

A Protestant Reformed World and Life View

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In discussing the view of Common Grace and its implications for a world and life view, we were making a few quotations from certain writers who hold to this view and who develop their world and life view on the basis of Common Grace. There is one more quotation I would like to make which comes from the mouth of Dr. Abraham Kuyper and is found in his Stone Lectures delivered at Princeton, New Jersey on the general subject of “Calvinism.”

In this particular quotation, the doctor is discussing the relationship between Common Grace and sin. He writes, “Sin places before us a riddle, which in itself is insoluble, If you view sin as a deadly poison, as enmity against God, as leading to everlasting condemnation, and if you represent a sinner as being ‘wholly incapable of doing any good, and prone to all evil,’ (this is a quotation from the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day III, with which evidently Kuyper does not agree – H.H.) and on this account salvable only if God by regeneration changes his heart, then it seems as if of necessity all unbelievers and unregenerate persons ought to be wicked and repulsive men. But this is far from being our experience in actual life. On the contrary the unbelieving world excels in many things. Precious treasures have come down to us from the old heathen civilization...And if you consider your own surroundings, that which is reported to you, and that which you desire from the studies and literary productions of professed infidels, how much there is which attracts you, with which you sympathize and which you admire. It is not exclusively the spark of genius or the splendor of talent, which excites your pleasure in the words and actions of unbelievers, but it is often their beauty of character, their zeal, their devotion, their love, their candor, their faithfulness and their sense of honesty. Yea, we may not pass it over in silence, not infrequently you entertain the desire that certain believers might have more of this attractiveness, and who among us has not himself been put to the blush occasionally by being confronted with what is called the ‘virtues of the heathen’?”

“It is thus a fact, that your dogma of total depravity by sin does not always tally with your experience in life. Yet, if you now run to the opposite direction and proceed from these experimental facts, you must not forget that your entire Christian confession falls to the ground, for then you look upon human nature as good and incorrupt;...regeneration is entirely superfluous in order to live honorable; and your imagination of the higher grace seems to be nothing else than playing with a medicine, which often proves entirely ineffectual. True, some people save themselves from this awkward position by speaking of the virtues of unbelievers as ‘splendid vices’ (this is a quotation from Augustine the early church father with whom also Kuyper does not agree, but who did deny that the wicked are capable of doing any good whatsoever, and that good can only come forth from a regenerated heart. – H.H.) and, on the other hand, by charging the sins of believers to old Adam, yet you feel, yourselves, that this is subterfuge, which lacks earnestness.” pp. 121, 122.

After speaking at some length concerning the Roman Catholic solution of this problem, the doctor goes on and says, “Sin, according to Calvinism, which is in full accord with the Holy Scriptures, sin unbridled and unfettered, left to itself, would forthwith have led to a total degeneracy of human life, as may be inferred from what was seen in the days before the flood. But God arrested sin in its course in order to prevent the complete annihilation of his divine handiwork, which naturally would have followed. He has interfered in the life of the individual, in the life of mankind as a whole, and in the life of nature itself by His common grace. This

grace, however, does not kill the core of sin, nor does it save unto life eternal, but it arrests the complete effectuation of sin, just as human insight arrests the fury of wild beasts. Man can prevent the beast from doing damage: 1st, by putting it behind bars; 2nd, he can subject it to his will by taming it; and 3rd, he can make it attractive by domesticating it e.g., by transforming the originally wild dog and cat into domestic animals. In a similar manner God by His ‘common grace’ restrains the operation of sin in man, partly by breaking its power, partly by taming his evil spirit, and partly by domesticating his nation or his family. Common grace has thus led to the result that an unregenerated sinner may captivate and attract us by much that is lovely and full of energy just as our domestic animals do, but this of course after the manner of man... Where evil does not come to the surface, or does not manifest itself in all its hideousness, we do not owe it to the fact that our nature is not so deeply corrupt, but to God alone, Who by His ‘common grace’ hinders the bursting forth of the flames from the smoking fire. And is you ask how it is possible, that in such a way out of restrained evil something may come forth which attracts, pleases and interests you, take then as an illustration the ferry-boat. This boat is put into motion by the current which would carry it swiftly as an arrow downstream and ruin it; but by means of the cable to which it is fastened, the boat arrives safely on the opposite side, pressed forward by the same power, which would otherwise have demolished it. In this wise God restrains evil, and it is He who brings forth good out of evil; and meanwhile we Calvinists, never remiss in accusing our sinful nature, yet praise and thank God for making it possible for men to dwell together in a well-ordered society, and for restraining us personally from horrible sins. Moreover, we thank Him for bringing to light all the talents, hidden in our race, developing, by means of a regular process, the history of mankind, and securing by the same grace, for his church on earth, a place for the sole of her foot.” pp. 123, 124.

This is probably a rather lengthy quotation, but is important in that it sets forth most clearly just exactly what is meant by the restraint of sin as taught by the theory does not become tedious, for Kuyper is of Common Grace. And even the quotation able to embellish his writings with many and fascinating illustrations, although one could wish that he would prove his point not by illustration and anecdote, but by some proof texts from the Word of God which are always strangely lacking. This is, however, evidently impossible to do. The whole of his Stone Lectures are alarming bare of any Scriptural references.

Kuyper was not himself a member of the Christian Reformed Church, yet the whole of the three points was obviously taken from his writings with the possible exception of the general offer of grace.

It remains for us now to sum up the teachings of these men in a few sentences, and then to demonstrate how they shape a form of a world and life view with which they face the world about them. With this view we cannot possibly agree, and if we do, we do so only to our irreparable harm.

But this summary must wait, the Lord willing, till the next issue of the **Beacon Lights**.

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