? This seems quite impossible, for the propagation of the human race and the replenishing of the earth appears inseparably connected with the present earthly state of man in his physical body. In heaven they do not marry and bring forth children. And what of the earth and all the earthly creation? Would it also have been glorified or would Adam simply have been taken out of it? Someone might object that in this way of argumentation we speak of things that did not actually happen and that therefore were not in the counsel of God. True. But I claim that God's promises are sure; he does not promise anything that is not possible of fulfillment within the economy of his counsel and the whole of his works.

It is quite conceivable that Adam would have obeyed and that in the way of obedience he would have continued and perpetuated his earthly life and happiness. It is also conceivable that in this earthly state of perfection he would have represented the whole human race and brought forth children. However, the theory that Adam had the promise of God that he would inherit eternal life had he obeyed the probationary command does not fit in with the rest of scripture, nor with any possible dogmatic conception.

Fourth, the covenant of works presents the covenant relation as something incidental and additional

to man's life in relation to God. The covenant relation is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It is not given with man's creation, and therefore is not a fundamental and essential relationship, but an agreement established sometime after man was called into being. The question as to how long after Adam was created God made this agreement with him is quite irrelevant. Whether it was a week, a day, or even an hour after his creation that the probationary command was given to him, the fact remains that this covenant was imposed upon the relation Adam already sustained to God by reason of his creation. What then was Adam's relation to God apart from this covenant of works? The word of God, however, does not present the covenant relation as an accidental relationship, but as fundamental and essential. It is not a means to an end, but an end in itself. In its highest perfection in Christ, it is life eternal: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

Fifth, from the viewpoint of God's sovereignty and wisdom, this theory of a covenant of works appears quite unworthy of God. It presents the work of God as a failure to a great extent. Even though God will be victorious in the end and the devil will suffer defeat, the devil nevertheless succeeded in inflicting heavy damage upon the works of the creator. If the covenant of works theory were true, then Adam stood in a position in which he could attain to eternal life and glory and merit that same glory and life for all his posterity by obeying God's command. The glory Adam could inherit for himself and all his descendants was the same or similar to that which believers presently receive in Christ through the deep way of suffering, sin, and death. Now it is merited only through the death and perfect obedience of the Son of God in the flesh. Now it is attained only by some, the elect, while the majority of the race perishes. Will this not everlastingly appear as a failure on the part of God? Or rather, can this possibly be true in view of the wisdom and absolute sovereignty of the Most High?

If eternal life and glory could have been attained in the first man Adam, would God have chosen the long and deep way through the death of his Son? He would not. The fact is that it was quite impossible for Adam to attain to the heavenly level of immortal life. Immortality and heavenly glory are in Christ Jesus alone. Outside of the Son of God come in the flesh, they were never attainable. We cannot accept the theory of the covenant of works, but must condemn it as unscriptural.

The Nature of the Adamic Covenant

Even though the first three chapters of Genesis do not mention the covenant, there can be no doubt that the relation between God and Adam was a covenant relation. This truth does not have to be based upon a single text, such as Hosea 6:7, although this passage certainly can be quoted with reference to this truth. The Lord in that passage accuses his apostatizing people of transgressing the covenant "like Adam." Some prefer here the translation "like men" instead of "like Adam." Although the translation "like men" is most probably correct, it does not make a great deal of difference with respect to the question we are now discussing. If "like man" or "like men" is considered correct, the text speaks in a broad sense of the relation between man and God as fundamentally a covenant relationship. If the rendering "like Adam" is preferred, the text refers directly to the covenant relation between Adam and God. But all of scripture proceeds from the truth that man always stands in covenant relation to God.

All God's dealings with Adam in paradise presuppose this relation: God talked with Adam and revealed himself to him, and Adam knew God in the wind of day. Besides, salvation is always presented as the establishment and realization of God's covenant. By the flood God destroyed the first world and saved his church in Noah and his seed, and with these he established his covenant

embracing all creation. With Abraham and his seed God made his covenant as an everlasting covenant, and he gave them the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness which is by faith (Gen. 17:7; Rom. 4:11). This covenant could not be disannulled by the law which came four hundred and thirty years later, which means that the covenant of Sinai is essentially the same covenant as that with Abraham and his seed, even though for a time the law is superimposed upon that relationship (Gal. 3:17).

In the new dispensation God establishes a new covenant with his people, a higher realization of the same covenant of the old dispensation, based on the blood of Jesus and consisting in the truth that God will remember their iniquities no more, that he will write his law upon their hearts and minds, and that all shall know him (Jer. 31:31–34; Heb. 8:8–13; Heb. 10:16–17).

Scripture often refers to this covenant relation without expressly mentioning it. Enoch and Noah walked with God (Gen. 5:24; Gen. 6:9). To walk with God is an act of friendship and intimate fellowship. Abraham is called the friend of God (Isa. 41:8; James 2:23). The tabernacle and temple foreshadowed the truth that God dwells with his people under one roof, in the same house, as a friend with his friends. This covenant relationship is centrally realized in the incarnation of the Son of God: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

Through the death, resurrection, and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ and the outpouring of his Spirit upon the church, that church is become "the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (2 Cor. 6:16). The highest realization of the glory that God prepared for those who love him is expressed in Revelation 21:3: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." Indeed, all scripture presents the covenant relation as fundamental and essential. If the work of redemption and the work of creation are related to each other, there can be no doubt that Adam in his state of integrity stood in covenant relation to God.

This covenant relation was not something incidental, a means to an end, a relation established by way of an agreement, but it was a fundamental relationship in which Adam stood to God by virtue of his creation. It was not essentially an agreement, but a relation of living fellowship and friendship given and established by Adam's creation after the image of God. Fellowship, the intimate relation of friendship, requires likeness as its basis. Like knows and can have fellowship only with like. For this reason the ultimate covenant life is found in God himself, and is based on the Trinity. Being essentially one, yet personally distinct, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost live in eternal covenant friendship with one another.

For this reason, the reflection of God's trinitarian life of friendship that is found in God's covenant with man was realized when Adam was created in the image of God, that creaturely likeness of God consisting of true knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness. From the very first moment of his existence, and by virtue of his being created after the image of God, Adam stood in covenant relation to God and was conscious of the living fellowship and friendship which is essential to that relationship. He knew God, loved him, and was conscious of God's love to him. He enjoyed the favor of God. He received the word of God, walked with God, talked with him, and dwelt in the house of God in paradise the first. And as Adam stood at the pinnacle of all created things on earth, the whole creation through him was comprehended in that covenant relation of fellowship. In Adam's heart the whole creation was united to the heart of God.

Adam's Part in the Covenant

In this covenant relation Adam was the friend-servant and officebearer of God in all creation. He was God's co-worker. This calling of Adam in the state of righteousness is to be understood very concretely and realistically. His life is not to be romanticized in our imagination as a sort of mystical enjoyment of sweet communion with the Lord under the tree of life. He had work to do. He had a very definite mandate. God had blessed Adam and Eve and said to them, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:28). When the Lord prepared for man the garden of Eden and placed him in it, God gave man a specific commandment to dress the garden, that is, to cultivate it and to keep it, which probably meant that he had to guard it against the inroads of the devil (Gen. 2:15). Adam therefore had a very definite task to perform.

In all his life and work Adam was to be busy as the friend-servant of God, not as a slave who works from the motive of fear for the whip, nor as a wage earner who puts in his hours merely for his wages, but freely from the love of God, as being his co-worker and as being of his party. As the friend of God he was to function as God's superintendent over all the works of God's hands. As God's friend he must replenish and subdue the earth, cultivate and keep the garden, and bring to light all the wonders and powers of the world. Adam's pure delight of it in the favor of God was his reward.

We may truly say that Adam was God's representative in the earthly creation, his officebearer: his prophet, priest, and king. This implies that he had the calling, the mandate, but also the privilege, the right, the ability, and the will to be the servant of God. The *must*, the *may*, the *can*, and the *will* to be God's co-worker were in perfect harmony with one another in Adam. As prophet he knew his God in all the earthly creation and praised him in a great congregation. As priest he dwelt in God's house and consecrated himself and all things to him. As king he declared and maintained the will of God in all the earth. All things served Adam in order that he might serve his God.

Adam as First Father

We must still consider the questions concerning the relation in which Adam, the first man, stood to his posterity, the rest of mankind, and to the world about him.

As to the question of Adam's relation to his posterity, to which we shall have to return when we discuss the universality of sin, we answer that the relation of Adam to the human race was threefold. First, he was the first father, the bearer of the entire human nature so that organically the entire human race was in him. Second, he was the head of all mankind so that he legally represented them. Third, he was the root of the race so that, figuratively speaking, all the nations, tribes, families, and individuals are branches of the tree of which Adam was the root.

It strikes our attention that the Reformed confessions emphasize the *organic* rather than the *legal* relation of Adam to his posterity. The Heidelberg Catechism instructs us:

> Whence, then, comes this depraved nature of man?
> From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise, whereby our nature became so corrupt that we are all conceived and born in sin.[9]

The same note is struck in the Belgic Confession:

> We believe that, through the disobedience of Adam, original sin is extended to all mankind; which is a corruption of the whole nature, and an hereditary disease, wherewith infants themselves are infected even in their mother's womb, and which produceth in man all sorts of sin, being in him as a root thereof; and therefore is so vile and abominable in the sight of

God that it is sufficient to condemn all mankind.[10]

In the Canons of Dordt we read:

> Man was originally formed after the image of God. His understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator, and of spiritual things; his heart and will were upright, all his affections pure, and the whole Man was holy; but revolting from God by the instigation of the devil, and abusing the freedom of his own will, he forfeited these excellent gifts, and on the contrary entailed on himself blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness of judgment; became wicked, rebellious, and obdurate in heart and will, and impure in [all] his affections.
>
> Man after the fall begat children in his own likeness. A corrupt stock produced a corrupt offspring. Hence all the posterity of Adam, Christ only excepted, have derived corruption from their original parent, not by imitation, as the Pelagians of old asserted, but by the propagation of a vicious nature [in consequence of a just judgment of God].[11]

These passages from the creeds deal with the problem of original sin and show clearly that the confessions emphasize the *organic* relation of Adam to his posterity. He is the father of us all. God created the whole human nature in him. In this sense Augustine was right when he taught that all men were in Adam. To be sure, there was in him not a multitude of individual persons, nor were there in him millions of individualizations of the human nature. Nevertheless, the truth is that all human natures that ever would exist were organically in Adam, and they all developed out of him. God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26).

Adam as Legal Head

Although this organic relation is emphasized in the confessions, it is not the only relation Adam sustained to the human race. He was not only the father of us all so that the whole human nature was created in him, but also he stood in the unique position of being the legal head of the race in the representative sense. This is very plainly expressed in Romans 5:12–19, where the apostle teaches that:

First, by one man sin entered into the world and that death passed upon all men because all had sinned. How could death be inflicted upon all because of the sin of one man, unless they had sinned legally in him and therefore were represented by him?

Second, this death, which is the punishment of sin, reigned from Adam to Moses, that is, before the promulgation of the law and therefore over those "that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" (v. 14).

Third, "through the offence of one many be dead"; "the judgment was by one to condemnation"; "by one man's offence death reigned by one" (vv. 15–17). All these terms express legal concepts and clearly indicate that Adam's relation to the human race was a representative relation: he was the representative head of the entire race.

Fourth, by the offense of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation and that by one man's disobedience many were made sinners. It is plain that "judgment" and "condemnation" are forensic terms. The fact that the offense of one can bring judgment and condemnation upon others implies a relation of legal solidarity between the one and the others, in this case between Adam and his posterity. Adam, the father of us all, is placed by God in the position of federal head of the whole race.

Adam as Root of the Race

Adam is also the root of the race. By this we mean to express the idea that men, tribes, and nations

are not all alike as to characteristics, place, and time, but they differ from one another in many individual ways and that all these differences develop organically from Adam, as from a root. This will become plainer when we consider the relation between original guilt and pollution on the one hand, and actual sins on the other.

Adam's Relation to the Earthly Creation

In relation to the earthly creation Adam was king. The Lord gave him dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowls of the air, and over every living thing that moved upon the earth (Gen. 1:28). This implies that Adam was lord, not over the entire cosmos, which includes heaven and earth, but over the earthly creation. He was originally made a little lower than the angels, according to Psalm 8:5–6 and Hebrews 2:6–7. The heaven of glory was not subject unto him. It was his final destiny to become lord over all the world (vv. 8–9), but that final goal was not reached in the first Adam. Adam was made after the image of God, but he was not the Lord from heaven. He did not bear the image of the heavenly, but was of the earth, earthy (1 Cor. 15:47–49). He was an earthly king, and his dominion was particularly the earthly paradise. He would especially serve his God as king under him in the bond of friendship. This paradise was in the rich country of Eden (Gen. 2:8–14). The Lord placed Adam in that garden "to dress it and to keep it" and to serve God there (v. 15).

Already implied in the term "to keep" is the idea that Adam had to fight the battle of Jehovah. This antithetical idea was embodied still more clearly in the two special trees in the garden: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree of life, standing in the midst of the garden and comparable to the holy of holies in the temple, assured Adam of life as long as he was able to meet his God in that sanctuary. For this reason it is called the "tree of life," whose fruit evidently had the power to perpetuate Adam's earthly existence (Gen. 3:22). The name "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:17) signified that Adam through that tree could know by experience, could taste good and evil—good in the way of obedience, evil in the way of disobedience.

Both trees together, therefore, embodied the antithesis. Adam must serve his God and reject the devil, from whence the term *probationary command*. This command put Adam to the test, the main purpose of which was the realization of the antithesis. For that reason this command stood outside of Adam's ethical life. There was in itself nothing sinful in eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or of any other tree. Only God's forbidding word made it wrong for Adam to eat of the tree. Therefore, Adam confronted the clear calling of serving God with the rejection of evil, of unconditionally heeding the word of God with rejection of the lie of the devil.

So Adam, as the friend of God and as the king-servant, was thoroughly furnished with many excellent gifts that he might serve the one master, the Lord his God, and hate and forsake every other.

Chapter 16

The Providence of God

The Doctrine of Providence in the Reformed Creeds

Even as Reformed theologians confess and maintain wholeheartedly and emphatically that all things take place according to the determinate purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his own will so that before the foundation of the world all things have been sovereignly established by the Most High, they also confess concerning the unchangeable counsel of God that God alone executes his counsel. They express this in their confession concerning the providence of God.

The Heidelberg Catechism presents this truth as a rich source of comfort for him who belongs with body and soul, in life and death, to his faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. The catechism says this faithful Savior "so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must work together for my salvation."[1] Beautiful is this answer of the catechism because it connects at once the providence of God with the doctrine of salvation.

The Belgic Confession expresses the same truth:

> We believe that the same God, after he had created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that he rules and governs them, according to his holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without his appointment; nevertheless, God neither is the author of, nor can be charged with, the sins which are committed. For his power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible, that he orders and executes his work in the most excellent and just manner even then when the devil and wicked men act unjustly. And as to what he doth surpassing human understanding we will not curiously inquire into it further than our capacity will admit of; but with the greatest humility and reverence adore the righteous judgments of God which are hid from us, contenting ourselves that we are disciples of Christ, to learn only those things which he has revealed to us in his Word without transgressing these limits.
>
> This doctrine affords us unspeakable consolation, since we are taught thereby that nothing can befall us by chance, but by the direction of our most gracious and heavenly Father, who watches over us with a paternal care, keeping all creatures so under his power that not a hair of our head (for they are all numbered), nor a sparrow, can fall to the ground, without the will of our Father, in whom we do entirely trust; being persuaded that he so restrains the devil and all our enemies that, without his will and permission, they can not hurt us.
>
> And therefore we reject that damnable error of the Epicureans, who say that God regards nothing, but leaves all things to chance.[2]

We feel that this article of the Belgic Confession teaches that the providence of God, although in the first instance immediately connected with creation, nevertheless aims at the salvation of the people of God.

That providence aims at the salvation of the people of God is also the fundamental thought of the Heidelberg Catechism. The catechism first presents providence as the power of God that preserves and rules over a sinful world that bears the curse:

> The almighty and every where present power of God, whereby, as it were by his hand, he still upholds heaven and earth, with all creatures, and so governs them that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, all things, come not by chance, but by his fatherly hand.[3]

The salvation of the people of God as the goal of providence is made even plainer in the next question and answer:

> What does it profit us to know that God has created, and by his providence still upholds all things?

That we may be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and for what is future have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from his love, since all creatures are so in his hand that without his will they can not so much as move.[4]

The Term *Providence*

The term *providence* does not occur in Holy Writ. According to the literal significance of the word, it does not represent a scriptural idea. Literally the term is derived from the Latin *provideo*, which means "to prevision, to see ahead." The term, therefore, denotes a seeing and knowing the things that are to happen and a preparing for them in advance. For example, I see beforehand that winter is coming, and I prepare myself by filling my coal bin. In this sense, however, we cannot properly speak of the providence of God. God does not see things beforehand, but he brings them to pass. He knows them not by a certain prescience, but eternally from his counsel. For that reason God does not prepare for the things that happen, but all things flow from his own will and counsel. However, the term *providence* has obtained a place in theological parlance; and, for want of a better term, we may well continue to use it. *Providence is the almighty and omnipresent power of God whereby he causes all things to continue to exist, and whereby he executes his counsel in and through all creatures and guides them in such a way that they must all, without exception, lead to the end he has determined for them in his counsel*.

Providence in Scripture

The idea of providence is certainly the teaching of scripture. The word of God teaches us that not only of him, but also "through him and to him, are all things" (Rom. 11:36).

Acts 17:24–28 says:

> God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

Beautifully also Psalm 139:1–16 expresses providence:

> O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.

Psalm 104 plainly and most beautifully expresses that all things come from the hand of God and are literally directed by him:

> He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches. He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works (vv. 10–13).

The same note is struck in all the rest of Psalm 104: For it is God who causes the grass to grow for the cattle and herbs for the service of man. It is God who produces food out of the earth, wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and the bread that strengthens man's heart (vv. 14–15). It is God who appoints the moon for seasons and causes the sun to know his going down; who makes darkness, and it is night, wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth; the young lions roar after their prey and seek their meat from God; and all creatures wait upon him that he may give them their meat in due season. Only when he opens his hand they are filled with good (vv. 19–28).

It is God who makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, who sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Matt. 5:45). He provides for the fowls of the air and clothes the lily of the field, and he certainly will provide for his children in the world. So the Lord teaches in Matthew 6:25–34:

> Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

According to Psalm 29, it is the word of God, or the voice of the Lord, that directs and moves all things in creation:

> The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the Lord is upon many waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars; yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon. He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn. The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness; the Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests: and in his temple doth every one speak of his glory. The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King forever. The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace (vv. 3–11).

It is the Lord who

> covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry. He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy . . . He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold? He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow (Ps. 147:8–11, 16–18).

As Hebrews 1:3 expresses it, the Son upholds "all things by the word of his power."

Providence and God's Rational, Moral Creatures

The providence of God rules not only brute creation, but also the rational and moral creature in all his deeds and activity. Deism will have nothing of this truth, but strongly protests against it. This is

characteristic of deism as regards its entire conception of God's relation to the world. According to this philosophy, God created all things and ordained laws for all the worlds, but now that world runs by itself, according to its own laws. Like a watchmaker makes a watch that is capable of running without the mechanic who constructed it, so God is in heaven, separated from the world. He is transcendent above the world but not immanent in it. Especially concerning man, and particularly when the question concerns his moral freedom, deism protests vigorously that God cannot control him. Man is free: his choice of will must remain independent. As regards his moral life, man is sovereign. Even God cannot interfere with this sovereignty of man.

This, however, is certainly not according to scripture, which knows nothing of a sovereign man or angel. It knows of no sovereign rational, moral creature apart from or next to God. The almighty and omnipresent power of God controls the whole life and all the deeds of his rational, moral creatures. Even such an arbitrary thing as the lot God entirely controls: "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord" (Prov. 16:33).

Even the heart of man, that center of his ethical life, is controlled by the Lord: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1). Jeremiah exclaims, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23).

> The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect . . . There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength. Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine (Ps. 33:10, 16–19).

Providence and Sin

God's sovereignty over all of his rational, moral creatures does not mean that God is the author of sin. Man is the second cause. Man works consciously and willingly and commits sin because he loves it, while God hates all evil. However, that second cause is not sovereign, not even in man's thinking and willing, and not even when he sins.

It is the Lord who hardens Pharaoh's heart: "And the Lord said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go" (Ex. 4:21). This is said before there is any mention of Pharaoh's hardening his own heart. Accordingly, Romans 9:18 says: "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

The people of Israel do not hesitate to profess before the face of the Lord, "O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance" (Isa. 63:17).

2 Samuel 16 records Shimei's cursing David, and when Abishai begs leave of the king to punish and kill Shimei, David answers, "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?" (v. 10).

In 1 Samuel 2:25 we read that Eli admonished and rebuked his wicked sons, but they did not heed his admonitions: "Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them."

1 Kings 22 recounts the prophet Micaiah's prophesying against King Ahab:

> And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven

> standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so (vv. 19–22).

Assyria is but an axe in the hand of the Lord: "Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood" (Isa. 10:15; cf. also vv. 5–14). "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?" (Amos 3:6). "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things" (Isa. 45:7).

Acts 2:23 certainly emphasizes that Christ was slain by wicked men. Yet Peter asserts God's sovereignty: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Later, after the chief priests and elders have called Peter and John to account for their preaching, and after the apostles have returned to their own company, we read concerning the church:

> And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done (Acts 4:24–28).

Surely, the scriptures teach very plainly that the Lord, although he certainly is not the author of sin, nevertheless controls absolutely all the wicked deeds of evil men.

The Two Aspects of Providence: Preservation and Government

In the light of scripture, there can be no doubt that God with his omnipresent power preserves, rules, and governs all things unto his own determinate end. Preservation and government are the two elements in divine providence. Frequently, a third element is mentioned, that of cooperation. But this is, strictly speaking, not necessary, because what is meant by cooperation is nothing else than the preservation and government of God with regard to the moral life and deeds of the rational creature. Therefore, we prefer to distinguish in providence only between God's preservation and government.

The element of preservation implies that God by his omnipresent power bears all things and causes them to continue to exist. God holds all things in his hand. Contrary to the teaching of the deist, God cannot withdraw himself even for a moment from the works of his hands. If he did, they would at that very moment sink back into nothing. God upholds all things. The providence of God is not a continued act of creation, because to create means to call the things that are not as if they were. Rather, by his providence he causes all things to continue to exist. With his infinite being he touches the finite substance of every creature and continuously speaks the word that causes the creature to be.

This truth marks the difference between pantheism and the scriptural presentation of the relation of God to all things. Pantheism knows only of one substance, the being of God. Providence distinguishes sharply between the infinite being of God and the substance of the creature. What is the substance, the ὑπόστασις, the *substantia*, of the creature? It is not matter, nor is it power, but it is the creative word of God which he spoke at the beginning: "In the beginning was the Word," and "all things were made

by him" (John 1:1, 3). Everything in all creation is a word of God, and that creative word of God is the real substance of all things. That word, which God spoke at the beginning, has no existence apart from him. He continues to speak it. He is the one who upholds "all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3), and by that word of his power all things continue to exist.

On the being of God the substance of all creation and of every creature is borne. God's being touches the substance of all things, and through his word he operates from moment to moment in and upon every creature according to its nature. Because the Lord of all bears and moves the sun, it radiates heat and light, rises every morning in due time, and sets in the western horizon at the exact moment every evening. Because the Almighty calls the stars by name continuously, they shine night upon night, each constellation in its proper position in the firmament of the heavens. Because God is in the trees of the woods with his almighty word, they cast their leaves in autumn in order to be adorned with a fresh garb of foliage in spring. Because the Almighty operates by the word of his power continuously upon the lily, the glory of its garb is greater than that of Solomon's. It is the same with all creation. No young raven cries, no lion seeks its prey, no nightingale fills the stillness of the evening with its sweet melody, no grain ripens in the field, no lightning flashes, and no thunder rolls in the heavens but by the voice of the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The same is true of the moral life of the rational creatures: men and angels, the righteous and the wicked alike. Only as long as God by his almighty word bears our mind and intellect are we able to think, whether our thoughts be good or evil. Only as long as the Lord of all sustains the will can it desire and decide upon either righteousness or iniquity. The Almighty, who created all things, bears them by the word of his power.

Even so, all is not said.

The creation of God, as the Almighty formed it in the beginning, was indeed good. There was no defect or flaw in the works of the Most High: "God saw every thing that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). This does not mean that the end of all the works of God was reached in the beginning. Even the fact that God made the cosmos a living creation that was adapted to development proves that the end was not yet. In one man, out of whom millions upon millions were to come forth, the human race was organically created. Hidden powers were working in creation, powers that still had to be brought to light. Creation stood only at its beginning. It had to develop and pass through a history.

Therefore, we must not connect the providence of God with creation without saying anything further—without taking into account the history of the world along the lines of sin and grace. If we do, we run the danger of harboring the mistaken notion that God from the beginning conceived of a twofold purpose: one according to which he wanted his creation to develop normally in harmony with a so-called ordinance of creation, and the other according to which he aimed at the final perfection of all things in Christ Jesus. With this conception it is possible to depart from the truth in two different directions.

It is possible to conceive of the relation between creation and providence as if God really had a double counsel: one in which the Lord purposed to cause his creation to develop normally, in case Adam remained standing in his original integrity, and the other in which God provided for the possibility of Adam's fall and for the salvation of his people in Christ Jesus. As we know, Adam fell, which means that the outcome was entirely contingent upon the free will of Adam. As far as creation itself is concerned, it is forevermore deplorable that the devil succeeded in his purpose to mar and spoil the beautiful works of God. The work of salvation is really a repair work. Such a conception is really blasphemous, for it robs God of his honor and to a large extent gives the devil and the forces of

iniquity the victory.

If we hold the conception of a double purpose of God for the creation, we can also depart from the truth in a different direction, namely, that of common grace. According to the theory of common grace, God has in mind the creation ordinance, and he still maintains it: the riches of creation must be brought to light under the dominion of man. Satan meant to frustrate this purpose of God through the fall of man. But through common grace—by which God restrains sin and checks the curse in creation so that man does not become a devil, descend into hell, or fall dead in paradise before the tree of life—God counteracts this attempt of the devil, maintains his original ordinance of creation, and realizes his purpose. In the meantime, however, the Lord begins a new work, through which the chief purpose of all things is realized and all things will be reunited in Christ Jesus as their head.

This conception finds no support in Holy Writ. Moreover, it is a dualistic conception, because it proceeds from the erroneous assumption that sin, death, and the curse, instead of being powers that God works as manifestations of his wrath, are powers outside of him and apart from him that he must restrain.

We must have a different presentation of the matter and establish at once the fact that God did not have all kinds of possibilities in mind when he created the world, but had before his mind only one purpose. That purpose was not to perfect all things in the first Adam, who was out of the earth, earthy, but to bring all things to final perfection in Christ, who is the Lord from heaven. The final goal of all things, which God conceived in his counsel, was the new creation, in which righteousness shall dwell forever and of which Christ shall be the eternal head in whom all things shall be united. This is the only purpose God ever conceived in his eternal counsel.

The providence of God implies that from the very first beginning to the end of the world, until the return of Christ, God governs all things and guides them by his counsel unto the end he has in view. From the beginning to the end nothing ever occurs in all the world which does not happen according to the counsel of the Most High. That is why the doctrine of the providence of God affords us unspeakable consolation: all things are in the hand of our heavenly Father; all things must work together for good to them that love God (Rom. 8:28); in the end it will become manifest that all the powers of darkness work together for the realization of God's eternal purpose in Christ Jesus and to the glory of God's holy name.

Providence and Miracles

In connection with the doctrine of God's providence, a word must be said about the scriptural idea of a wonder or miracle. Theologians usually emphasize that a wonder consists of something extraordinary, something that is supernatural and cannot be explained from the known laws of nature, or even something that is against the laws of nature, but that must be attributed to a special intervention or volition of God. We find this idea in the *Systematic Theology* of Charles Hodge. He distinguishes between events that are due to ordinary operations of God and second causes, events that are due to the operations of the Holy Spirit upon the hearts of men, such as regeneration. Then he differentiates yet another class, that is,

> events which belong to neither of these classes and whose distinguishing characteristics are, First, that they take place in the external world, *i.e.*, in the sphere of the observation of the senses; and, Secondly, that they are produced or caused by the simple volition of God, without the intervention of any subordinate cause. To this class belongs the original act of creation, in which all cooperation of second causes was impossible. To the same class belong all events truly miraculous. A miracle, therefore, may be defined to be an event, in the external world, brought about by the immediate efficiency, or simple volition of God.[5]

It is evident from this definition that, according to Hodge, the chief characteristic of a miracle is that it is a special, direct, and supernatural event in the external world that cannot be explained from second causes.

J. J. Van Oosterzee writes:

> A real miracle is nothing less than a direct *Divine act*; but God's mode of operation is to us as mysterious as His existence and the nature of His relation to this finite world. If there is much already in His ordinary agency which we cannot understand, how much more when we see Him act in a completely extraordinary manner! Every miracle has a side which we see, the fact in itself; but also a side which we do not see, the operating cause. Can it be otherwise but that definitions should differ, while not one is possible which does not leave room for objection? Yet every one knows what he must think of when he hears of miracles; that word offers a series of facts to his mind, which he tries to combine as far as possible under one notion. *A miracle is an entirely extraordinary phenomenon in the domain of natural or spiritual life, which cannot be explained from the course of nature as it is known to us, and must therefore have been brought about by a direct operation of God's almighty will, in order to attain a definite object.* Thus God Himself is at work in a miracle, but in a manner differing from the usual. "The character of miracles taken in the strictest sense is this, that they cannot be explained by the nature of created things" (Leibnitz). But it is this very conviction which makes the man who believes in a living, almighty, free-working God here exclaim with awe, "This is the finger of God."[6]

Notice that Van Oosterzee's definition of a miracle is purely formal also. It does not enter into the real idea of a miracle. He also emphasizes the direct, special, and supernatural act of God.

Dr. G. Vos writes:

> What belongs to the concept of a miracle?
> A direct intervention of God, whereby a new power is put into creation.
> An extraordinary intervention of God, that is not repeated, as, e.g., regeneration and the other works of grace, which for that reason cannot be called miracles in the strict sense of the word.
> An intervention of God which has for its purpose to corroborate revelation of the truth through the service of the prophets and apostles, and of salvation, which for that reason occurs only in critical moments of the history of salvation.[7]

Vos' description of a miracle is also purely formal; it does not enter into the scriptural idea or concept of a miracle.

Louis Berkhof writes:

> A distinction is usually made between *providentia ordinaria* and *providentia extraordinaria*. In the former God works through second causes in strict accordance with the laws of nature, though He may vary the results by different combinations. But in the latter He works immediately or without mediation of second causes in their ordinary operation. The distinctive thing in a miraculous deed is that it results from the exercise of the supernatural power of God.[8]

As we will show presently, the distinction between natural and supernatural is essentially not a Reformed conception.

Better, no doubt, is the description Bavinck gives of the miracles, although he does not venture a definition. According to him, the miracles have their inception and basis in the creation and preservation of all things, which are a continual work and wonder of God. The miracles in the Old Testament purpose to punish the ungodly and to save the people of God; as, for instance, the plagues upon Egypt, the passage through the Red Sea, the wonders in the wilderness, etc. They all have their end in the age to come, the day of the Lord. This coming or future age has come in Christ, in his incarnation, cross, resurrection, and ascension. But a series of wonders is still to come when the Lord shall come again, the dead shall be raised, and all things shall be made new, until the tabernacle of God will be with men.[9]

Miracles and God's Sovereign Government

In order to obtain a correct conception of the relation between providence and the wonder, we must once more emphasize the truth that God alone sovereignly governs all things. We must especially be careful not to entertain the notion that God ever does anything *in spite of the disturbing or marring influence of the powers of darkness*, be it of man or of the devil.

We may indeed say that God works in spite of the *intention* of devils and ungodly men. They purpose to frustrate the plan and work of God, and that is their everlasting sin and guilt. The axe exalts itself against him that hews therewith, and the saw against him that draws it (Isa. 10:15). From an ethical viewpoint the evil power of the devil and the ungodly world opposes God. They have a different purpose from the Almighty's, and that purpose is evil.

When Satan entered paradise to tempt man, it certainly was not his purpose to execute the counsel of God. He did not mean to be a servant of Jehovah, but he intended to destroy Jehovah's work and to press into his own service the creation God had formed. When his brethren sold Joseph to the Midianites, they certainly did not purpose to realize the counsel of Jehovah and to keep a great people alive. They meant to pour out the vials of their hatred over the head of their brother; that was their sin. When the ungodly world power marshalled its forces against Jerusalem, it did not intend to chastise the city of God that had become spiritual Sodom, as was the purpose of the Lord, but the world power meant to destroy the people of God. In its heart it conceived the notion that it had sovereign power in itself to oppose the God of heaven and to destroy his kingdom. That was the great sin of the world power. The same was true when Pontius Pilate, Herod, and all the heathen conspired to bring the holy child Jesus to the cross (Acts 4:27–28). They certainly did not mean to realize the purpose of God in Christ to reconcile the world unto himself through the blood of atonement. They intended to satisfy their hatred against the Lord and against his Anointed.

Always it is the purpose of the power of darkness to destroy the works of God and to frustrate the counsel of the Most High. In the light of this subjective intention of the evil world, we may certainly say that God executes his counsel in spite of the wicked intentions of the powers of darkness.

But in the objective sense the matter is quite different. The truth is that God does not realize his counsel *in spite of* something that disturbs, mars, or destroys the work of his hands, but *through the means of* all the attempts of the ungodly world to frustrate his plan, as well as through all other means. God's work has never been spoiled: "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning" (Acts 15:18). Always he follows a straight course to the end he has in view. Never is he forced by any power outside of himself to deviate from that course. He rules alone, sovereignly, and absolutely —also through the means of Satan and ungodly men.

There certainly is conflict between the purpose and intention of the ungodly and the holy will of God, but never is there conflict between the counsel of God and the operations of the creature. The ship of creation, leaving the coast in the בְּרֵאשִׁית (*beginning*), sailing over the ocean of time, follows a straight course to the harbor the Almighty destined her to reach. There are to him no contrary winds, for all winds are his.

For this reason we may never separate the fall from the providential government of God. Not only must we never hesitate to say that the fall of man took place according to the determinate counsel of the Most High in order to serve him as a means to an end, but we must also understand that it occurred entirely by God's own providential power and government. Never was the counsel of God frustrated. The work of grace is no repair work. Only under God's providence was Satan empowered to use the serpent as an instrument; only thus could he enter paradise, tempt the woman, and lead her—and through her, Adam—to the fall, and only thus could man and the whole creation fall under sin and the curse. This does not mean that we chime in with the morbid exclamation, "O blessed fall into sin!"

The fall itself is not blessed, but is our great guilt. Neither are we, as redeemed children of God, filled with a sad longing for a paradise lost, but we must rather boast in the manifold wisdom of God, who even through the deep way of sin and death and the curse executes his counsel to the salvation of his church.

We may never separate in our minds the providence of God from the facts of sin and grace. There is no operation of God's providence next to and apart from that of grace and the curse, love and wrath, and election and reprobation. The government of God is exactly of such a nature that it guides the organic whole of creation unto the final glory of the new heavens and the new earth, to the glory of God's eternal covenant and to his eternal tabernacle which shall be with men, while through the same government of the Most High the reprobate element falls away and becomes ripe for eternal desolation. It is God's positive purpose to unite all things in Christ as the new head of all creation, to preserve and perfect his covenant and his everlasting kingdom. Unto this end all things in heaven and on earth are directed, and the Most High so governs all things that they must infallibly lead unto that end.

All things under God's providence cooperate unto that end. All things in heaven, on earth, and in hell—angels and devils, righteous and wicked, the curse, death, and all the suffering of this present time, sin and grace, fruitful and barren years, rain and drought, war and peace, sickness and pestilence—all things work together unto the final glorification when the tabernacle of God will be with men. The devils and the ungodly cooperate unto that end in a different way than do the angels and the righteous. The devils and the ungodly gather unto themselves treasures of wrath, while they nevertheless cooperate in the execution of God's counsel; the angels and the righteous receive the eternal reward of grace. There is no dualism: all work together unto the realization of the counsel of the Lord. God's government is motivated by electing, redeeming, and glorifying grace on the one hand, and by reprobating wrath on the other.

The Biblical Idea of a Miracle

When we bear all of this in mind, we can also understand the scriptural idea of the miracle or wonder. Several words are used to express the idea of a miracle. There is, first of all, the Hebrew term פֶּלֶא, from the verb פָּלָא, which means "to separate, to distinguish, to make distinguished, to make wonderful, extraordinary." A miracle, therefore, is a work of God that strikes the attention by being extraordinary. This corresponds to the Greek word θαῦμα (*marvelous work*). Of course, all the works of God are marvels, but our senses are so dull that our special attention must be aroused in order for us to behold a sunset or the raising of the dead as the works of the Almighty. A similar significance has the noun מוֹפֵת, often used in combination with the word אוֹת in the phrase אוֹתוֹת וּמוֹפְתִים (*signs and wonders*), like the Greek σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα (cf. Deut. 4:34; Ps. 135:9; Heb.2:4). The מוֹפְתִים (*wonders*) or τέρατα (*wonders*) are splendid works or deeds that stand out because of their manifestation of great power and wisdom. Signs are the visible tokens of the presence of the extraordinary and marvelous power of God. They are also called גְּבוּרוֹת (*mighty works*), δυνάμεις (*powers*), or ἔργα μεγαλεῖα (*mighty works*), confer Deuteronomy 3:24; Psalm 66:7; Hebrews 2:4.

From the word of God, it is evident that all the works of God are wonders because as works of God they are marvelous. For this reason the question whether anything is natural or supernatural—which has so often been discussed in connection with the idea of a miracle—is irrelevant and is based upon an erroneous notion of the relation between God and the world. The question does not properly belong in Reformed theology. It is really a deistic notion. Whoever believes in the Reformed

conception of the providence of God will certainly understand and confess that the distinction between natural and supernatural is false. The things or events which we call natural are always works of God, manifestations of the omnipresent power of God by which he sustains and governs all things. Nature works nothing by itself.

Wrong Conceptions of Miracles Criticized

The most common things, the most every day phenomena of nature, are works of the Most High. This is why scripture calls the most common events "wonders" of God:

> They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders (Ps. 107:23–32).

The distinction, therefore, between the natural and the supernatural is neither Reformed nor scriptural. Everything is both natural and supernatural because everything is the work of God's sustaining and governing hand.

Also the distinction that is often made between the mediate and the immediate character of the works of God is neither Reformed nor scriptural. In a miracle, according to this notion, God works immediately. But in this distinction one cannot find the idea of a wonder.

Kuyper emphasizes that a wonder is always immediate, but it is not quite clear what he means by this, and one feels at once that by his distinction the real idea and essence of a miracle is not touched upon.[10] In the last instance it may certainly be said that all the work of God is immediate; God touches immediately the being of all things, bears them by his almighty power, and causes them to be and to develop from moment to moment.

In all these distinctions is evident a struggle to come to a certain conception of the miracle, but it is also evident that through these distinctions no place has really been found for the idea of a *wonder*.

Nor can the real and proper idea of the miracle be found in the fact that we cannot comprehend and explain the miracle, for in reality we never can comprehend things, not even the most common events. It is true that we cannot understand how the Lord can multiply the few loaves of bread in his divine hands so that a veritable multitude can be fed thereby (John 6:1–14). No more does it lie within the limits of our conception how a seed can fall into the earth and die in order to bring forth fruit a hundredfold. It is certainly true that our minds are amazed when the Savior calls Lazarus out of the grave after he has been four days asleep in the dust (John 11:1–46), but no less does the birth of a little child transcend our boldest comprehension. How the Lord Jesus at the wedding of Cana could change water into wine is certainly a mystery for us (John 2:1–11), but it is no less incomprehensible for us how the vine can produce grapes and in that way change different elements into wine.[11]

In other words, it does not make any difference for my understanding whether God by his almighty power operates in the common and known way upon the vine and causes it to bring forth grapes, or whether by the same almighty power he works upon water to change it into wine. When the sun and the moon stand still upon the word of Joshua (Josh. 10:12–14), we confess that we cannot comprehend this phenomenon. When the Lord every morning anew causes the sun to rise on the

eastern horizon, that work of God also transcends our comprehension.

It is true that, according to the significance of one of the original words for *wonder* in holy scripture, the miracle causes us to stand amazed and draws our special attention. The cause of this must not be found in the fact that we comprehend the common events and acts of God's providence while the wonders transcend our comprehension, but rather it must be found in that we become so accustomed to the daily works of God's omnipresent power that we usually pay no attention to them. In the miracle God certainly performs something special, which exactly through its special character draws the attention. Nevertheless, neither in the so-called supernatural, nor in the immediate character, nor in the incomprehensible character of a wonder, can the proper idea of a miracle be found.

The Wonder of Grace

As to its idea, a wonder belongs entirely in the sphere of grace. In general we would circumscribe *a wonder as that act of God whereby he raises the whole of his creation, fallen in sin and under the curse, into the glory of his eternal kingdom and everlasting covenant*. As we have said, the final purpose and final destination of all things lies in the glorification of God's everlasting covenant. Creation, which at present lies under sin and under the curse, must not merely be restored in order to be brought back to her former state, but must be exalted into heavenly glory.

That act of God whereby, through the deep way of sin and the curse, he raises the work of his hands from misery into the glory of God's everlasting kingdom is *the* wonder, the wonder of grace. It has its centrum in the incarnation of the Word of God, the Wonder of wonders, the central Wonder, from whom flow all the separate miracles, or of whom they are types and shadows. It has its final realization in the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, when the very elements of this present world shall burn and perish in order to prepare a new heavens and a new earth in which the tabernacle of God shall be with men. Wherever the power of that wonder breaks through in creation which lies under the curse there is *a* wonder in the proper sense.

Understood in this sense, the whole of God's providential government in this world is really a wonder, for by his almighty hand he directs all things unto the final end. His providence is motivated by his grace over his people in Christ Jesus. Whenever this power of grace comes to manifestation in any domain of creation, we have what scripture calls a sign that the God of the covenant in Christ Jesus redeems his people and presently makes all things new. Wonders, therefore, are also signs that point to the complete redemption of the church.

When Israel passes through the Red Sea, the great question is not whether this is a natural or supernatural act of God, still less whether in that act God works mediately or immediately. Rather, in that act the Almighty reveals the great power of his grace, whereby he makes a path for his people through the sea and redeems them from the bondage of Egypt in order to lead them to the haven of rest. When God causes water to come forth from the rock, when he causes the manna to descend upon the desert, when he causes the walls of Jericho to fall, when he causes the sun and the moon to stand still, and when he causes great hail to rain upon the heads of the enemies of his people, the main question is not whether we can interpret these events. Rather, the chief idea is that under God's providence all things must serve to redeem and to save the people of his covenant and to lead them into the eternal inheritance.

When Immanuel comes into the world, he is the Wonder *par excellence*. He is the Lord out of heaven in our flesh, God with us, the central realization of the covenant of God with his people. When

he comes into the world, he performs many wonders. He stands, as it were, in the midst of the accursed creation and shows by the wonderworks of his hand that he is the one who should come in order to raise all things from the misery of the curse into the glory of God's eternal kingdom. He causes the deaf to hear and the blind to see. He removes all our sicknesses and pains, and he raises the dead.

All these miracles are only shadows and signs of the reality, manifestations of his divine power to redeem all things. Presently he rises from the dead to enter into the glory of the heavenly life as the head of his people, ascends into the highest heavens, sits at the right hand of God the Father, pours out his Spirit in the midst of his church, regenerates his people through the wonder of grace, calls light out of darkness, and recreates a people that is given to him in order that they should be an everlasting revelation of the wonder of his grace in the midst of the world. Presently he leads them through death into life, raises their bodies from the sleep of death, and glorifies and unites all things in himself in order to cause the tabernacle of God to be with men everlastingly (Rev. 21:3). Through the wonder of grace, the government of God reaches its final destination, according to his eternal counsel, to the glory of him of whom, through whom, and unto whom are all things (Rom. 11:36).

Chapter 17

Sin and Its Origin

Biblical Terms for *Sin*

In scripture many different terms are used to denote the reality which we call *sin*. This is not surprising, because life is many-sided. The life of an individual comprises body and soul, and his spiritual soul includes his intellectual and volitional life. The individual stands in manifold relationships to God and man as well as to the whole world in which he has his existence and which he uses for the sustenance and development of his life. Small wonder, then, that Holy Writ uses many different words for the concept *sin*; for sin is as many-sided as life itself. It affects and corrupts the whole man in all his various relationships.

Of the different scriptural terms for the concept *sin*, we will briefly discuss the following. The Old Testament has the most generally used term for sin, חָטָא, which corresponds to the New Testament term, ἁμαρτία, which literally means "to miss something" in the sense of "failure to find." Hence it means "to miss the mark," and in the ethical sense it means "to miss the aim, the purpose, of our existence, for which God has created us." That purpose is to love, to serve, and to glorify God. The sinner misses that purpose, not accidentally but willfully, as is very plain from Romans 1:21: "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful." The meaning of the Hebrew verb as "missing the mark" is very plain from the contrast between verses 35 and 36 of Proverbs 8: "Whoso findeth me findeth life" (v. 35), and "He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul" (v. 36).

A second term from the Old Testament is עָוֹן, usually translated "iniquity," from the verb עָוָה, the root meaning of which is "to bend or to curve," and hence "to make crooked or to distort." Ethically, the verb denotes "to act perversely," as well as "to be perverse." In Proverbs 12:8 נַעֲוֵה־לֵב is "a man of a perverse heart." The noun עָוֹן therefore means "perversity"; in that sense it is closely related to עָוֶל, from the root עָוַל, which means "to turn away, to distort," and hence "to be wrong, to be evil," and *piel*[1] "to do evil, to act wickedly." The noun עָוֶל, then, denotes "evil, iniquity" and is translated in the Septuagint by ἀδικία (*unrighteousness*) and by ἀνομία (*lawlessness*).

The term אָוֶן, usually translated "iniquity," from the root אוּן, which means "to be nothing, to be vain, to be fruitless," denotes sin as vanity. It is used for an idol and to denote everything pertaining to idolatry. It also denotes falsehood and deceit (Ps. 32:5; Ps. 36:3; Prov. 17:4; 1 Sam. 15:23; Isa. 41:29; Hos. 10:5–8).

Another word is רַע or רָעַ, usually translated "evil," from the root רָעַע. The verb signifies "to make a loud noise," like the German *rauschen*, also *rasen*, and the English *to rage*. Hence it has the meaning "to break in pieces, to destroy," and thus "to be hurtful, to harm." The noun denotes a state of being evil, morally bad, like κακός (Gen. 6:5; Gen. 8:21; 1 Sam. 25:3). A לֵב רָע is an evil heart (Jer. 3:17; Jer. 7:24). As a substantive it denotes badness in a moral sense, like the Greek τό κακόν (*the evil*).

Then there is the term מַעַל, usually translated "trespass," from the verb מָעַל. It denotes treachery against the living God and often occurs in the construction מָעַל מַעַל בַּיהוָה, "to commit treachery against Jehovah."

מָעַל is a verb which *per se* does not denote sin, but is used in connection with words

like *law* and *covenant* and then means "to transgress" (Isa. 24:5; Hos. 6:7; Hos. 8:1).

פֶּשַׁע, usually translated "transgression," from פָּשַׁע, has the meaning of "rebellion" and is a strong word for sin or transgression (Job 33:9; Job 34:6, 37; Ps. 32:1).

רֶשַׁע, usually translated "wickedness," from רָשַׁע, is another word for sin. The verb means "to make a tumult, a commotion, a disturbance," something like רָעַע. Therefore, רֶשַׁע denotes the wicked as raving against God and man, especially as it occurs in Isaiah 57:20: "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt."

In the Greek we also have many words for sin. The most general are ἁμαρτία, the same as חָטָא (*missing the mark*); παράβασις (*transgression*) and παράπτομα (*trespass*), in which the preposition *para* denotes the idea of going beside the way, giving the meanings "transgression" and "misdeed." There is also the word ὀφείλημα, denoting the idea that we fail to render unto God what we owe, therefore meaning "debt." Finally, there are the well-known words ἀδικία and ἀνομία, in which the *alpha privans*[2] denotes the negative idea so that the meaning is "without righteousness" and "without the law."

Philosophy and the Problem of Sin

Sin is a universal phenomenon. We are not surprised, therefore, that philosophers as well as theologians confronted the problem of sin and attempted to solve it. Various solutions have been offered.

There is, first, the dualistic conception, which assumed different forms in the past, but which is always characterized by the assumption of an eternal principle of evil, whether this principle is conceived as a personal being, as a substance, or as matter. Second, sin is explained as a mere negation of being and is therefore really nothing. All being is good. According to Spinoza, power and goodness are the same; sin or evil is a mere negation of power, and the want of virtue is the mere limitation of being. The same view of sin as a limitation or negation of being is held by Leibnitz, although he was not a pantheist, as Spinoza was, but a theist. The creature, according to Leibnitz, is necessarily limited because he is a creature. Since all limitation is imperfection, he is liable to err.

According to Schleiermacher, who is pantheistic in his philosophy, religion is the feeling of absolute dependence. The original state of man was not the final state, since he was not perfectly God-conscious. Since man's own consciousness is not perfectly controlled and dominated by the consciousness of God, sin is the want of the feeling of absolute dependence or of the control of his own consciousness by the consciousness of God. Perfection can be reached only in the way of development under the influence of the Spirit of Christ, in whom the consciousness of God was complete and perfect.

Another theory seeks the nature of sin in the power of the sensuous or material over the spiritual. This is also the theory of the Romish Church with its conception of the well-known *superadditum* (*superadded gift*), that is, the image of God added as something special to man in a state of pure

nature (*in puris naturalibus*).[3]

The Nature of Sin

All these purely philosophical views about sin we must reject; for a true conception of the problem, we must turn to scripture and consult the word of God only. Sin is not a mere negation of being; nor is it something that has existence in itself, as was the theory of the Manichaeans and of all dualistic systems. Sin rather supposes a substratum in which it subsists, through which it operates, and from which it is nourished.

Nor does sin consist in the act as such, a truth which must be maintained in order to hold to the truth that God governs all the acts of men, even their evil deeds, without becoming the author of sin. God and the sinful world perform the delivering up of Christ to the cross; yet for the world it is the manifestation of the greatest sin, while for God it is the revelation of highest love. The act of killing a man is the same for the executioner of justice and for the murderer, yet only for the murderer is it sin. An act by itself, therefore, can be either good or evil. Sin lies rather in the spiritual, ethical direction of the deed and, understood as corruption, in the spiritual, ethical inclination of the whole nature, of the mind and of the will. Sin is not to be defined as a mere negative (*mera negativa*) or lack (*privatio*), but rather as an active lack (*actuosa privatio*).

Bucanus defines sin as follows: "Sin is indeed an active privation, which acting as a principle, and from which the very act itself proceeding, deprives only of rectitude, together with the corruption, not the destruction, of the principle itself." Bucanus offers the following illustration: "As for instance, from a leg out of joint all motion is not removed but only the ordinary and right motion . . . And so it happens that Scripture presents sin not only as a negative, but [also] as an affirmative, and that it attributes to it efficaciousness over against and hostile to holiness and righteousness."[4]

Sin is not a substance. However, it presupposes a substance, a rational, moral being, through which it can come to manifestation and from which it can operate as such an active lack or privation. To man belongs originally the knowledge of God by virtue of his creation after the image of God. This he has lost. He ought to have it. It properly belongs to his nature. But he has it no more. There is, therefore, a lack, a *privatio*, in his nature. Yet this lack is not a mere negative, a nothing (*nihil*), as, for instance, the theory of evolution has it, or as the theory of Schleiermacher has it. According to these notions, sin is a lack that will be remedied in the way of gradual development.

Rather, *sin is an active lack*. The human nature, body and soul, mind and will, was not destroyed by sin; it still exists and still operates, although its natural powers have been curtailed to a great extent. But sin turned that whole nature into reverse from an ethical point of view. Instead of knowledge of God there has come darkness and the lie; instead of righteousness, unrighteousness and iniquity; instead of holiness, consecration to the devil and impurity in all man's inclinations and desires. The human nature cannot stand in neutral: it is either motivated by the power of life or by the power of death, by the power of the love of God or by the power of enmity against him. Just because man's nature is rational and moral and remains such through the fall, the lack of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness causes it to turn into the active reverse; namely, darkness, unrighteousness, and unholiness.

The Angels

Scripture reveals to us the introduction of sin into the world as having its origin not in the world of

men, but in the world of angels. It relates the temptation of Eve—and through her of Adam—through the serpent, through whom as an instrument Satan sought and found contact with the father of us all. And Satan is a created angel.

Of the creation of the angels, scripture tells us very little. In Genesis 1 they are not mentioned at all; also in this respect the first chapter of Genesis reveals its earthly standpoint. However, scripture throughout presupposes the creation of the angels and speaks of the world of angels as really existing, although they are spirits.

Scripture tells us that in the day of Christ, in the day of the Son of man, God will send his angels to gather out of his kingdom all things that offend and all that do iniquity (Matt. 13:41). The angels of the little ones always behold the face of our Father who is in heaven (Matt. 18:10). In the day of the Son of man, the angels will be sent out to gather the elect from the four winds of heaven (Matt. 24:31). In the hour of his temptation, the Savior tells us that he could pray the Father, and he would send him more than twelve legions of angels (Matt. 26:53). In the resurrection the children of God will be like unto the angels, being the children of the resurrection (Luke 20:36). The "saints . . . shall judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3).

In Job 38:6–7, we read: "Whereupon are the foundations [of the earth] thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" From this passage the conclusion has been drawn that the angels were created on the first day, although it must be said that the text offers no strict proof for this contention. If we may conjecture that there is a parallel between the creation of the earth and the creation of heaven and the heavenly beings, it would seem more natural to suppose that the angels were created on the sixth day. But for the time of the creation of the angels, we have no proof in scripture.

From their name, their appearance in the world, and their work, it can easily be deduced that the angels are messengers, ambassadors of God, who are sent for the salvation of the elect. The name *angel* both in the Greek (ἄγγελος) and in the Hebrew (מַלְאָךְ) has the significance of messenger or ambassador. Angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14). In this service they reveal the real relation in which, according to God's plan, they stand to the elect. It is true that man is originally made a little lower than the angels; nevertheless it is to him that all things are made subject, and he is crowned with glory and honor. Although we cannot see him as yet in the glory and honor that is destined for him, yet "we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. 2:9).

For this reason the angels in their present state stand in the service of the elect. They certainly are interested in the development of the history of revelation, for they are desirous to look into the things pertaining to the salvation of the people of God (1 Pet. 1:12). With them there is joy in heaven over one sinner that comes to repentance (Luke 15:7, 10). The church proclaims to the angels the manifold wisdom of God: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10).

At the chief moments in the history of salvation, angels appeared to the elect. Angels appeared to the saints of the old dispensation to proclaim to them the things that would shortly come to pass. Through the angels the law was given on Horeb in the hand of the mediator of the old dispensation (Gal. 3:19). When presently the Son himself had become a little lower than the angels (Heb. 2:9), the heavenly spirits appeared frequently on the scene. They proclaimed the gospel of the coming of the Son of God in the flesh to the shepherds of Ephratah and sang of glory to God in the highest heavens. Angels served the Lord when he overcame the devil in his temptation and when he struggled in

Gethsemane. Angels kept watch by the empty grave from which the Prince of life arose in glory. Angels appeared at the occasion of the ascension into heaven. Scripture reveals in the book of Revelation that angels shall again appear frequently in the latter days, towards the end of time, when the day of the Lord approaches, for the service of the elect.

Scripture also speaks of different classes or ranks of angels. There are cherubim and seraphim, the cherubim evidently having the calling to defend and to guard the holy things of God, while the seraphim are busy in the very sanctuary of God in heaven and appear before the face of God (Gen. 3:24; 2 Sam. 22:11; Isa. 6:2). Scripture also makes distinction between thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers (θρόνοι, κυριότητες, ἀρχαί, ἐξουσίαι—Col. 1:16; Eph. 3:10). Besides, special mention is made of the Angel of the Lord, the Old Testament appearance of the Christ; of Gabriel, who stands before God; and of Michael, who as prince of the angels fights for the cause of God against the powers of darkness (Dan. 10:13; Luke 1:19; Jude v. 9; Rev. 12:7).

Satan also, according to the presentation of scripture, was a prince among the hosts of heaven. It is not even impossible to conceive of him as originally standing at the head of the entire angel world as its chief and prince. At any rate, he was endowed with great power and glory. From Jude, verse 9 we receive the impression that Satan was even greater than Michael, the archangel, who, when contending with the devil about the body of Moses, dared not bring against Satan a railing accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke thee." Satan still has his angels over whom he is prince and whom he leads in the battle against the people of God (Rev. 12:7).

The Fall of Satan

We may undoubtedly conclude that Satan was the leader of the rebellion originally instigated in heaven among the angels and that he dragged the angels, over whom he had power and authority and of whom he was the prince, with him in his fall and corruption. Of this fall as a historical fact the Bible makes no mention. It begins with the narrative of the introduction of sin into the world of man and presupposes by the appearance of the serpent in paradise that the fall of the angels had already taken place, without giving a description of that fall of the angels.

The word of God describes the nature of the sin in the angel world as pride and rebellion against God, as the sinful desire and the sinful attempt to dethrone God and to be God instead of him. The "angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, [God] hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude v. 6; cf. 2 Pet. 2:4). 1 Timothy 3:6 characterizes Satan's sin as his being lifted up with pride. Whenever he appears in the world of men, it is evident that his attempt is always to usurp the power and authority of God and to take the place of the Most High. Satan instills in the heart of the woman the false philosophy that if they eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they will be like God (Gen. 3:5). When Satan comes to tempt the Lord who is in the form of a servant, he approaches Christ with the demand and the condition that falling down before him Jesus shall worship him (Matt. 4:8–9; Luke 4:6–7).

His name, therefore, is Satan—the opponent, the adversary of God—and the devil—the liar, slanderer of God. After Satan has succeeded in subjecting under him the first servant of the Lord in paradise, the viceroy of God, Satan is also called the prince of this world (John 12:31; John 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4), the prince of the power of the air, and the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience (Eph. 2:2). Satan may not be presented as omnipresent so that he personally can be the author of all temptation in the hearts of men in all places at the same time: for the devil is a creature,

even though he is a spiritual creature. He goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). In his battle against the Lord an entire host of evil angels and powers are at Satan's disposal (Eph. 6:11–12; Rev. 12:4). For this reason the idea is foolish that with the binding of Satan (while all other powers of darkness that serve him remain free and unbound) a kingdom of peace, a millennium on earth, can be expected. We wrestle not only against the devil, but also against "principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places," and these powers join themselves with the powers of the present world (Eph. 6:12).

Absolute Depravity

The fall in the world of angels is absolute, that is, there is no salvation for them. The distinction between absolute and total depravity has been applied to men in their fallen and corrupt state. Some make this distinction in order to try to explain how a totally depraved sinner can still do good works. Man, according to this view, is totally depraved, but not absolutely depraved. Because he is not absolutely depraved, he is able to do good before God in his natural state. The proponents of this philosophy fail to make clear what they really want to explain. A totally depraved man is evil and corrupt in his whole nature, in all his thinking, willing, desiring, and acting. Therefore, even with the distinction between total and absolute depravity, the problem remains how such a totally depraved man can bring forth good fruits.

Besides, if one would make the distinction between total and absolute depravity, he must apply the distinction in a different way. *By total depravity is meant that man by nature in all his existence, with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength, has become a servant of sin; he is entirely incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil. By absolute depravity must be meant that the matter is settled, that there is no salvation for the sinner, and that he is fallen so deeply that he can never be saved*. But the absoluteness of the fall certainly has nothing to do with the totality of depravity. If the distinction is understood in this way, it cannot be used to prove that the natural man is able to do good, because he always remains totally depraved: from a corrupt tree no good fruits can be expected. Also in regard to the question of absolute depravity, the Reformed and scriptural distinction between elect and reprobate must be maintained.

From the point of view of God's counsel, it must be said that the reprobate are not only totally but also absolutely depraved. Their case is decided. As long as one does not want to make this distinction, he can say in general that man is not absolutely fallen because he is saveable, which is certainly true. However, this possibility of being saved may not be sought in any good that is supposed to have remained in the sinful nature of man, but only in the power of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Strictly speaking, from the viewpoint of the counsel of God, only the elect are saveable; from the same point of view the reprobate are absolutely lost.

It is important to understand this thoroughly. Not infrequently the error is proclaimed even in Reformed circles as if there were in the fallen nature a connecting point for the salvation of man. This must be denied. Nothing in the sinful nature of man is adapted to his salvation. Therefore, if we speak of absolute and total depravity, it is better to keep before our mind the distinction that scripture always makes between righteous and unrighteous, between elect and reprobate. All are indeed totally depraved, and there is nothing in their fallen nature that can render them saveable. But the elect are saveable through the almighty grace of God because they are in Christ from before the foundation of the world. They are fallen on Christ. Therefore, they are saved.

The reprobate, however, are hopelessly lost because they fell outside of Christ. Therefore, their fall and corruption are absolute. This is true also of the reprobate angels. Also in the world of angels, election and reprobation are in force. There, too, God's counsel makes separation. The difference, however, is this: while in the world of man, all fell under sin, and therefore the elect must be saved, the elect angels never fell. The power of election causes them to remain standing. Part of the angels fell. Because they, even as the reprobate among men, fell without a mediator and saving head, they are fallen absolutely and their case is absolutely determined. Election and reprobation in the world of angels are finished, while in the world of sinful men election and reprobation are being realized throughout the course of history.

The Tempter and the First Temptation

In connection with the history of the fall of our first parents described in Genesis 3, the prince of darkness appeared personally, even as he appeared personally in connection with the temptation of the Savior. The tempter came to Adam and Eve in the form of a serpent as his instrument. This is to be understood literally. There was really a serpent of whom the devil made use in their temptation. The devil had need of a visible instrument for more than one reason.

First, while Adam and Eve were in the state of righteousness, Satan had no direct access to their hearts; he had to come from without. Second, the probationary command was connected with an object in the visible world: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The temptation, therefore, must be directed to the tree. That Satan chose the serpent for his temptation was undoubtedly because "the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field" (v. 1) and thus the most suitable instrument for Satan's purpose.

This indicates that the serpent was endowed with a high degree of animal intelligence. It is not impossible that the serpent represented the animal world with man. We receive the impression that the serpent possessed some form of speech—not of human language, of course—but nevertheless of a language that enabled him to communicate with man. Even though it is true that Satan was the subject speaking through the serpent to Eve in paradise, yet we must note that the devil could not give the serpent the power of speech. In addition, the narrative leaves the impression that Eve did not consider it extraordinary that the serpent spoke to her. From the rest of Genesis 3, we receive the impression that the serpent originally presented a different form than the form he has today. Surely, the serpent was an animal that could form a sort of connecting link between the animal world and man. For that reason Satan could find no more suitable instrument than that most subtle of animals for his temptation of Adam and Eve.

At the same time, it is very evident that the subject speaking through the serpent was Satan. This is plain from the content of the speech, which suggests a rational, moral subject, and indicates also a wicked subject who lies and slanders God. The same can be concluded from the general observation that the Bible everywhere puts a connection between the devil and fallen humanity. He is the prince of this world, the old serpent (John 8:44; Rev. 12:9).

Why did he approach the woman rather than the man, since it certainly was not his purpose to tempt Eve only, but also to cause Adam to fall? If Eve alone had fallen, and Adam had remained standing in his original integrity, the purpose of Satan would certainly have been frustrated. This question we answer by remarking, first, that this was not because Eve was morally weaker and more inclined to sin: both she and Adam were holy and righteous and standing in the perfect knowledge of God. We must remember that not Eve was the head, but Adam, and that she did not bear the burden of the full

responsibility which Adam bore. Second, it was not she, but Adam who had received the command directly from God. Third, Satan no doubt judged that rather than approaching Adam directly, he could reach Adam more easily through Eve. Finally, to this we may perhaps add that the woman's nature was more susceptible than that of man, not to sin, but to an appeal to the senses.

As far as the form of the temptation and the conversation that ensued between Eve and the devil, we may remark that Satan at once revealed the inmost principle of his wicked nature, because he slandered God and presented him as a liar and as one who does not seek the highest good for his creature. Satan did that by presenting it (in question form) as very improbable that man would die through eating of the tree of knowledge. There was a very subtle argument in the first question of the serpent: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Gen. 3:1). The purpose of this question was not primarily to create confusion in the consciousness of Eve with regard to the proper contents of God's command, as is usually the presentation.

Usually this question is interpreted as Satan's purposing to distort in the mind of Eve the real meaning of the probationary command and to present the matter as if the Lord had forbidden Adam and Eve to eat of the other trees of the garden, while they were allowed to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But note that this was not the purpose of the question of the devil: he did not ask whether perhaps God had forbidden them to eat of the other trees of the garden, but whether God had said that they might not eat of *all* the trees, of *any* tree in the garden. Therefore, there was a very subtle argument in the question of Satan—an argument that can be stated as follows: "If you may eat of all the trees, what possible wrong or harm can there be in eating of this one tree?" In this way the devil prepared the mind of the woman for the lie that by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they would never die. And Eve took up the discussion.

This was already the beginning of her fall. She was motivated undoubtedly at that very moment by pride. Although it cannot be denied that Eve carried a personal responsibility with respect to the probationary command; nevertheless, if we consider the unique significance of this particular command—the fact that the future of the whole race was involved, the fact that not Eve but Adam was the head of the race, and the fact that Adam had received the command and not Eve—there certainly is reason to believe that even in taking up the discussion about this command with the serpent without Adam, Eve was already motivated by pride.

Notice, too, from Genesis 3:3 that in answer to the serpent Eve misquoted the command of God when she said, "Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." First, she used the plural, "ye," while God had addressed Adam alone when he gave the commandment. She evidently meant to defend her good right to discuss the matter. Second, there was gross exaggeration in her statement, "neither shall ye touch it." This was a sign of weakness, for God had not said that they might not touch the tree at all. Then she presented death as the result of eating the fruit of the tree or of touching it, rather than as a punishment of sin: "lest ye die." Finally, note that she avoided mentioning the name of the tree. Instead, she designated it as "the tree which is in the midst of the garden."

The second step in the serpent's temptation consisted in a flat contradiction of the word of God: "Ye shall not surely die" (v. 4). He was confident that the heart of Eve had been sufficiently prepared for this bold and wicked contradiction. At the same time, he slandered God: "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (v. 5). Therefore, he presented the end of sin as a good to be fervently desired: "Ye shall be as God." In this second step of the temptation, the devil revealed himself in his true character as the adversary of God who opposes and contradicts the word of God. This is implied in the name *Satan*. Here he becomes manifest as the slanderer of God, the liar, who always speaks of himself and lies.

Here sin is revealed in its deepest principle: to negate God, to deny his sovereignty, and to be our own God, determining for ourselves what shall be good and what shall be evil.

Finally, we read that the woman saw that the tree was good for food. Apart from the probationary command this must certainly have been true. However, in light of the word of God, "Thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17), this was a lie. The power of sin had already darkened Eve's understanding ethically. Here sin revealed itself as lust of the flesh (1 John 2:16). Further, the woman saw that the tree was pleasant to the eyes. This, too, was undoubtedly true, apart from the probationary command. There is no reason to assume that the tree was devoid of beauty. However, when seen in the light of the word of God, the tree as it stood offering its fruit was a temptation, a vanity, from which Eve's eyes should have turned away. Here sin manifested itself as the lust of the eyes (1 John 2:16). Finally, the woman saw that the tree was "to be desired to make one wise" (Gen. 3:6). Here Eve considered the tree from the viewpoint of the lie of the devil: "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (v. 5). In violating the word of God, she saw the way to true wisdom. The tree appeared to her as a means to make her truly wise. She set aside the word of God and preferred her own judgment. Here sin manifested itself as the pride of life (1 John 2:16).

The Fall and its Results for Adam and Eve

Of the fall of man we read only the brief statement: "And [she] gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat" (Gen. 3:6). We must bear in mind that when Eve tempted Adam, she had already fallen into death, from light into darkness, from righteousness into sin, from the bliss of paradise into the misery of corruption. This she must have felt deeply. She could not have tempted Adam because she had experienced the devil's words as truth and enjoyed happiness in disobedience. The contrary was true. She had plunged herself into misery, and she knew it. When she tempted Adam to eat, she was motivated by enmity against God and by the love of darkness rather than light. In her fallen state she could not tolerate the fellowship of a sinless, holy, and righteous husband. Hence she brought him down with her into death.

The deepest principle of sin, as manifested in the temptation of the woman by Satan, is the denial and rejection of God as the only Lord, the proud and foolish desire and attempt to be as God. This deepest principle revealed itself immediately as lust of the flesh and lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

The narrative of Genesis 3 describes the immediate results of the sin of Adam and Eve for themselves.

The first result of the disobedience of Adam and Eve was that their eyes were opened, and they knew that they were naked (v. 7). This does not mean that they now passed from a state of childish innocence or naïveté into a state of moral self-consciousness, but that they realized their sinful condition; they knew and were conscious that their bodies had become the instruments of sin. They made aprons of fig leaves and covered themselves, and as "they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day," they tried to hide themselves from his face (v. 8). It appears from this that there was a revelation of God in some perceptible form in paradise, a theophany, such as later appeared in the Angel of Jehovah. This probably also explains their attempt, which was nevertheless foolish, to hide themselves from this appearance, from the presence of the Lord among the trees of the garden.

It cannot be said that in the first reactions of Adam and Eve after the fall—in their attempt to cover

themselves and to hide themselves from the presence of the Lord—there were signs of the operation of God's grace. It was fear rather than sorrow after God and repentance that motivated their actions. The power of their sinful nature rather than the grace of God dominated their first reactions, although it is true that already there was the principle of grace in their hearts; otherwise they would have perished immediately. They fell, but they fell upon Christ who stood behind them. So-called natural shame, however, is not the expression or manifestation of grace, nor is it a revelation of any good left in man after the fall, as it is sometimes explained by the theory of common grace. It is true that their shame presupposed knowledge of the difference between good and evil and of the shamefulness of sin, but it did not evince any sorrow after God. It was rooted in false and vain pride and the consequent desire to save their own reputation.

After the fall God approached Adam pedagogically. This is evident from the question with which God approached Adam: "Where art thou?" (v. 9). This does not mean that God did not know where Adam was, nor even that he left this impression with Adam. It is evident from Adam's answer that he understood the purpose of God's question quite well. But God was dealing pedagogically with Adam; God would not only draw Adam from his hiding place, but would also induce him to give an account to God of the real reason for his hiding. Adam answered the question of God according to its real meaning and intent, as if God had asked the reason for Adam's hiding himself.

This suggests that God must have come into the garden daily and that Adam would come to meet him. This time, however, God had to call for him. What is the reason? Adam replied that he was naked and that on that account he was afraid. He felt that before the appearance of God, sin became manifest through his very body; even his outward appearance now condemned him. The Lord continued to deal pedagogically with Adam and to draw him out: let Adam give account of this sudden knowledge of his nakedness and of his fear because of it. What was the reason? Why was he afraid because of his nakedness? Had he eaten of the tree and transgressed the commandment of God? Naked he had always been, without being afraid. Why was he afraid now? (v. 11).

Adam did admit that he had eaten of the forbidden fruit. But there is an important difference between merely admitting the act of one's sin and confessing the guilt of that sin in sorrow after God and true repentance. Confession of guilt and true repentance imply assumption of full responsibility for the sin committed, and this cannot be found in Adam's reply to God's question. On the contrary, Adam shifted the responsibility and guilt of his sin to Eve by saying that she gave him of the fruit of the tree, and he did eat. We must remember that as yet there was no gospel; the promise of redemption had not been announced as yet. Therefore, Adam would not know that there was forgiveness for him with God.

Adam spoke of Eve as "the woman whom thou gavest to be with me" (v. 12). By implication this would seem to cast the blame for Adam's sin ultimately on God himself; by using this expression Adam certainly intended to excuse himself further. Had not God given him this woman, he would not have violated God's command. Apparently, God accepted this statement of Adam as far as it contained the truth, without at once rebuking him for his sin. He also accepted Adam's implied denial of his responsibility and guilt, for God acted upon Adam's statement and turned to the woman with the question: "What is this that thou hast done?" (v. 13).

In explanation of this method of dealing with Adam and Eve, we must remember the following:

First, God was dealing with our first parents in his eternal love and with the purpose of bringing salvation to them. God had chosen them unto salvation in Christ.

Second, Adam and Eve knew nothing of this purpose of God, for as yet the promise of the gospel had not been announced to them.

Third, as the sequel shows, it was God's intention, before he further pronounced his judgment upon them, to announce this gospel promise in the form of a curse upon the serpent by the announcement of the devil's defeat.

Fourth, for the moment God appeared to pay no attention to Adam and Eve's attempt to shift their responsibility; he allowed himself to be led from Adam to the woman and from the woman to the serpent.

In the meantime, the woman revealed the same disposition and attitude as Adam. She answered that the serpent had beguiled her, and thus she ate (v. 13). The same purpose that is evident from the answer of Adam is plain here: to shift the responsibility while admitting the deed itself. Her statement left the impression that she had so been brought under the spell of the serpent that she hardly had acted as an accountable moral agent when she ate of the tree. After all, was not also the serpent a creature of God's own making?

The Lord then approached the serpent. He did not question him, as he did Adam and Eve, but immediately cursed him, addressing him particularly. The words, "thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life" (v. 14), allow for no other interpretation. The curse was pronounced upon the serpent as an animal. However, the degradation of his tool is for Satan the constant symbol of his own curse. Although the serpent was not a moral agent in the same sense as Satan or as man; yet in this address of the curse to the serpent, there was presupposed a certain measure of responsibility for the part he played in the temptation of the woman (Gen. 9:5). That the serpent was cursed above all cattle and above every beast of the field means that he was cast down from his high position so that he became more humiliated and despised than any other animal. It also means that he will not be able to be represented with the other animals in the new creation: when the creature will be delivered from the bondage of corruption, the serpent will not participate in the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:21; Isa. 65:25).

The idea of the relation between the serpent's sin and the curse that was pronounced upon him is expressed in the words, "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased" (Matt. 23:12; Luke 14:11). The serpent had presumed to be instrumental in the temptation and fall of man: he is debased to the lowest position. The serpent does not eat dust in the sense that it is his proper food. However, as a reptile he naturally swallows dust with his food, which is a further symbol of his degradation.

The Protevangel

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). This protevangel was addressed primarily to Satan, though not exclusively. The very form of this prophecy shows clearly that it was addressed also to the serpent. The enmity here mentioned certainly refers also to the enmity between man and the serpent brood; yet it is evident that the principal subject addressed was the devil.

First, we know from the rest of scripture that the real tempter in paradise was not the serpent, but Satan. Therefore, it is impossible to suppose that he was not addressed here at all.

Second, by man's temptation and fall an alliance of friendship was established between man and Satan. This is also clear from the rest of the Bible. The enmity of which God here speaks must be the enmity between Satan and the seed of the woman.

Third, the rest of the history of God's people in the world is plainly the realization of this prophecy. This prophecy is called the protevangel (in Dutch: *moederbelofte, mother promise*). It is

called this because it is the beginning of the gospel of salvation. All the rest of the revelation of the gospel in Christ can be conceived as only a further unfolding and expansion of this promise. The gospel is not revealed bit by bit, but all the people of God have the entire gospel of salvation from the beginning; yet only in the course of history is it gradually revealed in all its implications. By the seed of the serpent, although also the serpent brood is meant, is indicated in principle the seed of the devil, that is, the children of the devil among men in the line of the generations of the reprobate, culminating in the antichrist, the man of sin.

In contrast, by the seed of the woman is meant the spiritual children of the covenant, the holy seed in the line of the generations of the elect. In the highest sense the seed of the woman is Christ, the Son of Mary, David, Judah, Israel, Abraham, Shem, Noah, Seth, and Adam, born of a virgin without the will of man. The positive meaning of the enmity against Satan, which was announced by God, is the covenant fellowship of the Most High. As the friendship of the world is enmity against God (James 4:4), so also the enmity against the serpent and his seed is friendship of God. The covenant of friendship had been violated by Adam, and an alliance with the devil had been established. But God maintains his covenant and through Christ destroys the alliance with Satan. The bruising of the heel of the woman's seed by the serpent refers literally to the injury inflicted by the serpent on man: creeping behind man, the serpent bites man's heel. But this is only a figure of the suffering and persecution inflicted on the church in the world by the powers of darkness. In principle this attack was made on Christ, especially in the cross, which was the judgment of the world.

The crushing of the head of the serpent is accomplished in principle in the revelation of Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman, by his cross, resurrection, and exaltation at the right hand of God. The crushing of the serpent's head is about to be fully revealed in the day of Christ when he shall destroy forever all the powers of darkness, and this crushing will be accomplished by faith by all the seed of the woman throughout history as they participate in the sufferings and victory of Christ.

The promise of God in the protevangel is that God will put enmity in the heart of man against Satan and his seed. This implies regeneration. This promise was certainly given directly to Eve, but also to Adam. In the light of this promise it cannot be doubted that our first parents were regenerated immediately after the fall. It is evident that Eve was addressed not merely as an individual, but as the mother of all mankind and especially as the mother of all women. This is clear not only from the entire context, but also from the fact that what was announced is realized in all women.

The Judgment of God on Adam and Eve

In Genesis 3:16–17 we read of the judgments that God pronounced upon our first parents:

> Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, because thou has hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.

We ought to give an answer to the question of the meaning of these judgments. Often they are considered merely as punishments for sin in general. But this cannot be true, for the real punishment of sin is death in all its implications. Before the fall God had clearly said, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). This punishment was surely inflicted upon Adam and Eve and was inflicted immediately, as we hope to see later. In Genesis 3:16–19, however, temporal judgments were announced.

Man, the king of the earthly creation, had fallen in willful disobedience and sin, but not apart from or contrary to God's counsel and eternal purpose. According to that eternal purpose and in harmony with the changed condition of man, God changed all of earthly existence so that it could become the proper stage for the realization of his purpose of election and reprobation. The great sorrow and conception of the woman, the curse on the ground, the bondage of corruption to which the whole creation was made subject, the toil of man, temporal death—all these belong to the proper setting of the stage for the realization of God's purpose in the future. Temporal suffering, toil, vanity, and death are common to all men. Yet, while they are manifestations of wrath for the ungodly, they are not punishments for the elect in Christ, who bore all our punishments. All things work together for good to them that love God (Rom. 8:28). This we must understand from the start.

God pronounced judgments upon the woman: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3:16). Literally, the text reads: "I will make very great thy sorrow and thy conception." That the correct meaning is not expressed by "I will multiply" should be self-evident, for this would express an increase in the woman's sorrow and presuppose that there was a measure of this sorrow possible before the fall. Rather, the text should read: "I will make very great." The sorrow refers to the suffering of the woman connected with her bearing of children.

Another question is whether the translation "the sorrow of thy conception" is correct. The majority of commentators consider it so, reading the expression "thy sorrow and thy conception" as a *hendiadys*.[5] However, the literal expression is "thy sorrow and thy conception." This would mean that after the fall the reproductive capacity of the human race was much increased. How deeply this affects the stage upon which humanity is henceforth to appear and to develop is self-evident, for it certainly implies that God is hastening to the end and that Christ is coming quickly.

The significance of the sorrow of childbirth must be found in the fact that it is a word of God's wrath. It is a clear testimony that we bring forth children of wrath and unto death. However, for the believing women of the covenant, who bring forth their children with their eye of faith on the promise, this wrath and this death are overcome through the seed of the woman *par excellence* and the crushing of the head of the serpent. Believing women bring forth their children in the blessed hope of eternal glory in the kingdom of God through the redemption in Christ Jesus our Lord (1 Tim. 2:15).

The final words of Genesis 3:16, "he shall rule over thee," do not refer to the fact that man is the head of the woman, because man's headship is rooted in creation: "For Adam was first formed, then Eve" (v. 13). However, after the fall this relationship is affected by sin and placed under the curse. The result is ruling on the part of man in pride and boastful cruelty and tyranny. From this the modern woman of the world emancipates herself by denying man's rule over her altogether. In Christ, however, the relation between man and woman is put in the sphere of true liberty (1 Pet. 3:1–7). The relation between the judgment pronounced on the woman and her sin of violating the proper relation to her husband by deciding the matter concerning the probationary command by herself—without him and by deceiving him—is that in all her life with her husband she will be subjected to suffering and humiliation. Her desire will be to her husband even in her sorrow and subjection.

God also pronounced a curse on the ground:

> And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return (Gen. 3:17–19).

In this curse on the ground is implied that it brings forth thorns and thistles, representatives of all obnoxious weeds that choke the good seed and greatly increase the toil of man in obtaining the necessary sustenance from the soil. The curse implies further that man shall eat the fruit of the earth in the sweat of his face, that is, with great toil and labor and in sorrow. The cursed earth produces corruption for his corruptible body. In the sphere of corruption, he eats and drinks unto death. Finally, implied in this curse is all the destruction and upheaval of the soil and of other parts of nature: deserts, volcanoes, marshes, earthquakes, hail, fire, winds, floods, scorching heat, drought, locusts, and other pests. We know from the rest of scripture that not only the soil, but also the entire earthly creation was made subject to bear the burden of the wrath of God. This would naturally follow from the organic unity of creation, but it is also plainly taught in other parts of the Bible. The creature is not only presented as being subject to special judgments of God, but also its whole existence is subject to vanity and to the bondage of corruption.

This is the general idea of the book of Ecclesiastes: all is vanity.

The same idea is definitely expressed in Romans 8:19–22:

> For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

The creature mentioned in these verses is the whole creation with the exception of angels and men. It cannot include the wicked, whether angels or men, for they will not be delivered from the bondage of corruption, and it cannot include the holy angels, for they never were subject to the bondage of corruption. Neither does it include the children of God, for they are mentioned in distinction from the whole creation in verse 23. Hence the brute, living creature is meant especially. This brute creation bears the curse of God in vanity and in suffering.

Man's labor is the result of the judgment of God after the fall insofar as his toil has become necessary for him to eke out an existence. In the state of righteousness, he ate to work, that is, to serve God, and his work was always pure delight. After the fall, however, he must labor in order to eat; his work has become hard toil, difficult labor, painful exertion, and drudgery: in the sweat of his face he must eat his bread. Above all, his work is performed in the sphere of vanity and death. Death limits him on every side. The creature is subject to vanity (v. 20). He never is able to accomplish anything at all. In reality there is no more culture in the true sense. Man works, eats, and drinks unto his own death, which is always the result of the operation of the wrath of God, of the curse. Physical death is not simply the separation of body and soul, but is rather that operation of the curse in our bodies, the result of which is their total corruption and dissolution. They return unto the dust.

In all these temporal judgments upon the woman, the man, and all the earthly creation, the original threat of the punishment of death is not fully executed, for it includes spiritual and eternal death. Yet these judgments are all the result of the operation of God's righteous and holy wrath and therefore are connected with death. They together create the proper atmosphere for the development of the fallen human race, dead in sin, from death unto death, unless the wonder of grace intervenes unto salvation.

God's Mercy to Adam and Eve

In the rest of Genesis 3, we read that Adam called his wife *Eve*, that God himself provided coats of skins for man, and that God expelled Adam and Eve from paradise.

The name *Eve* means "life." The text explains that Adam so called his wife because she is the mother of all living. That he called her *Eve* at this time reveals faith in the promise of God and a looking forward to its fulfillment.

By the fact that God made coats for Adam and Eve we must probably understand, in the light of God's usual dealings with man in such matters, that God made these coats for Adam and Eve by giving them the right to kill animals and by instructing them how to make coats out of animal skins. The idea of a bloody, atoning sacrifice was probably implied in the act of God whereby he instructed Adam and Eve to make coats of skins for themselves, because soon afterward we read of such sacrifices, and they must have been instituted by God. By this act God certainly gave man the right to kill the animal, which involved the shedding of the animal's blood. Thus in the way of the shedding of blood, coverings were provided for man's nakedness. These coverings were designed to replace those Adam and Eve had made for themselves. All this points to the idea of a bloody and atoning sacrifice.

Then the Lord God expelled man from paradise and from the approach to the tree of life. The Lord's words, "the man is become as one of us" (v. 22), are frequently understood as irony. This is very improbable, both because it is highly questionable whether irony is in harmony with the holiness and truth of God's being, and because we would hardly expect God in this particular instance to use irony with a view to the misery of man. It is better to understand "the man is become as one of us" to mean that man had sinfully assumed such a likeness with God as to determine for himself what is good and evil.

God expelled man from the garden of Eden, "lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (v. 22). This certainly signifies that by continued contact with and eating of the tree of life, the earthly life of Adam and Eve would have been perpetuated even in their fallen state. There is, therefore, certainly an act of salvation in man's expulsion from paradise. Eating of the tree of life would have resulted in a perpetuation of the state of death. However, in Christ, who is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25), temporal death is become the servant of the elect to open a passage into eternal life and glory.

God drove man forth from the garden in order that he might till the ground whence he was taken (Gen. 3:23). This fact, in connection with the words, "cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat of the herb of the field" (vv. 17–18), leaves the impression that before the fall this labor of tilling the soil was unnecessary. The humiliating character of this labor is expressed in the words, "for out of [the ground] wast thou taken" (v. 19). That man was expelled from paradise and from the approach to the tree of life shows that paradise itself was not immediately destroyed. We do not know when it was taken away—perhaps not until the flood. Paradise remained, then, as a constant reminder of the state whence man had fallen, but especially as a promise of a better paradise to come, as an element of the gospel to Adam and Eve and to the seed of the woman.

Chapter 18

Death as the Punishment of Sin

The Nature of Death

Only the superficial mind can make light of the fact of death or easily pass over the problem of death. Death is the powerful archenemy of all life, light, joy, and hope. It is darkness, sorrow, and despair. Death is a mighty tyrant, merciless, implacable, an unconquerable foe. There is no way out insofar as man is concerned. No one has ever successfully resisted its onslaught. No one has ever found a solution to the problem of death. No one among men, be he ever so wise or learned, has given or is able to give an answer to the grave question of death.

There is no escape from its pursuit. Death waits for us at the cradle. It reminds us constantly of its cruel purpose to destroy us. It follows us mercilessly and is not satisfied until it has dragged us down into the corruption of the grave. Death is no respecter of persons. It attacks and carries off the babe in the cradle, who knows not the difference between his right and left hands, as well as the head hoary with age who is full of days. It makes no distinction between the poor and the rich, the simple and the wise, the strong and the weak, and the learned and the unlearned. It mocks at the vain attempt of the physician to stay its hand. It is deaf to the cries of the anxious mother watching the struggles of her darling. It despises the millions of the rich, and it laughs at the resistance of the strong. Death reigns. And it reigns universally. The great reaper, even if you consider nothing more than that he cuts off our earthly life, is the terror of all men.

Even by this description we have not fully pictured the real terror of this universal power of death. Those who try to persuade themselves and others that death is natural, that it is the inevitable and necessary end of all life, a normal termination of a normal process, may perhaps be satisfied to accept the fact of death. To them man is like the beasts that perish. In that case death, as it dominates and sways its grim scepter over all mankind, presents no serious problem. But different it is when we accept the teaching of scripture that death is not natural and normal, but very unnatural and abnormal. It does not necessarily terminate the life of man, but it is always the execution of a sentence, of a divine death sentence, the manifestation of the wrath of God. That makes death so very serious. Death is punishment for sin. God said to man in his state of original integrity, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17). And die he did: not as a kind of natural result of his eating of the forbidden tree, but because God in his righteous wrath inflicted the death sentence upon him.

The Theory of Common Grace

It is well-known that the theory of common grace denies that man died when he ate the forbidden fruit. According to this theory, sin and death were restrained immediately after the fall, and death was not inflicted on the very day that Adam fell and ate of the forbidden fruit. The word of the Lord, “for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,” must not be understood as a threat of punishment that the Lord himself would execute, but rather as a prediction of what would inevitably have to follow if man ate of the forbidden tree and fell from the living God. Whoever sins tears himself loose from the living God, and therefore he cannot live. He must die, unless the wonder of God’s grace intervenes and cuts the causal connection between sin and death either eternally or for a

time.

According to the theory of common grace, the wonder of God's grace intervened. God had predicted that man would die the day he ate of the forbidden tree. In that prediction the Lord spoke the truth, for there is an inseparable connection, according to God's own ordinance, between sin and death. Whoever swallows poison must die, and whoever opposes the living God must also necessarily lose his life. Although the Lord in that sense spoke the absolute truth when he said that man would die the day that he would eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, yet in his great mercy the Lord intervened so that on the very day of his fall man did not die. This intervention by which man did not suffer the punishment of death in the very moment he ate of the forbidden fruit and fell away from God is the operation of common grace in which all men participate.[1]

This is a mistaken notion, and it is an erroneous interpretation of Genesis 2:17. We must understand that death is not a necessary consequence, a natural result of sin, but that death is very definitely presented in Genesis 2:17 and throughout scripture as the punishment of God, the manifestation of his wrath. God kills man. According to Kuyper, death must be a certain power that works of itself; in Genesis 2:17 God simply warned man against that necessary result of sin. Kuyper uses the illustration of a man swallowing the poison called Paris green.[2] When he is on the verge of swallowing it, you can warn him that if he swallows it, he shall surely die. If he nevertheless swallows it, and you give him an antidote, and he vomits out the poison, you can still save his life. According to Kuyper, that is exactly what happened. When God said, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," he simply predicted, prophesied, what would happen *if* man fell away from him. Yet the inevitable result of sin was prevented by God's administering to man the antidote of common grace.

This is not the truth. Death does not work of itself, but it works through the wrath of God. It is the punishment of sin. It is certainly true that sin is inevitably followed by death, but only because God himself, who is holy and righteous, maintains his covenant over against the rebellious sinner and inflicts upon him the punishment of death. Further, it is not even true that man did not die the very day that he ate. That is not even true physically. Even though man existed for many years after the fall and continues to exist on earth organically in the line of generations, yet he does not live. He is in the power of death also physically. Death reigns over him and leads him inevitably to the end. At the cradle stands the grave, ready to swallow him up. Besides, man is spiritually dead through trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1, 5).

That death man died in paradise. He is so dead that unless he is born again, born for the second time, he can never live: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25). It is plain that "the dead" in this verse refer to those who are spiritually dead, even though for many years they still exist in the world. "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Rom. 8:6).

From these and many other passages it is evident that according to scripture man does not live by natural birth, but lies in the midst of death, even though it is true that temporal death is postponed for seventy or eighty years. This death, in both the physical and the spiritual sense, dates from the first sin of Adam and Eve in paradise: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Therefore, the idea that the words of Genesis 2:17 simply refer to a prediction of God rather than to the infliction of the punishment of death is a mistaken notion. In paradise man died both spiritually and physically.

Pelagianism denies the truth of scripture that man died both spiritually and physically. According to that theory, man's nature was not corrupted by sin. Man did not die the spiritual death. The will of man still remained free, was not totally depraved, and his mind was not darkened so that he would not be able to discern and choose what is truly good. On the contrary, the will remained sound and retained its power to choose between good and evil, and the mind remained sufficiently enlightened to choose the good. Mind and will were indeed weakened through the first act of sin, but the freedom of the will was not lost. Over against Pelagianism, Reformed theologians have always maintained that man is totally depraved, that he is dead through sin, and that he is wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil. This is surely the teaching of scripture throughout.

The Loss of the Image of God

The truth that man is totally depraved implies that man lost what is usually called the image of God in the narrower sense, as it consisted in true knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness. We must understand, however, that this does not simply mean that he lost the image of God, but rather, that all that is implied in that image of God was turned into its reverse. Man's original knowledge of God turned into terrible darkness and foolishness so that he loved the lie rather than the truth of God, loved darkness rather than the light. His original righteousness turned into perversity so that he did not and could no more love that which was good. His original holiness, which consisted in complete consecration to God, turned into consecration to the devil, into impurity of all his thoughts and inclinations and desires. His mind became enmity against God.

This must be emphasized, especially in our day when the so-called small remnants that are left in the natural man are enlarged and enhanced in such a way and to such an extent that a good deal of Adam's original righteousness is ascribed to the natural man. It is important, therefore, that we understand clearly that our Reformed fathers taught not only that man lost the image of God through sin, but also that it changed into its reverse, and that man entailed on himself blindness, terrible darkness in his mind, perversity of will, and obduracy of heart. The working of his nature has become the operation of death.

Thus the Heidelberg Catechism expresses it:

> But are we so far depraved that we are wholly unapt to any good, and prone to all evil?
> Yes; unless we are born again by the Spirit of God.[3]

More elaborately and emphatically this is taught in the Canons of Dordt:

> Man was originally formed after the image of God. His understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator, and of spiritual things; his heart and will were upright, all his affections pure, and the whole Man was holy; but revolting from God by the instigation of the devil, and abusing the freedom of his own will, he forfeited these excellent gifts, and on the contrary entailed on himself blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness of judgment; became wicked, rebellious, and obdurate in heart and will, and impure in [all] his affections.
>
> Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and are by nature children of wrath, incapable of any saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto; and, without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, nor to dispose themselves to reformation.[4]

Further, concerning the glimmerings of natural light:

> 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 discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment. But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring

him to a saving knowledge of God, and to true conversion, that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil. Nay farther, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it [back] in unrighteousness; by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God.[5]

The Belgic Confession speaks the same language:

> But being in honor, he understood it not, neither knew his excellency, but willfully subjected himself to sin, and consequently to death and the curse, giving ear to the words of the devil. For the commandment of life, which he had received, he transgressed; and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life, having corrupted his whole nature, whereby he made himself liable to corporal and spiritual death. And being thus become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways, he hath lost all his excellent gifts which he had received from God, and only retained a few remains thereof, which, however, are sufficient to leave man without excuse; for all the light which is in us is changed into darkness, as the Scriptures teach us, saying: *The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not*: where St. John calleth men darkness.[6]

Concerning man's loss of the image of God, the French Confession of Faith says:

> We believe that man was created pure and perfect in the image of God, and that by his own guilt he fell from the grace which he received, and is thus alienated from God, the fountain of justice and of all good, so that his nature is totally corrupt. And being blinded in mind, and depraved in heart, he has lost all integrity, and there is no good in him. And although he can still discern good and evil, we say, notwithstanding, that the light he has becomes darkness when he seeks for God, so that he can in no wise approach him by his intelligence and reason. And although he has a will that incites him to do this or that, yet it is altogether captive to sin, so that he has no other liberty to do right than that which God gives him.[7]

This is the language of all the Reformed confessions.

It is certainly true that although the image of God was changed into its reverse, man nevertheless retained some remnants of his natural gifts and natural light. However, this means no more than that he remained a rational, moral being. The will itself was not lost, and his intellect he retained: even after the fall man could think, will, judge, and work as a moral creature. It is true that all these powers are only remnants of his original talents and powers. But this does not alter the fact that he remains a rational, moral creature and that he has sufficient light to make him inexcusable before God. With these small remnants man can do no good. On the contrary, they belong to the capital that he possesses in order to be able to sin. If he did not possess these small remnants, if it were true that in his fall he lost everything that belonged to his moral nature, if he lost his intellect and will, he could not be a sinner and could never be held accountable for the deed of sin.

But this is not true. Through these small remnants of natural light man retains some knowledge of God. Even in this remnant of the knowledge of God, there is no spiritual, ethical value; it is not a certain *semen religionis*, a seed of religion, in the sense that anything positive could ever develop out of that seed. Nevertheless, even in man's sin he remains a religious being, although his religious inclination works entirely in the wrong direction. He knows that God is; he knows also somewhat who God is; he is conscious that this God as he is God must be thanked and glorified (Rom. 1:18–20). However, it is true that natural man can indeed convince himself and become so confused in his own philosophy that he says in his heart, "There is no God" (Ps. 14:1). But in the depth of his heart man knows better. Never will he succeed in ridding himself of the consciousness that God is, nor of the obligation that he must be served and glorified.

Through the same small remnants man also has some knowledge of the difference between good and evil, for the *work* of the law—not the law itself—is written in his heart (Rom. 2:15). In fact, he can discern that it is good for him to walk outwardly as much as possible in the way of the law of God, even as he discerns that to walk in the way of sin and corruption causes him misery and death. The law of God is good for him, and to walk in that law has a reward. Because man discerns all this,

he shows some regard for virtue and for good outward deportment. This is what is called civil righteousness. From sin itself he does not even desire to be delivered, but he likes to be delivered as much as possible from the misery of sin, insofar as it consists in the suffering of this present time (Rom. 8:18). Because there is always suffering and misery connected with the service of sin, especially with some forms of sin, there is in him a regard for virtue for his own sake. Seeing that with his sin and misery he does not stand alone, but is connected with the organism of the entire race, he tries to propagate this regard for virtue also among others.

From this regard for virtue it is explained that apparently there is in the world so much that is noble and good, while scripture in the strongest words expresses that man is by nature in all his ways corrupt and ungodly and that the fear of God is not before his eyes. While maintaining himself in sin, the ungodly man desires to improve the world, not for God's sake but for his own. But never does he perform any good. He is indeed incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil. Certainly there is no operation of grace or of the Holy Spirit whereby that evil natural man is somewhat improved and sin in him is restrained. As the Canons express it, even in things natural and civil he renders his natural light wholly polluted and holds it under in unrighteousness, whereby he becomes inexcusable before God.

Total Depravity

It is of utmost importance, also for practical life, that in all its force we maintain this confession concerning the natural depravity of man. Especially in our time we must emphasize this confession, because also in Reformed circles the truth of total depravity is being corrupted. The truth of Holy Writ concerning the depravity of the natural man is being discarded, and the standpoint of the confessions is being forsaken in order to express a human and sinful judgment concerning what is discerned about that natural man in his life in the world. Much is found in the life of the sinner that cannot be harmonized with the confession that man is truly totally depraved, incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil. There is much in man, so it is judged, that is truly noble. Consider his serious attempts to improve the world, his manifestation of power and ability, and his development of art and science. How many noble attempts to help one another in misery one beholds in the world.

When one looks about in the world, the truth of scripture and the confessions that the natural man is totally depraved seems out of harmony with reality. Some infrequently express the judgment that the children of the world can be an example for the children of God. This means that the sinful judgment of the sinful mind of man is preferred above the judgment of scripture, which declares that there is no one that doeth any good, no, not one (Ps. 14:3). When this conclusion was reached, an explanation was sought and invented for this apparent contradiction between the judgment of scripture and the confessions and that which was discerned in the world and which was characterized as the good of the natural man.

It was on that basis and with this motivation that the theory of common grace was invented. According to this theory, there is a grace, an operation of the Holy Spirit, whereby sin is restrained in man's heart and mind, as well as in the community, in the power of which the natural man can accomplish all these good things. Of himself man can certainly do no good: he is totally depraved. But all men receive a certain grace. Through this grace man is not regenerated: his heart remains always evil. But the evil operation of his heart is restrained. Yea, what is more, he is somewhat changed to the good so that in temporal, natural, and civil things he can do good before God. *Hocus-pocus* is played with the confessions, for the confessions maintain that the natural man can do no

good, even in natural and civil things, and that he keeps under in unrighteousness the natural light that he possesses.

So scripture, which maintains emphatically that man is in all his ways ungodly and wicked, is contradicted. Therefore it is of utmost importance that we maintain without any falsification the confession that man is by nature totally depraved, wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil. We maintain, then, that man really died the moment he stretched out his hand to eat of the forbidden fruit. God maintained the holiness of his covenant. He who forsakes God must necessarily die. And die he did, on that very day. Nor shall he see life unless he is regenerated by the Spirit of God.

The Problem of the Universality of Sin and Death

However, the question arises and must still be answered: How can the universality of sin and death be explained? How can God inflict the punishment of death upon all men, regardless of their age and station in life, regardless of their knowledge and of their relation to the law? As the apostle Paul expresses it, "death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" (Rom. 5:14). The universal reign of death brings us back to the problem of the universality of sin. The one must be explained in the light of the other. All are under the penalty of death because all without exception have sinned. How have all sinned, and how can it be explained that all men without exception manifest themselves as enemies of God and of one another?

The Pelagian Explanation of the Universality of Sin and Death

Very superficial is the attempt to explain this dreadful and universal phenomenon by the Pelagian theory of the imitation of a bad example and the influence of an evil environment. According to this view, sin is always in the deed only; it is never a corruption of the human nature. The human nature is inherently good, that is, it always has the power to determine whether it shall do good or evil. In this positive sense the will is always free. There is really no such thing as bondage to sin. Adam's nature never became corrupt through the one sin of transgressing the special commandment of God. Adam may have become weakened somewhat. It may have become more difficult for him because of that first sin to return to and keep the way of obedience, but his nature had not become corrupt. Every child that is born is inherently good and is endowed with a will that can choose freely either for the good or for the evil. The nature, or moral character, of a newborn babe is like a blank sheet of paper on which one may write what he pleases and which the child itself as soon as it grows up, covers with the writing of good or evil.

If you ask how it must then be explained that the writing proves to be invariably evil, and that no living man is without sin, the answer is that all things in the world are against that babe in the cradle. From the very moment the babe comes into the world, the blank sheet of his moral character is written on with the language of sin. When later in life he comes into contact with the world at large, he meets with a multitude of bad examples and evil influences that dispose him to sin. Thus it comes about that all men go astray and that no man is actually without sin. To save mankind and to make a better world we must have faith in man, apply ourselves to character building, and create a better environment for men in general. Such is the teaching of our age, the teaching of humanistic philosophy.

Scripture and the Confessions on the Universality of Sin and Death

Scripture gives a radically different explanation of the universality of sin and death. It not only denies that sin is only in the deed of unrighteousness and insists that man himself—his nature, his mind, and his will—is corrupt, so that he is dead through trespasses and sins, but it also teaches that the whole human nature is depraved and that every individual human being is born in sin.

All scripture proceeds from the assumption that man is really dead unless he is born a second time through the Spirit of Christ. He who does not believe in the Son of God shall not see life; "the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). The tree is known by its fruit: "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Matt. 7:16–18). The tree of the human race is corrupt and produces corrupt fruit, according to the Canons of Dordt:

> Man after the fall begat children in his own likeness. A corrupt stock produced a corrupt offspring. Hence all the posterity of Adam, Christ only excepted, have derived corruption from their original parent, not by imitation, as the Pelagians of old asserted, but by the propagation of a vicious nature [in consequence of a just judgment of God.][8]

The Belgic Confession speaks the same language concerning original sin:

> We believe that, through the disobedience of Adam, original sin is extended to all mankind; which is a corruption of the whole nature, and an hereditary disease, wherewith infants themselves are infected even in their mother's womb, and which produceth in man all sorts of sin, being in him as a root thereof; and therefore is so vile and abominable in the sight of God that it is sufficient to condemn all mankind.[9]

The Heidelberg Catechism teaches concerning the depravity of man's nature:

> Whence, then, comes this depraved nature of man?
> From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise, whereby our nature became so corrupt that we are all conceived and born in sin.[10]

The language of the confessions is the language of scripture. The stock is corrupt, and the inevitable result is a corrupt offspring: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one" (Job 14:4). The psalmist complains, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5). All this can mean only that the very seed of man is corrupt, that the act of generation by the father and of conception by the mother takes place in the sphere of sin, and that the nature of the child that is brought forth is depraved unless he is regenerated by the Spirit of God.

Adam's Sin the Source of All Corruption

This universal corruption of the human nature the word of God traces to the one first sin of Adam as its ultimate source. In paradise not only the individual human nature of Adam, but also the nature of the whole race was corrupted, because when God created mankind, he did not make a multitude of individuals who stood in no relation to one another, but he created an organism, the root of which and the bearer of whose nature was the first man, Adam. In that one man he created the whole human race; he "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26). When that one man, in whose veins coursed the one human blood and who was the bearer of the entire human nature, sinned and corrupted himself, he thereby corrupted the entire race: "Wherefore, as by

one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

The language of this passage reminds us of the Lowlands of Europe that had to be protected in many places by sturdy dikes in order to prevent the water of the ocean from flooding the country. Sometimes the storm would rage long and furiously, and the angry waves of the sea would batter against the dikes long enough to pierce them, and then the water would rush through and inundate the land. So it is with sin; it was not in the world originally. The first man Adam may be compared with the dike that was to keep out the flood of sin. The dike was pierced, and the flood of sin as a power entered into the whole world of man. Through one man sin entered into the world.

Or to use a figure that is more in keeping with the moral nature of the first man Adam, the world of man may be compared to a fortress, sin to the enemy that made its assault upon that fortress, and Adam to the one-man garrison whose charge it was to keep the stronghold. That one man opened the gate and surrendered the fortress, and the enemy of sin entered in to establish his reign. Indeed, through one man sin entered into the world; Adam's transgression corrupted the whole human nature. Being of a corrupt stock, man always produces a corrupt offspring.

The Doctrine of Original Sin and Guilt

This doctrine of the universality of sin through Adam raises other very serious questions. It might appear as if the descendants of the one man Adam were the innocent victims of his transgression. He sinned, and they all suffer and come into the world with a corrupt nature and without the precious gifts of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness with which the human nature was originally endowed. Is not this an injustice? Must the children suffer for the sins of the parents? Are not men to be pitied for their deplorable state, rather than to be condemned on account of their wickedness?

Even more, how can man be held accountable for his actual sins and transgressions if he is born with a nature that is incapable of keeping the law of God and that is inclined to all wickedness? I am born with a corrupt nature, dead in trespasses and sins, and this I certainly cannot help. I never had an opportunity to do good. Hence I conclude that I am not responsible for my own misdeeds; I cannot be held accountable for the way I was born. I am a victim of circumstances who is to be pitied, rather than being an object of wrath and condemnation. God cannot demand of me what I cannot and never was able to perform.

In answer, we must remember that God created the human race not only as an organism with Adam as the root and first father, but also as a legal corporation with Adam as the representative head. Even from a legal viewpoint the human race is not a mere aggregate of individuals in which everyone stands and falls as his own master without being at all responsible for the whole. On the contrary, there is communal responsibility, and there is communal guilt and suffering in human life. This is evident in everyday life: individualism is condemned everywhere.

Clearly this is illustrated in the life of a nation in relation to its government. In the concrete instance of the United States' going to war with a foreign power, it certainly is not every American citizen who declares war on that foreign power. To be sure, for that act of the official declaration of war, the government is responsible before God. The government is entrusted with the sword. It is the only God-ordained power that has the authority to handle the sword, also in declaring and waging war. The individual soldier who is called by the government and goes forth to battle does not commit murder and is not guilty of bloodshed if he kills the enemy on the battlefield. He merely handles the sword of the government and does so in the name of the government. However, does that mean that

there is no communal responsibility and suffering? What right-minded citizen would say that when the government declares war that the government had better fight its own battles? When the government declares war, all of its citizens are very really in a state of war, and they will have to suffer all the consequences implied. Even before God, a nation is not an aggregate of individuals, but a legal body: the government represents all its citizens. If the government, in order to meet the expenses of a war, accumulates a debt of many billions of dollars, all of its citizens are responsible for the payment of that debt; even their children and their children's children will have to bear the burden of that responsibility.

So it is in every department of life. It is true that there is individual responsibility and individual sin and guilt. It is also true that in this sense the children cannot be held responsible for the sins of the parents. It is also true, however, that there is a communal responsibility and communal guilt that runs into generations. God visits "the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate" him (Ex. 20:5). God created the whole human race in Adam as a legal corporation represented by our first father. Therefore, no one can say that he is not responsible for Adam's transgression, for all have sinned in him, and his sin is imputed to them all.

This is the solution presented by scripture to the problems of sin and of death and of their universality and relation to each other. All men are born in sin because the whole human nature is corrupted by the sin of the one man Adam. Through the one man sin entered into the world and death by sin (Rom. 5:12); so all men are born in death in the full sense. They are born with the power of physical death dragging them into the grave and with the corruption of spiritual death in their hearts so that they are dead through trespasses and sins when they enter the world (Eph. 2:1). Death is punishment: it is the execution of the just sentence of the supreme judge of heaven and earth upon all.

If death is punishment, and if this punishment is inflicted upon the whole human race, upon every individual before he has been able to commit any actual sin, then the reason must be that in the sight of God the whole human race is guilty with a communal guilt in the one man Adam. So the scriptures instruct in Romans 5:12–14, where the text is dealing with the problem of universal death:

> Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come).

It is true that the text also speaks of the universality of sin through the sin of the one man. But it does so only in connection with the serious problem of the universality of death: death has passed upon all men.

Death reigns supreme. It reigned even before there was any law. It reigned from Adam to Moses, and it reigned even over those who "had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" (v. 14). They never had a special commandment to keep or to violate. They never had the power, as did Adam, to determine for themselves whether or not they would keep the law of God. Yet death reigned over them. It reigned even over the little children in the cradle who could not discern between their right hand and their left.

How is this universal reign of death to be explained? It is explained in the words "for that all have sinned" (v. 12). When, where, and how have all sinned? All men have sinned in the beginning, in the first paradise, and through the first Adam, who stood at the head of the race before the face of God: "by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation" (v. 18).

It is plain from scripture that the universality of sin and death in the human race is to be explained,

first, from the fact that the race was created in the one man Adam as an organism. He bore our nature, and that nature was corrupted; from a corrupt stock springs a corrupt offspring. Second, scripture teaches that as far as the guilt of sin is concerned, its universality is due to the fact that the whole race was created in Adam as its head and therefore that the whole race is responsible for the one sin Adam committed in the first paradise.

The Organic Development of Sin

Even so, the phenomenon of sin in the world is not quite explained, because the fact of actual sin cannot be explained merely from the hereditary corruption of the human nature, since the defilement and pollution of the human nature is the same for all men. In this sense, Adam as he appeared immediately after the fall was not any better than the man of sin who will appear at the end of this dispensation. The evil murderer and he who corrupts his life in immorality and adultery are in that respect not any worse than the sinner who reveals himself as having the utmost regard for virtue. All have departed from the living God. All by nature are dead through sins and trespasses.

Although the corruption of the nature is the same in all men, yet as soon as we pay attention to men in the world and to their walk in life, there are all kinds of differences. Not all commit the same sins. Not all bear the same fruits of sin. There is a tremendous difference between Adam as he fell into sin and the antichrist who will appear in the end of time. There is difference between Sodom and Gomorrah and wicked Jerusalem that nailed the Christ to the accursed tree. There is difference between Jerusalem and the apostate, antichristian church of the last days. There is also difference between nation and nation, people and people, and tribe and tribe. The Kafir and the Hottentot sin differently from the cultured Greek and the cultured Roman. There are all kinds of differences between person and person—between man and woman, between rich and poor, between learned and unlearned, between the mighty and the weak, and between the king and the subject.

To explain all this from a certain restraint of sin means that we close our eyes to reality—even apart from the fact that scripture knows nothing of such an operation of God whereby he restrains man in his sinful development. We must remember that Adam sinned as the root of the race; his sin, therefore, may be called a root sin, and this root sin must develop until its fruit is ripe and the full measure of iniquity is filled by the whole human race. This ripened fruit consists in that the sinner operates even unto the end with all the capital at his disposal. Only when he shall have sinned with all the gifts, talents, and powers with which God has endowed him and the whole human race; when he shall have sinned in every relationship which is being developed in the organism of our race—in the relation of man to man, of parent to child, of man to wife, of brother to brother, of king to subject, of master to servant, of nation to nation, and of the whole of the human life over against God—when he shall have sinned with all the means at his disposal—with his wealth, his gold and silver, with all the powers of nature that are by him brought to manifestation—only then will the one root sin of Adam become completely manifest, and will sin be revealed in its true character as rebellion against God. Then God will be revealed in his righteous judgment over all who do and love sin.

Toward the development of this complete and ripened fruit of sin all the ungodly work together in harmony with their natures, gifts, talents, times, places, circumstances, and means. The entire conception that Adam could have become a sort of devil immediately after his fall if there had not been an intervening and restraining common grace does not take account of this fact of the organic development of the human race. This conception is nonsense. Adam could not become the man of sin. He could not fill the measure of iniquity. He could not cause the fruit of sin to become ripe in all its

horror.

On the contrary, Adam sinned entirely in harmony with his own place in the world. There was no need at all of any restraint of sin to prevent his becoming the man of sin. Indeed, his sin is the root of all sin, and from that root the complete horror of sin will become manifest through the development of the race. But the race must first develop itself in connection with the development of the entire earthly creation. Every tribe and every nation and every person—each one according to his own character, gifts and talents, time and circumstances, means and powers—contributes his own actual sin to fill the measure of iniquity and presently to reveal the man of sin whom the Lord will destroy by the breath of his mouth. In no wise is this process of development restrained.

Rather, it is ever brought to further development through the operation of God's wrath from heaven. Presently it will be most clearly revealed in the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, which is that God is true and that every mouth shall be stopped. Blessed are they to whom it is given by grace in the cause of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake. They are redeemed and delivered and glorified in spite of the present wicked world. When they, in the cause of Christ and in the cause of God's covenant, have been privileged by grace to suffer with him in time, they will enter into the glorious victory, which he has gained for them, and into God's everlasting tabernacle to know him even as they are known.

THE THIRD LOCUS

Christology

Chapter 19

The Covenant

God's Counsel and the Covenant

The third locus treats the person and work of Christ, the mediator of God and man and the head of the covenant.

The Lord God maintains and establishes his covenant not only by visiting the transgressor with his wrath by bringing upon him death and the curse, and by manifesting in that way that only in the communion of God's friendship there is life and joy, but also by revealing that covenant of his friendship in Christ Jesus our Lord. God always executes his counsel, even through the means of Satan and sin, and in the way of sin causes the people of his covenant to attain to greater glory and to become manifestations of the glory of his grace.

It is true that the first man fell away from God by wanton disobedience and that man is the guilty one, while God is righteous. But it is no less true that man's fall into sin occurred according to the determinate counsel and will of God and that essentially sin can be nothing else than a means through which God executes his good pleasure regarding the covenant of his friendship. Not for a moment may we harbor the thought that God the Lord was obligated by the fall into sin to change his original counsel concerning all things. God is one. For that reason he is also one in all the works of his hands. His counsel is one. The execution of his counsel is also one.

Ever God continues to execute his counsel. Even when it would seem to us as if there appear powers that prevent God in the execution of his counsel, that oppose (at least for a time) the fulfillment of that counsel, that frustrate it, and that compel the Lord God to use different means and to follow different ways from those which he had originally intended, in reality God is God alone, and those very powers that oppose him must nevertheless serve to execute his counsel, even against their own will.

Thus it is also with the fact of sin. It is true that we confront a problem here, a mystery that we cannot fathom with our limited understanding, which is darkened through sin, when we wish to maintain that also in and through the fall of the first man God executed his counsel. But it is also true that we would stand before much more serious problems if we would attempt to deny this truth and to let the whole history of the world revolve around the axis of the will of man.

Christ and the Covenant

We must maintain, therefore, that the fall of Adam took place according to the counsel of God's will in order that through that fall the way might be opened for the coming of the second Adam, the Lord out of heaven. "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor. 15:47–49). However, "that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual" (v. 46). For that reason Adam is also called the image of him who was to come, that is, Christ (Rom. 5:14). If that counsel of the Lord must be fulfilled and the Lord out of heaven must come, it was necessary for sin to enter into the world in order that the

first Adam might be removed to make room for the second Adam.

God had from eternity willed in his counsel to reveal the glory of his covenant life in its highest manifestation. That highest possible revelation of the covenant life of God could not be reached in the first Adam but only in the second man, the Lord out of heaven, Immanuel, God with us. We will attempt, therefore, to present a true and scriptural conception of the covenant of God in order to understand the significance of the person and work of Christ, for in him the covenant of God was not only restored but also brought to its highest possible realization. That covenant and its idea we shall therefore have to treat in this connection.

The *Pactum Salutis* or Covenant of Redemption

Almost all Reformed theologians since the seventeenth century speak of a *pactum salutis*, a covenant of redemption, also called *de raad des vredes*, the counsel of peace. It may be remarked that there is no unanimity among theologians concerning the question of just what is meant by the *pactum salutis*. According to some, it is an agreement between the Father and the Son, between the first and second persons of the Trinity. According to others who realize that the Holy Spirit cannot very well be excluded from such a covenant, the *pactum salutis* is an agreement or pact among the three persons of the holy Trinity. With still others it is not quite clear whether this covenant is a pact between the Father and the Son or between the triune God and Christ as the head of the covenant. Besides, the scriptural ground on which this doctrine was originally based is somewhat weak and dubious.

Traditional Proofs for the *Pactum Salutis*

The term *pactum salutis* is derived from Zechariah 6:12–13:

> And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

This counsel of peace (*raad des vredes*) is explained as a covenant between Jehovah and the Branch, and therefore as a pact between the Father and the Son. But this evidently is based on an erroneous interpretation of the text. The counsel of peace does not refer at all to a covenant between the Father and the Son, but rather to the harmonious relation between king and priest united in the one person of the Branch.

The proponents of a pact between the Father and Son find this covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*) or counsel of peace (*raad des vredes*) in other passages of Holy Writ. They refer to Psalm 89:19–37:

> Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him. The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him. And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him. But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted. I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven. If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to

> fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven.

Emphatically, there is mention here of the covenant of God with David and his seed, who is Christ. If the covenant is looked upon as a pact or an agreement, the conclusion is drawn from this that there was an eternal pact between the Father and the Son.

Scriptural ground for this covenant between the Father and the Son is also found in Luke 22:29: "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me." Emphasis is laid on the original word for "appoint," which is διατίθεμαι (*to appoint by way of a testament or covenant*). From the same word is derived the term διαθήκη (*covenant*). Hence the text in Luke means that by way of a covenant the kingdom was appointed unto Christ. Again, since a covenant was understood to be an agreement between two parties, the conclusion was that there was an eternal agreement between the Father and the Son.

An appeal is also made to Galatians 3:16–17:

> Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

This text is considered to be a ground for the *pactum salutis* as a covenant between the Father and the Son. Those who hold this view overlook the fact that the covenant, which here is said to be established in Christ, certainly is the same as the covenant that was established with Abraham and his seed. They also overlook the fact that the promises concerned Christ himself *par excellence*, but that they were nevertheless spoken to Abraham and his seed. Overlooking these facts and ignoring also the fact that distinction must be made between Christ as mediator and as the eternal Son of God, they consider the text to be a ground for the *pactum salutis* that was established in eternity between the Father and the Son.

Besides, there are many other references in scripture that have been considered grounds for this covenant between the two persons of the holy Trinity. Especially those texts have been pointed out in which Christ is presented as sent on a mission by the Father and in which Christ is said to be the servant of Jehovah, as well as texts in which Christ is presented as the surety of the covenant. It has been argued that no one can appear as surety unless there is a contract or agreement or covenant between the creditor and the debtor. Hebrews 7:22 speaks literally of such a covenant: "By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament."

It cannot be denied that much scholastic reasoning and subtle hair-splitting characterized the development of this doctrine and that those who developed it proceeded from the mechanical definition of the covenant as an agreement between two parties with mutual stipulations, conditions, and promises. This definition was applied to the *pactum salutis* as an agreement between the Father and the Son, sometimes also including the Holy Spirit, although the place of the Holy Spirit in this covenant was left rather dubious. The result was that the covenant of redemption or counsel of peace was often presented as a bargain between the Father and the Son. Theologians could describe exactly what in this covenant the Father demanded of the Son, what conditions he stipulated, and what promises he made, as well as what the Son agreed to do and what he demanded of the Father.

Mastricht's View

Mastricht speaks of a twofold covenant of grace: the one is eternal, the other is temporal or in time. The eternal covenant is the *pactum salutis*, which he defines as follows:

> The personal and economical transaction and agreement between the Father and the Son, according to which the Father demanded of the Son from eternity all that was necessary to acquire for the elect eternal salvation and promised him as a reward, among other things, a mediator's glory; while, on the other hand, the Son complied with the demand and on his part demanded for himself the fulfillment of the promises made for the benefit of both parties.[1]

He emphasizes that it is a covenant that consists of an agreement between two equal parties, the Father and the Son. The purpose of this covenant is the restoration of the elect sinner. In this covenant the Father promises the Son that he will clothe him with the most glorious and important office of mediator; that he will appoint him as prophet to be a light to the Gentiles; that he will accept all that he will do for his own as high priest and king; that he will give him the elect as an inheritance; that he will support him in his favor in all his mediator's work; that he will strengthen him in all difficulties and obstacles that he will meet; that he will glorify him through the resurrection from the dead; that he will exalt him in heaven and in his sitting at the right hand; that he will give him all power in heaven and on earth, power also to judge the quick and the dead; that he will exalt him exceedingly and give him a name above all names; that he will provide him with an innumerable seed.

In this covenant the Father demands of the Son that he do all that is necessary for the salvation of the elect sinner, particularly that he will adopt the flesh and blood of the children; that he will suffer willingly all things, even the death of the cross; that he will set his soul as an offering for sin; that he will distribute among the elect all the gifts of the Spirit—regeneration, faith, conversion, love, and so forth. These promises and demands are the acts of the Father in this covenant.

In this covenant the Son promises that he will comply with all the demands of the Father, and he demands that the Father will fulfill to him all the promises enumerated above. In this eternal covenant of redemption or counsel of peace, Christ is made a surety for his people.

Turretin's View

Turretin makes the same distinction between the covenant with Christ and the covenant with the elect in Christ:

> It is superfluous, I say, to dispute about this [whether the covenant is made with Christ, or in Christ with all his seed—H.H.] because it amounts to the same thing. It is certain that a twofold pact must be attended to here or the two parts and degrees of one and the same pact. The former is the agreement between the Father and the Son to carry out the work of redemption. The latter is that which God makes with the elect in Christ, to save them by and on account of Christ under the conditions of faith and repentance. The former was made with the surety and head for the salvation of the members; the latter was made with the members in the head and surety.[2]

à Brakel's View

The same presentation is found in à Brakel. He speaks of the parties of the *pactum salutis*, about the persons for the benefit of whom such a covenant was made, and he describes the work of both parties. It is not always clear, however, whether according to him the covenant is made between God and Christ or between the Father and the Son. Often he speaks of that covenant as being made between God and Christ: "First of all we shall consider the covenanting parties, who are God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."[3] Referring to Psalm 89:28, 34, he says, "Proof that mention is made here of the covenant between God the Father and the Lord Jesus is clearly evident."[4] Further,

". . . thus it is evident that there is a covenant between the Lord and Christ."[5] Also, "Thus, we have here the covenant, the promises, and the fact that these have been made to Christ, as well as the fact that this covenant has been confirmed in Christ. Therefore, there is a covenant between God and Christ."[6]

Yet he leaves the impression that the *pactum salutis* is a covenant made between the Father and the Son as the first and second persons in the holy Trinity:

> Since the Father and the Son are one in essence and thus have one will and one objective, how can there possibly be a covenant transaction between the two, as such a transaction requires the mutual involvement of two wills? Are we then not separating the Persons of the Godhead too much? To this I reply that as far as the Personhood is concerned the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father. From this consideration the one divine will can be viewed from a twofold perspective. It is the Father's will to redeem by the agency of the second Person as Surety, and it is the will of the Son to redeem by His own agency as Surety.[7]

Evidently, there is a lack here of clear and sharp distinction.

Hodge's View

Hodge also speaks of this covenant of redemption:

> By this is meant the covenant between the Father and the Son in reference to the salvation of man. This is a subject which, from its nature, is entirely beyond our comprehension. We must receive the teachings of the Scriptures in relation to it without presuming to penetrate the mystery which naturally belongs to it. There is only one God, one divine Being, to whom all the attributes of divinity belong. But in the Godhead there are three persons, the same in substance, and equal in power and glory. It lies in the nature of personality, that one person is objective to another. If, therefore, the Father and the Son are distinct Persons the one may be the object of the acts of the other. The one may love, address, and commune with the other. The Father may send the Son, may give Him a work to do, and promise Him a recompense. All this is indeed incomprehensible to us, but being clearly taught in Scripture, it must enter into the Christian's faith.[8]

Hodge, too, continues to describe the stipulations and conditions and promises of this covenant between the Father and the Son, and especially the work assigned to the Redeemer, that is, to the Son, and the promises made to him.

Vos' View

Dr. G. Vos treats this subject under the locus anthropology in connection with the subject of the covenant of grace. He proceeds from the question concerning the parties in the covenant of grace. Of these he says:

1. Some envisage God as the one, man as the other party.
2. Others see the parties as God the Father representing the Trinity and God the mediator representing the elect.
3. Since Coccejus the usual conception is that there are two covenants: one between the Father and the Son, the covenant of redemption, and one between God and the elect, based on the covenant of redemption, called the covenant of grace. The second conception is preferable from a systematic point of view, but the third is more comprehensible and better for practical purposes. [9]

He then discusses the *pactum salutis*, the counsel of peace or the covenant of redemption. He writes that although the name *counsel of peace* as the term for the covenant of redemption cannot justly be derived from Zechariah 6:13, the name *counsel of peace* may nevertheless be maintained, because it expresses correctly what scripture teaches concerning it.

He then describes the demands and the promises of the covenant of redemption:

> What were the stipulations of the covenant in the counsel of peace?
>
> 1. That the Son as surety for the elect would assume our human nature, and even before the assumption of this human nature would perform the work of the mediator under the Old Testament dispensation.
> 2. That he would as surety put himself under the law, in order to satisfy for their debt through passive obedience, and in order to merit eternal life through active obedience.
> 3. That the Son would take care that everyone given him by the Father enters the covenant of grace; not merely by legal right, but by living in it through the Holy Spirit.
>
> What were the promises of this covenant to the Son?
>
> 1. That he would receive everything that belongs to the human nature.
> 2. That he in that human nature would be qualified with the Spirit to the discharge of his offices.
> 3. That he would be strengthened and comforted in the accomplishment of his task.
> 4. That he would be exalted in proportion to his humiliation.
> 5. That he would receive the Holy Spirit after his ascension in order to form his body and fulfil the covenant.[10]

He then defines the *pactum salutis* as follows:

> The counsel of peace is the agreement between the will of the Father, giving the Son for a head and redeemer of the elect, and the will of the Son, giving himself as a surety for them.[11]

Vos presents the *pactum salutis* or covenant of redemption as following from the counsel of predestination. As to the connection between them, the *pactum salutis* is the beginning of the execution of the counsel of predestination. As to the connection between the *pactum salutis* and the covenant of grace, he writes:

1. The counsel of peace is the eternal pattern for the covenant of grace in time.
2. The counsel of peace is the eternal foundation for the application of the covenant of grace.[12]

Bavinck's View

Dr. Bavinck also writes about the *pactum salutis:*

> The doctrine of the covenant is of the greatest possible significance both for dogmatics and for the Christian life. The Reformed church has a firmer grasp of this than the Roman Catholics or Lutherans. On the basis of Holy Scripture the Reformed understand the true religion of the Old and New Testaments in terms of a covenant between God and man, whether established with man unfallen (the covenant of works) or with the creation in general through Noah (the covenant of nature) or with the elect (the covenant of grace). Nor are the Reformed satisfied with this, but seek a firm and eternal foundation for these covenants in the counsel of God. They understood this counsel as purposing the preservation of the human race, and as a covenant of the three persons in the divine essence itself (the covenant of redemption, the counsel of peace). Mention of this covenant was found already though briefly in Olevianus, Junius, Gomarus, and others, was further developed in detail by Cloppenburg and Coccejus, was given an important place in dogmatics by Burnam, Braun, Witsius, Vitringa, Turretin, Leydecker, Mastricht, Marck, Moore, and à Brakel, was disputed by Deurhof, Wessel, and others and was finally expelled completely from dogmatics.
>
> The development of the doctrine of the covenant of redemption by the Reformed churches was not free of classical subtlety. The classic proof for this doctrine, Zechariah 6:13, proves nothing, but only says that the kingship and the

> priesthood become one in the Messiah who takes counsel for and promotes the peace of his people. From Job 17:3, Isaiah 38:14, and Psalm 119:122, which have nothing to do with the Messiah, and from Hebrews 7:22, which only states that Christ, because he lives forever, is surety that the new covenant shall endure eternally, it was concluded that Christ is eternally the surety in the covenant of redemption, though not on God's part with reference to us, as Crell and Limborch assert, for God who is true needs no surety, but rather on our part with reference to God, as Coccejus, Witsius, etc., attempt to show. Further, the distinction was adopted from jurisprudence of *fidejussor* and *expromissor*, and the question asked whether Christ in the covenant of redemption had taken the sin of the elect conditionally or absolutely—Coccejus, Wittichius, Allinga, Van Til, d'Outrein, Perizonius and others holding to the first, and Leydecker, Turretin, Mastricht, Voetius and others holding to the second. Finally, also the distinction was discussed whether the covenant of redemption has more the nature of a testament (with reference to Luke 22:19; John 17:24; Heb. 6:17; 8:6; 9:15; 13:20), as Coccejus, Burman, Heidegger, and Schiere taught, or of a covenant, as Leydecker, Wessel, and others held.[13]

Further, Bavinck maintains that although this *pactum salutis* as a doctrine is still very defective, it is nevertheless based on a fundamentally scriptural thought; and he points to various passages of Holy Writ to prove this statement. Then he continues:

> Scripture gives us through all of this a rich and glorious picture of the work of redemption. The covenant of redemption shows us that the life and relationship of the three persons in the divine being is a covenant life, a life of the highest self-consciousness and freedom. There, within the divine being, that covenant life has its full realization, while the covenant between God and man, because of the infinite distance between them, always has more the character of a sovereign decree, a testament. Between the three persons of the Trinity it is an agreement in the fullest sense. The highest freedom and the most perfect harmony come together there. The work of salvation is a work of the three persons, to which each contributes and in which each performs his particular task. In the decrees, including that of predestination, the one will of God is prominent and the character of the Trinity is not seen so distinctly. But in the covenant of redemption the work of redemption shows forth in its full divine glory. It is preeminently a divine work. As at the creation of man God first purposely takes counsel with himself, Genesis 1:26, so in the work of recreation each of the three persons appears even more clearly in his distinct character. Recreation, like creation, is a work of God alone. Of him, through him, and to him are all things. No man is his counselor, or has first given to him, that it might be recompensed to him again. It is the triune God alone, Father, Son, and Spirit, who together conceive, determine, execute, and perfect the work of salvation.[14]

It is clear that Bavinck makes an intentional attempt to avoid all scholastic hairsplitting and subtle sophistry that so often characterizes the definition and description of the *pactum salutis*. He does not speak of the conditions, demands, and promises that are stipulated in this covenant of redemption and that many dogmaticians know how to describe in detail. He beholds in the counsel of peace the living, triune, covenant God, in whom the covenant has its full and eternal reality. That appeals to us. In the doctrine of the covenant we have to do especially with the living God, who from eternity to eternity lives the perfect covenant life in himself.

We certainly must beware in the description of the *pactum salutis* that we do not lose the living God, that we do not introduce time into eternity, and that we do not present the matter as if a certain bargain was transacted between the Father and the Son, with mutual stipulations, conditions, and promises. This Bavinck certainly tries to avoid. However, it cannot be denied that Bavinck's presentation concerning the *pactum salutis* is not very clear and defined. He does not offer a definition of this covenant. It seems that also with Bavinck the *pactum salutis* is an agreement, in this instance among the three persons of the holy Trinity, and that this agreement among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost was made especially with a view to the redemption of the elect. The *pactum salutis* is subservient to salvation. Salvation is the purpose or end; the *pactum salutis* is a means to the end. The idea of the covenant remains a subordinate conception, and the main thing is the redemption of the elect.

Berkhof's View

Berkhof writes elaborately about the *pactum salutis*. Like Vos, he defines the covenant of redemption as "the agreement between the Father, giving the Son as Head and Redeemer of the elect, and the Son, voluntarily taking the place of those whom the Father had given him."[15] He describes in great detail the stipulations, conditions, and promises of that covenant. In speaking of the requirements which the Father makes of the Son, he writes in general that the Son should make amends for the sin of his people and fulfill all that Adam failed to do, and he describes in detail what is included in these requirements. It is required by the Father of the Son that he should assume a human nature by being born of a woman, a human nature weak but without sin; that he should place himself under the law and bear the penalty for sin; and that he should apply to the elect all the fruits of his merits. As to the promises, the Father promises the Son that he will prepare the Son a body; that he will endow him and anoint him with the Spirit; that he will support him, deliver him from death, and enable him to destroy the dominion of Satan and to establish the kingdom of God; and that he will enable him to send out the Spirit for the formation of his spiritual body. Besides, the Father promises to the Son a seed as numerous as the stars in heaven and the sand that is by the seashore and, finally, power in heaven and on earth and a special mediator's glory.

Here the objections against the defects of the current presentation of the *pactum salutis* appear in a glaring light. Like all other presentations, the covenant is a pact or an agreement, in this case between the Father and the Son; it follows upon the decree of predestination and thus is made subservient to the idea of redemption as a means to an end. In addition, the *pactum salutis* is here definitely defined as an agreement between the Father as first person of the holy Trinity and the Son as second person, not between the triune God and Christ as the head and mediator of his people. This is evident because, according to Berkhof, in the *pactum salutis* the Son does not appear as Christ, but through the covenant of redemption he becomes the Messiah. Further, it is evident that the Holy Spirit, the third person of the holy Trinity, is not a party of this covenant. Everything is decided about him, not with him. This really implies a denial of the Trinity, even though Berkhof, of course, does not mean to deny this fundamental doctrine. Finally, even the Son is subordinated to the Father in this presentation of the *pactum salutis*. The work of redemption is presented as a work of the Father alone. The Father prepares for the Son a body. The Father anoints the Son with the Spirit. The Father supports the Son. The Father raises him from the dead, and so forth. All this plainly puts the Son in a subordinate position to the Father and presents the Father as deciding upon and performing the entire work of redemption.

Kuyper's View

Dr. A. Kuyper, Sr. clearly recognizes this defect and weakness of the *pactum salutis*. He makes an attempt "so to construe the entire question of the *pactum salutis*, which was always left unfinished and never made clear, so that its necessity might be clearly discerned."[16] He bases his conception of the matter on those passages of Holy Writ that make mention of the relation wherein Christ as mediator stands to the triune God. Isaiah speaks of the servant of the Lord in a manner that eliminates all doubt that this servant is a common human person, but rather that he is the mediator, the Messiah, and thus the eternal Son of God. It must be clear, Kuyper says, that the Son's being servant cannot flow from his divinity, for the Son is essentially equal with the Father, and therefore his relation to the Father cannot be that of servant to his lord.[17]

1 Peter 1:20 speaks of Christ as the Lamb who was ordained before the foundation of the world. According to Kuyper, this foreordination is the anointing of the Son, and anointing denotes a position

of service. The Son, therefore, is from eternity put in a position of service through this foreordination as the Lamb of God. How did the Son ever come to occupy that position of service? His foreordination is clear from those passages of Holy Writ that speak of the fact that the Son is sent by the Father into the world. But if the lesser is sent by the greater, and if it must be maintained that the eternal Son is essentially co-equal with the Father, how then is it possible that scripture can speak of the Father's sending the Son? So the question arises, What is that eternal act of God whereby the Son becomes the servant of Jehovah?[18]

Moreover, according to Kuyper, it is evident from scripture that this relation of Christ to the Father is based upon the establishment of a covenant, that the relation in this covenant is such that the Father demands of the Son complete obedience, and that the Son renders this complete obedience. For instance, Psalm 2:8 teaches that the Father addresses the Son: "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Isaiah 53:10 teaches that it was demanded of the Christ that he would make his soul an offering for sin before he would see seed. And the Son addresses the Father:

> Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation (Ps. 40:6–10).

The Savior could therefore testify that it was his meat to do the will of him who sent him. When he puts down his life in order to take it again, he does so in obedience to the commandment that he received from the Father (John 4:34; John 10:18).[19]

Kuyper concludes:

> We may therefore indeed establish the fact that in Scripture, although nowhere is mentioned that Christ concluded a covenant, yet the relation is so defined that a *vocatio Messianica* [*messianic calling*] is imposed upon the second person. Very definitely Christ expresses that he received from the Father ἐντολαί [*commandments*], that he fulfilled them, and that he now prays for all that the Father promised him upon that fulfillment.[20]

Based on all these considerations, Kuyper offers the following elaborate and definite description of the counsel of peace or covenant of redemption:

> If the idea of the covenant with regard to man and among men can only occur in its ectypical form, and if its archetypical original is found in the divine economy, then it cannot have its deepest ground in the *pactum salutis* that has its motive in the fall of man. For in that case it would not belong to the divine economy as such, but would be introduced in it rather incidentally and change the essential relation of the three persons in the divine essence. Besides, the objection arises that the third person of the holy Trinity in that case remains outside of this covenant and that the three persons in the eternal essence are placed in such a relation over against one another that one runs the danger of falling into the error of tritheism. This danger can be escaped only when the divine economy of the three persons is presented *natura sua* [*by its own nature*] as a covenant relation . . . We then confess that in the one personality of the divine essence there consists a three-personal distinction, which has in the covenant relation its unity and an inseparable tie. According to this conception, God himself is the living and eternal foundation, not only of every covenant, but also of the covenant idea as such, and the essential unity has its conscious expression in the covenant relation. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost stand over against all that is not God or that opposes God in that unity of faithfulness in such a way that the one does not will anything else than the other, and the entire power of the divine essence turns itself with the highest consciousness in federal unity against all that is not God.
>
> And when in this manner the foundation of the covenant idea is found in the confession of the Trinity itself, then follows from this the further covenant relation between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit which is determined by the appearance of ungodliness in the world of angels and men, not only according to the idea of its possibility, but according to the idea of its reality. For when we proceed from the confession of the Trinity to the confession of the decree, then the reality of sin is a

> matter of fact, and the federal unity in God must be directed to the complete conquest of the fact of sin, in order that God may be triumphant. And this leads to the *constitutio Mediatoris* [*constitution of the mediator*], not as an act of force, but as a federal action, and thus arises the *pactum salutis*. In the covenant relation Father, Son, and Holy Spirit aim together and each for himself at the triumph over sin, that is, at the triumph over all that places itself over against God as anti-God. The ground of this will in God is found in the original covenant relation in the divine essence; and that which is to be accomplished by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit respectively unto that end continues to find its federal unity in the *opus exeuns* [*outgoing work*] which is common to the three persons. That which is assumed as the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit respectively does not rest on arbitrary division of labor, but on the distinction which exists between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the divine essence itself, and that not only in the work of salvation, but also already in the work of creation. Hence the *pactum salutis* can never include only the two, but must always include the three persons of the holy Trinity. Besides, considering that the decree knows not of two possibilities, with or without sin, but only of one reality, that is, the reality of sin, this *pactum* does not appear after the fall, but recedes into eternity and forms the point of procedure of the entire *pactum salutis*. And when the *pactum salutis* thus stands behind the fall and has its root in the *decretum* [*decree*], it follows *eo ipso* [*of itself*] that the introduction of it started immediately after the fall, and that a suspension of it until the hour of the incarnation is inconceivable.[21]

Kuyper therefore offers the following presentation:

First, the relation of the three persons in the divine essence is a covenant relation. According to this covenant relation all three persons want to maintain God over against all that is not God. But each of the three persons of the holy Trinity appears in this determination in his own place: the Father as Father, the Son as Son, and the Spirit as Spirit.

Second, God's eternal decree includes the decree of sin. Hence in God's eternal good pleasure there appear powers that are not God and that place themselves in opposition to God.

Third, according to the eternal covenant relation in the divine essence, all the three persons are united to oppose and to conquer the power of sin. Resting in the eternal covenant relation of the triune God, this eternal agreement to maintain God over against the power of sin is the covenant of redemption or the *pactum salutis*.

Fourth, according to this agreement the Father sends the Son, the Son is sent as the mediator by the Father, and the Holy Spirit is given to the mediator as the Spirit of Christ and of sanctification.

We must admit that Kuyper draws lines that are of the utmost importance. In the discussion of the covenant idea, we certainly must proceed from the covenant life of God triune. Out of God all lines must be drawn. In him all lines concentrate. He himself is, in his eternal divine covenant life, the ultimate, eternal, and only reason for all that takes place in time and that exists eternally. He made all things for his own sake, even the ungodly unto the day of evil. He who reasons from this fundamental truth and reasons correctly, can never err. We must think and speak theologically. For that reason we must certainly follow Kuyper when he wants to deduce the covenant idea from the life and covenant relationship of the three persons of the holy Trinity.

Yet we must draw the lines a little differently from Kuyper's conception. First, it must be noted that Kuyper still presents the covenant, according to its idea, as an agreement over against a third party. According to Kuyper, a covenant is always an agreement between two or more parties over against a third. The covenant of redemption, therefore, is the eternal agreement among the three persons over against the power of sin. This means that the covenant is still subservient. It still is means, not purpose. It is a way, not the destination. When sin is overcome, the covenant has served its purpose.

Second, and in close connection with the preceding, sin is indeed postulated by the decree of God, but in the whole of the decrees and works of God outside of himself (*ad extra*) it nevertheless stands dualistically over against him. Sin is a power that must be overcome: it is not a means to serve God for the full revelation of his eternal covenant life. It appears as the occasion and even as the cause for the conclusion of the *pactum salutis*. It is our conviction that the lines must still be drawn in a

different direction if we would maintain completely that God is God and that there is none besides him. Also with relation to the powers of darkness, the lines must be drawn out of God only. And the revelation of God's eternal covenant life must be the highest purpose, never a means to an end.

The Counsel of Peace and the Covenant with Christ Distinguished

To gain a correct understanding of the counsel of peace or the covenant of redemption, it is of the utmost importance that we distinguish sharply between the covenant that God establishes with Christ as the servant of the Lord, standing at the head of those whom the Father gave him, and the eternal covenant of the three persons of the holy Trinity. Failure to make this distinction became the cause that the covenant of redemption was presented as a relation or agreement between the Father and the Son, that no place was found in this covenant for the Holy Spirit, and that the result was practically a denial of the holy Trinity and of the co-equality of the Son with the Father. This was inevitable. The scriptural passages that mention the covenant that God establishes with Christ according to his human nature and as servant of the Lord were used as proof for the covenant of redemption, and it stands to reason that in all those scriptural passages Christ appears as subordinated to the Father.

The distinction between the counsel of peace, the covenant of redemption, and God's covenant with Christ as standing at the head of his own must be perfectly clear. The counsel of peace is a covenant among the three persons of the holy Trinity; God's covenant with Christ as the head of the elect is a covenant established by the triune God with Christ and those who are given unto him. In the counsel of peace, the Son appears as God in his divine nature, co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. In the covenant with Christ, the Son appears as the mediator in his human nature. In the counsel of peace, the Son, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, appears as the decreeing party.

The covenant with Christ as the servant of Jehovah is of God alone and is established with Christ by the triune God. In the counsel of peace, the Son is co-equal with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. In God's covenant with Christ, he is the servant of the Lord and subordinate to Jehovah. It is true that the covenant with Christ is closely connected with the counsel of peace. It may indeed be said that the covenant with Christ as the servant of Jehovah presupposes the *pactum salutis*. But this is no reason to identify the two. The counsel of peace stands behind the covenant that God establishes with Christ and those whom the Father gave him.

A careful study of scripture on this point will reveal that this is correct. When we pay attention to all those scripture passages that former dogmaticians quoted as proof for the counsel of peace or the *pactum salutis*, it becomes evident that all the passages without exception refer to the covenant that God establishes with Christ as the head of the elect.

The Servant Passages in Isaiah

That God establishes a covenant with Christ is clear from the well-known passages in the prophecy of Isaiah that mention the servant of the Lord (עֶבֶד יְהוָה). We can never understand these passages if they are made to refer simply to a covenant between the Father and the Son. We may even go a step farther and maintain that they who explain this servant of the Lord simply as the Christ cannot understand the meaning of scripture on this point. An investigation of these passages will show that the term *servant of the Lord* in Isaiah has more than one connotation.

It may certainly be said that the servant of the Lord in Isaiah is centrally the Christ. Even as in the central sense of the word he is the seed of the woman, the lion of Judah's tribe, the root of David, the

seed of Abraham, so also he is centrally the servant of the Lord. Without him there was no seed of the woman and no seed of Abraham. Without him Judah is no lion's whelp, and without him David has no significance whatsoever. Without him there is no servant of the Lord. In Christ, therefore, we have the very center, the very heart of the concept *servant of the Lord*. He is the servant of the Lord *par excellence*, in whom and through whom all true service of the Lord consists, and in whom God realizes his eternal covenant.

About this central servant of the Lord there is grouped the circle of prophets, who are also called anointed of God, his witnesses, his servants, in whom is the Spirit of Christ. In the prophecy of Isaiah, it is frequently difficult to distinguish between these separate servants of the Lord and the servant of Jehovah in the central sense of the word. The prophet can never be conceived in separation from Christ as the servant of the Lord in the central sense. Only because Christ is in him and speaks through him is the prophet a servant of Jehovah.

Even so, all is not said. The term *servant of the Lord* refers not only to Christ, and in a broader sense to the prophet, but also to the still broader circle of the true spiritual Israel, the true spiritual seed, Jacob, whom the Lord called by name, the remnant according to the election of grace. This remnant is the servant of the Lord only because it is organically connected with Christ, is included in him, and is given him by the Father before the foundation of the world.

Finally, because kernel and shell are in the natural, organic sense in the generations of Abraham, and because this entire organism in the nation of Israel is called by the spiritual name of the *kernel*, the name *servant of the Lord* also is used for Israel as it existed historically in the old dispensation.

A fourfold distinction, then, must be observed in order to understand the concept *servant of the Lord* in the prophecy of Isaiah:

1. Christ as the servant of Jehovah *par excellence*.
2. The small circle of the prophets around him.
3. The broader circle of the spiritual seed of Abraham.
4. The broadest or widest circle of the church as it existed in the old dispensation in the nation of Israel.

That this interpretation is correct can easily be proved from the different passages in Isaiah that mention the servant of the Lord. We call attention first to Isaiah 42:1–7:

> Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law. Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.

It is perfectly plain that although he is not mentioned by name, these verses refer to Christ as the servant of the Lord. What is said here can never be completely applied to Isaiah himself. Besides, all that is said in these verses of the servant of the Lord is completely fulfilled only in Christ as he appears in the fullness of time. He it is who receives the Spirit without measure. He is the beloved Son in whom God has all his good pleasure. He it is who is given for a covenant of the people, who

opens the eyes of the blind, and who liberates the captives. There can be no question about it that the reference here is directly to Christ as the servant of the Lord.

It also ought to be clear that he does not appear here according to his divine nature and that these verses do not refer to the counsel of peace or *pactum salutis*. The Christ does not appear here according to his divine nature, but according to his human nature. According to his divine nature he cannot be called the elect: he is the Son, generated by the Father from eternity to eternity. According to his human nature, however, he is the elect *par excellence*. According to his divine nature he is not the *servant* of Jehovah, but Jehovah himself, and as the person of the Son is co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. According to his human nature, however, he is the servant of the Lord *par excellence*, who is placed over the entire house of God and whose meat it is to do the will of the Lord. According to his divine nature he does not receive the Spirit, but the Spirit proceeds from him to the Father as the Spirit of the Son. According to his human nature, however, he receives the Spirit without measure. According to his divine nature it could not be said to him that the Lord had called him in righteousness, that he will hold his hand, and that he will keep him and give him for a covenant of the people and for a light of the Gentiles. But all of this certainly applies to the Christ according to his human nature. In these verses, therefore, there is no mention of a covenant relation between the Father and the Son, but only of a covenant that God triune established with Christ, the servant of Jehovah.

But notice how in the same chapter the prophetic picture of the servant of Jehovah changes in such a way that it is applicable to Israel as a nation in the broadest sense of the word, even as it becomes the object of the wrath of God:

> Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant? Seeing many things, but thou observest not; opening the ears, but he heareth not. The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable. But this is a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses: they are for a prey, and none delivereth; for a spoil, and none saith, Restore. Who among you will give ear to this? who will hearken and hear for the time to come? Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? for they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law. Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart (Isa. 42:18–25).

In these verses the servant of the Lord is the subject. The context demands that we do not think of another servant who stands in no connection to the first. On the contrary, it is the same servant, viewed not centrally, but in the broadest sense. In Isaiah 42:1–7 it is the Christ who is the servant of the Lord. In verses 18–25 that servant is Israel as it exists historically. That this servant of the Lord can be so blind and deaf, so sinful and disobedient that he can be delivered to the spoiler and that God can pour out over him the vials of his wrath, but that he nevertheless does not perish and is not consumed, has its cause not in that he is in the broadest sense Israel, but must be attributed to the fact that centrally he is Christ. That is why the wrath of God can be poured out over this nation, which has its center in the servant of Jehovah *par excellence*, without its being consumed.

This also explains the otherwise so inexplicable transitions from announcements of wrath and judgment to promises of preservation, redemption, and salvation that so frequently occur in the prophecy of Isaiah. Upon the dark and comfortless conclusion of chapter 42 follows the beginning of chapter 43:

> But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through

> the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee (vv. 1–2).

Verse 10 mentions Jacob as the servant of Jehovah: "Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me." It is evident that the reference here is no longer to the concept *servant of Jehovah* in its broadest sense, but to the spiritual seed, the spiritual kernel, the remnant according to the election of grace, the servant of Jehovah. That spiritual seed is able to pass through the fire without being consumed and through the water without being overwhelmed. Exactly because the remnant according to the election of grace is always connected with the central servant of Jehovah, the Christ, the incarnated Word, Jehovah has realized his covenant with this servant of Jehovah, who stands in an inseparable relation of friendship to the God of Jacob in Immanuel.

In the same sense reference is made to the servant of Jehovah in Isaiah 44:1–2, 21:

> Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me."

In these verses Israel appears according to its spiritual kernel as the servant of the Lord. This servant must be Jehovah's witness in the midst of the world; he must know him and attend to his works and wonders, to speak of them and to tell of the glory of the Lord. For that reason the Lord gives him his word, and that word he establishes for his name's sake.

Because that servant of the Lord receives that word in the old dispensation through the prophets, these appear on the foreground as the servant of Jehovah. For instance, in Isaiah 44:26 Jehovah is described as he that "confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers." The signs of the liars he frustrates, and the diviners he makes mad. He turns the wise men backward and makes their knowledge foolish (v. 25). But the word of his servants is his own word. That word he reveals centrally in and through Christ, the servant of Jehovah *par excellence*. By his Spirit he gives that same word to his prophets and through them to his people in order that his servant may be his witness in the covenant of friendship in the midst of the world.

Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish and to discern in the prophecy whether the prophet, Israel, or the Christ is speaking when mention is made of the servant of Jehovah. The reason for this is that Israel, the prophet, and Christ are one as the servant of the Lord. For instance, in Isaiah 49:1–9, the prophet appears as the servant of Jehovah. Yet these words cannot be applied in all their significance to the prophet, nor to Israel, but must refer centrally to Christ himself:

> Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me; And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God. And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth. Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee. Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the

people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.

Very applicable to Isaiah 49:1–9 is the question that the eunuch asked of Philip: "I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?" (Acts 8:34). We might add, or does he speak here of the people of Israel in general? The correct answer would undoubtedly be that Israel, the prophet, and the Christ are all the servant of the Lord on account of and through Christ as the central servant. God revealed his covenant and established it with Christ and his own. To that covenant is the reference when the scripture speaks of the servant of Jehovah.

In the prophecy of Isaiah, this central concept of the servant of Jehovah appears gradually more and more on the foreground, as might be expected. The people, the spiritual kernel, and the prophet himself disappear more and more from the circle of the prophetic vision in order to let all the light of revelation concentrate on the Christ himself. In Isaiah 50:4–10 the servant of Jehovah speaks of himself:

> The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up. Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.

Finally, in Isaiah 52:13 through Isaiah 53, this servant of Jehovah stands clearly before us as the central kernel of Israel, the representative of his people in the covenant of God. He is pictured as the servant of Jehovah *par excellence*, who is over the whole house of God, who shall act prudently and therefore shall be extolled and exalted very high. Oh, indeed, many will be astonished at him. His visage will be marred more than any man, but he shall sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at him, for he is the arm of the Lord through whom salvation shall be accomplished (Isa. 52:13–15).

He grew up before him as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground. There was no form nor comeliness in him, and according to the criterion of the world and of the Jews, there was no expectation of him. He was despised and rejected of men. He bore all the sickness of the entire servant of Jehovah; all the vials of God's wrath were poured out over him. All we like sheep have gone astray and turned everyone to his own way. But the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. It pleased the Lord to bruise him. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. Obedient he became even unto death, yea, to the death of the cross. But he shall see his seed. The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand, and by his knowledge shall the righteous servant of Jehovah justify many. The Lord will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong. He, the servant of the Lord, has the victory forever, and the covenant of the Lord is established in and with him forevermore (Isa. 53:2–12).

2 Samuel 7:12–16

Several other scripture passages (besides those we have discussed already) that are usually quoted in proof of the so-called *pactum salutis* certainly do not speak of a covenant between the Father and

the Son or among the three persons of the holy Trinity, but they speak of a covenant between the triune God and Christ as the mediator or head of the covenant. The trouble is that usually theologians fail to make the necessary distinction between the eternal Son of God in the divine nature and the servant of the Lord, the head of his people in the covenant of grace.

This is true with regard to the well-known passage from Psalm 89 in connection with 2 Samuel 7:12–16. Usually these passages are referred to as a basis for the covenant between the Father and the Son. But one who carefully investigates these passages soon comes to the conclusion that no mention is made in them of a covenant among the three persons of the holy Trinity, but rather of a covenant of God with Christ and his people.

The intention of King David to build the Lord a house is recorded in 2 Samuel 7. The Lord had established David in his kingdom and given him rest from all his enemies round about. Seeing that he lived in a house of cedar and the ark of God dwelt behind curtains, David desired to build the Lord an established house in Jerusalem. When David informed the prophet Nathan of this intention, Nathan at first agreed with him. But in that same night the word of the Lord came to the prophet, sending him to David with the charge to prohibit the king from executing his intention.

This word of the Lord with which Nathan was sent to David was rich with respect to the promise of the covenant that God would establish with David and with his seed forever:

> And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever (vv. 12–16).

Different elements in this passage deserve our special attention. First, it ought to be perfectly clear that he who is speaking here is not the first person of the holy Trinity, but the triune God. He it is who here promises and assures David of his covenant mercies. Even this makes it impossible to apply these words to a covenant among the three persons of the Trinity.

Second, the one who is addressed here is certainly not the Son as the second person of the holy Trinity, but David and his seed. This seed of David is Solomon, who would build the house for the Lord, as is promised in this passage. But it is also plain that Solomon alone cannot be meant, for what is said here of David's seed is never fulfilled in Solomon or during his reign. The Lord speaks here of an eternal kingdom that he will establish for this seed of David, of a continual house, of an established throne, and of unchangeable mercies. It is evident, therefore, that this prophetic word must be applied to the entire line of David's seed as it points to and culminates in Christ, the Son of David *par excellence*, the root of David. From this it is perfectly clear that no mention is made here of the Son of God according to his divine nature, but that the reference is to the mediator as he must come forth from the loins of David, to the eternal king of whom David is always the type, and therefore, to the servant of the Lord according to his human nature.

Third, in this passage of scripture there is no mention at all of mutual conditions or mutual demands and mutual promises. On the contrary, he who is speaking here is the only one who determines everything. He will cause the promised seed to come from David's loins. He will establish the kingdom forever. He will chasten the seed with the rod of men and with the stripes of the children of men, if the seed commit iniquity. He shall never remove his mercy from him. To be sure, this seed will build the house of the Lord; but this, too, is determined only by him who is speaking here. From all this it ought to be perfectly evident that here there is no mention whatever of a covenant among the

three persons of the holy Trinity, or between two of them, but in the central and ultimate sense of the word, of a covenant which God establishes with Christ as the head of his people.

These words were a strong ground of assurance and comfort for the believers of the old dispensation, especially in times of darkness and suffering when it seemed as if God had forsaken his covenant and his people and as if the enemies of Zion would have the victory. No wonder, then, that we find that the church of the old dispensation loved to sing—and that the church of the new dispensation still loves to sing—of the everlasting mercies of David in the inspired song that the Spirit of Christ put upon the lips of the church of all ages. This song we have in Psalm 89.

Psalm 89:1–34

Proof has been found in Psalm 89 for the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* as a covenant between the Father and the Son. It is true that this psalm speaks of a covenant of God:

> For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens. I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips (vv. 2–4, 28, 34).

However, it is evident from the whole psalm that the covenant of which mention is made is certainly not a pact among the three persons of the holy Trinity. He who is repeatedly introduced here as being the speaker is not the Father as the first person of the holy Trinity, but the Lord, Jehovah, the triune covenant God, the mighty Lord of Hosts, who is the incomparable one. The one with whom this covenant is established is not the Son in his divine nature, but David and his seed, the royal seed, the heart and center of which is Christ, the lion of Judah's tribe. He is David, the servant of the Lord, the elect of God *par excellence*. With him and his seed is this covenant established. Of him and his seed, of the elect church, it is essentially true that they will be visited with the rod because of the transgression of the children, yea, that their iniquity will be visited with stripes, as was centrally realized in the cross of Christ, but that nevertheless the mercy of the Lord is never taken away from them and that they may sing of an eternal covenant.

If a covenant is an agreement between two parties with mutual stipulations, conditions, and demands, then there is not even mention made of any covenant in this psalm, for in the psalm everything depends on God alone, on his faithfulness and on his mercies. It is he alone who made a covenant with David, his elect. He swore to David that he would establish his seed forever and that he would build his throne from generation to generation. It is he who raises him to a firstborn son, to the highest over the kings of the earth. He it is who shall keep mercy with David forever and establish his covenant with him unchangeably. Never shall he take his mercy away from him, and his faithfulness to him shall never fail. He will not break his covenant with him, and he shall not alter the thing that is gone out of his mouth.

In other words, the covenant here is strictly unilateral. There are no two parties who contract a covenant with each other. The words of Psalm 89 can never be applied to an agreement among the three persons of the holy Trinity, but are certainly applicable to a covenant between Jehovah and his people. In his covenant relation to the creature, God always remains God, and he only is the originator and the establisher of the covenant. In such a covenant there are no parties, although there are two parts. God is his own party. When he establishes his covenant with us, he does it as the absolutely sovereign God. We become of his party. The three persons of the holy Trinity are

essentially one and co-equal, although they are personally distinct. Hence the language of Psalm 89 is not that of the Father to the Son, but of the triune God to his elect, the servant of Jehovah. The Son indeed hears this language, but in his human nature.

Psalm 2:7–9

No different is it with another passage of scripture that has been quoted as proof for the *pactum salutis:*

> I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel (Ps. 2:7–9).

We must be careful that we do not apply this passage directly and without further thought to the eternal generation of the Son of God. If we do, the conclusion will be that the Father here addresses the Son and that therefore the text refers to a covenant between the first and second persons of the holy Trinity. We do not deny that in the last instance this passage certainly also teaches the eternal generation of the Son of God. Nevertheless, it is very clear that the reference in this passage is not first to this eternal generation.

We must remember that this psalm has a historical background in the raging of the heathen against David as the anointed king who has been set over the holy hill of Zion. These words refer first to him in his capacity as king over Israel. He is in the theocratic sense of the word the anointed of the Lord, against whom the heathen rage and the kings of the earth set themselves and take counsel to cast him from his throne. He is the king anointed by God over the holy hill of Zion, the son of God begotten by him. It is against this historical background, predestined for this very purpose, that the messianic prophecy of this psalm is based.

We may not overlook the fact that mention is made here of the decree. The words, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee," belong to the decree of Jehovah. The generation of the Son by the Father does not belong to the decree of God, but to the works of God within himself (*ad intra*). Hence this word of Psalm 2 cannot be applied first to the eternal generation of the Son by the Father.

Acts 13:32–37

This is corroborated by Acts 13:32–37, a New Testament passage that refers to Psalm 2:7:

> And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.

This passage teaches very plainly that the word of Psalm 2 cannot be separated from David and that in the typical sense it is realized in him. It belongs to the sure mercies of David. Further, Acts 13 teaches clearly that Psalm 2 refers to Christ according to his human nature and that the words, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee," are fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Through that resurrection God has begotten him in order that he may sit eternally as king over Zion, the mount of God's holiness. In that resurrection is the beginning of the exaltation that is completed in

the power and glory that Christ received at the right hand of the Father; therefore the heathen are given him for an inheritance and all the ends of the earth for his possession. The "this day" of Psalm 2 is, therefore, a reference to the historical moment of the anointing of David as king over Israel and at the same time a reference to the moment of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Psalm 2 refers to the covenant of God with Christ and to the promise of the gospel that is centrally realized in him.

Acts 4:24–28

The same truth of Psalm 2 is evident from that beautiful and clear prayer of the church recorded in Acts 4:24–28:

> And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

This passage teaches clearly that the reference in Psalm 2 is to the Messiah according to his human nature. It is in his human nature that the Son of God can be called the holy child Jesus. It is according to his human nature that the heathen, with Herod and Pontius Pilate and the people of Israel, have raged against him.

In his human nature the servant of Jehovah could ask the Lord, on the basis of the promise of the gospel given him in the decree, that the heathen would be given him for an inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession and that he would rule them with a rod of iron and would break them in pieces like a potter's vessel. For that reason the raging of the heathen is vain, and they can accomplish nothing but that which the counsel of Jehovah determined before to be done. From all this it is evident that in the covenant to which Psalm 2 refers, the Son appears as the servant of the Lord according to his human nature and that Psalm 2 does not refer to a covenant of the first person of the Trinity with the Son of God.

Hebrews 1:1–6

Without a doubt the covenant of God with Christ has its eternal background in the divinity of the Son and in the eternal generation of the Son by the Father. The church did not make a mistake when in Psalm 2 she also saw an indication of the eternal generation of the Son. Eternal generation is even the heart of the matter. That this is true is clear from Hebrews 1:1–6:

> God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.

These words must not be misunderstood to refer exclusively to the Son of God according to his divine nature. It is evident from the passage that this is not the meaning. It certainly is not in his divine but in his human nature that Christ is made heir of all things, that he is seated at the right hand of the

Majesty in the heavens, and that he has inherited a more excellent name than the angels. This is true even of the words, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee," as well as of the words, "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son."

That the words of Psalm 2 (as well as those of 2 Samuel 7:14 and Psalm 89:27–28) are addressed to the Christ as the servant of the Lord in his human nature is evident from a comparison with Hebrews 5:5: "So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to-day have I begotten thee." It is evident that the text from Psalm 2 is here applied to the royal priesthood of Christ.

Nevertheless, in Hebrews 1 all this evidence is adduced to show that he to whom all this is said at his entering into the world is essentially the eternal Son of God. He is the only begotten, and for that reason he also becomes the firstborn. By him the world is made and sustained. He is the brightness of the glory of God and the express image of his substance. He upholds all things by the word of his power. His eternal and divine sonship is the necessary background for all that he becomes in time. Because God says to him eternally, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee," and because within the divine economy he says this as the Father to the Son, therefore this can also be said to him in time as the servant of Jehovah who is placed over the house of God as king-priest forever.

In order correctly to understand the word of Psalm 2:7, we may think of three concentric circles, which have their center in the person of the Son. The words, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee," refer to the innermost circle, representing the eternal sonship of the second person of the Trinity in relation to the first person. From eternity to eternity the Father generates the Son and says to the Son, "Thou art my Son," while the Son addresses the Father, "Thou art my Father."

This same word has its second circle in the holy childhood of Jesus, who is brought into the world and to whom God says, "Thou art my Son, in whom I have all my good pleasure." This is the sonship of the decree, realized in the human nature of Christ and finally revealed in the resurrection and glorification of the holy child Jesus to the right hand of the majesty in the heavens.

Finally, the word of Psalm 2 refers in its widest circle to the typical kingship of David, who is anointed as theocratic king over Zion, the mount of God's holiness, and against whom the heathen rage. He who reads Psalm 2 in this manner will have to admit that the covenant, which is not mentioned in this psalm, but to which reference is nevertheless made, is the same as the covenant mentioned in Psalm 89. It is not a covenant between the Father and the Son as divine persons in the Trinity, but the covenant that God reveals and establishes in Christ with his people. In Psalm 2 the Son stands in the human nature before the face of the triune God as his Father.

John 6:38–39

In order to prove a so-called *pactum salutis* or covenant of redemption, reference is also made to passages of Holy Writ wherein the Savior speaks of a task that he has to fulfill, of a mission that is entrusted to him; to passages that speak of a reward that he receives upon his labor; to such passages of scripture wherein Christ addresses God as his God; and finally, to the passages in which the Lord appears as the covenant head.

It is well-known that the Lord frequently speaks of his work as a task committed unto him by the Father. Such is the current presentation of scripture, as we might expect. We call attention to a few passages to make clear what is meant. "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (John 6:38–39). On the

basis of this and similar passages, the conclusion is drawn that there is a certain covenant between the Father and the Son, a relation of sender to him who is sent.

Thus Bavinck asserts:

> That this relation between Father and Son, although most clearly appearing during the sojourn of Christ on earth, yet did not begin at the moment of the incarnation; for the incarnation itself already belongs to the execution of the work committed unto the Son. But it falls in eternity, and existed already during the time of the Old Testament.[22]

Now this last statement is certainly true. God knows all his works from eternity. For him the relation wherein Christ stands as the one who is sent by the Father is an eternal relation. The question is, however, whether this relation of the one who is sent to him who sent him, the relation in which Christ stands to God during his sojourn on earth, leads us to a *pactum salutis*, a covenant between the Father and the Son or among the three persons of the holy Trinity. Is it possible to conceive of the eternal covenant relation between the Father and the Son in such a way that the first person stands in this relation as the one who sends, and the second as the one who is sent? The answer to this question must certainly be negative, for the relation between the one who sends and the one who is sent is a relation of authority. One who is sent is completely subordinate to his sender.

That this is applicable to the relation of Christ to God, as indicated in John 6:38–39, is very plain. The Lord says that he is not come to do his own will, but the will of him who sent him. These words do not imply that there is a conflict between the will of the Christ and the will of his Father. That cannot be the meaning. As the servant of the Lord, he deems it his meat to do the will of the Father. But these words do mean that the task Christ is come to fulfill does not have its origin in his own will, but only in the will of the Father. His work is determined not by himself, but by the Father.

The Savior understands the relation of himself to the Father as one who is sent to his sender. If this is the case, then surely this relation can never be extended into the counsel of God. In that counsel Christ stands as the eternal Son, and as the eternal Son he is co-equal with the Father. In the eternal God there are not three wills, but there is one will. The Father wills eternally as Father, and the Son as Son, and the Holy Spirit as Spirit; but in their will Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are nevertheless eternally one. As Son, the second person is not subordinate to the first, but equal with him. As the Son in the divine nature, he can never say, “Not my will, but the will of the Father I will do,” because the will of the Father is essentially also his own. In the covenant life of the holy Trinity, the three persons are essentially co-equal by personal distinction. Hence in the counsel of God, the Son cannot stand as the one who is sent in relation to the Father as the one who sends.

The fact is that in the interpretation of these and similar texts we may never lose sight of the distinction between the person of the Son in the divine nature and the person of the Son in the human nature. In his human nature the Son is subordinate to God as his Father. In the divine nature he is co-equal with the Father. In his human nature he stands in relation to God as the one who is sent stands to the one who sends him. In his divine nature he, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is the sender not the sent. His human will is subordinate to the will of the Father. But in his divine will he is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. In John 6:38–39 the Savior does not speak according to his divine nature, but according to his human. He speaks there as the servant of the Lord, who is not come to do his own will, but the will of him who sent him.

The case is not altered by the facts that his doing the will of the Father includes the incarnation itself and that Christ also under the old dispensation was mediator and appears as mediator. It simply means that this mediator’s relation, this relation of servant to his Lord, this relation of the one who is sent to his sender, is determined in God’s eternal counsel and that also in this respect all the works of

God are known unto him from eternity (Acts 15:18). If there is indeed a covenant of peace among the three persons of the divine Trinity, this covenant must stand behind the relation wherein Christ stands as the one who is sent to his sender. How is the Son, who is co-equal with the Father, placed in eternity in the relation of one who is sent and in the relation of servant of Jehovah to the triune God?

John 10:18

This relation between God the Father and the Son in the human nature is also taught in John 10:18: "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." The Savior here speaks of the laying down of his life and of taking it again. He speaks of a power to do so: "I have power [ἐξουσίαν] to lay it down, and I have power [ἐξουσίαν] to take it up again." This power (ἐξουσία) denotes an authority that he has as the one who is sent by the Father on a mission that he has received as the servant of Jehovah. This is also plain from the last part of the text: "This commandment have I received of my Father."

The Savior alone has authority to put down his life and to take it again, because of this commandment of the Father. No man of himself has this power in the sense of authority. Man has power in the sense of strength or ability to lay down his life, but when he does so, he commits suicide: he attempts to leave the place in life in which God has stationed him, and his deed is a deed of rebellion. But with Christ this is different. When he puts down his life, he does so on the authority of the Father, in complete harmony with his will, as an act of complete obedience. Even as it was an act of obedience on his part that in the incarnation he took upon himself the earthly and human nature, so it is an act of obedience when he lays down his life: he does the will of him who sent him.

When his enemies apparently overcome him, bind him, and lead him to the accursed tree so that it appears as if they take away his life, it must be clearly understood that this is not the case, but that even then he accomplishes an act of his will and voluntarily enters into death. It must be understood that when he voluntarily enters into death and dies by an act of his own will, this act is not a deed of rebellion, an act of suicide, so that he leaves the position in which he is placed by the Father; but it is an act of obedience to the Father, with authority over his own life in which he lays down his life for his sheep. For that reason he has also power to take it again, which is his commandment of the Father. He laid down his earthly life, not to remain separate forever from the human nature, but to raise that life in the human nature unto the glory of the heavenly state. Hence the taking again of his life is an act of obedience.

It is plain from John 10:18 that the relation described here is one of Lord and servant, of master and subject, of the one who sends and him who is sent. It is in the human nature that the Son of God dies and in the same nature that he rises. In the human nature he has this power, and in the human nature he is obedient to the commandment of the Father. This cannot refer to a covenant relation between the Father and the Son, for as Son of God he has all power in himself and cannot receive a commandment from the Father.

John 17:4

We refer next to John 17:4: "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." Here the one who is speaking is not the Son in his divine nature, but Christ as the servant of the Lord. As servant of the Lord, he addresses the triune God as his Father. This is evident

from the entire chapter, which records Christ's sacerdotal prayer. It stands to reason that it cannot be the second person of the Trinity who sends this prayer to the first person, but it is Christ, as the high priest at the head of his people, who prays to the triune God. The person of the Son prays here according to his human nature.

This is evident also from the entire form of the sacerdotal prayer. When Jesus prays, "Glorify thy Son" (v. 1), this cannot have reference to his divine nature, which never left its glory and cannot be glorified. Rather, the Son prays for his glorification in the human nature. When Christ says that the Father gave him power over all flesh (v. 2), it is again evident that Christ can never speak thus according to his divine nature, but that he speaks as the mediator. So it is throughout this sacerdotal prayer. When the Savior says, "I have glorified thee on the earth" (v. 4), it is plain that the Christ speaks of the glorification of the triune God, whom to know is eternal life. When he continues and says that he has finished the work which the Father gave him to do, it is evident that he stands before the face of the Father in the relation of servant of the Lord to him who sent him. It is not in the divine nature, but in the human that he thus addresses the triune God.

All these and similar passages tell us nothing about a covenant between the Father and the Son or among the three persons of the holy Trinity. If a covenant according to its idea is an agreement, these passages do not speak of a covenant at all. They only mention a mission, a task, a work that God assigned to Christ and that is accomplished by Christ in all faithfulness.

John 17:24

Nor is it different with regard to other texts which mention a reward that the Savior receives upon his mediator's work and that he demands of the Father. At the end of the sacerdotal prayer the Savior demands: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). In this also there is nothing that is not applicable to the Son according to his human nature. Already we have pointed out that these words appear in a context that allows of no other explanation than that which interprets this whole prayer as proceeding from his mediator's heart. These words themselves allow of no other interpretation.

When the Savior speaks of the fact that the Father gave him his people, he refers to eternal election. Election is an act not only of the Father as the first person, but also of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The triune God gave the elect to Christ. When mention is made of the glory which the Father gave to Christ, then there can again be no question that this only is applicable to the Lord in his human nature. There is no question here of a relation between the Father and the Son or of a covenant among the three persons of the holy Trinity. The fact that the Savior here appears with a demand and says, "Father, I will," does not alter the case at all. When he demands his mediator's reward, he does so in obedience to the Father. From the Father he has received power to make demands. God said to him in the decree, "Ask of me" (Ps. 2:8). Christ knows that it is the Father's will that they whom the Father has given him be with him where he is. Also in this respect he is obedient to the Father's will.

Philippians 2:9–11

Nor is it different with Philippians 2:9–11. There we read the well-known words concerning the mediator's glory:

> Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus

every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The entire context speaks of Christ as the mediator according to his human nature. Of him it is said that although he is in the form of God, according to his divine nature, he never conceived of the robbery of being equal with God.

In this light, according to our conviction, verse 6 must be explained. Jesus Christ is eternally "in the form of God," according to his divine nature. This is true not only before his incarnation, as it is frequently explained—an explanation which introduces time into eternity and mutability into the immutable divine nature—but also when he became flesh. During his sojourn on earth he is, according to his divine nature, in the form of God.

Although in the form of God, he never contemplated in the human nature the robbery of being equal with God. This was the intention of Satan, and it also arose in the heart of man in paradise; but not so with the Christ. On the contrary, when he assumed the form of a servant, he emptied himself according to his human nature. Being made in the likeness of men and being found in fashion as a man, in that human nature he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.

For this obedience as the Son in his human nature he receives a reward. According to that human nature he receives a name which is above all names and is exalted to that glory in which every knee shall bow before him and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father. In Philippians 2, therefore, the question does not concern the relation in which the Son stands to the Father in the divine essence, but the relation in which the mediator stands to the triune God. Of an agreement there is no mention here at all. Christ is simply the servant of the Lord. As servant of the Lord, he is obedient unto death, and he receives the reward that is promised him, the highest place in the creation of God.

Other Passages

Proof for the *pactum salutis* is also taken from the fact that the Savior addresses God as his God, as in Psalm 22:1: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And in Psalm 40:7–8: "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." But the very fact that the Savior here addresses the triune God as his God rules out all possibility of a covenant among the three persons of the triune God. The second person does not address the first person as "my God."

As far as Psalm 22:1 is concerned, it is evident that these words have reference to the cross of Christ and that they are spoken by the Son, not in his divine, but in his human nature. In regard to the passage from Psalm 40, it is clear from the context and from the entire psalm that reference is made here to the servant of the Lord in his human nature. Of him it is said that his ears are opened. Of him it is written in the volume of the book. He carries the law of God in his inmost heart. As the servant of the Lord, it is he who delights to do the will of God. He stands in the midst of a great congregation and declares God's faithfulness and his salvation. From that congregation he has not concealed the lovingkindness and truth of the Most High.

There is no mention of an agreement or of the contracting of a covenant between the Father and the Son in the divine essence. Even though we apply these words to eternity, where they undoubtedly had their origin, they still can have no reference to a covenant between the Father and the Son as an agreement between two equal parties, but only to the relation of the servant of the Lord to the triune God.

Finally, proof for the *pactum salutis* has been sought in Romans 5:12–21 and in 1 Corinthians 15:21. However, these passages can be applied to a so-called *pactum salutis* or counsel of peace among the three persons of the holy Trinity still less than those passages we have already discussed. In these passages it is noteworthy that there is no mention at all of the Holy Spirit. Besides, in these texts there is no reference to the Son of God according to his divine nature, but only to Christ as the covenant head in his human nature, as is evident from the comparison drawn between Adam and Christ. Even apart from this, both passages literally express that they deal with the man Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15:21 all emphasis falls on the term *man:* "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead." In Romans 5:15 the same emphasis is placed upon the term *man:* "But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many." Christ does not appear here as equal party in a covenant of redemption or counsel of peace, but as the head of the covenant and as the God-ordained servant of the Lord.

The Biblical Idea of the *Pactum Salutis*

All that we have said above does not mean that we must reject the entire idea of a counsel of peace or of a covenant and covenant decree of the three persons of the holy Trinity. However, such a covenant cannot be deduced from the passages of scripture that we have just discussed. It is plain that those who see in these passages a covenant between the Father and the Son fail to make a distinction between Christ as the eternal Son in his human nature as the servant of the Lord and the same Christ as the eternal Son of God in his divine nature. A conclusion simply is drawn from Christ's relation to the triune God as the servant of the Lord to the eternal economical relation between the Father and the Son. The result is that a wrong conception is formed about the counsel of peace and that no place is found in the *pactum salutis* for the third person of the holy Trinity.

Thus far we have seen that generally the idea of the covenant is found in a certain pact or in a voluntarily concluded agreement between two or more parties. Kuyper finds the necessity for the conclusion of such a covenant in the circumstance that no higher power stands above the covenant. He writes:

> From this anyone can see that the conclusion of a covenant is conceivable only when there is no higher power that can compel the execution of justice.
>
> In that case there would originate, without the conclusion of a covenant, a complete absence of order and safety and social well-being. There would be only one right, the right of the strongest. Everyone would live by his sword. Robbery and murder would become general.
>
> To prevent this terrible evil mutual covenants are concluded. This implies that a certain established right is introduced, a right, which is based upon the honor of the word and the faithfulness of man's character; and thus it is that men find a means to create rest and safety round about themselves, those that are well-meaning from a sense of duty, others that are evil-minded from a sense of necessity.
>
> But as soon as there comes an end to this lawless condition, or as soon as a regular government is instituted, the law of the land is valid, and the transgressor is punished, the conclusion of a covenant is no longer necessary. Why would it be necessary to institute a certain rule of justice when there is already a power of justice above us which guards our safety?
>
> What we posited from the start remains true, therefore: wherever above the many that live together there still stands another power, there is no need of a covenant. But on the other hand, when there is no other power above them, the conclusion of a covenant is necessary. And a covenant is the only basis on which society can act, the form of life that must necessarily be instituted.[23]

From this Kuyper further explains the conclusion of the covenant among the three persons of the holy Trinity:

> And because the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are equal to each other, and because it is inconceivable that there be anyone above these three, so it follows that the underlying relationship among these three persons in the divine being, must rest upon the mutual communication, the mutual willing, the equality of being, and must take the form and character of a covenant.[24]

Thus the idea of a voluntary contract is applied to the covenant life in the triune God.

We have seen further that the covenant as to its idea was considered as a means to a certain end, a way to a certain destination, in the case of God's covenant with man as a means to the salvation of the elect. The covenant is itself not the end; it is not itself the highest state of bliss. It is the way along which the salvation of the elect is established. Hence the covenant of redemption or counsel of peace has been presented as an agreement between Father and Son or among the three persons in the holy Trinity to save the elect.

In close connection with this presentation, it stands to reason that the *pactum salutis* has been considered as logically following upon the counsel of predestination. The elect are already there, according to the counsel of God. The *pactum salutis* is the agreement to redeem and to save the elect. The counsel of predestination, the decree concerning creation and the fall—whether the order in these decrees is viewed either from the infra- or the supralapsarian standpoint—precedes the covenant of redemption.

Finally, we have seen that the texts on which this presentation of the *pactum salutis* is based are not applicable to a covenant among the three persons of the holy Trinity, but refer without exception to a covenant between the triune God and his servant, Christ in his human nature, standing at the head of the elect.

The Idea of the Covenant

The presentation of the counsel of peace or covenant of redemption must be changed when *the idea of a covenant is not understood as being a contract or an agreement, but is conceived as being a living, spontaneous relation and communion of friendship that is given with the very nature and relation of God and man in the covenant. The covenant is not an incidental relation, but belongs to the very essence of the relation in the covenant*.

In close connection with this presentation of the idea of the covenant, the conception of the covenant of redemption must also be altered so that *this covenant is not conceived as a means to an end, as a way unto salvation, but as the very end itself, as the very highest that can ever be reached by the creature: not as a way to life, but as the highest form of life itself; not as a condition, but as the very essence of religion; not as a means unto salvation, but as the highest bliss itself*. Then the counsel of peace is presented as the decree that dominates all other decrees of God concerning the ultimate end of all things as God has conceived it in his counsel.

Instead of a decree concerning the means, the counsel of peace is the decree concerning the end of all things. Instead of a subordinate place in the order of God's decrees, the main place must in that case be given to the counsel of peace in God's eternal decrees. Therefore, the question is whether scripture teaches that the idea of the covenant is an agreement or a living relation of friendship, whether the covenant is presented as means or as the end, as the way or as the proper essence of religion and salvation.

In answer to this question, it is certainly requisite that we proceed from what scripture teaches concerning the being and life of the infinite God himself. Behind all being and becoming, behind all the relations and connections of the creatures and of them to the creator, lies the eternal decree of the

Most High. Known unto God are all his works from eternity (Acts 15:18). All that exists is and becomes only according to his eternal will.

But the decree is not the ultimate ground to be considered. Behind the decree stands the infinite, ever-blessed, and self-sufficient God himself. The decree is the decreeing God. Even as the cause of all things lies in the decree of God, so also the motive of the decree must be found in the being and life of God himself. The decree is his good pleasure. It is perfectly sovereign. It is not determined nor motivated by anything outside of God. He made all things for his own name's sake, even the ungodly unto the day of evil. No one has ever given him counsel or instruction. Nothing has ever limited or determined him. In his eternal decree God is perfectly sovereign. The reasons and motives for his decree must always be found in himself, and these reasons and motives ever concentrate around the sole purpose of all things, his self-revelation and self-glorification.

It is always requisite that we turn from the created things to the decree of God and that we go back from the decree to what scripture teaches concerning the eternal God himself, for only from his being can be explained the being of all things, not in the pantheistic sense, but according to the counsel of his will. Hence also the idea and essence of the covenant must be explained from the relation among the three persons of the holy Trinity.

God a Covenant God

The scriptures teach very clearly that God is in himself a covenant God. He is a covenant God not because of any relation wherein he stands to the creature. The creature can participate in and taste his life according to the measure of the creature, but it cannot enrich that life. So it is also with the covenant. It is eternally of God. It is eternally perfect in him. He is the covenant God in himself. He is the God of the covenant, not according to a decree or according to an agreement or pact, but according to his very divine nature and essence. God is indeed one in essence, but he is not lonely in himself.

If nothing else could be said than that God is one, he would not and could not be the living God, who is in himself the ever-blessed one. A God who is lonely does not know himself and love himself, does not live and is not blessed, is a cold and dead abstraction. But God is one in being and three in persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As the triune God, he is the living God who lives the infinitely perfect covenant life in himself.

First, the idea of the Trinity teaches us not only that the three persons are essentially co-equal, but also that they are essentially one. There are no three perfectly co-equal divine beings. But God is one. He is one in being and nature, one in intellect and will, one in all his essential attributes and virtues, one in infinite perfection. There are in God no three divine beings, natures, intellects, wills, wisdoms, and powers that are perfectly co-equal, but for the rest separated from one another. If this were the case, it would be conceivable that the covenant could exist in an agreement or pact among these three perfectly equal, distinct divine persons, who, according to Kuyper's presentation, have no higher power above themselves and who for that reason determine their mutual relation to one another by a voluntary agreement or pact. But this is not the case. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are essentially co-equal because they are essentially one. They think, will, move, and live only in and through the one divine essence, in the one divine nature, from eternity to eternity inseparable and undivided.

Second, the truth of the Trinity teaches us that these three persons existing in the one divine essence are nevertheless personally distinct so that each one of them subsists in the divine being in his own personally distinct manner. By essential oneness there is personal distinction. The Father is eternally

Father, never Son or Holy Spirit. The Son is eternally Son, never Father and never Holy Spirit. The Spirit is eternally Spirit, never Father and never Son.

The Father generates the Son eternally; the Son is being generated by the Father eternally; the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Father. The Father is the Father of the Son and the breather forth of the Spirit of the Father. The Son is the Son of the Father and the breather forth of the Spirit of the Son. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son and searches the depths of God.

The Father is God as Father; he thinks and wills; he lives and loves as Father. The Son is God as Son; he thinks and wills; he lives and loves as Son. The Holy Spirit is God as Spirit; he thinks and wills; he lives and loves as Spirit. There is in God not only essential oneness, but also personal distinction, so that the persons are co-equal and stand in inseparable relation to one another by generation and spiration. The Trinity is a perfect threeness, a fullness of perfect divine life.

In the three persons God lives perfectly. He is in the three persons the perfectly self-sufficient God. No fourth person is conceivable. No one of the three persons could possibly be missed. The Father gives eternally to the Son to have life in himself, presents that Son eternally to himself as the express image of his substance and as the effulgence of his glory. The Son stands eternally facing the Father, is in the bosom of the Father (John 1:18), and is the express image of the full divine glory of the Father (Heb. 1:3); the Son is the eternal Word. The Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father to the Son and returns as the Spirit of the Son to the Father. The Father knows himself through the Son in the Spirit. The Son knows the Father through himself in the Spirit. The Spirit knows the Father through the Son in himself. Thus there is an eternal current of divine love-life out of the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit returning to the Father. Three there are that witness in heaven, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one (1 John 5:7).

That divine trinitarian life is the life of the covenant, for in the eternal sphere of the divine essence, the three persons of the holy Trinity live in inseparable, most perfect, and eternally complete communion with one another. It is the life of eternal and perfect knowledge, of a perfect entering into one another's life, of a perfect understanding of each other. In the divine economy there are no secrets. The Father never thinks or wills what the Son and the Holy Spirit do not think or will. It is a life of the most perfect love in which the three persons of the holy Trinity eternally find one another and are eternally united in the most perfect, divine harmony in the bond of perfect union. Nowhere is there separation, nowhere disharmony, in the divine life of friendship. Therefore God is in himself most blessed; therefore he is in himself the self-sufficient, who has no need to be served by men's hands, to whom no one can add anything, out of whom, through whom, and unto whom are all things, and who has made all things for his own name's sake; therefore he is also from eternity to eternity the covenant God in himself, the architect of all covenant life. The life of the divine Trinity is a life of the most intimate communion of friendship.

The Covenant between God and Man

However, as soon as we present the matter of the covenant in this wise—if the life of the covenant in God is such a life of most perfect friendship, of the most intimate communion, of the deepest knowledge and the most affectionate love—then it follows that the idea of the covenant cannot be found in an agreement or pact. With perfect harmony and communion of life, with the perfect, eternal knowing of one another, and with the most perfect love and unity, the idea of an agreement or the conclusion of a pact does not fit. In such a relation everything is spirit and life. The covenant idea is

given with the life of the triune God in himself. It rises in eternal spontaneity from the divine essence and realizes itself with perfect divine consciousness in the three persons. God knows and wills himself, loves and seeks himself eternally as the covenant God. The covenant is the bond of God with himself. It is the eternal life of perfect light.

If this is so in God himself, it must also be applicable to the covenant idea as a relation between God and man. Because all things are only out of God, through him, and unto him, also the covenant relation can never be anything else than an ectypical reflection of the covenant life in God himself. If the essence of the covenant in God is the communion of friendship, this must also be the essence of the covenant between God and man. If this communion of friendship in God rests upon his perfect essential unity by personal distinction, then this must also be the case with the covenant between God and man: it also must be based upon a creaturely likeness of man to God by personal distinction. If this communion of friendship in the Trinity implies a perfect knowledge of one another, then also the covenant life of man must consist in knowledge and communion: God reveals himself to man, causes man to know him, reveals his secrets to him, speaks to him as a friend with his friend, walks with him, eats and drinks with him, and lives with him under one roof. If the covenant life in God consists in the unity of the three persons of the holy Trinity in the bond of perfect love, then also the covenant relation between God and man must originate in God's opening his heart for man.

Then the life of the covenant is eternal life itself. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one (John 17:3, 23). As the Dutch versification of Psalm 25:7 has it, "*God's verborgen omgang vinden Zielen, daar Zijn vrees in woont; 't Heilgeheim wordt aan Zijn vrinden, Naar Zijn vreeverbond, getoond*."[25] Then the covenant is the very essence of religion, the highest good, the very best that can ever be imparted to man through grace, the highest bliss. The idea of the covenant is certainly not that of a pact or an agreement, whether you conceive of such an agreement in the unilateral or bilateral sense. *The covenant is the relation of the most intimate communion of friendship, in which God reflects his own covenant life in his relation to the creature, gives to that creature life, and causes him to taste and acknowledge the highest good and the overflowing fountain of all good.*

The Covenant as End

If we may thus conceive of the very essence of the covenant, then the covenant is not a way to a certain end, is not a means to the attainment of a certain purpose, and is not the manner wherein we are saved. It is itself the highest purpose, the end, the eternal bliss, unto which all things tend and must tend. Then the purpose of all things is always the covenant of God. Then the covenant determines and dominates the whole of God's counsel, and the whole of history concentrates around the highest realization of the covenant of God.

That is the sole purpose in creation and recreation. That is the purpose of the word, of the cross and resurrection, and of the uniting of all things in heaven and on earth in Immanuel, God with us. In the covenant of God is found the motive of the struggle of all ages in the world. In that covenant is found the reason for the consummation of all things. The idea of the covenant dominates all existence, and all life, and all relations of the creatures to God and of the creatures mutually. So all-dominating is the idea of the covenant that it would not be impossible to write a complete dogmatics from the viewpoint of the covenant. Not a way, and not a means, but the final destination and the all-dominating purpose, is the covenant of God.

It should be plain that this covenant conception must alter the common presentation of the *pactum salutis* or the counsel of peace. He who once has understood this beautiful and all-dominating covenant idea or rather has been inspired by this covenant idea that scintillates of spirit and life, certainly can no longer be attracted by the dry, scholastic presentation of the covenant of peace that presents the Father as concluding a pact with the Son, a pact wherein Father and Son mutually present their demands and conditions, a presentation in which no place is found for the Holy Spirit. He who once has learned to understand the living covenant idea of holy scripture is spontaneously convinced that the usual conception of the *pactum salutis* or counsel of peace is certainly a mistake and cannot be applied to the living covenant God himself.

But more about this presently. First, we wish to point out that apart from the covenant idea as we deduced it from the life of the triune God himself, scripture everywhere presents the same idea of the covenant between God and man.

The Meaning of the Word *Covenant*

The word that scripture uses for the covenant is of little help in determining the scriptural idea of the covenant. The derivation of the Old Testament word בְּרִית (*berith*) is uncertain. Some think that the word is derived from a term that means "to cut." According to this interpretation, *berith* is connected with the custom of cutting sacrificial animals in half and putting them over against each other when a covenant was concluded in order that the covenanting parties might pass through the halves of those sacrificial animals as a sign and pledge of faithfulness on the part of both covenanting parties. When the Lord concluded his covenant with Abraham, according to Genesis 15:9–17, he adapted himself to that custom.

However, according to this passage in Genesis, the Lord only passed through the pieces of the sacrificial animals; Abraham did not. This can only mean that the Lord did not conclude or contract a covenant with Abraham, but that he simply established it. This is the current teaching of scripture. God establishes his covenant. The covenant is his. Never does man become a party over against God in the conclusion of a covenant. This is in the nature of the case. How can the creature ever be party over against the creator? How can man, who has absolutely nothing of himself, who must receive everything from God, ever appear as a contracting party in relation to the Most High?

According to others, the term for *covenant* in the Old Testament signifies a bond and must be derived from a word that means "binding." The fact is the term for *covenant*, which appears about three hundred times in the Old Testament, has more than once the significance of a testament, and in the Greek it is rendered by the term διαθήκη, a word that has exactly that meaning.

The Covenant: A Relation of Friendship

To determine the idea of the covenant, it is better to note those scripture passages that speak of the relation between God and his covenant people. When we do so, there can be no doubt that the emphasis is not on the idea of an agreement or a pact, but rather upon a living relation of friendship between God and those whom he has chosen in Jesus Christ their Lord. In that relation he lives, as it were, on equal footing with his people, reveals himself to them, causes them to know him, opens his heart for them, speaks with them face-to-face, as a friend to his friends, imparts his secrets to them, lives under one roof with them, eats and drinks with them, and walks with them.

The relation is such that God receives them into his own family and that, according to the measure

of the creature, they enter into the life of friendship of the triune God and in that relation enjoy the highest possible bliss. God always remains God and Lord, and man remains creature and servant. The distance between the creator and the creature, between God and man, is not removed. Nevertheless, as the Lord God in the covenant, he is the sovereign friend of his people, who blesses them in his favor, blesses those who bless them, curses those who curse them, makes his people heirs of all things, puts them over the works of his hands, and causes them to enter into his rest and to enjoy the pleasures there are at his right hand. He who as servant enters into God's covenant is nevertheless friend of God, obedient friend, who has the law of God in his heart and delights to do his will, to sing his praises, to consecrate himself with body and soul and all things to the living God, and to rule only in his name over all the works of his hands.

That this is the relation between God and his covenant people is the current idea of the word of God. This was the case with the relation in which Adam stood to God in paradise. God created man after his own image and likeness, and in virtue of that creation man stood in covenant relation to God. The covenant was not something additional, but it was given with the very creation of Adam after the image of God. It is true that in that relation Adam was servant. It was God who placed him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and to keep it. He also imposed upon him the so-called probationary command, and by it God placed Adam before the antithesis and threatened him with death in case he would violate that command and trample under foot God's covenant. Although all this is a manifestation of the covenant relation, the covenant itself was given with Adam's creation after the image of God. In that image Adam possessed the necessary creaturely likeness which is the basis of all covenant relation. Because of that likeness he was capable of hearing the word of God not only through the speech of God in creation, but also through the speech of God with him as a friend with his friend.

By virtue of that image, he was capable of knowing God and of entering into his secrets, of tasting his favor and of considering that favor as the highest good. Through that image he could know the will of his God and consider the keeping of his commandments his highest good. Through that image he could love the Lord his God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength, and consecrate himself to the living God with the whole creation over which he had received dominion. Not only was he capable of doing all this by virtue of his being created after the image of God, but he also functioned in that covenant relation from the very moment of his creation. The covenant of God with Adam, therefore, was not an additional agreement, but was undoubtedly the living relation of friendship in which the first man stood to his God by virtue of his being created after God's own image.

When Adam violated the covenant of God by willful disobedience, and God maintained his covenant in Christ Jesus, the idea of the covenant did not change. The covenant remained the living, eternal relation of friendship, which is possible because in Christ his people again become conformed to the image of God. God maintains his covenant in spite of and even through sin. He establishes his covenant in Christ, and in him that covenant can never be destroyed or abolished. In Christ he realizes his covenant in the highest possible sense in the incarnated Word.

The fall of Adam must serve to make room for Christ and for the better covenant, but the idea of the covenant is not changed. God is one, and his covenant is one. In the very first revelation of that covenant, God put *enmity* between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Positively speaking, that enmity, which was established by God himself, was the friendship of God. Here, too, we must note that there is no mention of any contract or agreement.

The covenant is of God. He establishes it and announces that he will be eternally faithful to his own covenant. By God's putting enmity between man and the serpent and his seed, man is received

once more into God's covenant and becomes of the party of the living God in the midst of the world. Even as the friendship of the world is enmity against God, so also is the enmity against the serpent and his seed the same as the friendship of God.

The same thought occurs repeatedly in Holy Writ. We read that Enoch walked with God (Gen. 5:22), that Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9), and that with Noah God established his covenant (v. 18). This walking with God did not consist in a certain mystical, unspeakable experience, but in the clear consciousness of the covenant according to which Enoch and Noah were friends of God, knew him, served him, kept his commandments, confessed his name, and walked before him in uprightness in the midst of an ungodly world that apostatized from the living God.

Jehoshaphat called Abraham the friend of God. When the news was brought to Jehoshaphat that a veritable host of Moabites and Ammonites were coming against him to battle, he stood in the house of the Lord before the new court and prayed,

> O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee? Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever? (2 Chron. 20:6–7).

Concerning Abraham's friendship with God, we read also in Isaiah 41:8: "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend." Again, in James 2:23: "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God."

To Abraham the Lord said, "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). To Abraham the Lord revealed the secret thoughts of his heart:

> And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him (Gen. 18:17–19).

God's Dwelling with His People

In addition, the relation of God to his covenant people is usually indicated by the words *to dwell*. God dwells with and among his people. He makes his dwelling place with them, and they dwell with him. This denotes fellowship and friendship. It means that God eats and drinks with his friends, lives intimately with them, has no secrets from them, and causes them to taste his love and the blessedness of his house.

The shadow of this was found in the tabernacle and later in the temple. Thus the Lord commanded emphatically: "And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8). This same idea is found in Exodus 29:42–46:

> This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord: where I will meet you, to speak there unto thee. And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory. And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the Lord their God.

This dwelling of God among his people had its shadow not only in the Lord's representing himself in the holy of holies, but also in Israel's constructing the tabernacle and later the temple itself. In the holy of holies the Lord dwelt between the cherubim, but in the holy place the people themselves dwelt symbolically. There were the altar of incense, the golden candlestick, and the table of shewbread, which were symbols of the people of God under the old dispensation. Although the temple of the old covenant certainly proclaimed that the way into the inner sanctuary was not yet opened, it was nevertheless a very clear foreshadowing of the idea of the covenant, God's dwelling under one roof with his people.

Of this dwelling of God with his people, scripture speaks repeatedly: "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart" (Ps. 15:1–2); "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple" (Ps. 65:4). Therefore, Christ has ascended on high and led captivity captive and received gifts for men: "Yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them" (Ps. 68:18).

> How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee (Ps. 84:1–4).

The Fulfillment of the Covenant in Christ

This dwelling of God with his people is centrally fulfilled in the incarnation of the Word and is further realized through the cross and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, through his entering into the inner sanctuary above, and through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the church. In Christ the covenant of God is centrally realized: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). In Christ the covenant of friendship that God establishes with his people is eternally fixed, for he is Immanuel, God with us, who in his person unites the divine nature with us and in whom dwells all the fullness of God bodily.

For that reason he is centrally the servant of the Lord who is placed over the whole house of God. In his blood the covenant of God is founded on righteousness and truth, and therefore that blood is the blood of the new covenant. In his resurrection the covenant of God is glorified and raised to the height of glory that was never before known. For the "first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor. 15:47–49). When Christ is exalted in the highest heavens and has received the promise of the Holy Spirit, he returns to his own and dwells by his Spirit in his church.

The Covenant and the Church

The church has become the temple of the living God. The veil is rent, the way into the inner sanctuary has been opened, and the church enters into the most intimate friendship with the living God. The sacerdotal prayer of Christ is fulfilled:

> That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may

> believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (John 17:21–23).

This dwelling of God with his people is symbolized in the supper of the Lord, for there can be no doubt that the Lord's supper certainly consists in their sitting at the table of the Lord and in dwelling in his house, in eating and drinking with the God of their salvation. Through the communion with his body and blood, God's people enter into the covenant of friendship.

For that reason the church is commanded:

> Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:14–18).

Therefore, Christ always stands at the door of the church to invite the true church to open the door for him and to separate from the false church: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me (Rev. 3:20).

The Final Realization of the Covenant

In this world that covenant relation, although perfect in principle, is still very imperfect in reality. It stands in the sign of a struggle. In the covenant the church is of the party of the living God and through God's grace fights his battles. Hence she must put on the whole armor of God and watch unto prayer in order that she may resist and stand even unto the end (Eph. 6:13; 1 Pet. 4:7). It is given of grace in the cause of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer with him. Nevertheless, in all this she is more than conqueror through him who loved her, for never can anything separate her from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus her Lord (Rom. 8:37–39).

Presently, the complete victory is granted unto her. In the house of her Father there are many mansions, and Christ has entered in to prepare a place for her. When he has prepared a place for her, he shall come again in order that she may also be where he is (John 14:1–3). Presently, the new heavens and the new earth will appear when the first heaven and the first earth shall have passed away, and the sea shall be no more; then the holy city, the New Jerusalem, shall come down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride for her husband; and then shall be heard the word of the final realization of God's covenant:

> Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Rev. 21:1–4).

From all this it is perfectly evident that the deepest thought of scripture is not that the covenant of God is a certain agreement between two parties, but that the covenant is in the fullest sense of God alone. It is also plain that the idea and the very essence of the covenant are not found in a certain agreement or pact, but in the living and most intimate communion of friendship, in our being received into the life of friendship which is in God himself, the life which he as the Triune eternally lives in himself. Of that covenant life of God, his covenant with us in Christ is the highest and most beautiful manifestation; in the revelation of that covenant life of God, his covenant with us has at the same time

its highest purpose, for of him, through him, and unto him are all things, in order that his might be the glory forever and ever.

It is then evident that the covenant of God may not be presented as a mere way of salvation or as a way unto life, but as the highest possible form of all life and bliss itself. For that reason the covenant of God is an eternal covenant. If we would speak of a *pactum salutis* or a counsel of peace, it is certainly necessary that we do not lose sight of this essential idea of the covenant. In the covenant of redemption or the counsel of peace, the covenant may not be presented as something incidental, but as the highest purpose of God's revelation around which all things in the counsel of God concentrate themselves and unto which they are all adapted.

The Correct Conception of the *Pactum Salutis*

How, then, must we conceive of what is usually called the *pactum salutis*, which I prefer to name the *counsel of peace*? It has become plain that this counsel of peace cannot be the same as the covenant life of God himself. God's covenant life is indeed the basis for the counsel of peace, but it is not the counsel of peace itself. God's being and his counsel are to be distinguished. God's being is what he is in himself. The counsel of God represents that which, with absolute freedom and sovereignty, he determines and wills. Surely his counsel is always in harmony with his being, but it cannot, without anything further, be derived from the being of God immediately. God's counsel is his free and sovereign decree. If, therefore, we can speak of a counsel of peace, this counsel may not be identified with the covenant life in the triune God himself.

Nor (as we have shown) may this counsel be identified with the covenant as God establishes it with his servant and with the elect church in Christ Jesus our Lord. This is what is usually designated as the covenant of grace, but it must be distinguished from the counsel of peace. The covenant of grace is not the counsel of peace itself, but rather the revelation and realization of it. In the covenant of grace, Christ appears as man in his human nature, and as man he can have no participation in the decree of the triune God. Therefore, if mention can be made of a counsel of peace, then that counsel of peace must lie between the triune life of God, which is the basis of all covenant relation with men, and the covenant established with Christ and his own as the friend-servants of God. In other words, the counsel of peace must be the decree concerning the covenant.

Bearing this in mind and remembering at the same time that the covenant may not be conceived in an infralapsarian sense, as a means to an end, but that it is itself the purpose and end of all things in the works of God outside of himself, *we would define the counsel of peace as the eternal decree of God to reveal his own triune covenant life in the highest possible sense in the establishment and realization of a covenant outside of himself with the creature in the way of sin and grace, of death and redemption, to the glory of his holy name*.

In other words, the counsel of peace, which we can also call simply the *counsel of the covenant*, is the eternal will or the eternal decree of God to reveal himself as the God who lives in himself a perfect covenant life of friendship, to do this by receiving a people into his covenant communion and by making them partakers in a creaturely way and according to the measure of the creature in his own covenant life, and thus to cause them to taste that the Lord is good. This is the all-dominating element in God's eternal good pleasure, to which all other elements must be made subservient.

The Counsel of Peace and the Decrees of God

In the light of this presentation, it will be plain that the counsel of predestination follows logically upon the counsel of peace or the counsel of the covenant. The counsel of predestination serves the counsel of the covenant even as the counsel of providence serves the counsel of predestination. Usually the presentation is different. When one looks upon the idea of the covenant as an agreement to redeem some, and therefore as a way unto salvation, it follows that the counsel of peace receives a subordinate place in the decrees of God. Then the counsel of peace serves election, and everything in the decrees of God is turned about. The counsel concerning creation, the permission of the fall in the decree, and predestination—with election and reprobation—all precede the counsel of peace. The counsel of peace is nothing else than the agreement among the three persons of the holy Trinity to save the elect, and the so-called *pactum salutis* is nothing else than a means to the salvation of the elect, a way in which that salvation is being realized.

According to our presentation, in which the idea of the covenant occupies an all-dominating place, the relationships are different. God lives a perfect covenant life in himself as the triune God. He decrees eternally to glorify himself and therefore to reveal himself as the covenant God. He determines to impart his own covenant life, and thus to make himself known in the glory and blessedness of that covenant life, outside of himself. To do this the triune God ordains the Son to become mediator. Through him God's covenant shall be revealed outside of himself (*ad extra*), and in him the covenant life of God shall dwell centrally. The triune God in the decree of the covenant has given the kingdom to his dear Son,

> In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven (Col. 1:14–20).

We cannot enter into a detailed explanation of this exalted passage, in which we have a panorama of the one great work of God as he has conceived and willed it in his eternal good pleasure, as he realizes it in time in creation and recreation, and as he will present it in the new heavens and the new earth, in which righteousness shall dwell. But it is necessary to call attention to some of its main elements.

First, it ought to be very clear that in this passage the work of God in creation and regeneration or recreation is viewed from the standpoint of God's eternal good pleasure. God's work is presented here from the viewpoint of his eternal good pleasure as we shall see it only when his work is finally fulfilled. It is plain that in time not Christ but Adam is the firstborn of every creature. But it is the Father's good pleasure that in Christ (not Adam) shall all the fullness dwell.

Second, it is plain that in this passage mention is made not of the Son as the second person in the Trinity, but of the Son as the mediator of God's covenant, because of the Son according to his divine nature it cannot be said that he is the firstborn of every creature. This expression certainly must be explained in light of the similar expression in verse 18, "the firstborn from the dead." In other words, even as the expression "firstborn from the dead" gives him a place with the dead, out of which he appears as the firstborn, so the expression "firstborn of every creature" assigns him a place with the creatures. It is not proper to say of the Son in his divine nature that he is the firstborn of every creature. According to his divine nature he is not the firstborn, but the only begotten. As the Son he does not belong with the creatures, but he is the "wholly other." As Son he is not in time, but he is the

eternal one.

Also from the rest of this passage, it is evident that scripture does not speak here of the Son in the divine nature, but of the Christ or of the Son as he has been ordained in the eternal good pleasure of the triune God to become mediator. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the head of the body, that is, of the church, the beginning, the firstborn of the dead. Through the blood of his cross God made peace and reconciled all things unto himself, both that are in heaven and that are in earth. There can be no doubt, then, that the passage speaks of the Son as he was ordained in the decree of the triune God to be Lord and Christ.

Third, it is evident that this ordination of the Son through the triune God is *first* in the decrees of God concerning all his works outside of himself (*ad extra*) and follows in logical order immediately upon the counsel of the covenant, God's eternal decree to reveal himself in all the glory of his covenant life. This alone can be the proper explanation of Colossians 1:14–20. It is the Father's good pleasure that in Christ should all fullness dwell, that through him all the glory of the covenant life would radiate outside of God, for Christ is the beginning, and as the beginning he is the firstborn from the dead.

This sounds strange indeed when we try to explain these words from the viewpoint of history. From a historical viewpoint, not death and the resurrection from the dead are the beginning, but creation is. However, Colossians 1 does not speak about history but about the good pleasure of the Father, that is, of the triune God. In that good pleasure of the Father, that which is the end in history is the beginning in the decree. That end is not creation but recreation. It is not Adam but Christ. All things in heaven and in earth, united in Christ and reconciled to God: that is the end! Of that end Christ as the firstborn of the dead is exactly the *beginning* in the counsel of God. That end is first in God's good pleasure. The Son is ordained as the firstborn from the dead in order that in him should all fullness dwell. Thus in the counsel of God and as the firstborn from the dead, the Son is also the firstborn of every creature. He is before Adam, not only in order of time, but also in the logical sense. In the counsel of God all creatures follow upon the one who is raised from the dead, the beginning.

The beginning in the firstborn from the dead is not repair work of the beginning in Adam. Rather, Adam was so ordained in the counsel of God that all things were adapted to the one who is the firstborn from the dead. Around him in whom, according to the Father's good pleasure, all things must be united, in whom even the fullness of the Godhead would dwell bodily, everything is concentrated unto the realization of God's covenant. Not creation, not the fall, not the church, not the predestination of the elect, not even the incarnation, not the cross, are first in the good pleasure of God. But the firstborn from the dead, the glorified Christ, is first. He is the firstborn of every creature, the beginning.

You can perhaps call this supralapsarianism. I will not deny it. You may object, perhaps, that our confessions are infralapsarian. Again, I will admit it. But I will add immediately that although the supralapsarian conception was not adopted in the confessions, neither was it condemned. Everyone will have to admit that the presentation offered above is certainly founded on Holy Writ. He who thinks that this is not true ought to try to give a different explanation of Colossians 1:14–20 from the one offered above.

This is not the only passage of scripture which we should be able to adduce as proof for the scriptural correctness of our conception. Ephesians 1:1–12, for instance, offers basically the same thought as Colossians 1:14–20. Also in this passage everything concentrates around the mystery of God's will which he had made known unto us, according to which in the dispensation of the fullness of time he wants to gather together under one head all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and

which are in the earth. Only in this manner have we, who have been predestinated before the foundation of the world, obtained an inheritance to the praise of his glory.

Christ is the beginning. In him and through him God realizes his covenant. The fullness of God in Christ must, however, radiate a thousandfold: the covenant life of God in all its fullness as it is in Christ Jesus must scintillate and become manifest in and through the hearts of a multitude as innumerable as the stars of heaven and as the sand by the seashore. The unity of the fullness of God in Christ can only come to manifestation in the highest possible sense in the variety and differentiation of the many. Hence in God's decree of the covenant and upon his election of the Christ, the election of the church follows immediately.

The Covenant and Predestination

Reprobation is immediately connected with election but cannot be placed on a par with election. Reprobation follows election, and reprobation serves election. Reprobation has its motive in the divine will to realize the covenant in the antithetical way of sin and grace. The fullness of the Godhead dwells in the resurrected Christ. From the depth of misery and death, Christ enters into the glory of the full covenant life of God. This way from suffering to glory, from sin to the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven, from death into life, the church must follow. As the church follows this way, the reprobate shell of the human organism serves the church in Christ. In the shell of reprobation the elect kernel becomes ripe. For that reason reprobation cannot be put on the same line with election.

Election is the divine foreordination of the one church, with its millions of elect, unto the salvation of the life of God's covenant in Christ. The church serves Christ. The elect church is given to Christ as his body. She must serve to manifest and radiate in a thousandfold way the glory that is in Christ Jesus, which is the glory of God. For that reason the elect are those who are given by the Father to Christ. Those who are given form one unity. All *that* (in the singular) the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and *they* (in the plural) that come unto me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).

This is the teaching of scripture. Against this presentation it has been objected that the word *election* is a translation of the Greek ἐκλέγειν, which really means "to choose out." From this it is argued that if it is possible to speak of election or of choosing out, then the multitude out of which the choice is made must be presupposed to exist. Applied to eternal election, this would mean that in God's decree the multitude of men out of which God elects his people must precede election itself. It is concluded that in the counsel of God the decree of creation and the permission of the fall certainly must precede the decree of predestination. Hence God has chosen out of a multitude of fallen men.

Behind this presentation undoubtedly lies the good intention of not making God the author of sin. We may remark, first, that it must indeed be far from us to make God the author of sin. It is, however, an entirely different question whether or not God must be presented as *the decreeing cause* of the *fact* of the fall and of the *fact* of sin. If we do not wish to dethrone God and to present God and sin as a dualism, we certainly must maintain that God is the decreeing cause of the fact of sin.

Second, the infralapsarian, despite all his good intentions, does not ultimately solve the problem of sin in relation to God any more than the supralapsarian does. Also the infralapsarian will have to give to sin a place in the decree of God.

Regarding the reasoning from the word ἐκλέγειν (*to elect*), we may say that it rests on a misunderstanding. This misunderstanding is that one applies to God what is applicable only to men. When men elect, nothing comes into existence thereby. Men can only make distinction and separation.

Hence when men choose, that out of which the choice is made must first exist. But with God this is exactly the opposite. With him election is causal, creative, divine.

This distinction is the same as that between the divine word and the human word. God's word is creative. That word is first. The thing that comes into existence through the word follows. The word of man can only be an imitation of the word of God. Before man can ever speak, the created thing must first have come into existence by the word of God. The same is true of election. When God in his decree *chooses out*, then through that decree the differentiation or the differentiated multitude comes into existence. In other words, the election of God is first of all foreordained unto salvation and to the glory of the covenant life in Christ.

Thus it is in scripture. In another connection we have already pointed to the fact that scripture speaks of an election before the foundation of the world: "he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). This does not mean that this "before the foundation of the world" is simply before the world or before the foundation of the world in time. Eternity, in which lies the decree of God, does not *precede* time but is far above time; it is no time.

Besides, scripture often speaks of the fact that God knows his people:

> For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified (Rom. 8:29–30).

In 1 Peter 1:2 we read: "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

This foreknowledge of God cannot and may not be explained in a human way, as the Arminian wants to explain it. Then we get the idea of a *prescience* of God, of a seeing from eternity who will and who will not believe in Christ and persevere unto the end, and of an election founded upon this foreknowledge. According to such a presentation, what is applicable only to human knowledge is applied to God. Rather, this foreknowledge of God is a creative knowing of love, by which the object itself comes to stand before God, and the stream of sovereign love eternally proceeds to it. Only in this light can we understand a passage such as Isaiah 43:4: "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." In the same light must we see Isaiah 49:16: "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me."

This, then, is the conclusion of the matter concerning God's covenant: God wants to reveal his own glorious covenant life unto us; as the triune God he ordains his Son to be Christ and Lord, the firstborn of every creature, the first begotten of the dead, the glorified one, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead; unto this end he ordains the church and gives her unto Christ, and he elects by name all those who in the church will have a place forever, in order that the one fullness (πλήρωμα) of Christ may scintillate in a thousandfold variation in the church to the praise of his glory. Around that Christ and his church and that purpose of the revelation of the glory of God's covenant life, all things in time and in everlasting eternity concentrate. The end of it all is that we fall down in adoration before that glorious sovereign God and exclaim,

> O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen (Rom. 11:33–36).

Chapter 20

The Person of the Mediator

The Idea of the Name in Scripture

It may be appropriate at this stage of our discussion to offer a few introductory remarks on the significance of the name in scripture. It is often objected that the method which dogmatics usually follows and which introduces the discussion of the person of the Savior by an explanation of his names is faulty. But if we consider the significance of the name in scripture, this method can certainly be justified. In Holy Writ the name of anything is its real essence, its sense, its meaning, the denotation of that which it is in itself and with relation to everything else.

Apart from scripture, we no longer understand this significance of a name. No doubt it is one of the effects of sin that we no longer discern the real nature and meaning of things and are no longer able to express the true sense of anything in a name. We see some external phenomena, and from these we deduce some characteristics of the objects to which these phenomena belong. We discern the difference between one object and another, between a bird and a tree, between one star and another, between a lake and a river, between a sheep and a lion. But we do not intuitively discern the nature of anything, even though we bring it within the range of our telescope or minutely examine and analyze it under the microscope. In the original state of rectitude this was different. Adam intuitively looked into the being of things, saw their real meaning, and was able to express the sense of all things in their proper names. This is evident from the fact that he could name the animals which God brought to him in paradise. The real, scriptural meaning of the name is exactly that it is the denotation of the true nature of the thing named.

The underlying reason for this is evident: all things were called into existence by the word of God. When God speaks, even when he speaks creatively, he always speaks concerning himself. The word of God is always his self-revelation. It follows that the real essence of any creature is that word of God by which it was called into being and through which it continues to exist. The word of God in the creature is its real nature, its sense, its essence, its substance. In this light we can understand what the scriptures declare in such passages as Ephesians 3:14–15: “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.” Although it is true that through sin the power to discern the name or the essence of anything is lost, scripture still speaks of the name in that sense.

This means that the name of God in scripture is God himself as he is revealed to us. His name is in all the works of his hands, as the psalmist sings in Psalm 8:1, 9: “O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!” That his name is near his wondrous works declare (Ps. 75:1). To fear his name is to fear him. To glorify his name is to glorify him. To trust in his name is to trust in him. To believe on his name is to believe on him. The name of God is God revealed to us.

Besides, that the scriptures use the name in its original sense may also be gathered from the fact that names are sometimes changed intentionally, so as to have their proper meanings. Abram is changed to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, and Oshea to Jehoshua. It is, therefore, quite in harmony with and on the basis of scripture that in Christology we usually begin with the discussion of the names of the mediator.

The Name *Jesus*

The name *Jesus* (Ἰησοῦς) is the equivalent of the Old Testament name *Joshua* or *Jeshua* or *Jehoshua*. There is a difference of opinion about the derivation of that name in Hebrew. According to some, the name is a *hiphil*[1] form of יָשַׁע (*to save*). According to others, it is a composite name (*vox compositum*), consisting of יְהוֹ (*Jehovah*) and שׁוּעַ (*salvation*). The *hiphil* concept is defended by Abraham Kuyper.[2] Without entering into this controversy, we nevertheless are inclined to favor the idea that the name is a composite name.

We base this consideration especially on the analogy of similar names in the Old Testament. Thus the name *Jehohanan* is composed of Jeho- and -hanan and means "Jehovah gracious" or "Jehovah granted." *Jehoiada* is composed of Jeho- and -iada, meaning "Jehovah knows." *Jehoiachin* consists of Jeho- and -iachin, signifying "Jehovah appoints." *Jehoiakim* is composed of Jeho- and -iakim and means "Jehovah sets up."

It is quite in line with these and other examples in scripture to explain the name *Jehoshua* or *Joshua* as being composed of Jeho- and -shua, meaning "Jehovah salvation." This is the full meaning of the name *Jesus*. Thus explained, the name has a profound and rich significance. It signifies that Jesus is the revelation of the God of our salvation or that he is Jehovah-salvation. In him we see Jehovah—the I AM THAT I AM (Ex. 3:14), the eternal, self-existent, immutable God—as eternally immutable also in his relation to his people and to his covenant and as come down to us in our misery and death, reaching down with his mighty arm to save us. Creation is the revelation of the Almighty who calls the things that are not as if they were. Jesus is the revelation of Jehovah our salvation who calls light out of darkness, righteousness out of sin, life out of death, heavenly glory out of the desolation of corruption and hell.

The Name *Christ*

The second most general name of the mediator in scripture is *Christ* (Χριστός), which corresponds to the Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ (*Messiah*). The name מָשִׁיחַ (*Messiah*) is derived from מָשַׁח, which means "to stroke, to draw the hand over anything," then "to spread over with anything, to smear," and thus "to rub over with oil" or "to anoint." The word is used to express the idea of anointing as a sacred rite, to consecrate by unction to any office in the kingdom of God (Ex. 28:41; Ex. 40:15; 1 Sam. 10:1; 1 Sam. 15:1; 2 Sam. 2:4; 1 Kings 1:34; 1 Kings 19:16; Isa. 61:1). The full construction is with לְ (*to, for, at*), as for instance, מָשַׁח לְמֶלֶךְ, "to anoint anyone as king"; and in Isaiah 61:1, מָשַׁח לְבַשֵּׂר, "to anoint, to announce," while that with which one is anointed is construed with בְּ (*in, with, on*—Ex. 29:2; Ps. 45:7–8; Ps. 89:20; Amos 6:6).

The anointing oil was a symbol of the Holy Spirit. It was the meaning of the oil of the seven lamps of the golden candlestick that stood in the holy place of the tabernacle and the temple. The seven-armed lamp was a symbol of the people of God as the light of the world, shining before the face of God, called out of darkness into his marvelous light to declare his praise and reflect his glorious virtues. The lamps in themselves were nothing. Without the oil they could not burn and had no light. Thus the people were reminded that without the grace of the Spirit of God they were not and could not be the people of God.

This is evident from the wonderful vision recorded in Zechariah 4:1–6. The prophet beholds a golden candlestick with a bowl containing oil above it and pipes leading from the bowl to the seven lamps of the candlestick. The idea is evidently that the lamps are constantly supplied with oil from the

bowl through the seven pipes that lead to each of the lamps. The angel interprets the vision to the wondering prophet in the words: "This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (v. 6). Without entering into a detailed explanation of this vision, it is evident that the oil in the bowl constantly flowing into the seven lamps is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, by whom alone the house of God, the true spiritual temple of the Most High, can be built and maintained.

The same applies to the oil that was used for anointing. The holy ointment was fragrant and shining, a picture of life and light, and as such was a symbol of the Holy Spirit. That this is indeed the meaning which scripture attributes to the holy oil of anointing is plain from Isaiah 61:1, where the gift of the Spirit is directly connected with the idea of anointing: "The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." Even as the anointing oil was a symbol of the Holy Spirit, so the ceremony of anointing was designed to express that the anointed one received the Spirit of God to qualify him for a certain office.

Two ideas, therefore, were expressed or implied in the act of anointing: that of ordination or appointment unto a certain office and that of qualification for that office. This is expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism:

> Why is he called *Christ*, that is, *Anointed*?
>
> Because he is ordained of God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Ghost, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, who fully reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption; and our only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of his body has redeemed us, and ever liveth to make intercession for us with the Father; and our eternal King, who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and defends and preserves us in the redemption obtained for us.[3]

This ordination and qualification was accomplished in principle in the eternal decree of the triune God, according to which the mediator was constituted to be the chief prophet, priest, and king in the kingdom of God. This qualification took place in time when the Son of God assumed our human nature and received the Spirit without measure. This qualification, as well as his ordination, was strictly necessary. Without his ordination Christ had no authority, and without his qualification he had no power to accomplish salvation. For all that Christ had to do in his official work in the house of God, the anointing was necessary (Ps. 2:2, 6; Ps. 45:7–8; Ps. 89:20; Ps. 110:1, 4; Heb. 1:8–9). About the three offices to which the Savior was anointed we must speak later.

The Name *Lord*

The meaning of the name *Lord* (Κύριος) is said by some to be the same as that of Jehovah. They reach this conclusion on the basis that the Septuagint translated the name יְהוָה (*Jehovah*) by Κύριος (*Lord*).

According to others, this name is supposed to have a threefold significance.

First, it is supposed to be the form of respectful address, like the name אָדוֹן (*Adonai*, Lord). This significance of אָדוֹן (*Adonai*, Lord) is found, for instance, in Genesis 18:12, Genesis 24:14, 27, Genesis 39:2, 7, and Isaiah 26:13. However, although the name אָדוֹן (*Lord*) in these verses is not used of God, it nevertheless has very emphatically the connotation of authority. The same is implied in the name *Lord* when addressed to Christ in those passages where the name is alleged to denote no more than a polite or respectful address. One such instance is found in Matthew 8:2, where the leper addresses Christ as Lord: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." But surely the very request

of the leper implies that he supposes that the Lord has power and authority to make him clean.

Second, some find that the name *Lord* (Κύριος) has somewhat the same significance as יְהוָה (*Jehovah*) אֲדֹנָי (*Lord*) and, therefore, God. For this significance they appeal to passages such as Mark 12:36–37, Luke 2:11, Luke 3:4, Acts 2:36, 1 Corinthians 12:3, and Philippians 2:11. But in these passages the name *Lord* is applied to Christ in his human nature.

Finally, they apply the name *Lord* to Christ in his human nature as a denotation of his great power, authority, and ownership of all things and especially of his people.

It is only in the last sense that we prefer to explain the name. The name *Lord* has been given to Christ by the Father, as the triune God, as "a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9–11).

The name signifies that he is Lord and Master of his people: they are his property because he purchased them with the price of highest love, even as they were given him by the Father. He has authority over them, protects them, and is responsible for them in time and eternity. He is also in the universal sense Lord of all. He has all authority in heaven and on earth and is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. This lordship in his human nature can never be separated from his absolute lordship in his divine nature, but that does not mean that the two may be identified.

The Name *Son of God*

The name *Son of God* denotes the mediator in his essential deity. It is true that in the Old Testament the name *Son of God* appears in an official, theocratic sense (2 Sam. 7:14). It is also true that this name is sometimes applied to Christ as the Messiah, but even then the essential deity that is expressed in the name is by no means excluded (Mark 13:32). Some find this meaning even in passages such as Matthew 3:17, Matthew 17:5, Mark 9:7, Luke 3:22, and Luke 9:35. But in all these passages it is very doubtful whether the name refers to anything but the trinitarian sonship of Christ.

Others find in the name *Son of God* a reference especially to his supernatural birth from a virgin and refer to Luke 1:35, Matthew 1:18–24, and John 1:14. But also here this meaning is very doubtful: the name certainly always expresses that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God in the unique sense (Matt. 11:27; Matt. 14:28–33; Matt. 16:16; Matt. 21:33–46; Matt. 22:41–46; Matt. 26:63). Besides, the Lord frequently refers to this name without mentioning it (John 8:16, 18, 23; John 10:15, 30; John 14:20, and others). In the epistles the name *Son of God* is very frequently used in this absolute sense (Rom. 1:3; Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 1:2). The name, therefore, denotes the eternal, essential, and absolute sonship of the Savior in relation to the Father as the first person in the holy Trinity.

The Name *Son of Man*

The name *Son of man* (Υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) occurs very frequently in scripture. It is even the name with which Christ preferably designates himself. The name certainly does not mean that Jesus assumed a general human nature, as is the theory of Abraham Kuyper. Such a general human nature is simply an abstraction and does not exist.

It is generally accepted that the name *Son of man* is derived from Daniel 7:13 and refers to Christ's human nature as he assumed it in Bethlehem in the likeness of sinful flesh. It denotes especially that in Christ, the Son of man as the Messiah, this human nature is destined to be glorified in the everlasting

kingdom. This is corroborated by such passages as the eighth Psalm in connection with Hebrews 2:6–9. The name therefore denotes the mediator in his human nature, as in the way of deepest humiliation he will be clothed with the highest honor and glory in the everlasting Messianic kingdom.

Other Names

The above are the most general names of the mediator. Many other names are given him in scripture. He is the Lamb of God, the Root of David, the Lion of Judah's tribe, Immanuel, the faithful Witness, the Prince of the kings of the earth, the Lamb that stands as though he were slain, and more. Each of these names has its own proper significance, but we need not enter into them in this connection.

The Two Natures of Christ: His Divinity

A correct conception of the person and the natures of the mediator, of the relation between the person and the natures, and of the relation between the two natures mutually is of central significance in orthodox theology. This doctrine has always been a point of serious controversy. In respect to this part of dogmatics all sorts of heresies were developed in the course of history.

Sometimes it was the true deity of Christ that was attacked as, for instance, by the Ebionites and the Alogoi who conceived of him as a common man, who was equipped with extraordinary powers by his baptism. Others, like the Docetae, denied the true humanity of Christ. According to them, Christ is the highest Aeon (*emanation*), who was sent by the Father into the world as redeemer and who revealed himself in the apparition of a body. This also was the error of many of the Gnostics who attempted to mix certain heathen, dualistic, theosophical elements with the Hellenistic philosophy and tried to unite them into Christian ideas. Arius, too, denied the true divinity of Jesus Christ and taught that he was the most important creature of the Father, produced out of nothing in time. About the same time Apollinaris denied the completeness of the human nature of Christ and taught that the Λόγος (*Word*) had taken the place in the human nature of the νοῦς (*mind*), or of the human spirit.

Other errors had to do with the relation between the two natures of Christ. Nestorius denied the unity of the natures in the one person of Christ, while about the same time Eutychus and the Monophysites denied the distinction between the two natures and taught that in the incarnation a third nature originated, and Christ became the Θεάνθρωπος, the God-man. In some form or other all these heresies were revived in later modern theology as, for instance, in the schools of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Wendt, Harnack, and others. All these errors were warded off, and the true doctrine was set forth in the Symbol of Chalcedon (A.D. 451).

> We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [coessential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, *inconfusedly*, *unchangeably*, *indivisibly*, *inseparably*; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.[4]

The Divinity of Christ in the Confessions

The truth of the incarnation of the Son of God has been clearly and strongly maintained in the confessions of the church from earliest times to the present day in opposition to every form of heresy that has arisen to undermine it. The Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed of A.D. 381 states this truth:

> And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds [God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [essence] with the Father; by whom all things were made.[5]

The Athanasian Creed has the following:

> Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation: that he also believe rightly [faithfully] the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess: that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the Substance [Essence] of the Father; begotten before the worlds: and Man, of the Substance [Essence] of his Mother, born in the world. Perfect God: and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead: and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood. Who although he be [is] God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh: but by taking [assumption] of the Manhood into God. One altogether; not by confusion of the Substance [Essence]: but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man: so God and Man is one Christ.[6]

The same teaching is found in the later creeds. The Augsburg Confession declares:

> Also they [the churches—Ed.] teach that the Word, that is, the Son of God, took unto him man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, so that there are two natures, the divine and the human, inseparably joined together in unity of person; one Christ, true God and true man.[7]

The Formula of Concord teaches:

> That the divine and the human nature in Christ are personally united, and so completely that there are not two Christs—one the Son of God, the other the Son of man—but that one and the same is Son of God and Son of Man (Luke 1:35; Rom. 9:5).[8]

The attributes of the divine nature are said to be omnipotence, eternity, omnipresence, and so forth.

The Second Helvetic Confession has this to say:

> Moreover, we believe and teach that the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, was from all eternity predestinated and foreordained of the Father to be the Saviour of the world. And we believe that he was begotten, not only then, when he took flesh of the Virgin Mary, nor yet a little before the foundations of the world were laid; but before all eternity, and that of the Father after an unspeakable manner . . . Therefore the Son is coequal and consubstantial with the Father, as touching his divinity: true God, not by name only, or by adoption, or by special favor, but in substance and nature (Phil. 2:6) . . . We acknowledge, therefore, that there be in one and the same Jesus Christ our Lord two natures—the divine and the human nature.[9]

The French Confession of Faith states:

> We believe that in one person, that is, Jesus Christ, the two natures are actually and inseparably joined and united, and yet each remains in its proper character: so that in this union the divine nature, retaining its attributes, remained uncreated, infinite, and all-pervading.[10]

The Belgic Confession declares:

> We confess, therefore, that God did fulfill the promise which he made to the fathers by the mouth of his holy prophets when he sent into the world, at the time appointed by him, his own only-begotten and eternal Son, *who took upon him the*

form of a servant, and became like unto men . . . so that in truth he is our Immanuel, that is to say, *God with us*.

We believe that by this conception the person of the Son is inseparably united and connected with the human nature; so that there are not two Sons of God, nor two persons, but two natures united in one single person; yet each nature retains its own distinct properties. As then the divine nature hath always remained uncreated, without beginning of days or end of life, filling heaven and earth, so also hath the human nature not lost its properties, but remained a creature . . . But these two natures are so closely united in one person, that they were not separated even by his death. Therefore that which he, when dying, commended into the hands of his Father, was a real human spirit, departing from his body. But in the mean time the divine nature always remained united with the human, even when he lay in the grave; and the Godhead did not cease to be in him, any more than it did when he was an infant, though it did not so clearly manifest itself for a while.[11]

The Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England expresses this truth as follows:

The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, *and* of one substance with the Father, took Man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man.[12]

Finally, the Westminster Confession teaches:

The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin: being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.[13]

Throughout history, therefore, the confessions teach very clearly and emphatically that Christ is the only begotten Son of God, the person of the Son subsisting in two natures, the human and the divine.

The Divinity of Christ in Scripture

The truth of the incarnation, the doctrine that the Son of God assumed the human nature and that therefore the mediator in one person is both very God and very man, is taught throughout Holy Writ:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:6–7).

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting (Mic. 5:2).

Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:34–35).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:1, 14).

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory (1 Tim. 3:16).

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God (1 John 4:2).

Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:5).

We call attention also to those passages that speak of Christ's divine nature. His divine nature is evident from the divine names that are given to him. Christ is called God in 1 John 5:20: "This is the

true God, and eternal life." We quote this text especially because it is sometimes alleged that Christ is never called "the God" (ὁ Θεός) with the article. But here he is emphatically called "the true God" (ὁ ἀληθινὸς Θεός). In Romans 9:5 we read of Christ: "who is over all, God blessed for ever" (ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων Θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τούς αἰῶνας). After the resurrection Thomas addressed Jesus Christ, saying, "My Lord and my God" (ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ Θεός μου: literally, "the Lord, mine, and the God, mine"—John 20:28).

Further, divine attributes are ascribed to Christ, such as eternity and omnipotence. This is evident from Micah 5:2: "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Peter ascribes omniscience to the Lord:

> [Jesus] saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep" (John 21:17).

The Lord calls himself "the Almighty" (ὁ παντοκράτωρ): "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8).

Besides, divine works, such as creation, providence, remission of sins, and quickening are attributed to the mediator. John 1:3 speaks of the same Word who according to verse 14 was made flesh: "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."

> For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist (Col. 1:16–17).

And in Hebrews 1:3: "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

Christ claimed to have power to forgive sins, which is certainly a divine work, as even the scribes and the Pharisees knew and testified:

> And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house (Luke 5:20–24).

John 5:21 speaks of Christ's quickening power: "For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will."

Finally, it is well known that in scripture divine honors are ascribed to Christ. Stephen called upon God and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). Calling upon the name of Christ as Lord certainly is an act of worship. The same act Thomas performed after the resurrection of Christ when he cried out, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Besides, the honor of believing in his name is ascribed to Christ: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). From all these passages it is very plain that Christ is the true and co-eternal God with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The Two Natures of Christ: His Humanity

That Jesus is truly man is not so much in question in modern times.

The scriptures call him man in 1 Timothy 2:5: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" and again in 1 Corinthians 15:21: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead." Christ has a true human body: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24).

Jesus could hunger and thirst and be weary: "Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink" (John 4:6–7). "Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst" (John 19:28). "Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered" (Luke 4:2). Jesus also speaks of his soul: "Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me" (Matt. 26:38). All these and many other passages plainly teach that Jesus' body and soul were real and that he assumed human nature from the womb of the virgin Mary.

The Necessity of the Incarnation

The historical reason for the necessity of the incarnation of the Son of God is found in the fact of sin. It is possible to view this necessity from a different aspect and to consider it from a higher, theological point of view. The ultimate reason for all the necessity, for every *must*, is the eternal counsel and good pleasure of God. It was God's eternal purpose that in Christ as the incarnated, crucified, raised, and glorified Son of God all the fullness of God should dwell bodily (Col. 2:9). The incarnation, therefore, is not an afterthought of God so that Christ is appointed only to repair what had been marred and destroyed by sin and by the devil, but it is God's first and final purpose to reveal his glory in Christ.

God purposed to reveal himself and to realize his everlasting covenant, and thus to glorify his holy name, in the highest possible degree. This revelation is to be realized in Christ, the Son of God in the flesh, crucified and raised from the dead. Thus it is in God's good pleasure. It is for this reason that Christ is called the firstborn of every creature, that is, the firstborn in and according to the eternal counsel of God, for whom, through whom, and unto whom all things are created (Col. 1:15–17). If we consider the necessity of the incarnation from this higher viewpoint, then even sin and death, the devil and all the powers of darkness are but means unto an end. They are subservient to God's purpose of bringing his Son into the world and of realizing in and through him all his good pleasure.

This does not alter the fact, but rather implies that the historical reason for the incarnation of the Son of God lies in the fact of sin. The fact of sin is the proximate answer to the question of Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo?* (*Why Did God Become Man?*). The Heidelberg Catechism gives the same answer: Christ must be very man because satisfaction must be made in the same human nature that has sinned, and for the same reason he must be a righteous man.[14]

A real man is one who partakes of our human nature, soul and body. Christ must be real man, that is, he must not assume a temporary appearance of a human being, for then he is not related to us. He must not come in a specially created human nature, for then he stands outside the scope of our race. He must be of us. He must subsist in the very human nature that was created in the beginning. As far as his humanity is concerned, he must have been with us in the loins of Adam. He must be a very real "son of man." This is necessary, for otherwise he could not make the required satisfaction.

Christ, in order to save his people, must satisfy the justice of God concerning sin. That satisfaction

implies that Christ must bear the punishment of sin. The punishment inflicted must be equivalent to the sin committed. The evil suffered must be commensurate to the evil done. Such is the justice of God. Human sin is sin committed in and through the human nature, the human body, the human soul, the human mind and will and heart, the human flesh. Such sin can be atoned for only by suffering human punishment, that is, death in the human nature. Christ, in order to be our mediator, must fulfill all righteousness in our stead. He must be able to take the law for us. In order to do this he must be very man and assume the real human nature.

But there is more. Christ must be very man and actually subsist in our nature, because as mediator he must also be able to deliver us from death and impart his own resurrection life to us. This is possible only if he is organically related to us, if he partakes of our human nature. It would be quite impossible to transfuse the blood of a horse into the veins of a human body. Similarly, the resurrected Lord could never transfuse his own life into our hearts if he were not related to us. A mediator who is to save us, who is to make the required satisfaction, and who is also able to deliver us from the power of sin and the dominion of death and give us new life must be very man.

The Necessity of Two Natures United in One Person

At the same time the mediator must also be very God. This means that he must be of the divine essence. He must be the eternal one himself, the I AM, the infinite God, who exists in himself and has life in himself, who is the Almighty, the all-wise, the omniscient, the Lord of all. This is necessary because he must sustain, bear completely, bear through, and bear to the end, the wrath of God against sin, which no mere creature can possibly do. There must be divine power to bear to the end and to bear away, to bear and to live through the divine wrath. Hence the mediator, in order to satisfy the justice of God in respect to our sin, must be very God.

There must be a very intimate relation, a close union, between the divine and the human natures of this mediator. Although the mere human nature could never sustain the wrath of God and live, yet it must be in that human nature that the wrath of God must be borne. The divine nature could not be the object of the divine wrath, nor can the divine nature suffer and die. The relation between the real manhood and the true Godhead of this mediator, therefore, must be such that in the human nature the divine nature sustains the infinite wrath of God so that God bears the punishment for sin in the human nature.

Besides, Christ must also be very God because he must free us, deliver us, from the power of sin and death and impart the life of his own resurrection to us. Only when he is God can he so deliver us from death and translate us to life eternal. Finally, he must be God because his work must have infinite value. His suffering and death must be imputed to all the elect. This is possible only when it is the person of the Son of God who suffers in the human nature. It is true that the divine nature in the mediator does not suffer; but it is nevertheless always the person of the Son, the divine person, who suffers and dies in the human nature. Hence the mediator must be God.

For the same reason the two natures must be united in the one person of the Son of God. He must be one person and not two, as was the heresy of Nestorius. If he were two persons, we would have had two mediators, the one of whom would have had no significance for the work of the other. That one person of the mediator must be the divine person of the Son of God, because only in this way could he stand outside of the imputation of the original guilt of sin. Had he been a human person, that original guilt would also have been imputed to him.

The Virgin Birth

We must still discuss the question of what kind of human nature the Son of God assumed from the virgin Mary. That he was born of a virgin is the confession of the church of all ages, and that this confession is based upon scripture cannot be doubted. Even in the old dispensation the sign of the virgin who would conceive and bear a son was given: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14).

It is true that those who deny the virgin birth of Christ point out that the Hebrew word for "virgin" used in the text may also refer to a young woman recently married. However, the fact is, first, that the word signifies the age of puberty, a person of marriageable age but not yet married, and second, that the text speaks definitely of a sign. A sign is a phenomenon that draws the attention of men by its extraordinary character, its being radically different from the facts of experience, a wonder of grace. But there certainly would be nothing extraordinary in a young woman's conceiving and bearing a son. We maintain, therefore, that the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 ultimately looks forward to the wonder of the birth of our Lord from the virgin Mary.

This is corroborated by Matthew 1:18–23. "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (vv. 22–23). The word of the Lord by the prophet is evidently a reference to Isaiah 7:14, and "all this was done" refers to what is narrated in the preceding verses of Matthew 1. Joseph, having noticed Mary's condition, had been minded to leave his espoused wife secretly. But the Lord had revealed to him in a dream that she was quite innocent of the sin he had suspected her to have committed, "for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (v. 20). This passage, therefore, is not only in itself clear proof for the virgin birth of the Savior, but also corroborates the view that in Isaiah 7:14 this amazing wonder was predicted.

That the scriptures plainly teach the virgin birth is also evident from the annunciation of the birth of Christ by the angel Gabriel to Mary in Nazareth, the narrative of which is in Luke 1:26–38. We note especially Mary's question: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man" (v. 34)? It may be asked, What induced Mary to ask this question? The mere fact that at the moment Mary was still a virgin would hardly seem sufficient to explain this. It is true that she was not yet married, but it is also a fact that she was espoused to a man named Joseph. She was therefore about to be married. How, then, could she be so absolutely certain that she would not know a man? Certainly there was nothing in the words of the angel to suggest this, far less raise it beyond a doubt that she would become pregnant without the normal intercourse. Why could she not interpret the words of the angel to mean that she would get married to Joseph as soon as possible and that then in the normal way she would become with child?

It seems to me that there can be only one answer to the question. There was no man for her to know, that is, there was no man left in the royal line of the promise who could beget the promised Messiah. The Davidic generation of royal seed that, according to the promise, was expected to bring forth the Christ had ended in a virgin. Thus the angel replied to her question, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (v. 35).

The denial of the virgin birth of Christ usually implies or leads to the denial of the incarnation of the Son of God, the truth that Jesus Christ came into the flesh. There are those who would maintain the truth of the incarnation and of the real divinity of Christ, but who deny that he was born of a virgin

and claim that Christ's assuming our human nature did not necessarily require his birth of a virgin. The Son of God, according to them, could just as well unite himself with our nature as it is normally conceived and born from a human mother and by the will of man.

To say the least, this is a proposition that is very difficult, if not impossible, to prove. We know very little about the mystery of the conception and birth of a normal child, much less about the birth of the Son of God in the flesh. Even though we may not be able to demonstrate the truth of this proposition, we much rather assume on the basis of scripture that the virgin birth of Christ was also ontologically necessary, that is, that the Son of God could assume the human nature only by way of the elimination of the will of man. But whether or not this is so, it is certain that God purposely created the sign of the virgin birth to make known unto us that Jesus Christ's coming into the flesh is God's act exclusively and that Christ is born not by the will of man, but by the conception of the Holy Ghost.

We refrain from any attempt to explain this profound mystery of the conception and birth of the Savior from the virgin Mary. All we can say about it is that it signifies that the Son of God himself by his Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, so operated upon the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary that she conceived in her womb and brought forth her firstborn son. Eliminating the will of man, that person of the Son of God prepared his own human nature from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary. Seeing that the persons in the holy Trinity can never be separated, this means that the triune God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ also in his human nature.

Further, concerning the human nature of Christ we must always maintain that it is a real and complete human nature. The Belgic Confession emphasizes this truth when it declares that he

> *took upon him the form of a servant, and became like unto men*, really assuming the true human nature, with all its infirmities, sin excepted . . . and did not only assume human nature as to the body, but also a true human soul, that he might be a real man. For since the soul was lost as well as the body, it was necessary that he should take both upon him, to save both. Therefore we confess (in opposition to the heresy of the Anabaptists, who deny that Christ assumed human flesh of his mother) that Christ is become *a partaker of the flesh and blood of the children*.[15]

Christ's Real Human Nature

That the mediator assumed a real human nature means that he was very really born, not created, according to body and soul. Even though he was conceived without the will of man and born of a virgin, his was not a strange or specially created human nature: but he took upon him our flesh and blood. He was organically connected with us. As to his human nature, he did not come from without, but was brought forth by us. He did not stand next to men, but among them, and was of them. He partook of the flesh and blood of the children. He was flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood, bone of our bone.

This must be maintained because it is the plain teaching of Holy Writ. According to the message of the angel to Mary, she would conceive in her womb and bring forth a son (Luke 1:31). That which was conceived in her developed in her womb like the seed of any other human being, and its growth required the same length of time: for while Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, "the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son" (Luke 2:6–7). When Mary visited her cousin Elisabeth before the birth of Jesus, the mother of John the Baptist, filled with the Holy Ghost, greeted her, saying, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:42–43).

Moreover, scripture teaches that "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son,

made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal. 4:4). Again, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14–15).

Christ's Complete Human Nature

The truth that Christ assumed a true and real human nature also implies that his human nature is complete, that is, consists of body and soul. We must not conceive of the incarnation of the Son of God in such a way that by this wonder of grace the divine nature came to inhabit a human body, took the place of the human soul, or even that the person of the Son of God took upon him a human body and a human soul, but that the divine nature took the place of the human νοῦς (*mind*) or πνεῦμα (*spirit*). The entire human nature Christ assumed in his incarnation. He was completely human, even as he is truly divine.

It is true that this conception seems to favor traducianism, the theory that in all cases the whole human nature is brought forth through the conception and birth by the human parents. But it seems to me that it is possible to avoid both crass creationism[16] and liberal traducianism. It would seem that the theory of creationism is guilty of complete separation of soul and body, while traducianism must lose the spiritual identity of the soul. Therefore, rather than distinguishing between soul and body, I would suggest that a distinction be made between person and nature.

This is certainly the distinction that we face in the incarnation of the Son of God. He was a human being without being a human person. In his case the divine person of the Son of God took upon himself a human nature, but not a human person. Hence it is certainly correct to say that in the case of the incarnation the person of the Son came from God, and his nature came from the virgin Mary. But if this is true of the incarnation, it must also be true of the birth of every human individual: the whole nature is born, while the person comes into being by an act of God. Thus we must conceive of the incarnation and maintain that the person of the Son of God assumed a real and complete human nature from the virgin Mary.

Christ's Central Human Nature

Concerning the human nature of Christ, we must maintain that it was a central, as well as an individual, human nature. The Belgic Confession declares that Christ

> is a *fruit of the loins of David* after the flesh; *made of the seed of David according to the flesh; a fruit of the womb* of the Virgin Mary; *made of a woman; a branch* of David; a shoot of *the root of Jesse; sprung from the tribe of Judah; descended from the Jews according to the flesh: of the seed of Abraham, since he took on him the seed of Abraham, and became like unto his brethren in all things, sin excepted*; so that in truth he is our Immanuel, that is to say, *God with us*.[17]

This implies that Christ assumed a very concrete and individual human nature. There are those who deny this and who insist that Christ's humanity was general. He did not assume a certain concrete form of the human nature, but took upon himself the human nature in general. He was not *a man*, but man. Just as we speak of the general concept, *the tree*, in distinction from all specific trees, so we must conceive of the humanity of Christ as being *the human nature*. This is especially the teaching of Kuyper:

> With each of us the human nature bears a definite, concrete stamp, determined by our individual ego. The human nature in the abstract sense is that which is common to us all. The general human nature is, so to speak, the wax into which each man impresses his own stamp. Christ, however, assumed the abstract and unstamped human nature, while he possessed the divine nature concretely.[18]

Again:

> To be sure, Scripture teaches everywhere that Christ was a man, that he bore the human nature, but that he was an individual, that among the variations of the seed of Adam there was also the variation Jesus is absurd. In the seed of Adam were all the variations of human life, of nations, generations, and persons. And over against this, the Scriptures witness and say that Christ was the second Adam; he was out of Adam *as Adam*, that is, as one who like Adam carried within himself endless variations, namely, those of all the elect of God. Because of this every child of God knows that he is in Christ, that he died and is raised with Christ, that he draws his life out of Christ, even as the sinner out of Adam.[19]

The scriptural ground on which this conception is supposed to be based is especially threefold. First, Kuyper asserts that in 1 Corinthians 15:45 Christ is called "the second Adam." However, let it be noted here at once that Christ is not called "the second Adam," but "the last Adam," and that he is such not by virtue of the fact that in the state of humiliation he bore a general human nature, but because he represents all his own and as the quickening Spirit is able to impart himself to all the elect.

Second, Kuyper emphasizes that Christ is called *the* Son of man. This is supposed to teach us that we are all sons of man, but Christ is *the* Son of man in the sense that he assumed a general human nature. He was not a man among men, but man in the abstract sense. However, the term *Son of man* is derived from Daniel 7:13. It does not refer to a general and abstract human nature in distinction from the specific forms of the human nature which other men have, but to the Messiah as he is destined to inherit the glory of his everlasting kingdom.

Third, Kuyper appeals to the fact that scripture presents the Lord as the head of the church, his body. This implies, according to him, that even as we partake of the nature of Adam, so we also really partake of the nature of Christ. According to this theory, this is possible only if Christ is not a mere individual, a man among men, but *the man*, and if he assumed a general human nature. But this argument overlooks the fact that we are not partakers of Christ according to the flesh, but according to the spirit, and that this union became possible not by virtue of a supposed general human nature in Christ, but by virtue of his exaltation and through the Spirit who was given him.

The most serious objection to this theory of a general human nature in Christ is that it really implies a denial of the reality of our Lord's humanity. What is a general human nature? It is something that does not concretely exist, an abstraction that exists only in the form of conception, but that has no real, no tangible existence. To say that the human nature of Christ was a general human nature is tantamount to saying that it did not concretely, historically exist, that he had no tangible reality. This is indeed absurd.

It is evident that our Lord, according to the flesh, had a very concrete form of the human nature. In the days of his flesh he certainly could have been photographed: he had a concrete body. It was of a certain measurable height, weighed a certain number of pounds, had a certain color of eyes, was white, not black or yellow, and possessed certain definite features by which he was recognized in distinction from his fellow men.

What is true of Jesus' body is equally applicable to his soul. Even though the gospel narratives are not at all interested in a "Life of Jesus" (*Leben Jesu*), and although it is certainly true that one looks in vain in them for a description of his character, the conclusion is not warranted that Jesus had no character or that he had a general human soul. That the gospel narratives are not interested in a "Life

of Jesus" is due to the fact that they mean to be the revelation of Jesus Christ, the incarnated Son of God, who died for his people, rose again, and is seated at the right hand of God. But it certainly must be maintained that both according to soul and body our Lord possessed a real, concrete, definite form of the human nature. He was of the seed of David, the son of Mary, and it is not at all presumptuous to say that he looked like his mother.

Rather than assuming that Jesus possessed an abstract, general human nature, we hold that the Son of God assumed the flesh and blood of the children, that is, that he took hold of the human nature in its very center, in the center of the holy line of the covenant. He assumed his human nature not from the Romans or from the Greeks, not from the sons of Ham or from the Asiatics, but from the seed of the promise.

He is the seed of the woman, the son of Adam. In the generations of Adam, he is the seed of Seth, not of Cain. He is of Noah. In the generations of Noah, he is the seed of Shem. In the generations of Shem, he is of the line that culminates in Abraham. In the generations of Abraham, he is the seed of Isaac, and in Isaac's generations he is not of Esau, but of Jacob. The line runs through Israel, but in Israel it is the tribe of Judah that bears the Christ in its loins. Within the tribe of Judah, the house of David is pointed out as the everlasting royal line that must culminate in the Christ. This royal line of David culminates finally in the virgin Mary.

Thus the generations of Jesus Christ are like a pyramid with its base in the seed of the woman and its apex in the virgin Mary. In the fullness of time, the Son of God took hold of the very heart of the seed of the promise and assumed the flesh and blood of the children. A very definite and concrete, but at the same time a central human nature Christ took upon himself in assuming our flesh and blood.

Christ's Weakened Human Nature

We must also emphasize that the Son of God assumed a weakened human nature. He came, according to Romans 8:3, in the likeness of sinful flesh; that is, not in sinful flesh, for he was without sin, but in the *likeness* of sinful flesh just the same. He did not assume the original human nature as Adam possessed it in the state of rectitude, but the flesh and blood of the children subject to suffering and death. And it behooved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren; we have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who was in all points tempted even as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 2:17; Heb. 4:15).

Christ's Sinless Human Nature

In contrast, the fact that it was the Son of God who assumed the human nature postulates the sinlessness of that nature. God can have no fellowship with sin. In a corrupt human nature the Son of God could not have dwelled. He was the holy child Jesus. He was separate from sinners: "For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Heb. 7:26).

This sinlessness of Christ implies, first, that he was without original guilt. We are born in original guilt and condemnation. The sin of Adam is imputed to us, we being reckoned in Adam forensically. Christ does not fall under this imputation because he is not a human person, but the person of the Son of God. Although as to his nature he is out of Adam, as to his person he was not reckoned in Adam. Guilt is imputed to the person. Since Christ was a divine, not a human, person, the guilt of Adam's sin could not be imputed to him. Personally he did not lie under the wrath of God and under the

condemnation of the human race. He was separate from sinners.

Second, the sinlessness of Christ implies that he was not depraved, that his nature was without corruption, that he assumed a holy human nature. Being without original guilt, Christ was entitled to a sinless human nature, for he was personally not subject to the sentence of death. This sinless human nature he assumed not from a holy virgin, who herself was immaculately conceived, but because the Son of God formed his own human nature through the conception by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

Finally, the sinlessness of the human nature of Christ means that Christ never had any actual sin, that his whole existence from the manger to the cross was without spot or blemish. He was tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:22–23). "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18).

In this connection it must be maintained that there was not the slightest possibility that Christ could fall into sin. He could not sin. The first Adam was lapsible; the last Adam was not. This impossibility was due not to the holiness of his human nature alone, for Adam was also righteous and holy, yet he fell. But this impossibility is due objectively to God's decree that in Christ all things should be made perfect and subjectively to the union of the human nature to the divine in the person of the Son of God.

To maintain that for Christ there was the possibility of falling into sin is to deny God's immutable decree that Christ should be made perfect as the captain of our salvation, and it is tantamount to the statement that the person of the Son of God in human flesh could become disobedient to the Father. This is absurd. Hence it must be maintained that Christ could not sin.

This does not render the reality of his temptation less real. He was tempted in all things even as we are, yet without sin. The trial or test of anything does not become less real because it is certain from the outset that the thing being tested will not and cannot break. The strain put upon the obedience of Christ in his sufferings and death is nonetheless real and heavy, because it was *a priori* established that he could never be crushed under the strain. Also in this respect Christ was separate from sinners. He could never fall. In him the realization of God's everlasting covenant is assured from the beginning, because he is the Word become flesh.

The Union of Christ's Two Natures

How are the two natures, the human and the divine, united in the person of the mediator?[20]

We must emphasize that Christ is one person, not two persons. In the incarnation of the Son of God, it was not a human person but a human nature, body and soul, which the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, assumed. This truth has sometimes been expressed by stating that in the incarnation the person of the Son assumed an impersonal human nature. This is hardly correct. Better it would be to express the matter thus, that the human nature of Christ became and is personal only through its assumption by the person of the Son of God. It has no personal subsistence of its own, but it is personal because the Son of God took up his abode in it. Hence both the personality of the Savior's human nature and its union with the divine nature have their ground in the person of the Son

of God.

It is difficult to conceive of and to define what is meant by a person. It has usually been defined as an individual subsistence in a rational, moral nature. Only a rational, moral being can be a person. There may be individual trees, but a tree is not a person. There may be endless variety of the species *horse*, but no individual horse is a person. God is personal, for he reveals himself as having intellect and will. So, those creatures are persons who are endowed with a rational and volitional nature, such as angels and men. This description, however, is rather an answer to the question, What is a person? It does not define what is that mysterious something within us that we call our person or our ego.

My person is that which I know to be the subject of all my actions and of whose identity I remain conscious and assured no matter what radical change my nature may undergo. It is not my nature—my body or my soul, my brain, my eye, my ear, my mouth, my feet—that acts, thinks, sees, hears speaks, and runs, but it is my *person*. I act, I think, I see, I hear, I speak, and I run, in and through my nature. From childhood to old age, from the cradle to the grave, my nature undergoes many and great changes, yet my person remains identical. I know that I am still the same person who was once nursed at my mother's breast. Even through death my person remains the same, retains its identity: I die and I will be raised again in Christ at the last day.

Christ's person is the Son of God, the second person of the holy Trinity. In and through the human nature of Jesus, the Son of God was the subject of all his actions and all his experiences. The person of the Son of God as to his human nature was born in Bethlehem, grew up in the home of Joseph and Mary in Nazareth, conversed with the doctors of the law in the temple when he was twelve years old, and was baptized and entered upon his public ministry when he was about thirty years of age.

The person of the Son of God, who is in the bosom of the Father as to his divine nature, appeared in the form of a servant in the human nature, tabernacled among us, spoke to us, and performed his mighty works among us. The person of the Son of God as to and in his human nature was captured in Gethsemane, condemned by the Sanhedrin, and delivered over unto death by the Roman governor. The Son of God suffered death, was raised from the dead, was exalted at the right hand of God, and received a name that is above every name—all in his human nature.

Always he is the same person, "not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ."[21] Were he two persons, he would not be Immanuel: the union of God with us would not be established in him. His death would have no other significance than any human death. Atonement would not have been made through him. He could not be the object of our adoration and worship. We could not address him as, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

Chalcedon: "Without Mixture"

The union of the two natures in Christ, therefore, is in and through the person of the Son of God. Hence the church confesses that this union is without mixture or fusion into one nature. Christ is not a God-man (Θεάνθρωπος).

Such a view would be pantheistic. Pantheism identifies the essence of God with the essence of the creature. It fuses the creator and the creature into one vague all. God is the world, and the world is God. The world-spirit is the Spirit of God that comes to highest expression and self-consciousness in man. It obliterates the line of demarcation between God and man, the infinite and the finite. According to this proud philosophy, the incarnation is only the natural development of the human race. In Christ, God reached self-consciousness. Hence Christ could identify himself with the Father. Christ was

divine because he was truly human. This pantheistic view, which in the course of history frequently lifted its proud head in one form or another, is the destruction of all true religion.

If the divine essence is not distinct from the essence of the creature, if the personality of God and the personality of man are merged, if my life, my thoughts and my desires, are nothing but little ripples on the swelling tide of the universal spirit-ocean, then there is neither religion nor morality. Then God is one universal subject in all, and there is no fellowship between him and us, no responsibility, no sin, and no redemption. Then he does not exist, has no being in distinction from us; we cannot speak to him, believe in him, trust in him, or enter into his covenant fellowship.

Hence it is important that the Symbol of Chalcedon be maintained with regard to the natures of Christ: they are united in the person of the Son unconfusedly. The Son of God, who is co-equal with the Father and the Holy Ghost, God of God, Light of Light, assumed the real and complete human nature, body and soul, but in such a way that the two natures remain forever distinct. God and man are most intimately united in him, yet in such a way that the two natures are never fused into one substance or nature.

Chalcedon: "Without Change"

In close connection with the preceding negative qualification stands the second limitation by the Council of Chalcedon of the union of the two natures in Christ: "unchangeably." Neither the divine nor the human nature was essentially changed through the incarnation. The Son of God did not leave the bosom of the Father to become man. According to the divine nature he is in the bosom of the Father, while according to the human nature he lay in the manger of Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, walked among men in the form of a servant, died on the cross, was raised, and was exalted. The divine nature is immutable.

The Son of God did not put aside the divine virtues. The infinite was not changed into the finite but assumed the finite. The eternal did not empty himself of eternity but assumed the temporal. The Lord of all did not cease to be Lord but assumed the form of a servant.

Nor did the human nature in any sense change into the divine or assume divine attributes. In his human nature Christ was finite; temporal; limited in power, knowledge, wisdom, and understanding; dependent and changeable. In the human nature he lived our life, thought human thoughts, had human desires, and spoke our language. He is eternally very God. He became truly man in time. He is eternally in the form of God. In the fullness of time, he also assumed the form of a servant. Therefore, the Council of Chalcedon expressed emphatically that the human nature subsisted in union with the divine nature without change.

Chalcedon: "Without Division"

The union of the two natures implies that the two natures, the human and the divine, subsist in Christ indivisibly, without division. The early fathers considered it necessary to express this negative qualification in order to bar another erroneous view from entering into the church. The heresy had already been taught that Christ assumed only a partial human nature, that the natures of Christ were divided into parts, and that parts of these natures were joined in the incarnation. He was really human insofar as he assumed the human nature, but he was not completely human. The divine spirit or nature inhabited a human body and a human soul, but no human spirit or mind. The highest in man, his spirit or mind, was replaced by the divine spirit. Over against this heresy of Apollinarianism, it must be

constantly emphasized that the whole, infinite divine nature was joined indivisibly to the whole human nature, body and soul. Christ is very God and completely man.

Chalcedon: "Without Separation"

Finally, we must maintain with the Council of Chalcedon that the two natures of Christ, the divine and the human, are united in the divine person of the Son of God without separation. Although the human nature in Christ never partook of the divine, through the intimate union of the two natures in the person of Christ there was a constant inner connection between his human nature and the divine, between his human mind and the mind of God, between his human will and the will of God, between his human spirit and the Spirit of God, and between his human power and the power of the Almighty, instructing him from within, making him obedient unto death, sanctifying him, and sustaining him even in his deepest afflictions. That is why he is the perfect revelation of the Father in human nature, and that is why he could endure the terrible moment of the pouring out of all the vials of God's wrath without being crushed.

The Communion of Christ's Two Natures

As to the results of this union of the divine and human natures in the one person of the Son of God, a threefold fruit is usually mentioned. First, there is what is called a *communicatio charismatum*, that is, a communion of gifts. This indicates that through the union of the human nature with the divine in the person of the Son of God, special gifts are imparted to the human nature, such as wisdom, knowledge, holiness, power, and so forth. Second, there is a *communicatio idiomatum*, that is, a communion of virtues or attributes. This must not be understood in the Lutheran sense, as if through this union divine attributes were imparted to the human nature, but in the sense that to the one person of the mediator attributes of both natures are ascribed (Matt. 17:11–12; John 3:13). Third, the result is a *communicatio apostelesmatum*, a communion of mediator's activities. By this is usually understood that the two natures of Christ cooperate in the works of redemption and that they are ascribed to the one person of the mediator.

Chapter 21

The Offices of the Mediator

The Idea of the Office

In the communion of the covenant, man was friend of God, but in that communion of friendship the Most High was and remained sovereign, and man was and remained servant of the Lord. Man was friend-servant. As servant he was called to serve God in friendship with his whole being and in relation to all things. This position was his office. The office is essentially one, not three. We may distinguish the one office into three aspects that are denoted by the terms *prophet, priest*, and *king*, but these may never be separated. They are not three separate offices, but rather three different aspects or functions of the one office. There is one fundamental thought in them all, one idea that lies at the basis of all three.

By this fundamental concept of office is meant man's position of servant-king in relation to God. *We might also express the same idea by describing an officebearer as the official representative of the invisible God in the visible world*. More fully defined, *by office is meant the position in which man is authorized and qualified to function in the name of God and in behalf of God's covenant and kingdom, to serve him and to rule under him.*

There are two sides to the office. With relation to God, the officebearer is servant. He may neither act upon his own authority and according to the imagination of his own heart, nor function in his own behalf. On the contrary, he is a servant of the living God. In relation to God he is clothed with humility, prostrates himself in the dust, and always asks, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" It is his calling to know the will of God, to love that will, and to have his delight in performing it. He must love the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his mind, with all his soul, and with all his strength. He is the servant of Jehovah. With relation to the creaturely sphere in which he functions, the kingdom of God in the visible world, the officebearer is king. He is clothed with authority and power to represent the sovereign God in the world. All creatures must serve him in order that he may serve his God.

In the state of rectitude, Adam stood as the officebearer of God with his mind and will and heart and all his power. That one office had three aspects, just as we may consider man from the viewpoint of his intellectual life, his volitional life, and his active life in the world. From the viewpoint of his intellectual life, he was prophet of God; from the viewpoint of his volitional life, he was priest; from the viewpoint of his active life in relation to the world, he was king under God.

Through sin, however, the officebearer of God became a rebel. He became the officebearer of the devil. From the viewpoint of all three aspects of his office—those of prophet, priest, and king—he was subverted into the very opposite of the position in which God originally had created him, for he lost the image of God. Or rather, the image of God was reversed into its very opposite.

He remained a thinking, willing, and acting creature, although even in these respects he retained only a remnant of his original nobility and power. The fact remains that also after the fall his life was manifested in the same threefold manner as prophet, priest, and king. But from a spiritual, ethical viewpoint the operation of this threefold office was the very opposite of what it originally had been. He became the friend-servant of the devil, the slave of sin.

As the slave of sin, he was prophet of the devil and loved the lie; he was priest of the devil and

consecrated himself in enmity against God to the service of sin and iniquity; he was king under Satan, and Satan became prince of this world through him. However, Adam was only an image of him who was to come.

Christ's Threefold Office

Christ is *the officebearer* in the kingdom of God forever. He is the Christ, the anointed of God, appointed and qualified to do all things necessary to lead the works of God unto the highest glory of the heavenly kingdom and of the tabernacle of God with men in the new heavens and the new earth. Adam was no more than the image of him who was to come (Rom. 5:14). As the heavens are higher than the earth, so far is Christ, the last Adam, exalted above the first Adam (1 Cor. 15:47).

We must not proceed from the idea that Christ's office consists merely in the fact that after Adam had fallen into sin, and with him the whole creation was made to bear the curse, Christ redeems his own and delivers them from sin and death in order to restore the original relationship and the first state of rectitude in paradise. It is certainly true that this work of redemption and deliverance belongs to his work as God's anointed. He is indeed their chief prophet to make known unto them, who are by nature in darkness, the whole secret counsel and will of God concerning their redemption. As their only high priest, he intercedes for them with the Father after he has obtained redemption for them by his perfect sacrifice on the accursed tree. As their eternal king, he fights the battle for them against sin and death and all the powers of darkness and gains a complete victory over them, and he preserves his people unto the salvation obtained for them.

But this is not the whole of his work as God's officebearer. If this were true, his work as God's anointed would be finished, and he would cease to function in his office as soon as the work of redemption was completed. But we know that this is not the truth. The word of God emphasizes everywhere that Christ's office is without end; that his dominion is an everlasting dominion (Dan. 4:34); that he must reign forever (1 Cor. 15:25); and that he is priest forever after the order of Melchisedec (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 5:6; Heb. 7:21). The last Adam does not appear simply as a restorer of what the first Adam spoiled and destroyed by his disobedience. He is not ordained just to repair the damage done by the powers of darkness. Nor dare we present the matter as if Christ were, so to speak, an afterthought of God occasioned merely by the fact that sin came into the world.

On the contrary, we must proceed from the correct, scriptural viewpoint that in his eternal counsel God decreed to unite all things in Christ and to make him head over all things, not only in the earth, but also in heaven. The last Adam in history is the first in God's counsel. He is not an afterthought. He does not occupy the second place. He is strictly first, for God purposed in his eternal good pleasure to reveal and glorify himself in the realization of his everlasting kingdom and covenant, not in the first Adam, but in Christ, the firstborn of every creature (Col. 1:15), as the first begotten of the dead (v. 18; Rev. 1:5), in the way of sin and grace.

In the new creation, the new heavens and the new earth, in which the tabernacle of God shall be with men forever (Rev. 21:3) in heavenly beauty and glory, the covenant of God's friendship shall be perfected, God's house shall be finished, and his kingdom shall be established. Christ shall everlastingly be the head over all, the visible representative of the invisible God, the glorious servant-king, the Lord of lords and the King of kings (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; Rev. 19:16). He shall subject himself unto the Father that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28). Even angels and principalities shall forever be subject unto him (Col. 1:16), and in that glorious reign the church shall participate.

Such is the glorious office unto which Christ is anointed from before the foundation of the world. The task of this officebearer of God is twofold. First, he must appear before God in the stead of his people. By his passive obedience he must remove the guilt of their sin, and by his active obedience he must fulfill all righteousness in their stead, that is, he must glorify the Father as prophet, must consecrate himself to the Father as priest, and must reign over all the works of his hands in the name of his God. Second, he must deliver his people out of the power of sin and out of the tyranny of the devil, make them partakers of his anointing, and thus restore them to the position of prophets who glorify God, of priests who consecrate themselves to him, and of kings who fight the battle of Jehovah, enter into his victory, and presently reign with Christ over all creatures.

The Prophetic Office

What is meant by a prophet? In general we may say that *a prophet is one who has the knowledge of God, speaks in his name, and thus declares his praises*. The Hebrew word for prophet is נָבִיא. It is derived from the verb נָבָא, which means "to boil up, to boil forth, as a fountain," and then "to pour forth words like one who is divinely inspired." It is peculiar that in *niphal*[1] this word has the meaning of "to speak under a divine influence, to prophesy." Evidently the passive form of the verb is used because the Hebrews regarded the prophets as moved and affected by the inspiration of God rather than by their own powers.

The prophet, then, is someone who speaks under the divine influence, upon the authority of, and in the name of God. He is an ambassador, an interpreter of the mind of God. This meaning is evident from Exodus 7:1, where God says to Moses, "See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet." In the same sense it is said about Aaron, "He shall be to thee instead of a mouth" (Ex. 4:16).

The idea of a prophet is also applied in a wider sense to include any friend of God to whom God makes known his will (Gen. 20:7; Ps. 105:15). This idea of a prophet, who speaks not on his own authority but in behalf of and in the name of someone else, is also implied in the Greek word προφήτης (*prophet*). A prophet, therefore, is one who is so filled with the true knowledge of God that his mouth overflows, that he is impelled to speak of God and to show forth his glorious praises. God reveals himself to him. He puts his mighty word in the prophet's heart. This word of God becomes a fire in the prophet's bones (Jer. 20:9) urging him to speak of that God who revealed himself to him.

Thus the matter is presented repeatedly in the prophetic books of the Old Testament. The word of God overpowers the prophets. They eat his word and fill their whole being with it. They are wholly in subjection to that word so that they cannot keep silent but must speak of him, his covenant, and his will, whether the revelation they thus received has reference to the past, the present, or the future. A prophet as the friend-servant of the Most High, then, is one who knows God and speaks in his name and of him.

Adam as Prophet

In this general sense Adam was a prophet of God in the original state of rectitude. In his intellectual life he stood entirely in the service of God. He was capable of knowing God with a true knowledge, that is, with the knowledge of love, and thus of entering into his intimate fellowship. Not only was he capable of receiving this true knowledge of God, but also from the very first moment of his existence, Adam was filled with the light of this knowledge.

It is true that this knowledge of God in the first Adam functioned on a lower plane than that which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Adam's knowledge is not to be compared with the glorious knowledge that is the heritage of the elect in the final realization of the covenant of God when his tabernacle shall be with men in heavenly perfection. But the fact remains that Adam possessed the true knowledge of God as soon as he opened his eyes upon the wonder of God's creation round about him. God revealed himself to him. Adam's receptivity was perfect. There was a perfect contact between the word of God that spoke to him through the things that were made and Adam's own consciousness. All things were made through the word of God, and they were God's revelation of himself.

Through the things that were made God spoke to Adam. In the midst of this speech of God, addressing him on every side day and night, Adam stood, hearing this word of God and receiving it in his pure consciousness; and through his consciousness in his heart, he was filled and moved by the love of God. Besides, God revealed himself to Adam in the garden and spoke to him as a friend with his friend. As Adam received this true knowledge of God, he declared God's name and glorified him in loving adoration. In this sense Adam was really a prophet of God in the state of original rectitude.

Fallen Man as False Prophet

The fall of man caused a radical change. The knowledge of God was not only completely lost, but was also subverted into its very opposite—darkness and the love of the lie. Man became by nature the false prophet, a prophet in the service of the devil. To be sure, in a certain sense man remained a prophet. His light was not changed into darkness in the sense that he ceased to be an intellectual and volitional, a rational and moral being.

Even though from a natural viewpoint the light of man's knowledge does not shine any more in its original brilliance, he does retain some remnants of natural light by which he has some knowledge of God and of the difference between good and evil, remnants of light that are sufficient to leave him without excuse.[2] But with all this natural light fallen man has become a servant of sin. From a spiritual, ethical viewpoint, all the light that is in him is very really darkness.[3]

He is no longer a prophet of the living God. He has forfeited the privilege. He has neither the ability nor the will and desire to be God's prophet. He is no longer authorized to appear as the representative of God in the visible world, to know God and to speak in his name and in his behalf. Fallen man is guilty before God, the object of his wrath and condemnation, an exile from the house and fellowship of God. He is darkened in his understanding; he loves the lie and prefers the word of the devil to the knowledge of God. Although he is still a prophet, he is in no sense a prophet of God. Through sin he has become a false prophet who lies about the living God.

The Historical Development of the Lie

If we bear this in mind, we can also understand that in the world and throughout history there is a development of the lie in the direction of and culminating in the false prophet who is pictured in the book of Revelation. The natural man who stands in enmity against God works out his own philosophy, the wisdom of the world, which is from below, is natural, earthly, devilish (James 3:15), and is foolishness with God (1 Cor. 1:20). Although in the wisdom of God, the philosophy of the world does not know God, it does not want to know him and develops its own conception of God, of man, of the world and its origin, its religion and ethics, and of society and the state and is always chiefly characterized by the fact that it rejects and opposes God's revelation. It speaks of itself and closes its

ears to the speech of God.

The line of this pagan philosophy of the old dispensation Romans 1 clearly traces, and it teaches that the invisible things of God are clearly seen from the beginning of the world, being understood by the things that are made, and that what is known of God is manifest in the natural man (vv. 19, 20). But man deliberately opposed this revelation of God. Rejecting the word of God, he followed his own philosophy of the Most High and changed the glory of the incorruptible one into the image of the corruptible creature, and bowed himself before man and beast and creeping things (v. 23). Thus man's philosophy gave birth, first of all, to the pagan religion and polytheism.

Second, this false philosophy and pagan religion, operating under the wrath of God that was revealed from heaven, proved its destructive character in the demoralization and degradation of all life in the pagan world, in its corruption and bestiality: God gave them up through the lust of their own wicked heart unto uncleanness and vile affections, unto a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient (vv. 24–28). It is true that this false prophecy in the pagan world appeared in different forms, according as the nations moved on different levels of culture and civilization. But even in its most polished and cultural form, as in the Greek philosophy at the time of Plato and Aristotle, it was false prophecy nevertheless—the wisdom of the world that is foolishness with God (1 Cor. 1:20). There is none that seeks after God, no, not one (Ps. 14:3; Rom. 3:11–12).

It stands to reason that this spirit of false prophecy revealed itself not only in the pagan world, but also in the line of the generations of the people of God, with whom God established his covenant and to whom he revealed his counsel of redemption. In fact, within the scope of the historical realization of God's covenant in the world, the false prophet expressed himself more boldly and directly, because there the word of God was heard much more distinctly, and accordingly it was contradicted by the flesh much more sharply and vehemently.

Always it is true that Christ came unto his own, and his own received him not (John 1:11). It is Israel who produced the false prophets in their worst form, in their most hateful opposition to the truth of God. Israel committed more idolatry than any other nation under the sun, trampled God's covenant under foot, despised his precepts, killed the prophets, and stoned those who were sent unto them by God. Among the people in whose true prophets the Spirit of Christ dwelt and operated, the false prophets appeared in their most determined and wicked opposition to the word of God.

Nor is it different in the new dispensation. Even today there is still the pagan world, whose millions upon millions prefer the darkness of their own philosophy and false prophecy to the light of the gospel, and who fast become prepared to play their own part in the final scene of the drama of God's program for the world's history.

Also in the days of the new dispensation, it is true that the false prophet must not be sought primarily in the heathen world, but rather within the scope of what is known as Christendom. There he reveals and expresses himself in the more refined forms of culture and civilization, of science and philosophy, and of religion and philanthropy. There he appears as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), as the true Christ himself, but there he exerts his most profound and most pernicious influence. It is within the scope of Christendom that the antichrist is developing and that the false prophet, the combination and culmination of all false religion and false science and false philosophy, must be expected to appear. That the spirit of antichrist is the false prophet, who will speak great things and blasphemies and perform signs and wonders, but whom Christ will cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone, is plainly taught in Revelation 13 and 19.

Christ as Prophet

Over against this spirit of false prophecy, Christ is the true prophet. As prophet he was announced in the old dispensation by Moses:

> The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; According to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him. But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him (Deut. 18:15–22).

This passage does not speak exclusively of Christ as the chief prophet, but refers to the entire line of prophets, who in the old dispensation declare the word of God unto Israel and whose line culminates in Christ as the prophet.

This is evident from the context of this passage. The people are warned that when they come into the land of promise, they shall not do after the abominations of the heathen with their divinations, observers of times, enchanters, witches, charmers, consulters of familiar spirits, wizards, and necromancers; for the secret things are for the Lord their God, but the revealed things are for them and their children (Deut. 29:29). The Lord will declare unto them through his prophet what is his will. Although it is true that the text speaks of the prophet in the singular and that therefore ultimately the reference is to the Christ, we make a mistake if we apply it exclusively to him and fail to include the entire succession of prophets that preceded him.

This is further evident from the last part of Deuteronomy 18, in which the people are taught to distinguish between the true and the false prophet. False prophets will arise among them, men who pretend to speak in the name of the Lord, but who have not been anointed by the Most High and in whose mouth the word of the Lord is not found. They shall speak the lie and tempt the people to apostatize from the living God. Israel must, therefore, distinguish between the true and the false prophet. They may do this by applying this test: the word of the Lord spoken through the prophet will surely come to pass, while the word of the false prophet shall fail (vv. 20–22).

The line of all these true prophets culminates in the Christ. He it is who spoke the word of God in the prophets and through them to the people of God in the old dispensation. Without Christ the prophets could not have been prophets. They spoke because his Spirit was in them (1 Pet. 1:11). Although the word had not yet become flesh and did not yet speak to the people of God of heavenly things in personal union with human nature, nevertheless Christ was anointed to be their chief prophet from before the foundation of the world, and he began to function in that capacity from the beginning of history. He functioned through visions and dreams, through types and shadows, through Moses and all the prophets, as well as directly in the revelation of the Angel of Jehovah. In all the prophets Christ was the speaking subject.

The prophets of the Old Testament frequently speak as if they identify themselves with the person of the Christ (Isa. 49:1–7; Isa. 50:5–9). There need be no doubt about this frequent identification of Christ with the subject of the Old Testament prophet. The New Testament proves that Christ is the one who speaks in Isaiah 61:1–3:

> The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath

> sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

The ultimate fulfillment of these words is certainly not found in the prophet himself, but in Christ Jesus our Lord (Luke 4:16–21; Isa. 8:18 and Heb. 2:13; Ps. 22:22 and Heb. 2:12). All this corroborates the statement that the prophet referred to in Deuteronomy 18 is ultimately none other than the promised Messiah, and the New Testament clearly proves that this is correct.

We read several times in the gospel narratives that Moses spoke of the Christ; this was generally known and admitted. When Philip informed Nathaniel about the Christ, he said, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John 1:45). To the unbelieving Jews the Lord said, "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me" (John 5:45–46). The expectation of the great prophet was very general and common among the Jews. Even the Samaritan woman knew "that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things" (John 4:25).

The carnal Jews of Galilee, when they had seen the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, wanted to take Jesus by force to make him king, saying, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world" (John 6:14). The sojourners to Emmaus spoke concerning "Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people" (Luke 24:19). When the Lord explained to them the necessity of the sufferings of this Christ concerning whom they were having their discourse, he began "at Moses and all the prophets" and "expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (v. 27).

Besides, the words of Deuteronomy 18 are also directly quoted and applied to the Lord as the chief prophet in Acts 3:22–23: "For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people." Stephen also quoted this passage before the Jewish Council: "This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear" (Acts 7:37).

As he functioned in the old dispensation, speaking through and in the prophets, so Christ personally came in the fullness of time to dwell among us and to speak to us face-to-face and mouth-to-mouth: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:14, 18).

Christ is the one "that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven" (John 3:13). He is the light of the world that shines in the darkness; they who follow him shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life (John 3:19; John 8:12; John 12:35–36, 46). He is the true and faithful witness, who receives not testimony from men, but of whom the Father himself bare witness as being sent from him (John 5:32–38). Christ speaks the words of eternal life, and his words are spirit and are life (John 6:63, 68).

His doctrine is not his own, but the Father's who sent him; if any man will do the will of God, he will surely acknowledge that Christ's doctrine is of God, for he "that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in

him" (John 7:16–18). He speaks the things which he has seen with the Father (John 8:38). He always glorifies not himself, but the Father (John 17:4). Indeed, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Heb. 1:1–2).

Being the Son of God in human nature, he is the prophet *par excellence*. He is eternally in the bosom of the Father (John 1:18), the eternal Word, the express image of the Father's substance, the effulgence of his glory (Heb. 1:3), God of God, who knows the Father with an infinitely perfect knowledge. It is this person of the Son of God, who from eternity to eternity is essentially and truly God, who assumed the flesh and blood of the children, took upon himself our nature, and united that nature with the divine in his own person.[4]

In him there is the closest possible union of God and man, the most intimate communion between the divine and the human natures. In him the person of the Son of God, very God, lived with us and walked with us, talked with us, thought in our mind, willed with our will, had human desires and passions, human love and human sympathies, and spoke to us by human mouth and in human language. He, therefore, is the most perfect prophet conceivable. He knows the Father as none other could know him. His human consciousness is enlightened and filled with the knowledge of God from within. Because of the union of the divine and human natures, the knowledge of God in Christ is direct and, in the highest sense, perfect. He glorifies the Father over against a blaspheming world of sin, and to his own he imparts the knowledge of God, the God of their salvation.

Nor as to its function is Christ's prophetic office finished with his death and resurrection, for he is our eternal prophet. He died and was raised from the dead, and he was exalted at the right hand of God and received the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33). In that Spirit he returned to us on the day of Pentecost to dwell in the church and abide with her forever. He is with us as our chief prophet, our teacher, who instructs us by his Spirit and word. For a time after his exaltation at the right hand of God, he gave to his church apostles (1 Cor. 12:28), in order that through them he might more fully reveal unto us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption.[5]

When his revelation is complete, he functions as our chief prophet in and through the church by his Spirit, and in and through the word preached, according to the holy scriptures. There is no instruction; there is no preaching of the word; there is no exhortation or consolation, except of him, our only and chief prophet. Even unto all ages of ages, it will be of him and through him as our prophet that we shall receive and rejoice in the perfect knowledge of the God our salvation.

The Priestly Office

It is emphasized in scripture that Christ is a priest after the order of Melchisedec: "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Ps. 110:4); "Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 6:20).

Melchisedec

Concerning Melchisedec and his priesthood, the epistle to the Hebrews says that Melchisedec was king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, and that he blessed Abraham as he returned from the slaughter of the kings (Heb. 7:1). Abraham acknowledged his superior priesthood by giving him tithes of all (v. 4). Moreover, it is explained that his name denotes him as a king of righteousness, while the

fact that he was king of Salem designates that he was king of peace (v. 2). Stranger still is the statement that Melchisedec was without "father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually" (v. 3).

Different explanations have been given of Melchisedec as he appears in the book of Genesis as a historical person. One theory has it that this Melchisedec is the son of Cainan (Gen. 5:12), who guarded the hill Golgatha where Adam, who died in the days of Cainan, was buried. According to others, he is the same as Shem, the son of Noah. Still others dare not make of Melchisedec, of whom such wonderful things are written, a mere man. They make him an angel or some sort of incarnation of the Holy Ghost or of the Word or of some higher god. There can be no question about the fact, however, that Genesis 14 pictures Melchisedec as a real man of flesh and blood who lived in the days of Abraham and was the king of Salem and a priest of the Most High God.

Kuyper's View of Melchisedec

Kuyper explains the priesthood of the historical Melchisedec as a remnant of the original priesthood of Adam in the state of rectitude. Adam also was priest of God. His priesthood was not that of redemption and had nothing to do with atoning sacrifices for sin. It simply consisted in Adam's calling and ability to love God and to consecrate himself and the whole creation to the living God. This priesthood, according to Kuyper, was not at once completely lost through sin. A remnant of it remained and continued to reveal and express itself even to the days of Melchisedec, in whom there is an especially glorious manifestation of this priestly office and function.

The fact that such a wonderful manifestation of the original priesthood of man could be preserved until so late a date Kuyper explains from the restraining and preserving power and influence of common grace. Through that common grace man did not become so totally corrupt as he would have been without the influence of that grace. He retained a remnant of his original priesthood. Much of it was lost, but a glimmering of the original glory remained. A most beautiful manifestation and expression of this priesthood of creation we find in Melchisedec.[6]

Against this explanation we have the following objections:

First, through sin the whole relation of man to God was put into reverse. He lost the image of God, yea, that image turned into its very opposite. The same is true of the original priesthood of creation. Instead of being consecrated to the living God, man, who fell into sin and death, was consecrated to the service of iniquity and of the devil. That fallen man could reflect such a marvelous remnant of the original priesthood of creation as is supposed to be preserved in Melchisedec is a mere myth.

Second, it is historically incorrect to maintain that such a wonderful afterglow of the priesthood of creation as was represented in Melchisedec remained and continued after the fall. History, as revealed in scripture, plainly traces an entirely different line of development after the fall with respect to the original priesthood of creation—the line of a false and wholly corrupt priesthood that commenced with Cain, continued in his generations, reached a climax in the vainly boasting Lamech, and perished with the flood. After the flood there was the same line of development. In the world of heathendom outside of the covenant line that ran through the generations of Abraham, men turned away from the living God, corrupted the glory of the invisible one, made themselves gods after their own hearts, consecrated themselves to gods of wood and stone, and worshipped sun, moon, stars, man, beasts, and creeping things, corrupting themselves in the lust of their flesh in immorality and bestiality of every imaginable sort.

It is quite impossible to find room for a figure such as Melchisedec in this line of development. This line of wicked development was found even among Israel in contrast to the true priesthood and was represented by a veritable multitude of official priests who defiled the sanctuary, made God's house a den of robbers, led the people in the worship of golden calves, and introduced into the holy land literally all the gods of the nations round about Israel.

That line of development continues in the new dispensation. Always the great majority of mankind makes its own gods. Paganism is polytheism. Also in the midst of nominal Christendom the line of the false priests continues. The Christ of the scriptures is rejected openly or transformed into the modern Jesus; the blood of atonement is despised and trampled under foot. According to the book of Revelation, this modern idolater, this false priest, will ultimately even make an image for men to worship and will persecute to the death all those who refuse to bow down before it. The false prophet of the anti-Christian dominion is also the false priest.

Third, Melchisedec appears in scripture as a type of Christ. Now type and antitype, shadow and reality, belong together, are inseparably connected, and occur only in the same line of history. Cain is no type of Christ. Sodom and Gomorrah are not shadows of Jerusalem. Babylon is the antithesis of the city of God that comes down out of heaven. The one cannot be the picture of the other. Type and antitype are one. If Melchisedec does not stand in the line of grace but stands in the line of sin and the development of fallen man, he cannot possibly point forward to the Christ as the high priest that is to come.

Fourth, if Melchisedec reveals a remnant of the original priesthood of creation, it follows that the priesthood of the Savior is only a restoration of the original priesthood of man in the state of righteousness. This entire view is contrary to scripture and unworthy of God the Lord, who has done whatsoever he has pleased (Ps. 115:3).

The purpose of God was not to lead the church back to the original state of righteousness in the first paradise, but to lead her and all things to the second paradise of God, to the heavenly destination and perfection in Christ. Unto the attainment of that priesthood—which is as far more glorious than the original priesthood of creation as the Son of God in the flesh, raised and exalted at the right hand of God, is more glorious than the first Adam—all things are subservient and must serve the counsel of the Most High, even the fall, sin, the devil, and death. Adam's original priesthood was only a faint image of that glorious priesthood of the Son of God. Therefore, the priesthood of the historical Melchisedec cannot have been a weak afterglow of Adam's original priesthood.

The Correct View of Melchisedec

We insist that the historical origin of Melchisedec must be traced not to paradise and to the state of original righteousness, but to the ark and to the grace Noah found in the eyes of the Lord. The priest-king Melchisedec, as Abraham met him after his victory over the allied kings, must be placed not in the line of reprobation, in which by the power of a certain common grace a remnant of the original integrity was preserved, but in the line of election, in the generations of the people of God saved by sovereign grace.

Historically he was a real man of flesh and blood. All the strange things that are written of him in the epistle to the Hebrews dare not be applied to his person, but they have reference to his peculiar priesthood as typical of the priesthood of Christ. As *priest* he stands without father or mother, without genealogy, but as a *person* he has his descent in the generations of the sons of God.

There are those who prefer another explanation of the historical figure of Melchisedec, namely, that

he was created by a wonder of God's grace simply for the purpose of creating an altogether unique type of Christ. But there is no need of such an interpretation, and the sober narrative of Genesis 14 leaves a different impression. He was a real, historical person. He was certainly king of Salem, and he must have ruled over a real people. As king he was also priest of God in the midst of his people.

The narrative of Genesis 14 leads to the conclusion that at the time Abraham sojourned in the land of Canaan there was still a group of people, a small nation, who knew Jehovah, who served and worshipped the Most High, and who, through Melchisedec as their high priest, brought their sacrifices to the God of Shem. However, this explanation must not be sought in the line of the wicked reprobate, but in the line of the generations of the people of God in which, even outside of Abraham, God still preserved his covenant in those days.

Nor is this in conflict with the historical data furnished in scripture. After the flood, the main line of the covenant ran according to election from Noah through Shem and was afterward more specifically limited to the generations of Abraham. But this may not be understood as if, with the calling of Abraham, God's covenant was strictly limited to him only so that the father of believers was a lonely remnant of those who knew Jehovah and called upon the name of the Lord. During Abraham's life many of the old patriarchs from the generations of Shem that culminated in Terah, the father of Abraham, were still alive. Even Shem was still living when the father of believers was called. Although the immediate ancestors of Abraham apostatized and turned to idols, there must have been thousands of others in the earlier generations who kept the covenant of Jehovah.

Besides, although the generations of Shem were destined to receive the covenant blessing in a special sense, for a long time the fear of the Lord must have been preserved also in the generations of Japheth. It is not even improbable that also in the line of Ham there were found those who called upon the name of Jehovah. In view of all this data, it is by no means strange that in the land of Canaan during Abraham's sojourn a group of people was found who had the knowledge of the true God and who were ruled and represented by a priest-king like Melchisedec.

Some four hundred years later we meet with a similar figure in the person of Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses (Ex. 2:16; Ex. 3:1; Ex. 4:18). He, too, was a priest of the Most High among his people, although the line of the covenant in the narrower sense did not run over the children of Keturah, but over Isaac. Hence if only we bear in mind the organic development of the covenant in the line of generations, we will have no need of explaining Melchisedec as a product of common grace, nor is it necessary to interpret his appearance as priest of the Most High through an exceptional wonder of God's grace. He must be explained simply as belonging to the generations of those who feared the Lord and with whom God still continued his covenant. He was a priest of the Most High by grace; as such a priest, and only as such a priest, was he and could he be a type of Christ.

"After the Order of Melchisedec"

What does it mean that Christ is priest after the order of Melchisedec (Heb. 5:6, 10; Heb 6:20; Heb. 7:17, 21)? In the epistle to the Hebrews, distinction is made between the priesthood of Aaron and that of Melchisedec. This does not mean that there is an antithesis between the two orders of priesthood and that the two exclude each other. It is evident that in certain respects they were alike: also the priesthood of Aaron foreshadowed that of Christ, and also Aaron was a type of Christ. The situation is rather that, while the priesthood according to the order of Melchisedec included that of Aaron, Melchisedec's priesthood had a far more exalted character than Aaron's, was much richer in significance, of a wider scope, of far greater power and authority. While the priesthood of Aaron

found its final fulfillment (and in some respects also its termination) in Christ, that of Melchisedec was so realized in the Lord that in him it is perfected and remains forever.

What, then, was the difference and the distinction between the two orders of priesthood, that of Melchisedec and that of Aaron? On the basis of scripture, we may at once note two points of difference. First, while among Israel the priestly and royal offices were separated, so that one and the same person could not function in both offices, the offices were combined in Melchisedec. He was a royal priest. Second, while the priesthood of Aaron in its specific meaning was temporal and must come to an end as soon as the perfect sacrifice was made, the priesthood of Melchisedec is everlasting.

This is evident from Psalm 110:4: "The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." From these words it is evident that the priesthood after the order of Melchisedec is distinct from that of Aaron in two respects. First, it is a royal priesthood: the kingship is combined with the priesthood. In the context we have a description of Christ in his royal glory, of the king going to battle at the head of his people and being victorious over his enemies. It is Christ in his royal power and exaltation of whom it is said, "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (v. 1). It is evident, then, that even as Melchisedec was a royal priest, or a priestly king, so also Christ will combine in himself the kingly and priestly offices in final and highest perfection at the right hand of God. Second, in close connection with this combination of the royal and priestly offices, the priesthood after the order of Melchisedec is distinct in that it is forever. The priesthood of Aaron would come to an end. The priesthood of Melchisedec, as realized in Christ, is everlasting (Zech. 6:9–13). This passage is a further prediction of what was already promised in Psalm 110. It refers to the harmonious union between the king and the priest united in the one person of the Branch, that is, of the Messiah.

In the epistle to the Hebrews, Melchisedec is presented as a type of Christ. The author of Hebrews refers to his name and to the place of his reign and explains that as a typical figure Melchisedec was both king of righteousness and king of peace. Concerning his priesthood the author of the epistle to the Hebrews reminds us that Melchisedec was a priest of the Most High God. Further, he describes him as appearing "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually" (Heb. 7:1–3).

All this applies to Melchisedec not as a historical person, but as a type of Christ and with reference only to his priesthood. As a priest, Melchisedec had no need, as did the Aaronitic priest, to prove that he descended from the priestly family. He appears in Genesis 14 without any reference to his descent or his genealogy, nor is anything said about his end or about the continuation of his priesthood in his generations. He is typically, not personally, made like unto the Son of God, the Christ, in whom all these typical traits are realized in highest perfection. In Hebrews 7 the same two elements of the priesthood of Melchisedec that were mentioned in Psalm 110 appear on the foreground: he is priest-king, and his priesthood is everlasting. Christ is the real Melchisedec, the king of righteousness and the king of peace, and he functions in both the royal and priestly offices.

From this viewpoint it may be said indeed that there was a figure or image of this priesthood in the priesthood of the first Adam in paradise in the state of rectitude, for Adam was really priest of the Most High. This does not mean that he offered up bloody sacrifices; this was added after the fall and became necessary because of sin. But the offering up of bloody sacrifices, though for a time necessary on account of sin, is not the essence of the priesthood. *The central idea of the priestly office is that of consecration of oneself and all things to the living God*. In this sense Adam was surely priest of the Most High God in the midst of the earthly creation. As priest, he was also king: dominion was

given him over all the earthly creation. The royal and the priestly offices were harmoniously united in his person. He was priest-king, a servant-king, king under God.

In Israel this was different. Aaron was priest, but he did not sway the scepter. The two offices were strictly separated in Israel's theocracy. The king might not minister at the altar, and the priest could not occupy the throne. Hence Aaron, although prefiguring a phase of the priestly office of Christ, was not his perfect type.

The perfect type is found in the figure of Melchisedec, king of Salem and priest of the Most High (Heb. 7:1). His priesthood is realized in Christ, who is the perfect priest, the perfect servant of Jehovah, whose meat it is to do all the Father's will and who, as the Son of God in human nature, is consecrated to him in his whole being. He is the only high priest over his brethren, and he is set over the whole house of God to accomplish all things pertaining to God. Having accomplished all and having become revealed as the perfect servant of Jehovah, who "became obedient unto death, even unto the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8), he is exalted at the right hand of the majesty in the heavens, from henceforth expecting until all things shall be put under his feet (Heb. 1:3; Heb. 10:12–13).

Hence the priesthood of Melchisedec is fulfilled in Christ. He entered into the sanctuary above, not made with hands, constantly consecrates himself and all things to the Father, has all power and authority in heaven and on earth, and sits in his Father's throne. As the perfect high priest he is also king of righteousness, and on the basis of God's everlasting righteousness, he is king of peace.

This priesthood is without end: it is everlasting. This was not and could not be true of the priesthood of Aaron. It represented but a phase of the priestly calling of Christ—that phase which had become necessary on account of sin but which could not be everlasting. It belonged to the way the high priest must travel to realize his everlasting priesthood. It was part of the work that must be performed to build the house of God. It was accomplished in the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and there it came to an end. Of this phase of the priesthood of Christ, that of Aaron was a shadow.

Hence while the eternal priesthood of Christ could be typified in just one figure, that of Melchisedec, the priesthood of Aaron must be spread over a long line of generations. The blood of bulls and of goats could never blot out sin (Heb. 10:4). The sacrifice must ever be repeated until the perfect sacrifice of reconciliation had been offered in the blood of the cross. The sacrifices of bulls and goats could not last forever. Not only must they end, but also the perfect sacrifice of the high priest himself cannot be repeated (Heb. 7:27; Heb. 9:28; Heb. 10:10–14). This phase of the priesthood of Christ, therefore, was finished when the high priest laid down his life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28).

But the priesthood of Christ did not reach its end on Golgotha: it is everlasting. He is a priest after the order of Melchisedec. Forever he consecrates himself and his people and all things in perfect love to the Father. Presently, he will come again to perfect the work the Father gave him to do, to finish the house of God and to establish it in heavenly beauty in the new Jerusalem where the tabernacle of God will be with men (Rev. 21:3). In that everlasting house of God, Christ will forever be the perfect king-priest, the king of righteousness and the king of peace, after the order of Melchisedec.

Reconciliation and Satisfaction

As the perfect high priest, Christ must bring the offering for sin on the accursed tree. To his perfect obedience and consecration to the Father belonged the one sacrifice of his body. The reason is that he

was appointed high priest and head of a people who were by nature sinful, guilty, and damnable before God "that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17). It pleased God to make reconciliation through him, for "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19). When "we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:10).

Reconciliation is a covenant idea. It presupposes a relation between those who are to be reconciled, whether of friendship, of love, or of obligation. Perfect strangers are not reconciled. One can speak of reconciliation between man and wife, between friend and friend, between subject and king, and between father and son. With respect to divine reconciliation, the relation that is presupposed is the eternal covenant of God with his people in Christ Jesus. When God through Christ reconciled us unto himself, he revealed his eternal covenant love and friendship toward us.

Reconciliation also presupposes that the relation between those to be reconciled has been violated so that it cannot function and so that they are at variance with each other. With respect to divine reconciliation, the cause of this separation and variance lies wholly with man. By his willful disobedience he violated the covenant of God and became an object of wrath by nature. All men come into the world—also God's own elect—as enemies of God who have forfeited all right and claim to God's favor. The act of reconciliation consists in the removal of the cause of the separation and variance. *Reconciliation is the act of God whereby he changes the state of the sinner from one of guilt, in which he is the proper object of God's wrath, into one of righteousness, in which he is the object of God's love and favor*.

In reconciliation, as in all other aspects of his covenant, God is his own party. He is the reconciler. Never may we represent the matter as if God were the one who is reconciled and as if Christ steps in between God and man to reconcile God to man. Scripture never speaks of God and the sinner being mutually reconciled. Nowhere do we read that God reconciled himself to his people or that Christ reconciled God to his people. Always scripture represents God as the reconciler and his people as those who are reconciled to him by his gracious act. Christ is not a third party intervening between God and man, but he is the revelation of God the reconciler: God was in Christ reconciling not *himself to the world*, but *the world unto himself*, not imputing their trespasses unto them (2 Cor. 5:19).

The way of reconciliation is that of satisfaction. Only satisfaction of the justice of God can remove our alienation from God. Satisfaction can be made only by a perfect sacrifice, that is, by the offering up of oneself in perfect obedience and in the love of God to God's perfect justice against sin. Mere passive suffering is no sacrifice. Even the damned in hell suffer the wrath of God without ever atoning for their sin. To satisfy the justice of God one must perform an act that is the perfect antithesis of the act of willful disobedience of man in the first paradise. His act must be the perfect "yes" over against the sinner's "no." This is exactly what Christ accomplished on the cross. Voluntarily he entered into death and suffered the deepest agonies of hell, not for his own sins, but for the sins of those whom the Father had given him.

His sacrifice, therefore, was vicarious, substitutional. He was able and authorized to make this perfect sacrifice and to make it instead of all his own. He was personally without sin, and therefore he was capable of rendering perfect obedience, even unto the death of the cross. Moreover, he was able and authorized to bring that perfect sacrifice for his own because he represented them all by

virtue of his eternal anointing. God had chosen the elect in him, and he died as the head of all his own. Because it was the person of the Son of God who died, he could suffer death for all his own so as to satisfy for them all and redeem them all unto life.

Different Theories of the Atonement

In this connection we must call attention to a few so-called theories of atonement. I say "so-called theories of atonement" because, although they concern the death of Christ, they are really not concerned with atonement at all. They all are characterized, first, by the fact that they are not in harmony with the scriptural view concerning the death of Christ, but are philosophical. Second, they deny the death of Christ as being vicarious atonement and vicarious satisfaction for the sins of the people of God. Third, they also really deny the justice of God over against sin. Therefore, they can hardly be called theories of *atonement*.

The Moral Theory

This is true of what is called the *moral theory* of the death of Christ. This theory assumes different forms, but in all its forms it rejects the idea of expiation, the satisfaction of justice by vicarious atonement, and is based on the supposition that there is no vindicatory justice in God which requires that sin must be punished.

According to this theory, the true purpose of the death of Christ in connection with his teachings is to exert a salutary, reformatory influence upon the moral condition of man. Christ left us a worthy example when he willingly sacrificed his life for the truth. Or, according to others, he revealed the love of God and the fact that he would suffer with us and that he entered into all our afflictions and death in order that he might be able to sympathize with us. But the real purpose of the death of Christ is to deliver man from his misery and make him happy. To accomplish this no expiation or satisfaction for sin is necessary in order to atone and thus reconcile man to God. All that is necessary is that such an influence is exerted upon man's moral character that he ceases to be a sinner, for then he is restored to the favor of God.

Critique of the Moral Theory

It ought to be clear that in whatever form this theory may appear, and however it may try to explain the character and purpose of the death of Christ, it denies that Christ's atonement is an offering for sin and that Christ died in our stead to satisfy the justice of God, and it insists that Christ's suffering is meant to make a moral impression upon man and to exert an improving influence upon mankind. To consider the suffering man of sorrows tends to the moral uplift of man.

It is hardly necessary to point out that this theory stands in direct contradiction to the plain testimony of scripture. The moral theory of the suffering of Christ stands condemned in the light of all that scripture teaches concerning the state and the condition of the natural man and the character of sin in relation to God. According to scripture, sin is guilt, and the sinner is liable to punishment, worthy of damnation, wholly unworthy of God's favor, a child of wrath. Sin is not only—and not even first—an inherent weakness or defilement of the human nature, some moral imperfection that may be removed by the influence of some sound moral teaching or example, but sin is also guilt. This means that the sinner, as the object of God's just condemnation, lies in the midst of death and has no right to life. This also implies his spiritual death, according to which he is incapable of doing any good and

inclined to all evil. He is legally a slave of sin. His moral depravity is the punishment that is inflicted upon him by the righteous judgment of God.

Man, therefore, has not even the right to be delivered from the power of sin and from the slavery of the devil, even if he could be reformed by moral persuasion or influence. Before he can be delivered, the justice of God against sin must be satisfied. That satisfaction of justice can only consist in the bearing of the punishment of sin and in such a bearing of the punishment that it is the offering up of a voluntary act of love to God. There is no deliverance from sin without atonement for sin. There is no possibility of sanctification without justification. If the death of Christ is not the sacrifice of vicarious atonement, it certainly cannot have the power of moral improvement or reformation.

The moral theory denies the justice of God and denies also that in principle sin is guilt, that is, liability to punishment. This theory also proceeds from the supposition that man is inherently good, although his nature is somewhat weakened and morally incapacitated. It is based on the assumption that if man will only consider how infinitely good and loving and merciful God is, he will, by the contemplation of these virtues of God the Father, be persuaded to love him and to strive for improvement in order to be pleasing in the sight of God. These virtues of God are supposed to be revealed in the death of the Son of God. All this is quite contrary to scripture. The Bible does not teach that man is simply weakened in his moral nature, but that he is dead through trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), so dead that unless he is reborn, regenerated by the Holy Spirit of God, he cannot see life (John 3:5). Besides, it is not true that the death of the Son of God on the accursed tree exerts a sound moral influence upon the sinner.

It is true that the cross of Christ is the greatest manifestation of the love of God in the true sense. But so far from the idea that this love of God exerts an improving and reformatory influence upon the sinner is the reality: that the manifestation of God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord, especially as it was revealed in his cross, aroused all the hatred of the sinner against the Most High. Rather than being morally improved by the sight of the suffering, righteous Son of God, men jeered and mocked and blasphemed, as long as they dared, at the spectacle of the accursed tree.

Apart from God's act of reconciliation through the atoning death of his Son, the cross reveals nothing but wrath and judgment. It is the condemnation of the world. Besides, how could the cross be a demonstration of the love of God unless God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself through the death of the Son of God (2 Cor. 5:19), unless the sacrifice of the Son of God on the accursed tree was the satisfaction of the justice of God on account of our sin, and unless Christ represented us and bore away all our sins through his blood? If all this is not true, God could not justly send Christ into our death or into death at all. It is quite impossible to discern how such an unjust and quite superfluous infliction of suffering on the righteous Son of God—which, apart from the idea of atonement and suffering for sin, can be little more than an empty show—could be a revelation of the love of God and a power for the moral improvement of the sinner.

Finally, this theory is directly opposed to all teaching of scripture concerning the death of Christ. Scripture throughout presents his death as an atoning sacrifice for the sin of his own, as a propitiation for their sin (1 John 2:2). Christ is the merciful and faithful high priest who makes reconciliation in his blood for the sin of his people (Heb. 2:17). God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. God has made Christ, who knew no sin, sin for us in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:19, 21). He himself bare our sin in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness (1 Pet. 2:24). The church is bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Cor. 7:23). All the sacrifices of the old dispensation point to the same truth. Christ's death is the vicarious atonement whereby the justice of God is forever

satisfied against the sin of his people and through which they are reconciled to him. Therefore, Holy Writ condemns the theory that the death of Christ is a power that exerts a certain moral influence upon the sinner or that the death of Christ is merely the death of a martyr who sealed his teachings and his principles by his own death.

The Governmental Theory

A second so-called theory of the atonement is what is known as the *governmental theory*. This theory was introduced into the church during the Arminian controversies in the Netherlands and shortly before the national Synod of Dordrecht. The author of this theory was Hugo De Groot or Grotius. He was, as were many of the Arminians, a very erudite and able theologian. On the face of it, his theory seems to represent an orthodox view of the atonement. He does not seem to deny the justice of God or the necessity for satisfaction or propitiation, but appears to maintain the penal character of the suffering of Christ and of his death as a vicarious sacrifice for the sins of his people. Although he apparently adheres to and defends the orthodox view of atonement, especially over against the Socinians, whom he opposed,[7] it is nevertheless true that the underlying principles of his theory are quite opposed to the doctrine of the Reformed church on this point.

Grotius proceeds from the principle that God is a moral governor who must maintain his moral government of the world and the right to punish the sinner. But he denies that God's justice had to be satisfied by bearing this punishment. Christ did not have to suffer and die in order to bear the sins of many and thus to atone for them in the way of satisfaction. God's mercy is exactly that he forgives sin, that he cancels the debt without payment. However, God as a good governor cannot allow sin to be committed with impunity, without at least manifesting that he is righteous and that therefore he can righteously punish the sinner. He cannot pardon the sins of the world without some adequate exhibition of his displeasure over against sin and of his determination to punish it.

It would, therefore, be dangerous and a morally impossible thing to forgive the sinner and to treat him as if he had never committed any sin without first causing him to acknowledge the righteousness and justice of God. In that case God would give the impression that he is indifferent to sin and that he is not terribly displeased with the workers of iniquity. Thus instead of preventing crime, which, according to Grotius, is the proper end of punishment, God would induce the sinner to continue in his sin. God, therefore, must maintain the moral order of the universe, and the sinner must repent and acknowledge that God is holy and righteous. In order to bring him to the acknowledgment of God's righteousness and to true repentance, God gave a demonstration of his wrath and justice in the death of his Son.

In delivering up his own Son he clearly revealed to the sinner what he might righteously do to every sinner. This exhibition of righteousness was the proper design of the death of Christ. Just as a general might court martial and sentence to death every soldier of a mutinous regiment, but singles out only one—the ringleader, perhaps—and hangs him in the sight of all the rebels, so God demonstrated his righteousness and displeasure against sin by sending Christ into death that sinners might go free. The sinner, looking by faith at that demonstration of the justice and wrath of God, will confess his sins, acknowledge that God is righteous, and thus assume the position in which God, while maintaining his moral government of the universe, may forgive him and treat him as if he had never had or committed any sin.

Critique of the Governmental Theory

This theory stands in plain contradiction to the teachings of Holy Writ regarding the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. All the scriptural passages that speak of the death of Christ as a sacrifice for sins, as a ransom, as a price that was paid for redemption, as a propitiation for sin, as an atonement and reconciliation through blood, condemn this presentation of the significance of Christ's death and of the redemption of the church as contrary to the revealed word of God.

To be sure, the death of Christ is a setting forth, a demonstration, a declaration of the righteousness of God in justifying the ungodly, but only and exactly because it is a payment of the debt, a satisfying of the justice of God, a "propitiation through faith in his blood" (Rom. 3:25–26). Only because Christ represented his people in the hour of righteous judgment and as their representative took upon himself the guilt of their sins, so that he could justly bear the wrath of God in their stead and in their behalf, was the death of Christ a demonstration of God's unchangeable righteousness.

If this is not true, the death of Christ could not be and was not a demonstration of the righteousness of God at all. The general of an army who selects one of the guilty mutineers to punish in the sight of all the rebels and lets the others go free certainly does not give a demonstration of righteousness and justice, for the simple reason that all are guilty and all deserve punishment. In the case of such a general, at least he selects one of the guilty rebels to be an example of what he might justly and righteously do with all the others. But Christ stood outside of the guilty sinners insofar as he was personally concerned. He knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). Unless the guilt of his people could be and was imputed to him so that he could suffer their punishment in their stead, there was no sin and guilt upon his head for which he could justly be made to suffer death.

If our Lord suffered merely as a demonstration of the justice and righteousness of God against sin in order to impress sinners with the truth that God might justly damn them to eternal death, the demonstration missed the point entirely. To make the just suffer as an example for the unjust is not a show of righteousness and justice, but is a revelation of the grossest injustice. Such a demonstration, even though this method would be sufficient to satisfy and maintain the justice of God, would be quite devoid of power to bring men to an acknowledgment of the justice of God and to true repentance and sorrow over sin, simply because it is no demonstration of justice, but of injustice.

Besides, the governmental theory is grounded upon an erroneous conception of the purpose of the punishment of sin. It assumes that the purpose of punishment is not the satisfaction of justice, but the good of society. Charles Hodge relates a striking illustration of this theory of the purpose of punishment. He quotes a story from the *British Quarterly Review* for October 1866:

> There is a story of an English judge who once said to a criminal, "You are transported not because you have stolen these goods, but that goods may not be stolen." The reviewer then adds, "No principle more false in itself or more ruinous to public morality was ever announced from the English bench. The whole moral effect of punishment lies in its being just. The man who suffers for the benefit of others is a martyr and not a convict."[8]

It is exactly this utterly false principle that lies at the basis of the governmental theory. The justice of God need not be satisfied if only the good of society is attained. This, according to the governmental theory of the atonement of Christ, was actually accomplished by the exhibition of righteousness in the death of Christ. That this is false we have already shown in the preceding paragraph.

Finally, such a demonstration of the righteousness of God could never accomplish the reconciliation of men with God, because sin is not merely a denial of the justice of God in the consciences and consciousness of men. It is also in the objective sense a violation of the law of God. It is rebellion against the Most High. It is guilt. It must be blotted out. It can be blotted out only

through satisfaction, that is, through an act of obedience that is the complete antithesis of the act of sin committed.

Not the mere acknowledgment that God could justly punish every sinner with eternal death, not the most earnest and heartfelt repentance can satisfy the justice of God, even if such heartfelt repentance were at all conceivable as having been effected by this supposed exhibition of the righteousness of God. Only an act of obedience whereby the sinner voluntarily and from the love of God suffers the punishment for sin to the end is capable of blotting out the guilt of sin. This act of loving obedience in the suffering of eternal death the sinner could never perform, still less accomplish perfectly to the end. But God's own eternal Son in human flesh, ordained to be the head of all his elect, was authorized and capable of bringing this willing sacrifice instead of his guilty people. This, and not a mere demonstration of the justice of God, is the meaning of the atonement in the death of Jesus Christ our Lord.

All the Remonstrants did not follow Grotius and accept his governmental theory. Nevertheless, although they apparently adhered to the scriptural presentation of the death of Christ, they rejected the doctrine of the church and denied that the death of Christ was a vicarious satisfaction of justice and that he bore the sins of all his people on the accursed tree. According to the Remonstrants, God does not need a sacrifice as the exact equivalent for the penalty incurred, but he may consider anything he pleases as the condition of forgiveness and deliverance.

This theory of the death of Christ in its various forms is expounded and condemned in the Canons of Dordt. There the fathers condemn the errors of those who teach

> that it was not the purpose of the death of Christ that he should confirm the new covenant of grace through his blood, but only that he should acquire for the Father the mere right to establish with man such a covenant as he might please, whether of grace or of works.
>
> . . . that Christ by his satisfaction merited neither salvation itself for anyone, nor faith, whereby this satisfaction of Christ unto salvation is effectually appropriated; but that he merited for the Father only the authority or the perfect will to deal again with man, and to prescribe new conditions as he might desire, obedience to which, however, depended on the free will of man, so that it therefore might have come to pass that either none or all should fulfill these conditions.
>
> . . . that the new covenant of grace, which God the Father through the mediation of the death of Christ, made with man, does not herein consist that we by faith, in as much as it accepts the merits of Christ, are justified before God and saved, but in the fact that God having revoked the demand of perfect obedience of the law, regards faith itself and the obedience of faith, although imperfect, as the perfect obedience of the law, and does esteem it worthy of the reward of eternal life through grace.[9]

On the governmental theory Hodge remarks:

> This is the old scholastic doctrine of "acceptatio;" a thing avails, irrespective of its inherent value, for what God sees fit to take it. The death of Christ was no more a satisfaction for sin, than that of bulls and of goats under the old dispensation. God saw fit to make the latter the condition of the pardon of violations of the ceremonial law; and He has seen fit to make the former the condition of the pardon of sins against the moral law.[10]

This theory of *acceptatio* is plainly contrary to scripture, as we have already shown.

The Mystical Theory

Finally, we must briefly review what is known as the *mystical theory* of the death of Christ. This theory, in common with the two presentations of the meaning of Christ's suffering which we have already discussed, denies that Christ's death is substitutional. It must have nothing of what is often called "blood theology." Those who support this view scoff at the idea of the necessity of satisfaction

and vicarious atonement. They will not hear of guilt and punishment, but rather they emphasize that the sinner is morally weak and sick and must be delivered from the power of sin. To this end Christ entered into our nature. The incarnation of Christ, the union of the divine and the human, is strongly emphasized by this theory as the central source and cause of our redemption and deliverance.

Many of the mystical theologians are either pantheistic or have a strong pantheistic tendency. This was already true of some of the early fathers such as Origen and was advocated in the Middle Ages by men like Scotus Erigena and at the time of the Reformation by men like Osiander, Schwenckfeld, and especially Oetinger. According to him, the plenitude of the Godhead that dwells in Christ causes not only the complete deification of the human nature in Christ, but also the deification of the human nature in general, because the personal union of the two natures in Christ is at the same time the source of the mystical union between Christ and his people. So we are not saved by the substitutional sacrifice of Christ, not by his objective work *for* us, but rather by his work *in* us, that is, by the incarnation of the man Jesus Christ in the church.

Many modern theologians follow the same trend of thought with regard to Christ, his incarnation, and his death. Christ indeed entered into our nature, and on the cross he actually bore our sinful nature and delivered it up unto death. On the cross our sinful nature died in principle. In the resurrection Christ arose with a new, glorified human nature, wholly free from sin and death. If by faith we become mystically one with that Christ, who led to death and buried our sinful nature and arose in glory and righteousness, we, too, are delivered from sin and partake of the glory of his resurrection by virtue of this mystical union.

Critique of the Mystical Theory

There is an element of truth in this mystical theory, provided it is left in its proper connection and viewed in the proper light. The word of God indeed teaches that by grace we become one plant with Christ so that our old nature is crucified with him, and we are raised with him in newness of life. We are crucified with Christ, are raised with him, and are set with him in heavenly places. In and through the suffering and death of Christ, sin itself was condemned in the flesh so that it has no longer the right or the power to have dominion over us (Rom. 8:3). Thus there is surely power in the cross to deliver us from the power of corruption through union with Christ.

Yet we must not overlook the fact that the word of God always presents this power of deliverance from the dominion and defilement of sin as the fruit of the cross, never as the ground of reconciliation and justification. The ground is found only in the vicarious suffering of the Lord, in his perfect sacrifice for sin, never in our being crucified with Christ in mystical union with him. Moreover, this spiritual fruit of the death of Christ is given us only on the ground of his perfect satisfaction and of our being justified by faith in him. We are not justified because we die and rise with Christ in the mystical sense, but we are delivered and sanctified because we are justified through his blood. Justification is always the ground of sanctification.

Substitutionary Atonement

That the death of Christ has the nature of a vicarious atonement for the satisfaction of the justice of God with respect to the sins of his people is the plain doctrine of scripture throughout.

In the Old Testament, this is plain from the fact that the sacrifices were expiatory. They are called sin offerings or trespass offerings, and they are said to bear the sins of the offender, to make expiation

for sin, to be a propitiation, and to cover the sins of the people in the sight of God. Their fruit is the forgiveness of sins. All of these sacrifices were through the shedding of blood.

The idea that these sacrifices were made as a *propitiation* for sin is expressed by the Hebrew word כָּפַר (*to cover*), or in the *piel*,[11] כִּפֶּר. The substantive, כֹּפֶר, means "a covering in the sense of coverage" or "that which delivers from the punishment of sin." The Greek verb is ἱλάσκομαι (*to propitiate*), and the noun is ἱλαστήριον (*propitiation*). A כֹּפֶר, therefore, is a satisfaction that is made either by the offender or by someone in his stead, while כִּפֶּר denotes expiation by penal satisfaction.

That this was the idea of the sin offering in the Old Testament is plain also from the ceremonies that accompanied the sacrifice. The sinner himself was supposed to bring the sacrificial victim to the altar as an acknowledgment on the part of the offerer that he was justly exposed to the wrath of God on account of his sin. Besides, the hands of the offender were to be laid on the head of the victim to express the idea of substitution and even of the transfer of guilt upon the animal to be sacrificed. The blood of the victim was sprinkled upon the altar by the priest or, on the great day of atonement, was carried into the most holy place and sprinkled upon the mercy seat. All this proves very plainly that the Old Testament sacrifices were designed as typical of the one sacrifice of Christ as a substitution for the sins of the people of God.

Also the New Testament teaches the substitutionary atonement of Christ in those passages in which the work of Christ is plainly set forth as a sacrifice for sin. This is evident from the very words that the scriptures use to express the suffering and death of Christ. We refer to the words καταλλάσσω (*to reconcile*) and καταλλαγή (*reconciliation*), as in 2 Corinthians 5:18–19: "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled [καταλλάξαντος] us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation [καταλλαγῆς]; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling [καταλλάσσων] the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

Note here that the reconciliation is absolutely one-sided. It is not God and man who are mutually reconciled, nor is it even Christ who reconciles God to man and man to God, but God is the reconciler, and man is reconciled to him. The covenant God, in everlasting love and faithfulness to his everlasting covenant, is the sole author of reconciliation. Reconciliation means that the cause of the estrangement of man in relation to God—sin—is removed. *Reconciliation is the act of God whereby he changes the state of the sinner from one of guilt into one of righteousness and from being alienated from God to being the object of his everlasting favor* (Rom. 5:10).

The removal of sin is the meaning of the words ἱλάσκομαι (*to propitiate*), ἱλασμός (*propitiation*), and ἱλαστήριον (*propitiatiatory*). In Hebrews 2:17 we read: "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation [τὸ ἱλάσκεσθαι] for the sins of the people." The words ἱλάσκομαι (*to propitiate*), ἱλασμός (*propitiation*), and ἱλαστήριον (*propitiatory*) have approximately the same meaning as the Hebrew word כֹּפֶר, which means a propitiation in the sense of a covering for sin, not as a covering from the sight of God that hides the sins that are still there, but rather as a complete coverage so that the damage of the sin is completely covered by the blood of Christ.

Finally, we call attention to the word λύτρον (*ransom*). The word means literally "the price paid for redemption," as in Matthew 20:28: "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom [λύτρον] for many." The meaning of this, especially with the addition "for many" (ἀντὶ πολλῶν), can only be that Christ paid the price for the redemption of

sinners by bearing the punishment of their sin (Mark 10:45). According to 1 Timothy 2:5, 6, there is one God and one mediator of God and men, the man Jesus Christ, who "gave himself a ransom [λύτρον] for all." Here the preposition ἀντὶ (*in place of, for*) strengthens the idea of λύτρον (*ransom*).

Finally, we call attention to the prepositions ἀντὶ (*for*) and ὑπέρ (*for, for the sake of*), which are often used to denote the relation of Christ to his own. Think of ἀντὶ πολλῶν (*for many*) in Matthew 20:28 and ἀντίλυτρον (*ransom*), as well as the numerous passages where ὑπέρ (*for, for the sake of*) occurs. Sometimes the preposition περί (*of, for, concerning*) is used with ἁμαρτίας (*sin*) as, for instance, in Romans 8:3, which says that God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin (περὶ ἁμαρτία), which means that the entire appearance and work of Christ is concerned with the condemnation and destruction of sin.

There are many other words in the New Testament that have the same general meaning. We refer to words like ἀπολύτρωσις (*redemption, deliverance*) and the verb λυτροῦν (*to redeem*). The term ἀπολύτρωσις undoubtedly denotes deliverance through the death of Christ from the retributive wrath of God and from the merited penalty of sin. "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption [ἀπολυτρώσεως] that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). The term "redemption of the transgressions" (ἀπολύτρωσις τῶν παραβάσεων) means the deliverance from the penalty of transgressions effected through their expiation (Heb. 9:15).

The same idea is expressed by the verb λυτροῦν (*to redeem*) in Titus 2:14: "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem [λυτρώσηται] us from all iniquity." A similar idea is expressed by the verbs ἀγοράζειν (*to purchase*) and ἐξαγοράζειν (*to purchase from*), that is, to deliver out of the possession or power of anyone by purchase. Christ has purchased his people and made them his private property by purchasing them with the price of his blood (2 Pet. 2:1). Christ has bought them for God by his blood (Rev. 5:9). God sent his Son, born of a woman and born under the law, to "redeem [ἐξαγοράσῃ] them that were under the law," that is, that he might redeem, or purchase free, those who were under the law and therefore under the curse (Gal. 4:5).

Scripture always declares that through his blood Christ himself is the price or ransom paid for our redemption. Throughout scripture it is very evident that the idea of vicarious atonement, of satisfaction for sin, is the meaning of the cross of Jesus Christ. All the other theories must be rejected as quite contrary to scripture. They are a denial of the one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross, and they deprive us of the sure ground of our salvation. This sure ground can only be the righteousness of God realized in the perfect obedience and satisfaction of Christ, imputed to us freely by grace, and given unto us and appropriated by us through faith. All the other theories somehow substitute a righteousness of man for the righteousness of God. The righteousness of man can never be the ground of salvation. The righteousness of God through Jesus Christ, and that righteousness absolutely and alone, is the sure basis of hope in God, of all salvation, and of eternal peace.

The Kingly Office

The kingship of Christ as mediator may not be confused with his eternal royal power as the Son of God. These two are not the same. Royal power he possesses of himself, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, from eternity. It is called the *regnum essentiale* or the *regnum naturale*, the essential or the natural kingship of the Son of God. *The kingship that he possesses as mediator is the authority and power with which the person of the Son according to his human nature is invested by the Father for the purpose of completing his kingdom, preserving and protecting his church, and*

leading his people on to eternal glory. This is called the economical kingship (*regnum oeconomicum*) or mediatorial kingship (*regnum donativum*), which in turn can be distinguished as the kingship of power (*regnum potentiae*) and the kingship of grace (*regnum gratiae*).

By Christ's kingship of power is meant his royal power and authority over all creatures, including devils and ungodly men. He is king over all things, even over all the powers of evil; all principalities and powers are made subject unto him. He has received a name above all names and all power in heaven and on earth. He uses his mighty power for the preservation of the elect and unto the coming of the day of his return and the establishment of his eternal kingdom in glory (Ps. 2:6–12; Matt. 28:18; Phil. 2:9–11).

The second aspect of his kingship is called the kingdom, or rule, of grace (regnum gratiae) because by it is meant his royal power over his people, whom he rules by his grace, by his Spirit and word (Eph. 1:22). This royal power, this *regnum gratiae*, has its basis or ground in Christ's purchasing of his people by his own blood, their redemption from sin and death. It is spiritual in character, a dominion of love, so that his people are made willing by his grace to keep his commandments. It embraces all the redeemed, the entire church; it has for its purpose the manifestation of the glory of God in the church, and it endures forever.

Premillennialism and the Kingship of Christ

The truth of Christ's kingship, except as king of the Jews, is denied by the premillennialists. According to them, Christ is not king of the church, but merely her head in the organic sense. He is the king of the Jews, of the nation of Israel, and as king he must still be revealed in the future. This national Israel, the kingdom people proper, rejected him at his first advent: he came unto his own, but his own received him not. On the contrary, they crucified the Lord of glory, their king.

Because of this the Jews are for the time being rejected. They are in captivity, in exile, in the diaspora, scattered over the face of the earth among all nations. During this period that the kingdom people are in the diaspora and God does not deal with them unto salvation, he gathers another people out of the Gentiles. This other people, gathered in the interim of Israel's captivity, is the church, the body of Christ, the bride of the Lamb that will be taken up into heavenly glory when it is complete.

This church is not the kingdom of Christ. On the contrary, the Jews are and remain forever the royal people of Christ, and Christ is their anointed king. When the church shall have been gathered and the fullness of the Gentiles shall have come in, Christ shall once more turn to his own, gather them out of all nations, cause them to return to their own land—the Old Testament land of Canaan—and rule over the house of Jacob on the throne of David forever. Christ, therefore, is the king of the Jews, but he is the head of the church.

Critique of Premillennialism

It is true that the concepts *head* and *king* are not identical, although the concept *head* certainly occurs in scripture in the sense of *king*. Christ is head of the church in the spiritual, organic sense, and the church is the body of Christ. This refers to the mystical union between Christ and the church. The church is united with him, lives out of him, is spiritually, essentially one with him, and through his Spirit becomes partaker of all his spiritual benefits. But this does not alter the fact that the church is also the kingdom of God. From that point of view, Christ is also her king. He is head of the church also in a juridical sense. This is evident from many passages of scripture, such as Ephesians 1:20–23,

Ephesians 5:23, and Psalm 2:6.

Besides, the premillennial view is based upon a wrong conception of the relation between the old and new dispensations, between the church and the kingdom of heaven. There can be no doubt that the only kingdom of which the New Testament ever speaks is the kingdom of heaven. Nor can it be subject to doubt that the relation between this kingdom and the church is such that the members of the church are also the citizens of the kingdom.

Concerning the kingdom of heaven the Lord taught the people in parables. He explained that the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while men slept an enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat. He interpreted the field as the world, the good seed as the children of the kingdom, and the tares as the children of the wicked one. According to this parable, the children of the kingdom are not the Jews, but the believers out of all nations, for "the field is the world" (Matt. 13:38). The enemy that sowed the tares is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world; nothing can be expected after the harvest. The reapers are the angels. When the time for the harvest is ripe, the Son of man shall gather out of his kingdom, as it is established in all the world, all things that offend and those who do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire. Then shall the righteous shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (vv. 37–43). Surely, these righteous, these children of the kingdom, are not the Jews, but the elect gathered by Christ's word and Spirit out of all nations. Therefore, the church is also his kingdom, and Christ is her eternal king (Matt. 16:18–20; Gal. 6:16; Eph. 2:11–19; 1 Pet. 2:9).

The Kingship of Christ

In order to understand comprehensively this kingship of Christ, we must keep the following line of thought before our attention.

First, God originally created the earthly creation as a kingdom with man as king under God reigning over all the earthly creation. There was a reflection of the royal office of Christ in Adam in the state of rectitude in paradise; for the first man was king under God, expressly ordained by God to that position in the earthly creation: God gave him dominion over the beasts of the field, over the fowls of the air, and over the fish of the sea (Gen. 1:26, 28). It must be emphasized, however, that man's original dominion was limited to the earthly creation. We cannot say without qualification that he was king over the world, over all creation. Adam was of the earth, earthy. He was not the Lord from heaven (1 Cor. 15:47). All things in heaven and on earth were not and could not possibly be united in him: they did not all belong to his dominion.

Second, it was God's eternal purpose to raise man to that exalted position in which all things in heaven and on earth would be subjected under his feet. That this is true is evident especially from a comparison of Psalm 8 with Hebrews 2. The psalmist exclaims in wonderment,

> What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things under his feet (Ps. 8:4–6; Heb. 2:6–8).

It is true that the psalmist evidently considers man in his original position and in his dominion over the earthly creation: sheep and oxen, the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea. But in Hebrews 2 the Holy Spirit interprets this dominion as having reference to all things. There Psalm 8 is interpreted as meaning that originally man was indeed made a little lower than the angels, that his original dominion was limited to earthly things, but that he was destined to reign over all the

works of God's hand:

> But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him (Heb. 2:6–8).

This highest form of universal dominion was not destined to be realized in the first Adam. He was an image of him that was to come, and in his kingship there was a reflection of the kingship of him who was to come. But Adam himself was not king over all the works of God's hands. He was made a little lower than the angels, although destined in the last Adam to rule even over them. His dominion was limited to the earthly creation, but even so he was king as servant of God. As the friend-servant of God in the covenant, it was Adam's calling to acknowledge the Most High as his Lord, to love and to serve him with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to rule over all the earthly creation. Nevertheless, it was God's eternal purpose to unite all things and to glorify them not in the first Adam, but in the Lord from heaven.

Third, according to the counsel and will of God, the first king, Adam, fell and rebelled against God. The result was that his royal power was broken, although his relation to the earthly creation was still sustained. He remained king, with this difference: he became king under Satan in the spiritual, ethical sense. There were indeed remnants of his original royal power and dominion, which were plainly visible in the mighty works he still accomplished and in all his attempts to subject things under him.

Even in the present world, burdened by the curse, man constantly struggles to maintain and regain his royal dominion. Although in the attempt he is often overcome, he despises death in the struggle to attain to the end he has in view. He makes the world about him the object of his scientific investigation. He discovers God's ordinances in creation and arranges his own life accordingly. He brings to light the hidden power and wonders of the world and presses them into his service. He understands the laws of the seasons, of winds and rains, of seeds and the soil and makes the earth produce the best possible crop. He studies the laws of gravity, of steam and electricity, of light waves and sound waves and invents many wonderful things—telephone and telegraph, radio and television. He plunges through the depth of the sea and flies through space. He studies the structure and laws of the human body, fights disease and death, alleviates human suffering, prolongs human life, and surrounds himself with means to enhance and enrich his life in the world.

It is true that all this is but a faint afterglow of man's original glory. It is also true that in reality he accomplishes nothing—for the creature is made subject to vanity—and in the ultimate sense he is always defeated; for he dies like the beasts that perish (Ps. 49:20). But this does not alter the fact that there is a certain remnant of man's original kingship. It is exactly because of this remnant that there is a kingdom of darkness; for in the spiritual, ethical sense man became an enemy of God and a slave of the devil. So there develops in this world a kingdom of the devil that will ultimately culminate in the world-power of antichrist in which all the powers of creation shall be exploited and pressed into the service of man; but in which at the same time the measure of iniquity shall be filled, and the root sin of the first Adam shall be completely revealed in the fully ripened fruit of iniquity.

As we said, all this stands strictly in the service of God and of his eternal good pleasure. God has provided some better thing for us; before the foundation of the world he has ordained his servant to be king over all the works of God's hands. Even though it remains true that the first man plunged himself and all his posterity into the abyss of misery and death by an act of willful disobedience and that for

this he is responsible to his Lord, nevertheless his fall is no accident from God's point of view, but must serve to prepare the way for God's bringing the first begotten into the world (Heb. 1:6).

For God is the Lord. He is in the heavens and performs all his good pleasure (Isa. 44:28; Isa. 46:10). His counsel was never frustrated; his purpose was never thwarted. Always he accomplished all his good pleasure, even through the devil's temptation and through the fall of man. There was never a power on earth, in heaven, or in the abyss of darkness that really opposed him or that forced him to change his plan. God, without any deviation from the straight line of his counsel, attains his purpose.

Fourth, God's purpose is to make room for Christ, the anointed king over all creatures in heaven and on earth. His own Son, the only begotten, is eternally ordained to be the firstborn of every creature (Col. 1:15), king over all things, in order that, as the Lord of his elect brethren and with them, he might forever reign over all the works of God's hand. To this end he comes into the flesh, and in the flesh he fights the battle against the powers of darkness in the way of perfect obedience. And he is victorious in his battle. Perfect and everlasting righteousness he establishes as the foundation of his kingdom.

Through the darkness of death, he breaks into the glory of his resurrection and is exalted into the highest glory, in order that at the right hand of the Father, clothed with all power in heaven and on earth, he may reign over all things in the present dispensation until all God's counsel is fulfilled. Then he shall subject himself with his kingdom as the eternal servant-king to the Father that God may be all and in all.

Fifth, when all things are fulfilled and perfected, Christ himself also shall subject himself to the Father that God may be all and in all:

> For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:27–28).

According to Kuyper and many others, this must signify that in the end Christ shall cease to be king. This, however, is a mistaken notion. Christ shall never be deprived of his present power over all things so that he shall not be a king forever. On the contrary, according to scripture, he shall reign forever. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; it shall have no end (Dan. 4:34). All things shall be united in and under him in the new creation unto unending ages of ages. Yet even in that position, he is now and shall forever be subject to God. The power and dominion unto which he is exalted is vested in his human nature. In that nature the incarnated Son of God is subject to the Father, and he will be subject unto him also in the new creation. He is priest and king forever after the order of Melchisedec: but he is king under God, God's servant-king.

Chapter 22

The States of the Mediator

The Idea of State

By state, in distinction from condition, *we must understand one's legal position, the position which one occupies or assumes in relation to the law and according to the verdict of justice*. Distinction can be made between generic status (*status generis*) and modal status (*status modi*). Thus, for instance, when a Hollander comes to America and is naturalized, he becomes an American according to his state, even though according to his condition he remains a Hollander. His *status generis* is changed. If, however, he commits a murder and is found guilty by the earthly judge, his state is changed once more. Instead of being righteous before the law, he becomes guilty, and his *status modi* changes.

This distinction may also be applied to the states of Christ. He became man and entered into the state of man under the law (a change in generic status). He emptied himself, but having been found in fashion as a man, he also assumed the state of the guilty (a change in modal status), for the guilt of his own was imputed to him (Phil. 2:7–8; 2 Cor. 5:21). Hence he entered into the state of a guilty man in the state of condemnation (*status rei*). Entering into that state of guilt, he bore the punishment of sin and the wrath of God in the curse, even unto the death of the cross, into the depth of hell. Because this bearing of the punishment caused him, according to his condition, to enter into ever deeper humiliation, this state of condemnation (*status rei*) is usually called the state of humiliation, the *status humiliationis*. The steps or degrees in this state of humiliation are, strictly speaking, not derived from the concept *state*, but denote rather the *condition* of humiliation into which the Savior entered by virtue of his being in the *status rei*.

The state of exaltation, the *status exaltationis gloriae* (*the state of exaltation to glory*), is that state of perfect righteousness into which the Lord entered and in which he was glorified after he had perfectly satisfied the justice of God by his voluntary obedience. The subject of both the state of humiliation and the state of exaltation is the person of the Son of God, but in human nature. The person of the Son of God became servant, entered under the law, suffered, died, was buried, and descended into hell. The same person in human nature was raised from the dead, was glorified and exalted into the highest heaven. All this is applicable to the person of the Son in human nature.

The State of Humiliation

Five steps or degrees are usually distinguished in Christ's state of humiliation: his lowly birth, his suffering during his entire life, his death, his burial, and his descension into hell.

Christ's Lowly Birth

The state of humiliation began with the entering of the Son of God into the human nature. This humiliation consisted, first, in the *exanitio* or *kenosis* (*emptying*). The *kenosis* does not mean that the Son of God temporarily laid aside the divine nature in order to exchange it for the human nature. This would be impossible, for the divine nature is unchangeable.

During his entire sojourn on earth, the Son of God was and remained in the form of God according to his divine nature: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God" (Phil. 2:6). The *kenosis* means rather that he entered into the state of man in such a way that before men his divine glory and majesty was hid, although even in the state of humiliation it flashed out occasionally as, for instance, in the performance of his wonders. We must not say that the humiliation of the Savior consisted in the assumption of the human nature, as is the contention of Kuyper,[1] because it is evident that even in the state of exaltation the Savior still is in the human nature, although he cannot be said to be in the state of humiliation any more.

Instead, the humiliation of the incarnation consisted in that the Lord from heaven assumed an earthy, weakened, corruptible, mortal, suffering human nature, while in the state of exaltation he possesses a heavenly, spiritual, incorruptible, immortal, and glorious human nature. Through the incarnation the Son of God, the Lord of all, came under the law. He was Lord and became servant. He was in the form of God "and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (v. 7). Above all, his humiliation consisted in his occupying, as mediator and head of his people, the place of sin and guilt over against the law of God. When he became man, he went to the place of judgment where the vials of God's wrath were poured out upon him: "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (v. 8).

Christ's Suffering

The second step in the humiliation of Christ is usually considered to be his suffering during his entire life. In order to understand this, we must remember that the suffering of Christ consisted chiefly in his bearing alone the wrath of God against the sin of his own. To understand the severity of this suffering, we must always bear in mind that Christ personally was sinless, which means that he could taste the wrath of God as no one else could.

His personal state remained that of perfect righteousness before God. He was born without guilt, because he was the person of the Son of God. While under the law, and even while under the wrath of God, he remained perfectly righteous. He was the obedient servant of Jehovah. As to his ethical condition, he was and remained perfectly holy and blameless. While he entered into the state of sinners, he remained separate from sinners as to his condition, except insofar as he must bear the wrath of God and therefore be subjected to suffering and death.

The Son of God, who is Lord and above the law, came under the law and entered into the state of a servant. The holy child Jesus, who was personally righteous, both as to his state and his condition, entered into the state of sinners and into their condition as far as their suffering and death are concerned. This is the teaching of scripture, especially in Philippians 2:6–8.

That sinless Christ suffered all his life by bearing the wrath of God against sin. What does it mean to bear the wrath of God? It certainly cannot mean that God was ever angry with Christ personally. In his person our Lord is the only begotten Son of God, who is in the bosom of the Father eternally (John 1:18). God was never angry with the person of the mediator, with the man Jesus Christ.

To say that God was angry with Christ Jesus is contrary to all we read of the Savior as man in relation to God. If he suffered the wrath of God all his life, this certainly cannot mean that God was angry with his holy child Jesus during his entire lifetime and that our Savior was conscious of this anger of God against him personally. All his life is a testimony of the fact that he lived in perfect fellowship with the Father and was conscious of his approval and favor. What was announced from heaven at Jesus' baptism and again on the mount of transfiguration, covers his relationship to the

Father during his whole life: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Always he was the obedient servant of Jehovah. Therefore, God was always well pleased with him, even as man.

The question arises once more, What does it mean that the Savior bore the wrath of God? We answer that he suffered the expression, the concrete effect, of the wrath of God against the sin of others. *God's wrath is the reaction of his holiness against the workers of iniquity*. God is the Holy One, for he is the only good, the implication of all infinite perfections. Hence God is consecrated to himself: he seeks himself, knows himself, loves himself, glorifies himself, and seeks his glory also in the creature.

For man this means that it is his everlasting obligation to be consecrated unto God only. Man must love God, seek him, and glorify him with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his mind and with all his strength. If he does this, God embraces him in his blessed lovingkindness and favor. But if he fails to do this, if he turns against the Holy One, rejects him, rebels against him, ignores him, and tramples his glory under foot, God reacts against that rebellious sinner in his anger, pursues him constantly with fear and terror, makes him inexpressibly miserable, and casts him down into everlasting darkness and desolation.

The expression of God's wrath is the pain and agony of soul and body, the suffering and misery, the sorrow and anguish, the desolation and darkness, the fear and terror, and the death and hell that becomes the experience of him against whom God directs his wrath. Christ bore and experienced that wrath as no one else could experience it. No one, even in hell, can ever suffer what Christ suffered during his entire life and especially on the cross, because no one can possibly taste the wrath of God as the sinless one, and because no one could possibly bear the complete burden of the wrath of God against the sin of the world. Even in hell everyone will suffer in desolation according to his personal sin and in his personal position. But Christ bore the sin of all his own as the sinless one.

That is the meaning of this second degree in the state of humiliation. All the time that he lived on earth he sustained the wrath of God against sin. No, this does not mean that Christ was subject to special diseases or even to the common sicknesses of mankind. If we consider the life of Jesus insofar as we become acquainted with it from the gospel narratives, we can find no special suffering of pain or sorrow that distinguishes him in any respect from other men. But we must remember that he sustained the wrath of God. He, the Son of God in the flesh, the sinless one, assumed the likeness of sinful flesh. This means that he took upon himself the corruptible human nature, in which life is nothing but a continual death; this death he tasted as the heavy hand of the wrath of God against sin.

Moreover, in the likeness of sinful flesh, he came into a world that was sinful and under the curse of God. The creature itself was made subject to vanity and was subjected to the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:20–21). The person of the Son of God in the sinless human nature tasted and suffered all the just wrath of God. We must add to this that Christ suffered the contradiction of sinners against himself (Heb. 12:3). He dwelt among men who loved darkness rather than light (John 3:19), with whose enmity against God and against one another he came into daily contact, and in the corruption of whose nature he apprehended the wrath of God revealed from heaven. Then we need not try to discover some special suffering, sickness, or calamity in the life of Jesus on earth in order to understand that his life was nothing but continual death and that in this death he experienced the wrath of God during his entire sojourn in the world. He did that in corruptible and mortal flesh, in the midst of the world filled with enmity against God and in the midst of the creation that bore the curse of God.

In addition, we must never forget that all his life Christ lived in the shadow of the cross and that

with increasing consciousness he moved deliberately in the direction of that cross. He had come under the law, not only the moral law, but also under the entire Mosaic institution of ordinances and shadows. This meant that he came under the curse and that his task was to remove that curse. He knew the program of his suffering, as is evident from the repeated and detailed announcement of it to his disciples. He had come to lay down his life, and he was aware of it all his life.

In a sense, all his life was a Gethsemane, an anticipation of the hour of the righteous judgment of God when all the vials of God's wrath would be poured out over his head. To this suffering of Christ during his entire lifetime also belong his poverty both at birth and during his entire sojourn; his circumcision; his being persecuted by Herod; his flight into Egypt; his temptation in the wilderness, in the temple, and on the mountain; the contradiction and reproach of men; his not being understood even by the disciples; and his fear and anguish in Gethsemane, all of which reaches its climax in the cross.

Christ's Death

The third step in the state of humiliation is Christ's death on the cross. To this step also belongs all the suffering which immediately preceded that death of the cross: the last passover, together with the foot washing; the unmasking of the traitor; the institution of the Lord's supper; the suffering of the Lord in Gethsemane and his being captured; his condemnation by the Jewish council; his appearances before Annas, before Caiaphas, and before the council that was held in the early morning; the denial by Peter; and the maltreatment of Jesus in the council. Further, there was the condemnation by the Roman governor; his appearances before Pilate, before Herod, and again before Pilate; the scourging; the crown of thorns; and the insult of placing Jesus on a par with Barabbas.

This public trial and judgment of the Lord was necessary to bring into clear light his perfect innocence and to expose and to condemn the world. All this resulted in the final phase of the Lord's suffering, his death on the cross.

The Necessary Death of the Cross

Christ had to die the death of the cross because the death of the cross was an accursed death. No death other than crucifixion might the Lamb of God, who must take away the sin of the world, endure. For him it would not have been proper had he died suddenly, say, of heart failure, of some common disease, or of the weakness of old age. Nor might the enemy stone him to death, as they sometimes sought to do even before his hour had come, or cast him down from the precipice, as they meant to do at Nazareth; nor might they with the help of the traitor sneak up on him unawares and secretly put him out of the way, as must have been their intention when they covenanted with Judas for thirty pieces of silver.

All these attempts were frustrated. The counsels of the enemies were brought to nought, and by God's special direction the events of Christ's hour were so arranged that the ultimate outcome was the death of the cross, for he had to bear God's curse against the sinner. The death of the cross was accursed of God. Undoubtedly this is the principal reason that the death of the cross was necessary.

Thus it was written: "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13). Galatians here interprets Deuteronomy 21:22–23:

> And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

The reference is not to capital punishment by hanging, but to the hanging and public exposure of the bodies of those who had been put to death by the sword or by stoning. Such a public hanging was considered an intensification of capital punishment. It was the hanging itself, not the death by hanging, that was an abomination and that caused the hanged one to be accursed of God:

> For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree (Gal. 3:10–13).

The quotation in verse 10, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," is from Deuteronomy 27:26. The context of Deuteronomy 27:26 is remarkable in that it shows how really as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse. Moses gave a commandment to the people of Israel that when they crossed over Jordan into the land of Canaan, half of the tribes would take their position on Mount Gerizim and the other half on Mount Ebal. The Levites would read to them the curses and the blessings, and the people would respond by a solemn "Amen." From this it is evident not only that all who were under the law were actually under a curse—inasmuch as no one could keep the law of God perfectly and inasmuch as the people of Israel in the course of their history had trampled the law under foot a thousand times—but it is also evident that Israel had solemnly covenanted on Mount Ebal to take this curse upon themselves.

Did all this mean that the promise had been made of none effect, seeing that the law and its curse had been superimposed upon it and that no one could fulfill the demands of the law nor bear the curse and remove it? This would be impossible. How is it possible that the heirs of the promise could be made subject to the law as a condition unto life? How could the curse they assumed on Mount Ebal ever have any other result than that it made the promise forever impossible of realization?

The answer is in the thirteenth verse of Galatians 3. To be sure, all who are under the law are under the curse. Israel by itself could never bear that curse and live. Israel could never work its way through the curse, so to speak, unto the promise and unto the inheritance of eternal life. It would seem to have been nothing short of sheer recklessness on their part to assume responsibility for the curse at all. Yet in Christ they could assume that responsibility. Christ was in their loins. Christ was able to bear and would bear the curse for them, in their behalf and in their stead, as was daily demonstrated to them by their sacrifices.

In the fullness of time Christ did come. He came under the law. With the people, his own, the heirs of the promise, he, so to speak, took up his position on Mount Ebal. To him, too, the curse of the law was read. He, too, responded with a solemn "Amen." And he was able to assume that responsibility and to fulfill it, for he was the holy child Jesus, the Son of God in the flesh. He could bear that curse in such a way that the demands of the law were satisfied and so that the law would no longer curse the children of the promise. Figuratively speaking, then, the cross was planted on Mount Ebal, and there Christ fulfilled once and forever the curse of the law. Christ became a curse for us, as it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13).

In addition to the matter of the curse, there are other reasons why Christ must die the death of crucifixion. First, the Savior must be brought to his death by the way of legal procedure and of a public trial, not only by the Jewish authorities but also by the tribunal of the world represented by Pontius Pilate. Second, his death must be a sacrifice for sin. This implied the shedding of his blood. In Christ, the priest and the sacrificial victim were one. He must shed his own blood and himself

carry it into the inner sanctuary, as did the high priest among Israel on the day of atonement (Heb. 9:11–14).

That the death of our Lord must be a sacrifice for sin implied that he must lay down his life voluntarily in willing and loving obedience to the Father. His death must be an act of the high priest: he must offer himself. As he said himself, he is the Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:11, 15, 17–18). If he were to lay down his life, if he were to shed his own blood, the very form of his death must be such that it offered him an opportunity to do so. To this end the death of the cross was eminently adapted.

In the case of the Old Testament sacrifices, the priest and the sacrificial victim were two different beings. All that was required was that the priest should stab the victim as quickly as possible and sprinkle its blood upon the horns of the altar and upon the mercy seat in order to realize that idea of a sacrificial offering. It was not necessary that the victim should be slowly tortured to death in order to make its death a voluntary offering, because it was the priest, not the victim itself, who brought the sacrifice.

With the Savior this was different. He was both the priest and the offering. He had to shed his own blood. Hence the very form of his death had to be such that it gave him the opportunity to pour out his life in a voluntary sacrifice and to carry his own blood into the heavenly sanctuary. Had our Lord simply been stabbed to death so that he had died instantaneously, this act of voluntary and loving obedience could not have been performed. But his death was different: he died the death of the cross, which meant not that the enemies killed him instantaneously, but that they merely opened his body and broke it so that he might shed his blood.

For six hours Christ poured out his life unto death. This was a completely voluntary act on his part. At any moment during those six hours he might have refused to remain suspended on the accursed tree and have taken up the challenge of the enemy to come down from the cross. But he remained on the tree and continued to pour out his life. In every drop of blood that slowly trickled from his hands and feet there was an expression of perfect obedience, of the love of God, and of the love of his own. Through the death of the cross, he, the high priest, poured out his own blood, sacrificed himself as the Lamb of God without spot, and carried the blood of atonement into the sanctuary of God. Thus through the death of the cross the Lord could taste death in all its horror.

The death of the cross was necessary in order to make of Christ's death a sacrifice for sin. He could not merely die as quickly as possible, but he had to pass through the full experience of the agony of death. Every bitter drop of death in all its misery he had to taste as he drank his cup, and the death of the cross was eminently adapted to this purpose.

The idea of the cross is that it is the emblem of the curse of God. *God's curse is the expression of his holy wrath against the workers of iniquity*. It is the opposite of his blessing. Both blessing and cursing are words of God. God's blessing is the word of his favor, his grace and lovingkindness, drawing his own into his fellowship and causing them to taste that the Lord is good. God's curse is the word of his wrath, expelling from his house those who are not his, causing them to experience him as a consuming fire, casting them away from him, forsaking them in utter terror of darkness and desolation, and making them unspeakably wretched. This awful curse Christ experienced through the means of the cross.

What did the cross have to do with Christ's tasting the horror and the curse of God against the sinner? Was it merely a symbol expressive of the curse? Or did it serve as a means through which the bitter experience of God's wrath in the curse was conveyed to the consciousness of the sufferer on Calvary?

In answer to this question, we reply that it was both a symbol and the reality of the curse. To us the cross of Christ is a symbol, a sign expressive of the fact that he bore the curse of God that was upon us. The victim of crucifixion was a castaway: there was no room for him in all God's wide creation. Suspended between heaven and earth, he was the embodiment of the judgment that there was no place for him on the earth among men and no room for him in heaven with God. Men did not want him; God did not receive him. Such is the symbolism of the cross of Christ. Therefore, by the symbol of the cross we are assured that Christ bore the curse that was upon us.

At the same time the cross was also the means through which Christ actually tasted the horror of God's curse upon the sinner. Let us not forget that the cross was a word of God. It was not man, but God himself who had spoken the word: "Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13). That the hanged one was accursed, therefore, was not due to an act or interpretation of man. It was God himself who by his own word placed Christ in the category of the accursed, for according to Deuteronomy, everyone that hanged on a tree was accursed. There was no exception to this rule. In that category belonged the cross of Christ, according to the word of God. On Calvary, through the means of the tree, God spoke the word of his wrath to the crucified one: "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." This is the meaning of the cross on Calvary.

Christ's Burial

Christ's burial belonged to the state of humiliation, even though the suffering of Christ proper was finished on the cross; for the grave is the place of corruption, and that place Christ also had to enter. He had to deliver his body to the humiliation of the grave, the place where the sinner returns to the dust. In perfect obedience to the Father, he entered into Hades and committed his body to the grave. We must not forget that even his burial was an act of his own. As he entered into the womb of the virgin and thereby into the likeness of sinful flesh, as he voluntarily suffered the reality of death in all his life, as he willingly entered finally into death and gave up the ghost, so he also obediently submitted to the sentence of God, "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19) and entered into the grave.

He could do so because he was the Son of God whose person was never separated from his human nature even in the grave.[2] So he accomplished all of death and fulfilled all righteousness. However, seeing that he had completely satisfied the justice of God with respect to sin before he died, his burial was in a way a transition from the state of humiliation into the state of exaltation, for his soul was in paradise (Luke 23:43, 46). Because of his perfect satisfaction and obedience, the corruption of the grave could have no dominion over him (Isa. 53:9; Matt. 12:40; Acts 2:27; Ps. 16:10).

Christ's Descension into Hell

That Christ descended into hell is expressed in Article 4 of the Apostles' Creed. Various explanations have been given to the expression "descended into hell." One explanation asserts that Christ's descension into hell means simply that he was in the state of the dead. The Greek word for "hell" is ᾅδης (*Hades*), a word that is usually and correctly translated in our English Bible by "hell," but which may signify the same as "grave" or the state of the dead before the resurrection. Hence it is linguistically possible to render Article 4 as "he descended into the state of the dead."

However, the context in which the phrase "descended into hell" occurs would seem to be opposed to the idea that Christ's descending into the state of the dead was actually the meaning of the article

according to the faith of the early church, because "descended into hell" occurs at the end of the series: "suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried." "Buried" declares that Christ descended into the place of the dead. To add another phrase expressing virtually the same thing would appear to be useless repetition.

Another possible explanation of Christ's descension into hell, which according to Philip Schaff presents the meaning of the early church, is that it refers to "an actual self-manifestation of Christ after the crucifixion to all the departed spirits . . . As such the descent is a part of the universality of the scheme of redemption, and forms the transition from the state of humiliation to the state of exaltation."[3] Whether or not this is really the historical explanation, as Schaff contends, the explanation is rather vague, and it is difficult to see how the descent into hell in this sense could be a part of the universality of the scheme of redemption. Besides, it opens a wide field of speculation regarding the purpose and effect of this self-manifestation of Christ to all the dead in Hades. Why should Christ thus manifest himself to all the dead? What could such a self-manifestation add to the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Savior of his people?

Nor can the explanation be seriously considered that our Lord after his crucifixion descended into the place of desolation in order to suffer the tortures of the damned. This certainly cannot have been the meaning of the early church. The notion that the Savior suffered the torments of hell after his crucifixion is contrary to the plain teaching of scripture. Evident it is that after the Lord gave up the ghost he could not have suffered the torments of hell in body and soul, for his body rested in the grave of Joseph of Arimathea, and his soul was in paradise (Luke 23:43). When the Lord said, "It is finished" (John 19:30), he surely uttered this cross word in the consciousness that the work of redemption, the sacrifice of reconciliation, had been completed and perfected and that no more suffering remained to be endured.

Nor can this possibly be the meaning of Psalm 16:10, which the apostle Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost: "Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (Acts 2:27). The reference here is not to the place of eternal torture, but to Hades, the bodiless state of the dead. In that state the Lord's soul was in paradise, and his body lay in the grave. The meaning of the passage is that God would neither leave Christ's soul in a disembodied state, nor would he allow Christ's body to be swallowed up by the corruption of the grave, but that he would glorify his Holy One in the resurrection.

This is evident from the following considerations:

First, it may not be ignored that in Psalm 16 it is David who speaks.

Second, he speaks as a type of Christ, and ultimately his words are applicable to Christ only. Nevertheless, what is true of the antitype in principle and in the full sense is certainly predicated of the type in the first instance. The words of Psalm 16, therefore, must also be applied to David. The psalmist is confident that God would not leave his soul in hell, but through death would show him the pathway of life. It follows that David cannot be speaking of the place of eternal damnation, but that he refers to Sheol (שְׁאוֹל), the state of the dead.

Third, on the day of Pentecost the apostle Peter does not speak of Christ's deliverance from the place of the damned, but of his glorious resurrection. This is evident from Acts 2:24: "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." In proof of this, Peter refers to the passage from Psalm 16. The very purpose for which Peter quotes Psalm 16 proves that he is not thinking of a descent of Christ into the place of the damned, but simply of Hades, the state of the dead, and of Christ's deliverance from it.

Fourth, this is also the application of Psalm 16 by the apostle when he says,

> Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption (Acts 2:29–31).

Therefore, the view that Christ personally descended into the place of the damned, there to suffer vicariously the pains of eternal torture, cannot be maintained.

Erroneous Views of the Descent into Hell

The Roman Catholics offer the following explanation of the descent into hell:

> 922. Why did Christ go to hell?
>
> Christ did not go to hell in the modern and restricted sense of that word. At the time when the Apostles' Creed was composed, the word hell was used to designate any state of existence lower than heaven. After His death on the Cross, our Lord's soul went, says St. Peter, to preach to those spirits who were in prison. That is, He joined those souls which were detained from the fullness of heaven and who were awaiting the opening of heaven to mankind by Him. This descent of Christ's soul into hell was obviously not to the hell of the eternally lost, but to what we call the Limbo or detention place of the souls of the just who lived prior to our Lord's coming into this world.[4]

However, this bit of Roman Catholic exegesis cannot stand for a moment, even though there may be room for difference of opinion as to the true meaning of 1 Peter 3:18–20:

> For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a-preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

First, the apostle is not speaking at all of a personal descent of Christ into prison after his crucifixion and before his resurrection, but of his going—after his resurrection and through the Spirit—to preach to the spirits that were in prison. This is the simple and plain meaning of the text. The introductory words of verse 19, "by which," refer to the latter part of verse 18: "being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." Then follows: "By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison" (v. 19). The order of the phrases, therefore, demands that we conceive of this mission of Christ to the spirits in prison as having taken place after his resurrection. Moreover, he went not in the human nature or in his disembodied soul, but in the Spirit, by whom also he was quickened from the dead. Through this Spirit, without a personal descent, he was able to send his word down unto the spirits in prison.

Second, by the phrase "spirits in prison," the apostle certainly cannot designate the Old Testament saints, unto whom heaven was not supposed to be opened until the coming of Christ, because they are described as those who "sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a-preparing" (v. 20). The phrase "spirits in prison" so very clearly refers to the ungodly of Noah's day, when the righteous were persecuted all the day long and God saved them by the waters of the deluge, that one can only be amazed at the curious bit of exegesis that makes Old Testament saints out of these spirits.

Third, the apostle does not speak one word, nor even suggest in any way, that these spirits in prison were delivered and taken to heaven by Christ. Verse 19 simply informs us that he "preached" to them. The word used here for "preached" does not mean at all that he preached the gospel unto them, but simply that he proclaimed or announced something as a herald. Besides, scripture knows nothing of a

limbo in which the Old Testament saints were kept until heaven was opened for them by Christ. For all these reasons we reject the Roman Catholic view of the descension into hell.

The Lutheran explanation that after his death and before his resurrection Christ descended into hell to proclaim his victory to the spirits in prison also finds no support in 1 Peter 3:18–20. It is quite in harmony with that passage to say that Christ announced his victory to those spirits that persecuted his people and mocked at his cause in the world. However, this word of victory was proclaimed by Christ not between his death and resurrection, nor by a personal descent into hell, but after his resurrection and exaltation and through the Spirit who was given him.

This also means that we cannot agree with the exegesis which most of the Reformed theologians offer of 1 Peter 3:18–20. According to them, the Spirit of Christ was in the prophets, including Noah. In that Spirit, Christ through Noah preached at that time to the spirits who are now in prison. Against this exegesis we have the following objections:

First, if we accept this view, we must also accept a very strange sequence of thought in the apostle's argument. He evidently speaks in historical sequence of the suffering and the resurrection of Christ: "being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (v. 18). How is it possible to conceive that the apostle would all of a sudden think about an event that happened centuries before?

Second, the question arises why exactly the disobedience of those who existed before the flood is mentioned. The Spirit of Christ certainly prophesied in all the prophets of the Old Testament.

Third, the text plainly indicates that the Savior preached to the spirits in prison: "By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison" (v. 19). This preaching did not take place in former times. Rather, the spirits were once disobedient, and the preaching took place after the Savior was crucified and raised. If the apostle had meant to say that Christ had preached to the spirits in prison at the time of Noah, when these spirits were still in the world, he could easily have expressed himself as follows: "by which also he went *aforetime* (ποτέ) and preached unto the spirits in prison."

Scripture's Explanation of the Descent into Hell

Therefore, it seems to us that the following explanation of 1 Peter 3:18–20 is the only possible one.

First, Christ has really proceeded to the spirits in prison, that is, to the place of desolation where the unbelievers are kept to the day of judgment. He went there not during his sojourn in the grave, but after his resurrection and exaltation: ". . . but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison" (vv. 18–19). Christ proceeded to that prison not personally, whether in the divine or in the human nature, not by a personal descent into hell, but in the Spirit (ἐν ᾧ [*by which*]—v. 19). The text does not teach a personal descent into hell at all. The Savior is able from heaven and in the Spirit to preach to the spirits in prison.

Second, in that Spirit, Christ very really preaches and did preach to the damned spirits, especially to those who were once disobedient in the times of Noah. This preaching was not a preaching of the gospel. That idea is not necessarily expressed by "preached" (ἐκήρυξεν). Rather, it refers to an announcement, a preaching, of his complete victory. The apostle speaks in the context of a suffering for righteousness' sake: Christ had suffered, and his people from former ages had suffered. This was especially the case with the saints who lived before the flood. That this is the apostle's thought is very plain from the expression, "when once the longsuffering of God waited . . ." (v. 20). The saints of God in those days were especially persecuted. It appeared in those days as if the cause of God's covenant would suffer defeat. Therefore Christ by his Spirit proceeded to the damned in hell, the damned as they were especially represented by the spirits in prison from Noah's time, to announce

that his cause has the victory through his humiliation and exaltation.

We must conclude, therefore, that whatever may be the significance of the clause concerning the descension of Christ into hell in the mind of the early church, scripture knows of no such descent into the place of the damned, nor of such a self-manifestation of Christ to all the departed spirits. If the article in the Apostles' Creed that speaks of this descent is to be retained, the explanation of it offered by Reformed theologians must be adopted in spite of the fact that this is not the historical meaning.

The Reformed explanation, which is also Calvin's interpretation of the fourth article in the Apostles' Creed, is that Christ endured the very agonies and pains of hell on the cross. He endured them in all his sufferings, but especially on the accursed tree. Even on the cross there was a gradual increase in his suffering of this hellish agony. This was evident from all that occurred on and about the cross.[5]

During the first half of the six-hour period of the crucifixion, the sun still shed its light upon the awful spectacle on Calvary. Christ's enemies had the audacity to mock and jeer at the crucified one, and the Lord himself found it possible to take interest in the things about him—praying for his enemies, committing his mother to the care of the disciple whom he loved, and assuring the penitent malefactor of his final salvation. But during the last three hours the cross was completely taken out of man's hands. Darkness, that dreadful symbol of God's wrathful presence, descended on the scene. The enemies, amazed at the fearful omen, ceased from mockery and grew silent. For the space of three hours the crucified one was completely wrapped up in his own suffering. Not a word was heard from his lips. Then, almost at the end of these last three hours of his passion, he made it known in the question of amazement that he had been descending into the depths of hell: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" That was especially the moment of Christ's descension into hell.

The State of Exaltation

In the state of exaltation usually four degrees are distinguished: the resurrection, the ascension, the sitting on the right hand of God, and the return to judgment.

The Resurrection

We note that there were many evidences and many witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. There were the women, who in the early morning of that first day of the week went to the sepulchre to finish the embalming of their Lord's body. There were Peter and John, who upon the first report of Mary Magdalene went to inspect the grave. There were the two sojourners to Emmaus, to whom the Lord appeared late in the afternoon of that first day through the word that he spoke to them and through the breaking of the bread. In the evening of the same day, the Lord manifested himself to the disciples without Thomas, and a week later he appeared again unto them, particularly to Thomas. There was also the appearance to the seven disciples at the Sea of Galilee. There were the appearances to Peter alone and to James, the brother of the Lord. There was the manifestation on the mount in Galilee to more than five hundred brethren at once. At the end of those marvelous forty days, Jesus appeared unto his disciples for the last time when he was taken up from them on the Mount of Olives. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:8 that last of all Christ was seen of Paul himself, as of one born out of due time.

We must remember that all the witnesses were wholly unprepared for the revelation of the risen Lord, which they received on that first day and on succeeding days, and of which they became faithful

witnesses. Not one of them looked forward to the resurrection on the third day. In spite of the fact that the Lord had repeatedly assured them that he must suffer and on the third day rise again, when that third day dawned, they all stood in the gloomy darkness of the cross and neither could nor did expect the way out through the resurrection of Christ. The women went to the sepulchre to perform the last act of loving service upon the body of their dead master. When they reported to the apostles what they had seen and heard at the grave and how the Lord had met them on the way back, their words were to the apostles as idle tales. Yet soon they one and all believed and gave testimony of their faith that the Lord had risen indeed.

Consider also the content of their testimony. How wonderfully it bears witness of the fact that they simply reported what they had seen and heard. The resurrection of Christ was something very wonderful. The witnesses could not possibly have invented it. If the Lord had been raised as were the young man of Nain, the daughter of Jairus, and Lazarus, the matter would have been simple, and the narratives of the resurrection would have been quite different from those we now have in the gospel. But that was not the case. The resurrection of Christ was no return from the grave to our earthly sphere. It did not consist in a resumption of his former mode of living in the earthly house of this tabernacle, but in an advance to the glory of immortality and incorruption. Hence the reports of the witnesses of the resurrection must testify to two facts: the reality of the bodily resurrection of Christ and the wholly otherness of the risen Lord, or the wonder of the resurrection on the third day.

The Evidences of the Resurrection

Now what were the evidences of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead?

There were no eyewitnesses of the resurrection itself. Matthew tells us that "there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it" (Matt. 28:2). It is evident from this narrative that the angel did not roll away the stone from the grave in order to make it possible for the Lord to issue forth from it. In fact, it is quite probable that the Lord had risen before the angel had descended from heaven. The angel simply opened the grave for the witnesses to inspect it, and he sat upon the stone to guard the grave against profane intruders who might destroy the wonderful testimony of the empty grave. The fact that no one was present as an eyewitness at the moment of the resurrection of the Lord was a factor in producing in the minds of the witnesses the correct impression of that marvelous event. It immediately distinguished Christ's resurrection from all the typical resurrections that had gone before as something that transcends all our earthly experience.

The evidences of the resurrection of Jesus Christ were fourfold: the empty grave, the place where the Lord had lain and the wonder of the linen clothes, the message of the angels to the women, and the ten appearances of the Lord to the disciples.

The vacated grave was a negative testimony that the living one was not to be sought among the dead. That the grave had been vacated certainly assured the witnesses, especially in connection with the later appearances of the risen Lord to them, that Christ had really risen, that he was not merely alive in the spirit, but that his body had been quickened and raised. They looked for him in Hades, but they discovered that he was not there.

But there was a richer testimony in the vacated grave and in the wonder of the linen clothes. In order to appreciate this second evidence of the resurrection, we must remember that at the burial by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus those linen clothes, together with the spices, had been wrapped around the dead body of the Savior limb by limb, separately, while a napkin had been twisted around

his head. The meaning of these linen clothes in the vacated grave was undoubtedly that they testified to the wonder of the resurrection because these clothes lay in the grave exactly in the very shape in which they had been wound around the body of Jesus. They had not been folded up, as is the usual interpretation, but they lay in their original position as they had been around the body. If we remember this, there was sense in the special invitation of the angel, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matt. 28:6). Otherwise this special invitation had no sense.

Besides, this was also the impression left by two other witnesses who later came to the grave, Peter and John. Aroused by the report of Mary Magdalene that the body of Jesus had been stolen, they hastened to the sepulchre. John, being the younger of the two, outran Peter; coming to the tomb first, John stooped down to inspect it and was at once struck by the position of the linen clothes. Peter, the more impetuous, entered the grave as soon as he reached it, and he also paid particular attention to the linen clothes in which the body of Jesus had been wrapped. As a special detail, he noticed that the napkin that had been wound around Jesus' head was lying somewhat apart from the linen clothes in a place by itself.

Evidently, the two disciples did the very thing that the angel had invited the women to do: they saw the place where the Lord had lain. We read that then "went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed" (John 20:8). What did John believe? Evidently not the report of Mary that the enemies had stolen the body of Jesus, but he believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. The position of the linen clothes had this faith-producing effect upon the apostle John. There can be but one answer to the question why the position of the linen clothes was sufficient to make John believe, and that is that they were found in the exact position and shape in which they had been wrapped around the body of the Lord.

Moreover, there was the message of the angels who waited for the women in the vacated grave. The spoken word of God always accompanies the word which comes to pass. It was so at the incarnation of the Son of God when the heavenly messengers pointed to the wonder of Bethlehem, and it was no different at the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. This word was necessary because of the very wonder of the resurrection of Christ. The Lord had arisen, yet he was no longer with them. He had advanced into the sphere of the spiritual, the incorruptible, and the immortal. That wonder must be explained, or must at least be announced, before the Lord could even appear to the disciples. They must be prepared for the glorious gospel of the risen Lord. Unto this preparation served the evidence of the vacated grave, to which was added the resurrection gospel that was preached by the angel at the grave: "He is not here: for he is risen, as he said" (Matt. 28:6).

That brief message—in connection with the evidence of the empty sepulchre and with the words Jesus himself had spoken to them when he was still with them—certainly prepared the hearts and minds of the witnesses for the wonder of meeting the risen Lord when he would appear to them. This appearance or manifestation of Christ to the disciples constituted the final link in this chain of evidence by which the first witnesses became convinced both of the reality and the wonder of the resurrection of their Lord. Already on that first day of the week he showed himself to his disciples several times. He appeared to Mary Magdalene, to the women returning from the grave, to Simon Peter, to the travelers to Emmaus, and to the disciples as they were gathered without Thomas. A week later he appeared again to the disciples as they were assembled and manifested himself, particularly to Thomas. Some time later he was seen by seven disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He showed himself to a large number of disciples on a mountain in Galilee, to James alone, and finally, to the disciples on the Mount of Olives, whence he departed from them into heaven.

These manifestations—for such they were—convinced the disciples of the reality of the bodily

resurrection of the Lord, yet also of the wonder, of the otherness, of that resurrection. He was real, their risen Lord, for he showed them his hands and his feet and the very imprints of the crucifixion; he ate with them and convinced them that he was no mere ghost. Yet he was different: he was no longer with them in earthly fellowship. Mary Magdalene must not touch him.

Only occasionally he appeared from his resurrection sphere to manifest himself to the disciples: he would suddenly stand in their midst while they were assembled behind closed doors. Also this wonder of the risen Lord the disciples faithfully recorded exactly as they experienced it. They thought that they saw a ghost. At the Sea of Tiberias, "none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord" (John 21:12). On the mount in Galilee, "they worshipped him: but some doubted" (Matt. 28:17). When the disciples received the Holy Ghost all their experiences were sealed in them and clearly understood in the light of the Old Testament scriptures so that the last vestige of doubt was removed and the disciples became fully prepared to become witnesses of the resurrection and to proclaim to all men: "The Lord is risen indeed" (Luke 24:34).

The Significance of the Resurrection

For the Savior the resurrection was the transition out of the state of humiliation, the state of death, into the state of exaltation in which according to body and soul he was clothed with new, eternal, heavenly life. We must remember that the body in which the Lord was raised was an entirely different body from that in which he appeared in the likeness of sinful flesh. According to 1 Corinthians 15:42–44 it is sown in corruption (ἐν φθορᾷ) and raised in incorruption (ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ); it is sown in dishonor (ἐν ἀτιμίᾳ) and raised in glory (ἐν δόξῃ); it is sown in weakness (ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ) and raised in power (ἐν δυνάμει); it is sown as a natural body (σῶμα ψυχικόν) and raised as a spiritual body (σῶμα πνευματικόν).

The resurrection of Christ, therefore, was not a return to his former state. In fact, the risen Lord transcends in glory and power the first man Adam in his original state of rectitude as far as the heavenly transcends the earthy. The first man was "of the earth, earthy" (ἐκ γῆς χοϊκός), but the second man is "from heaven" (ἐξ οὐρανοῦ—1 Cor. 15:47). Adam, even in the state of rectitude, was of the earth, earthy. Moreover, although he was not under the actual dominion of death, he was not immortal but most emphatically mortal: he could die. But with the resurrection of Christ, death is completely swallowed up in victory, and this corruptible has put on incorruption, this mortal has put on immortality; in the risen Lord the image of the invisible God has been raised to its highest possible perfection on the plane of heavenly glory.

The risen Lord, then, is not for a moment to be compared to the first man Adam, even in his state of original righteousness. Nor dare it be said that Adam could have attained to the state of glory that is now realized in the resurrection of the Son of God. In the resurrection of Christ, God did not repair what was spoiled and marred by the first man Adam; but through the amazingly deep and marvelous way of the death and resurrection of the Son of God, a glory was attained far higher than what might have been accomplished through the first man, even if he had remained obedient.

This resurrection of Christ was an act of the triune God: the Father raised up his Son through his Spirit, and the Son arose of himself through the power of the Spirit. Christ is risen and "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). Christ is both raised and risen. "He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11). "But now is Christ risen from the dead" (1 Cor. 15:20). He is risen, and therefore he is powerfully set forth to be the Son of God, and

he is raised by the power of God for our justification.

In a threefold sense the resurrection of Christ is of central significance in the economy of salvation.

First, his resurrection is the seal of God on the righteousness which we have in Jesus Christ our Lord. It is the word of God concerning our justification. He "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). The meaning of this is evident. Christ had assumed the responsibility for our sins, though he was personally without sin and guilt. According to the responsibility of our mediator, he was worthy of death; although, again, insofar as his personal relation to God was concerned, he was the object of God's favor. With the load of this responsibility for our sins upon his mighty shoulders, he stood before the tribunal of God in the hour of judgment and willingly descended into the darkest depth of death where he suffered all the pain and agony in body and soul that is caused by the wrath of God against the workers of iniquity.

Out of that depth of death, there was only one way: such perfect obedience that God could declare Christ, as mediator with regard to our sins, perfectly justified. Just as sin and death, so also righteousness and life are inseparably connected in the judgment of God. When God raised Jesus from the dead, he thereby declared him, as mediator, worthy of eternal life. God set his seal upon the perfect sacrifice of Christ and declared that he, the mediator, had perfectly satisfied for all of our sins and transgressions that he had borne upon the cross. He was raised, therefore, on account of our justification. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the gospel of God declaring us righteous and worthy of eternal life.

Second, by the power of the resurrection of Christ all the elect are centrally raised unto a new life. The scriptures frequently speak of this spiritual resurrection and fellowship with Christ. Of this Christ spoke:

> For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live (John 5:21, 24–25).

In Romans 6:3–5 we read:

> Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.

In Ephesians 2:4–6 we read:

> But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

The apostle admonishes the church: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

Third, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the earnest of our own resurrection in glory. Through the resurrection of Christ we are saved in hope. Being raised with the risen Lord, and having within us the beginning of the resurrection life, we are nevertheless still in the flesh. In the flesh we lie in the midst of death. We live, and we cannot die; yet we are encompassed by death on every side, and die we must. Therefore, we groan with all the groaning and suffering creation, waiting for the adoption, to

wit, the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23). But we do not groan without hope. And this hope is sure and well-founded. It has its source within us, in the fact that even now we are raised unto a new life by the risen Lord. It has its objective ground in the fact of the resurrection of Christ: he was raised in glory as to the body; we shall be raised in glory with him in the last day (1 Cor. 15:20–24; 1 Pet. 1:3). So the apostle writes in Romans 8:11: "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." Christ was raised not as a mere individual, but as the head of the body, the church. Therefore, he is raised as the firstfruits; the harvest is sure to follow.

The Ascension

The ascension is the act of God whereby the resurrected Christ in his human nature is transposed from this earth to the heaven of glory.

Although in the nature of the case, the event itself of the ascension of Christ Jesus into heaven is not as elaborately mentioned as the event of the resurrection, the fact of the ascension and its great significance are frequently emphasized in Holy Writ. The event is mentioned in Mark 16:19: "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God." In Luke 24:50–51 we read: "And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven."

The gospel according to John does not speak of the ascension on the fortieth day, but it does mention it repeatedly in a more indefinite fashion. To the murmuring Jews in Capernaum the Savior said, "Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" (John 6:6–162). To the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem he spoke these words: "Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me" (John 7:33). His disciples he comforts with the well-known words:

> In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know (John 14:2–4).

Again Jesus says, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:7). After his resurrection Jesus spoke the remarkable words to Mary Magdalene: "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20:17).

The most definite testimony concerning the event of the ascension is found in Acts 1:9–11:

> And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

Apart from these references to the event of the ascension into heaven on the fortieth day after the resurrection, very frequently scripture mentions the truth of Christ's assumption into and his being in heaven (Acts 3:21; Eph. 4:8–10; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 4:14; Heb. 6:19–20; Heb. 9:24; 1 Pet. 3:22).

The Lutheran View of Ubiquity

The ascension definitely must be conceived as consisting in a change of place. In his human nature Christ departed from the earth and went into heaven both in body and soul. After his ascension, according to his human nature he is no longer on earth, but in heaven only. This must be emphasized especially over against the Lutherans who teach what is called the ubiquity (omnipresence) of the human nature of Christ after his resurrection and ascension into heaven.

The Lutherans teach that in Christ the one nature shared the properties of the other, and more particularly that the divine attributes were imparted to the human nature of Christ. With a view to the Lutheran theory of the bodily presence of Christ in the bread and wine of the Lord's supper, the doctrine of communication of attributes (*communicatio idiomatum*) is applied especially to the so-called ubiquity of Christ's human nature, the attribute according to which Christ in his human body can be present in more than one place at the same time. According to some Lutherans, this communication of attributes took place at the time of the incarnation, but during his earthly sojourn the Lord emptied himself so that his divine power and glory remained largely concealed behind the likeness of sinful flesh. According to others, this impartation of the divine attributes to the human nature belongs to his exaltation only.

This view the Lutherans officially expressed in the Formula of Concord when they explained the two natures of Christ as follows:

> But, rather, here is the highest communion which God truly has with the man assumed, and from the personal union and highest and ineffable communion, which thence follows, flows all of human that is said and believed of God, and all of divine that is said and believed of the man Christ. And this union and communion of the natures the most ancient doctors of the Church have illustrated by the similitude of glowing iron, and also of the union of body and soul in man.[6]

Further:

> And that majesty, in virtue of the personal union, Christ has always had, but in the state of his humiliation he divested himself of it, for which cause he truly grew in age, wisdom, and favor with God and men. Wherefore he did not always make use of that majesty, but as often as seemed good to him, until after the resurrection, he fully and forever laid aside the form of a servant, but not the human nature, and was established in the plenary use, manifestation, and revelation of the divine majesty, and in this manner entered into his glory (Phil. 2:6ff.). Therefore now not only as God, but also as man, he knows all things, can do all things, is present to all creatures, has under his feet and in his hand all things which are in heaven, in the earth, and under the earth. That this is so, Christ himself bears witness, saying (Matt. 28:18; John 13:3): "All power in heaven and in earth is given unto me." And Paul saith (Eph. 4:10): "He ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." This his power, being every where present, he can exercise, nor is anything to him either impossible or unknown.[7]

The Lutherans applied this doctrine to their conception of the Lord's supper, that of consubstantiation, as follows:

> Hence also, and indeed most easily, can he, being present, impart his true body and his blood in the Holy Supper. Now this is not done according to the mode and attribute of human nature, but according to the mode and attribute of the right hand of God, as Luther, according to the analogy of our Christian faith, as contained in the Catechism, is wont to speak. And this presence of Christ in the Holy Supper is neither physical or earthly, nor Capernaitic; nevertheless it is most true and indeed substantial. For so read the words of the Testament of Christ: "*This is, is, is my body*," etc.[8]

It is true that later Lutheranism somewhat modified this theory. It is also not quite clear from the Formula of Concord exactly how the Lutherans sought to establish their doctrine of a communication of gifts (*communicatio idiomatum*) in Christ on the basis of the personal union of the two natures

only. Nevertheless, it may be regarded as established that the Lutherans teach the ubiquity of the human nature of Christ after his ascension. In opposition to and distinction from this Lutheran doctrine, it must undoubtedly be maintained in the light of scripture that the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ implies a change of place: he departed from one place—the earth—and went to another place—heaven.

This is evident from all the passages quoted above. After the resurrection the Lord appeared to his disciples in his resurrection body more than once. He appeared and disappeared. But in his final appearance on the Mount of Olives, he did not merely disappear; he departed from the disciples and went into heaven. After this they expected him no more. They knew he had gone away from them.

The Proper Conception of the Ascension

When all this is duly established, we must also warn against the danger of conceiving of the wonder of the ascension in an earthly manner. We shall have to remember that the ascension of the Lord, although it was indeed a personal departure from the earth in the human nature, is not comparable to one's taking a journey from Chicago to New York, from one earthly place to another.

What the apostles observed on the Mount of Olives when their Lord was taken up from them is not to be compared to what one sees when he visits an airport and watches an airplane take off. We dare not forget when speaking of the ascension of the Savior that also the risen Lord's last manifestation to the apostles when he led them out to the Mount of Olives was an appearance of him who had already passed on into the resurrection. What was given to the apostles to see on the Mount of Olives of the wonder of the ascension was sufficient for them to know that their Lord had departed from them and that he had gone into heaven. The ascension, as well as the resurrection, is a wonder of grace.

Heaven

Heaven is a definite place and not merely a condition, but it is a place that radically differs from the earth. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50). With our present bodies we cannot enter into heaven or live its life. Our earthly eyes cannot behold it. The gaze of the disciples, though earnestly directed toward the firmament after their Lord had been taken up from them, could not follow him into the heaven of heavens. A cloud received him out of their sight (Acts 1:9).

It is idle to speculate about the definite location of this heaven of glory in the present universe. It is true that the scriptures speak of it as high and even present it as "the highest" (Luke 2:14; Luke 19:38). Whether or not this means that the glorious heaven into which the exalted Christ ascended is above and beyond the starry heavens, as is often supposed, is a matter of speculation rather than of revelation. There may well be an element of symbolism in the language of the Bible when it speaks of the highest heaven. In any event, we dare not speak of the distance of this glorious heaven from the earth in terms of our earthly laws of space and time. Wherever we conceive the definite location of the heaven of glory to be—whether we think of it as above and beyond the firmament or as interpenetrating our world, as surrounding us on all sides, though we cannot see it—we may never think of it as far away in the earthly sense of perceiving that there is no contact between heaven and earth or that it actually would take a long time to reach heaven.

When Christ was taken up from the earth on the Mount of Olives, he was at once in glory in the highest heavens. The transition took place in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Proof of this is the

fact that at the same moment, while the amazed disciples were still staring into heaven, two angels from that same heaven of glory stood by them to announce that their common Lord had been taken up from them into heaven and would so come again.

Originally, heaven was the abode of the holy angels, the spiritual principalities and powers and dominions, perhaps with Satan as their chief—not, of course, as Satan, but as the most glorious and powerful of the heavenly spirits. But a break occurred in the heavenly world. The chief ruler of the heavenly principalities, together with a large number of his fellow angels, stumbled in pride, rebelled against the Most High, and became irrevocably the enemy and opponent of God. God's election and reprobation made separation between the heavenly spirits, and the matter was at once decided. After Satan had directed his attention to man, the king of the earthly creation, and seduced him to violate God's covenant, and God had maintained his covenant in the line of the elect among men, putting enmity between the woman and the serpent and their respective seeds (Gen. 3:15), heaven was also made the abode of the "spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23).

In the old dispensation before the coming of Christ, this glorified church in heavenly places, though ever increasing in numbers, was saved in hope. It appears that Satan in the old dispensation had access to heaven and acted as the accuser of the brethren (Job 1:6–12; Job 2:1–6; Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:10). The promise was not yet realized, and with the saints on earth the saints in heaven looked forward in hope to its fulfillment. In the fullness of time Christ came, brought the sacrifice of reconciliation, realized the justification of all the saints, was raised from the dead, and ascended up on high leading captivity captive. For heaven and its inhabitants this ascension of Christ was of great significance. It was the end of the war in heaven. The devil was permanently cast out, and the great voice was heard in heaven:

> Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them (Rev. 12:10–12).

Still the history of the heaven of glory is not finished. When God shall create new heavens and a new earth, also the heaven of heavens shall be changed, for it is the good pleasure of God to unite all things in heaven and on earth into one glorious creation in Christ as the head over all, the glorious kingdom of heaven that is to be realized in the day of Christ.

The Significance of the Ascension

First, the significance of Christ's ascension into heaven is that he is our intercessor or advocate with the Father. The ideas *advocate* and *intercessor* are closely related, yet they may also be distinguished in that *advocate* is a more specific and limited description of *intercessor*. An intercessor is one who prays in behalf of another (ἐντυγχάνειν ὑπέρ τινος), and an advocate (παράκλητος) is one who pleads on behalf of someone. Intercessor, therefore, is the more general concept. The intercessory prayer of Christ covers all our needs, and it results in the bestowal of all spiritual blessings upon the church.

The idea of an advocate or paraclete is more limited. As our advocate Christ pleads for us, who in ourselves are sinners and damnable before God, to obtain our justification before the bar of the Judge of heaven and earth. In that sense the term *advocate* or *paraclete* occurs with reference to our glorified high priest in heaven in 1 John 2:1: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father,

Jesus Christ the righteous."

It is plain that the plea of Christ as our advocate in the presence of the Father concerns particularly his people in the world, for whom he died and obtained forgiveness of sins and eternal righteousness, who also have been delivered in principle from the power and dominion of sin, who earnestly desire to be completely delivered from all corruption and unrighteousness, who walk in the light, but who find that they are still in the body of this death (Rom. 7:24) so that there are still many sins remaining against their will in them. Any of these sins would make them damnable before God and would be sufficient to deprive them of the blessed fellowship with the Father were it not for the fact that they have a paraclete, an advocate, with the Father in heaven, who constantly pleads their cause, defends them, and obtains for them from the Father the sentence of their perfect justification.

This intercession or advocacy of Christ in heaven dare not be deprived of all reality. When the scriptures teach us that Christ is our intercessor or advocate with the Father, we may not understand this as a mere figurative expression, denoting no more than the permanent effect of his atonement and work of obedience in our behalf.

On the contrary, that Christ is our intercessor means that the Son of God in his glorified human nature is really in the presence of, before the face of, the Father. The plea of the Son of God in behalf of his still-sinful people in the world is a real activity on his part: on the basis of his own work of atonement, he appeals to the justice and faithfulness of God for their perfect justification and for the bestowal of all spiritual blessings upon them.

This work of Christ in heaven as our advocate and intercessor with the Father constitutes a real element in the economy of redemption: only in the consciousness of this function of Christ do we approach God through Christ and obtain the assurance of forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life. However, we may not so present this activity of Christ in heaven that it becomes derogatory of God's perfections. All that is earthy and imperfect must be eliminated from Christ's activity as our advocate with the Father. His plea in our behalf is not occasional but constant. Above all, both the plea and its result are constantly perfect. The plea for our justification by our advocate in heaven is constantly granted, and the prayer of Christ as our intercessor for the bestowal of all the spiritual blessings of salvation upon his people is also constantly heard. Even as the mediator in heaven constantly pleads in behalf of his people, presenting to the Father the ground of his perfect work of atonement, so the Father is constantly delighted with this plea for forgiveness, righteousness, and spiritual blessings and beholds his people in the light of this plea with an eye of everlasting mercy and eternal love.

Second, the significance of the ascension of Christ includes his people's sitting with him in heavenly places. This is plain from Ephesians 2:4–6: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

We must remember that Christ is the head of the elect, both in the juridical and in the organic sense. His entrance into heaven does not mean that someone succeeded to glorify his own human nature and to obtain for himself a place in glory. On the contrary, it is Christ who ascended up on high and who occupies a central position. His ascension is of central significance. He is the head of the body, the church, who represents all the elect. As the head of his own in the forensic sense, he entered into death, bore all our iniquities on the accursed tree, blotted out all our sins, and obtained eternal righteousness (Dan. 9:24). His righteousness is our righteousness; his death is our death; his resurrection is our resurrection. So also in that legal sense his ascension is our ascension: we sit with him in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6).

Christ is also the head of the body organically. We are members of his body, and we cannot be separated from him, our head. That he went to heaven means that centrally we are in heaven. He will not return to us, but he will draw us unto himself so that we may also be where he is. In the consciousness of our inseparable union with Christ our head, we look up toward heaven by faith and confess that we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that Christ as the head will also take us up to himself as his members.[9]

The third significance of the ascension of Christ is that as our eternal head and mediator he blesses us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. When he ascended on high, leading captivity captive (Ps. 68:18; Eph. 4:8), full of the riches of grace for all his people, Christ received the Spirit that through him he might bestow all the blessings of salvation upon his people. On the day of Pentecost he poured out that Spirit upon and into his church. Through that Spirit he dwells in us and works in us the firstfruits of salvation. Through that Spirit we become partakers of his heavenly life.

All who are regenerated by the Spirit of Christ partake of the life of that heavenly Lord. That life is resurrection life. It is the life of heaven. By virtue of that life, they are even now citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, not only because they have citizens' rights, but also because in principle they partake of the life of that city. Because of this principle of heavenly life wrought in them by the Spirit of their heavenly Lord, they even now "sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). Thus by the power of that indwelling Spirit, we do indeed seek the things which are above where Christ is sitting on the right hand of God (Col. 3:1). His heavenly lordship we seek to realize even in our earthly life. While we are still present in the body, and therefore absent from the Lord, yet longing to be present with him, we seek to be pleasing to him (2 Cor. 5:6–9). We hear his voice, we love his good commandments, we fight against sin within and without, and we daily put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24). We labor to enter into the rest (Heb. 4:11). While confessing that we are sojourners and strangers in the earth, we declare plainly that we seek a country, a heavenly country of our heavenly Lord, the city which hath foundations whose builder and artificer is God (Heb. 11:10, 13–14, 16).

The Sitting at God's Right Hand

By the sitting at the right hand of God, we understand the act of God whereby he clothed the exalted Christ according to his human nature with all power in heaven and on earth, with the highest majesty and glory. Of this sitting at the right hand the scriptures speak very frequently. It is mentioned already in the Old Testament. Especially the psalms look forward to this universal glory of the universal king. Psalm 2:7–9 speaks of the eternal decree concerning this exaltation:

> The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

In the light of Hebrews 2:6–10, we read in Psalm 8:5–6:

> For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.

In Psalm 24 the people of God sing of the king of glory, who is himself the Lord of Hosts, who ascends into the holy hill of Zion, and before whom the everlasting doors must be lifted up so that he may come in (Ps. 24:3, 7–10). In this general way many more of the psalms, such as the forty-fifth, the

seventy-second, the eighty-ninth, and others, speak of the glorification of the servant of Jehovah, the theocratic king, the Christ of God. Moreover, his sitting at the right hand of God is literally mentioned in Psalm 110:1: "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool."

Also the prophets of the Old Testament directed the hopeful eye of the people of God to this future exaltation and glory of the Messiah. Jehovah's servant

> shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonied at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men; So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider (Isa. 52:13–15).

Daniel

> saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed (Dan. 7:13–14).

Zechariah is enjoined to take silver and gold of them which were of the captivity, to make crowns, to set them upon the head of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to speak unto him, saying,

> Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both (Zech. 6:11–13).

In the New Testament the truth of the exaltation of the Lord at the right hand of God is frequently emphasized. The Lord himself gave the testimony before the high priest: "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64). On the mount of transfiguration, according to 2 Peter 1:16–18, the apostles saw his power and glory. On the day of Pentecost Peter proclaimed:

> Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:33–36).

Peter proclaimed further: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:30–31).

Also the epistles repeatedly emphasize the truth of Christ's exaltation at the right hand of God. We read in Romans 8:34: "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

1 Corinthians 15:25–27 describes Christ's exaltation:

> For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.

In Ephesians 1:19–21 the exaltation of Christ is presented as the revelation of God's great power:

> And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.

In Philippians 2:9–11 we read the well-known passage:

> Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth: And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The whole epistle to the Hebrews is an exposition of the theme that God

> hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they (Heb. 1:2–4).

God's Right Hand

We all understand that the expression "sitting on the right hand of God" is a figurative term. It is not to be understood in a local sense; nor is there a particular spot in heaven that is indicated by the phrase "at the right hand of God." The expression rather indicates a position of power and might, of authority and dominion, of majesty and glory, of universal and highest power, of authority and might and dominion. It denotes that Christ is Lord over all and is exalted over all created things in heaven and on earth and under the earth. It signifies that he is raised to the very pinnacle of all created things.

In all the wide creation there is no creature over whom Christ does not sway his scepter, whom he does not hold in his power, and whom he does not render subservient to his will and purpose. That includes the brute creation as well as the rational creature. Christ has received from God the Father authority to exercise this dominion over all the works of the Almighty; he has the right, the prerogative, to rule, to subject all creatures to his will, to use them for his purpose, and to judge and execute judgment over all. He has also received the actual power, wisdom and might, and knowledge and ability to realize this dominion. All the powers and principalities in heaven are subject unto him, and they willingly and gladly obey his command and wait upon his word. Also the powers of darkness, in spite of themselves, are subject unto him so that they must execute his will. Even Satan and all the demons of his domain tremble at his word, and all their intended and attempted opposition against him is vain. Christ is Lord, the only Lord of heaven and earth.

This power and dominion, however glorious and universal it may be, must nevertheless be distinguished from the divine power and rule of the triune God and from the rule and power which Christ as the Son of God in and according to his divine nature possesses and exercises in himself, for that power is divine and eternal. The authority denoted by the sitting at the right hand of God is evidently not original, but derivative. It is not eternal, but it was bestowed on Christ after his exaltation into heaven. It signifies an official position to which Christ is appointed and exalted.

The truth of this is evident from the expression itself. It cannot mean that the Son in his divine nature sits at the right hand of the Father, the first person of the holy Trinity. It can only mean that Christ sits at the right hand of the triune God. If we conceive of the Son in relation to the Father, through whom all things were made and by whom they are still sustained and governed, we may say that he *is* the right hand of the Father; but it can never be said of him that he sits at the right hand of the

majesty in heaven in his divine nature.

Besides, the sitting at the right hand of God denotes a power that is *given* to Christ. Hence this power cannot refer to any attribute of his divine nature, for in that nature the Son of God is almighty and in himself possesses all power and authority forever. As Son of God he could not receive power, and no power can possibly bestow it upon him. However, we dare not so draw these lines of distinction that we separate the human from the divine nature. It must be maintained that only the Son of God in human nature could be exalted to that glorious position that is figuratively expressed in the words, "sitteth at the right hand of God." We must maintain that it is the only begotten Son of God, but the Son in the human nature, who was so exalted.

Constantly, Christ receives this high power from God who sits on the throne. God did not abdicate his authority, prerogative, and function as the sole governor of the universe. We must not think that before the exaltation of Christ at the right hand of God, God himself by his almighty and omnipresent power upheld and governed heaven and earth and all that is in them; while now after Christ's exaltation, he resigns this power and function of providence in favor of Christ. On the contrary, God alone is the creator and sustainer of the universe, upholding all things by the word of his power. But he bestows on Christ, the Son in the human nature, the wisdom, authority, and power by virtue of which he is able to occupy the position at the pinnacle of that created, sustained, and divinely governed universe. Christ is Lord over all, but Lord as servant of Jehovah. He reigns, but as the representative of God. The visible representative of the invisible Sovereign of heaven and earth he sways a universal scepter, but only in the name of God and according to his will. His position is an office, the highest office in the whole universe: he is king-priest forever after the order of Melchisedec (Heb. 6:20; Ps. 110:4).

Rule of Power and Rule of Grace

This power that Christ exercises at the right hand of God is twofold: he rules over his church by the power of his grace, and he rules over all the world by his might.

Christ is king over his church. God set his king upon his holy hill of Zion (Ps. 2:6). In the new dispensation it is said of the church:

> But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect (Heb. 12:22–23).

That church of the firstborn is the same as Mount Zion, upon which God set his anointed as king forever.

The apostle writes about the glorious kingship of the exalted Christ, whom God set "at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet" (Eph. 1:20–22). Then the apostle denotes the relation and position of that mighty and exalted Christ with respect to the church: "And gave him to be the head over all things to the church" (v. 22).

Now it is true that Christ is also the head of the church in the organic sense: the church is his body, he lives in them, and they live through and out of him. But this does not alter the fact that Christ is also the head of the church in a juridical sense: he is her king. In this domain of the church, he rules by the power of his grace and therefore through his Spirit and word, and by that same Spirit and word he

dwells with his brethren. When this mighty Lord was exalted at the right hand of God, he received the promise of the Holy Ghost, and in this Spirit he returned to his church to dwell in her and to make her partaker of his wondrous grace.

At the right hand of God, he opens and no man shuts (Rev. 3:7); there he diffuses his marvelous gifts of grace, of life and faith, of love and mercy, of wisdom and knowledge, of hope and confidence, of hunger and thirst after righteousness, of the forgiveness of sins and sanctification, and of all the fullness of his spiritual blessings which he has obtained for her by his obedience even unto death. By the power of his grace he makes the members of his church his glad and willing servants, citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Thus we become willing to acknowledge him, and it becomes our only comfort in life and death that we are not our own but belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who delivered us from all the power of the devil and makes us sincerely willing henceforth to serve him. [10] Such is the rule of grace that Christ exercises over his church.

However, the lordship of Christ is not limited to this rule of grace in the church. He is Lord also over all things in the whole world. All things in creation are at his disposal to use for his own end. He rules over the brute creation as well as over all the affairs of men. He reigns over sun, moon, and stars, over floods and droughts, over fruitful and barren years, and over rain and sunshine. He governs and directs all matters of war and peace, of business and industry, and of social, national, and international relationships. He rules over the secret intents of the hearts of men and controls all their plans and counsels. He holds the keys of death and hell (Rev. 1:18).

The course of the four horsemen pictured in the book of Revelation is continually determined and controlled by Christ, for he was deemed worthy to open the book with its seven seals, which was in the hand of him who sits upon the throne (Rev. 5:5, 9). He rules over the devil and all his demons, over the wicked and all their devices. Christ is Lord! He rules not only within the domain of his church by his grace, but also in the realm of creation and over all the forces of darkness in this world by his power. *All* power is given unto him in heaven and on earth. Angels and principalities and powers are subject unto him (1 Pet. 3:22).

This power Christ exercises to defend and preserve his church and to lead her on to glory, for the church is still in the world where she has many enemies. The world is in darkness and is of the darkness, while the church is of the light, as Christ is of the light, and witnesses of the light. Hence the world hates the church. The enemies of the church are very powerful, and they are able to use many means to reach their purpose. Theirs are usually the wisdom and power, the riches and resources, and the might and dominion of the world. It is by way of exception that God's people are found in high places, occupy positions of authority and honor, and belong to the rich and mighty of men. The world is in power. It is in a position to employ various means and methods to seek the destruction of the church. The world strives to entangle believers in its false philosophy and to lead them astray from the way of truth and righteousness. It is in a position to offer believers honor and riches and the treasures and pleasures of Egypt. The world also has the power to make the place of the faithful very narrow; to take away their name and their job, their place and their very bread; to fill them with reproach; to persecute them; and to kill them all the day long.

But Christ defends and preserves his church by his power. The enemies cannot touch his church but by Christ's will and direction. This preservation is not such that the enemy has no power to make them suffer and to persecute them to the death. On the contrary, it is the will of our Lord that believers shall suffer with him, that they fill the measure of his suffering.

First, this defensive and preserving power of Christ so operates that the elect shall never be deceived and finally fall away. Second, the enemy can attack and realize his wicked devices of

destruction against the church only under the direction of Christ and to the extent that Christ permits him. Third, the affairs of men and of history are so directed that the world remains a house divided against itself and cannot unite all its forces against the church until the very end of time. In wars and contentions, in economic strife and dissension, in strikes, boycotts, revolutions, and so forth, the world is fighting itself and cannot direct all its attention to the church of Christ in the world. Fourth, even when the world and its power shall finally direct its attention exclusively to the people of God, Christ shall preserve them unto the end. He will preserve and defend his own in the days of antichrist. All the forces of the universe he shall marshal to fight for his own. With the heat of the sun, the destructive elements of creation—hail, fire, locusts, wild beasts, earthquakes, pestilence, and the like—Christ shall oppose and harass the enemy until he shall consume him by the sword that proceeds out of his mouth (2 Thess. 2:8). For Christ is Lord over all and forever.

The Return for Judgment

The last stage in the exaltation of Christ is his second coming. Christ will come at the end of this dispensation with the clouds of heaven to raise the dead, both the wicked and the righteous, to execute judgment over all, and to establish the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness shall dwell (2 Pet. 3:13) and in which the tabernacle of God shall be with men forever (Rev. 21:3). About these things we will speak in eschatology, the last locus of dogmatics.

Notes

1 The Name *Dogmatics*

[1]. Origen, *De Principiis,* in *ANF*, 4:239–384.

[2]. Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, trans. William Fletcher, in *ANF*, 7:9–258.

[3]. Augustine, *The Enchiridion, Addressed to Laurentius: Being a Treatise on Faith, Hope and Love*, trans. J. F. Shaw, in *NPNF*[1], 3:237–76. For a more detailed discussion of the various names used, see H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* [Reformed dogmatics], 4 vols. (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1976), 1:1–3. The introduction of this work is now available in English translation: *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt and trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003), 26–28.

[4]. Lucas Friedrick Reinhard, *Synopsis Theologiae Christianae Dogmaticae* [Synopsis of Christian dogmatic theology], emeratius edita (Nurnberg: n.p., 1661).

2 The Definition of Dogmatics

[1]. Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, trans. G. T. Thompson, part 1 of *Church Dogmatics*, 13 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1969), §1, 1:1.

[2]. Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. Hendrik de Vries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954), 221–27. This work is a partial translation of Kuyper's *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid* [Encyclopedia of sacred theology], 2nd rev. ed. (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1908).

[3]. Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. William Hendricksen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 13.

3 The Methods of Dogmatics

[1]. The Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council concerning the Catholic Faith and the Church of Christ 4, in *CC*, 2:270–71.

[2]. Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), 196. The quotation reads: "With all due respect to the genius shown in his work, I can *not* consider Schleiermacher a good teacher in the realm of theology because, so far as I can see, he is disastrously dim-sighted in regard to the fact that man as man is not only in *need* but beyond all hope of saving himself; that the whole of so-called religion, and not the least the Christian religion, *shares* in this need, and that one can *not* speak of God simply by speaking of man in a loud voice"—Ed.

[3]. *Vermittelungstheologie* (mediating theology) was a specific school of nineteenth-century German theology, inspired by Schleiermacher, that proceeded from the subjectivity of faith and attempted to synthesize Christianity and modern idealistic philosophy into a rationally and morally defensible religion—Ed.

4 The Systems of Dogmatics

[1]. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 24, in *CC*, 3:315.

[2]. Johannes Coccejus, *Opera* [Works], 7, *Summa Doctrinae de Foedere et Testamento Dei* [The whole doctrine of the covenant and testament of God](Amsterdam: n.p., 1701).

[3]. J. J. van Oosterzee, *Christian Dogmatics: A Textbook for Academical Instruction and Private Study*, trans. John Watson Watson and Maurice J. Evans, 2 vol. (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1874).

[4]. An arbitrary stop is made in the works of God outgoing in time, under which in reality the last five loci would be subdivisions.

5 The Principles of Dogmatics

[1]. Belgic Confession 14, in *CC,* 3:398–99.

[2]. Canons of Dordt 3–4.4, in *CC*, 3:588.

6 God: Incomprehensible, Yet Knowable

[1]. Clement of Alexandria, *The Miscellanies*, 2.2 in *ANF*, 2:348.

[2]. Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, trans. S. Thelwall, 17 in *ANF*, 3:31–32.

[3]. Tertullian, *The Five Books Against Marcion*, trans. Peter Holmes, 2.2, in *ANF*, 3:298.

[4]. Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, trans. William Fletcher, 1, "Preface" in *ANF*, 7:9.

[5]. Lactantius, *On the Anger of God*, trans. William Fletcher, 11, in *ANF*, 7:269.

[6]. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. J. G. Pilkington, 1.4.4, in *NPNF*[1], 1:46.

[7]. John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 1.4, in K. R. Hagenbach, *A Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, the Edinburgh translation of C. W. Buch, rev. from the 4th German edition, Henry B. Smith, 2 vols. (New York: Sheldon & Co., 1861–1862), §164, n. 1, 1:438.

[8]. John Scotus Erigena, *De Divisionis Naturae*, 2.28 in K. R. Hagenbach, *A Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, §164, n. 1, 1:438.

[9]. Anselm, *Monologue*, 15–17 in K. R. Hagenbach, *A Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, §164, n. 1, 1:439.

[10]. Albertus Magnus, *Sum of Theology*, 1.4.18.3, in K. R. Hagenbach, *A Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, §164, n. 1, 1:439.

[11]. Alexander of Hales, *Compendium of Catholic Theology*, 1.2.1.2, in K. R. Hagenbach, *A Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, §164, n. 1, 1:439.

[12]. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (London: James Clarke, 1953), 1.13.1, 1:109.

[13]. Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O.R. Johnston (London: James Clarke, 1957), 7.19, 314–15.

[14]. The Athanasian Creed 9, in *CC*, 2:66.

[15]. The Longer Catechism of the Orthodox, Catholic, Eastern Church Q&A 8, in *CC*, 2:446.

[16]. The Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council concerning the Catholic Faith and the Church of Christ 1, in *CC*, 2:239.

[17]. Second Helvetic Confession 3–4, in *CC*, 3:835–36.

[18]. French (Gallican) Confession of Faith 1, in *CC*, 3:359–60.

[19]. Belgic Confession 1, in *CC*, 3:383–84.

[20]. Scottish Confession of Faith 1, in *RCSC*, 166.

[21]. Westminster Confession of Faith 2.1, in *CC*, 3:606.

[22]. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (London: G. Bell, 1910), 21–44.

[23]. Herbert Spencer, *First Principles*, 4th ed. (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1896), 31.

[24]. Ibid., 32–37.

[25]. Ibid., 40–41.

[26]. Ibid., 43.

[27]. Ibid., 44.

[28]. In Samuel J. Andrews, *Christianity and Antichristianity in Their Final Conflict* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1981), 129.

[29]. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 42.

7 The Being of God

[1]. Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek* [Dictated dogmatics], 2nd ed., 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Sevensma, n.d.), 1.§3, 1:84.

[2]. Herbert Spencer, *Data of Ethics* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1894), §89, 233–37.

[3]. G. Watts Cunningham, *Problems of Philosophy: An Introductory Survey*, rev. ed. (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1935), 410.

[4]. Ibid., 410.

[5]. Ibid., 430–31.

[6]. Ibid., 431.

[7]. Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, 1.§5, 1:131.

[8]. Ibid., 133–34.

[9]. For a complete catalog of references see Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. William Hendricksen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 86–88.

[10]. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 121, in *CC*, 3:352.

[11]. Belgic Confession 1, in *CC*, 3:383.

8 The Nature of God

[1]. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:5, 50–63.

[2]. Petrus van Mastricht, *Beschouwende en Practikale Godgeleerdheit*, trans. Cornelius Vander Kemp, 4 vols. (Rotterdam: Hendrik van Pelt, 1749), 1:188–241. This is a Dutch translation of Mastricht's *Theoretico-practica Theologia* [Theoretical and practical divinity] (Utrecht: n.p., 1725).

[3]. Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, 4 vols. (Ligonier: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992–1995), 1:83–88.

[4]. Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, 1.§6, 1:159–267.

[5]. Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, 139–40.

[6]. Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, 1.§7, 1:286–87.

[7]. Foppe Martin Ten Hoor, *Compendium der Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* [Compendium of Reformed dogmatics] (Holland, MI: Ten Hoor, n.d.), 11–26.

[8]. Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, 83–334.

[9]. Two Hebrew verb tenses—Ed.

[10]. *Yodh* is a Hebrew letter, the first of the name *Jehovah*, and *shewa* is the initial Hebrew vowel of the name *Lord*—Ed.
[11]. Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, 1.§4, 1:235–44.
[12]. Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, 105–7.
[13]. Ibid., 127.
[14]. Ibid., 142.
[15]. *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, ed. and trans. S. P. Tregelles (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 49.
[16]. Ibid., 806.
[17]. K. R. Hagenbach, *A Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, §152, n. 5, 1:400.
[18]. *St. Anselm Basic Writings*, trans. Sidney Norton Deane, 2nd ed. (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1962), *Cur Deus Homo*, 1.12, 219.
[19]. Ibid., 2.5, 258.
[20]. Ibid., 2.18, 288.
[21]. Ibid.
[22]. Ibid., 289.
[23]. Abelard, *Christian Theology*, 5, in K. R. Hagenbach, *A Textbook of the History of Doctrine*s, §167, n. 3, 1:449–50.
[24]. Hugo of St. Victor, *Concerning the Sacraments*, 1.22, in K. R. Hagenbach, *A Textbook of the History of Doctrine*s, §167, n. 4, 1:450.
[25]. Peter Lombard, *Four Books of Sentences*, 1.42.E in K. R. Hagenbach, *A Textbook of the History of Doctrine*s, §167, n. 4, 1:450.
[26]. Abelard, *Christian Theology*, 5 in K. R. Hagenbach, *A Textbook of the History of Doctrine*s, §167, n. 6, 1:452.
[27]. Peter Lombard, *Four Books of Sentences*, 1.42.E in K. R. Hagenbach, *A Textbook of the History of Doctrine*s, §167, n. 4, 1:450.
[28]. Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, 244.
[29]. Abelard, *Christian Theology*, 5 in K. R. Hagenbach, *A Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, §167, n. 6, 1:452.
[30]. Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, 1.§7, 1:344–49.
[31]. A Hebrew verb tense—Ed.
[32]. Hebrew verb tenses—Ed.

9 The Holy Trinity

[1]. The Greek has *homoousion* (of the same substance or essence)—Ed.
[2]. Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed, in *CC*, 2:58–59.
[3]. Nicene Creed, in *CC*, 2.§8, 1:29.
[4]. Constantinopolitan Creed, in *CC*, 2.§8, 1:29.
[5]. Athanasian Creed, in *CC*, 2:66–68.
[6]. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.13.2, 1:110–11.
[7]. Ibid., 113.
[8]. Ibid., 1.13.6, 114–15.
[9]. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 24–25, in *CC*, 3:315.
[10]. Form for the Administration of Baptism in *The Psalter with Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and added Chorale Section*. Reprinted and revised edition of the 1912 United Presbyterian *Psalter* (PRC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 86.
[11]. *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, n.d.), 119.
[12]. Ibid., 119–20.
[13]. Ibid., 120.
[14]. Belgic Confession 8, in *CC*, 3:389–90.
[15]. Belgic Confession 1, in *CC*, 3:383.
[16]. Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed, in *CC*, 2:59.

10 God's Eternal Counsel

[1]. Belgic Confession 16, in *CC*, 3:401.
[2]. Canons of Dordt 1.10, in *CC*, 3:583.
[3]. Canons of Dordt 1.15, in *CC*, 3:584.

11 God's Work of Creation

[1]. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), 1.10.§1, 1:553.

12 The Creation Week

[1]. Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, §5, 2:85.

[2]. Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, 33, in *NPNF*[1], 5:485. Hoeksema makes reference to Augustine, who distinguished the various states of man as follows: Adam in the state of innocence was "able not to sin" (*posse non peccare*); fallen man is "not able not to sin" (*non posse non peccare*); and the saints in glory are "not able to sin" (*non posse peccare*)—Ed.

13 The Creation of Man

[1]. Heidelberg Catechism A 6, in *CC*, 3:309.

14 Created after the Image of God

[1]. In the references to the image of God in Augustine's writings, it appears that he used the terms *image* and *likeness* interchangeably and did not always make a clear distinction between them (cf., for example, *On the Trinity*, 7.6.12, in *NPNF*[1], 3:113–14) —Ed.

[2]. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (London: James Clarke, 1953), 1.15.4, 1:164.

[3]. Ibid.

[4]. Ibid., 165.

[5]. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 6, in *CC*, 3:309.

[6]. Belgic Confession 14, in *CC*, 3:398.

[7]. Canons of Dordt 3–4.1, in *CC*, 3:587.

[8]. Canons of Dordt 3–4, errors 2–3, in *Psalter,* 70

[9]. Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, 33, in *NPNF*[1], 5:485.

15 The Covenant with Adam

[1]. Irish Articles of Religion 21, in *CC*, 3:530.

[2]. Westminster Confession of Faith 7.2, in *CC*, 3:616–17.

[3]. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:6, 117.

[4]. Ibid., 6 §1, 117.

[5]. Ibid., 6 §2, 118.

[6]. Ibid.

[7]. Ibid., 6 §3, 119–20.

[8]. Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 349.

[9]. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 7, in *CC*, 3:309–10.

[10]. Belgic Confession 15, in *CC*, 3:400.

[11]. Canons of Dordt 3–4.1–2, in *CC*, 3:587– 88.

16 The Providence of God

[1]. Heidelberg Catechism A 1, in *CC*, 3:308.

[2]. Belgic Confession 13, in *CC*, 3:396–98.

[3]. Heidelberg Catechism A 27, in *CC*, 3:316.

[4]. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 28, in *CC*, 3:316.

[5]. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1.12.§1, 1:618.

[6]. J. J. Van Oosterzee, *Christian Dogmatics: A Textbook for Academical Instruction and Private Study*, trans. John Watson Watson and Maurice J. Evans, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1874), 32.6, 1:127.

[7]. Geerhardus Vos, *Systematische Theologie: Compendium* [Compendium of systematic theology] (Grand Rapids, MI: n.p., 1909), 54 (author's translation).

[8]. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 176.

[9]. H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* [Reformed dogmatics], 4 vols. (Kampen: J. H. Bos, 1906), 1:349–54; cf. *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt and trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 336–39.

[10]. Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, §3, 3:89–91.

[11]. Cf. Athanasius, *The Incarnation of the Word*, 18.6, in *NPNF*[2], 4:46.

17 Sin and Its Origin

[1]. A Hebrew verb tense—Ed.
[2]. The Greek letter *alpha* at the beginning of a word, meaning "without"—Ed.
[3]. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2.8 §2, 2:132–37; H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 3:121–23.
[4]. Gulielmus Bucanus, *Disputatio XVI De Peccato Actuali* [Disputation 16 concerning original sin, thesis 8], in Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, §4, 3:28–29 (author's translation).
[5]. A figure of speech in which a single but complex idea is expressed by means of two words connected with a conjunction—Ed.

18 Death as the Punishment of Sin

[1]. Abraham Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie* [Common grace] (Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser, 1902), 1:208–9.
[2]. Ibid., 209. In the original edition of *Reformed Dogmatics*, Herman Hoeksema, for unknown reasons, translated Kuyper's term *Pruisisch blauw* (Prussian blue) as "Paris green." Prussian blue is a cyanide compound; Paris green is an arsenic compound. Both are used in paints and dyes, and both are highly toxic. Whichever rendering is accepted, the point is the same: These substances are very poisonous—Ed.
[3]. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 8, in *CC*, 3:310.
[4]. Canons of Dordt 3–4.1, 3, in *CC*, 3:587–88.
[5]. Canons of Dordt 3–4.4, in *CC*, 3:588.
[6]. Belgic Confession 14, in *CC*, 3:398–99.
[7]. French Confession of Faith 9, in *CC*, 3:365.
[8]. Canons of Dordt 3–4.2, in *CC*, 3:588.
[9]. Belgic Confession 15, in *CC*, 3:400.
[10]. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 7, in *CC*, 3:309–10.

19 The Covenant

[1]. Petrus van Mastricht, *Beschouwende en Praktikale Godgeleerdheit*, 2:373 (author's translation).
[2]. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George M. Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, 3 vols. (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992–1997), 12.2.12, 2:177.
[3]. Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, 4 vols. (Ligonier: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992–1995), 1:252.
[4]. Ibid., 1:253.
[5]. Ibid., 1:254.
[6]. Ibid., 1:255.
[7]. Ibid., 1:252.
[8]. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 3.2.§4, 2:359–60.
[9]. Geerhardus Vos, *Systematische Theologie: Compendium* [Compendium of systematic theology] (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 76.
[10]. Ibid., 76–77.
[11]. Ibid., 77.
[12]. Ibid., 78.
[13]. H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek,* 3:192–94.
[14]. Ibid., 3:194–95.
[15]. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 265ff.
[16]. Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, §5, 3:81 (author's translation).
[17]. Ibid., 3:82.
[18]. Ibid., 3:82.
[19]. Ibid., 3:84–85.
[20]. Ibid., 3:86 (author's translation).
[21]. Ibid., 3:80–81 (author's translation).
[22]. H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 3:194 (author's translation).
[23]. Abraham Kuyper, *Uit Het Woord* [From the word], 6 vols. (Höveker & Wormser, Amsterdam, n.d.), 5:13 (author's translation).
[24]. Ibid., 5:14–15.
[25]. "Yea, the secret of Jehovah is with those who fear his Name; With his friends in tender mercy he his covenant will maintain." *Psalter,* No. 415:7.

20 The Person of the Mediator

[1]. A Hebrew verb tense.
[2]. Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, 2.2, 3:56–60.
[3]. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 31, in *CC*, 3:315–16.
[4]. Symbol of Chalcedon, in *CC*, 2:62–63.
[5]. Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed, in *CC*, 2:58–59.
[6]. Athanasian Creed 29–37, in *CC*, 2:68–69.
[7]. Augsburg Confession 3, in *CC*, 3:9.
[8]. Formula of Concord 8, Affirmative 1, in *CC*, 3:148.
[9]. Second Helvetic Confession 11, in *CC*, 3;850–51.
[10]. French Confession of Faith 15, in *CC*, 3:368.
[11]. Belgic Confession 18–19, in *CC*, 3:402–5.
[12]. Thirty-nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England 2, in *CC*, 3:488.
[13]. Westminster Confession of Faith 8.2, in *CC*, 3:619–20.
[14]. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 12–19, in *CC*, 3:311–13.
[15]. Belgic Confession 18, in *CC*, 3:402–3.
[16]. The theory that each soul is divinely created at birth—Ed.
[17]. Belgic Confession 18, in *CC*, 3:403.
[18]. Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, 3.§7, 33 (author's translation).
[19]. Ibid., 3.§6–7 (author's translation). Cf. also Abraham Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie,* 2:138–39.
[20]. The first edition of *Reformed Dogmatics* included here the following: "This is indeed an important question. In order to present the problem involved clearly to our minds, I want to present the following conceivable propositions:
(1) The person of the Son assumed the an-hypostatical human nature.
(2) The person of the Son assumed the an-hypostatical human nature.
(3) The person of the Son assumed together with the human nature also a human person.
(4) The two natures of Christ subsist in unity of the person.
(5) The two natures of Christ subsist in unity of the person.
(6) The unity of the person of the mediator subsists in the two natures.
(7) The unity of the person of the mediator subsists in the two natures.
(8) The unity of the person of the mediator subsists out of (ἐκ) the two natures.
(9) The unity of the person of the mediator subsists out of (ἐκ) the two natures.
(10) The human nature of the mediator subsists an-hypostatically.
(11) The human nature of the mediator subsists an-hypostatically.
(12) The human nature of the mediator subsists personally in the one person.
(13) The human nature of the mediator subsists hypostatically.
(14) The human nature of the mediator subsists en-hypostatically.
(15) The human nature of the mediator subsists en-hypostatically."
Editor's note: These propositions were prepared in relation to a controversy in the Netherlands in the late 1930s in which Dr. Valentine Hepp accused Dr. H. Th. Vollenhoven of semi-Nestorianism in connection with some statements concerning the relationship between Christ's two natures and his person. (Cf. G. C. Berkhouwer, *The Person of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 313–21.) The propositions were drawn up to show that it is not so easy as may first appear to define the exact relationship between the person and natures of Christ. The two key words are *an-hypostatically* and *en-Hypostatically*. The term *an-hypostatically* means that the human nature of Jesus *does not have* a human person of its own, but it *becomes personal* to the extent that the second person of the Trinity united the human nature of Jesus to himself. The term *en-Hypostatically* means that the human nature of Jesus, his manhood, *is personal in the person of the eternal Son of God*. God became flesh. The human nature was assumed by and united to the person of the eternal Son of God.
[21]. Symbol of Chalcedon in *CC*, 2:62–63.

21 The Offices of the Mediator

[1]. A Hebrew verb tense similar to the passive form of English verbs—Ed.
[2]. Canons of Dordt 3–4.4, in *CC*, 3:588.
[3]. Belgic Confession 14, in *CC*, 3:398–400.
[4]. Belgic Confession 18, in *CC*, 3:402–3.
[5]. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 31, in *CC*, 3:317–18.
[6]. Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek,* 5.§6, 3:89–99; Abraham Kuyper, *De Gemeeme Gratie*, 1:327–34.
[7]. Hugo Grotius, *A Defence of the Catholic Faith concerning the Satisfaction of Christ against Faustus Socinus*, trans. Frank Hugh Foster (Andover: Warren. F. Draper, 1889).
[8]. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3.9.§4, 2:579.

[9]. Canons of Dordt 2, errors 2–4, in *Psalter*, 64–65.
[10]. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3.9.§4, 2:576.
[11]. A Hebrew verb tense—Ed.

22 The States of the Mediator

[1]. Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek,* 4.§1, §2, 3:59–78.
[2]. Belgic Confession 19, in *CC*, 3:404–5.
[3]. Philip Schaff, *CC*, 2:46.
[4]. Leslie Rumble, *Another Thousand Radio Replies Given from the Catholic Broadcasting Station 2 SM Sydney, Australia: 1364 Questions and Answers on Catholicism and Protestantism*, ed. in collaboration with Charles Mortimer Carty, 3 vols. (St. Paul: Radio Replies Press, 1938–1942), 3:219.
[5]. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (London: James Clarke, 1953), 2.16.8, 1:441–42.
[6]. The Formula of Concord 8, Affirmative 5, in *CC*, 3:149–50.
[7]. The Formula of Concord 8, Affirmative 11, in *CC*, 3:152.
[8]. The Formula of Concord 8, Affirmative 12, in *CC*, 3:153.
[9]. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 49, in *CC*, 3:323.
[10]. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 1, in *CC*, 3:307–8.