

The Natural Knowledge of God

by Abraham Kuyper¹

I. Three Positions

Of what value is the knowledge of divine things that is available to man in the absence of Holy Scripture and without internal illumination by the Holy Spirit? Through the ages, the Church has given three different answers to this question.

Modernists deem a *supernatural* knowledge of God unnecessary. They deny it, combat it, and recommend the *natural* knowledge of God as the only true one. They do not deny any value to the Bible or internal illumination, but they include both Bible and illumination among the class of *natural* givens and deny that either of them have any *supernatural* character.

The Christian Church counters by emphasizing that knowledge of God can be attained only in the *supernatural* way. She does not deny that nature declares the glory of God, that history testifies to His providence, and that God speaks into man's conscience; but she mentions these sources of knowledge of God only "for the sake of completeness."

Guido de Brès was not so one-sided. He wrote that we know God by *two* means: "First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to see clearly the invisible things of God, even His everlasting power and divinity, as the apostle Paul says (Rom. 1:20); which things are sufficient to convince men and leave them without excuse." And then: "Second, He

¹ Dr. A. Kuyper, *Het heil in ons* (1879; repr. Kampen: Kok, 1910), pp. 165–225. This study appeared in thirteen installments in the Sunday supplement of *De Standaard*, from Aug. 2 to Nov. 15, 1874. Translated and annotated by Harry Van Dyke. The first four articles are heavily abridged, the remainder only slightly. Also omitted are the Bible texts printed at the top of each article.

makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word . . .”²

Similarly John Calvin: “We take to be beyond dispute that there is a sense of the divine in the human mind, indeed by *natural instinct*, and that God has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his presence, the remembrance of which He constantly renews with fresh drops, in order that no one can take refuge under the pretext of ignorance and that all should grasp that there is a God and that He is their Maker.”³ Further, “God has not only implanted in men’s minds a seed of religion, but He also, lest anyone be excluded from happiness, so reveals Himself in the order of the universe and so clearly discloses Himself every day that men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see Him.”⁴

The same was taught by Voetius, Vitringa, à Brakel, à Marck. It is the calling of the Reformed Churches to hold on to this teaching. They have defended it against Rome, against Socinians, against Arminians. But alas, subsequent neglect of this doctrine has destroyed the bridge that our fathers laid between Church and world. This has resulted in enmity between faith and science, an impossible separation of education in the school and in the home, sectarianism among believers, and impotence to persuade theological modernists of the error of their ways.

II. What the Church once Confessed about this Doctrine

The natural knowledge of God is the point of departure where all the paths of piety begin. The question is: Is man since the Fall a rock or a block of stone, impervious to every sense of God and the divine? Or is his nature open to a certain revelation of God’s power in the deepest core of his being?

To know God is a demand of human nature. What sin corrupts is still our human nature. Amid our total depravity there is a natural knowledge of God, a knowledge that can be suppressed but never extinguished. Remnants of it, however small, are never absent. The sinner hates God, but he cannot escape Him.

² Belgic Confession, art. 2.

³ *Institutes*, 1.3.1.

⁴ *Institutes*, 1.5.1.

III. Innate Knowledge of God

Knowledge of God is innate, inborn in man. It is inseparable from his nature. He cannot shake it off. Atheists do not exist. True, some people have grown insensitive to any imprint of God's majesty; others try to explain it away. With some it leads to idolatry, spiritism, even deification of man. Were it not for sin, the natural knowledge of God would have led man to true knowledge of God. Hence the absolute necessity that man be born again. Socrates, Plato—Confucius and Buddha, if you will—these noble sages beheld the radiance of God's majesty, but they never tasted the bliss of communion with His merciful love.

IV. Not Indwelling But Reflecting

The innate knowledge of God is not something that man possesses. It radiates from God from moment to moment as the steady impression on man's heart of God's omnipresent power. God has made of man's heart a mirror, split and broken though it is, yet a mirror that reflects God's radiance, albeit not His true image. The human heart, though fallen, remains open to knowledge of God. Our philosophers may talk proudly of our *capacity* for knowing God, but the Church speaks of the majestic impression of the Lord that bears down on all men.

V. Nature

Thus far we have seen that *the natural knowledge of God*⁵ is not acquired through training or study. It is inborn, innate. That is why all people share in it. It is inseparable from human nature and belongs to man as a human being.

Furthermore, the natural knowledge of God exists thanks to the uninterrupted radiation of God's majesty throughout creation, hence also

⁵ Kuyper's term is "natuurlijke Godskennis," often translated as "natural theology."

in man who is sensitive to this radiation and is given a sense of that majesty. That is why it is called a "*sensus divinitatis*," a sense of the Divine, a "*semen religionis*," a seed of the relationship that ties us to God, and a "*theologia innata*," a knowledge of God that is grounded in our relation to God as creatures.

Moreover, not even sin has destroyed this natural knowledge of God. "Thou hath beset me behind and before" remains true, even if I make my bed in hell. In fact, so little has this awareness of God's omnipresent power been taken away from us that neither the Devil and his fallen angels nor the lost in the state of utter doom can be imagined as not sensing the majesty of the Lord.

In sum, the natural knowledge of God is created into us and therefore part of our nature; it is radiating into us, not radiating from us; and as a result of sin it bears down on us, being far from destroyed.

Meanwhile, the natural knowledge of God does not remain submerged in our unconscious. It is proper to man to try and account for this sense of the Divine. In sensing God's omnipresent power man is entirely passive, as passive as our lungs during breathing, our eyes when touched by light, our ears at the tremor of sound waves. He can neither block nor invite this divine power as it radiates into him, touches him, and causes his heart to tremble. He can neither prevent God's power from being everywhere nor his own being from being touched by it.

He does not become active until he tries to account for those feelings and wonders what is causing his heart to tremble—in a word, when he tries to become conscious of the sense of the Divine that arose in him.

It would of course never occur to man, without further information, that this awareness results from the majesty of *the Lord*. At most he knows that an invisible force along secret paths has access to the inner recesses of his conscience. All the rest remains guesswork for him: guessing whether that force comes from nature or from somewhere *higher* than nature; guessing whether that force is a *personal* being, or just another "force of nature"; and, supposing it is a God that works this in him, guessing whether that God is merely *one* of the Gods or always the same God and therefore the *only* God.

But that innate knowledge of God does not stand on its own, is not left to itself, but is given content and explained by what a person observes in and around him. Besides that sense of God's power in his heart, there is

also *nature*, the human world, the course of events we call *history*, tradition, the *personal* life of each and every individual human being. All this has to be taken into account and related to the innate knowledge of God if a person is to see what that power is which constantly affects him internally, and if he is to acquire *conscious* knowledge of the all-powerful God. Accordingly, our church makes a sharp distinction between *innate* knowledge of God and *acquired* knowledge of God. Only the latter is conscious.

However, one should not conclude from this that the knowledge we gain from nature and history, tradition and life experience, is separate from and merely supplementary to our innate knowledge of God, without any inner connection to it, hence contingent and to a certain extent dispensable. Such a view would ignore the essence of human nature.

Man belongs to nature and nature belongs to him. In addition, man was made to live in intimate community with his fellow-man and can therefore not develop well apart from *human society*. The generation that lives today stands in a living relationship with the generations from former centuries, hence forms a part of *history* and has a claim on the benefits of *tradition*. Finally, every human being has his own life, his own experiences, and is simply unthinkable without an *internal history* of his own formation and development.

Man belongs to *nature*. Not in the sense that he was created as an afterthought, once nature was made and furnished. Rather, everything created prior to man was aimed at man, fitted for man, and given its reason to exist for the sake of man. As a pedestal has as its object the statue that will soon be placed on it, as a prepared meal awaits the guests who are about to sit down to it, and as a bassinet and a diaper basket await the child that is not yet born; or if you will, just as a keyboard and a palette await the artist who will work his magic in the world of tones or colors, so nature is not understood until man is created, enjoys it, admires it and rules over it.

Man carries within his own body the fluids and vapors, the organic and inorganic materials that are taken from nature, and so far as his body is concerned he is subject to the laws of nature. In his body he is related not just to inorganic but even more to organic nature. The whole composition of his body is the consummation of what the animal world possessed before him. His eye is made for sight, his blood for breath, his

ear for sound. The earth carries, feeds and clothes him. Nature provides virtually nothing that is not profitable to man, that man cannot use to his advantage to provide comfort, pleasure, affluence, if for no other reason than to display his resourcefulness.

Thus the relation between man and nature is rooted in man's very being. It is intimate, multi-faceted, not self-invented but given with his creation.

No wonder, therefore, that the two things that belong to man as part of his being—on the one hand his indestructible sense of the Divine, on the other his belonging to nature—also relate to each other.

Nature is a tremendous force that man struggles against in his quest for self-preservation. It surrounds him like a flood that wants to engulf him. He has to fend for his very life against the stronger animal, the poisonous plant, the threatening plague, the destructive force of the elements, heat and cold, drought and rainstorms. Poor soil here and toxic soil there force him to be on guard, to look for shelter, to put up resistance. Most everywhere on earth he has to wrestle with the soil to earn his morsel of bread, and he has to fight stubborn nature for a piece of cloth to cover his nakedness. Despite this titanic struggle, nature's resistance all too often ends in man's defeat and death. The storm scoffs at the mariners' efforts. Lightning kills the shepherd in the midst of his flock. The plague returns despite your hygiene. And even if you are not the victim of such extraordinary events, still the seed of death insinuates itself into your members and nature triumphs over you when at last it sends you, exhausted as you are by the struggle, to the grave.

Today, people are less impressed by the power of nature and feel it less in the urban centers than in the countryside, and less in our temperate zones than at the pole and the equator. This is so, not because the forces of nature are so much less today, but because past struggles have armed and equipped us better against nature's onslaughts. At bottom, what else is a big city but a giant fortress to which men retreat in order to escape the tyranny, whims and vagaries—nay, the relentless persecution—of the forces of nature?

Yet nature still remains, also for us, a force that inspires awe. Our ceaseless exertions to break its direct impact show how much power it really has and how much it can fill us with dread. It is almost as if all

man's labor and toil come down to a coordinated attempt by all available human strength to stem the destructive effects of the forces of nature.

Once nature is viewed in this way, we can begin to understand what it contributes to our sense of God. Natural theology has often been portrayed as a process whereby man calmly contemplates nature, observing its order, regularity and beauty, and from there ascends to a recognition of God's great power. Nothing is further from the truth. For ordinary man, such calm contemplation is an exception. Our constant contact with nature directly affects our life, our body, our struggle for survival. Not abstract reflection but restless, painful experience has acquainted us with the power of nature.

Man was compelled to study the dynamics of nature from pressing needs, not calm observation, at first even from fear, not wonder. As one spies on his enemy and traces his movements, so every member of the human race—I do not speak of philosophers and scientists—has closely watched nature in his surroundings and in his own body and has been intent on curbing its power. That is what has made our impression of the power of nature so deep, so permanent, so awe-inspiring. What impresses is not the sea viewed from the shore, the ice observed in the skating rink, the thunder storm watched from a distance, the starry heavens and the flower beds that delight the eye. No, what impresses is the sea as it looks to the survivor of a shipwreck, icebergs at the pole, lighting rods that strike, the course of the stars to a traveler through the desert, the healing herbs gathered by the sufferer from a disease—every part of nature that we come into contact with when our life or well-being is at stake.

In the struggle for life itself, man has come to understand that nature does not just consist of bits and pieces but is one single mighty power. Nature is not dead matter but a living organism; it does not play cruel games but harbors order, law and regularity; it does not just create interesting phenomena but confronts us with overwhelming force.

Thus, two forces bear down on man. The one comes to him along secret paths and touches his soul inwardly. The other comes to him from outside and touches his body outwardly. Our peace is disturbed in two ways: by the tremor of the sense of the Divine within us, and by the movement of nature in our bodies and our surroundings.

Now then, is there a connection between these two forces? Without hesitation man has said yes. They are two actions of one and the same

force. The one causes the inner strings to vibrate; the other takes the forces of nature and by turns lays them at his feet or turns them against him. That is how man came to realize that nature and the force operative within it are two. That is how man began to see that this force does not reside *in* nature, but *behind* it, as it causes nature to seethe and ferment. Learn from the apostle Paul that what strikes us in nature is not first of all its order or beauty but its *power*. What is clearly seen and understood from the creation of the world is both "his eternal power and his divinity" (Rom 1:20).

VI. Study of Nature and Admiration of Nature

Thus far we have emphasized that if you are looking for support of your internal sense of the Divine and awareness of God, then look at our *struggle with nature*, not at our *intellectual contemplation* of it. Neglect this advice, and before you realize it natural science will throw you off balance.

The pursuit of natural science cannot be forbidden. The struggle for life that humanity has joined with nature forces him to spy on it as accurately as possible in all its passages and inner recesses. Knowledge is power. If man is to have power over nature he has to know it. This knowledge has to be the fruit of relentless research. And this research, to yield knowledge, must be free. Not curiosity but inescapable necessity drives man to engage in natural science.

Science has brought many benefits. It has accelerated communication, improved our homes, alleviated our toil, multiplied our power, promoted physical comforts, facilitated the production, preparation and distribution of our food.

We gladly accept these benefits. Believers do too. Everybody can see that they represent great gains in the struggle to alleviate suffering or ease pain or make life more pleasant. Those are gains we will not turn down.

Nevertheless there are believers who sometimes regret and deplore the successes of science. If it were up to them, they would confine science within very narrow limits. They fear its success will harm their faith.

The blame for this no doubt lies in part with our natural scientists. Instead of sticking to their field they are repeatedly tempted to pass judgment on things that lie entirely outside their sphere.

That they observe nature, imitate how it works, analyze its components and reassemble them, spy on how its phenomena arise and try to trace the connections between its component parts—that is their right. But they exceed their right as soon as they use their results in order to try and erect a system that can encompass all of life.

“Creation” is not a word the scientist can understand, for his investigations can never go beyond that point in time when creation was not already an accomplished fact.

The scientist can neither deny nor affirm whether nature owes its existence to God or is eternally self-existent. Insofar as he acts purely as a scientist, he knows nothing about that. His sense of God, his religious faith, may make it an irrefutable fact for him that all nature speaks of God, but he does not owe this certainty to his science but to operations in his spirit that have nothing to do with the investigation of matter and its forces. Altogether outside the domain of science, likewise, is the question whether the behavior he observes in nature is borne by a divine power, governed by a divine wisdom, guided by a divine love. No handbook of physics or chemistry is allowed to contribute a single thought to this question.

The natural scientist is not competent to pronounce on a person’s soul and its moral demands, on immortality and an eternal life, on sin and guilt, on the redemption that is in Christ—not even on the question whether there is a God who works miracles and has his messengers perform miracles. The scientist has to account for the things *that are seen*. Of the things that are *not seen* the scientist as such knows nothing. A scientist as such has no spiritual life; he is a person who is gifted with senses to observe nature and with a mind to conceive of the connection between its actions. That is all.

We do not deny that a scientist can at the same time be a believer in Christ and can derive support for his faith from nature. Newton and Agassiz are proof of this. We assert only this: if a scientist joins Newton and Agassiz and finds his God in nature, he does not owe this to his science but to wholly other factors that have worked on his person.

This is what our scientists most often lose sight of. They arrogate to themselves what does not belong to them. They design systems about things that lie outside their ken. Especially men of the second rank have a predilection to turn their laboratories, often with fanatical zeal, into arsenals for attacking the faith once delivered.

To name an example, by no means the worst. With great confidence they proclaim: That matter cannot arise from nothing, hence is eternal. That therefore there can be no question of creation. That the whole notion of the Christian world on this question rests on ignorance and prejudice and should be jettisoned as an antiquated error.

Science is in no way warranted to make statements of this sort. Here it states more than it can account for.

To the natural scientist, the idea that matter is *eternal* is preposterous. He knows nothing about things eternal. Nature does not teach him the concept, and so little does his intellect teach him this concept that the strict demands of logic actually exclude it. Our mind requires above all that everything has a *beginning*. "Eternal" is the denial of a beginning, hence may be believed despite our intellect but can never be *required* by our intellect.

The same goes for Darwin's theory. The scientist is perfectly competent to point to the close affinity between the animal and the human body. He is competent to demonstrate that what are often called new species are merely alterations of already existing phenomena. He is even competent to venture to take as a guideline for his research the assumption that there is an unbroken transition between matter and plant, plant and animal, the animal and the human body. But further he cannot go. He is not competent to claim that it is not true that God, after forming man from the dust, breathed the breath of life into his nostrils. For him to claim that our human mind germinated from animal instinct and that this instinct germinated from the sense of touch is to confuse apples and oranges and to hold forth about colors like a blind man. Doing this, the scientist is starting to theologize and in spite of himself is turning profane.

That reputable scientists are beginning to realize this themselves became apparent just recently at the opening of the annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. On this occasion the famous professor Tyndall gave an address which demonstrates that one

can continue to sin against an evil that one is combating, but also that men's eyes are opening to the evil.⁶

We have long felt that our government ought to guard against certain teachers in our secondary and primary schools, insufferable pedants, half-baked scientists, who instead of teaching their subject indulge in statements about things of the spirit—although I fully concede that government action on this score is only to be expected from a purging of public opinion.

But what must never happen is that Christ-believers, out of revenge for these sins of the scientists, fall out of sympathy with science itself. Just as no one has the right to combat Christianity because of the sins of its confessors, so we must not blame science for what its practitioners do wrong.

Neither an appeal to the creation story nor an appeal to the miracles and prophecies in Scripture should ever induce us to restrict the freedom of scientific research. They are two spheres that do not touch each other. Nature just is the way it is, and no one can change it with unscientific complaining. That God is Creator, that He created everything, is an irrefutable truth for the believer; but what processes matter underwent in that event—how the creating Word of the Almighty gave being to matter and how He worked on matter once it was there—remains undecided.

We are not in a position to assess the deeper questions with which nature confronts us until we approach it not as scientists but as humans.

When a scientist gets ready to observe nature he is equipped only with his senses, his intellect, his telescope, his weigh-scales, and so on; but when a human being approaches nature he carries with him an entirely different set of instruments, namely his inner sense of God, his sense of admiration and awe, his memory, his emotional experiences, his premonition that he is in the presence of an eternal Being.

Our church has never claimed that scientists discover God in nature and can read his handwriting in it. They say this about *humans*. When the Belgic Confession states that nature is like “a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to see clearly the invisible things . . . ,” then it has in view not the scientist but the believer, if you will the *sinner*. It speaks of seeing “invisible things”;

⁶ John Tyndall (1820–93), an Anglo-Irish physicist, was a confirmed naturalist and evolutionist. In chapter VIII below, Kuyper summarizes the famous “Belfast Address” of 1874 in which Tyndall conceded that there is an “insoluble mystery” that science can only respect as very real.

whereas the calling of the scientist is precisely to read in the book of nature not the invisible but solely the visible, observable things. With a protractor and a measuring tape you will make as much progress in seeing the invisible things as when a blind person reads braille.

Thus, when we point to nature as one of the means whereby God wants to enrich our innate sense of the Divine, we are focusing on man *qua* man, on man who brings with him his heart, his sense of God, his feelings of guilt, his sense of wonder and awe.

It is not as though one first has to become a Christian before one receives those impressions from nature. The only condition required is that one lets his human attributes do their work and not silence the voice of his inner self but remain open to the impressions that nature makes on a person.

If that is done, the Church of Christ assures every human being, also the scientist insofar as he wants to act as a human being, that nature affects, moves and reinforces his inner sense of the Divine; that he would sinfully have to force himself *not* to hear the voice that speaks to him from the whole of nature and its multifaceted phenomena; that, try as he might, he can never wrestle free from the power and majesty, from the wisdom and order, that are impressed upon him by the creation; and that, provided he connect his inner sense of the Divine with these impressions, he too can read on the face of nature the invisible things that speak to him of God.

But no less does the Church of Christ admonish her members not to turn their backs on nature from a mistaken love of God, as though one has to flee from nature in order to be able to serve God. She warns them that such an arbitrary separation can only end in divorcing piety and life, robbing religion of reality, and depriving life of nobility. She will urge them to return to the old paths where men honored in the visible creation what has come forth out of the invisible things.⁷

Calvin expressed this in a picturesque way with the metaphor of a pair of glasses. He compared Holy Scripture to spectacles: without them you can pore over creation yet be unable to read what is written in its letters. But once your eyes are sharpened and enhanced by the instrument of Scripture, its letters escape the confusion that first prevented you from

⁷ Cf. Heb. 11:2.

reading them: you distinguish them, you spell the words, you grasp their meaning.⁸

Notice that Calvin does not call Scripture our *eyes*, but the glasses that come to the aid of our weak eyes. Those eyes are real; even though they have not yet led you to Scripture and are still weak, incapable of reading correctly, yet they receive impressions, they discern that something is written there. And that is what our church understands by the natural knowledge of God.

From the beginning of creation, hence before Scripture was, before special revelation came, the invisible things of God, says Paul, were seen and understood from the creatures, i.e., from nature.⁹

Just don't trip over the word *nature*.

We are apt to take "nature" as referring to fields and forests, oceans and firmament, light waves and atmospheric waves. But here it means all things visible, all things that can be observed by your senses, hence also your body, your clothing, your house, your food and drink, along with illness and death that come with life.

That is why we emphasize this so much. The nourishment that the sense of the Divine receives from nature is not tied to a walk in beautiful meadows, but presents itself at every moment in the rich fullness of life, whenever you enjoy what is visible or wrestle with that which can be seen.

VII. The Moral World-Order

The natural knowledge of God has been enervated, eviscerated and dishonored by classifying it among the things that can be *proved*, hence that fall outside *faith*. It was treated as a kind of philosophical forecourt through which one entered into the sanctuary of faith but which itself lay outside faith. It was used to show how far one could get in the knowledge of things divine *without revelation*, and accordingly it was hastily discarded as soon as revelation came into view. Who would be interested in knowing how we could live if there were no atmosphere? The atmosphere is real, is what we inhale; what more do you want? Similarly, who in the

⁸ *Institutes*, 1.6.1.

⁹ Cf. Rom. 1:20.

world cares to know along what tortuous paths we might arrive at knowledge of God if there were no revelation? Revelation is real; we live by it; a hypothetical possibility does not interest us.

Thus the natural knowledge of God could not but end up being held in contempt. It seemed of lower, of very low status, lying outside the area of faith, a gratuitous luxury, a kind of knowledge that scholars could indulge in, but not one that suited the taste of simple believers.

For this reason we must, before going any further, wipe out, root and branch, the erroneous view that the natural knowledge of God is not as indispensable for faith as the revelation in Christ. We must remove the false idea that the natural knowledge of God is even conceivable apart from faith. We must abandon the assumption that Revelation can ever compensate for what we would miss if the natural knowledge of God were absent. We must put a stop to the misconception that the natural knowledge of God ends where Revelation begins.

All Scripture rests on the natural knowledge of God. Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs operate almost exclusively in its domain. The oracles of the Prophets about the nations are unintelligible without it; it alone justifies that the life of the people of Israel is included in Scripture. Every word in the Sermon on the Mount makes it shine. The beautiful prologue of the Gospel of John gives it the highest consecration. Paul's performance in Athens, Philippi, Corinth puts a seal on it from city to city. His letters to the Romans, the Ephesians and the Colossians proclaim it equally. The final judgments described by the seer on Patmos determine its enduring significance for the glory that is coming.

The natural knowledge of God, far from lying outside the area of faith, is an absurdity outside of faith. It does not concern things visible. It focuses exclusively on things invisible. Nature's dimensions, colors and forms are of no use to it. It is concerned only with an invisible something, with something that hides behind and within nature, that speaks to it from nature and affects it through nature.

Accordingly it is invariably of a serious moral character. It is not a form of arid scholarly knowledge that draws up syllogisms in order to satisfy the mind; nor a piece of philosophy that would allow shallow and untrained minds to be judges about the deepest questions of life; nor yet a set of speculations that stand outside reality and life's struggles and leave the heart cold. On the contrary, the natural knowledge of God is an article

of faith for the Church of Christ. It touches the conscience of the unbelieving world, awakens it from its unbelieving slumber, and looks in all living things for points of contact with the kingdom of God.

The immediate sense of the Divine, as we saw, is the center from which the natural knowledge of God proceeds, the organ through which it operates, the indispensable condition which it presupposes. But that sense of the Divine does not remain by itself, in isolation. It comes into contact with nature and hears an echo of its own word in the life of nature. It becomes aware of something in nature that is in tune with the sense in our heart of God's omnipresent power. It is one voice in the heart and in nature, distinct in sound yet vibrating from the same depths. It is not we who connect that sense with nature, but that connection already exists; we merely discover it, and that discovery confirms and clarifies our inner sense of the Divine.

Meanwhile, the light ray emitted by nature is not the only one that falls on the focal point of the human heart. Next to visible nature we are also surrounded by a human world of which we are a part, to which we belong and the life of which resonates as we become conscious of our own human existence.

What is visible in the human world does not count here. In terms of the body, man too still belongs to nature. Here we are looking only at the invisible dimension of human life—at the affects and impulses of the heart, the world of thought, those awesome factors of duty and calling, enthusiasm and passion, hatred and love, selfishness and dedication, respect and admiration, in short the whole of that immense phalanx of invisible forces that set the undulating surface of the human heart in motion, that cause it to flare up and push on, and that form the actual content of what we understand by the rich full life of man in its higher sense.

“The knowledge of God from the moral order” is what our fathers called the nourishment that the sense of the Divine receives from that mysterious world. The natural knowledge of God proceeds from the sense of the Divine that is fed first of all by our contact with nature, but secondly also with the world of man. The latter knowledge is of a higher order, hence was called the *moral* knowledge of God.

What are we to understand by this? The apostle, referring to the Gentiles, speaks of “their thoughts meanwhile accusing or else excusing

one another" (Rom. 2:15). To say it in today's language: there is a public opinion which acts as a judge of our actions also in the moral domain. In what immediately precedes these words Paul writes about the Gentiles that they are "a law unto themselves, which show the work of the law written in their hearts" (Rom. 2:14–15). Surely this is not meant in the sense of Jeremiah 31:33? There Israel is promised a future that far exceeds the blessed state enjoyed by the people of God in distinction from the Gentiles, a future state marked by having the law written on the tablets of their hearts: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." Now since it will occur to no one that Paul means to say that the Gentiles already possess that which was promised to Israel as something in a very remote future, then it goes without saying that his statement that the Gentiles "show the work of the law written in their hearts" must be taken in quite a different sense.

What is that sense?

Among all nations is found an idea of justice, of duty, of the difference between good and evil. No people so dull, no tribe so brutalized, no band so savage has ever been discovered where those ideas are not found. Those ideas are usually very different from ours, often quite bizarre, even absurd, at times the very opposite of what obtains among us, calling just what we call unjust, duty what we abhor, good what we deem evil. But however confused and bewildered their customs may be, the idea that there is justice and that all will be judged in accordance with it, that there are duties and that all are bound to them, that there is a difference between good and evil and that all should behave accordingly—these ideas are never lacking, are found everywhere, are held among all peoples.

Paul does not say whether these ideas are good. He says only that they have ideas about justice and duties, and that they judge each other and themselves in accordance with these ideas, whatever they may be.

This fact is exceedingly significant.

Whoever talks of justice acknowledges a power which stands above him, to which he must yield, and which he cannot ignore without moral harm. Where does that justice come from? He did not establish it, nor was it established by others. Those who described justice did not fancy that they were inventing it; instead they tried to find the purest expression of

what they acknowledged to be the justice that was there and that existed all on its own.

Whoever speaks of absolute Justice senses immediately that not only he but every human being is subject to it. A king may stand above the law, but not above justice; it is a power also over him. What is unjust remains unjust also over against a king, albeit that there is no power in the world that can punish the transgressor.

The same holds for duties. Exactly what is my duty and what is yours can be open to debate; but that we have duties is known to all. In other words, there is a power that stands above us and binds us, that commands us and tells us to obey. We do not determine that duty ourselves, else it would cease to be a duty. That duty is not grounded in other people's will, for they in their turn are bound to duties. Duty is not an idea invented by our ancestors. As far back as memory extends man has felt morally bound to duties that rest on him. Thus duty is a power that governs not just a few among us but all of humanity.

We can repeat the same about the difference between good and evil. Just where the distinction has to fall is far from certain. But no one will dispute *that* there is a difference and that we are the more secure the closer our insights approximate the true, absolute difference. Time and again we face choices. We sense at once that the alternatives are not equal. No one can tell us that the concept of choice is just imaginary. There is a difference between doing something or not doing it. There is good in the one, evil in the other. The boundary lines are seldom sharp. Often we wonder: what would be best and what would be bad in this case? But we know instantly *that* there is a difference. And as we search for that, what else are we groping for but the power outside of us, which knows the true difference since it is the author of it? And what else does that reveal but the awareness of a moral power which decides at the highest level, to which we have to conform, and which can have its ultimate ground neither in our heart nor in the will of others.

Here again, therefore, we encounter powers, moral powers to be sure, but still *powers*. These powers do not stand outside our life, nor are they the object of philosophical reflection every now and then, but they are powers that we come into direct contact with from hour to hour, powers that govern our lives, guide our judgments and determine our yardstick for other people's lives. They are powers that follow us on the market

place and in the stock exchange, but also in our living rooms and inner chambers. They are powers that are never absent, that we meet at every station on our journey, that board our steamers with us, that reappear in our colonies overseas; powers that are as inseparable from our existence as the body that we bear and the nature that surrounds us; powers that sought us out when we were children, that confronted us during our youth, that accompanied us as adults, and that call us to account even on our deathbed.

Those powers inhabit the human world. From there they creep into our hearts. Whether they reside within man's world or behind it, we do not know; but we do know that the human world is the area from which they come to us. The mere presence of other people reminds us of our duties. The mere glance of other people can call up shame and self-reproach in us. Public opinion can level a judgment in which those powers crash over us. Higher commandments may be able to shield us against such judgments, as we hope to point out below. But enough said for now if our readers will but admit that it is public opinion, the voices of men, their thoughts accusing or excusing one another, from which those moral powers of duty and justice impinge upon us, demanding unconditional submission.

VIII. Tradition

The natural knowledge of God, so the Christian Church confesses, is nourished by nature, by the moral power that is manifest in the world of man, but also by tradition.

Don't let the word deceive you. The Reformers disavowed the authority that Rome extended to Tradition about Jesus and his Apostles because the scriptures of the New Testament suffice for that and render every contradictory tradition useless or even dangerous.

Similarly Jesus himself disavowed the authority that the sect of the Pharisees extended to tradition about Moses and the Council of Elders because the scriptures of the Old Testament sufficed for that and rendered every contradictory tradition useless or even dangerous. "It has been said of old . . . but I say unto you!"

Special revelation is inscripturated tradition. Over against inscripturated tradition oral tradition has no authority, even though we recognize that it derives from true elements.

But the case is different with respect to the revelation in Paradise. No books were made by people who were in paradise or who spoke to Adam and Eve. In any event, none of the Bible books is older than Moses. Genealogies, fragments of poetry and prose may have been inserted in the Mosaic narrative, but we have no authentic recording of the revelation in Paradise.

This circumstance agrees entirely with the nature of Holy Writ. Its pages are a record, in stories, proverbs and prophecies, not of general revelation intended for all, but exclusively of special revelation. Yet Scripture itself points out that apart from it there is still another revelation, dating from the most ancient days, from the cradle of mankind itself; dispersed among all nations, among all people; always more distorted and less recognizable—in itself proof that we cannot do without special revelation.

When we consult the ancient traditions that present the course of things before and during the period of the patriarchs, we find among the oldest humans, without exception, knowledge of the true God. In the generations that followed this knowledge came to light in surprising ways, and as history unfolded further the traces of this knowledge were still, though weakly, visible. In the family of Abram, people knew the Lord of heaven and earth; worship of teraphim had already crept in, yet the God whom they worshiped above all was our God, the God who revealed himself to Abram. Melchizedek dwelt in Canaan yet was “priest of the Most High” who blessed Abraham with a divine blessing and who is praised in the Letter to the Hebrews (following Psalm 110) as a servant of the true God, foreshadowing Christ.¹⁰ Rebekah and Bethuel, Laban, Leah and Rachel knew whom Eleazar, Isaac and Jacob meant when they spoke to them of Almighty God. Abimelech and his army commander Phichol were, no less than Pharaoh of Egypt, familiar with belief in the living God. Jonah in Nineveh and Daniel in Babylon met with traces of knowledge of God to which they attached their testimony of the Lord of heaven and earth. The wise men from the East brought to Bethlehem’s stall a weak thread which the cult of the Magi still attached to Israel’s

¹⁰ Cf. Gen. 14:18–20; Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7:1–4.

hope and expectation. In Athens Paul comes across an altar to the Unknown God and pronounces that the Gentiles too are offspring of God. "He was in the world," writes John, "but the world knew him not."

We should look especially at the beautiful Book of Job. It never mentions the special revelation given to Israel. It knows nothing about tabernacle, temple, altars and priests. Job himself administers the altar to atone for his friends. We hear virtually nothing of *Jahweh*. There is no evidence of attachment to the land of Canaan. In short, the environment where this book takes you is not Israelite, but universally human. Job lived in the land of Uz. His neighbors were the Chaldeans. That he stood outside any connection with Israel is expressly mentioned. The region of Hauran still boasts a "Monastery of Job" that claims to immortalize Job's dwelling place. In any case, Job's homeland was closer to the Euphrates than to the Jordan. Thus the tone that is struck in this book, the expressions it uses, the way it gives voice to faith, the knowledge of God it assumes—they are altogether different from what the other books of the Bible offer us. The nearest to Job are Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Keeping this in mind, the reader is struck by the fact that these scriptures on almost every page hark back to the oldest age of human life, that their words resonate with a sacred memory, and that their favorite illustrations are taken from the wonders of creation. That most sublime chapter 8 in Proverbs and the magnificent chapters 40 and following in Job lose themselves in the beginning of things, when the mountains were laid and the foundations of the earth were set. The human race originally possessed insight into God's virtues and powers which fallen man took with him from Paradise and which highlighted the majesty of God the Creator. Worship of that exalted God was common among mankind, until it gradually darkened—more quickly among some tribes than among others, while here and there the Paradise tradition was preserved quite well, sometimes in a purer form than one might have thought.

This conforms to what we know about the oldest religions. Studies of the region broadly circling the probable location of Paradise have shown that the strongest memory of one original God is found precisely among peoples along the Indus, Tigris and Euphrates, the cradle of the human race. The older a tribe, the more certain it is that it will show traces of the one true God, the service of whom over time lapsed into worship of many gods. We do not find among these tribes an ascent from polytheism to

monotheism, but inversely, we see in them clear evidence that monotheism lies back of their history and that they descended from worship of one God to multiple gods. It is worth noting that the story of the Flood is found in the traditions of almost every one of these tribes. The similarity between the most ancient sagas and the historical narrative from Adam to Moses will become ever clearer as research continues.

The Paradise tradition existed in Ur of the Chaldees and was preserved by the patriarch Abraham as a foundation upon which, through special revelation, the religion of Israel would be erected. That Paradise tradition was known to the magicians of Egypt and to Jethro the priest in the Midian desert, and from that quarter it again penetrated with fresh vigor into the religious life of the nation of Israel. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Paradise tradition was recorded in summary form at the opening of Holy Writ; it was developed in the inspired didactic poetry of the age of Solomon; it offered the canvas upon which the prophets of the Lord painted the future of the nations; it was taken up in the prologue of John in the doctrine of the eternal Word; and it was the point of departure for Paul for his special mission to the Gentiles entrusted to him on the road to Damascus. The great mystery that he repeatedly talks about—the hidden truth that was not uncovered in former ages but is now revealed to the holy apostles and prophets, namely that the Gentiles too are fellow-heirs and partakers of the same body¹¹—that mystery consists in the fact that the special revelation of Israel and the general revelation of Paradise are, for all peoples, two streams from the same well-spring which for a time ran along separate channels but were destined in Christ to merge again.

Why that mystery was so important is obvious. It revealed that God, by setting apart a people for himself, had not despaired of the redemption of his creation; that the nations in their apostasy had been serving the counsel of God; and that the great work He brought about in Israel remained fenced in only for so long as was necessary to bring to maturity Israel's blessing to the world—to all God's peoples and nations.

That Paradise tradition was also the root from which the idol worship of our Germanic forefathers sprouted. This factor made it possible for the missionaries who brought us the gospel to link up with many elements in their religious consciousness. The forms were exchanged. The false forms

¹¹ Cf. Eph. 3:1–12.

were replaced again by the true ones, the originals substituted for the falsified elements; but the deepest groundwork remained. That is how throughout the centuries the same power was operative among the masses that were baptized yet never converted to Christ. That power, however perverted and degenerated, kept alive the common notions of God the Creator. The older an idea, the more ineradicable it is. In our own day much effort and expense has been spent on rooting out the basic ideas of Christianity among the masses; yet these ideas were only eight or nine centuries old, in some areas even less.¹² But it will take greater efforts to eradicate the notions of a God the Creator, a last judgment and a life after death, since these notions do not date from eight or nine but from scores of centuries. They are as it were woven into life itself; they peep out of the language we speak and in an unguarded moment betray their presence even among the philosophers whose wisdom consists in denying the existence of God.

This gem, too, the Christian Church must preserve, honor, and put to use.

The Church must preserve it by never creating the impression as though she would withdraw herself into isolation, like ancient Israel, and were ignorant of the connection between her confession and the original revelation. She is to preserve it by always placing her confession in the light of that great mystery that mankind's universal awareness of worship and adoration constitutes the foundation upon which also rests the revelation of the Son of God.

The Christian Church is to honor that golden thread that runs from Paradise to Bethlehem's manger and since then has been woven into the Christian religion. She is to honor it by never resting until she has made the splendor of Golgotha fall upon human life in all its manifestations and has given a practical demonstration of how the spirit of Christ is the only and infallible power to raise all those dead and dry elements in human life from their slump.

But above all the Church must put to use the nourishment that our sense of God receives from it.

The Church must use it among the believers—: to find in their ordinary thought-world the points of contact that relate their beliefs to every-

¹² Two of the foremost missionaries, Willibrord (658–739) and Boniface (680–754), came over from England and were active in the Low Countries during the seventh and eighth century.

day life; to keep them from merely parroting phrases; to pervade our consciousness with the truth that she is to preach.

The Church must use it among those who have rejected Scripture yet retain some general religious terms—: to tell them in the name of God that they do not owe that remnant of knowledge of God to their own intellect but have received it from that stream of tradition that has irrigated all peoples and all nations with her precious drops.

The Church must use it also among worldly and hostile people—: to remind their conscience of traces in their language and common expressions, in their domestic and social customs, of something else besides their own wisdom.

The Church must use it, finally, also in missions among the heathens, by digging up and pointing out those things which, however perverted and degenerated, bear witness, behind their forms and inanities, to a better origin and which can be brought to light again through the spirit of Christ.

The sense of God goes no further than the acknowledgment that there is a power which touches our inner life. Nature merely confirms the sense that this power is not imaginary but real. The world of man hints that this power rules our morality. But neither that sense, nor that nature, nor yet that morality would lead us to the knowledge that this mysterious power is a person, a Deity. *That* knowledge is solely the fruit of the original revelation. And however much that revelation has been falsified and darkened in the most diverse forms of idolatry, still this is the revelation that calls up in the soul the idea of a personal God.

Christianity purifies, refines, ennobles and perfects that idea, but it does not call it up. No nation has ever been converted to Christianity where this idea had not survived. Precisely the presence of that idea offered the indispensable point of contact whereby conversion to the Christian religion became possible.

IX. Ultimate Failure

Thus far we have looked successively at three spheres of life that can reinforce our sense of God: nature, morality and tradition. They nourish the sense of God but do not coincide with it.

The sense of God belongs to our very existence. It is present in our innermost being even before we begin to distinguish between what is there and what surrounds us. Human beings are inconceivable without that sense. We exist, we live, and then one of two things: either we sense the ground of our existence *in our own person*, or we do not find it there, hence know that the ground of our existence *lies outside ourselves*.

The first condition is not unthinkable. Sin in fact consists in nothing but attempting to look for the ground of one's existence in oneself, trying to exist in and by oneself, to depend upon no one, to be sufficient unto oneself, to be like God. All egoism and pride stem directly from that attempt. Most people may not have the mental energy to continue in that sinful attempt to the very end; they shrink back from the arrogant presumption to which it leads. Still, it is an inconsistency that changes nothing about the nature of the sin and can never serve as an excuse. If I look for the ground of my existence in myself I can only end up exalting myself above everything else. Then I cannot rest until I have subjected everything to myself and worship myself as a God whom all must serve and to whom all things belong. Then ambition, egoism, presumption, tyranny cannot be banned or exorcized and must dictate my conduct, until at last I leave that imagined world and return to the real world. Then I discover that I can change very little about the power of nature, that nature exists and works without my approval whether I like it or not, and that I am forced to acknowledge the existence of a much greater power outside myself. I then finish by admitting nature's superiority. I discard my personal claim to supremacy and put matter above spirit. At first this makes me seek happiness in pleasures. Next, I embrace a materialist worldview and deduce my thinking, my feeling, even my morality, from the properties of physical stuff. Finally, I am content with a system like Darwin's, which traces the origin of man to the animal, just as it traces the animal to the plant and the plant to matter.

There is no defense against this except in *the sense of God*, that is, in not suppressing the feeling, however mysterious and undefined, that we experience of God's omnipresent power at the deepest level of our being.

Suppressing this feeling comes easiest in the ordinary routine of life, hardest in moments of grave difficulty. During our daily routine we live on the surface and do not reckon with the deepest ground of our being.

During grave difficulties the ground of our being is shaking and heightens our sense of God's omnipresence.

Suppressing this feeling requires will-power and resolve; only the very strong of mind succeed in guarding against its occurrence. Most people, for all their denial of God, immediately betray themselves during unguarded moments of profound grief, violent anger or overwhelming joy. The effort they make to dismiss God and seek a ground for their existence outside themselves testifies that they are driven by an inner awareness.

With this sense of God people step out into the world and there find things visible and invisible. The visible world we call nature. Its power in part far exceeds the power of man, yet in part is also in many ways subject to man. Thus man cannot regard nature's power as supreme; instead he finds that nature too is dependent and is guided by a will exterior to itself. In this way he connects the power revealed in his heart with the power revealed in nature and cannot shake off the impression that it is one and the same power that reveals itself in his soul through the sense of the Divine and externally in nature, a power above himself and above nature.

But man also comes into contact with a whole world of invisible things, things that have nothing in common with nature. Love and duty, hatred and egoism, anger and vengeance are real forces in life. It's no use denying this. Those forces exist; they are actively at work; they exert incalculable influence. The important thing is that man knows how to find his way in that invisible world. For that, he needs to be able to distinguish—to know the difference between two wholly different spheres of life which one cannot confuse without getting lost. It is the difference between the *moral* life and the life of the *soul*.

This difference is undeniable. Everyone will agree out of hand that right and duty, crime and transgression, respect for property, habits of chastity and decency, a sense of order and subordination all belong to the area of morality. They can be incorporated in laws and punished when flouted, if not by the state then at least in narrower circles. They concern exclusively our relations to our fellow-man.

But we sense just as surely that we enter an entirely different realm, a completely different order of things, a wholly other sphere of ideas, when we are dealing with qualities of the heart, qualities that we express in

words like admiration, respect, trust, meekness, gratitude, dedication, self-sacrifice, humility, devotion to prayer.

These feelings, sensations and inclinations do not stem from our social intercourse, so do not belong to the area of morality and cannot be covered by laws or compelled by force. They require quite a different state of mind. They are so strictly separate from moral qualities that it sometimes seems the two are mutually exclusive.

It is often seen that many people who are strict about duties, unbending on rights, chaste without blemish, praiseworthy in conduct, are nevertheless completely incapable of tender feelings like meekness and admiration and who are indifferent to any need for prayer.

The converse is also seen. Many people who are lax about duties and far from keen about rights can sometimes show strong feelings of respect and enthusiasm, of admiration and devotion.

In short, one can say that moral qualities relate to man in his interaction with his fellow-man, whereas the qualities of mind and heart relate to man in his relation to the infinite.

Among artists one often meets with a spirit of generosity and openness that are entirely in keeping with the enthusiasm, wonder and ecstasy in which he lives, whereas the ordinary forms of life like right and duty, soberness and chastity are seldom esteemed in an artist's life.

Among the Anabaptists were found a highly developed enthusiasm, uncommon zeal for their ideals, boundless fervor, yet mixed with vile lust and malicious cruelty.

Stoic natures are usually formal, aloof, withdrawn and stand-offish, yet in equal measure scrupulous, orderly, and honest. At the same time you can join a company of people who welcome you warmly, who open their hearts to you and carry you along in their enthusiasm, yet whose loose living is a riddle to you.

The Pharisees were impeccable in their outward conduct, yet Jesus told them that publicans and harlots would enter the kingdom of heaven before they would.

To this day one can find two currents in human life. To be proper, civil, orderly is the ideal of the first current. To glow with enthusiasm, to sink away in adoration and worship, to live by faith, is the highest goal of the other one.

It is already evident in children. Two children from the same parents, differing very little in age, can differ greatly in character: one is docile, complaisant, punctual, orderly, but without enthusiasm, never passionate, always cool; the other lives for higher things, is warm and inspired, but by repeatedly getting out of hand causes his parents much grief.

Enough said to show that the distinction we pointed out is not made by us but is a fact of life, confirmed by history, our environment, and our home life.

And once we penetrate to the deepest ground of this contrast we recognize that the qualities of mind and heart are all connected with our immediate relation to God.

We do know that these qualities, too, can be misused by sin, diverted from their object and even turned against God. We see this all too often in the artist. Our age is rife with fanatics who worship not God but their ideal. Idol worship is there to demonstrate that these movements of mind and heart can lead a man astray if he does not focus his worship on its true object.

Nevertheless it remains true that when man was created, mind and heart came before morality.

When the first man was all by himself on earth morality was of no concern to him. He could not steal, because everything was his; he could not kill, because no one was with him; he could not commit adultery, because no marriage had yet been solemnized; he could not bear false witness against his neighbor, because there was no one to hear it; he could not covet his neighbor's goods, because he had no neighbors. Right after creation a moral life was impossible. The germs for it were there, but they could not yet sprout.

What could sprout was the life of mind and heart, the sense of devotion and dependence, admiration and adoration, love and dedication, humility and trust. And these spiritual forces could not be focused on any other object than on the living God, simply because no other ideal existed as yet, and no idol had yet been found.

It is noteworthy that sin did not originate in a moral transgression but in distrust. For many people, a more natural explanation of the origin of sin would be if it had started with adultery or murder, a ghastly crime or a patent breach of morality. Then one could see that the punishment was in proportion to the sin. But eating from a forbidden fruit?

The Heidelberg Catechism sensed this and therefore spoke of *apostasy*, of a falling away prior to being *disobedient*, in line with the Mosaic narrative which first points to the sin of the heart and then points to the eating of the forbidden fruit as the consequence of an evil that was already there.¹³

Thus morality and religion are connected but they do not coincide. First and foremost is our personal relationship with the living God, which must never be reduced to moral living. Theologians and preachers who devote their energies to nurturing moral living and who barely tolerate a personal relationship with the Lord as “mysticism” and “enthusiasm” disregard their calling, and the Church is fully justified in resisting this inversion of the proper connection.

In the political domain, where laws rule, the chief concern is the external life of people. But in the Church no other criterion should count than the mystical life, a person’s internal state, the personal relation to God.

Of course we do not mean to imply that anything, however small, should be allowed to make light of the demands of moral living. Faith that is not evident in works carries its own judgment. We mean that morality has value only as an expression of a person’s religion and is connected to it by profound *thankfulness*—a word of deep meaning that is disregarded and falsified when reduced to moral living. Thankfulness is a quality of mind and heart which, to be sure, has the same effect as moral living but derives its strength from a totally different source, draws from a wholly different spring.

Accordingly, the sense of God is nourished by the visible things through nature and by the rules of morality through human society. But it also means that for the heart the sense of God is fed only by tradition, art, and life experiences. Yet tradition is what God has revealed to others, not what one has come to understand in one’s personal relationship with God. And that is why the natural knowledge of God ultimately fails. It can go no further. The relation with God is broken. It is not restored until He heals it.

That’s where *special* revelation comes in.

¹³ Cf. H.C., Q&A 7: “Whence, then, comes this depraved nature of man? From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise . . .”

X. The Demands of the Heart

Morality and religion are not the same. You can reside in someone's house for a long time as a boarder or live-in maid and strictly conform to the family's habits, rules and customs, without ever winning over their hearts or they yours, without ever developing a personal relation of trust or a warm attachment. It is the same in the great household of human society. You may seek to serve God, even from a sense of duty, in the environment in which God has placed you, by scrupulously inquiring after his ordinances, leaving your rights and goods and pleasures in His hands and carefully observing every demand of moral living, without ever having a relationship of trust develop between you and your God, without God ever winning your heart or you acquiring a heart for Him, without opening yourself to a more intimate relationship—in short, you fulfilled your duties from fear or reward or pride, but you had no love, no affection of the soul, no tenderness of heart. So you remained a servant in the house of your Lord, but you never became a child in your Father's house. You remained far from God in your interests, aloof in your life-style, rebellion seemingly overcome yet merely covered by the icy coolness of your inner life. You tried to live a moral life, but you never attained to a religion of the heart.

Do not misunderstand. Often it is said that this lower level of moral living holds for slaves of the law who fancy they have done their duty merely by keeping the outward commandments without ever concerning themselves about the deeper meaning of those commandments, whereas it does not hold for more noble spirits who barely ask after outward commandments but who let themselves be ruled by the loftier principles of self-sacrifice, self-control and self-improvement.

This distinction we reject.

To be sure, we allow that the latter type speaks of a stronger spiritual development, but whether a harmful plant stays a dwarf among the burning nettles or grows into a gigantic thistle does not change anything about its nature. Similarly, whether someone strives after greatness by observing a small number of specific commandments, or alternatively by adhering faithfully to a moral principle that prescribes its commandments in continually new forms, this makes no difference as to the nature of his

sense of duty. The former is like a stranger who scrupulously studies a city plan to see how the streets and canals run; the latter is like the local resident who without ever consulting his map simply relies on his general knowledge of the layout of the city to decide where to go. At bottom, however, both are doing the same thing. Inevitably, self-complacency, a high opinion of one's moral excellence, even if that prideful opinion expresses itself in humble forms, is the abiding trade-mark of this commerce in moral concepts. That someone might cultivate a morality of this kind while setting aside all religious faith and excising every religious principle is quite conceivable. It involves drill, training in the harness, learning the techniques, practicing civilized behavior, acquiring a high level of outward propriety—but moral strength is not cultivated, inner motivation for moral living is not developed.

Moral living needs roots, which a person does not find in himself but in religious faith. From this it follows that true piety cannot but lead to moral living, but also that faith cannot, as if by magic, reform and restore a person's morality. For a long, long time, usually till the hour of our death, there will be two forces within us: on the one hand faith that seeks only God, on the other morality that follows rule upon rule. The moments that faith and morality coincide perfectly, that we think only of faith while moral conduct is there, shining like sparkling stars—that is, without our being aware of it—those moments are rare; they do not occur very often and are less the fruit of personal effort than of miraculous guidance of God. Happy the man who does not crush the little flowers in his life after they have just opened by priding himself on them!

Next to it is the life of mind, heart and soul,¹⁴ the life that enjoys a personal relationship with the Holy God. That life is indifferent to the question whether anything else exists. The inner life of the soul can dwell at ease, can thrive and blossom, if it but knows that God is real, knows where He can be found and knows which paths lead to Him—if it can enter his presence, speak to Him, listen to his word, catch his eyes, rest at his bosom.

This life is not a duty but a loving friendship, a tender communion, an intimate trust. It does not ask for rules and ordinances. It just cannot stand separation, being alone. It dies, or at least it languishes, if it has lost sight of God. For that life, to be forsaken is death, to be rejected is a deep sorrow

¹⁴ Orig.: *het gemoedsleven*, a broad concept here rendered in three terms.

that consumes it. To be near unto God is the only condition it cannot give up. Provided that condition is met, this life has the strength to endure anything. It is of a marvelous kind, always withdrawing and sheltering in mystery. It can sing, it can be jubilant, it can pray, it can weep—but it cannot express its experience in plain words.

This life lives by inclinations and stirrings which the world considers useless trivia. Adoration is its life's breath, quiet veneration a touch of God, reverence its inner delight. Meekness and self-abnegating humility are the springs that elevate it. It relies on neither words nor deeds but swells and sparkles in deeper soil, soon inspiring both word and deed. It loves, but it cannot analyze for you what love is. The infinite is its element; the eternal is its high road; its world is where God is; it is a conversation in heaven.¹⁵

This deepest life of human nature is the only thing that makes him human in a higher sense. He can arrange his relation to nature without overcoming animal drives. In the domain of morality he can likewise regulate his relation to his fellow-men without penetrating to the eternal ground of his existence. Only through his personal relationship to God does the world of infinite things open up to him: his eternal destiny, the highest degree of bliss for which his life as a human being is intended.

A sinner's natural knowledge of God can go no further than to admit that he has to have such a personal relationship with God if he is to be open to the eternal, imperishable powers of human existence. But he is unable to call forth this personal communion, to push on to that hidden fellowship. This leaves him with three options. In his stubbornness he can turn against the heaven that is closed to him and devote his heart to the visible world. Or in his pride he can block off the moral life and cut out all religion. Or in presumption he can delude himself into believing that he can supply the deficiency himself and so lapse into idolatry.

The first is done by sensual men who lose themselves in gratifying their sensual penchants in selfishness, wantonness, lust and self-indulgence.

The second is done by men and women who put the highest premium on their reputation for being decent law-abiding citizens and who, without a clue in the world as to what they might still be lacking, turn their backs on religion or else turn hostile toward it.

¹⁵ Cf. Phil. 3:20 (KJV).

The third is done by people who have a natural element of enthusiasm and fervor and who will not and cannot admit that they would never be able to satisfy their inner needs.

There is nothing new under the sun. Forms may change, but man's fundamental traits remain the same. In former times the sensual trait was strongest in people between 18 and 30 years of age and people of sanguine temperament; people lived in Babel and Athens the way they live today in Berlin and Paris. Similarly, the Stoic of an earlier age is back in the self-righteous man who has a reputation to lose, who will do anything to give a good impression of himself, and who considers his highest goal in life attained if he succeeds in being known in his circles as a man of impeccable conduct, friendly disposition, proper manners and an educated mind. This style is especially evident in adult males and those with a hot temper.

But just as in the past, so today there is a part of mankind that looks for diversion in idolatry. This phenomenon is found especially among the very young and the very old, and most strongly among those of a fanatical nature. What used to be worshiped as Lady Fortune is now worshiped as luck, speculation or chance. Minerva has been resurrected in the fetish for genius. Venus is the worship of beauty. Mercury is the idolization of material prosperity. Men talk of Ideals, Public Opinion, the Spirit of the Times and similar powers as of ruling spirit whose influence is not less than formerly the influence of idols.

The leading motive in this is always to satisfy the demands of the inner life of the soul by means of one's own invention. The ancients held the oracles of Delphi and Egypt in high esteem because they sought communion with the world of infinite things. Hence the holiness they accorded priests as organs of the Deity, as vicars of the Unknown Being who were authorized to speak on his behalf. Hence they thought they had recovered what they had lost by separating from God.

In the same way we see again today how a portion of mankind, numbering already in the millions, resort to mesmerism and spiritism to establish communion with the invisible. Also, the majority of Christendom gathered in the Church of Rome believes that the priest is the means to enter into direct communion with the Divine. The doctrine of papal infallibility stemmed from no other desire than to restore the direct communion with the Divine Being.

Thus the sinner finds himself in the following situation: he is made to feel so uneasy by God himself that he senses the need for communion with Him, but he either suppresses this need in sinful pride or presumptuously thinks himself capable of satisfying this need on his own.

He cannot understand God, because he is separated from God as a result of sin. Nor can he speak to God, because he does not know who God is, where He is to be found and how he is to approach Him. Thus, left to himself, he can only become proud or presumptuous—unless he is willing to shatter and break his own soul.

That requires grace, if for no other reason than to be able to realize one's guilt and admit one's impotence.

We do not deny that tradition contributes to this. But that this tradition survived and reached us and did not repel our soul but attracted it is itself unthinkable without grace.

Yet that grace could have no other result than to cast the sinner into the arms of despair.

Only one fact can save him from that—if he hears that God on his part has broken the deadly silence and has *spoken*, first through his prophets, now through his Son.

The fact that God has spoken is the first ray of light in the night of the soul—the soul that lacks a relationship with God yet cannot do without it.

XI. Tyndall's Address

No sinner can ascend to God. Nevertheless, the Christian Church is justified when she insists that the sinner, too, must turn to God. The unity of those statements, as Schweizer¹⁶ puts it, lies in the bankruptcy of natural theology and the indispensability of a special revelation.

To explain this well-known train of ideas, we referred above to an address delivered in Belfast in 1873¹⁷ before the British Association for the Advancement of Science. It was given by the English physicist Professor

¹⁶ Alexander Schweizer (1808–88), a Reformed theologian in the University of Zürich.

¹⁷ The actual date of the speech was Aug. 19, 1874, some two months before Kuyper wrote this. The address ignited a storm of controversy because it banished religion and theology from the study of the natural world and assigned them to "the region of poetry and emotion."

John Tyndall [1820–93], who spoke on the subject of “materialism in Britain.” Allow me to comment briefly on this address.

The address consists of two parts. The first part deals exclusively with nature as it appears in the observation of the scientist, that is, of the knower. This part leaves aside all religious views, reckons only with observed facts, is exceedingly biased against the Christian Church, in many ways shortchanges the respect owed to Holy Scripture, and constructs a system of assumptions that sink away in its soft subsoil. Naturally Professor Tyndall has no warrant to do this, and on this point ordinary believers among our readers have the perfect right to pit their personal authority against that of the celebrated scholar. When a scholar of the stature of Tyndall tells us about what he observes in nature, how and under what conditions he observes it, and in what way he thinks the phenomena are connected, then we listen with respect and defer to our superior. But when he ventures upon a domain that is not his, presumes to assess the significance of the Christian Church and allows himself to contradict what we are told in God’s Word, then his words are to us as not spoken and we go our own way.

Professor Tyndall himself grants us that right by adding a second part to his speech in which he admits that apart from the natural domain there is also a *spiritual* domain, a domain which the natural scientist cannot presume to give an opinion about and which reveals needs that he cannot possibly satisfy.

Two things follow from this. First, Professor Tyndall himself invites us to deny all value to the dogmatics he tries to erect upon scientific data. Secondly, his address puts an end to the era in which scientists, professional or amateur, constitute themselves the teachers of mankind.

Thus far it has been customary to appeal for evidence of the natural knowledge of God to the ancient pagan world. That invocation, repeated *ad nauseum*, lost its force. It is more thrilling and more convincing when we can derive the evidence from a scientist of our own time, from a scholar like Professor Tyndall. In fact, the three components of evidence, as we shall see, are fully present in his address. So long as the natural scientist stays in his own field, his walk is steady. When he wants to speak as a human being, nature leaves him in the lurch. Every attempt at deducing a world of thought for his human personhood from the phenomena of nature fails utterly.

The difference between Professor Tyndall and his predecessors is that while the pedantry of scientists thus far robbed morality and religion of any independent reality and so clashed with Christian theology and tried to supplant it, Professor Tyndall claims absolute freedom for the investigation of nature by transferring the separation of Church and State onto this domain as well and realizing that a scientist crosses over into another world and becomes something else the moment he lays aside his instruments and listens to the tones of his heart.

XII. Fruits of the Natural Knowledge of God

We have seen that the natural knowledge of the living God, which even today and apart from the drastic means of special revelation presents itself to man, is far from negligible. A great deal can still be known of God, so much so, in fact, that guidelines for human living, even in the absence of God's Word, need not be lacking.

And yet it is undeniable that thus far in the absence of special revelation not one nation, not a single individual has risen to heart-refreshing knowledge of the high God.

Our fathers have always confessed, and we confess it with them, that as a result of sin our mental cognition has been so weakened and falsified that if we rely solely on the light of nature, reason and tradition, we only increase our alienation from God and find no assurance.

Outside of Christ we seek and grope, we toil and slave, we guess and surmise, we imagine and persuade ourselves, but without ever finding any certainty. We walk around in circles without making any progress. We never have peace; we never find comfort in life and in death.

No one can deny that originally there was much beauty and truth in the religious notions of the pagan world. They still show traces of genuine tradition, an afterglow of the splendor that once shone in Paradise. But the fate of all those religions is that they bleed to death instead of flourishing robustly. The elements of truth which they originally contained is choked; fancies and falsehoods gain the upper hand; the tie to conscience loosens; before long the boundary between sin and holiness is wiped out; and the tender shoots that try to blossom forth degenerate into wild thistles from

which crafty priests and power-hungry princes prepare the magic potion that delivers into their hands a passive, supine people.

To be sure, we must recognize that among the most vibrant nations people's conscience rose in protest against this shameful chicanery. These people tried to plant the better element back into its proper soil, and aimed at a sweeping reform of religion and morality. Yet these attempts too, however well intentioned, came to nought. What Buddha did for Asia and Plato for the West¹⁸ unquestionably deserves great appreciation. The Reformers understood that it would not do to dismiss these outstanding men. On the contrary, in these superior geniuses they acknowledged the sparks of higher light that broke with many mindless superstitions. They honored their life's work as powerful evidence that pagan nations too were not withdrawn from divine guidance. They did not hesitate to declare that the sublime ideas taught by these men sometimes seemed a prelude to the message of compassion that Christ brought into our lost world. And yet, how effective was their message? Did it not become evident time and time again that it lacked the power to lead men to God, to heal men's hearts, to comfort their souls and make a difference in their personal lives and the life of society? Plato's followers squandered the golden jewel he had offered them. One need only compare India with Britain to sense the immense distance between what Buddha made of his Hindu peoples and Christ of his baptized nations.

The same response can be seen all around us. The revelation of God in the human heart is today what it was in Moses' days. Nature has not changed; the lessons of history have become infinitely more plentiful; the moral world-order is more transparent than ever. The field of the natural knowledge of God has expanded rather than shrunk. And now look at how those people are doing who today have closed themselves off from the Word-revelation!

At first it looks as if they will actually succeed in building a beautiful temple of worship. They still have some certainties. Their words penetrate the soul. Their eyes glow with enthusiasm. Their lips betray nobility of mind. But how short it lasts! How quickly the walls they started to erect come tumbling down! How difficult they find it to preserve their lofty standpoint for even a short while! And then all the results of their striving and pondering begin to flow downstream like loosened ice floes. System

¹⁸ Orig.: for Europe.

after system arises. None enjoys currency for more than a dozen years. Then their enthusiasm changes into a false glow. Their voice lowers. Their conduct loses nobility. Rapidly they retreat. A few expressions of sincerity can no longer hide their inner emptiness. All their knowledge totters. They sink away without hope. The onlookers disperse, the masses turn their backs on all religion, a smaller group withdraws into the chilly chambers of philosophy, and at most a diminishing crowd of Churchmen and Churchgoers cling to religious rituals even as they experience their best moments when looking back with nostalgia at the childlike faith they left behind.

Personal experience led to the same outcome. It was touching recently to read the humble confession in the testament of François Guizot that he had reaped bitter disappointment after he wandered away from God's Word. The testimony of such a man is valuable. Praised by friend and foe alike as an outstanding genius, a brilliant scholar, a prudent statesman, a noble character—a celebrated author like few others, an ornament of French literature, a powerful figure who for half a century served his country in the highest offices of state, who controlled the fate of France and thus of Europe—such a man is too rare not to reckon with the experience of his heart. From his deathbed he calls out to the nations that he too once thought he could find true wisdom and real strength apart from God's Word and his grace in Christ, but that his wisdom turned out to be foolishness and that only then were quiet strength, tranquil peace and robust energy restored to him when he returned to his old Bible and found mercy and grace at the foot of the cross of Golgotha.¹⁹

That wonderful confession is echoed by everyone who wandered away and came back again. There is scarcely anyone who today finds his salvation in Christ who has not known the days when he looked at God's Word with suspicion and listened to the Tempter's voice! Just try to satisfy your thirst for knowledge and succeed at moral living without that Word! At first it seemed an alternative that worked, that made the pulse of your soul beat faster. But how quickly it became apparent that it was all self-delusion, the fruit of over-excitement, a deceptive illusion. And who is

¹⁹ François Guizot (1787–1874) dictated his testament nine months before his death. Its opening line reads: "I die in the bosom of the Reformed Christian Church of France in which I was born and in which I congratulate myself to have been born." I have not been able to trace the provenance of this testament, but Kuyper may have read it in the *Revue des deux mondes*.

still not filled with gratitude to God for that unspeakably tender, beatific awareness that coursed through his soul when at last he gave up and once more felt the love of his Savior?

What is the cause of this?

Is it caused by the fact that God does not manifest himself? Or is it caused by the fact that our eyesight is too weak to notice what may be known of God?

Nothing exposes the wretchedness of sin more shamefully than that dullness of our spirit, that blindness of our mind's eye, that insensitivity of our cognitive faculty that keeps us from noticing and grasping what may be known of God in his works.

That is not caused by what *we* call weak faculties and blunted senses, for such blindness is often most severe precisely among the more educated of our generation, among the most learned scholars and most talented men. Blessed are the poor in spirit, Jesus said, and daily life confirms time and time again how exceedingly difficult it is to restore spiritual sight among the rich in spirit.

It is sin that draws this veil over our soul, that first blindfolds us and then pushes us to the edge where yawns the abyss and where nothing and no one can stop us anymore.

But you ask: to what end have we been given this false stimulus of the natural knowledge of God? Does that half light not draw our eye away from the full light of the Word? Would many wandering souls not quickly turn to Christ if that manifestation of God in his works did not divert their attention?

This objection may touch the strings of our heart, but it is not inspired by faith. It is prompted by sin. It turns things around and tries to come up with an excuse. But God reveals himself in his works "*so that they are without excuse.*"²⁰

Can we come to Christ when we do not know the depth of sin? Does the darkening of our understanding not reveal our sin most painfully? Did sin not originate with the wish to gain knowledge by ourselves? Did the Tempter not say: "*You will be like God, knowing good and evil*"?²¹ And is there anything greater to wound our pride, to unmask our pretense of self-sufficiency, to humble us and break down our ego, than the over-

²⁰ Rom. 1:20.

²¹ Gen. 3:5.

whelming awareness that, for all the light that shines on all sides and falls through our windows, we never quite see properly, never quite see correctly, and are *always* mistaken?

Now then, you would never reap that precious fruit of self-abasement and humility if God did not manifest himself so clearly in his works. The sinner would then cast the blame on God, saying: How shall I see Him if He conceals Himself? Men would be at peace with sin, not just the hardened sinner who has locked himself up in his pride, but in general every sinner at the first and the last sin—at peace with a life apart from God.

The second fruit of the natural knowledge of God is that it proves *the necessity and indispensability of a special revelation*. It shows that we have to push on, yet are unable to do so without outside help. It makes seekers after God say the prayer, “LORD, uncover my eyes, that I may see you; show me your light, that my eyes may look into your glory!”

The third fruit of the natural knowledge of God is that it offers God’s special revelation the terrain where it can do its miracles. Mentally remove the natural knowledge of God among the outcasts from Paradise, among Noah and the patriarchs, and special revelation would be unthinkable. It always presumes the many things that are already known of God from his works, links up with them, elaborates on them, and always moves on the leveled terrain that is already at hand in the revelation in God’s works. This may come out most clearly in Job and the Proverbs, but it is invariably found also in David and all the prophets. Only among the Pharisees had it become unknowable.

A fourth fruit is that it positively prepares for the capability to receive special revelation. Paul turns to the heathens, not to have them first pass through the school of Israel, but to sow the seed of the Word into the soil prepared by the natural knowledge of God. The biggest question that divided the first Christians—whether or not the Gentiles had to be circumcised—touched on this solemn truth. That the *Word*, according to the prologue of John, was in the world was upheld by Paul’s ministry as one of the deepest mysteries.

Finally, when special revelation comes on the scene the natural knowledge of God is not over and done with, but precisely then it shows its full value. A Christian is not a hermit who stands outside the world. The Church is not a monastery that closes itself off from humanity and things

human. Special revelation opens the eyes and offers more to see; but what one sees is the same truth of the same living God who revealed himself also in his works.

XIII. *Articuli Puri et Mixti*

Traditionally, the articles of faith were divided between *articuli puri et mixti*, literally: pure and mixed articles. The distinction was between articles of faith that were evident purely from Revelation and others that could in part be derived from nature and experience. The “pure” articles dealt with the Trinity and the deity of Christ, atonement through his blood, the person of the Holy Spirit, and similar heads of doctrine. Nature, after all, taught us nothing about these mysteries; we learned of them exclusively through the preaching of the Word. The “mixed” articles included doctrines like creation, sin, and man’s destiny for a higher life. Not that the mixed articles were second-rate, of lesser importance, less needful unto salvation; but because reason too arrives at an idea of “creation,” experience affords a glance into “sin,” and nature and human nature themselves prophecy a higher life.

The latter were called “mixed,” not because the mixture was wrong and reprehensible, but to indicate that these articles of faith, dealing more directly with the knowledge of man, simply had to have a point of contact with the sinner who after his fall remained “man” after all.

They were called “mixed” because even nations that were deprived of the light of special revelation entertained notions of a creation, albeit most defective, and hope of a better life, albeit hesitant and deficient.

They were called “mixed” in particular because even for the Christian, after his conversion and enlightenment, these articles of faith are not just based on God’s Word but also on experience illumined by the Spirit. The Christian learns to know the depth of sin not only from God’s Word but equally from his experience of life, from the depths of his heart, from the unveiling of other people’s secrets. And so also, the inadequacy and vanity of this earthly life and Scripture’s answer that “*here we do not have a continuing city, but seek one to come,*”²² is daily confirmed in the life of every

²² Heb. 13:14.

Christian for whom his Christianity is not a veneer for the sake of his social position but a firm acceptance of *the Cross* as the symbol and prophecy of his life.

This whole distinction of traditional theology, therefore, was rich in content, and we may well ask whether some of today's "new" insights were not already present in the thinking of our old theologians and familiar to our fathers.

For example, what do our ethical theologians mean other than what our former theologians expressed by the designation "mixed articles of faith"? To wit, the recognition that the redemptive truth of the Christian religion does not come to the sinner in an external and mechanical manner, but that it is designed and suited to his nature and essence in such a way that it turns out to belong to them, finds a point of support in them, and however much of absolutely divine origin, nevertheless works in real "human" forms.

Our fathers confessed the natural knowledge of God, prevenient grace, the covenant, the relation between Israel and the nations and the foreordination of God, the harmony between the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Very well, if we relate this to the distinction between pure and mixed articles, we fail to see how anything more could be added to sum up the confession of the Apostle that "*that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural*"²³ and that they relate to each other in life through faith.

New wine is put in new bottles, but if you confess with us that the draught that refreshes our soul comes from the same Vine from which our fathers drank, then you should think twice before deliberately breaking the old cup and buying a new one and so breaking the line of communion that connects our faith to that of our fathers.

We think there is a more excellent way.

Placing ourselves where our fathers so admirably took up position, or better, where they were placed so gloriously by the King of the Church, we are to become conscious of our calling and carry on their work, elaborating on what they produced and always prepared to purify the product.

We can start by giving back to the Church the treasures which the fathers already possessed as the prize of sixteen centuries of struggle. That will not be a luxury. At least, the Church of today is incomparably poorer

²³ 1 Cor. 15:46

in knowledge than the Church of two centuries ago. From a period of higher development we have gone back to a nomadic period. Compared to former days, we have almost everywhere regressed in knowledge of the Scriptures, knowledge of the truths of salvation, and insight into the structural features of the temple of glory. Only here and there do we see small traces of further development. That must be ended, and to achieve that there is no other way than to begin by accepting our *heritage* and then—mark this well—not to bury this talent in the ground but to take it to the marketplace of life and gain another talent with it.

The latter is also urgently needed with respect to the doctrine of the *articuli puri et mixti*. In the face of modernism's revival of the Ebionite²⁴ and Samosatine²⁵ heresies, we must emphatically insist, more than ever, that belief in the person of the Mediator is part and parcel of the pure and mixed articles of faith. At the risk of being suspected, like Calvin and all major Reformed theologians, of Nestorianism,²⁶ we must underscore in the very person of the Mediator the oneness that unites the redeemed creature with the Triune God by virtue of a counsel of God which was decided, not until *after* the fall, but grounded in the divine will *from before the foundation of the world*.²⁷

On the other hand as well, we must guard against attempts *to explain the divine nature of Christ from his human nature*. Today the Lord is teaching us by means of the spirits of apostasy and seduction—spirits that were still partly bound in the days of our fathers—that every creed complicit in this attempt, however covert and subtle, will entail the absolute loss of our Christian faith. From human nature as it has become on account of sin (and outside of Christ there is no other human nature), *nothing* can be explained in the plan of salvation—not one step, however minute.

Human nature and world history provide hints of nearly every truth of salvation, leading men to pause and leaving the sinner without excuse. But the true understanding of how the mystery of salvation relates to the nature of man, already before creation, in the counsel of God, cannot be derived from nature but can be understood only in the light of grace.

²⁴ Second-century sect that accepted Jesus as the Messiah but denied his divinity.

²⁵ Third-century sect that believed Jesus was born a mere man but at his baptism was adopted to become equal to God.

²⁶ Fifth-century heresy which taught that Christ had two natures which were only loosely linked. The doctrine was condemned at the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451).

²⁷ Cf. Eph. 1: 4, 11.

No less significant are the consequences that flow from this standpoint, which was already arrived at by our fathers, for the relation of religion and life, faith and science, Church and State. A brief word about each may suffice.

If there is no connection in the counsel of God between the truth of salvation and our human nature, so that the gospel and our life touch each other only as two forces that are entirely alien to each other, then a separation must show up among Christians between religion and life. Any attempt to connect the two will be in vain. To be religious, Christians will have to withdraw from life. In order to live, they will have to put religion on hold for a while. They will then live in two worlds: on the one hand the world of grace, to which belong the Bible, the creeds, spiritual exercises and prayer; on the other, the natural world, to which belong family, body, vocation and social interaction. The faith of Christians will turn into a barren abstraction, since it lacks practical application. Their life will not be hallowed, because it is not illumined by higher light.

The Reformed Church protested against this by thrusting discipline into the forefront. Discipline was her translation into practice of what she taught in the *articuli mixti*. Religion and life were not to be affairs alongside each other: they were to interpenetrate.

The same is true of the age-old dilemma between faith and science. To keep the two separate seems the most plausible, and unless we decide, in order to get at the root of things, to go behind the Fall and behind the Creation and trace them to the counsel of God, we have no other solution than to define science as a belief in visible things and faith as a knowledge of invisible things. If, however, we are not content with this separation—if we refuse to limit science to observing and connecting what the senses see and hear, if we cannot concede that this division of the human person is permissible, and if we remain convinced that *reason*, provided it is set free from the bonds of sin, is the organ of a human consciousness that comprehends not only the temporal but also the eternal—then of course we have solved the dilemma between faith and science and recognize faith, in regard to both visible and invisible things, as the soil from which the plant of science and knowledge draws its vital sap.

Finally we mentioned the relation between Church and State. If nature and grace are simply juxtaposed as originally alien powers, then either the Church must control the State (as a power of nature), or the State must

control the Church (as an institution of grace). Rome wanted the former, secularists the latter. Calvin, however, contends that even in countries and among peoples where the gospel is still unknown, the government acts as a servant of God: it is kept by the natural knowledge of God from eradicating religion, and by virtue of the natural knowledge of God it makes its laws and justice, albeit in a weakened manner, conform to the laws and justice of God.²⁸

This is the only correct standpoint. The State must accept concrete reality as it presents itself and so cannot deny that its citizenry, taken as a whole, confesses a belief in God. This belief implies that God stands above the State. Accordingly, the State has to choose. If it deems this belief false it must eradicate it, for it undermines its authority by acknowledging a sovereignty that stands above it. If on the other hand it judges that this higher sovereignty of God really exists, then it too must defer to that sovereignty.

In the first case we have an *atheistic* State. Here the State first pretends that religion is of no concern to it, that it is neutral with respect to religion; yet this State ends by making laws and taking measures that gradually push back religion, insisting that State sovereignty be recognized everywhere as the sole authority.

In the second case we have a *Christian* State. Here the State acknowledges God as standing above it. This State binds its officials to God by means of an oath and it refers to its own authority as real only *by the grace of God*. It will commend the people's representatives to God's keeping and invoke the blessing of the Almighty on the nation. But the very respect which the State then owes God compels it to admit that it is powerless to foster religion. The State will recognize that God has created another institution for that purpose, the Church of Christ. The State must therefore leave it to the Church to propagate the worship of God. It will honor the Church, guarantee her freedom of movement, and—provided it does not interfere in what does not belong to her domain—support her with its sovereign authority.

This would guarantee a proper separation of Church and State, or as Calvin puts it: "These two governments, which are of a completely different nature, must not be carelessly mingled."²⁹ And yet both find their

²⁸ This reference to Calvin could not be traced.

²⁹ *Institutes*, 4.20.1.

higher unity in the service of the one God, sovereign of both, King of kings.

The State of The Netherlands did not abandon this standpoint when our Constitution was revised in 1848. At least not entirely.³⁰

³⁰ This last point calls to mind the fact that some months earlier Kuyper had exchanged the pastorate for a seat in parliament, where he engaged vigorously in the debates, arguing among other things that the new provision of the freedom and equality of religions did not necessarily imply that the Netherlands was no longer a Christian country.