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The Daane Reviews: I.

In the present issue of the Forum the reader will find a number of articles which concern either directly or indirectly the views of Professor Van Til of Westminster Seminary. Four of them represent a symposium on Dr. Daane's book, A THEOLOGY OF GRACE. Inasmuch as the Forum is a journal devoted to the application of Reformed principles to religious, cultural and other fields, the editorial committee regrets its becoming top-heavy with discussions on a relatively minor parochial issue. However, in view of the series of criticisms of Van Til which appeared on these pages during the Autumn of 1953, and in view of the rather cursory and admittedly inexpert notices given to A THEOLOGY OF GRACE elsewhere, the committee decided to give both Daane and the defenders of Van Til a hearing. Incidentally, with this issue and, possibly, a few articles widely scattered among future issues the committee hopes to be done for a while with the subject of Van Til.

Daane's book concerns the philosophical principles underlying Van Til's view of the doctrine of common grace, the thesis being that these principles involve a virtual denial of that doctrine. The criticisms appearing in the Forum during the Autumn of 1953 concerned primarily the intellectual respectability of the philosophical argument involved in Van Til's apologetics, touching only incidentally upon the subject of common grace. There was, therefore, no attempt to call in question the soundness of Van Til's personal theological beliefs, but only to point out that his philosophical justification of those beliefs left much to be desired.1

In fact, the criticisms were in reality a statement of disappointment by men of the Reformed faith trained in the field of philosophy, a statement in which they deplored the fact that his defence of Christian Theism appeared to be a rather inferior performance. They specifically pointed out that as the result of an inaccurate use of the language of philosophy and a failure to express himself in clear and unambiguous English, Van Til's writings were characterized by confused expression to such an extent that any philosophically trained person trying to get some idea of the specific content of Christian Theism, upon reading what Van Til writes in defence of it, could easily come away with the impression that it must be a form of pantheism.

That some of these critics exhibited impatience and occasionally employed sharp language should be judged in the light of the fact that a man of Reformed convictions on the philosophy staff of a state university is not in an enviable position. He is called upon almost daily—frequently under quite embarrassing circumstances—to give an answer "to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." Should he at an unguarded moment avail himself of Van Til's arguments, their futility would be pointed out to him almost at once. If in addition he should be told—and shown—that the job of Christian apologetics had been done considerably better by Anglicans and Catholics (Fairbairn, Taylor, De Burgh and others), he can hardly be expected, if he is under fifty, to take this with the nonchalance of an experienced and probably tired saint of seventy-five. After all, a bad argument for the truth can do more damage than a good argument against it. Apologetics is in part for the silencing of the scornful; and Van Til's way of doing this is evidently not the way to do it.

Does Van Til merit the confidence of the Church? We leave that to our ministers and theologians, meanwhile observing that although his soundness may be a question to be put to the test of Scripture, the intellectual respectability of his use of philosophy in apologetics is a question to be put to the test of philosophy as well as Scripture. Van Til's personal beliefs may be quite in order, but he evidently has great difficulty making this clear in the language of philosophy. And that, incidentally, may account for the fact that his critics so frequently "misunderstand" him. In other words, by reason of his inaccurate use of the language of philosophy and his failure to express himself in unambiguous English, he may virtually have caricatured his own position which—let us assume for argument's sake—may be wholly Reformed.

A postscript. The Calvin Forum is a forum; and opinions expressed in the articles contained in this and other issues are not necessarily those of the editorial committee, to say nothing of the Forum Board. As for the opinions expressed in the editorials— they are the sole responsibility of the staff member expressing them.

C.D.B.

The Daane Reviews: II.

That Calvinists differ at times in their theological constructions is a truism that needs no documentation. That in itself is not regrettable. On the con-

trary, it is salutary and good. It indicates a living church. It indicates a church that manifests concern about constantly rethinking its basic position. Open discussion of differences, if conducted on the high level that befits the Calvinist, can be fruitful and beneficial. Furthermore, it may signalize progress. Only when our cherished views are tested anew in the crucible of the Word of God can we come to greater clarity and precision with respect to them. So we construe the debate between Dr. C. Van Til and Dr. Jas. Daane on the subject of common grace and its concomitant, the philosophy of history. This is no personal quarrel between the contestants — they are fellow soldiers in the army of the Lord. Nor is this a squabble between Westminster and Calvin or between the Orthodox Presbyterian and Christian Reformed Churches. We are allies in a common cause. We stand shoulder to shoulder in our defense and propagation of the Reformed faith. But we are seeking clearer and more adequate formulation of these truths imbedded in the Word of God. That is the avowed aim of the chief figures in this discussion. Although both of them argue their respective positions vigorously, no one of them claims finality for his position. Both are ready to admit that there may be flaws or loopholes in their reasoning or argumentation. To make that admission is the mark of a humble Christian scholar who knows that even though he is regenerate, the beclouding vestige of sin is still with him and will be with him to his dying day. Hence we need mutual instruction. We must learn from one another. In these controversial writings we design to assist one another in our comprehension and explication of the Reformed faith. And in order that the study which has been projected into the limelight may be carried forward we have sought the contributions of other minds. We have arranged a symposium on Daane's *A Theology of Grace*. Invitations to participate were extended to Prof. L. Berkhof of Grand Rapids, Dr. Edw. Carnell of Fuller Theological Seminary, Dr. Alex. De Jong of Grand Rapids, Rev. Edw. Herrema of Grand Rapids, Dr. Carl Henry of Fuller Seminary, Dr. Balmer Kelly of Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, Pres. R. B. Kuiper of Calvin Seminary, Rev. Raymond Opperwal of Racine, Wisconsin, Rev. L. Verduin of Ann Arbor, Michigan and Dr. William Young, currently studying in Oxford, England. Pressure of duty and other commitments kept the number of contributors relatively low. We are pleased to present, however, the reactions of the Messrs. Herrema, Opperwal, Verduin and Young, who have kindly consented to serve the Reformed community with their reflections.

John H. Bratt,
(Book Editor of Theological Works)

## Daane's *A Theology of Grace*

**A Symposium**

THIS book deserves a serious reading by the readers of the *Calvin Forum*. It is a direct analysis and evaluation of Dr. C. Van Til's view of common grace and the philosophical structure underlying that view. While other writers have addressed themselves to the views of Dr. Van Til, this is the first book to appear that is devoted exclusively to those views. For some years there has been a real need for competent assessment of the philosophical framework of Dr. Van Til's position, particularly because some who have accepted his framework have been pressing their criticism of the more traditional position on common grace in a way that cannot be ignored. This, then, should be a relevant book, since it addresses itself to a problem disturbing to everyone alive to the situation.

The fundamental thesis of the book may be rather simply summarized. As Daane tells us in the preface he is concerned that we see two things: (1) That while Van Til has attempted to deliver the common-grace views of others from non-Christian philosophi-
when he does not find it in God's decree of election and reprobation.

There is a reason, Daane informs us, for this new definition of the problem. It is to be found in the fact that Van Til takes as his point of departure the abstract entities of election and reprobation. Beginning abstractly with two entities which by definition have nothing in common, Van Til sees the "problem" as one of explaining what two such entities can have in common in time.

This starting point, Daane goes on, is the same as Herman Hoeksema's. But Hoeksema, proceeding from this abstract starting point, arrives at simple consistency at a denial of common grace. Hoeksema's logic is excellent. Two things which by definition have nothing in common simply do not have grace in common. Hoeksema's error is his starting point. He has reduced election and reprobation to abstractions, whereas actually election and reprobation do not exist except as qualities that adhere to persons. Furthermore, "persons defined exclusively in terms of election and reprobation do not exist, either in the mind of God or in the temporal world." (p. 27) Thus, the un-Scriptural abstractness of Hoeksema's point of departure predetermines his denial of common grace.

But now Van Til starts where Hoeksema starts rather than where the framework of the 1924 formulations begins. Why is it that Van Til does not then arrive at Hoeksema's conclusion? The reason, says Daane, is that Van Til thinks in existential categories while Hoeksema does not. If Van Til would lay aside his existential categories he would come out just where Hoeksema does. If Hoeksema, on the other hand, would accept Van Til's existential categories he would come out just where Van Til does. (See pp. 59-60)

II

Van Til's problem of common grace then becomes a "problem" of how to avoid Hoeksema's conclusions after one has accepted his starting point. The key to answering this wrongly-defined problem of common grace Van Til would provide by throwing history into a existential framework. The "problem" can be resolved by seeing history as an existential process, i.e., a process in which elect and reprobate are gradually coming to existence, becoming self-consciously themselves, or achieving more fully what they already are in principle. (see p. 44)

This involves regarding history as a process of particularization. At one end of the process is the beginning of history when elect and reprobate have everything in common. At the other end of the process is the conclusion of history when elect and reprobate have nothing in common. Moving between these two poles are the historical elect and reprobate. They are gradually emerging from the commonness of the beginning and moving toward the separation at the end. They are like one another to the extent that they have not yet become self-consciously "themselves," but insofar as they are "themselves" they already have nothing in common.

Commonness in God's grace must then be related to the degree to which men are not yet themselves. "When the reprobate is 10% reprobate he is 10% of what he will be ultimately. When he is 10% reprobate, 10% of his not-yet-existence has turned into real existence. Toward this 10% reprobate God has only wrath; because he is 10% real, 10% of common grace is already past for him. Only toward the 90% does God extend his common grace, i.e., common grace extends to the 90% non-existence which is not-yet." (p. 50)

Behind Van Til's existential tension of history Daane finds a use of the ontological trinity as Van Til's most basic principle of interpretation. For Van Til the problem of commonality vs. particularity in history is but one aspect of the great problem of the one and the many. For Van Til the key to every form of this problem is to be found in the ontological trinity, our "Concrete Universal," in whom one-ness and many-ness are equally ultimate. Regarding the one-many problem as the basic problem of interpretation Van Til regards the one-many aspect of the Trinity as the Christian's most basic principle of interpretation.

Daane, however, regards this use of the Trinity as more Hegelian than Biblical. Hegel also claimed the Trinity as his concrete universal. Both Hegel and Van Til have abstracted the one-many aspect of God's nature and elevated it at the expense of God's virtues revealed in Christ. Daane believes that we must recognize the one-many aspect of God's nature, but we must reckon with the whole of God's nature. God's revealed nature cannot be reduced to a biblical statement of the right interrelationship of the one and the many. Daane asks: "Does the Bible present the one-many principle as the highest principle of interpretation?... as the key to the interpretation of every problem, including sin?" (p. 103)

Non-Christian philosophers, Daane goes on, have often presented the one-many problem as though it were the world's one great problem. But "Christian theologians must not allow non-Christian thinkers to formulate their problems for them... Christian thinkers must remember that the form of the problem determines the form of the solution." (p. 104) For the Christian the one-many problem is not the basic problem. But Van Til has accepted a non-Christian definition of the problem of history and as a result has "gone off on a philosopher's holiday." (p. 105)

The serious thing about this compound of "Hegelian rationalism" and "existential dialecticism," says Daane, is that it overthrows the Biblical views of the nature of God, of grace, and of time. The abstract use of election and reprobation as if they were equal-
ly ultimate involves making God's wrath as definitive of God's nature as his love. (p. 71) God then becomes not a God who has no pleasure in the death of the wicked and who would have all men to be saved, but a God who is as much interested in the damnation of the reprobate as He is in the salvation of the elect. History, too, is not "distinctively and decisively qualified by grace so that its continuance may be regarded as a result of grace and its distinctive purpose that of redemption. . . .History is [rather] equally much geared toward election and reprobation, toward heaven and hell." However, says Daane, "According to Gen. 3:15 the primal issue of history is redemption, the crushing of evil, and the victory of the good." (p. 141)

III

The Three Points of 1924 also do not escape mutilation. The fact that Van Til says "No" to Hoeksema does not mean that Van Til says "Yes" to 1924.

Daane is convinced that Van Til cannot and does not accept the Three Points as they were intended by the 1924 Synod. Van Til uses them as a means to the general gospel offer "in general," (p. 46) as "the reprobate as distinguished from the elect." (p. 46) [Italics Daane's]

Similar things happen to points two and three of 1924. In Van Til's framework they cannot mean what the 1924 Synod meant by them.

In Van Til's theology strange things also happen to the general gospel offer which 1924 regarded as an evidence of favor toward the reprobate. Van Til attacks the 1924 teaching on the general offer as it appears in Hepp's writings. (p. 53 ff.) Van Til, Daane goes on, "cannot on his basis allow what Hepp allows and what 1924 allows - the extension of a well-meant offer of salvation, expressive of God's will to save, to sinners as real sinners, to reprobate as real reprobate." (p. 56) Instead, to Van Til the general offer has for its purpose the producing of two kinds of reactions in men. It is an instrument by which two kinds of men are to be brought to self-consciousness and thus the historical process advanced. But then, says Daane, the gospel becomes equally much bad news as good news, equally much a savor of death unto death as a savor of life unto life. Christ then came into the world to condemn the world to the same extent that He came to save. But this is a distortion of the Biblical well-meant offer and a profound distortion of the gospel itself. "Van Til's view of common grace, like Hoeksema's denial of common grace, involves much more than a mere difference of opinion concerning a separate isolated doctrine. What is at stake is the very essence of the gospel of grace and the very nature of God himself." (p. 73)

IV

But are all these charges of Daane's correct? To what extent is Van Til subject to the criticisms of the book? This is a question which needs much same discussion with open minds and perhaps some tentativeness of judgment for a time. My own feeling is that there is enough truth in this book to make Van Til extremely uncomfortable. While there are aspects of Daane's criticism which seem to me to go too far, it seems difficult to deny the force of his main thesis. I believe that those who have read with understanding both Van Til and Daane will not deny that Van Til has framed the problem of common grace as Daane indicates and has sought to solve his problem with the use of existential categories. This much of Daane's analysis is too well documented by Van Til's own words — words which when checked in their context in Van Til make no sense if interpreted otherwise.

There are places where Daane seems to forget the larger context in which Van Til is operating, or the limitations which this places upon his existential categories (e.g., p. 44, mid-page). Van Til at least desires to limit the use of these categories to the ethical and epistemological realm, and this within the framework of a Christian metaphysics built on the Creator-creature relationship. In many places Daane also goes far beyond Van Til's intent in the application of these principles. All this, no doubt, is done in the interest of showing the unsuitability of these principles. However, it seems as though Daane might have distinguished more sharply between what Van Til intends to say and what his theology entitles him to say. Ironically, Van Til himself is often rightly criticized for failure to make this same distinction in his treatment of others.

However, even when one carefully limits the use of these existential categories to the area in which Van Til is operating, or the limitations which this places upon his existential categories (e.g., p. 44, mid-page), Van Til at least desires to limit the use of these categories to the ethical and epistemological realm, and this within the framework of a Christian metaphysics built on the Creator-creature relationship. In many places Daane also goes far beyond Van Til's intent in the application of these principles. All this, no doubt, is done in the interest of showing the unsuitability of these principles. However, it seems as though Daane might have distinguished more sharply between what Van Til intends to say and what his theology entitles him to say. Ironically, Van Til himself is often rightly criticized for failure to make this same distinction in his treatment of others.

The correctness of Daane's basic criticism is underscored by the way his analysis explains some of the formerly puzzling things about Van Til's thought. For example, Van Til insists that he believes in commonness (for the time being), but nevertheless he also insists upon an absolutistic "black and white" apologetics — not at the end of history but here and now. How can these two things be reconciled? Daane's analysis makes the answer clear. If history is an existential process of becoming it is only at the
end of history that men will be themselves. Hence, for Van Til a consistent apologetics must wipe away the misleading appearances and illusions of history, unmasking a man as he is in "himself." Such a view of history can produce only a black and white apologetics, for commonness is there only as unreality or not-yet-ness.

The treatment of philosophical categories probably makes this book difficult reading for those unfamiliar with the terminology. For this, of course, Daane need not apologize. The categories are Van Til's, not Daane's, and Van Til's theology cannot be analyzed without the unthreading of these principles. Nevertheless, some may note the philosophical terminology and easily assume that the essential criticism of the book is philosophical. This is not true. As the title of the book indicates, it is Van Til's theology that Daane challenges. The question is whether Van Til's theology is faithful to Scripture. As Daane puts it: "What is at stake is the very essence of the gospel of grace and the very nature of God himself." (p. 73)

Edward Heerema

I WAS to be expected that voices would be raised to challenge the thinking of Dr. C. Van Til. That is commonly the case when a man takes a position on moot questions and expounds it forthrightly over a period of time. And every student of Van Til welcomes such challenges as an aid to the clarification of his own thinking. Any sincere piece of writing, polemical and otherwise, that honors the accepted canons of responsible discussion and composition, is helpful to this end and is therefore to be welcomed.

This former pupil of Van Til finds it most difficult to welcome the book under review in that spirit. The most obvious reason for this difficulty lies in the fact that the book charges Van Til with just about everything that he has vigorously challenged and criticized. Grounding himself on the ontological Trinity as revealed in Scripture, Van Til has persistently attacked (also in his Common Grace) abstraction in the formulation of our conceptions. Throughout his book Daane charges Van Til with the most arrant abstractionism.

I

"Van Til's thought," we are told "is shot through with a sheer unbiblical individualism" (p. 109). And here is the ultra-ultra judgment: "His fundamental presuppositions lie embedded in the rational dialectical tradition of philosophic idealism. It has been modified by existentialism. His basic presuppositions, therefore, bear the character of a rational existential dialectic" (p. 99). It is to be noted that Daane makes this heavily loaded assertion about Van Til's "basic presuppositions." The irrepressible reaction is — "fantastic."

Daane's reconstruction of Van Til leads him to believe that the biblical teaching of creation as a definite work of God in time is placed in jeopardy (p. 43). As a matter of simple fact no element in Van Til's thinking receives more emphasis than the doctrine of creation and the correlative distinction between the Creator and the creature. Furthermore, it is passing strange to read that Van Til's thinking on the matter of cooperation between believers and unbelievers "conceals the religious difference and infringes on the nature of Christian witness" (p. 157).

A second feature of Daane's treatise must be placed alongside of these wholly incongruous things that he distills from Van Til's little book on common grace. The book under review abounds in strongly flavored language like the following. "Van Til's wholly unbiblical conception of grace" (p. 64); "loose thought and careless expression" (p. 69); "serious departure from the biblical conception of grace and from the biblical conception of the nature of God" (p. 72); "wholly presumptuous and illegitimate procedure" (p. 104) "statement is freighted with confusion and unrefined theological thought' (p. 126). And the book is not without a suggestion of vitriol in the author's ink bottle (see footnote, p. 114).

Worthy of note, in the third place, is the manner in which factual matters are dealt with at points where the issue in dispute is broached. We are told in an historical judgment appearing early in Daane's book that "after almost thirty years of relative quiet, common grace as defined in 1924 is now being sharply criticized" (p. 16. Italics mine.) Can Daane point to one definite and clearcut sentence in the writings of Van Til where he "sharply" criticizes the decisions of the synod of 1924? If Daane means to say that he understands Van Til's position to be a sharp criticism of the three points of 1924, then the use of the adverb "sharply" certainly begs the question in the introductory historical observation referred to.

Daane refers (pp. 147f.) to the controversy over the teachings of Gordon H. Clark which disturbed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church a few years back. Daane's treatment of this debate reduces it to a conflict between what he regards as two faulty positions, namely, that of Clark and that of Van Til. Such a description of the controversy is quite inaccurate and misleading. Theologians of repute who are not necessarily committed to C. Van Til's manner of theological formulation (the rest of the faculty of Westminster Seminary, for instance) opposed Clark's ideas on the ground that they contained elements that were decidedly unscriptural and uncon­fessional. The issue was most certainly not simply Van Til versus Clark.

II

The manner in which Daane deals with the subject of his surgical treatment is a fourth matter worthy of careful attention. Here is a sample. Daane quotes
Van Til as follows: "The general presentation comes to a generality. It comes to 'sinners' differentiated to be sure, as elect and reprobate in the mind of God, but yet prior to their act of acceptance and rejection, regarded as a generality. To forget this is to move the calendar of God ahead" (pp. 51f). One of two observations made by Daane on this passage is as follows:

... his placing the term sinners within quotation marks indicates how strongly he is opposed to the idea that the general offer is meaningful for real, existent sinners, for sinners as we see them in life. For Van Til contends that it is not to real, existent sinners, as Point I of 1924 teaches, that the general offer of salvation comes as an expression of common grace. The general offer is not an expression of common grace when it comes to real sinners as they confront us in life. Hence Van Til's quotation marks around the word sinners (p. 22).

Isn't it rather high-handed to place so much weight on these two little marks around the word sinners? The statement itself distinguishes between such sinners as they are in the mind of God and as they are in actual existence where they as real beings accept or reject.

The same type of procedure is apparent in his dealing with a laconic statement by Van Til regarding Point I of 1924. This is the statement: "For better or for worse, Synod meant to teach that God has a certain attitude of favor to all men as men." This terse statement, called "highly significant" by the critic, is given the following initial treatment:

The stress in this sentence falls upon God's favor to all men as men, and it is in reference to this that Van Til's words 'for better or for worse' apply. The meaning of 'men as men' is far from transparent. The phrase indicates that men can be regarded under some other category than the category of men, but what this category is, is not apparent. The task, therefore, of those who desire to understand and evaluate Van Til's common-grace thought is to discover and evaluate this other category under which Van Til regards men and defines common grace. As will be shown, it is precisely this question of God's favor toward men as men that constitutes the point of Van Til's greatest proximity to the thought of Hooker. It would, therefore, have been not for worse but for better, if Van Til had not chosen to conceal his evaluation of Synod's teaching behind the non-committal phrase, 'For better or for worse'... (pp. 18-19).

It is to be noted that the brief sentence which receives this drastic and arbitrary treatment by Daane is found in a context in which Van Til agrees with Zwier in rejecting abstraction in a criticism directed by Schilder against the decisions of 1924 (see Common Grace, p. 26).

There is in Van Til's book on common grace an insistent emphasis which Daane's reconstruction boldly sets aside. Van Til regards the question of common grace as part of the larger problem of the meaning of history. Van Til wants us to take history seriously. His little book abounds in references to history and the historical. He is concerned that the historical Moment shall have real significance. He calls upon all concerned with the problem at hand "to learn to take time more seriously than we have done" (Common Grace, p. 64). In spite of this repeated emphasis Daane deals as follows with a reference to the historical by Van Til: "Van Til asserts, 'Accord-

ingly we need not fear to assert that there is... a certain good before God in the life of the historically undeveloped unbeliever' (p. 94). Since the 'historically undeveloped unbeliever' is mankind as non-existent, i.e., the unbeliever in so far as he is not historically real, the good that he performs is no more real than the non-reality which is said to perform this good" (p. 83). A reconstruction of a man's thought that prompts one to deal thus with his words ('life', 'historically') suggests its own inherent weakness.

With regard to Daane's manner of treating his opponent it is to be noted that he bases his critique, even as to Van Til's "basic presuppositions," exclusively on the little book on common grace. It would seem reasonable to expect that Daane would have gone to Van Til's far more extensive writings to ascertain more exactly what his meanings are. Such a drastic overhauling of a man's thinking calls for more exhaustive research than Daane's critique reveals.

All of these considerations raise a persistent question in this reviewer's mind. Is this book to be taken seriously as an objective piece of theological writing, or is it really only a "propaganda piece"? There is another feature of the book that reinforces the pertinence of this question. Daane is determined to show that Van Til disagrees with and denies the teachings of the "Three Points" on common grace adopted by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924. Nowhere can Daane point to one sentence in which Van Til gives expression to such basic disagreement and denial. Therefore Daane subjects Van Til's book to a thorough process of overhauling, and on the basis of this reconstruction he alleges that Van Til denies the teachings of 1924. His right to make this allegation is not subject to question if he sincerely feels thus about it. But one ought to be more careful that this allegation be always just that, and not a matter of simple, manifest fact. What does Daane do? That which in the nature of the case is only an allegation turns into a datum of fact in Daane's book. As his argument progresses he speaks freely of "Van Til's rejection of Point I" (pp. 77 and 87), and of "Van Til's denial of Point I" (p. 157). This is a most high-handed procedure that violates the fairness and objectivity that characterize responsible scholarship. It would seem altogether proper that all such allegations be qualified by some phrase like "as I understand him," or "as it seems to me."

III

What shall we say as to Daane's argument? It turns on his understanding of certain crucial concepts in Van Til's thinking on common grace and on his understanding of Van Til's starting point in formulating his conception of common grace. The two significant concepts central to this discussion are the concept "mankind as a generality" and the con-
cept “earlier” as applied to common grace. “All common grace is earlier grace,” says Van Til (Common Grace, p. 82).

Daane asserts that the common grace problem in Van Til is “explicitly stated” as follows: “The common grace problem deals with this question: What do entities which will one day be wholly different from one another have in common before that final stage of separation is reached” (Daane, p. 20, quoting Van Til’s Common Grace, p. 68). One can share some of Daane’s distaste for this particular formulation of the problem. But, in all fairness to Van Til, one must ask whether it is wholly correct to single out this particular brief utterance as the explicit delineation of the problem. The contextual setting does not suggest that it was so intended. The sentence in question appears in a section dealing with the matter of mystery, and the very statement quoted above is colored in its mode of expression by the setting in which it is found.

Laying this question aside, we turn to Daane’s understanding of these terms. Van Til’s “generality of mankind” (which is the object of common grace) is understood to be “a generality with non-existence.” This understanding stems from the following statement by Van Til: “If we make the earlier our point of departure for the later, we begin with something that believers and unbelievers have in common. That is to say, they have something in common because they do not yet exist. Yet they do exist. They exist in Adam as their common representative” (Common Grace, p. 72). With regard to his statement Daane says:

Thus Van Til defines mankind as a generality both in terms of existence and non-existence. Now it must be asked, What can be defined in terms of both existence and non-existence? We may begin to answer this question by asserting that it cannot be anything real ... Mankind as a generality is a mental idea which views existence under the form of earlier. If, thinking only of existence, we ask what is earlier than existence, the answer is non-existence. Mankind as a generality, therefore, is only a mental concept which views mankind before it exists, and, therefore, in the form of its non-existence (pp. 36ff).

Here, says Daane, is the explanation of Van Til’s reference to “men as men” in speaking of the intent of Point 1 of 1924. “For ‘men as men’ are always existent men, and common grace, in Van Til’s thoughts, is always earlier than men’s existence and only extends to mankind as a generality” (p. 37).

The next step in Daane’s reconstruction of Van Til is to assert that he equates existence with self-consciousness (hence the charge of idealism against Van Til). History is a process in which the undifferentiated generality of men (or “mankind in general,” as Van Til also expresses the idea) moves forward to the time when men will be fully self-conscious members of the elect family of God or fully self-conscious members of the class of the reprobate. Because no Christian is ever completely free from sin (and hence is not completely self-conscious as a Christian living and breathing his confession at every point) and the reprobate is never absolutely evil, the generality of mankind remains such in some degree to the very end of time. However, as time progresses there will be increasing self-consciousness on the part of the elect and the reprobate, so that on the part of the reprobate there will be increasing hostility against the kingdom of God. “Each man is on the move,” says Van Til (Common Grace, p. 92).

All of this Daane interprets as movement from a generality which is non-existent to the actual existence of men as flesh and blood realities. And here the concept earlier comes into play. The earlier of common grace is correlative with the earlier character of this non-existent generality. It is earlier grace, earlier than existence. Yes, “Van Til’s ‘earlier is earlier than creation, earlier than created time and created realities” (p. 42). In fact, Van Til’s earlier “is as early as the eternal decrees of election and reprobation” (p. 42).

And here is Van Til’s starting point says Daane, namely, in the “abstract ideas of election and reprobation” (p. 28). Real men do not yet exist in election and therefore the ideas are “abstract.” Van Til relates the common grace problem to pre-Fall time, when the elect and the reprobate were not yet real existent beings. “To speak of common grace as real before the Fall is a capitulation to abstract thinking . . . The common grace problem is said to be a real problem in sinless time. The elect and the reprobate are said to have much in common in sinless Adam because they do not yet exist . . . Common grace is said to be a historical attitude of God toward men not yet within history because they are not yet within existence” (p. 46).

Although there are some points at which one might wish for more clarification on pages 72ff. in Van Til’s book, still his meaning in the main is fairly clear. He is dealing with the matter of the divine attitude. God has had an attitude of favor toward mankind as represented in Adam. This turned to an attitude of wrath toward mankind in fallen Adam. Therefore, since God has had a common attitude toward mankind in general, mankind as yet historically undifferentiated into the elect and reprobate, we have warrant, argues Van Til, for believing in an attitude of common favor or grace by God upon mankind now in actual history, upon mankind in general, mankind not yet fully differentiated.

Daane contends that “the shadow of the fictional falls over” Van Til’s common grace theology in all of its ramifications. Common grace is directed toward a non-existent generality of mankind. The offer of the gospel is given to the same non-existent generality. Why is this so for Daane? It is because Van Til’s “whole common-grace theology and his epistemology rest on the fallacious assumption that it is possible for something to be both existent and non-existent, and yet real” (pp. 158ff.).
This *reductio ad absurdum*, this reduction to meaninglessness of Van Til's common grace theology rests, in my opinion, on a failure to understand Van Til. Daane has read strange and almost fantastic meanings into Van Til's terms, often on very scanty quoted evidence, and with these meanings he has sought to force Van Til to amazing conclusions. A good illustration of the manner in which Daane has misunderstood Van Til is found in his reference to "Van Til's principle that at the end of the historical process, the generality disappears. . . . If mankind as a generality were something real and something that actually enjoyed existence, Van Til could not so posit that mankind as a generality disappears at the end of history, for it is an elemental biblical principle that God does not allow any created reality to slip into nothingness, i.e., to utterly disappear" (pp. 387). All Van Til means to say here, it seems to this reviewer, is that one day all men will finally make up either the company of the elect or of the reprobate. All men will in actual reality be differentiated into the two camps appointed by the sovereign God. Hence, there will no longer be a generality of men who are as yet neither elect or reprobate in actual historical fact.

Does Van Til found his idea of common grace finally on the "abstract ideas of election and reprobation"? I think not. It seems much more accurate to say that he takes his starting point from the fact of the existence of elect and reprobate beings in history who are moving toward the day when the number of both elect and reprobate will be full, quantitatively and qualitatively. If Daane had honored Van Til's insistence on the significance of history in and for the common grace problem, he would not have reduced Van Til's common grace thought to meaninglessness and nothingness. Then Daane would have been more sensitive to the movement of actual history through the sentence which he believes "explicitly" states the problem of common grace as Van Til sees it: "What do entities [beings, E.H.] which will one day be wholly different from one another have in common before that final stage of separation is reached?" To be sure, Van Til looks at history against the background of the counsel of God. But no Calvinist can find reason for reproach in this.

IV

Before this review is concluded, a matter of no little importance remains. It has to do with the place of the decree of God in Daane's book. In the opinion of this reviewer Daane does not do justice to this highly important element in theology, particularly with regard to the decree of reprobation. The grounds for this opinion are given as follows:

(1) Daane charges that Van Til "fallaciously assumes the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation" (p. 25). Those who speak thus take upon themselves the burden of explaining just what they mean. Daane indicates his meaning by saying that *equal ultimacy* here involves "the principle that both are equally definitive of the sovereign purposes of God" (fn. p. 25). Whatever may be the merit of the particular manner in which Daane raises the question, we must insist that we be most careful to remain true to the scriptural data bearing on this matter with its many complexities, and that we do not decide such delicate balances in the decree of God by the introduction of moments of human logic into the sovereign counsel of the Almighty. Of first importance in speaking of the decree of God is to assert that "the divine decree is one . . . . a single, all-comprehensive, and simultaneous act" (see Berkhofer, *Systematic Theology*, p. 102). Who shall determine the shades of ultimacy in that decree? Are not all elements of God's decree or counsel final, unalterable, efficacious, sovereign, unconditional and absolute? He who insists that all elements in God's decree are equally ultimate need not agree to Daane's description of the position as meaning that "God is as much interested in the damnation of the reprobate as in the salvation of the elect" (p. 25). Such language again reads human feeling moments into the secret counsel of God. To be sure, Reformed theology has discussed the matter of the "order" of the divine decree(s). But the discernment of "order" in the decree(s) would seem to have nothing to do with the positing of variations in the ultimacy of the elements in the decree(s) of God.

(2) In a significant footnote Daane takes the position that there are in the counsel of God "genuine possibilities that do not become actualities in history" (p. 60). Possibly there is confusion of terms here. If Daane is confusing God's counsel with His knowledge then we can do no more than point out the confusion. But if Daane means to equate the terms *counsel of God* and *decree of God* (which is standard Reformed practice) I must demur. Berkhofer says: "The decree of God bears the closest relation to the divine knowledge. There is in God . . . a necessary knowledge, including all possible causes and results. This knowledge furnishes the material for the decree; it is the perfect fountain out of which God drew the thoughts which He desired to objectify. *Out of this knowledge of all things possible He chose, by an act of His perfect will, led by wise considerations, what He wanted to bring to realization, and thus formed His eternal purpose*" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 102. Italics mine). God knows all possibilities, but only what He intends to actualize in fact is part of His decree. The Westminster Confession and Catechisms plainly restrict the decree of God to "whatsoever comes to pass." What it means to allow for unactualized possibilities in the decree of God is something to ponder seriously.

(3) On page 132 we meet the following arresting statement: "Each response to common grace, whether that of the elect or of the reprobate, reduces the significance of common grace by reducing the
amount of common grace, and thus each succeeding moment is less significant regardless of the nature of the ethical response of the preceding moment" (italics mine). What does Daane mean to say in this final clause? Can the reprobate respond to the common grace of God in a manner that is ethically good before Him? A similar question is prompted by another remark, namely, "There is nothing conditional about a kind of common grace which must necessarily pass away, and must necessarily pass away regardless of the nature of the ethical response given" (p. 127). We may well ask Daane what reprobation means to him.

(4) The same question presses itself upon us in connection with a comment on Van Til's notion of the offer of the gospel. Says Daane: "An offer of salvation which has meaning only for that which by its very nature cannot in any event be saved, and which regardless of any decision must be annulled, can hardly be called a meaningful offer of salvation, nor can the moment in which it is offered be called a serious moment" (pp. 121ff.). To be sure, this statement is found in a context dealing with the irrelevance of the offer of the gospel to a generality of mankind which is non-existent, in Daane's understanding of Van Til. "Non-existence cannot be saved," says Daane in the previous paragraph, "for it is nothing." If this context completely determined the meaning of the sentence in question, we could say nothing with regard to it other than to challenge the correctness of Daane's understanding of Van Til's generality of mankind. But the insertion of the clause "regardless of any decision" moves the meaning of the sentence beyond the context. And the prepositional phrase "in any event" seems strangely incongruous here. Plainly Daane's thought has moved beyond the point where men are regarded as a non-existent generality, for non-existent being make no decisions. Therefore we are again forced to ask what reprobation means to Daane. Can the reprobate ever be anything but unsaved, and can they ever make any decision except that which is in keeping with their reprobate nature? Furthermore, are we to understand that the moment in which the gospel is offered can be serious only if we think of the certain character of reprobation as suspended in that moment?

(5) "A significant moment," says Daane, "is a point in which a serious decision, a decision that makes a difference can be made" (p. 119). Is human action the criterion of significance, of meaningfulness in history? Is not Van Til on more solid ground, more truly Reformed ground when he consistently declares that history has meaning because of the counsel of God? The human action has significance precisely because it expresses the counsel of God, and not just because "it makes a difference." To be concrete, what is it that makes the "moment" of conversion significant? Is it the human decision simply and barely as human decision, or is it the fact that such decision is grounded in and expressive of the sovereign grace of God who "chose us in before the foundation of the world?"

(6) One experience's a keen sense of discomfort on reading of election and reprobation as "abstract ideas." By so designating them Daane means to say that men are not yet actual historical beings when we think of them in the decree of God. The point is obvious enough. But one must ask whether an existential phenomenism is the only gauge of reality. Does not God's decree carry within itself the determination of all the facts and factors that enter into its own efficient actualization? One who has a healthy biblical sense of the sovereign reality of God, the reality above and antecedent to all reality, should not speak of these two facets of God's decree as "abstract." Daane should have taken Van Til's "concrete universal," the "ontological trinity," more seriously.

This review has not been written on the supposition that there are no points in Van Til's exposition on common grace that are without need of further exposition. Van Til intimates his own awareness of such need when he describes his positive ideas as "suggestions" for further study. It is hoped that our evident purpose has been to ascertain whether Daane has understood Van Til aright by way of an objective inquiry. Our conclusion is, as already indicated, that Daane has not achieved these goals. A book that seeks to reduce the efforts of a recognized Reformed scholar to absurdity is of little real help in gaining further light on a complex problem. It is to be hoped that we can carry on our discussions on a higher and more fruitful plane in the future.

William Young

R. CORNELIUS VAN TIL has distinguished himself as a relentless polemicist in a number of theological controversies. In the discussion over common grace, however, he has attempted to occupy a more irenic role in the midst of conflicting voices within Reformed circles. In this attempt, he has called attention to aspects of the problem which had been overlooked in previous stages of the consideration of the doctrine. Certain of these aspects stand in the forefront of Dr. James Daane's critical evaluation of Van Til's views in A Theology of Grace.

I

The reader of this critique of Van Til is apt to experience a certain perplexity if he has some previous acquaintance with Van Til's publications on the subject. Daane pursues a line of argument which appears to embody a sustained misunderstanding of Van Til's views. Repeated instances occur in which Van Til is represented as implying doctrines which
Reformed theology. Incidentally, can the aversion to rationalism of the traditional Reformed type (not to speak of antipathy toward determinism voiced repeatedly) be a symptom of an influence of contemporary irrationalism?

II

Possibly there is a sense in which a cranked rationalism in the sense of schematic formalism has exercised an adverse influence on systems of theology. Such a rationalism commonly abuses theological language by framing pseudo-statements that exceed the bounds of Revelation and have no bearing on Christian experience. The assertion of pseudo-propositions is accompanied by the employment of pseudo-arguments. The polemic directed against Van Til is marred by such improprieties in the use of theological language. As an indirect proof that Van Til has committed the same sort of impropriety in the felicitous use of language, the discussion may have some value. Yet on behalf of Van Til the consideration can be added that by his content he often compensates for defects of form.

Reformed writers of our day ought to pay attention not only to the truth and falsity of statements but also to other features of theological utterances in which basic issues may be involved. Theologians would be well advised to inquire whether their utterances are felicitous or infelicitous, conducive to the promotion of piety and the Glory of God or the reverse. Attention to these features of religious language as well as to the truth of doctrinal statements has ever characterized the truly great theologians.

1 As an instance of infelicity, the tendency to focus attention on common grace to the relative neglect of particular grace may be mentioned. The chapter on "Van Til's Conception of Grace" is disappointing in this respect. The argumentation in pp. 63ff. can leave the reader with the feeling that either the general offer is being grounded in a universal abonement or else that an unjustified identification of grace with common grace permeates the discussion. The second alternative is supported by the fact that such an identification provides part of the basis for the fallacious argument by which Van Til is allegedly shown to deny any point of contact between sin and grace. In a footnote on p. 58, doubt is expressed "whether the usual clear-cut distinctions between common and saving grace can be maintained if the general offer of the gospel is a gracious offer." As against such an interpretation of point one of 1924, Van Til's emphasis on the particularity of God's free and sovereign grace must be deemed salutary.

Infelicity and inaccuracy appear also in the references to the unhappy discussion of the incomprehensibility of God in Dr. H. Clark's address to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The proceedings over the complaint against Dr. Gordon H. Clark's ordination are incorrectly termed a "heresy trial" (p. 147). The point in dispute is misunderstood as though it concerned the identification of the human with the divine manner of knowing. Dr. Clark in fact so clearly distinguished the "mode of man's knowing from the mode of God's knowing that the complainants, of whom Van Til was one, never tried to claim the contrary. Daniel Clark has strongly refuted his criticism of Van Til at this point if he had refrained from asserting that each side of the dispute maintained an element of truth. A more precise formulation of the question might have led to the dismissal of the entire dispute over qualitative difference of the "content" of knowledge as a striking instance of infelicity and impropriety in the use of language rather than as a genuine theological issue where the truth or falsity of a cardinal doctrine is at stake.
The title of A Theology of Grace is something of a misnomer. This is not theology (although the book contains excellent theological insights, with the needed Biblical orientation). Nor is it "of Grace" (at best it deals with common grace). The sub-title, however, adequately sets forth the contents of the book: "An Inquiry into and an Evaluation of Dr. C. Van Til's Doctrine of Common Grace."

As has been said already, this is not theology but philosophy. This fact does not make the book less valuable. Moreover it could not well be otherwise; for the quite sufficient reason that the book it discusses is itself philosophy. He who would criticize a philosophy must himself write in a philosophic vein.

This is not an easy book to review. Not as though it were not lucidly written, but, because this review must be a review of a review. One finds it impossible to talk about Daane's book intelligently without talking about Van Til's the while.

Anyone conversant with Van Til's thought habits will have detected in him a veritable phobia for that which-men-of-all-categories-have-in-common. He is much happier in the presence of evidence for discontinuity between believer and disbeliever than he is in the presence of evidence for continuity between them. (This need not surprise anyone. Dr. Van Til has rebelled vehemently against the modern spirit that is happier in the presence of evidence for continuity than it is in the presence of evidence for discontinuity, and his whole thought is in the signature of this rebellion.)

One is eager to see what treatment that which is common will have in a mind so conditioned. For common grace has as its distinguishing characteristic that it is common. It is called common because men of all categories have it in common. What will happen to a theological item of which the distinguishing feature is continuity as it passes through a theological system of which the distinguishing feature is a penchant for discontinuity? Will the commonness of common grace survive? Or will it lose its commonness as it passes through?

Daane says it does not survive. The common grace that went into the hopper of Van Til's thought was a commodity which saints and sinners have in common; the "common grace" that comes out is a something that pertains to what Van Til calls man-in-the-state-of-undifferentiatedness. Common grace in his system is an attitude of God toward the it of as-yet-undifferentiated-humankind; it is decidedly not an attitude of God toward the them of saints and sinners. If the commonness of common grace survives at all in Van Til's system it survives at the expense of the differentiation of saint and sinner — the very polarity that earned for it the adjective common. In commonsense language, the categories of saint and sinner are necessary to common grace; Van Til denies that common grace pertains to saints and sinners as such; it is therefore hard to see how this is less than a forthright denial of common grace.

Dr. Daane has located this Achilles heel in Van Til's thought and has grasped it firmly. It is the opinion of this reviewer that it will not be easy for Van Til to shake him off.

Daane indicates that this manipulation whereby Van Til gets man-as-as-yet-not-differentiated (toward which God has the attitude of graciousness called common grace) and man-as-already-differentiated (toward which He does not) is essentially a sell-out to existentialist thought habits. This constitutes Daane's most basic criticism. We feel that he is in a large way right.

Commonsensically, scientifically, also theoretically, it is illegitimate to predicate things of a commonality which we in the same breath deny touching the differentiated individuals of whom the commonality exists. Van Til has a strange way of speaking of favor on the part of God toward an it, toward "the originally created good nature of man." But, neither God nor man can be gracious to an it, to a nature. It is too late in the day to talk about the group (in casu, the commonality called "Man") as though it did not consist of individuals (in casu, differentiated "Men"). One cannot be a massist now and an atomist later. He who tries it in the idiom of dialectic existentialism is simply repeating an old error in youthful terminology.

Daane points out (the present reviewer is of the opinion he should have borne down even more heavily at this point) that on his own premises Van Til is not entitled to his mass-vs.-individualized particulars device. If, as Van Til tells us at the outset and all along, our most basic interpretive concept is the ontological trinity in which commonality and particularity are equally ultimate, by what right does Van Til deal with men now under the aspect of commonality and later under the aspect of particularity? Are these not also equally ultimate in man?

In this review we have touched upon only a few of the facets of Daane's contribution. There are many more — awaiting the reader who is willing to work as he reads. Daane's book is one of meatiest ever to emerge from a Christian Reformed manse.

(Incidentally, the publisher has allowed the proof-reader to get away with things. Misprints abound. Passing over comparatively innocent slips, such as Kierkegaard (p. 146), correlation (p. 138), Bavink (p. 33), etc., we call attention to "prediction" for "predication" (p. 26), "common race" for "common grace" (p. 33). Even more disturbing is "dialect" for dialectic (p. 39 bis), a word that occurs as "dialetics" on p. 99. Dr. Daane's book is good enough to deserve more careful printing.)
We propose to do two things:

1. to show how Dr. Van Til and A. Kuyper really are insisting upon the same viewpoint, Dr. Van Til's criticism notwithstanding.
2. to show the ambiguity of Mr. Orbeke's position as he fluctuates between a realistic and a Christian position.

First let us try to make clear the real problem facing any Christian apologist. We can do this readily if we give careful attention to the classic formulation of Abraham Kuyper. In the midst of his Encyclopedia, Kuyper makes a distinction (discarded in a day of science) between truth-falsehood and accuracy-error. He who in good faith has made an error has been inaccurate, but not necessarily untrue.22 Mistakes can be corrected and indeed history's progress is just such a process of clarification. "Vanity of mind," falsehood, on the contrary, is a basic religious approach to one's perspective in life which conditions all of a man's theoretical inquiry in a way impossible to repair except by a fresh orientation. Kuyper appeals to the message of Jesus. "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life," setting it in juxtaposition to the "lie" of the religious leaders of Jesus' day in order to make clear this distinction. He speaks:

"In this condition of affairs a holy interest is at stake in this struggle for truth. This conflict does not aim at the correction of mistakes in the representation, neither does it combat prejudice, nor rectify in accuracies; but arrays itself against a power, which ever in a new form entangles our human consciousness in that which is false, makes us servants to falsehood and blinds us to reality."23

But lest we mistake the import of Kuyper's distinction and confuse it with any theological tilt between heretic and conservative, notice that Kuyper reformulates this distinction in terms of two incompatible sciences, bodies of knowledge.

The proposition, that in virtue of the fact of palingenesis a science develops itself by the side of the naturalistic, which though formally allied to it, is differently disposed and therefore different in its conclusions, and stands over against it as 'Christian' science must not be understood in a specifically theological, but in an absolutely universal sense.24 This is the root of Kuyper's position: the religious attitude which lies at the heart of each man's formulation of his total world of experience determines the orientation and hence the organization of that world-and-life view. Basically, there are two alternatives: love of truth or love of lie, child of God or child of Satan, Christian or pagan system of knowledge.

Those who study science under the influence of palingenesis (regeneration), as well as those who leave it out of account, can only hold for true what rests on their own premises and thus appreciate each other's study only in a formal manner. That with the Christian as well as with naturalistic science, that only stands scientifically sure which going out from its own premises, each has obtained as the result of scientific research . . .

The antithesis is complete. Kuyper intends that there shall be no common accounting of the items of experience for Christian and non-Christian. There is only one Truth, one Science: the Christian Revelation. "The Christian must maintain the unity of the sciences in truth and this truth as opposed to the unity of the pagan science in lie... the negative for the one determines the positive for the other."25

It is just this position which Van Til prizes so highly in his evaluation of Kuyper. Anyone who reads Van Til's writings and then attempts to set Kuyper and Van Til in opposition has obviously missed the point. Dr. Van Til, himself, openly avows his indebtedness by use of the figure of standing upon the shoulders of another, namely Abraham Kuyper.26 But if Van Til is indebted to Kuyper, he rightly seeks to pay his respect, not by slavish imitation, but by further elucidation of the problem. In Van Til's own mind, there are difficulties of formulation and expression that seem to rob Kuyper's magnificent insights of their full glory and effective use. Kuyper seems to fail of reaching the full antithesis of pagan versus Christian by continually reminding us that there can be a formal agreement between pagan and Christian. (This reminder of Kuyper can be observed readily, by rereading each of the above quotations from the Encyclopedia.) Kuyper specifies some of these "formal areas of agreement," such as the activity of counting (arithmetic), of logic, and of language.

The bifurcation must extend as far as the influence of those subjective factors which palingenesis causes to be different in one than in the other. Hence all scientific research which has things seen only as object or which is prosecuted simply by those subjective factors which have undergone no change, remains the same for both. Near the ground, the tree of science is one for all.27

It is this distinction of "formal agreement" which Dr. Van Til feels is so harmful. For Van Til interprets this to mean that there are some areas in the pursuit of knowledge which by their supposed objective character are exempt from the workings of

Harold J. Franz

On Brute Facts

* This concludes an article the first part of which appeared in the March number of the Forum.

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22 Kuyper, op. cit., p. 107.
23 Ibid., p. 115.
24 Ibid., p. 161.
25 Loe., p. 168.
26 Ibid., p. 168.
28 Kuyper, op. cit., p. 168.
sin. The “Lie” does not enter into the “factual” sciences because these are public, open to correction merely by more accurate inspection and careful recording.

We are to hold, according to Kuyper’s argument, that, where sin has not changed the metaphysical situation, the difference between the believer and unbeliever need not be brought to the fore.29

I have two things on which to comment before we examine this criticism in the light of Kuyper’s writing. First, there is a difference in the above quotation as found in H. De Vries translation of the Encyclopedia and in Dr. Van Til’s first-hand translation from the Dutch edition. I have used De Vries because I feel it more faithfully adheres to the overtones of the words and the context, than does that of Dr. Van Til. However, even using Van Til’s translation, we may develop the interpretation which I seek to elucidate. I say this lest I be criticized for basing my exegesis of Kuyper on one passage or one translation of a passage. Secondly, even Dr. Van Til, while developing this criticism, does not feel that he therefore places himself against Kuyper. Rather does he appeal to the ambiguities of Kuyper’s own treatment and of the two incompatible viewpoints hidden in these ambiguities. It is his judgment that he remains faithful to the best and most decisive in Kuyper.30

In seeking to obviate this weakness Van Til suggests a further distinction. He suggests that if we consider Christian and pagan knowledge epistemologically, we must hold to Kuyper’s antitheses. There is no common ground. However, viewing the situation in which both the pagan and Christian find themselves, we can and should admit that they have a metaphysical common ground. To put this distinction as pointedly and clearly as we can, we may say they both have in common the activities of life and human beings: i.e., eating, sleeping, seeing objects, talking, even thinking! However, when each man seeks to rationalize his experience, he has to commit himself to either of two exclusive points of view: he is either a Christian or a pagan.

It is either the would-be autonomous man, who weighs and measures what he thinks of as brute or bare facts by the help of what he thinks of as abstract impersonal principles, or it is the believer, knowing himself to be a creature of God, who weighs and measures what he thinks of as God-created facts by what he thinks of as God-created laws.31

Please pay particular attention to the peculiar circumlocution Van Til employs in order to make clear his distinction. The underlined portions, “by what he thinks of . . .” make all the difference between the epistemological task and the metaphysical situation. Those who criticize Van Til for allowing no “common ground” and then argue that we all do see flowers and trees and hear the wind, birds and bees, have obviously missed the whole point of the argument. We all have “experience” and indeed appeal to that “experience,” but the antithesis is to be found in the fact that we account for this experience differently!

IV

Let us return in our discussion to Kuyper in order to see whether or not Dr. Van Til has done justice to him. When we reread Kuyper, we find that his distinction of “formal agreement” rather than disagreeing with Van Til, is really parallel in intention and purpose with Van Til’s own distinction of epistemological-metaphysical. Kuyper, having set forth the clear antithesis of pagan and Christian knowledge, then asks why this antithesis was not crystal clear from the inception of Christianity. His answer is twofold:

1. because there is a broad realm of investigation in which the differences between the two groups exerts no influence . . .
2. it is a slow process which must ensue before any activity can develop itself from what potentially is given in pal­ingenesis. If palingenesis operated immediately from the center of our inner life to the outermost circumference of our being and consciousness, the antithesis between the science that lives by it and that which denies it, would be at once absolute in every subject.32

It is this first reason which bothers Van Til. What is this broad realm of investigation common to all, not influenced by the antithesis? Kuyper specifies it as the domain of the senses, the “plastic conception of visible things,” “the entire domain of the more primary observation, which limits itself to weights, measures, numbers, is common to both.”33 I wish I could quote fully the passage in which Kuyper sets forth his argument for this assertion. The remarkable insight of Kuyper into the working of science causes him to emphasize “the absolute character of perception by the senses” which is the ground for any certainty or validity of the natural sciences. Equally significant in emphasis is his insistence that these operations are not science. However rich and fruitful these observations are in subduing nature, they are to be compared to the farmer’s lore of tilling and breeding and not to the theoretical predicting power of the scientist. In another context, that of describing the “animal faith” which is the root of certainty in life, Kuyper again argues that merely to observe or count is not science: science begins where observation leaves off. Granted, therefore, that the preparation of the chemist is scientific, that his purpose lies in science, that presently he will go beyond his domain scientifically with what has been observed. Very well, if only you concede that his observation as such lacks all scientific character, and that a chemist who confines himself to observation would not be prosecuting science at all.34

If we read carefully his treatment of those previously specified areas of formal agreement, i.e., language, logic, counting, again we will find Kuyper radically qualifying his assertions of “common to all.” Language is an objective study. It consists of examining archives, unearthing monuments, translating, analyzing forms of languages and the rela-

29 Van Til, op. cit., p. 43.
30 Ibid., p. 42.
31 Ibid., p. 44.
32 Kuyper, op. cit., p. 162.
33 Ibid., p. 167ff.
34 Ibid., p. 185.
tion of language to sense experience. Yet for all of this he says:
This should not be granted too absolutely, and the determination whether an objective document is genuine or not, or whether the contents of it must be translated thus and so, is in many cases not susceptible to such an absolute decision.\(^{35}\)

If in the light of more recent and intense debate on the analysis of historical “fact” we may question the details of Kuyper’s accounting for historical “description,” we should not let our eyes be blinded to the fact that even here Kuyper will not allow for an absolute objectivity to be awarded to historical and textual criticism. How much more clear is Kuyper’s rejection of the neutrality or objectivity of logic. Logic is a common tool providing a means of critical examination and verification “insofar at least as the result strictly depends upon the deduction made...” and in order that the viewpoints seek to justify themselves over against one another. Exercising caution again as to the meaning of “justify,” “verification,” and “examination,” and seeking for the reason for this affirmation, we read this radical statement of “antithesis.”

For though it is well known beforehand that even at this point of intersection, no agreement can be reached; for then no divergence would follow; yet at this point of intersection it can be explained to each other what it is that compels us, from this point of intersection to draw our line as we do... \(^{30}\) (Italics mine)

Adding up all of these qualifying caveats, we gain a total impression which differs little in import from that of Van Til. The “formal recognition” to be mutually accorded both antithetical science-systems is warranted only of those practical activities that underlie all intellectual effort. In themselves these areas of formal agreement are pre-scientific and even though they form the material out of which science builds, they are not specifically scientific.

Hence formal recognition only is possible from either side. The grateful acceptance of those results of investigation which lie outside the point in question, is no recognition, but is merely a reaping of harvests from common fields.\(^{37}\)

This contrast of pre-scientific practical activity (This I equate with the metaphysical common-situation to which Van Til refers) with actual scientific procedure merits our careful attention. In a day when we speak glibly of “scientism,” as the danger of spinning speculative theories beyond the support of facts, we should remind ourselves that science is the ability to predict or post-dict. This ability is directly proportionate to the ability of the scientist to generate a hypothesis flexible enough to meet the requirements of the situation and fruitful enough to find new areas of experience to control. Without this making of hypotheses or theorizing, there is no science, only accident. Science is hypothetical-deductive observation. Kuyper recognizes and capitalizes on in his suggestion of the antithetical nature of Christian “science.” This I take it is what Van Til means by epistemological common ground. In this area there is only antithesis, the two hypothetical-deductive systems are directly contradictory. Van Til’s distinction in Kuyper’s terms amounts to this: there is “formal recognition” (the practical, pre-scientific activities of life), there is no “material recognition” (the borrowing of materials as epistemologically equivalent for any theoretical viewpoint.)

V

It is important to reemphasize, that Van Til and Kuyper can not be antagonized. To antagonize them would be to accept the faulty interpretation which Van Til and many others have placed upon Kuyper. Nevertheless, if Van Til is wrong in his criticism, he is right in his intent and he faithfully preserves the significance of Kuyper’s viewpoint. As we consider Mr. Orlebeke’s discussion of the problem, we ought immediately to disqualify his “avowed defense of Kuyper.” Indeed, it seems clear in my mind that Van Til’s criticism of Kuyper really can be levelled against the ambiguity of Mr. Orlebeke’s Realism, and in fact, Kuyper would join heartily in the criticism! Notwithstanding this, we ought to also notice that Mr. Orlebeke in many of his utterance professes close alliance at least to Kuyper, and wants to consider himself as standing firmly in the Reformed tradition. Witness his explicit statement of the antithesis: “From the ultimate point-of-view the ‘natural’ man knows nothing truly, and from the same ultimate point-of-view the Christian knows everything truly.”\(^{38}\) Notice also his sharp distinction of natural theology and general revelation:

Unless there be revelation, man can know nothing about God. But there is revelation. General revelation, as Calvin says, is objectively perspicuous and sufficient to convince any right-minded man that God, the Creator and Ruler of the universe exists. The beauty of the flowers in the field, for example, would be impossible if God did not exist.\(^{39}\)

He further makes his position clear by asseverating that unless the grace of God intervene in the mind of the unbeliever, there can be no genuine conviction in the final proof of the Christian position.

What Mr. Orlebeke is interested in maintaining in contradistinction to Van Til is that even though the unbeliever never has the full-bodied truth, he can attain to “partial truths” which the Christian dare not discount. The statement of Socrates that it is better to suffer injustice than to commit injustices is such a partially true statement which it is sinfully arrogant to deny. The reason Mr. Orlebeke gives for maintaining this position is simply that inasmuch and to the extent that the Christian and the unbeliever refer their statements to “Reality,” “to the real order of intelligible facts-in-relation,” their statements can be abstracted from any system, checked and verified and hence asserted as true.

Thus the judgment of an unbeliever concerning the distance between our two hypothetical flowers can be considered by itself.
and evaluated by inspecting the fact involved. It is possible because its truth and meaning is not derived from an intellectual system but from reality. 40

If it seems to some readers that the actual difference between Van Til and Mr. Orlebeke is almost null, we would remind that reader that similar conclusions do not always spell out agreement, especially if the reasons buttressing the conclusions strikingly differ. That is, both Van Til and Orlebeke hold to the ultimate exclusiveness of the system of truth, both further agree that there is sense in talking about abstracted “factual” propositions; on the other hand they radically disagree as to the significance of “abstraction.” Van Til insists that any abstracting is merely rule-of-thumb, limited to the immediate task at hand. He allows only a practical justification of the abstraction, namely, that we all have to live beyond our consciously-formulated explanation of experience. Mr. Orlebeke is not content with this “practical abstraction,” but wants a guarantee that any abstracted factual statement can be true apart from all other considerations and therefore can take its same place in any system that is factually oriented. He confesses it is hard to see how the “details” furnished by non-Christians would be themselves altered in a Christian system of interpretations, unless one denies the “value” of these details. 41

Perhaps if we analyze one of the most important terms of Mr. Orlebeke’s analysis we may see the point more clearly. He speaks of “reality” as that to which every one must appeal, the common ground for all, even those in error! How can a man say anything whether true or false if he does not refer to reality? Yet on the other hand, he affirms this reality as somehow given (he does not specify how) as an order of intelligible facts-in-relation. Further he feels that each fact comes ready catalogued in this order of things so that somehow its truth and its meaning are not derived from anyone’s interpretation, but from reality itself. 42 I do not want to quarrel with Mr. Orlebeke about the variety of his Realism, nor indeed even about the adequacy of it, for how can I judge that except by attributing positions to Mr. Orlebeke which he does not specify. It is enough for my purposes merely to point out that “reality” as somehow given (he does not specify how) is used in the above discussion in at least two ways:

1. “Reality” as the experience which each of us encounters.
2. Reality as the meaningful pattern by which we feel this “experience” can be explicated and organized.

To ask the question: “Indeed, to what else can one appeal?” is to think of “reality” in the first sense. As we have seen, it is an artificial interpretation of either Van Til or Kuyper to think that they do not appeal to “reality of experience.” Even the revelation they prize so highly as the impulsion and directive of the Christian system is itself part of the “reality of experience.” Mr. Orlebeke is quite right to assert that every man has to appeal to reality and certainly will find no one to dispute him. But all of this is to be sharply contrasted with his other statements which reflect the use of “reality” as a self-conscious accounting of experience. To speak of “reality as directly given,” as a “real order of intelligible facts-in-relation” is to make a significant interpretation which may be criticized and even contradicted! In fact, even Mr. Orlebeke, if he takes himself seriously cannot agree with the rest of the Realists (Aristotle, Alexander), because he insists that this reality is a real created order of intelligible facts-in-relation. As a matter of fact, even Dr. Van Til is a Realist if we wish to continue in this ambiguous way of speaking, for he insists that all the proofs of God, especially the cosmological argument, are fully valid. Men ought to see God in nature; in point of fact, however, they do not. 43

If “facts” are really interpretations, it follows that any “fact” will change in direct proportion as the total character of the systems in which it alternately finds itself radically antagonize each other. Take Mr. Orlebeke’s example as a means of clarification. Two men go to a certain blossom to admire its beauty and in doing so quarrel concerning its classification: is it a rose or a pansy? Mr. Orlebeke asserts that this is easily settled by proper reference and in fact can be settled because both know and agree that it is a flower blossom. But suppose one of these two men was from the North Pole, not even having seen vegetation. Where is the common knowledge of flower blossom? We need not develop this illustration to the point of absurdity. Even in this less radical opposition of life and world viewpoints we see that the significance of a piece of experience varies according to the whole interpretation. The point of Van Til is exactly that we are new creatures, so also our world and life view is a radical new creation, hence our total view and every related fact will differ from that of the unregenerate. Pagans do not need to find disagreement in basic matters and indeed can appeal to basic interpretations which stand as “facts” for all of them. The Christian, inasmuch as he lacks self-consciousness in areas of life in which he is compelled to live must and does adopt many interpretations and basic “facts” of the pagan. Notice carefully however that these agreements arise out of practical compulsions and are not really acceptable until the Christian in the light of God’s revelation can make adequate justification for them. It is only because we have not made careful interpretation that we agree. We can never agree except with fatal consequence on the basis that we do not need to make any conscious reorientation.

VI

In conclusion I have two suggestions to make. First, if we forego the metaphysical allure of terms

40 Loc. cit.
41 Ibid., p. 16.
42 Ibid., p. 17.
43 Van Til, Introduction to Systematic Theology, p. 99.
such as "formal" and "metaphysical-epistemological" common ground and adhere to the more simple distinction of theoretical-practical, distinguishing between the consciously-oriented accounting of life's experiences and the practical process of actual living which carries us beyond our own accounting, I think we can save much confusion and misunderstanding. This in no particular goes beyond Kuyper and Van Til, but in a measure it may clarify the issue of common ground and adhere to the more simple distinction indicative of more or less radical disagreement, even within pagan thinking.

The second conclusion I wish to draw concerns this "borrowing" process which is continually carried on between the Christian and the pagan. In the figure of Kuyper, we are like Solomon who in order to build the temple of God must employ the cedars and stone from Phoenicia. If on the one hand we emphasize the fact that there are common vocabularies and concepts employed by the two antithetical positions, we yet are not warranted in arguing that this proves dependence, or shows common kinship in philosophical orientation. For in the process of "borrowing" the concept has become abstracted, sterilized in order that it may take its place in the new orientation. That is, if properly utilized such an abstracted "tool" receives in proportion to the contrast of the two orientations a place of different significance and relevance. By way of illustration one need but look at Ruth Benedict's book, Patterns of Culture, to see that we cannot merely talk of marriage, birth or death, etc. as operating in any or all parts of the world; rather is it true that the only way in which we can know the significance of the selected detail of behavior is against the background of the motives and emotions and values that are institutionalized in that culture.

Similarly, such a state of affairs seems to prevail in all our theoretical endeavor. We all "borrow," but if we are "worth our salt," the borrowed item is so metamorphized as to be quite another item. It is in this sense that we have spoken of a Christian "Realism," "Platonism," "pragmatism," etc., meaning thereby that the Christian has oriented his theoretical stand in terms of one or another of these manifestations of pagan thinking. Perhaps he has even employed "conceptual tools" such as "limiting concept," "fact," "constitutive," etc. The fact remains, however, that in the measure that he is consistently a Christian, any of these terms must become so completely reoriented and related as to mean something quite different for him. Borrowing is bad if this abstracting is incomplete and often means that the thinker finally is carried by his use of these borrowed concepts into a discarding of his original viewpoint.

We may summarize the intent of this article by rephrasing a cliche often heard. It is commonly spoken, "we agree to disagree," but in the light of the above statements, we can say more accurately, "we agree in order to disagree."


An Inherited Epistemology: I

There is a strange reluctance to face the issues of Professor C. Van Til's theology. An instance of this reluctance can be seen in Professor L. Berkhof's review of Dr. William Masselink's General Revelation and Common Grace. Masselink had expressed concern that important aspects of Van Til's theology were departures from Reformed theology. Without facing the issues, Berkhof gave Van Til's theology the seal of his approval, and stated simply that he did not share Masselink's concern because Van Til was an old personal friend and a theologian who had long enjoyed the confidence of the Christian Reformed Church.

The protection enjoyed by a theology favored by the standards of "orthodoxy by friendship," and "orthodoxy by reputation" is neither of long life nor wide coverage. The disciple in his own theological writings brings the true character of the motifs of such a theology in clear light and thus cuts short the life of its special protection. The disciple indeed renders valuable service when he makes explicit the character of the theology to which he has granted his discipleship. But alas, he does it without the protective coverage of such standards of orthodoxy. Suppose the disciple is not an old friend? Or too young to have had the confidence of the Church for many years? He is then in the unhappy position of propagating a theology, without himself enjoying the special protection enjoyed by the theology he propagates.
A case in point is an article by Russell Maatman, "On Miracles," in Torch and Trumpet (Aug.-Sept.) in which the writer applies Van Til's conception of "fact" and God's will to the subject of miracle and natural law. His conclusion is that there is no essential difference, so far as the factor of the miraculous is concerned, between the fact of an atom and the fact of Christ's healing of the leper, and that the latter is called a miracle only by "general agreement"! He writes, "It is only by general agreement that the two events only the healing of the leper is called a miracle." How did he arrive at this untenable conclusion? From Van Til's position that God's will is related to every fact (creation or redemptive, sinful or non-sinful) in precisely the same manner, Maatman draws the conclusion that every fact is equally miraculous, and that therefore what the Bible designates as miracle is not more than any other fact than the atom. Maatman undoubtedly will not share the protection enjoyed by the theology he makes explicit.

Another case in point is Dr. Alexander De Jong's book The Well-Meant Offer (The views of H. Hoeksema and K. Schilder). In this book the author, a one-time student of Van Til, appears as an ardent exponent of Van Til's theology. At almost every juncture the theological standards employed to evaluate Hoeksema and Schilder are taken over directly from Van Til.

This explains the otherwise strange fact that although De Jong criticizes a host of theologians besides the two mentioned, he does not express a single criticism of Van Til, although the latter has stated his position on the general offer of the gospel much more explicitly than many whom De Jong does evaluate. Since the norm of criticism cannot itself be the object of criticism, Van Til's positions go by untouched.

But De Jong is already discovering that the protection granted the theology he champions, is not being granted to him. In reviews of De Jong's book, both Dr. H. Kuiper and Rev. H. Hoeksema have accused De Jong of holding a conception of predestination that cannot be reconciled with Reformed thought. Yet neither of them pointed out that De Jong's position is a direct consequence of his commitment to Van Til's theology. The truth of this will be shown in the next article. I wish here only to make the further observation that if it were not for the general reluctance to face the issues of Van Til's theology, many more objections would have been registered against De Jong's book.

1 It is strange to see Hoeksema criticize De Jong for applying Van Til's position to predestination and on the same page in a review of my book A Theory of Grace say that he could easily defend Van Til against my criticisms (Standard Bearer, Aug. 1, 1954). And it is even more strange to see both Hoeksema and Berkhof—who were at opposite ends of the 1954 common grace controversy—reveal sympathy for Van Til's common grace theology! This indicates either that both Hoeksema and Berkhof are giving up their original positions, or that neither understands the issues of Van Til's theology.

De Jong's book reveals that he has all too uncritically accepted many of the characteristic features of Van Til's theology and epistemology. Although the cost of his uncritical acceptance appears clearly in his view of predestination, it appears just as clearly as other basic points in De Jong's theology.

I do not mean that De Jong never goes beyond Van Til. At times under the impulse of other theological movements, he strikes out far beyond the borders of Van Til's thought. One striking example is De Jong's attempt to define the general offer of gospel proclamation in terms of the eschatological nature of preaching. Here De Jong is frequently at his best and he has rendered a real service by insisting that we may not continue to ignore the New Testament teaching concerning the eschatological nature of gospel preaching, if we would arrive at a better understanding of the general offer of salvation.

At one point De Jong declares his complete independence of Van Til. While Van Til regards Barth as one of the most dangerous heretics ever to confront the Church (Has Karl Barth Become Orthodox?) and designates his theology as the New Modernism, De Jong says about Barth, "His concern is to fashion a theology of grace." (p. 179). And at some other points De Jong reveals courage and daring to strike out on his own power for new theological insights and formulations. At such points he shows that he is free from the Roman Catholic conception of Traditionalism which urges that if Calvin said something it ought to be accepted and not for improvement. He rightly does not believe that Calvin's words are necessarily the Word of the Lord. Yet one could wish that his independent excursions were tempered by that greater theological care and independence that comes with greater theological maturity. De Jong's book shows a tendency to accept almost any theological position, provided he can find some Reformed writer who can be quoted as support.

Thus De Jong does indeed go beyond the borders of Van Til's theology. But what he glean abroad is brought back as an import. What he gathers as he goes hunting in theological lands beyond, is brought back into the borders of Van Til's theology for naturalization. The result is that De Jong's theology not only lacks integration, but cannot possibly be integrated. For what he seeks to naturalize within the framework of Van Til's theology cannot even co-exist within the same theological home.

I. De Jong's Evaluation of Hoeksema's Epistemology

De Jong's criticism of Hoeksema and Schilder falls into two parts: an epistemological and a theological criticism. This article will be limited to the former, and a second article will be devoted to the latter. Both articles will deal chiefly with De Jong's criticism of Hoeksema, for although De Jong shows greater sympathy for Schilder, the pattern of his criticism is the same in both instances.
The late Prof. Heyns, says De Jong, defined the God-man relationship "in terms of a competitive polarity," and Hoeksema made the mistake of accepting this formulation (p. 76). Heyns desired to stress God's sovereignty in applying, and man's responsibility in appropriating, salvation. This led him, says De Jong, to posit a competitive relationship between God and man. De Jong derives this competition from that "enabling grace" which Heyns said extended to all members of the covenant. Since De Jong himself regards this enabling grace of Heyns as an Arminianistic kind of grace (p. 76), one would think that this would lead to a cooperative rather than to a competitive relationship.

As will be seen in the next article, it is precisely this denial of competition in De Jong's conception of the God-man relationship which calls for serious scrutiny. De Jong apparently reasons this way: Heyns' enabling grace enables a man to accept or reject God, hence there is a situation of competition between God and man. But this is a confusion of sin and grace! Grace enables a man to accept—not to reject. Sin takes care of the latter. Yet as we shall see in the next article, De Jong, following in the footsteps of Van Til, denies that sin is a factor in competition with God's will. In De Jong's conception of competition is the idea that grace (not sin!) produces a sinful competition between man and God—an idea identical with and derived from Van Til's notion that it is the nature of grace to produce believing elect and sinful reprobate. Thus in his idea of competition we see De Jong falling into Van Til's error of denying that sin is a competitive factor antithetical to God's will, on the ground that it is the very nature of grace to elicit sin as desired by God's counsel.

Because of this alleged competition which Heyns is charged with having posited between God and man, De Jong accuses Heyns of having fallen into serious epistemological error (p. 77). "Heyns considered it methodologically proper and possible to abstract himself conceptually from the God-man relationship in order to explain its dynamic and reciprocal character by means of logical concepts" (p. 77).

As indicated above, De Jong deduced the idea of competition from Heyns' conception of grace by means of Van Til's conception of the nature and purpose of grace. Grace produces sin, and sin is not something that competes with God, for sin is precisely what God's counsel wills. Therefore, Heyns is said to make a great mistake both in the realms of method and epistemology when he thinks that the gracious offer of the gospel is something that we can understand by means of "logical concepts." De Jong is surely correct and Heyns very much mistaken—if De Jong's idea that grace makes a man a sinful competitor of God, is correct!

What is the nature of Heyns' epistemological error, according to De Jong? De Jong urges that the general offer must be understood in reference to the dynamic situation created by the eschatological event of gospel proclamation. With this I agree. But I cannot agree when he urges that it is an epistemological error to attempt to describe this gospel event in which God meets man by means of logical concepts. What concepts should Heyns use, if not logical concepts? If the theologian may not use logical concepts, is theology possible?

The reader may be tempted at this point to say that since De Jong says that Heyns made a mistake in using logical concepts, De Jong wants Heyns to use illogical concepts. For what other kind are there? But De Jong would answer the reader by asserting that there is another kind of logical concept. God's kind! And he would warn the reader that he must not, may not apply the law of non-contradiction at this point and say that God's kind of logical concept is either logical or illogical! In short, De Jong criticizes Heyns for using "logical concepts" when he should have used what Van Til calls a Christian logic.

And if the reader persists that this so-called Christian logic must be either logical or illogical, he will be accused of not operating with the principle of the "apparently contradictory," a principle to which, it is said, the theologian must hold with passion. And if the reader still persists that such an epistemology is rooted in irrationalism, and will inevitably bear the fruit of scepticism, De Jong will deny it but his theology will provide the evidence that the reader is right.

Speaking at one point of a truth distilled from Scripture, De Jong's epistemological irrationalism and scepticism comes to clear view. He says concerning this scriptural truth, "It is confessed and not explained, for if it could be explained it would no longer be confessed" (p. 99). In other words, if Christian truth would seem logical and reasonable to us and could therefore be understood and explained by us, then a Christian would not confess it, for it would not be Christian truth! As will be shown later, this epistemology insists that it is the nature of Christian truth that it cannot be explained; all Christian truth must necessarily appear to us to be illogical and "apparently contradictory."

If it could be understood and explained, then it could not be confessed! This surely is not the epistemology that underlies the Heidelberg Catechism's description of the faith we confess as a "sure knowledge." Must we confess only what we cannot explain? If we must eschew logical concepts, as De Jong advises, there will be no faith to confess and no theologies constructed. De Jong's contrast between faith and thought is at least as radical as that of Emil Brunner (Christian Doctrine of God, Dogmatics, Vol. I) which has drawn the fire of orthodox theologians.
II. The "Qualitative Epistemological Difference"

Continuing his criticism of Heyns' epistemological methodology, De Jong declares, "Implicit in his objective-subjective schematism is the fallacious assumption that human logical predications involve identical matters when predicated of God's activities and the creature's activities... In his theological reflection Heyns neglected the obvious fact that God's offer is an action qualitatively different from man's offer" (pp. 77, 78).

Here we are at the heart of Van Til's epistemology, which De Jong has taken over bodily.

De Jong urges that it is a "fallacious assumption" to assume that a divine offer and a human offer involve the identical matter, namely, an offer. He urges that it is "obvious" that a divine offer is "qualitatively different" from a human offer, i.e., qualitatively different from anything we conceive an offer to be. Therefore, De Jong condemns the "logical objectivity" of Heyns and Hoeksema. They make the mistake of assuming that our logical concepts and theological statements have objective validity, i.e., are capable of defining and describing the objective event of the gospel offer. The truth of the matter is, urges De Jong, that the objective event and its truth are always qualitatively different from anything we ever say or think about them. When the Bible says "offer," or when God says "offer," what is meant is something that differs in quality from anything that man means when he describes this same objective event as "offer." And it was because Hoeksema and Heyns either forgot, or never knew, about this "obvious fact," that they committed a grave theological error of methodology and epistemology when they abstracted themselves "conceptually from the God-man relationship in order to explain its dynamic and reciprocal character by means of logical concepts."

"Christian Logic"

This "obvious fact" was not obvious to Heyns and Hoeksema. Nor is it likely to be as obvious to most readers as it is to De Jong. The issue should be clearly seen. It is not whether our doctrinal formulations are exhaustive expressions of Christian truths. De Jong did not criticize Heyns for trying to be exhaustive, but for attempting to explain by use of "logical concepts" (cf. above). Most of us would agree that they are not. But most of us would also contend that if God can reveal himself in the Bible without violating the law of non-contradiction, and if the Son of God can reveal himself in human flesh without becoming a rational Paradox (which De Jong and Van Til admit), then there would seem to be no reason to deny (as De Jong and Van Til do) that the Bible and Christ must appear to us as contradictions and that our doctrinal expressions of these realities must appear contradictory because human language and concepts are qualitatively different from the truth they seek to express. There is no reason to believe that the Word of the Creator must appear to us as a contradiction when it comes in human flesh or human language so that it is a serious error to say that our logical concepts can express God's truth.

The real issue therefore centers on that allegedly "obvious fact" that our human logic (created and sanctified by God) is so different in kind from that divine logic that informs God's act and word in the gospel offer, that the truth of this event is something qualitatively different for God (and thus in truth) from anything we can say or think about it.

The real issue centers on this difference between divine and human logic.

This divine logic is what Van Til calls Christian logic. It should be observed, however, that this divine Christian logic which is qualitatively different from any human logic, is not the logic of the Christian. As that logic that characterizes God as distinct from man, it is no more the logic of the Christian than of the non-Christian. For the Christian no less than the non-Christian is, and remains, but a man.

The nature of this divine, Christian logic must be clearly understood, for Van Til frequently violates his own basic position and speaks of this Christian logic as something that distinguishes Christian from non-Christian thinking. He does so whenever he urges that a Christian can think God's thoughts after him. But on Van Til's basis this is an inherent impossibility. If man's thinking is always qualitatively different from God's thinking, so that Heyns and Hoeksema fall into the error of "logical objective" when they forget the obvious fact that our logical concepts cannot describe God's thought and truth, then the Christian, precisely because he is also a man, can no more think God's thoughts than the unbeliever. The Christian can only do so by becoming God. Therefore when Van Til urges that this Christian logic characterizes Christian thinking as distinct from non-Christian thinking, he is in fact, on his own basis, confusing God with man. And it is for this reason that his thinking has recently been criticized as enmeshed in philosophical Idealism.

If it is true, as De Jong contends, that the theologian may not — because he cannot without losing the truth — "abstract himself conceptually" from the event of gospel offer, then traditional, rational, theology is an inherent impossibility and all our traditional knowledge of God is suspect. If, because our logical concepts are not adapted to the objective event and truth of the gospel offer, the theologian may not "abstract himself conceptually" from this event, but must remain within, existentially within, this event in order to explain it, then the logic he must employ is an irrational, non-logical, existential dialectic. If our logic is divorced from the gospel-offer event, if reason is divorced from existence, so
that our logical concepts are not applicable to events (in this instance the gospel-offer event) that take place in our existence, then there is nothing left to explain such events except an existential, dialectical logic. It is therefore no accident that Van Til's conception of Christian logic leads him in his actual theological thought into existentialism. When Reason is theoretically abandoned—even when done in the interest of a Christian logic—then the practical and inescapable necessity of thinking rationally will lead the theologian to accept another type of rationalism, which is in this case Existentialism. Neither De Jong nor Van Til has yet fully understood that all theoretical rebellions against Reason and Logic do in fact employ these very realities to effect their rebellion. And this last consideration reveals that in actual practise every such rebellion is only a theoretical game, governed by the rule that the illusion on which it is based may not be taken seriously. Proof for this can be seen in Van Til's conception of the "apparently contradictory," which De Jong applies to Hoeksema.

III. The Illusion of the "Apparently Contradictory"

De Jong contends that because Hoeksema (and Heyns) is seriously in error in his epistemology, he gets himself involved in logical contradictions and dilemmas. "Because Hoeksema misconstrues the nature of the God-man relationship he often deals in terms of logical dilemmas. We mention a few. The covenant promise and the gospel promise must be either conditional or unconditional. The covenant must be either a means to an end or an end in itself. The Spirit's regenerating activity is either mediate or immediate" (p. 79).

De Jong's position is that we must hold — on the basis of the qualitative difference between God's logic and man's logic — for example, that regeneration is effected by the Spirit both medially and immediately, that the gospel offer is both conditional and unconditional. We must be willing to make such contradictory predications about the same fact. If Hoeksema, or anyone else, would say that this is nonsensical (which he does), he would be warned by De Jong that he must not impose his human logic upon the Bible by using the principle of non-contradiction. If Hoeksema would say that it is irrational and nonsensical to insist that the gospel is both conditional and unconditional (which he does), he would then be told that this is not really a contradiction, but only an apparent one. It only seems as-if it were a contradiction. It is really only the "apparently contradictory" to which a biblical theologian must hold, as Van Til says, with passion. We must forebear and not apply the law of non-contradiction. To do so, would be to impose our human logic upon God and his Word.

What must be said about this rejection or suspension of the law of non-contradiction in theology? First of all, that it rests on an illusion. Here too the issue must be clearly seen. We will perhaps all grant that some biblical teachings seem to us to be contradictory. And we should all grant that the Bible does not in fact teach contradictions. What seem to be, only seem to be. Granted. But it should be clearly seen that we may freely admit all this, but that this admission does not in the slightest degree commit us to an acceptance of what is meant by the "apparently contradictory"! This phrase, like Van Til's "thinking God's thought after him," is a loaded phrase. The distinctive feature of Van Til's "apparently contradictory" is that it does not rest on an application of the law of non-contradiction. And this is an illusion. Neither Van Til nor anyone else could arrive at, or employ the idea of, the "apparently contradictory" without using the law of non-contradiction! The concept of the "apparently contradictory" has not been forged except by use of the law of non-contradiction! To employ the "apparently contradictory" to the Bible, with the pretense that one does thereby not apply the law of non-contradiction to the Bible, is only a game in which the rules forbid that the illusion on which it is based be taken seriously. The rebellion against the law of non-contradiction has been only a theoretical exercise, for in actual practise this law has in fact been employed. The very rebellion rests on the acceptance of what is (allegedly) rejected. The rebellion against Reason, itself necessarily employs Reason. Van Til's rebellion against traditional logic in favor of his Christian logic, only leads him into another kind of rationalism and logic—in his case into an irrational, existential logic.

One can think of apparent contradictions only because one is thinking in terms of contradictions. It is an illusion therefore to assert that Hoeksema uses the law of non-contradiction in his theology, but that De Jong and Van Til do not.

IV. The Arbitrariness of the "Apparently Contradictory"

It can be expected that a theology built on this epistemology will present many arbitrary and irrational contradictions. And this is exactly what we confront in the theologies of De Jong and Van Til. Thus, for example, Van Til by means of his existential logic can teach that men both exist and do not exist (Common Grace, p. 72), that the gospel offer is both meaningful and meaningless, that all men heard the gospel in Adam, and that millions never heard it (Particularism and Common Grace, p. 2).

We find the same arbitrariness in De Jong. He scores Hoeksema for insisting, for example, that grace is either conditional or unconditional, but with Van Til he insists that our knowledge of God must be either exhaustive or non-exhaustive. This indicates that De Jong no less than Hoeksema has done his thinking in terms of the law of non-contradiction.
Yet Hoeksema is scored for doing what both Van Til and De Jong do when they desire to do it.

We have another example of this arbitrariness in De Jong's evaluation of Hoeksema. De Jong says, "Because Heyns neglected this fact [the "obvious fact" defined above] he was driven to such a logical contradiction as this: Man accepts the promise of salvation. Man does not actually accept the promise offered because God causes him to accept. Thus man's acceptance is not a real, a genuine acceptance" (p. 78).

Here the exponent of the "apparently contradictory" presents us with a phoney. This is not even a seeming contradiction. If God causes me to breathe, is it a contradiction to say that I breathe?

But De Jong continues, "Hoeksema reacted against such a logical contradiction... With his keen abilities of logical precision and accuracy Hoeksema addressed himself to the task of clearing away some of the ambiguities he discovered in Heyns' covenant views. In this task Hoeksema's reasoning was clear and consistent. Certainly one could never accuse Hoeksema of not thinking with logical precision" (p. 78).

Thus while De Jong insists that the theologian may not employ the law of non-contradiction in determining Christian truth, he himself applied it to Heyns' position, and extends high praise to Hoeksema for doing the same.

It is not difficult to account for this wholly arbitrary theological procedure. The epistemological principle of the "apparently contradictory" rests on the law of non-contradiction. Consequently, De Jong does not violate his basic position when he applies, and praises Hoeksema for applying, the law of non-contradiction to Heyns. But at the same time their principle of the "apparently contradictory" gives them the special privilege of denying that anyone has the right to apply the law of non-contradiction to their theology. No one has the right to apply this law to De Jong's position that regeneration takes place both mediatey (through the Word) and immediately (without the Word). Such a theological contradiction is protected by the principle of the "apparently contradictory," i.e., that God's truth must always seem to us to be contradictory. With this the doors are open for a theological method that is wholly and purely arbitrary.

V. The "Apparently Contradictory" as Theological Norm

The "apparently contradictory" does not merely point to the fact that some biblical truths appear to us as contradictory. On the contrary, the "apparently contradictory" characterizes all Christian truth. For the "apparently contradictory" stems from the epistemological principle that the truth of God is always qualitatively different from what it seems to us, always qualitatively different from anything we can say or think about it. According to this epistemology, then, all truth must appear to us as contradictory, for all truth is determined and characterized by the God of Christian logic.

If our doctrinal formulations do not appear contradictory, then they are not sound. If they appear logical, then their very logical nature is proof that we have violated the law of the "apparently contradictory." A logical doctrinal formulation has abandoned God's (Christian) logic!

Thus it appears that the proponents of this epistemology do not merely hold with passion to the "apparently contradictory" because it is a necessary device to protect their theological statements from the claims of logic and rationality. The "apparently contradictory" has been made into a norm and standard of Christian truth and doctrinal soundness. Since God's Christian logic informs all truth, all truth must appear contradictory to us. If it does not, it is not truth! And this holds true also for the non-theological sciences.

VI. The Absolute Autonomy of the "Apparently Contradictory"

What could lend a theologian and his theology a more absolute autonomy? De Jong's conception of regeneration as being both mediate and immediate cannot be touched by any criticism. Any objection is prohibited by the principle of the "apparently contradictory." All De Jong has to do is say this is biblical truth, and every arrow of criticism is broken before it is shot, by the claim that it is the nature of biblical truth to be "apparently contradictory." With absolute autonomy the "apparently contradictory" is set up as that which is beyond criticism.

In practice the autonomy of the "apparently contradictory" is as absolute as any autonomy claimed by the autonomous man of secular philosophy. If we object to a given position because it is contradictory — even contradictory to the Bible! — we are simply told that it is the nature of biblical truth to appear to us as contradictory. And for this very reason it is more dangerous and subtle than the secular autonomy of the secular thinker, for it comes in the name of the Lord. It claims that all truth must appear illogical and irrational because it is determined by the nature of the God of Christian logic. Once the claim of this epistemology is granted, there is no defense against its absolute, arbitrary autonomy.

What has De Jong under the influence of Van Til actually done through his insistence that our logical concepts cannot describe the objective truth of God's words and acts? He has accepted the sceptical and irrational conclusions of modern secular philosophy, declared that they are an "obvious fact," and under the slogan of "Christian logic" asserted that this sceptical irrationalism actually characterizes the rationality of God and of his words and acts. While the older scepticism could be challenged by pointing
out that its position that we can be quite sure that we know nothing for sure is self-contradictory, the sceptical irrationality of this epistemology cannot be so challenged, for its principle of the “apparently contradictory” insists that God’s truth must always appear contradictory. The irrationality of the self-contradictory has been exalted in the principle of the “apparently contradictory” as the characteristic feature of the true rationality of Christian logic. What was a problem of thought, has now become the nature of thought, i.e., of Christian thought.

Nor would it help to counter that the truth about epistemology is — by virtue of the fundamental principle of this Christian epistemology! — qualitatively different from what the proponents of this epistemology say it is. They supposedly would admit that the real truth about epistemology is qualitatively different from what they have claimed it to be. But if so, by what right (except a wholly arbitrary one!) do they press for the acceptance of this epistemology? Surely I am not obliged to accept something as true, if he who presses it upon me insists that the truth is really qualitatively different from what he offers!

This then is that “obvious fact,” so revelatory of the nature of that epistemology which De Jong has uncritically taken over from Van Til, which De Jong applies, without any demonstration of its correctness, as a standard of theological evaluation to Heyns, Prof. L. Berkhof (unlike Van Til, De Jong does not exempt Berkhof from criticism, p. 167), Hoeksema, and Schilder.

Without wishing to fall into sarcasm, I can only wonder why De Jong had to obtain so obvious a fact from another, and why it took so many centuries for this “obvious fact” to become obvious to the theological mind of the Church.

I fear it is far more obvious — although not at a first or second glance—that this alleged qualitative difference between God’s (Christian) logic and man’s logic, together with the wholly arbitrary and autonomous protective device of the “apparently contradictory,” is an epistemology resting on a theological scepticism which renders all our knowledge of God suspect.

Not indeed at a first or second glance! For the epistemology of the “apparently contradictory,” together with the theology constructed upon it, is a highly developed and intricate maze of contradictory and incompatible elements. It is not a surprise that De Jong got lost and confused in its labyrinths. But I would suggest that a good place to begin the process of untangling — and it will take a long critical scrutiny — is with the principle of “sameness with difference,” or “commonality with difference,” which underlies this epistemology.

This principle, which Van Til claims to derive from the ontological trinity, plays an exceedingly large role both in this epistemology and in this theology. How is it that De Jong can say that God’s offer and man’s offer, God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge, are qualitatively different and therefore do not involve the “identical matter” (p. 77), and yet write a book about this offer? Because this epistemology both denies and affirms that God’s truth and man’s truth, God’s logic and man’s logic, God’s speech and man’s speech, pertain to the same identical matter. This is justified by the principle that identity is always identity with a difference. This enables De Jong and Van Til, both in epistemology and theology, to deny, or affirm, or do both, according as they desire. Thus De Jong and Van Til can affirm that our knowledge of God is non-exhaustive, and deny that it is exhaustive. But they can also affirm that God’s love is qualitatively different from man’s love, and insist that this may not be denied, and yet themselves deny it by insisting that God’s love and man’s love are qualitatively similar (p. 78). Or again, De Jong can insist that the gospel offer is both conditional and unconditional and assert that this “both-and predication” is “wholly unique” (p. 94). This “both-and predication” corresponds to that which is “identical and yet different.” When the meaning of this latter phrase is understood, most of the difficulties of this epistemology and theology will disappear.

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