

COMMON GRACE AND CHRISTIAN ACTION IN ABRAHAM KUYPER*

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Introduction

Abraham Kuyper's standard work on common grace, entitled *De Gemeene Gratie*, which first appeared in a series of weekly articles, could not fail to arrest the attention of his followers and contemporaries. In fact it captivated them, touching them in the depths of their minds and hearts. For this work, compelling in its broad sweep and irresistible in its central thrust, delivered them from an "Anabaptist isolationism"¹ by providing them with their eagerly awaited religious justification of Christian involvement, not only individually but also organizationally, "in all areas of life"; of Christian involvement not only in the affairs of the church but also "in state and society, in art and scholarship." It both justified such involvement and encouraged it. And even though it is true that the Anti-Revolutionary Party had been in existence for more than ten years already, henceforward it would certainly also be from this three-volume work that the independent party formation by Dutch Calvinists in the sphere of politics would draw its inspiration and vision. If the Anti-Revolutionary Party does not stand or fall with the doctrine of common grace, its history cannot be written without a proper understanding of the great significance this doctrine has had — and still has — for its adherents.

* "*Gemene gratie en Pro Rege* bij Dr Abraham Kuyper," *Anti-Revolutionaire Staatkunde* 24 (1954), 1-19, 49-73. Cf. A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, Vols. I-III (Leiden, 1902-05), Vol. IV (Leiden, 1905); hereafter cited as G.G., according to the 3rd unaltered (pagination moved up 4) impression (3 vols.; Kampen, 1931-32); idem. *Pro Rege*, of het Koningschap van Christus ("3 vols.; Kampen, 1911-12). The translation is by Harry Van Dyke, who wishes to record his indebtedness to Donald Morton for numerous small and invaluable improvements to the final draft.]

Kuyper, of course, was not the first to write about common grace and to demand attention for it. He had been preceded in this effort by Herman Bavinck, who in 1894 delivered a rectorial address at the Theological School in Kampen under the title *De Algemeene Genade*. But Kampen as little as Amsterdam could boast that here for the first time in the history of the Christian church ‘common grace’ was thought about and discussed. Neither Bavinck nor Kuyper considered himself original in this regard. Quite rightly they saw themselves also on this point as pupils of John Calvin, as “copyists” (to use Kuyper’s own term). In his doctoral dissertation, *Calvin on Common Grace*, Herman Kuyper has presented a well-documented case for the view that Calvin’s theology at least implies the doctrine of common grace and that anyone who rejects common grace thereby attacks an essential point in the Christian thought not only of Kuyper and Bavinck but also of Calvin.² On this issue no wedge can be driven between Amsterdam and Kampen and Geneva.

Common Grace and ‘Pro Rege’

Any attempt, meanwhile, to isolate what Calvin, Bavinck and Kuyper taught concerning common grace – the one more systematically than the other – from what they taught concerning God’s saving grace by which He in Christ elects, reconciles and calls sinners unto eternal life would definitely militate against their deepest beliefs. To be sure, Kuyper – from this point on I shall confine myself to his views – repeatedly taught that God’s common grace has an independent purpose.³ By this he meant to say that common grace has a purpose of its own, next to and even over against God’s special, saving grace.⁴ In other words, common grace has a purpose which as such cannot be placed in subservience to God’s reconciling, redeeming and electing work in His covenant of grace. In this connection, however, three points should not be overlooked.

First, the only reason why Kuyper was constrained as if by inner necessity to posit this independent purpose of common grace was that he himself had begun by defining too narrowly the purpose of particular grace and the scope of its operation. This narrow definition could have driven him into Gnostic and Anabaptistic waters if he had not also posited the pole of common grace next to the pole of particular grace. The independent goal ascribed to common grace is only “relatively” independent. Kuyper sought to keep his conception

in balance by positing the no less “independent” purpose of particular grace, namely: the election unto eternal salvation. It would be in conflict with the deepest religious motives, convictions and inner experiences of Kuyper and his brethren, indeed with this whole type of man, to assume even for a moment that he would want to base his position, or even his activity in the world, on this one pole of common grace with its independent purpose. Ever since Kuyper’s conversion experience, the humanist in him could only live on as the tempter to be resisted, as the seducer to be cast out with prayer. A synthesis of Christianity and humanism is the last thing that Kuyper could have intended with his doctrine of common grace. I concur with A.A. van Ruler that Kuyper neither said nor implied anything of the sort.⁵ If this doctrine could be used to justify some sort of accommodation to humanism in “the broad domain of common grace” — which it can’t — Kuyper would undoubtedly have counted the whole thing but dung for the excellency of the (saving) knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. When later he came to write his *Pro Rege*, therefore, the intention was certainly not to offer a fundamental correction of his doctrine of common grace, least of all to quietly vitiate or retract it. To Kuyper’s mind, the one did not clash with the other. The doctrine of common grace is anti-Anabaptist, but it cannot possibly be grasped if it is also taken to be anti-soteriological, that is, as diluting the Christian confession of the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, this doctrine cannot be grasped even if “common grace” is interpreted merely as a kind of Libertine-humanist addition to life, as a domain of life where the Christian for once need not live out of God’s grace in Christ but can go his own “natural” way.

That brings me to my second point. What Kuyper intended with his doctrine of common grace was not at all to pave the way for some sort of “neutral” appreciation of the cultural activity and achievements of the unbelievers. Much rather he wanted to blaze a trail for God’s believing people to engage in their own distinctive way in the “domain of common grace”—an activity having its origin in and deriving its impulse from particular grace. Kuyper showed a way in which to be active *Pro Rege* in the domain of common grace. Van Ruler, who precisely for this reason rejects Kuyper’s doctrine, shows thereby that he has at least understood Kuyper correctly.⁶

But there is a third point that should be considered here. S.J. Ridderbos for one has pointed to contradictions in Kuyper’s doctrine of common grace.⁷ In that he is right. But for just that reason his conclusion on the last page of his book is only a half-truth. He writes there: “If contemporary Calvinism wishes to avoid becoming stagnant on

account of one-sidedness, it should not push to the foreground certain emphases in Kuyper's heritage at the expense of others. One is only true to Kuyper if one refuses to replace the complexity of his thought with an oversimplification that ultimately impoverishes it."⁸ This conclusion is itself an oversimplification and an impoverishment – of Ridderbos' own method of dealing with Kuyper. For we see Ridderbos himself trying to resolve some of the contradictions in Kuyper's doctrine; and we see his effort resulting, too, in the weeding out of a good many needless complexities. In this effort, however, I think he is being true to Kuyper. For Kuyper certainly was not out to produce contradictions; rather, he rejected internal contradiction as error. Thus, one cannot be charged with oversimplifying matters if he is merely resolving contradictions. The resolution of contradictions does not immediately entail the oversimplification and impoverishment of Kuyper's thought; and Ridderbos' warning must therefore be taken cautiously lest, as a half-truth, it preclude a proper understanding of the import and application of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace.

Take the following inner contradiction in Kuyper's argument. Kuyper explicitly both combats the idea of an independent purpose of common grace and teaches it approvingly. He combats the idea when he asserts that also with respect to the divine order for the present dispensation it must be said that "the order of particular grace obtains":

To be sure, there is nothing wrong with saying that all things occur for the sake of Christ, that therefore the Body of Christ constitutes the dominant element in history, and that this validates the confession that the Church of Christ is the pivot around which in fact the life of mankind turns. He who ignores or denies this can never discover unity in the course of history. For such a person, century follows upon century, and therein growth upon recession, and again progress upon regression, but the stream of life goes nowhere, it is without purpose [!]. This life lacks a center; it has no axis. If this condition has to continue world without end, life will end up being boredom without end; and if it has to break off at some point because the elements of fire or water become too powerful for our earth, then such a break will be totally arbitrary and no purpose will have been served [!]. Nothing will have been gained! The Reformed confession, which maintains that all things, also in this world, aim at the Christ, that his Body is the chief element and that in this sense one can say that the Church of Christ constitutes the center of world history – this confession

offers a principle for a philosophy of history that towers high above the common view of history. We will think twice, therefore, before detracting from this confession in any way whatsoever. Not common grace but the order of particular grace obtains? ⁹

Here the doctrine of the independent purpose of common grace is denied in so many words, and history, which in the present dispensation takes place “in the domain of common grace,” is conceived of Christocentrically and soteriologically. Here *Pro Rege* sounds the dominant note, or to put it more correctly: here Christ is confessed also as the “King of common grace” and common grace is denied a purpose of its own independent of particular grace.

But this is not the whole of it. Not only in the center of history but also at its end does Kuyper distinguish two lines. For he explains, not just once but over and over again, that common grace is limited to the present dispensation and realizes its purpose in our present “life in time.”¹⁰ This in fact is one of the marks which in Kuyper’s view distinguishes common grace from particular grace. Yet at the same time he teaches that the fruits of common grace shall be brought into the Kingdom of glory in the hereafter.¹¹ The reason he gives for this view is that the actual existence of the visible things – the domain of common grace – has as purpose (!) “to become the possession of particular grace.... There will come a time when the present course of things will reach a turning point and then the re-creative power of particular grace will appropriate to itself also the whole domain of common grace [Hence] the contrast between the domain of particular grace and that of common grace is only temporary.”¹²

Once more it turns out that particular grace triumphs as it were over common grace. This is far removed from the notion that either at present or in the end common grace will annex particular grace to itself. (Kuyper is no Christian humanist!) It is equally far removed from the notion that common grace has an independent goal and purpose in this life and in the present dispensation. On the contrary, common grace is pictured as flowing into the hereafter, and in such a way that Christ will then finally be “King of common grace.” Thus the “independent” purpose of common grace turns out to be quite relative, in truth only appears to be independent. Even its temporary character is but relative and is posited by Kuyper with the one hand only to be retracted with the other.

From all this it is unmistakably clear that particular grace remained closest to Kuyper's heart, together with the Kingship of Christ as the Mediator of Redemption. This is true even when he holds to a relatively independent purpose for common grace and carves out a relatively autonomous domain for common grace. Anyone who would use Kuyper's doctrine of common grace to justify a view of culture and an involvement in culture existing as it were alongside faith in God's particular grace, would be misusing it. The only thing Kuyper's doctrine of common grace can justify is the acceptance of a dialectic, polar relationship between the domain of common grace and the domain of particular grace. But even in that case the independence of common grace is never without its opposite pole: common grace cannot be accepted without at the same time accepting the antithesis and the call to Christian action, action *Pro Rege*, for Christ the King, action born of the grace of regeneration. Moreover, even as Kuyper maintains this polarity, at heart he remains the pious mystic and the longing pilgrim. This is the heart of Kuyper, this is where it all starts, and this is what he always comes back to. The fact and the fruits of particular grace, as he defined it – these are what finally weighs the most with Kuyper.

Besides, all this refers only to the one Kuyper, a Kuyper reduced to a minimum. The same Kuyper in the same breath speaks of common grace as the grace that comes with Christ as the Mediator of Redemption not only at the end of history, for the life hereafter, but also here and now, in the very midst of human history.¹³ To appeal to this Kuyper is as justified as to appeal to the reduced Kuyper. Meanwhile, to press both "Kuypers" to one's bosom is to embrace internal contradiction. This can be acceptable only to followers who are in truth but "followers," men unwilling to disentangle and remove the inconsistency. Such recalcitrance is unworthy of true followers of Kuyper. They who wish to follow Kuyper will have to make a choice here.

Common Grace Makes Christian Action Possible

It has been correctly pointed out by Van Ruler that the whole import of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace, both as to its objective content and as to its author's subjective intention, is to stimulate, as well as to justify, truly Christian action by God's people from out of the particular grace of regeneration by the light of Holy Scripture. Common grace supplies the believer with the material for fulfilling his calling to be culturally formative and to fight the battle of the Lord in the world of culture.

The sphere of common grace is the sphere of action for people who are blessed with particular grace and now seek to administer the blessings of particular grace.¹⁴ It is the area where Christian scholarship, Christian politics, Christian social action and individual Christian activity are to be developed. Common grace provides the platform, as it were, on which all these cultural tasks are to be acted out. Common grace is the presupposition of the possibility of Christian cultural activity. Common grace makes this activity born of particular grace possible. Common grace makes the antithesis, makes *Pro Rege* action possible.

Once more it should be stated at the outset that this doctrine in no wise suggests or implies the existence of anything like an area of life where the Christian can operate autonomously, i.e., independently of God's Word and detached from the grace of regeneration. Wherever "common grace" functions as a blank cheque for a non-Christian walk of life and a non-Christian mind, there the doctrine is brutally violated. With his doctrine of common grace Kuyper aimed precisely at clearing the way for the privilege and obligation of cultural involvement rooted in the communion with Christ, the new Head of redeemed mankind; involvement rooted in the mystic Body of Christ; in the grace of God that regenerates man, redirecting and renewing his "innermost pivot," his "center," his "core."¹⁵ Common grace is here for the sake of Christian action; it justifies and makes possible the antithesis.

To be sure, Kuyper stressed this much more in his later studies entitled *Pro Rege*. But in doing that he in no wise departed from the plan, the tenor and the contents of his work *De Gemeene Gratie*. To suggest that *Pro Rege* shows traces of self-correction as regards *De Gemeene Gratie* is to suggest too much. Kuyper could do without correction, and so could *De Gemeene Gratie*.

Meanwhile we have hit upon one of the most important concepts in this whole doctrine of common grace as expounded by Kuyper. I am referring to the idea of common grace as "the ground for the possibility of" particular grace, and then especially of the activity born of particular grace. Curiously, a similar idea of "possibility" crops up today in the *Kirchliche Dogmatik* of Karl Barth. For Barth, "nature" is the possibility of "grace." Of course I am aware that Barth also has a second way of talking about "possibility;" namely, that God's grace carries its own possibility with it, in fact is its own possibility, makes itself possible, creates along with itself its own "point of connection." Barth's position, consequently, is summed up this way: "nature" or creation is the "external possibility" of grace, whereas grace is its own internal possibility.¹⁶

I point out this parallel in Barth in order, among other things, to demonstrate that the idea of an “external possibility” has nothing to do with Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism or Arminianism in one’s doctrine of the *ordo salutis*. Kuyper, too, very consciously has particular grace rest in itself: he insists that when we are born again and come to believe, this is due solely to the work of the Holy Spirit. Kuyper’s doctrine of the *gratia communis*, therefore, has only the name in common with the Arminian doctrine of the *gratia communis*.¹⁷ With the Arminians, “common grace” plays its own decisive and autonomous role; it is an “internal” ground for the possibility of regeneration and conversion of the man who is dead in trespasses and sin. Now this is the very last thing that Kuyper had in mind. His doctrine of election and of the covenant of grace, which he worked out extensively before he had set down on paper so much as one letter about common grace, is free from all Arminian taints. Klaas Schilder is therefore fighting windmills when he uses the term and the concept of Arminianism’s *gratia communis* against Kuyper and proceeds on that account to label the term “common grace” unacceptable;¹⁸ he also ignores the fact that the term and the idea of *gratia communis* occur also in Calvin—in a perfectly acceptable sense.

In addition it should be noted that Kuyper, though holding common grace to be indeed the “external” possibility of particular grace, in most cases – with one exception¹⁹ – explicitly calls the Spirit’s working of God’s regenerating grace “immediate,”²⁰ hence independent of all “preparatory grace” contained in common grace.²¹ True, Kuyper does teach that to be born again is “possible” only for those who are born, and that it is only owing to God’s common grace that after the Fall “to be born” is “possible” at all.²² But surely this line of argument is not going to tempt anyone to think that Kuyper thereby meant to somehow maim or weaken the confession that God’s grace is particular or to detract from the sovereignty of God’s free grace?

But enough has been adduced to prove my thesis: Kuyper’s doctrine of common grace is there for the sake of his doctrine of particular grace; and first and foremost for the sake of his doctrine that particular grace gives birth to Christian action which is as broad as life and which is not only not impossible and not forbidden, but possible and even mandatory. With this doctrine he summoned God’s people, “the church organism,” to distinctive Christian activity, to activity *Pro Rege*, to “antithetical” activity especially, not in the last place in the form of separate organizations.

[1] Particular Grace and Common Grace

Meanwhile, whether Kuyper's doctrine of particular grace allows of Christian action and whether the companion doctrine of common grace does indeed encourage Christian action, remains to be seen. Can common grace indeed render such Christian action possible; can particular grace indeed come to express itself in action along this route?

What is Particular Grace?

What is God's special grace – or, as Kuyper was wont to call it, God's particular grace? It is God's merciful disposition towards sinners with whom He has reconciled Himself for the sake of Christ's meritorious work on the cross and to whom He now freely grants, through His Holy Spirit, out of pure, unmerited, forfeited and gratuitous favor, according to His eternal plan of salvation, Christ and all His benefits.²³ God's particular grace issues in the work of Christ as our Mediator of Redemption, who took upon Himself our flesh and blood, our human nature, and who gave Himself for us as a remission of all our sins, in the "Covenant of Grace and Reconciliation."²⁴ It issues no less in the work of the Spirit of Christ, who makes us Christ's possession, who dwells in us and works in us, and who brings about in our hearts, in the core and center of our being, that regeneration without which no one can see the Kingdom of God.²⁵ In short, just read the Canons of Dordt and you will know what Kuyper understood by particular grace.

Particular grace issues in the "Body of Christ," the "corpus Christi mysticum" of Ephesians 1:26 Van Ruler is quite wrong in seeing in Kuyper an overemphasis of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit at the expense of Christocracy.²⁷ For Kuyper is quite explicit in stating that regeneration – the work of the Holy Spirit – means that a person is implanted in the "Body of Christ," and that thereby he "personally belongs to Christ."²⁸ As II Corinthians 3:17 says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit." But Van Ruler has seen quite correctly that the "subjective grace"²⁹ of God, according to Kuyper—but no less according to the Canons of Dordt and no less according to Calvin—begins with regeneration.³⁰ Consequently, when Kuyper attacks the problem of truly Christian action in the world, there is no question in his mind that this action must arise from the "new man," who is "born again," and that this is in full harmony not only

with the rule of Christ but also with the rule of the Spirit. If now Van Ruler wants to call this “spiritualistic,”³¹ I will not demur; it is in very truth: acknowledging the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, “who dwells and works in our hearts”; this is Biblical; this echoes John 3. But if Van Ruler wants to posit over against this: “time has come to a standstill, as it were, in eternity,”³² then I think he is distorting the Biblical revelation about regeneration and particular grace and the work of the Holy Spirit. For it is certainly in conflict with the Biblical revelation to teach that eternity robs our life-in-time of any significance of its own.

This is where Kuyper takes his point of departure: in regeneration. And he calls this regeneration “spiritual” in nature.³³ One may object to this term and wish to replace it with a better one – provided one does not object to the matter so designated and seek to remove it, and provided one would not have us believe that the salvation in Christ touches our bodies as closely (or, as remotely) as our souls.³⁴ The whole Bible bears out the meaning of ‘heart’ as the controlling center of man. And this heart is something other than our functioning and something other than our feelings; it is to be distinguished from the issues of life, including the psychical issues of life. Kuyper stands on the basis of the Bible when he has particular grace take its start with the “spiritual” renewal and reversal of the “pivot” of our selfhood and therein with the re-creation of ourselves into “new men.” In this, he also stands on the basis of the Reformed creeds.

This point of departure is for Kuyper also the connecting point, the point of invasion and inception, for the re-creation – or for the Kingdom of Heaven.³⁵ The Kingdom of Heaven is the kingdom of particular grace, in which all participate who are “in Christ,” who belong to Him, who are engrafted into Him, and who thus belong to the (invisible) Church of Christ, His “mystic” Body.^{35a}

It deserves mention at this point that in Kuyper’s theology the thesis that grace is particular does not mean that it is individualistic, i.e., of benefit only to the individual person. This is the conclusion Van Ruler mistakenly draws.³⁶ When Kuyper calls this grace of God “particular,” he does so because he does not consider it bound to any societal structure belonging to this temporal life, be it the family, the church institution, the state, or any social group. While holding this view, however, Kuyper has not been swept into the dangerous waters of individualism, of particularism. He is fully conscious of the Body of Christ into which we are in-grafted through regeneration, and this Body is something else than the sum total of individuals, even of born-again

individuals. It is in fact for Kuyper, as it was for Bavinck and Calvin, no less than the re-born, re-created human race, the New Humanity that finds its unity no longer in Adam but “in Christ.”³⁷ The renewed human race has a “spiritual” unity, a “mystical” unity, the unity of “children” of God who have been adopted as sons “in Christ” by the “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Born-again Christians are sons of one Father; they are brothers and sisters in Christ; they belong to the same “household of faith”; they believe that the Son of God leads the “Church of God” and that they “are, and forever shall remain, living members thereof.”^{37*}

For Kuyper, this Scriptural doctrine of the Church chosen unto everlasting life leads to the “mysticism”³⁸ of the communion with God, of God’s “nearness,” of God’s being near-unto-us and our being near-unto-God, of the intimacy of “being in Christ.” This he emphasizes through- out. In his view, this precedes any and all Christian action. In fact, this is the indispensable prerequisite for Christian action.

But having emphasized this, Kuyper goes on to explain, in the second place, that this particular grace is not intended to come fully into its own in this life, but rather in the life to come. Particular grace is directed toward the hereafter.³⁹ In its deepest essence particular grace operates apart from this temporal life.⁴⁰ Viewed by itself, it can, if need be, operate entirely apart from this earthly life.⁴¹ It saves only unto eternal life, and accordingly is bestowed only on the elect.⁴² It is not “common” but “particular.” It is founded on the election unto salvation and finds its destination in the eternal blessedness of the afterlife.

From this it follows that particular grace is not really directed toward activity in the sphere of our temporal life, in the world of visible things. This explains the tremendous tension so often inserted by Kuyper in the very union he seeks to establish. For how can activity in the domain of the temporal and the visible arise out of particular grace? How can such activity be truly Christian activity? Will this activity in the world, this being busy with things secular and profane, not rather be worldly, secular, profane? It will take us – this is certain, on Kuyper’s own view – beyond the sphere of the invisible and the “spiritual,” beyond the zone of regeneration in the central core of our being. Particular grace must choose for the theater of its activity an area to which it is by nature foreign: looking to the hereafter for its end and purpose, particular grace has to look to the here and now for its area of operations. How can this be? How can particular grace impel the elect to be active in this temporal life – “alongside” their life of the soul and “apart from” their being saved?⁴³

It will no longer surprise us to find Kuyper explaining somewhere that the early Christians did not engage in any cultivation of the sciences, not even in a Christian cultivation of them, because such activity was really beneath their standing.⁴⁴ Grace, after all, directs our minds, our hearts, toward the hereafter, hence away from this temporal world and all its pursuits, including the pursuits of science. Particular grace converts a man into a pilgrim who sets his face toward the eternal future beyond the grave.

And, thirdly, to complicate matters still further, particular grace re-creates. It entails no less than re-creation.⁴⁵ Now this re-creation means first of all that the destructive effects of sin and curse are brought to nought. But it entails more than that. It does not simply restore the condition of Paradise; it does not take us back to the original state, to what Kuyper calls the “natural” life. It brings something more and something else. It can in fact be called “supernatural” – not only because it does not arise from our nature (for in this sense Kuyper can call common grace “supernatural” too,⁴⁶ and rightly so), but also because it brings something other than the original nature. It brings something new, some-thing not even Paradise had known. For – so runs the reasoning – particular grace begins where Adam would have ended had historical development gone on uninterrupted. That is to say, it begins with eternal life; it begins where the covenant of works with Adam was to have ended;⁴⁷ it begins with Christ’s fulfillment of all the requirements of the covenant of works, hence with the reward for Christ’s work as Mediator: namely, eternal life.⁴⁸

This re-creation, to be sure, is a re-creating of the natural; it is not a second creation foreign to the first. The regenerated man is the selfsame man before and after his regeneration.⁴⁹ Yet as the same man he is, in Christ, a new creature, for whom the old things have passed away and all things have become new. He “has” eternal life. Death has no more dominion over him. Adam could fall into sin, but one who is born of God does not commit sin; the divine seed remains in him.⁵⁰ A change of state such as was possible in Paradise – from sinless to sinful, from righteous to ungodly – is no longer possible for regenerate man; for him a change of state has become an impossibility.⁵¹

Thus the “natural” man has become a “spiritual” man. This is re-creation – the work of particular grace, the all-controlling benefit of Christ whereby the regenerate man becomes one plant with Christ so that he can sin no more.⁵² Hence, in contradistinction to the “natural” state of Adam in Paradise, Kuyper calls this new state of the regenerate man “supernatural.”⁵³

This last concept should not be misunderstood. Kuyper does not fill the distinction “natural-supernatural” with Thomistic content. To be sure, he indeed has this distinction in common with Thomism. And again, to be sure, as in Thomism so in Kuyper the distinction is usually a polar one. But whereas the Thomist distinguishes already in the state of rectitude a supernatural grace and a supernatural life of grace,⁵⁴ not so Kuyper. According to the latter, the man of Paradise was a natural man through and through. But, the Fall having taken place, the man who is redeemed by Christ and endowed with His Spirit is a re-created man, and as a re-created man he is more than—and in some respect different from—the man as he was originally created. Moreover, in Kuyper “supernatural” does not mean what it has come to mean in Thomism, to wit: a partaking of the Divine nature, a divinization of man.⁵⁵ To the extent that Kuyper deals with it in connection with the re-creation, the supernatural too is not divine in essence. “Nature,” of course, in the sense of the kingdoms of minerals, plants and animals cannot participate, certainly in the present dispensation, in this work of re-creation, subject as it remains to corruption.⁵⁶ But neither can the whole of man’s “visible life in time” partake of the “supernaturalness” of the re-creation. This life was and ever shall remain “natural”—at least for the duration of “the present dispensation.”⁵⁷

Thus for Kuyper particular grace means the grace by which we are granted now in the present dispensation, on the basis of Christ’s reconciliation and through the operation of His Spirit, the “re-creation” of regeneration in the core of our being, in the pivot of our human selfhood; a grace which will not until hereafter, however, at the “rebirth of heaven and earth,” translate the whole of created reality into a supernatural re-creation.⁵⁸ Wherefore in the present dispensation regenerate man is a pilgrim directed toward the coming day of our Lord Jesus Christ, a stranger for whom the curse-ridden nature, but also the Paradise nature, is a foreign land. The born-again Christian, according to Kuyper, lives in an “alien” world – and in a “lower” world, a world lower in rank than the regenerate man himself who is chosen unto ever- lasting life and equipped by particular grace with the supernatural “powers of the age to come.” Small wonder that the goal and end of regeneration is to be sought in the life hereafter.

What Is Common Grace?

Now it is certain for Kuyper – and it also follows from the above

– that where particular grace has done its work of re-creating, there no work, hence no working area, remains for common grace. The sphere of action of particular grace cannot possibly be at the same time a sphere of action for common grace.

Conversely, however, Kuyper is also certain that wherever in the present dispensation particular grace has not yet entered, there common grace finds its own proper and true domain. That is where common grace rules. That at least is where it can rule. That is where particular grace has not in advance rendered common grace superfluous, impossible and unthinkable. In this manner then, on the basis of a polar dualism like this, Kuyper is led to locate the “domain” of common grace outside of the regenerated heart, in the temporal and visible, and in the “natural.”⁵⁹

Likewise the nature of common grace is indirectly predetermined by the nature of particular grace. Common grace cannot be “spiritual,” i.e., regenerative; it cannot find its goal and end in the hereafter but only within the present dispensation, i.e., in the temporal; it is never “super-natural,” i.e., re-creative; and finally, common grace cannot be saving grace.⁶⁰

The outermost limit to the operation of common grace is that it restores the original condition of Paradise and, without re-creating, reduces the Fall and its results to a minimum.⁶¹ Here we have that unmistakable “cultural optimism” streak in Kuyper’s doctrine of common grace.⁶² Common grace checks the operation of sin and the curse on sin, and in principle makes possible again the unfolding of creation’s potentialities and the development of the creature. It fosters this unfolding, nourishes it, strengthens it. It makes for a “grace-endowed nature”;⁶³ nature remains nature—the re-creation is not shared in by nature—but common grace curbs the destructive operation of sin and postpones the curse on nature; in fact, in the realm of the temporal and the visible (i.e., quite apart from men’s hearts) it even enables people to do the good, the moral good, the civic good, opening up the possibility of progress in the life of creation. Thus, next to the stemming of sin and curse, common grace in Kuyper’s view also operates for “progress”: it serves and promotes cultural development and progress, and makes these possible.⁶⁴

Thus the need for confessing God’s common grace follows for Kuyper, among other things, from the manner in which he has defined the domain and the operation of particular grace. Van Ruler, too, notes, in part correctly, that Kuyper’s doctrine of common grace is governed by how he conceived God’s particular grace – which is granted to His elect

unto eternal life – as it relates to the present dispensation.⁶⁵ Outside the regenerative operation of particular grace, converting man in his root, there lies the domain of the temporal and the visible world of the present dispensation. But this natural, creaturely domain – for Kuyper there is no contrast between “nature” and “creation,” between “natural” and “creaturely”!⁶⁶ – has since the Fall been subjected to the curse and to the power of sin, and man after the Fall is also in this domain incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil. Yet likewise for this domain God had announced death as the punishment for sin.⁶⁷ If God did not deal “graciously” here; if with respect to this temporal and natural life, which is not immediately translated by His particular grace into the glory of the re-creation, He were not “gracious” and long-suffering in some way other than in particular grace, this domain without fail would immediately after the Fall have sunk into nothingness, swallowed up by the curse: there would no longer have been a temporal and natural life. The grounds for the possibility of the prolongation of this domain must be sought in some such divine long-suffering, which indeed does not lead to salvation and supernatural grace but which does at least bridle, arrest, restrain and resist the powers of corruption and death, of Satan, sin and curse. Where particular grace does not rule, there in some way or other – if hell is not to break loose – God’s goodness and mercy, God’s grace must be operative.⁶⁸ This grace can then not work save in a “natural” way only. If this were not the case, it would be equal to God’s particular grace and the whole problem would be solved by having been dissolved. It must therefore be limited to a mode of operation which maintains and develops the creature within the bounds of the original creaturely state as had obtained in Paradise; it may not carry things beyond the confines of creatureliness;⁶⁹ otherwise it would not be common grace but particular grace. In sum, common grace is to particular grace as creation is to re-creation.⁷⁰

This conception differs fundamentally from the Thomistic theme of grace and nature. For Rome on principle uses this theme in the domain of man as he was in Paradise and already there distinguishes between “nature” and “grace” or “supernature.” Not so Kuyper. He distinguishes nothing of the sort in Paradise. There, only creatureliness was present – “nature,” if you like. Not until after the Fall is there a saving, redeeming grace of God that leads to “re-creation,” to the “supernatural” or “gracious” quality proper of a creation that is elevated above its original status and which as such may even be called a “new creation.” Kuyper is well aware of this specific distinction. Though he does use the terms “grace” and “nature” repeatedly to distinguish

respectively the domains of particular grace and common grace and sometimes even their respective operations, he ultimately and advisedly has the distinction between the two rest in the distinction between re-creation and creation, avowing a preference for this distinction over that of grace and nature.⁷¹

Connected with this preference, of a certainty, is the circumstance that Kuyper – in spite of the fact that like the Gnostics he usually limits particular grace, at least insofar as it concerns the present dispensation, to the saving of men’s souls unto eternal life – does not follow the Gnostics when they logically go on to accept an antithetical relation between the saved soul and the order of this temporal life. Precisely because he confesses common grace, Kuyper takes great distance from such antithetical dualism in the conceiving of the relation between grace and nature, even of the relation between grace and sin-effected nature. In this connection the specter of the Anabaptistic world-view always looms up before his mind: a world-view which inevitably leads to world-flight – the saved soul shuns all contact with the “world”⁷² – or else leads to the error of the radical Anabaptists, who from out of the grace of regeneration seek to erect the Kingdom of God visibly even in the here and now, in order thus to translate the “world,” by “Christian” force so to speak, into a world of the re-creation. This revolutionary Christianity Kuyper rejects.⁷³ He rejects it because it does violence to nature which has been endowed with common grace; and because it pursues a premature triumph: what God is keeping for the hereafter – the new heaven and the new earth – let no man try to realize in this age! In both types of Anabaptism the controlling assumption is that the born-again soul and the temporal-visible world are mutually exclusive opposites, and this is the very thing Kuyper is fighting.

Ridderbos, following his teacher Hepp, is quite justified therefore in rejecting the idea that Kuyper’s doctrine of common grace is dualistic.⁷⁴ For this would make it Anabaptistic or Gnostic; whereas in reality this doctrine, both in tenor and scope, is anti-Gnostic to the core. This is true even as regards the creation after the Fall – let alone therefore the creation as it came forth out of God’s hand in the beginning. In consequence, it is not to be wondered at that this doctrine must offend every thinker whose own doctrine of creation is not free from Gnostic stains. For this common grace doctrine places Kuyper outside of and over against the tradition that stretches from Marcion through Occam right up to modern times—to Karl Barth in particular. The latter’s “creation docetism,” according to which the creature is so intrinsically alien to God that even as created reality it cannot possibly remind

one of its Maker, is grounded in nothing less than a dual-antithetical relation between creation and grace, between creation and Revelation. A "grace-endowed nature," such as Kuyper could hold to, would to proponents of this type of Gnosticizing thought spell the end of the "pure gospel," i.e., of an anti- thetical contrast between nature and supernatural revelation and reality.⁷⁵

Meanwhile, more needs to be said about this aspect of Kuyper's thought. Hepp as well as his pupil Ridderbos make a mistake, I believe, when they stop here. They judge that since Kuyper is a sworn enemy of this type of antithetical dualism he must be, and in fact is, averse to each and every form of dualism.⁷⁶ I submit, however, that this is not the case. For it so happens that Kuyper's "nature" (also the nature endowed with common grace) and Kuyper's "grace" (particular grace and its domain of the "spiritual") do in fact function in his thought as polar opposites. Though he wishes to avoid a dualism of two absolute antitheses which mutually exclude each other, like light and darkness, good and evil, truth and falsehood, nonetheless his exposition rides on a dualism of two contrasting poles which at once attract and repel each other. When giving a more exact description of the relation between the two domains of common grace and particular grace, Kuyper talks in terms of an opposition: he does not scruple to state that common grace is in contrast with particular grace.⁷⁷ Thus the two appear to be mutually exclusive after all. It becomes a matter of either/or: either particular grace or common grace; both at once is out of the question. Hence his two "domains," which never overlap and never merge. Now the domain of the visible and the temporal is the domain of common grace; this is where the structures of common grace obtain, that is to say, this is where the original creation structures and creation ordinances hold. They hold – though sometimes slightly modified, as in the case of the sword-wielding authority of civil government or the breaking up of the human race into nations and different nation-states;⁷⁸ yet even these modifications are only possible within the original creation structures and only serve to realize the original goal and purpose of the world in the present dispensation.⁷⁹

It is precisely under the compulsion of this polar contrast that Kuyper in most places considers the origin of common grace to be different from that of particular grace: common grace rests in Christ the Son of God as the Mediator of Creation; particular grace is rooted in Christ as the Incarnate Word, the Mediator of Redemption.⁸⁰ This also explains why he has difficulty in seeing the exalted Christ as the King of common

grace.⁸¹ For this would on principle break down his polar contrast. And if this were to break down, Kuyper fears a revival of the Anabaptistic peril: erecting a Kingdom of Heaven on earth by means of a “Christian” revolution with all its attendant evils.⁸² Without this polar contrast he fears no less an ecclesiasticizing of life: if the temporal-visible world, too, belongs to the domain of particular grace, then one is only a step removed from the ecclesiastico-political dogma of a Church state – be it Roman Catholic or Calvinist – and from the “establishment” in such a Church state of a State church.⁸³ For, it must be admitted, precisely the polar contrast between the domain of particular grace – the spiritual and mystical realms – and the domain of common grace – the world of the temporal, visible things and of culture and cultural formation – enables Kuyper powerfully to champion the emancipation of culture and societal relationships – of family, state and society, of science, labor and art – from the tutelage of the institutional church. He has no scruples about introducing a word here that can hardly be said to appeal to many Christians, namely: “secularisatie.”⁸⁴ The terrain of the world, of common grace, is not the domain of the Kingdom of Heaven.⁸⁵ The domain of the Kingdom of Heaven is rather the mystic realm of the “spiritual,” of the “inner soul,” and, further, of the new Jerusalem that will not be revealed until after the present dispensation has passed away. The domain of common grace, by contrast, is by its very nature not “Christian,” it does not bear a “Christological” stamp,⁸⁶ it does not share in the power of Christ’s resurrection nor does it participate in the supernatural gift of grace. At the same time it may not be made subservient in the sense that it might be lorded over by the institution of particular grace, the church.⁸⁷ Rather it has an independent, secular, worldly goal.⁸⁸ By its inner nature it aims, and under God’s providential rule it is aimed, at its own creaturely end, which as such has no real connection with the hereafter and no real connection with the mystic life of the souls that are saved.

Common grace only operates by linking up with the creation and always relates things back to the creation. The creation, to be sure, is in constant development. But this dynamic unfolding is itself creaturely, is embedded in the creation. This means that culture can only be a secular affair.⁸⁹ “Christian culture” is hardly something that speaks for itself. For example, a Christian architect is basically an architect, working qua architect in the sphere of common grace, with the tools of common grace; like any other architect, Christian or no Christian, he draws on nature, not Scripture, and designs according to the laws of architecture, which are common to all men. When an architect is also a Christian,

that is something additional, an added consideration.⁹⁰ Kuyper's polar contrast between particular grace and common grace, between re-creation and creation, allows of no other viewpoint. Architecture arises out of the creation, not the re-creation. On the extreme "left" the ultimate consequence of this polar dualism appears in Kuyper's inability to view the church institution – in his theory the fruit of particular grace – as having arisen organically from the common-grace-endowed creation, with the result that he must see her as foreign to creation and nature, that is, as something "mechanisch."⁹¹ From the viewpoint of creation, there is no room for an institution like the church. It does not fit in a normal way in the temporal, visible world. It is abnormal, when looked at from the perspective of common grace. It is as abnormal as the Cross of Christ. In fact, it is contrary to nature.⁹²

On the extreme "right," however, the ultimate consequence of this polar dualism appears in those passages where Kuyper regards the contrast between creation and re-creation, between common grace and particular grace, as the grounds on which common grace can even come to stand antithetically opposed to particular grace. In those passages it is even so much as called a threat to particular grace.⁹³ There this evil fruit of the sphere of common grace is even necessary and desirable, in order to demonstrate that particular grace is absolutely essential.⁹⁴ But even in this most extreme case, which according to Kuyper may well be imminent and which will usher in the end of time⁹⁵ – please note the limits to Kuyper's cultural optimism and his faith in the unfolding of culture – even then it is not really common grace that will endanger particular grace and threaten it with extinction but it will be the abuse of common grace, the unbelievers' misuse of the richly developed creation potentials, that will pit the treasures of common grace and creation against the realm of particular grace and the Kingdom of Heaven.⁹⁶

Yet this last point, in spite of itself, only underscores the polar dualism in Kuyper's conception of common grace. For common grace apparently can be used awry, can be used against God and His kingdom – but never so particular grace. In the sphere of particular grace one cannot but choose for God and His Christ, whereas in the sphere of common grace one can still choose between two directions. As a matter of fact, common grace can even become common "disgrace."⁹⁷

With respect to this point one can speak of a difference in emphasis between the works *De Gemeene Gratie* and *Pro Rege*. It is no more than a difference in emphasis, to be sure, but the difference is there. Throughout the latter work Kuyper dwells extensively on precisely this dangerous and problematic character of common grace. There he gives

it much more attention. Small wonder, therefore, that in *Pro Rege* he argues much more emphatically for the necessity of the organizational antithesis in the domain of common grace, for the need, in other words, of separate Christian organizations.⁹⁸ Thus this form of the antithesis becomes — to adopt Van Ruler's convenient distinction for a moment⁹⁹ — less and less a merely practical necessity and more and more a matter of principle.

From the above also emerges, however, that in spite of the enthusiasm with which Kuyper sings the praises of the wonderful fruits that are “yet” allowed to ripen and that may “yet” be gathered on the terrain of this temporal, visible world,¹⁰⁰ he always has a reservation. It is the reservation of every Christian man. It is the reservation of the man Christian, of the mystic, longing for Jesus, of the pilgrim traveling to a better country.¹⁰¹ For all his “worldly” career, the man Kuyper never became this-worldly. Nor was he ever swept off his feet by the this-worldliness of even a Christian culture. Common grace, after all, is “only” common grace; some day it will end.¹⁰² There is something higher than common grace: there is particular grace. That is the grace that counts. That is the one thing needful. And in the hereafter that is the one and only thing that remains.¹⁰³

Not an Anabaptistic Way of Putting the Problem

The problem that Kuyper wrestled with in his doctrine of common grace will not be appreciated in its real depth and inner tension if this postulated and rather persistent polarly dualistic nature of the fundamental relation between particular grace and common grace, between re-creation and creation, is not at every turn taken into account. For Kuyper's intention, after all, was precisely to show how particular grace and common grace cohere and cooperate, how they influence and condition each other, and what the true nature of these relationships is.¹⁰⁴ His basic questions are: (1) How is it possible that common grace can be of significance for particular grace?¹⁰⁵ and (2) How is it possible that particular grace can be of significance for common grace?¹⁰⁶ hence (3) Of what significance can they be for each other in the present dispensation?

Indeed, how can a grace-endowed nature serve supernature, and how can Christian action in the natural domain arise from the spiritual, mystical center of the regenerated hearts of the elect and develop into truly Christian activity that ministers to this domain, fructifying and blessing it?

I would like to point out with some emphasis that this is anything but a Gnostic or Anabaptistic manner of dealing with the problem of the relation of the Christian and the world. For, whatever else it may mean, in Kuyper common grace means at least this, that the Christian who is active in the sphere of common grace is not necessarily dirtying his hands or his soul. It was this spirit that could make Bavinck write, "Politics is a holy affair!" And Kuyper agreed. Quite different, that, from modern-day personalism, which assumes that every man who allows himself to get involved (*s'engager*) in the affairs of this temporal world will of necessity involve himself in dirty business: only internally self-contradictory arguments of the "nevertheless" type can then be resorted to as a way out of the self-imposed predicament.¹⁰⁷

From such dilemmas Kuyper has freed himself. Common grace has at least this value for the spiritually redeemed man, that he is not necessarily sinning when he gets involved in the world of creation and common grace. The structure of creation even after the Fall is not anti-divine; it does not stand antithetically opposed to piety and to love of God from a pure heart. This is really the first point that is gained by Kuyper's doctrine of common grace. Gnostic culturophobia has been exorcised. This clears the air for Kuyper to call for cultural interest, concern, activity. He can do this responsibly, Christianly. Common grace in this sense makes Christian action "in all areas of life" possible, legitimate, and justified. No Christian has a legitimate reason for withdrawing from the world of God's creating.¹⁰⁸ That holds for the whole of creation, to its farthest reaches; that holds for "all areas"; that holds in principle for the whole world of culture, politics included.

The second gain that Kuyper's approach makes on the Anabaptist or Gnostic attitude is the thesis that Christian action in the domain of common grace must acknowledge the structures of this domain, must minister to the structures of creation and the structures of common grace (which for all intents and purposes coincide) – instead of overturning them! Christian action is never revolutionary action. Just as common grace maintains and develops the creation, so all Christian action will be obliged to attach and submit to this order of common grace. Its results can only be a "higher development" of "nature" and the "natural," i.e., of the creature.¹⁰⁹ For this reason it will never bring "the Kingdom of Heaven" on earth,¹¹⁰ and for the same reason it aims at something quite different from a kind of Christian culture which as such would anticipate the hereafter in the form of a "supra-natural nature" and a "supra-creaturely" culture. Looked at from the perspective of the creation and the common grace that sustains it, Christian action

in the domain of the preserved creation is not something abnormal, odd, exceptional, absurd, antinomian, comical, queer and out-of-this-world, something typical of a “Christian ghetto” (thus Van Ruler), but normal, ordinary, reasonable, logical, in accordance with the law of creatureliness, inconspicuous, something typical of man as man. It is not at all a “Christian specialty.” At most it makes of Christians the “best” of citizens in the public life of the nation, the “best” members of the State and the “best” subjects of the Magistrate.¹¹¹ But it certainly does not make of them a separate breed of citizens; nor revolutionary citizens or anti-bourgeois citizens; nor yet conservative citizens; but simply – citizens!

Such is the fundamental significance of common grace for the activity of the Christ-believers in the domain of the visible and temporal. This is the basic theme that Kuyper is to hammer away at, without pulling any punches, throughout his teachings concerning Christian action and the Christian life style in the temporal, visible world. A Christian marriage is an ordinary marriage, a Christian society is an ordinary society, a Christian family is an ordinary family, a Christian state is an ordinary state, a Christian association is an ordinary association – according to the ordinances that obtain for marriage, family, society, state and associations.¹¹² The Christian family is no miniature church; the Christian church is not also a state; the Christian state is not a Christian church; a Christian marriage is no supernatural cloister but simply a conventional marriage; and even a Christian political party is just that – an ordinary party! Christian action is the opposite of overturning the Divine structural principles that are normative for this temporal, visible life. To mention just one more example: Christian political action will have to be more than lobbying for legislation to preserve the “Christian heritage” of Sunday observance: it will have to be the expression of a political philosophy and program that touches upon every aspect of political life.

[2] Common Grace as Means for Particular Grace

First among the basic questions to be dealt with in Kuyper’s doctrine of common grace must therefore be: How can common grace serve particular grace?

The fact that it does indeed serve particular grace is something that Kuyper does not doubt for a moment. Only, he does not regard the factuality as proof of its possibility. What he searches for and wrestles

with is an explanation of this “fact.” Our first task will be, therefore, to ask ourselves which facts Kuyper noted in this connection, after which we shall examine what explanation he gave of them.

The Idea of the Prolongation

Particular grace, as will be remembered, is by its nature – at least in the present dispensation – the grace which saves the souls of the elect for eternity and which essentially accomplishes this salvation by regenerating them, ingrafting them into Christ, implanting them as members into the mystical Body of Christ, and translating them into the Kingdom of Heaven. Now in the abstract Kuyper does not consider it impossible that these souls would be created even without the generation of the human race out of Adam and Eve.¹¹³ But in reality he takes the position that this may not be assumed. In this temporal life human beings come to be, and the human race continues to be, via generation.¹¹⁴ But for generation out of our forebears, there could be no regeneration by God’s Spirit. But for the continuation of the world after the Fall, there could be no regeneration.¹¹⁵ If Adam and Eve had suffered death immediately after their fall into sin, not only would there have been no possibility for a human race to be generated out of them, but there would also have been no possibility for the bestowal of the grace of regeneration and election unto everlasting life. There first have to be human beings born, generated, procreated, before such beings can receive the grace of regeneration.¹¹⁶

Now the postponement of the sentence of doom, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die!” and with this postponement the prolongation of this temporal world, constitutes the indispensable prerequisite for particular grace. The prolongation itself is not particular grace: it does not regenerate and does not lead to the blessedness of eternal life in the hereafter.¹¹⁷ But grace it is: it is the postponement of curse and punishment. To be sure, Kuyper is of the opinion that God really owed it to Himself to allow Adam and Eve to continue to exist after the Fall: otherwise Satan would have succeeded in his aim to drag God’s creation into nothingness and thus defeat God’s Self-glorification in His work of creation¹¹⁸ – that is why common grace can be called “natural”;¹¹⁹ still, this does not alter the fact that common grace is an act of God’s mercy, of His longsuffering, of His unmerited kindness and forfeited favor.

Again, to be sure, this prolongation is also terrifying.^{119*} For just think:

were it not for this prolongation, the birth of all those offspring of Adam and Eve who are not elect, and who will therefore be given over to the eternal judgment of punishment in hell, would not have taken place either! Breathtaking is the prolongation of the human race, and thus also the common grace that results in this prolongation: it makes possible not only heaven for the elect but also hell for the damned. Common grace is therefore at the same time “common dis-grace,”¹²⁰ and common judgment. Nevertheless – and this is where Kuyper differs fundamentally from Schilder¹²¹ – common grace should be called after its first quality. For with Kuyper, election and reprobation are not, as to their worth and end, on the same level. He does not believe in a *gemina praedestinatio*, a double predestination which attaches equal weight and value to election or (and) reprobation. On this point Kuyper, like Calvin, differs not only from Gottschalk¹²² but also from Schilder.¹²³ Christ did not come into the world to condemn the world,¹²⁴ yet it is precisely His coming that increases the condemnation of the unbelievers since they give no heed to so great a salvation;¹²⁵ still, one may not draw the conclusion that Christ came in order that redemption and damnation could be equally realized. In the same way, then, one may not draw the conclusion that the covenant of grace of which Christ is the Head and the Mediator, and the particular grace of God which comes to us in the Word Incarnate and in all the facts of the history of salvation, are equally a “covenant of curse,” particular disgrace, and facts in a history of damnation. Here logical thought breaks to pieces on pious adoration. Here Scripture calls a holy halt. And so in the same way Kuyper makes sure not to put common grace on a level with common dis-grace and to call the continuation of the human race equally and simultaneously a blessing and a curse, a benefit and a disaster. The lament of the rich man, “I am tormented in this flame,” is far outweighed by the song of the redeemed before God’s throne. In my opinion Kuyper rightly calls common grace, as the prolongation of the human race after Adam’s fall into sin, common grace, and not at the same time common dis-grace.

The first significance of common grace for particular grace has now emerged: by protecting and sustaining the generation of mankind from Adam’s loins it makes the regeneration of men possible. As such it is no less than the pre-condition for particular grace.¹²⁶

What is happening here? In the first place Kuyper is here warding off the temptation to insert a Gnostic notion into the doctrine of particular grace: namely, the assumption that it is not impossible that the “souls” of the elect can come into being quite apart from the procreation of the human race through birth out of the “created” forefathers. Thus

he denies the very thing that Van Ruler has termed particularistic and spiritualistic about his doctrine – thereby criticizing, even before his death as it were, Van Ruler’s analysis of his doctrine. The thesis that birth is indispensable for rebirth sounds the death knell for all Gnostic dualism, just as it hardly favors the view of psycho-creationism.

In the second place however, it must be observed that Kuyper himself effects in this connection a mere improvement of the Gnostic notion. This appears precisely when he appeals to “common grace” to account for the prolongation of the human race. His own remark that the prolonged existence of Adam and Eve was certain even after the Fall by reason of the fact that their sin could never destroy God’s Counsel according to which He willed to create a human race via procreation out of our first parents, should have brought him to the realization that his exegesis of Genesis 2 (“in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”) really agrees with Gnosticism but not with the book of creation, with Genesis itself. In my opinion, Schilder,¹²⁷ along with S.J. Popma¹²⁸ and also LA. Diepenhorst,¹²⁹ are in the right when, in contrast to Kuyper, they refuse to talk of common grace at this point. To use Kuyper’s own words: God owed it to Himself to continue the human race and thus prolong this temporal life. That Kuyper appeals to common grace in this connection can only be explained from a Gnostic remnant in his thinking. To this extent the point can be conceded to Van Ruler that Kuyper’s doctrine is not free from “spiritualism.”

Common Grace as Foothold for the Institutional Church

But there is yet another, quite different way in which Kuyper speaks of common grace as the basis, the groundwork, the possibility of particular grace.¹³⁰ This occurs especially in his doctrines of the church as an institution, of the Incarnation of the Word, and of the “special” Revelation that resulted in Holy Scripture.¹³¹

(I can hardly resist comparing Kuyper with Karl Barth on this point. Already from a strictly theological point of view it is highly interesting to discover that it is once again Gnosticism that separates Kuyper from Barth. In contrast to Barth’s Gnosticizing thought, Kuyper’s is anti-Gnostic. Consequently, Kuyper’s theology is anti-nihilistic, hence far removed from modern existentialist thought, whereas Barth’s theology works with Gnostic themes in the doctrine of creation and therefore borders on nihilism and is of a kind with twentieth-century

existentialism.¹³² It is unfortunate that to date no comparative study has appeared of the theologies of Kierkegaard and Barth on the one hand and Kuyper on the other as regards the doctrine of the means of grace, including the doctrine concerning the person and work of Christ and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Such a study might prove worthwhile! In the present context, however, we have to limit ourselves to the views of Kuyper.)

So far I have done no more than point out that according to Kuyper the “domain” of particular grace must be located in the “spiritual,” in the “center” of man’s being, and in the life hereafter. That is where the heart, the nucleus of particular grace is to be found. If now particular grace is also to “radiate out” from this nucleus,¹³³ this radiation will still have to proceed from out of this same nucleus and will still have to be regarded as no less than an anticipation of the “powers of the age to come.”¹³⁴

Now one such anticipation Kuyper sees in the Incarnation of the Word. And who could possibly disagree with him there? Certainly after His exaltation Christ is no longer a “natural man” even according to His human nature but has become a “spiritual man,” having been raised by the “Spirit of sanctification” (Romans 1:4); according to His human nature He is a “new creature,” re-created, sharing in eternal life and incorruption, elevated from the creaturely, natural state to the supernatural, glorified state. But Kuyper knows further anticipations of the age to come. Not only the exalted Christ but also the means of grace, the administration of which Christ has entrusted to His church and which do not fall outside the plane of the temporal and the visible, are by their very essence more than and other than mere creaturely phenomena: Holy Scripture is more than a creaturely word; baptism and the Lord’s supper are more than “visible signs”; and preaching, the administration of God’s Word, is more than a creaturely, natural event.¹³⁵ In Kuyper’s system, the church institution, i.e., the church of the means of grace, must be a new creation of God’s particular grace.¹³⁶ That is to say, the church institution does not grow out of creation, nor does she stem from common grace. When Kuyper wants to emphasize this, he even goes so far as to talk of her in terms of a *Fremdkörper* in creation, calling her a “mechanical” insertion.¹³⁷

This church institution, however, does not form part of the “spiritual” and inner life of the regenerate.¹³⁸ She is, rather, particular grace’s visible instrument¹³⁹ and also its temporal manifestation and demonstration¹⁴⁰ in the visible, temporal domain of common grace.¹⁴¹ In this temporal, visible world she is an “appearance,” a “form,” a “gestalte”¹⁴²

(remarkable: the same word that is used by Barth and the existentialists, but with an entirely different content!) of the Kingdom of Heaven, of the “invisible” church and “invisible” particular grace.

Here now is where Kuyper’s views on the significance of common grace for particular grace make their start. In this domain of common grace, to which also Holy Scripture and the church institution in her visible-temporal “form” belong, particular grace seeks a “foothold.”¹⁴³ This means that if something goes wrong with this domain, the means of grace will share in the chaos: something will go wrong with them too. Preaching and missions, both of them Christian activities in the sense of being activities that arise out of particular grace and that are instruments of particular grace because they serve as means of (particular) grace, need “the broad base”¹⁴⁴ of common grace in order to realize themselves as to their “temporal-visible” side. The Christian church so conceived cannot do without the assistance of common grace. For example, she requires political conditions that do not make life impossible for her; further, she calls for a political order and a society in which all things are done in good order, to the end “that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life” precisely while being busy in the work of missions (I Timothy 2:2 may not be torn loose from I Timothy 2:3-6), precisely as Christian propagandists of saving grace.

All of a sudden here, common grace loses its independent purpose. It becomes a means to an end that lies above and beyond its competence as well as above and beyond its strength. Common grace is to lay the groundwork for the pulpit.¹⁴⁵

This is where “Christian” politics comes in. Yes, already here we can talk of Christian politics, but then in the sense of a politics which is not as such Christian in itself but which may be called Christian insofar as and inasmuch as it enables the institutional church to carry out its mission. This is reason enough for Christians to enter the political arena. Very often, as a matter of fact, it is the reason why they enter there independently, with their own party formation. The Christian body is then active in the domain of common grace for ulterior reasons – for reasons of particular grace, for reasons of church rather than reasons of state. And this Body will have to close ranks and form a separate Christian political party, a separate party for Christian politics, if it becomes apparent that powers are gaining the upper hand in this domain that are bent on taking away from the Christian church this possibility, this “base of operations”,¹⁴⁶ if anti-Christian powers are in fact exploiting common grace to turn it – from the perspective of particular grace – into dis-grace, and into an antithetical force against

the Kingdom of Heaven.¹⁴⁷

In this indirect way common grace must serve particular grace. And, of course, what has been said here in respect of the state can be said to hold *mutatis mutandis* for family life, for marriage, for society, in fact for all the areas of common grace. In this indirect sense one can speak of a Christian family and a Christian marriage, of a Christian society, a Christian economy, a Christian state, of a Christian university and Christian scholarship, of Christian literature and Christian art. These do not at all need to stem from regeneration and regenerated hearts. And still they may be called “Christian” insofar as, and inasmuch as, they lend a hand to particular grace, to the church institution and to the way of salvation along which God leads His elect-for-eternity through this world of time.

This then is the dependent purpose of common grace,¹⁴⁸ whereby it finds its *raison d’être* outside of itself in particular grace and furnishes this grace with a “foothold” in the face of the forces of chaos, nihilism, and Antichrist. Such is common grace as a means to something else, to an end that lies beyond itself.

State and Church

This broadening of the domain of particular grace, whereby it now also includes the visible and temporal church institution, has as result that for Kuyper the problem of the relation between nature and grace, creation and re-creation, common and particular grace returns once more, this time as the problem of Church and State. The church in his view is more Christian than the state, the clergyman more spiritual than the alder-man, the theologian holier than the philosopher. Finding one’s life’s task wholly within the domain of common grace means occupying a “lower” station in life than if one is busy in this very same domain creating the indispensable conditions for the functioning of the institutional church.

This form of discrimination, however, Kuyper can again relativize. For the Christian character of the church institution is itself a relative thing. She is not solely an anticipation of the hereafter in this life.¹⁴⁹ Rather, for all her other-worldly orientation she remains temporal and visible and as such indistinguishable from that which belongs to the domain of common grace. Kuyper will certainly advance this argument against Rome, and for that matter against every view that identifies the means of grace with particular grace itself. Against all such views

Kuyper will vigorously defend the view that regeneration on principle is not dependent on the administration of the means of grace but rather is an immediate work of the Spirit.¹⁵⁰ He will oppose any binding of the work of the Spirit to the means of grace. This is where he will introduce the distinction between “being” and “consciousness,” holding forth that being born-again is independent of consciousness but that consciousness interacts with the use of the means of grace and requires the Bible and the church.¹⁵¹ But then the pressing question becomes: Does this consciousness also still fall under particular grace, or is it perhaps, as visible (discernible) activity, already part of the domain of common grace? Indeed, is consciousness not already creaturely, “natural”? The problem remains. Each time it comes back in a different form. The church institution belongs to the domain of common grace, however much she may be a means of particular grace.

The problem becomes even more involved when in his anthropology Kuyper does not follow Rome in her definition of “nature” and “super-nature,” whereby man’s faith-life as such is a supernatural addition, a *donum superadditum* tacked on to the lower, natural life. On the contrary, Kuyper attributes to Adam in the state of rectitude a “creaturely” function of believing.¹⁵² This function, though distorted by the Fall inasmuch as Adam directed his faith away from God to the creature, nevertheless does not need to be created all over again when at “re-creation” it is once more re-directed to the true God and His Revelation. The direction and the content of this activity of believing may then be different again, but that does not alter the fact that the act of believing as such is nothing new. At re-creation, the believing activity of the heart is brought back to order again through the re-creative power of grace and it will henceforward have to feed again on the means of grace; but in this conversion particular grace in fact restores to a true faith that same function which had turned into unbelief.¹⁵³ Kuyper will therefore refuse to attribute faith, as Rome does, entirely to supernatural grace. But no less will he refuse to attribute this reversion-of-unbelief-to-faith to the natural powers of man or else to common grace, as do Arminians and Pelagians and semi-Pelagians. When all is said and done, however, it remains an open question whether Kuyper regards belief-in-Christ as being purely of the re-creation, a purely “mechanical” intervention in the original creatureliness, at bottom something odd, something out-of- this-world that does not go with man. Sooner than say that, he will instead probably fall back on regarding belief-in-Christ as the fulfillment of a general “predisposition” which even apostate man never lost entirely – in that measure obliging himself to resort again,

however, to the nature-grace scheme of Roman Catholicism.

Undoubtedly there are problems here that Kuyper did not succeed in clarifying. Thus the problems of the coherence and the co-operation of particular grace and common grace, so decisive for Kuyper especially in the problem of Church and State, wholly depend upon the conception he had of the church institution. And this conception, in which he refused to capitulate to Rome's scheme of nature and supernature, is for all that a conception in which he still did not manage to extricate himself entirely from this scheme, unable as he was to separate "the spiritual life" from the actuality of the means of grace in such a radical way as to be able to dispense as it were with these means as far as the living operation of the spiritual life is concerned. Hence we see Kuyper moving from position to position. Sometimes common grace is indispensable for particular grace (i.e., for the institutional church), at other times this independence is relativized again. This relativization is possible because for Kuyper the church institution is not in the strict sense indispensable for the "spiritual" gift of particular grace, allowing him in the final analysis to retreat back into the church as the mystic Body of Christ,¹⁵⁴ to which the institutional church qua institution does not belong.

Earlier we already came upon Kuyper's first use of the connection between common grace and particular grace, and with that of the concept and idea of a Christian culture. We saw there that its Christian character consisted only in the indirect service which the powers and means of common grace can render the institutional church. This service can arise unintentionally from the life in the domain of common grace. As such it can therefore be rendered to the church also by non-believers. Meanwhile, however, this service can also be rendered deliberately from the regenerated heart, out of love for Christ and His cause. It can be inspired by love for His gospel and His church. Such love will inspire Christians in this common, general domain – which as such is not geared to particular grace nor does it stem from it – to all kinds of activity which does not so much aim at developing this domain toward its own end, but which seizes and exploits the opportunities this domain affords, to be the means to an entirely different sort of end. The impelling motive behind such indirectly Christian activity is then already the notion of working *Pro Rege*.

Thus the term "Christian" culture ("Christian" politics, etc.), can in general refer to *Pro Rege* activity – but not necessarily. This ambiguity in the use of the term reveals with irrevocable and inescapable logic the

dialectic, the polarly dualistic contrast, between nature and grace. Meanwhile the common grace domain is drawn as close as possible to particular grace – without losing its own character and therefore its polar contrast with the domain of particular grace – when it is regarded and labeled as the domain of “preparatory grace,” preparing as it does for the possibility of the means of grace, and with that for the possibility of the working of the Spirit by means of the church institution.¹⁵⁵ Still, the sovereignty of God, which He shows in His particular grace, remains totally independent of this preparatory grace. As such it is anything but inconceivable that preparatory grace did in certain instances prepare for, yet failed to prepare, grace; or rather, that it failed as such to become efficacious because no grace had been prepared by God that leads to regeneration and eternal life. Thus common grace as “preparatory grace” determines nothing in advance with respect to particular grace.¹⁵⁶ The same could be said, for that matter, of the very means of grace themselves.¹⁵⁷

We should be extremely cautious here in our criticism. Kuyper is wrestling with a problem that every son of the Reformation has in the end to wrestle with. Christ did not come that the world might be condemned. But neither did He come ¹⁵⁸ that the world is now automatically saved. He did not institute His church and the offices of the church in order that the world might be condemned. But neither did he institute them so that through them the world is automatically saved, *per opus operatum*, simply by virtue of the work they perform. These considerations led Calvin to speak of the very covenant of grace as a “medium *quiddam*,” something intermediate, something in between the reprobation of the human race and the election of the small number of the elect;¹⁵⁸ for which reason Calvin too, exactly like Kuyper later, is ultimately forced to withdraw back into the church as the mystic Body of Christ, into which the members are ingrafted through the work of the Spirit. But it also kept Calvin from reducing the institutional church to an “ordinary” institution of common grace and from not reckoning the means of grace, however “creaturely” and “natural” these means “in themselves” may be (Luther is reputed to have said once that the water of baptism is the same water cows drink), among the gifts of God’s particular grace.¹⁵⁹ An objectivistic doctrine which simply assumes an objective salvation contained in the means of grace and entrusted to the church¹⁶⁰ rules out this complex of problems, but does violence to the revelation of Scripture. The objective fact of a pulpit or a communion table, precisely as “objective fact,” is yet without salvation, without grace, and therefore, as far as the problem of Christian culture is

concerned, of no earthly use. A pulpit, a baptismal font, a communion table, a Bible represent, when taken by themselves, mentally torn from the God of the Word and of grace, neither God's salvation nor God's grace. Kuyper's problem is indeed a Reformation-inspired problem.

[3] The Significance of Particular Grace for Common Grace

Meanwhile, what is beyond dispute is that the doctrine of common grace as the pre-condition for particular grace was considered by Kuyper to be the less important aspect of his doctrine of common grace as a whole. For Kuyper's deepest sympathy and abiding interest lay with "secularization" – this term to be understood in the special sense in which Kuyper used it in this connection! – with the secularization of culture, with the emancipation of life from the servitude of the institutional church, with what he regarded as the "independent" function of common grace. A return to or even a longing for a medieval structure of society like the *Corpus Christianum* was the farthest thing from his mind. Here too he was an anti-revolutionary, not a counter-revolutionary. Furthermore, the lines of his thought all focus on the sovereignty of God. Kuyper's mind was of an entirely different cast from the mind that is accustomed to placing the church institution first, let alone from the type of mind that is oriented to the supremacy of the church offices.

With that we have come to the second basic question that engrossed this man's mighty intellect. That question is: How does particular grace affect the domain of common grace? Of what significance is particular grace for this domain? Note that this time there is the tacit assumption that the common grace domain is not to be viewed as the pre-condition for particular grace, as a means to a loftier end, but rather as independent, with a purpose of its own.¹⁶¹ To be sure, the object of both particular grace and common grace is the glory of God, His Self-glorification.¹⁶² But each achieves this in its own proper way and along its own proper path. Particular grace glorifies God in the salvation of sinners, an eternal source of praise unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb that was slain.¹⁶³ But common grace is to proclaim the glory of God in its own way. This it does in its temporal, visible domain precisely by bringing the creation to its destination, to its full unfolding and flowering, and by preserving it against the rule of the Devil. It does this by dressing the creation and keeping it, and by

fostering and stimulating culture.¹⁶⁴

To what extent now can particular grace serve this purpose, this end peculiar to the visible, temporal, creaturely realm? Once again we shall first note what Kuyper considered “factual” here, and then in what manner he “explained” these facts.

Indirect Significance

In the first place, then, Kuyper distinguished an “indirect” influence of particular grace on the domain of common grace.¹⁶⁵ He tried to demonstrate, especially from history, how wherever Christianity took root, the visible-temporal life also began to flourish. There the preserving and especially the stimulating forces of common grace were promoted, incited, strengthened, enhanced, heightened; there culture was set in motion toward the fulfillment of the original plan of creation.¹⁶⁶

To begin with, Holy Scripture, Christ’s walk on earth, and the institutional church with her administration of the means of grace unmistakably have this leavening effect which powerfully strengthens, enhances, ennobles and heightens common grace.¹⁶⁷ All these things permeate the broad domain of common grace, for example in the area of civic virtue, even when their true effect, the saving unto everlasting life, does not take place.¹⁶⁸ This holds especially for the development of history in the direction of a universal history of mankind. Precisely owing to the influence of the Christian church, history is becoming increasingly a universal history.¹⁶⁹ Wherever particular grace begins to take effect, there the domain of common grace witnesses the powerful development of the potentials which from the beginning have lain hidden in the creation, including the creation that is man. There common grace works itself out in a more refined and a more efficient manner. There dynamic development, growth, progress will ensue¹⁷⁰ – which would not be forthcoming in the absence of particular grace.¹⁷¹ From this promotion of culture in all areas of life not only the Christ-believer but also the unbeliever residing within the sphere of influence of particular grace reaps the richest benefits. The fact that European-American civilization has arisen as a universally human culture,¹⁷² and the fact that the nations who did not live under the influence of particular grace have to acknowledge the preponderance of these European-American peoples while they as colonial nations in turn indirectly share again in the benefits of particular grace for the domain of common grace, are among the facts which constitute solid evidence, according to Kuyper,

of the salutary effect of particular grace.¹⁷³

Accordingly, everything that is under this influence, even if it does not itself live out of the roots of particular grace, can be called, albeit in an improper sense of the word, Christian.¹⁷⁴ There is a Christian European-American civilization which really fills the whole world with its blessings. At the heart of this civilization is found the Christian,¹⁷⁵ who, precisely because he lives by particular grace, makes for the best citizen.¹⁷⁶ In this way particular grace is a blessing for the realm of common grace. In the center of the common grace realm thus blessed, in the midst of this “world,” is found the church, like a city set on a hill.¹⁷⁷ The indirect fruits, the by-products of particular grace, are the elevation of art and science, the ennoblement of political, social and economic life, the enrichment, in fact, of the whole of public civic life in all its facets. Particular grace as it were “baptizes” common grace, immersing it in its blessings. It “christianizes” common grace.¹⁷⁸ And it does this in a way that nothing else can.¹⁷⁹ To be “Christian” is not to be opposed to progress, for

Also in Christian circles men will begin to realize that to be co-laborers in the advancement of the national culture is a calling that comes to us from God for the sole reason that only if this advancement is rooted in the Christian religion can it lead to true culture.¹⁸⁰

Kuyper returns to this theme time and time again. To be sure, nothing but the creaturely, “natural,” original life of creation, the domain of common grace, is stimulated by this permeation with particular grace. Nor does this permeation bring about any internal changes in this domain’s own peculiar natural character. Yet on the other hand the impact of particular grace on the domain of common grace is of inestimable value because it and it alone can bring about this heightened, enhanced, enriched development of the domain. Common grace, when left to itself, cannot accomplish this. Witness the life of the nations in whose midst the church-like-a-city-set-on-a-hill is wanting. There we find backwardness. There common grace languishes feeble and destitute. There it leads to meager results. Only Christian faith truly sets free the forces of common grace. Take, for example, the world of science. Set free by the Spirit of Christ from the bonds of sin and the devil, one is also set free from the enslavement to nature.¹⁸¹ Only this setting free enables one to be internally free to adopt a stance over against nature – the pre-condition for any development of the science of

nature and the conquest of nature. This makes it understandable why the natural sciences flourish only in those countries where common grace was christianized, baptized.

Even though it is not the actual purpose of particular grace to be serviceable to common grace in its domain and for its benefit, it cannot be denied that wherever particular grace has entered the hearts of men and wherever the light of God's Word shines forth, there culture thrives. This fruit is not to be spurned. It is of immense benefit to all mankind – to mankind in general, not just to the new humanity. It benefits culture, which is shared in by all. It raises state and society, science and art, marriage and family life to a higher level. Even though it does not lead to a real and true Christian state, society, science, etc., it cannot be denied that that quality of political life, married life, etc., could not exist if an indirect influence of particular grace were not operative.¹⁸² For that reason Kuyper does not scruple to attach to the common grace life that is thus "impregnated with the Gospel"¹⁸³ the epithet "Christian": our Christian Europe, a Christian marriage, a Christian state, etc. Common grace then draws strength, as it were, from particular grace, to attain its own proper end in its own visible-temporal domain.

If we concentrate on this particular concept of a "Christian state," it becomes apparent that this concept has something else in view than the concept of a Christian state that we came across earlier. For here the state is not called Christian because it serves the institutional church, serving as a means to an end that transcends that state and is foreign to the state, but here the state is called Christian because its level of development is due to the leavening effect of the powers of particular grace – even though the state as such has nothing to do with this particular grace and remains what it always was: an institution in the domain of common grace, a creational institution by origin and nature, the norms for whose conduct are found in the creation ordinances and nowhere else.¹⁸⁴

Or perhaps also in the Bible? Here Kuyper hesitates. But he thinks he has solved the difficulty by explaining that the Bible also reveals many things that are not really related to particular grace but belong to the domain of the "natural life."¹⁸⁵ A political program that takes these Biblical data into account pays heed to the creation ordinances, or to the guidelines of common grace – but certainly not to the commandments and gifts of particular grace. Such a political program is free also to take the Bible as guide, to the extent that the Bible throws "natural" light on political problems and makes us wise unto common grace. This use of the Bible is not by its nature Christian. It is "universally human"; that

is, it can be engaged in by all men. It arises from common grace and leads back to common grace.

But is this state of affairs not by the same token a clear proof of the significance of particular grace for common grace? Scripture carries real weight, after all, only with those who belong to the Christ of particular grace. Only where Scripture owing to the Spirit's particular grace gets a grip on people's consciences, does it acquire authority. And only in such surroundings is it to be expected that what it teaches concerning the "natural" life will carry weight also with people who do not acknowledge its supernatural significance for things eternal and spiritual. This common authority of Scripture then is an indirect fruit of the particular authority that Scripture has in the church and in the hearts of the regenerate. All to the good of the people, the nation, the state!

Kuyper's Apologetics

Here, if anywhere, Kuyper acts as the apologist of the Christian religion. World history proves the usefulness, the value of the Christian religion. Where this religion does not flourish, there also culture flags.¹⁸⁶ But where this religion comes to manifestation, there the marvelous phenomenon appears that so many sectors of life begin to blossom forth which in themselves have no intrinsic relation with this religion of regeneration. There the common life of mankind is ennobled and unfolded, there human life becomes dynamic and acquires splendor. There enterprising activity leads to progress in moral and civic life and in control over nature. There science and art flourish. There culture is raised to levels never before attained.

Surely these indirect benefits of Christianity for this temporal life are worthy of some note! Surely they must speak to men's imagination! Surely they vindicate this religion's validity even in the eyes of those who may be skeptical about an afterlife and therefore doubt its "eternal" value – vindicate it on the strength of its irreplaceable and inestimable value for this temporal life! Also for the unbeliever, to live in "Christian" countries like these is much to be preferred to living in a non-Christian world. As far as that goes, also for the unbeliever America has a thing or two up on Tibet.

The Immediate Significance of Particular Grace for the Domain of Common Grace

Apart from this indirect effect of particular grace on the domain of common grace, Kuyper credits particular grace with yet another, quite different influence: a direct, immediate, and deliberate one. Here at last we can speak of “Christian” activity in the real and proper sense of the word. And here especially emerges Kuyper’s doctrine of the church as an organism.

It is in this context that Kuyper ascribes to particular grace an inner dynamism: particular grace cannot be contained; it must out; it must radiate out into the very realm of the visible and temporal.¹⁸⁷ The structure of the latter terrain remains what it was, creaturely, preserved and in some parts modified by common grace. But the terrain itself now becomes the arena for particular grace. Granted that this particular grace, by origin and at heart, is directed toward the center, the core of man’s being and does not arrive at its true and original destination until the hereafter, this does not mean that in this age it would not also direct itself to the whole of human life and move out from its “spiritual” center toward the periphery.¹⁸⁸ Whereas Kuyper initially expounded the view that only after the Noachic Covenant (of common grace) had come to an end would the Kingdom of Heaven set in,¹⁸⁹ he now drops this spiritualistic and eschatological position in the sense that he makes room for the idea that the Kingdom of Heaven is to be revealed already in the present age, in the realm of common grace – in the form of visible, concrete, tangible manifestations.¹⁹⁰ And this now will be the task of the church organism.

Without entering more fully now into Kuyper’s notion of the church as an organism, suffice it to establish at this point that Kuyper used this notion, among other purposes, for typifying the free and voluntary activity, incited by the impulse of regenerative grace, hence arising from the mystic communion of the Body of Christ, of Christ-believers in the domain of the visible-temporal world of common grace.¹⁹¹ The term is applied especially in reference to activity not undertaken under the direct leadership of the institutional church and the ecclesiastical offices and not directly related to the church institution as such. This activity, in the second place, can be both organized or not organized: this makes no essential difference for defining what is to be understood by the church organism. What is essential, however, is that Kuyper is not here propounding an individualistic concept of the church as an organism,

for he regards all this “out-going” activity as taking its origin in the church as the Body of Christ, in the “mystic” church of Our Lord.¹⁹² On the one hand, there is no regenerate man who is not ingrafted into this Body, who is not a liberated member of this mystic Body. On the other hand, there is in society no visible-temporal structure, be it a free association or a more institutionary body, that has any direct authority over that which has its origin and source in this mystic Body of Christ. For Kuyper, “the freedom of the Christian man” is at stake here. A Christian is “free” from all societal bonds in this visible-temporal world; he is called to the freedom of a discerning faith that can keep at a distance even the institutional church! But never the Word of Holy Scripture, nor the Incarnate Word of God! This is Kuyper’s position, and it is in harmony with the creeds of the Reformed churches, to be more exact: with Article VII of the Belgic Confession.¹⁹³

In its own distinctive way the meaning of Kuyper’s battle for “secularization” once more comes into view here. He resists every form of domination by the institutional church over the domain of common grace. He resists no less the idea of “church-sponsored” Christian action in this domain.¹⁹⁴ The Christian stands and must stand fast in the liberty of the children of God and shall live and work as a child of God also in the domain of common grace, also in the church organism.

Now this activity of the Christians, or of the church organism, is regarded by Kuyper, furthermore, as the natural out-come, the coming to light of what God’s Spirit has wrought in the “spiritual” core of the regenerate.¹⁹⁵ Christian action, in other words, is a revelation of the miracle of particular grace in the hearts of the elect and thus a revelation, a concrete manifestation, of the Kingdom of Heaven. And, seeing that Kuyper always immediately relates this “spiritual” realm of particular grace to its eternal destination and to its full implementation in the “age to come,” it will no longer seem strange that he also sees Christian action as faith’s anticipating of the kingdom that is to come and as faith’s working from out of “the powers of the age to come.”¹⁹⁶

Not until Kuyper has worked out this view is he in a position to define the function of *Pro Rege* in the domain of common grace. Not until now is he able to speak of real “Christian action” and of “Christian culture” in the proper sense of the word.¹⁹⁷ Not until now is he able to describe in the “broad” area of the temporal-visible life the working out of that radical antithesis between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of this world, an antithesis which originates in the fundamental antithesis between the Mystic Body of Christ and the race of Adam which in its spiritual root has fallen away from God.¹⁹⁸

Looked at in a positive way, this Christian activity, which directs itself from out of the spiritual center of particular grace into this temporal life, working itself out there, extending its influence, making the most of the treasures of common grace (and thus of creation and its many possibilities) as raw material for a truly “Christian” culture, means a new and unique way of pressing the domain of common grace into the service of the realm of particular grace.¹⁹⁹ All this activity, with all its many possibilities of expression, Kuyper concentrates in the single (Christian) parole: *Pro Rege*, for King Jesus.

“For King Jesus” – that means here: for the Christ Who as Mediator of Redemption and as exalted Messiah “has been given all power in heaven and on earth.”²⁰⁰ Looked at from the positive side, the most intimate and fruitful co-operation between common grace and particular grace is being carried on here: common grace preserves and develops the structures of creation, and on the basis of this preparatory work particular grace leads culture to a higher, richer and nobler development—to the praise and glory of Christ.²⁰¹ That is how the two co-operate – not in the first place for the sake of that development itself, but first and foremost to reveal thereby what the (particular) grace in Christ can do in the (common) domain of human culture.²⁰²

Once again, unlike the battle cry of the Anabaptist revolutionaries this *Pro Rege* does not call for the tearing down of the creation structures in order to establish an “otherworldly” kingdom in this world. Rather, it actually harmonizes with the highest development of the potentials and tasks that lie enclosed in creation. This slogan is a spur for such development. Hence we are at last dealing here with things like “Christian culture” this time properly so called, with Christian politics, Christian family life, Christian scholarship, etc., etc., in the true and unadulterated sense of the word.²⁰³ Cultural activity *Pro Rege* arises from regeneration,²⁰⁴ but abides by the ordinances for the life of the creature, by the creation ordinances as maintained and developed by common grace. The purpose of the visible and the temporal, its intrinsic “cultural” goal, its natural, creaturely end, has here become coterminous with the purpose of particular grace: the honor and glory of the exalted Christ and in Him of the Triune God of salvation. The twin goals merge: Christian cultural activity finally ends in exalting the Kingly glory of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

Here Kuyper has dropped his exclusively spiritualistic characterization of particular grace; here also particular grace has lost all traces of an exclusively eschatological end – let alone of any individualistic character it may originally have had. Much rather, we here see particular grace

radiating out from its center – even while not forgetting for a single moment to look to the hereafter for the full revelation and realization of its glory – into the life and labor of the domain of common grace. Here Christian culture is not at odds with the expectation of the new earth; here the Christian’s sense of calling in this temporal-visible reality is never without the Christian’s pilgrim song;²⁰⁵ here the spiritual center of particular grace is not weakened for the sake of “broad” cultural pursuits on the surface of life, but neither is that center made averse to or disdainful of (Christian) cultural activity.

Here Kuyper has achieved what he had in mind from the outset: while retaining the mysticism of particular grace and the eschatology of future expectation, he has found a spur for Christian action in the domain of common grace. This was his answer to the question, To be and not to be: To be in the world, yet not be of the world.

[4] ‘Pro Rege’ and the Antithesis

As had been indicated, with his *Pro Rege* password Kuyper expresses the positive aspect to his idea of a Christian culture properly so called. Next to that, however, he also has a negative way of expressing this same basic conviction. This we find in his doctrine of the antithesis. And we find it especially in his views concerning the organizational antithesis in the visible, temporal world.

That this antithesis is a fundamental and undeniable fact in the domain of “the spiritual” is something that Kuyper is never in doubt about. With Augustine he recognizes the deep-seated antithesis between the Kingdom of grace and the kingdom of this world, between this (invisible) church and the humanity that is included in Adam and his fall, between the “new humanity” and the humanity that has been given up to death, judgment and enmity against God.²⁰⁶

But that this antithesis manifests itself also in the domain of common grace and can even make itself felt so strongly there that the kingdom of this world makes capital of the treasures of common grace for the very purpose of driving the kingdom of Christ, the *Pro Rege* army, from its last foothold – that is a conviction that grew on Kuyper more and more.²⁰⁷ More and more will the antithesis come knocking at our door, precisely in the domain of common grace. The positive work from the *Pro Rege* motive will encounter more and more opposition and increasingly face an organization of the powers and treasures of common grace that is bent on thwarting this positive work.

Kuyper creates room for this conviction by dividing the domain of common grace into two areas: on the one hand there is the area of rational and technical culture, on the other there is the area of moral Culture. The progressive rational-technical conquest of inorganic and organic nature will go hand in hand with a decline in moral-civil society. It will mean a decline of the "higher values" of humanity.²⁰⁸ And therefore it will mean a conscious antithesis against the kingdom of Christ, precisely because Christian culture upholds, fosters and pursues these higher values. Moreover, the enmity against Christ Himself will constantly increase. As a result, common grace will be misused, will be turned against the Name of Christ and against His followers.²⁰⁹

All this summons the Christian to posit the antithesis, or rather to open his eyes to the reality of the antithesis. This is what makes *Pro Rege* a battle cry and gives *Pro Rege* action its war-like character. The more the hostility against Christ and against the preservative influence of Christianity comes out into the open in the area of "higher" culture, the more will Christians come to recognize their calling to set up their own distinctive organizations in the public sector of life and the sooner will they rally under the *Pro Rege* banner.²¹⁰

In this context Kuyper will sometimes venture statements that skirt the limits of propriety. For example, for the sake of greater solidarity among the Christians in the cause of *Pro Rege* science and scholarship he considers it "fortunate"²¹¹ that the godless character of the "misuse" of common grace is showing up more brazenly all the time; for the fact that it does so will of course undermine the temptation to blend Christianity and humanism.

But however strongly Christians may be steeled in this antithetical posture, this does not mean that their *Pro Rege* activity is not at the same time a struggle to preserve the highest values of common grace for the benefit of all the people and the entire nation, in fact for all man-kind in the present dispensation. Self-interest is not a motive here.²¹² The honor of Christ in this age is always a blessing for the whole of humanity – for unbelievers no less than for believers. Yes, in this very antithesis a battle is being waged for "the whole Dutch people," as Kuyper would repeatedly aver; it is a battle in the interest of culture, waged for the sake of strengthening, enhancing and developing common grace in the common domain and for the "common" people. This concern was never so much as a moment from Kuyper's mind and heart, even when he was most afire for the *Pro Rege* campaign and for the call to take up

the antithesis.²¹³

Here, at this 'Pro Rege,' this antithesis in the visible-temporal domain of common grace, here we hear the heartbeat of Kuyper and of his doctrine of common grace. In comparison with the use of the gift of common grace for Christian action, all those other things that follow in his doctrine of common grace and that may further be deduced from it are for Kuyper but side-issues.

That Christian action has priority in Kuyper is evident, among other ways, from the way he reacts when this Christian culture (Christian politics, etc.) properly so called, is endangered by having brought in against it the earlier so called "Christian" culture, that common grace culture which indirectly enjoys the fruits of particular grace but which has not directly come forth out of regeneration. This is done, for example, when the public school passes for a "Christian" school – in that second, improper sense. Obviously Kuyper can thus be fought with Kuyper. The Kuyper of the antithesis is then fought off with the Kuyper of common grace. Then the Christian school is combated with the "Christian public" school of a "Christian" nation.²¹⁴ When this threatens, when this use of (part of) his doctrine of common grace threatens to frustrate his choice for Christian education and to wound his love for the Christian school, Kuyper is not afraid to retract and even attack his earlier conception of a "Christian" school, a "Christian" culture, a "Christian" country, as being both invalid and misleading.²¹⁵ There cannot be the least doubt about it that this second sense of "Christian" was never intended by Kuyper to make the Christian school superfluous. As far as this point is concerned, this is how I would summarize Kuyper's deepest convictions as well as his actual practice: you may not mobilize his idea of a christianized common grace against his idea of a full-blooded and genuinely Christian culture that arises from the living fountains of particular grace, because in so doing you would clearly be making an unbelieving, anti-Christian use, and therefore a misuse, of what Kuyper understood by christianized common grace; therefore, to preclude any misunderstanding, it is better once for all to deny it the epithet Christian, which had been applied to it in an improper sense in the first place. This should clear up the real state of affairs, sharpen the awareness that the antithesis is gathering strength, and quicken the hearts to *Pro Rege* action.

[5] The Critical Question

Meanwhile we should not let slip the critical question whether Kuyper, next to enumerating these two, mutually quite distinct, ways in which particular grace in his view operates upon the domain of common grace, also proved able adequately to explain these operations by means of his doctrine of common grace and his *Pro Rege* emphasis.

This is a question which was dealt with neither by Hepp nor by Ridderbos, but which had been raised, many years before they ever wrote about common grace, by Van Ruler – who had answered it in the negative. Neither of our two authors appear to have had a ready answer for Van Ruler; at least, they chose to pass over the point in silence. This neglect is probably due to the fact that once they had determined that Kuyper did not teach an “Anabaptistic” dualism they had no eye for the fact that throughout Kuyper’s view of the relation between common grace and particular grace a polar dualism is habitually at work. This oversight is to be deplored if only for this reason, that the question raised by Van Ruler concerns the heart of the matter and has occasioned, also in the more immediate circles of Kuyper’s spiritual kin, differences of opinion and even of standpoint.

Van Ruler formulates his problem as follows:

Still, the question that was raised already in our third chapter presses itself upon us with greater urgency than ever: What does the impact of the supernatural powers of particular grace on the natural powers of common grace consist in?²¹⁶

He continues:

Now at last we have to be told, not why a Christian culture is so desirable, but what is to be understood by “Christian culture”! And the answer given to this question suffers from all the inner tensions contained in the principles undergirding the entire conception. Particular grace has been cast too much in terms of eternity for it to be able to make a clearly visible appearance in the world of time. Common grace has been riveted too tightly to the creation for it to be able to bear the insertion of a real hard quantity of particular grace without the break not always remaining visible.²¹⁷

Wherefore he concludes:

On the one hand Kuyper began by hiding the essence of particular grace too much in the mystic life of the soul to be able later to bring it out again as a culturally formative factor in history. And on the other hand Kuyper equally—and consistently—began by proclaiming common grace too positively as the explanation of God’s regiment over life outside the church to be able later to eliminate it or even relegate it to the second place. His insertion of particular grace into Christian culture is never fully successful; his elimination of common grace from Christian culture is never quite complete.²¹⁸

What are we to make of this, and what can we
reply to this?

When we consider the two ways in which Kuyper describes the influence and significance of particular grace for the domain of common grace, we cannot deny that he has had to do some adjusting to his view on particular grace, exclusively spiritualistic and eschatological as it had been initially; so much adjusting, in fact, that thanks to it he can hence – forth speak of a “fully developed particular grace” – fully developed because it is then no longer limited to the spiritual life of the inner soul and to the life of the hereafter but has “radiated out” into the domain of common grace, choosing this ordinary life for its instrument and making it serve the particular grace of *Pro Rege*. Of course, it goes without saying that once having committed himself to this position Kuyper must teach about the domain of common grace that the exalted Christ is also King of common grace and may rightfully demand that it be thus pressed into the service of His Royal rule.²¹⁹ The doctrine that common grace rests in Christ as the Son of God and as the Mediator of Creation will now no longer suffice for Kuyper. He is forced to correct himself on this point. And, however sparingly, he does exactly that. Even Ridderbos cannot get around this self-consistency in Kuyper and is forced to introduce into his study the position to which Kuyper’s doctrine finally brought him²²⁰ – despite his admonition to take Kuyper as he comes, in the full complexity of his thought.²²¹

What Van Ruler ignores, however, is that Kuyper himself had already made this correction; that in fact the happy hour arrived that he set forth that Christ as the Mediator of Redemption not only may lay claim to the central, spiritual core of man, but also is in principle the new Root

of all of created reality and the Head, the new Head, of the “human race.”²²² With that, Kuyper had broken with his own polarly dualistic contrast between particular grace and common grace. That is why he could state more forcefully in his writings on *Pro Rege* than in those on *Gemeene Gratie* that we are in the service of Christ throughout the entire domain of common grace.²²³

Kuyper vacillated between the two positions. He himself once said that any efforts to bring greater clarity in this problem would be more than welcome.²²⁴ He is rather to be admired, therefore, for correcting and replacing the basic conception with which he had begun – a polarly dualistic one – whenever it became clear to him that its inner logic was preventing him from being able to speak of truly Christian action in the domain of common grace. In those instances he did not brook being dictated to even by himself and his own world of ideas, but broke through these harmful constructions of his own, opening the floodgates for the work of the Spirit in His particular grace to pour out over the fields of life in the temporal-visible world as well.

By not taking this self-correction of Kuyper into account, Van Ruler in his conclusions does not do justice to Kuyper. No doubt he is right in saying that Kuyper never succeeds fully in inserting particular grace and never manages completely to eliminate common grace. However, the reason for that is that Kuyper had designedly tied particular grace too closely to the “supernatural” and the new, and had paid too little attention to the fact that if and when particular grace changes the direction of a man’s heart, this re-direction has immediate consequences for his “natural” life, for the whole of his activity in the domain of common grace: life in the domain of common grace once again becomes true religion and is once more experienced and intended as service of God in God’s covenant of grace. To be sure, Kuyper does indeed talk of “mediated religion” here,²²⁵ but because he failed to bring this element sufficiently to the foreground the door was left open to an “abstract” kind of common grace which as such does not lead to true religion but only to a cultivation of the creation potentials. Thus, by his rigid, often philosophical distinction between particular grace’s essence as supernatural and really belonging to the realm of glory – the new heaven and new earth – and common grace as never transcending the “essence” of creatureliness, Kuyper gives just cause for the criticism that “his insertion of particular grace is never fully successful.” But this is not – and this is the point I want to emphasize above all else – this is not the only Kuyper.

A full picture of Kuyper is not given unless it is also shown that he did not halt before his self-imposed problem, but broke through to the confession that truly Christian action is possible also in the domain of common grace. The fear of the Lord, not distinguishable from the confession and the experiencing of Jesus Christ as our Lord and King, is totalitarian in that it embraces not only the mystic life of the inner soul and not only the life of the hereafter but embraces no less our life "in all areas of life" in the present dispensation. This fundamentally Reformed confession never left him; rather, when in a predicament it saw him over the barricade thrown up by his polarly dualistic view of the relation between the two domains of particular grace and common grace.²²⁶

This escape, meanwhile, was never such that he needed really to eliminate common grace from the new life in the creation. It is not correct to say baldly that his "elimination of common grace is never quite complete." That the elimination was never quite complete is due to the fact that Kuyper never quite tried or intended it. Kuyper was quite on guard against that "Christian ghetto" into which Van Ruler would like to force him and his followers. He knew better than to admit and accredit the Anabaptistic and Gnostic notion that the "Christian life" is a revolutionary way of life running counter to creation. He had more sense than to identify the Christian activity of the church organism with doing things odd and out-of-this-world, and with outdoing simple, ordinary (!) obedience to the creation ordinances. His *Pro Rege* call and his doctrine of the antithesis were always intrinsically connected with the acceptance and recognition of the creation ordinances and the creation structures and never with an imaginary, would-be "Christian" world. This was the only way Kuyper knew of that avoided a contradiction between creation and redemption, between common grace and particular grace. Creation was to be anything but "eliminated," redemption was to be anything but "perpendicular" to God's work of creation.

While therefore Kuyper is never for a moment willing to disown the Christian Body's longing for the end of its pilgrimage and for the kingdom of glory, he can indeed be seduced more than once into seeing particular grace as the grace that would bring us, as it were, quite apart from this life,²²⁷ "into the realm of glory; yet even this temptation does not prevent him in due time from expressing the opposite view, from teaching that the journey to the Jerusalem that is above takes us right through this life and straight through this temporal reality, and that

this pilgrimage demands the labor of the service of God in a religion of thankfulness which devotes itself with all its energies to this life and its God-given structures and ordinances."²²⁸

*Kuyper's Gemeene Gratie as well as his Pro Rege testify to his religious desire to escape a culturally irrelevant and ineffectual Christianity and to pave the way for the Body of Christ, in his days still too much trammelled by an unwarranted renunciation of life and a false contempt for the world, to be once again the salt of the earth and to be once again the leaven of the world – or at least to learn to see that this is what Christianity means.*²²⁹

At the same time, when Kuyper, with due modesty and a healthy realism yet also in conformity with Scripture and the confessions, teaches that we may expect no more than "the beginnings of a break-through of the powers of particular grace in the visible things of this present life,"²³⁰ then he serves as an apt warning for all those pedagogues of Christian action who frightfully overestimate the quantitative (not the qualitative) importance of Christian action in the world. That does not alter the fact, however, that Kuyper is not afraid, having once sounded this caution, to retract as it were his doctrine of the independent purpose of common grace and to write: "Apart from particular grace, common grace would have been without a goal."²³¹ Nor is he afraid to write: "Not common grace but the order of particular grace obtains;" and to conclude the passage in question, in which he is evidently struggling not to impair altogether his stake in the independent purpose of common grace and yet to acknowledge the Son of God, as Mediator of Redemption, to be also the King of common grace, without pandering to a Christian individualism that makes man and his salvation the center of interest: "In this sense it ought to be recognized therefore that common grace is only a radiation from particular grace and that all its fruits flow back into particular grace."²³² Similarly: "Let no one forget, however, that particular grace always remains supreme, the core and center around which common grace turns."²³³ Or again: "That this silencing of God's wrath is possible through common grace finds its explanation exclusively in particular grace. It all turns on and ends in Christ."²³⁴ That is why common grace is said to work together with particular grace "in order to enable the powers of the Kingdom to penetrate into the world",²³⁵ and that is why Kuyper can even write that in common

grace “the harbingers” of the Kingdom are already visible.²³⁶

Kuyper himself desires more than once to be freed from the dualism between nature and grace, and then he sees no other way of acquiring this freedom than in the recognition that through particular grace the world that God once made “is restored in the nerve center of its life and purged of the cancer in its root.”²³⁷ This insight enables him in this connection to speak already of “the same old world of Adam, fashioned by God and despoiled by us, which [is] saved in Christ.”²³⁸

Furthermore, to give just one more citation, those polarly dualistic thought patterns that predominated as he structured and elaborated his doctrine and that pursued him every step of the way, Kuyper also, after all, revolts against. He wants to be rid of them and to be set at liberty. Ultimately what he wants to show is

that grace and nature belong together and that you cannot see the richness of grace if you do not see how its root fibers everywhere penetrate into the joints and rifts in the life of nature. Now this connection you cannot see if ‘grace’ makes you think first of the salvation of your soul and not first and foremost of the Christ of God. It is for this very reason that Scripture constantly reminds us that the Savior of the world is at the same time the Creator of the world; in fact, that He could only become its Savior because He was its Creator. Of course, it was not the Son of Man, the Incarnate Word, that created. Also in the Mediator all that was human was itself created, creaturely, as it is in us. Yet Scripture also points out repeatedly that this firstborn from the dead is also the firstborn of every creature and that the Incarnate Word always was and remained that same eternal Word that was with God and that was God and of Whom it is written that without that Word not any thing was made that was made. Thus we can see how Christ connects with nature, inasmuch as He is its Creator; and with grace, inasmuch as He has re-creatively revealed in that nature the richness of grace.²³⁹

No wonder that precisely in this connection Kuyper vigorously and cogently attacks the notion that our life in the world and for the world is something that is carried on “alongside our Christian religion,”²⁴⁰ and over against this view posits the confession that “Christ our Savior has to do not only with our souls but also with our bodies; that everything in the world belongs to Christ and is claimed by Him.”²⁴¹

But, in addition, Van Ruler has not sufficiently, or rather not at all, taken

into account the Kuyper who in principle overcomes and removes the polar tension between particular grace and common grace – precisely in his doctrine of particular grace. I am referring to the Kuyper who teaches – as he does in *De Gemeene Gratie*²⁴² – that particular grace does not, in regeneration, work a “conversion of being,” a “change in essence,” but rather a deeply religious reversal of the “innermost pivot” of I our being, whereby what had turned into its opposite through sin is once more set straight. For it is not now a polarly dialectical approach to the problem when next he asks how this reversal of the “invisibly small yet all-controlling central point” in man can possibly become effective on the periphery, that is to say, how a truly Christian life can blossom forth from such a regeneration which does not bring about a different “kind” of life or a change in being or essence. This time there simply is no inner tension for Kuyper to overcome when he continues:

Now this distinction [between center and periphery] enables us to picture to ourselves how it is possible that a change can take place in that matrix, in that single point from which all activity proceeds, without any change being discernible as yet in the broad periphery. But gradually that change in the center is completed; accordingly it gains in strength and begins to manifest itself also in the “issues of life;” and so at last the change or renewal becomes noticeable throughout the whole periphery.²⁴³

Here, precisely in his doctrine of regeneration and particular grace, Kuyper radically rises above that haunting dilemma brought on by the polarly dialectical relation which he usually construed between re-creation and creation.

Conclusion

In summary I conclude that Kuyper gave Van Ruler cause for writing what he did. But no less do I conclude that Kuyper more than once should have given Van Ruler pause in writing what he did. Many a passage in Kuyper, such as I have referred to or quoted above, should have suggested to Van Ruler that perhaps he was presenting only half a Kuyper and that there may also be another Kuyper, a Kuyper who in principle rises above the polar dualism in his view of the relation between re-creation and creation – especially where he writes that particular grace “restores the creation in its root.”²⁴⁴ In that case the

Kuyper of Van Ruler, the Kuyper of the particularistic, eschatological and spiritualistic doctrine of particular grace, is a misrepresentation of the true, in any case of the whole, Kuyper.

Kuyper himself struggled to reconcile the two lines in his thought, a struggle which became very conscious when he had to deal with the place and significance of the exalted Mediator for the domain of common grace.²⁴⁵ Contradictory statements, as we have seen, were the result.

No true follower of Kuyper can make a halt before these contradictory statements.²⁴⁶ He will have to choose. As for me, I do not want to make a secret of my position, which is that if there is to be a restoration of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace in which these contradictions no longer occur, it should be undertaken in no other way than in the way of a full-fledged elaboration of the things Kuyper wrote concerning the Christ and concerning particular grace which "restores the creation in its root." In such a restoration, common grace should never again be made to find its purpose in itself. It should never again be placed, even if only as to its origin, outside of particular grace.²⁴⁷ Rather, common grace should then be confessed as a work of God whereby He upholds His creation, maintains His creation ordinances, and thus opens the way for the militant as well as suffering church to fight her warfare *Pro Rege*, throughout this age, with the weapons God in His common grace has provided her – weapons that are forged, in spite of the impulse that is not of God, also by unbelievers, who no less than the believers are fitted by God's common grace with gifts and talents for their tasks, tasks which they perform, whatever they intend and whatsoever they will, in the service of particular grace.

And this will go on until Christ's second coming coincides with the end of the age, when the present dispensation will come to its appointed end.²⁴⁸ To the glory of Him that sitteth upon the throne. To the glory of the Lamb that bought us, soul and body, to be His own possession, in body as well as in soul.



Notes

1. Cf. G.G., II, 52, 349, *et passim*.
2. Herman Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace* (diss. Vrije Univ.; Goes, 1928).
3. G.G., I, 254; II, 632ff.; III, 124.
4. G.G., II, 685.
5. A.A. van Ruler, *Kuypers Idee eener Christelijke Cultuur* (Nijkerk, n.d. [1940]), pp. 12f.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 78ff., 136f.
7. Simon Jan Ridderbos, *De theologische cultuurbeschouwing van Abraham Kuyper* (diss. Vrije Univ.; Kampen, 1947), pp. 86f.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 328.
9. G.G., I, 223f.
10. G.G., I, 497; II, 277, 679.
11. G.G., I, 458ff.
12. G.G., II, 684f.
13. G.G., II, 341, 348, 355; III, 515f., 523.
14. Van Ruler, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
15. For these expressions, see G.G., II, 212: binnenste spil, middelpunt, kern.
16. Cf. Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, II/1, 255f.
17. Cf. G.G., II, 117, 216f.
18. K. Schilder, *Is de term "Algemeene Genade" wetenschappelijk verantwoord?* (Kampen, 1947), pp. 14ff.
19. Cf. A. Kuyper, *Encyclopaedic der Heilige Godgeleerdheid* (3 vols.; Amsterdam, 1893-94); II (2nd rev. ed., Kampen, 1909), 232.
20. G.G., II, 207ff., 241, *et passim*.
21. G.G., II, 207-217.
22. G.G., I, 95, 212ff., 222, 254, 263; II, 293, 338, 354, 684; III, 423.
23. Cf. A. Kuyper, *E Voto Dordraceno, of de Geloofte van Dordt* (4 vols.; Amsterdam, 1892-95); II, 537.
24. G.G., I, 296.
25. G.G., II, 137, 614, *et passim*.
26. G.G., II, 614, *et passim*.
27. G.G., II, 672; *Pro Rege*, II, 130f.
28. G.G., II, 672.
29. For this term, see S.J. Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
30. G.G., I, 255; II, 52, 207ff.
31. *Op. cit.*, e.g. p. 7.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 137; cf. p. 126: "Christianly speaking, after all, the significance of things lies in eternity."
33. G.G., II, 219.
34. So Van Ruler, *op. cit.*, p. 146: "If our salvation is hid in heaven, there is on principle no difference between the body's communion with salvation and the soul's.... The Spirit does not have a greater kinship with, and therefore hold on, the soul than with and on the body."
35. Cf. G.G., II, 10f., 639.
- 35a. Cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day VII.
36. *Op. cit.*, e.g. p. 7.
37. Cf. S.J. Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
- 37a. Cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day XXI.
38. "Mystiek;" cf. *Pro Rege*, II, 189ff.
39. G.G., II, 639, 654.
40. G.G., II, 341.
41. G.G., II, 654. [The reference is to the high incidence of infant mortality.]
42. G.G., II, 613.
43. G.G., III, 307.
44. *Encyclopaedie*, II, 112f.
45. G.G., II, 613.; III, 110ff.
46. G.G., II, 67.
47. Correctly observed by V. Hepp; see his *Dreigende Deformatie, IV: De algemeene Genade* (Kampen, 1937), pp. 73, 78, 87.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
49. G.G., I, 216, 244; II, 193, 214, 294.
50. I John 3:9; cf. I Peter 1:23ff.; G.G., II, 303.
51. G.G., II, 210.
52. Cf. Romans 6.
53. G.G., II, 243; III, 110.
54. Cf. M.C. Smit, *De verhouding van Christendom en Historie in de huidige Rooms Katholieke Geschiedbeschuwing* (diss. Vrije Univ.; Kampen, 1950), pp. 27-49. See also G.G., I, 131ff.; II, 44ff.
55. M.C. Smit, *op. cit.*, pp. 36, 37.
56. Cf. S.J. Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, p. 156; and e.g. G.G., III, 21.
57. Cf. G.G., II, 341, 665, 685, 688; III, 341.
58. G.G., II, 685, 689.
59. G.G., I, 291; III, 109, 331, *et passim*.
60. G.G., I, 86, 296; II, 507-511; III, 107-110, 146, *et passim*.
61. G.G., II, 613f.

62. So Van Ruler, *op. cit.*, pp. 39ff., 44ff.; so likewise, but shilly-shally, S.J. Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pp. 125, 322; so K. Schilder, *op. cit.*, pp. 69, 76.
63. G.G., II, 613.
64. G.G., II, 606, 626, *et passim*.
65. Van Ruler, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
66. Cf. G.G., II, 192, 246, 496, 613ff.; II, 47, 65-67, *et passim*.
67. G.G., I, 213, 220ff.
68. G.G., I, 243; II, 611.
69. G.G., III, 107ff.
70. G.G., II, 613f.; III, 110.
71. G.G., II, 613f.
72. G.G., II, 69ff.; III, 18, 19.
73. G.G., III, 27, 30, 31, 32, 423, 424.
74. S.J. Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, p. 322; cf. pp. 18, 131f., 156.
75. For this, see G.C. Berkouwer, *Karl Barth* (Kampen, 1936), *passim*, and Dionysius Kempff, *Die Skeppingsleer van Karl Barth* (diss. Vrije Univ.; Amsterdam and Capetown, 1949). [See also the article in this volume, "The Structure of Karl Barth's Doctrine of Creation."]
76. Thus, for example, S.J. Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pp. 137, 322.
77. G.G., II, 685.
78. For a survey, see S.J. Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pp. 122f., 157f.
79. G.G., II, 85ff.; III, 109, 110.
80. G.G., I, 225ff.; II, 637, 646; III, 123f. *et passim*.
81. For this, see S.J. Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pp. 72ff., 87, 294.
82. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 23ff.
83. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 26ff.
84. G.G., II, 279, et al.; cf. S.J. Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, 210ff.
85. G.G., II, 10, 11.
86. For Kuyper's opposition to a "pan-Christism," see S.J. Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pp. 86f.
87. G.G., 11,635; 111,302.
88. G.G., I, 307; II, 118, 626, 632; III, 302.
89. Cf. the expression "het ongekerstende burgerleven" (the unchristianized life in society), G.G., III, 425.
90. Cf. G.G., III, 143f.
91. G.G., I, 166; III, 103f.; *Pro Rege*, II, 349, 350ff.
92. G.G., I, 166.
93. Cf. G.G., I, 276f., 447ff., 456; II, 630; see also *Pro Rege*, I, 43ff.
94. Cf. G.G., I, 457f.; II, 121.
95. G.G., I, 451ff.; *Pro Rege*, III, 191, 225, 341, 352.
96. G.G., I, 452; II, 517.

97. G.G., II, 224.
98. *Pro Rege*, III, 184ff.
99. *Op. cit.*, p. 123.
100. See, for example, G.G., II, 121, 607f., 610, 623, 630f., *et passim*.
101. G.G., I, 489.
102. G.G., I, 105.
103. G.G., I, 220, 224.
104. Cf. G.G., I, 250; II, 631f., 639f.
105. Cf. G.G., I, 321; II, 680ff., 684.
106. G.G., I, 293; II, 147, 275-283, 634, 673-8.
107. Cf. E. Mounier, *Qu'est-ce-que le Personnalisme* (Paris, 1946), esp. chap. II, "Les Personnalisme de l'Engagement."
108. For examples of Kuyper's railing against "Doperse mijdinghe" (Anabaptistic separation), see G.G., I, 468; II, 69-76; II, 424; *et al.*
109. G.G., II, 276, *et passim*.
110. G.G., I, 432.
111. G.G., II, 341.
112. G.G., III, *passim*; cf. *Pro Rege*, II, 354ff.
113. G.G., II, 661.
114. G.G., 1,218,220; 11,662.
115. G.G., I, 222, 254, 263.
116. See note 22.
117. See note 60.
118. G.G., II, 611f.
119. G.G., III, 107ff.
- 119a. G.G., I, 215f.
120. G.G., II, 224.
121. K. Schilder, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
122. Cf. H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolarum*, pp. 316-318; J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink and J. Lindeboom, *Handboek der Kerkgeschiedenis*, I, 209.
123. *Op. cit.*, pp. 43f., 57, 59, 62, 64, 73f.; as a result, Matthew 5:45 is hardly done justice on p. 69.
124. John 3:17.
125. John 3:18, 19; John 16:22.
126. G.G., I, 222, 254.
127. *Op. cit.*, *passim*.
128. S.J. Popma, *Hedendaagsche vragen aangaande De Algemeene Genade*, p. 19.
129. LA. Diepenhorst, *Algemeene Genadeen Antithese* (Kampen, 1947), p. 26.

130. Cf. G.G., I, 90; III, 124: *een plek voor het hoi van haar voet (a foothold)*; I, 278: *mogelijkheid (possibility)*; II, 98: *voetstuk (groundwork)*.
131. G.G., II, 120, 125-191, 683f.
132. See my "Theologie en wijsbegeerte in de Kirchliche Dogmatik van Karl Barth," *Philosophia Reformata* 18 (1953), 77-138.
133. G.G., I, 220; II, 268ff., *et al.*
134. G.G., II, 243.
135. G.G., II, 253ff., 665, 680; III, 104.
136. G.G., II, 253ff.
137. G.G., II, 253; III, 103.
138. G.G., II, 254.
139. *Pro Rege*, II, 210.
140. G.G., II, 254.
141. G.G., II, 254, to be read in connection with II, 277: "particular grace always works unto eternal life, but what works here is wholly absorbed in time, hence falls under common grace." See also G.G., III, 34-40.
142. G.G., II, 254.
143. G.G., III, 124.
144. G.G., II, 98, 116f.
145. Cf. S.J. Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
146. Cf. G.G., I, 449.
147. Cf. G.G., I, 452; II, 517; III, 149, 153; *Pro Rege*, III, 191, 225, 341, 352.
148. Cf. G.G., II, 626.
149. She arises from a miracle: G.G., III, 110.
150. G.G., II, 207ff.
151. Cf. G.G., II, 212f; *Encyclopaedie*, II, 195, 196.
152. G.G., I, 162; cf. *Encycl*, II, 228ff.
153. *Encycl*, II, 228ff.
154. G.G., I, 337.
155. G.G., II, 199ff., 207ff.
156. G.G., II, 194. One should just compare this passage, as well as *Encycl.*, II, 232 and G.G., II, 199-207, with K. Schilder, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
157. Cf. G.G., II, 238, 660, *et al.*
158. *Institutio*, III, xxi, 7: "... cum quibus paciscitur Deus, non protinus eos donat Spiritu regenerationis, cuius virtute usque in finem in foedere perseverent: sed externa mutatio absque interiore gratiae efficacia, quae ad eos retinendos valida esset, medium quiddam est inter abjectionem humani generis et electionem exiguiorum numeri." ("... to those with whom God makes His covenant He does not at once grant the Spirit of regeneration by virtue of Whom

they would endure in the covenant unto the end; rather, the external change, without the working of internal grace which would have the power to keep them there, is something intermediate between the reprobation of the human race and the election of a small number of the godly.”)

159. *Institutio*, IV.

160. As found with Van Ruler, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

161. G.G., II, 275, 278; cf. S.J. Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

162. G.G., II, 610-612; III, 383.

163. G.G., II, 610.

164. G.G., I, 90, 247; II, 507, 509; III, 124.

165. Cf. S.J. Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pp. 136, 192ff.

166. G.G., II, 246, 260ff., 275ff.; III, 144.

167. G.G., I, 279; II, 242, 273.

168. G.G., II, 242.

169. G.G., I, 504; II, 184, 246, 671.

170 G.G., II, 248, 610; III, 437, *et passim*.

171. G.G., II, 664.

172. G.G., II, 670f.

173. G.G., II, 177ff., 668ff.; cf. *Pro Rege*, III, 311, 316.

174. G.G., II, 671-3, *et al.*

175. G.G., II, 341.

176. G.G., II, 341.

177. G.G., II, 275ff.

178. G.G., II, 672, 674.

179. G.G., II, 437: “precisely only the Christians...;” II, 246, 278.

180. G.G., III, 405.

181. G.G., II, 275; *Pro Rege*, III, 457ff.

182. See the many references in S.J. Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pp. 200ff.

183. G.G., III, 672.

184. G.G., III, 41, 52, 62, 289.

185. G.G., II, 133-135; III, 154, 394.

186. G.G., III, 105; cf. 1,457.

187. G.G., II, 350, 644, 684.

188. G.G., II, 684.

189. G.G., I, 432.

190. G.G., II, 672.

191. G.G., II, 253f., 689; III, 425, *et al.*

192. G.G., II, 253f.

193. [Belgic Confession, Article VII: “We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man

ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein. For since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise. . . nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, ... for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself. . . .”]

194. G.G., II, 279, 287ff., 350, 665ff.

195. Cf. G.G., II, 337, 644, 654ff.; III, 330, 338.

196. G.G., II, 689.

197. Cf. S.J. Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pp. 127n6, 160ff.

198. Cf. G.G., III, 527f., 569.

199. G.G., III, 149, 570f.

200. G.G., III, 281; but especially in *Pro Rege*, I, 370, 526, 567; III, 582, et al.

201. This is the prevailing tenor of the whole of *Pro Rege*; but it is also present in G.G., e.g. II, 348.

202. G.G., II, 341, 355.

203. G.G., II, 672, *et al.*

204. Cf. esp. Kuyper’s idea of a Christian science, in *Encycl.*, II, 97ff.

205. *Pro Rege*, II, 96ff.

206. Cf. e.g. *Encycl.*, 97ff.; G.G., II, 23.

207. *Pro Rege*, III, 225, *et al.*

208. G.G., I, 415ff., 431f., 447-450, 455f.

209. G.G., I, 452.

210. Thus esp. *Pro Rege*, III, 184ff., *et al.*

211. G.G., III, 528.

212. G.G., II, 246, 277; III, 405.

213. Not even in the three volumes on *Pro Rege*.

214. Cf. S.J. Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pp. 160ff.

215. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

216. Van Ruler, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

217. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

218. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

219. Cf. *Pro Rege*, III, 25.

220. *Op. cit.*, pp. 297ff.

221. *Ibid.*, p. 328.

222. Cf. G.G., II, 183.

223. *Pro Rege*, II, 527.

224. G.G., III, 280.

225. *Pro Rege*, I, 193.

226. G.G., I, 468; cf. II, 657f., 679.; III, 19.
227. G.G., III, 307.
228. G.G., III, 308; cf. also Ridderbos, *op cit.*, p. 264.
229. Cf. G.G., I, 468; III, 19.
230. G.G., II, 689.
231. G.G., I, 499.
232. G.G., I, 224.
233. G.G., I, 220.
234. G.G., II, 420.
235. G.G., I, 490; see also I, 496.
236. G.G., I, 490.
237. G.G., II, 183.
238. *Idem.*
239. G.G., I, 228.
240. G.G., 226.
241. G.G., I, 228.
242. G.G., II, 298.
243. G.G., II, 299; cf. II, 59, 65, 68.
244. G.G., II, 183.
245. G.G., III, 280.
246. Cf. V. Hepp, *op. cit.*, p. 70: "Are we then denying the possibility of inconsistencies in Kuyper? Of course not. But we ought to have enough respect for men of his stature not to start tinkering with them. If Kuyper has inconsistencies, then that too is the real Dr Kuyper – inconsistencies and all." My question is: What if he has internal contradictions? All I can say is that I find this a bigoted Kuyper worship which is untrue to the real Kuyper and which enthrones a false Kuyperianism.
247. Cf. G.G., II, 420.
248. Cf. Matthew 24:3.