

YOU CAN DO GREATER THINGS THAN CHRIST

by Abraham Kuyper

Abraham Kuyper's theological work addressing worship and Christian living.

11 Chapters

Table of Contents

0. You Can Do Greater Things Than Christ
1. Chapter 1: MIRACLES
2. Chapter 2: THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST
3. Chapter 3: HUMAN POWER AND AUTHORITY
4. Chapter 4: THE ENHANCEMENT OF OUR HUMAN POWER
5. Chapter 5: THE SHREWDNESS OF THE WORLD
6. Chapter 6: THE WORLD OF THE SPIRITS
7. Chapter 7: THE EFFECTS OF THE SPIRITUAL WORLD
8. Chapter 8: CHRIST AND SATAN
9. Chapter 9: THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD
10. Chapter 10: SCHOLARSHIP AND SCIENCE

You Can Do Greater Things Than Christ

Chapter 1: MIRACLES

MIRACLES

Anyone seeking to understand miracles must keep in mind the painful struggle in which the human race is involved against nature. In this struggle, the human race is at a disadvantage. While humanity is seriously weakened by the curse of sin, that same curse has increased the power of nature. Nature appears to be more powerful than the spiritual.

This situation led long ago to the deification or idolizing of nature that became the object of worship. The human race, stricken with fear, gradually transferred the adoration that is reserved for the living God to nature. These fears did not arise when nature was in restful repose, but only when it was in a state of turbulence and agitation. It does not really make any difference whether, as in some cases, this fear was the result of what people suffered directly at the hands of nature itself or whether, as in some other cases, it arose because people thought to detect the work of evil spirits behind nature's violence. In either case the dominant concern constantly was how to escape from the threatening power of nature when it is agitated. Take the sea, for example. When the sea is quiet, it is most enjoyable and restful to walk along the beach or to take to the water in a rowboat or sailboat. But once a storm begins to break loose, waves as high as mountains can in no time flat demolish the boat and render the beach into a place of death and destruction. There is no way people can control the threatening waves when this happens. They are totally helpless over against them. Nature, when it is quiet, can quicken one's spirit and soothe one's heart, but when it becomes

violent, it arouses fear and horror. Over against such fearful terrors people feel helpless not only in themselves, but it also seems as if God Himself is overwhelmed by it all and quite powerless.

The above scenario has led to the transfer of adoration from God to nature with all of its turbulence and violence. In other cases, it has led to an animistic fear of the spirits that supposedly used the forces of nature for their own evil purposes. Under these conditions, it was only when God displayed His superior power over nature and over these spirits by means of miracles that the fear of God could remain a reality in the hearts of men at all.

Only in this context do both the necessity as well as the great significance of miracles become clear to us. It is impossible to understand miracles without considering sin, the curse and their effect on creation. It is safe to say that rejection of the reality of miracles is caused by the failure to recognize the significance and reality of these factors.

Over against the powers of nature, fallen mankind was at a disadvantage. It was weak in both body and spirit. The powers given mankind at creation slowly but surely waned after the fall. Take the human life span, for example. At first, we read of our ancestors living nearly 1,000 years but this is slowly reduced so that later we are promised an average of three score years and ten (70 years). Diseases of all kinds reared their heads. As the generations went by, these diseases and other negative forces undermined human resistance. It is for this reason that many cultures have stories of ancient ancestors that were very powerful and strong, stories of Nimrods and giants, of descendants of Anak to whom the Israelites seemed like mere grasshoppers (Numb. 13:33). Alas, subsequent generations, even those of OT Israel, continuously deteriorated and

weakened.

The deterioration of spirit was even worse than that of the body. Instead of attacking nature together, people began to attack each other. Cain murdered Abel. Murder and hatred became common among people. Human conscience was defiled, which, in turn killed morale and courage. Mankind lost its awareness of its position of superiority over against nature. Fear replaced courage and reduced the inner resilience of the human soul. A soul tormented by fear cannot but lose its resilience. And thus it was that mankind experienced increasing weakness and helplessness over against a nature that appeared to rule and threaten all of life.

The human race, severely weakened by sin, was in confrontation with a nature with a greatly increased power. It is extremely difficult for us today to form an adequate picture of the curse that came over nature. [5] Perhaps it is best to think of nature as having gone berserk, because of the weight of the curse under which it had to labour. We all know how a berserk person can sometimes be very strong. Three or more people may be needed to overcome such a person. The same is sometimes true for a drunk person. It often takes special effort to overcome a drunken madman. It is not unheard of for a people, before they start a war, to prepare themselves by heavy drinking. Intoxicants tend to increase one's courage and strength and make one reckless.

Such increase in strength characterizes berserk persons even more than drunk people. The anger that comes with being berserk can heighten the victim's physical power beyond that of an ordinary person. Being berserk causes a radical transformation in the nature or personality of its victim. He stands before you totally venomous and obnoxious, apparently without any redeeming features. A person, whom

you normally know as calm and collected, suddenly attacks his wife, his children or even his parents. He may try to torment and kill them. His emotions, his expressions, in short, his entire personality has been transformed into a totally different being. He attacks his environment with destructive powers. Anyone who tries to tame or restrain him will experience the full force of an anger aggravated by this strangely heightened strength.

The above image is an example of nature after it was distorted by the curse of sin. Just like a berserk person, nature has its moments of calm and quiet, but this is often interrupted by periods of violence and anger that stir up all of creation and threaten destruction everywhere. The earth quakes; cyclones pick up homes and hurl them down to the ground; tempestuous gales anger the ocean waves; rivers burst beyond their banks. At such times, it may seem as if all nature is hell-bent on destruction. The curse has totally transformed nature into an ominous threat. What used to be peaceful has become violent. Plants sprout thorns and thistles. Animals have become wild and roam about devouring their fellows. Sickness and pestilence abound everywhere.

All of nature constitutes one organic unity. The curse has entered the very core of that organic whole and all of its spheres and aspects. Destruction has wormed its way into the very marrow of the system and from there its effect radiates throughout all of its parts.

Indeed, it confronts the human race like one gone berserk.

In the Garden of Eden nature embraced our race with a disarming love and protected it, but now, driven by the curse, it appears as if this same nature directs its anger especially to the object of its former special love and leaps upon the human race to torment it, to squelch it, to vent every possible violence upon it

until it is totally annihilated. The power of this cursed nature has become so much greater in comparison to the weakened human race. She attacks humanity in the world of plants with poison and thorn, in the animal kingdom with claw and fang, in the skies with lightning and gale, in the depths with fiery volcano and quake. She sets herself up as a possessed and angry colossus that leaps upon the human community with unrivaled destructive power. In this state of anger, her strength has been multiplied tenfold. She roars and snarls to terrify the people. Subdued by this violent anger, a terrorized race withdraws into itself as a snail hides in its shell and sneaks away, trembling with fear. [6]

Fear has become the essence of religion. Actually, the term fear gets in our way when we want to express our tender and inner feeling of love for our God. The Christian religion fills us with a Spirit that creates within us an emotion leading us to whisper in holy adoration, "Abba, Father!" (Mark 14:36; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). But if you turn to the Old Testament, whether you read the stories of Moses or about the Patriarchs, the Psalms or the prophets, it is always the fear of God that comes to the foreground. This fear is and will remain the dominant form in which godliness expresses itself. Even in the last book of the prophets, Malachi, the Lord asks, "And if I am a master, where is my fear?" (Mal. 1:6). [7]

It could not be otherwise. It is difficult for us, living as we do in a modern world, to imagine concretely the fear and despair which our ancestors experienced because of the curse that brutalized nature after the fall. [8] Their relationship to nature went far beyond mere dependence. That word is much too weak to convey the fear and terror with which that generation regarded nature with its unlimited powers that would brook no restraints and of which they

became helpless prey. The human spirit was beset by apprehension, by anxiety and by terror unto death--by fear in the fullest sense of the word. Anyone so beset by terror and carnality and who had ceased worshipping God could hardly avoid regarding this all-powerful force of nature as the ultimate or highest power.

Nature worship and its close relative, subjection to evil spirits which were thought to be the basic cause behind the terrorism nature represented, arose out of this fear. Those who continued to believe that God retains power over nature and that the latter is His servant came to regard God with a similar kind of fear, so that fear of God became a central focus of their religion.

It is in this context that the need for miracles arose.

The need arose because of the contrast between a weakened human race and a brutalized nature that had acquired such great and destructive powers. Humanity had become so impressed with and fearful of nature, that God was obscured and no longer noticed. He was invisible, while nature with its terrorizing powers was around them at all times and had to be taken into account constantly. The impression nature made upon the human race was so overwhelming that it destroyed human courage. Who could withstand nature? Who could oppose her? Who could overcome and subdue her?

Well, yet, it is true: faith in God had not disappeared altogether. It was dimly realized that the Creator of heaven and earth had to be more powerful. Sometimes His help was recognized, coming as it usually did via ordinary means. But the question could not be suppressed: is God, our God, really stronger than nature? Is He really its Lord and master? People would plead and pray, torture themselves and make offerings to God, but after all that, nature would gain the victory. Such situations further depressed faith in God. The final

conclusion for most was that nature was the all-powerful one, not God. Fear for nature with its accompanying doubt as to God's power had eventually to lead to the question whether God even exists. It was in order to take the wind out of the fearful faith-undermining experience that miracles became necessary. Whenever God would show His signs and miracles that so brilliantly displayed His power over nature, then fear for nature would go on the retreat and God becomes once again a refuge and rock for His children.

Revelation also became necessary in this context. In addition to God's apparent powerlessness, He was invisible. Where was He? How could He be discovered? That is where revelation came in, already beginning in the Garden of Eden. He made promises and these were fulfilled. He announced judgement in the great flood and it came. He related to the Patriarchs as a man to his friend. Hence, in the community where this revelation was given, faith in God's existence was either retained or revived. But this was a small community. Those who were blessed with this revelation were very few.

Among the other nations, faith in God faded away. Almost all of them succumbed either to nature worship or they subjected themselves to evil spirits. The time arrived when a new people had to be called and formed, a people among whom faith in God formed the foundation of their nation. To this end, the descendants of the Patriarchs had to go through the melting pot of Egypt. From there they emerged as one nation, called to leave Egypt and to take possession of Canaan and so to become the people of the Lord. It was at this point that God worked a miracle so grandiose and so overwhelming that it became for Israel the miracle that would remain for them the foundation of faith and hope throughout the ages.

The first miracles occurred in the presence of Pharaoh in

his palace. Then came the miracles of judgement upon Pharaoh and his people. Finally, we witness the mighty miracle of Israel's crossing of the Red Sea. The obvious intention here was a display of power in order to inculcate respect for God on the part of Egypt and its rulers. Other reasons for this display included the liberation of Israel and their establishment as a household of faith in the God of their fathers.

These miracles were preceded by revelation to Moses. God judged it necessary to make a deep and powerful impression on Moses of God's holy existence. And then came the competition with the wise men of Egypt.

Take careful note of the following! How could these Egyptian wise men perform the miracles they did? The ancients had retained an instinctive knowledge or understanding of nature, handed over as tradition from generation to generation. This tradition included certain secrets that left the human race at the time with a remnant of control over nature. Superficial mockery may try to explain this all away as imagination and deceit, but it is not so treated in Scripture. We are told that the wise men of Egypt could indeed perform works that are beyond most of us today and that can be explained only in reference to a certain mysterious, instinctive knowledge of power over nature that has since then been lost.

Though we gladly acknowledge the existence of such knowledge at the time, it must simultaneously be conceded that it was mixed with a great deal of deceit and trickery. The source of the wise men's magic was that traditional knowledge of nature. This secret knowledge had served for a long time to elevate the people of Egypt to a higher level of culture, but by this time it had deteriorated into deceitful magic. For this reason, Moses and Aaron stood up to them

with a completely different power, the wonderful power of God. They did so in ways that are unfamiliar to the modern person, but that effectively demonstrated the emptiness of these Egyptian mysteries. The first cycle of miracles is thus aimed at counteracting the mysteries that still bloomed in Egypt.

Things became more serious upon completion of this cycle.

Now came the miracles of judgement. These were mostly miracles for which the powers of nature were harnessed in order to fulfil the judgement of God on the pride of Pharaoh. The Egyptians were very proud of their river Nile and they worshipped it as an idol. And now God turned that same Nile, that idol, into His instrument for destroying Egypt's pride.

Then came the miraculous plagues from the desert. These can only be explained in terms of an intensified working of nature, but so intensified that even the Egyptians had to acknowledge the working of a higher power, even though they continually retreated into their unbelief.

But then all the stops were pulled out. The first-born sons of Egypt died. Israel marched through the Red Sea. Now the people saw the full power of God and all His glory over nature at work. Miriam and all the women with her burst out into jubilation at such a display of wonderful power. And Moses shouted it out, "Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you - majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?" (Exodus 15:11).

The last miracle is the miracle at the beginning of Israel's history that has forever been established as the witness to Jehovah's unrivalled superiority over nature and its powers and thus has become the cornerstone of Israel's religion. Israel will from here on time and again refer to this magnificent display of power. This

event continued to provide them with a focus for all of their subsequent history and with a source of strength. "Jehovah, a God who works wonders," is the call that accompanied them during their entry into Canaan. All the inhabitants of Canaan were terrified at the God of Israel. This reputation of a God more powerful than nature filled the nations with awesome fear and its experience filled the children of Israel with courage that enabled them to subdue Canaan.

In this way, faith in the living God was preserved for the benefit of the human race through the miraculous. The miraculous is not a mere appendage to the history of religion. It does not serve as mere decoration on a cake, something you could simply ignore. To the contrary, the miraculous had a most significant role to play. Out of it came revival and the reaffirmation of faith. Even the fact that we can believe in a living God today is, after so many centuries, still to be attributed to that miracle that took place at the beginning of Israel's history.

The full significance of the miraculous cannot be appreciated, unless you go back to the ordinance of God that the human race is to subdue all of nature and all of the earth (Gen 1:26-28). [9] Sin has robbed the human race of the crown of honour. After the fall, humanity was faced with unrestrained violence on the part of nature, helpless and impotent. Mankind was left with the question whether the God it adored was also impotent in the face of this turbulent creation. Or was this God in a position to lord it over nature and to protect its human victims from its violence?

The answer to this question could be given only by miracles. It had to become known that there is a power much greater than that of nature, one that can work or reveal itself in nature, control her and make her subservient to a higher goal. Spiritual or

oral revelation would not be able to make the point sufficiently.

There was need for a demonstration of power over the terrible terrors of nature to which an impotent race found itself subjected in fear. It is precisely this need that was supplied by the miracles at the birth of the people of Israel. That is the reason the Reformed churches, in distinction from some other traditions, did not ignore the Old Testament in order to bury themselves only in the New. The Reformed fathers constantly referred back to the beginning of Israel for the purpose of honouring the mighty revelation of the miraculous power of God in that birth. They understood that this miracle, for which there was no need in the Garden of Eden, had to come after the paradise tradition had worn off. A new faith had to be nurtured in Israel, so that eventually all nations of the earth would be blessed through that people.

[5] This statement may be true for Kuyper's contemporary fellow Westerners, but in Africa we tend to be much more aware of the power of the curse.

[6] All words or sentences written in capital letters in the text serve as editorial devices to draw attention. They are not so emphasized in the original.

[7] In the New International version (NIV), this phrase "my fear" reads "respect due to me."

[8] The comment in Note 5 applies here as well.

[9] This concerns the Cultural Mandate which is explained in the Introduction.

Chapter 2: THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST

THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST

The foregoing discussion by no means exhausts the significance of miracles in the Bible. Until now, we have discussed primarily those miracles that God directly and immediately performed Himself. Their purpose was to demonstrate that God's power far exceeds that of nature, though her power, too, is impressive. Those who thought nature to be a superior power would backslide into the idolatry of nature worship. Only those who recognized and confessed that the power of Jehovah far exceeded that of nature, would bow themselves in humility and adoration before the Invisible One. Fear filled the hearts of everyone, fear that expressed itself either in terror before nature or in the worship of the God of miracles.

More needs to be said. If we stop here, we will not see the relationship between the task of the human race to rule and develop the world (Gen. 1:26-28), the Cultural Mandate, and to the power to perform miracles of which the Scripture speaks. If we are to obtain a clear and complete understanding of the miraculous, we need to pay attention to two other series of miracles, namely, those performed by the men of God and, secondly, the wonders and signs of Christ Himself.

As far as the miracles performed by the men of God are concerned, we will discuss only those that these men themselves have performed by means of a power granted them. We will ignore the signs of competition with the wise men of Egypt as well as those wonders by which these men of God played only an external role.

When Moses stretched his staff over the River Nile or over the Red Sea, it was not as if Moses brought these miracles about on his

own power by simply swinging his staff. Moses himself rejected any such interpretation. He gave the glory to God alone when he sang, "By the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up..." (Exodus 15:8). When he hit the rock with his staff, instead of speaking to it, his self-esteem prompted him to take the initiative with respect to this miracle, even though he was not the source of the power to accomplish it.

It is not always easy to distinguish clearly between miracles performed directly by God Himself and others in which God is involved, but in which people serve as tools or channels through which the power of God comes to expression. Nevertheless, there is a difference between them. The flood was a direct miracle in which no human being participated. The raising of the child of the widow by the prophet Elisha, however, involved the medium of the prophet. The virgin birth of Christ was an immediate miracle of God, while the signs and wonders performed by the disciples were possible because Jesus empowered them. There is a direct relationship between the miracles performed through the media of the men of God and the royal mandate to the human race to rule the world. The power to perform these miracles has been given to us in order to gain the victory over nature and to undo the effects of the curse.

We are faced here with a mystery, namely the power of the spiritual over the material. There is no better example of this power than that which we exercise over our own bodies. In all that we do through and with our bodies, it is not the body that does it, but the spirit within us. [10] It is our spirit that moves our bodies around and makes it perform. When one person holds the hand of another or embraces another with his arm, the hand and arm are merely in the service of the spirit in us that makes our bodily parts perform. In

all that we do, our bodies are the servants of our spirits.

As much power as the spirit has over our body, it does not have the power to influence the world outside our bodies in an immediate way, that is, without some external means. The ability to exercise such external immediate influence is restricted for most of us to our speech. We are no longer capable of exercising immediate influence on the material world around us. The means through which such influence could have been exercised has been broken. We now stand almost helpless before nature. The Bible testifies often that the supernatural world of spirits can exert influence on our world, good influence from God's angels and evil influence from demons. Fallen man is as powerless with respect to demonic influence as he is over against nature. He is not capable of delivering a man possessed by demons. However, it is clear from the residual after-effects of the instinctive power over nature found in animistic societies, that such instinctive power belonged originally to the entire human race. Anyone who denies these instinctive residual after-effects will have a hard time explaining all the reports coming from animistic societies. [11]

This instinctive after-effect of humanity's original ability has gradually faded away until our race became almost totally powerless. Our spirits were restricted to influencing our bodies as well as other spirits by means of the word and personal influence. The one appointed by his Creator to rule the world had collapsed into impotence. Although he retained his authority to rule, his scepter and crown had fallen away.

In this context, the miracles that God enabled a few people to perform have a unique meaning. True, they served to rescue or liberate people from the miserable predicaments in which they found

themselves, but their actual purpose lay elsewhere. Misery was rampant in Israel, while it was even more intensive among the other nations. If the purpose of these miracles was to rescue people from their miseries, the power to perform them should have been much more widespread than in fact it was. They were small in number. They took place within a small area and among only one nation. They occurred only sporadically. They were performed by only a few individuals, all of whom stood in the higher service of interpreting God's revelation. The purpose of these miracles was to buttress faith in his revelation, to place the seal of truth on this revelation and to evoke the conviction that a greater power had come down among the people. This purpose could have been achieved if all these miracles had been performed directly by God and without intermediaries, but that was not what happened. In addition to those performed by God directly, others were carried out by the mediation of these men of God. The reason for God's using their mediation was to restore mankind in its royal power over nature and over evil spirits in a prophetic way. These miracles were a prelude to the triumph, a foreshadowing that in the future, humanity would regain what it lost. They showed a glimmer of the power and majesty that had been man's at his creation. They demonstrated that the human spirit is capable of greater power when that spirit is touched by the Spirit of God.

These miracles were not produced by magic. The Scripture sharply condemns miracles by magic. All magic and trickery was banned from Israel. The demonic element that had become mixed up with these miracles was strongly opposed in every way. Over against this semi-demonic power of magical miracles, arose in Israel the ability to perform miracles by means of empowerment of the human spirit by the Spirit of God. This was no magical power; it was a continuation or

renewal of the original power of the human race over nature. These miracles were momentary flashes seen in a few godly people that showed and reminded Israel of the original nobility that was mankind's. They also were prophetic of the glory that lay ahead. They constituted a breakthrough of the curse that had since the fall oppressed the human race and continues to do so partially, but that will one day be lifted.

The story of Daniel in the lion's den reminds us of Adam in the Garden of Eden. Of course, it was God's power that restrained these animals, but that power is the secret in all that we do, not only in our miracles. When one is victorious in battle, he may return home a hero, but he will give God the glory, for God's power was operative through the victor. The miraculous power that suddenly came to life in Daniel was the same power of which we see a glimmer in a tamer of wild animals and which Adam possessed fully in the Garden of Eden. Daniel stood among the kings of the forest as the human king over nature.

The above power is displayed in its full majesty by the son of Man, our Saviour. The Old Testament miracles have to be seen in relationship to the Messiah. They were distant prophecies of what would be accomplished by Christ. They were reminders of the high position of the human race before the fall. They demonstrated that restoration of those original powers was possible and prophesied, that, indeed, they would be restored. However, these miracles could not reveal that power in its fullness. That revelation would first come with Christ, in whom we meet mankind without sin, that is, mankind with its original unbroken power.

It is important in this context that we do not turn the miracles of the Son of Man into miracles of the Son of God. It would be easy to do so. God is almighty. It is easy to attribute Christ's signs and miracles to His divine powers and to regard these miracles as

proof of His divinity. Their purpose was to show that the Father had sent Him, that He had a task to perform on earth. He never made a sharp distinction between His own miracles and those of His disciples. He made the remarkable promise to the disciples that whoever believed in Him would do even greater works than His (John 14:12). With respect to forgiveness of sins, the Lord said, "But so that you may know that the Son of Man (not: "Son of God") has authority on earth to forgive sins... Then He said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home" (Mat. 9:6). Matthew adds that the crowd was amazed that such authority was given to people. You will completely misunderstand Jesus' work, unless you realize that He was among us as the Son of Man. He humbled Himself, in fact, destroyed Himself, when He took upon Himself the form of a servant. While on earth, He neither ruled as the Son of God nor did He display the majesty of His divinity, but He appeared among us as a human being, as one of us, and He did not reveal any power other than that potentially available to all humanity. He simply obeyed His Father. He came to fulfill the work to which His Father had called Him.

All his powers resided in His spirit. The Holy Spirit was given to Him in rich measure. It was a spiritual power that worked in Him always within the parameters of our human nature, subject to the ordinances that God Himself had embedded in the creation of our human nature. When Jesus was arrested, He said to Peter, "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Mat. 26:53). He was not speaking as the Son of God. God does not need the help of angels. He spoke as the Son of Man, who would be rescued from danger and death by an invincible army of angels.

Jesus represents for us the restored person in whom the

human spirit had reached the pinnacle of power over against nature, material and the demons. It would be wrong to assert that Jesus was like Adam, for in Adam human development was in its beginning phase, while in Jesus this development reached its climax. He was not merely a person, but He was the Son of Man, the central person. He represented the human race in its fulfillment, humanity in its richest and highest power and authority. Adam's power over the creation collapsed the moment the curse fell upon creation and made it go berserk. The Son of Man, however, possessed the power of the human spirit to the highest possible degree so that He could even control nature, disoriented as it was by the curse. Similarly, His power to perform miracles remained to the end a human power, that is, a power that falls within the limits of our human nature. Human nature here is, of course, to be understood not as we know it today, but as it was in Adam, except that it had reached mature development. In Jesus' signs and miracles there resided a power that far exceeds our power, but it was a power that He received, that was given to Him. It was not something He possessed in Himself as Son of God. In His signs and wonders He revealed Himself not in His divinity, but in His humanity. Even in His present state of glorification He is and remains the glorified Head of the church, the glorified Son of Man. As God, He could not have been glorified in the sense of being "promoted." And as to His future glory, the apostle teaches that His saved ones will one day reign together with Him as King. Also, our humiliated bodies will one day become glorified like His.

It is not possible here to treat exhaustively the relationship between Christ's divine and human nature, but it must be emphasized that the signs and miracles of our Lord must not be regarded as direct divine miracles. The work of Christ in its totality was one

grand miraculous display of power of the man Jesus Christ or, better still, of the Son of Man. He was robed with the majesty of Adam before the fall, except that in Christ this majesty had reached its full development, culmination. Furthermore, Christ applied His power to a nature deeply disturbed by the curse and become violent. Thus He stood in all His human majesty and power over against the worlds of demons and of nature. The power and authority that humanity lost in the Garden were restored in Him and then developed to their culmination. In His miraculous power we see the reappearance of the glory of human control over the earth.

When Jesus was tempted in the desert, "He was with the wild animals, and angels attended Him" (Mark 1:13). This scene reminds us of the story in the Garden when Adam gave names to the animals. His temptation in the wilderness reminds us of the temptation of Adam and Eve, the difference being that while Adam and Eve gave in, the Son of Man was victorious. His battle was first of all against demons.

Casting out devils breaks the demonic power. When Jesus sent out His disciples, their main assignment was "to drive out evil spirits" (Mat. 10:1). It is this demonic power that undergirds so much of nature. This demonic power displayed itself especially in those considered possessed. Jesus broke that power with a power that is within reach of humanity, for both the disciples and the apostles also drove out demons.

The power of the Son of Man showed itself in ever widening spheres. Not only were the animals in the desert subjected to Him, but so were the fish of the sea. He also demonstrated power over the world of plants by turning water into wine (John 2) as well as by multiplying loaves of bread (Mat. 14, 16) and by causing a fig tree to wither (Mat. 21). He displayed His power over the inanimate world when He walked

on the water (Mat. 14) and stilled the storm (Mark 4). This display of power was not limited to the realm of nature. He also attacked the result of the curse. He freed the blind, deaf and dumb from their shackles. Victims of every kind of disease received mercy and healing at His hands. Finally, at least three times He re-united body and soul of those who died. Not only did He heal the diseased, but He also healed the wounded, as in the case of the servant of the High Priest (Luke 22).

All of Jesus' miracles are cut from the same cloth and form a unit. It could almost be said that there was a plan in the way the Messiah restored and fully developed the power of the human spirit, thus demonstrating clearly His triumph over the various realms of the demonic, of nature and of suffering in general. You can appreciate this display of power fully only if you recognize in all of it the Son of Man as victorious King over all that opposes or attacks mankind. The above does not deny the legitimacy of looking at each miracle individually and attribute individual meaning to each one. You may also admire Jesus' pity for the maimed or His love for the suffering. Jesus' miracles form a holy string of pearls, in which each pearl by itself is of great value. Nevertheless, it is only when you regard the pearl string as a single entity that you can understand the basic meaning of Jesus' miracles and thoroughly analyze their deeper significance. Such analysis and understanding require that you do not take the godless race or the sinner as your point of reference, but mankind as God created it in His image, crowned with honour, clothed with power and majesty, anointed as king over creation.

That race had gone under, disappeared, no longer to be found. However, the germ of that power and glory was still present in human nature, though smothered under the ruins of sin and curse. It

was that original human nature that Jesus adopted. He was the seed promised to Eve. As far as the flesh is concerned, He was from Adam's loins. His Spirit was allotted a level of power that restored in Him all the glory of the Garden. In Him that glory shone once again, but now in its complete potential brilliance. In the presence of that brilliance all the agitation and turbulence caused by sin and curse became pale, even as far as the triumph over death. Thus the kingship of Christ in its first manifestation was not a foreign robe hung on His shoulders. Neither was it a foreign authority laid upon Him. This kingship, this power, this authority emerged from human nature, spiritually elevated to a very high and rich state. It was the man-King from the Garden that was revived in Jesus and developed far beyond its initial form.

[10] Not being a psychologist, I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the details of the theory here advanced. However, the general picture advocated would seem to be confirmed by the Biblical emphasis on the role of the spiritual in human action.

[11] Only yesterday a Nigerian Muslim theologian recently converted to Christ told me that he used to have the power to make people berserk by placing a curse on them. After his conversion, he undid the curse, the victims became free and he apologized to them for his actions. These curses can affect people without anyone knowing the perpetrator. Only the day before yesterday, I received a letter from a Nigerian pastor who from his childhood on was dedicated by his parents to the service of Satan. He had the power to curse and otherwise ruin the lives of anyone he desired. Upon his conversion, he also renounced these powers. He is now engaged in a Christian healing ministry. People with such demonic powers are found throughout Africa, among adherents

of Traditional Religion as well as Islam.

Chapter 3: HUMAN POWER AND AUTHORITY

HUMAN POWER AND AUTHORITY

Thus, in summary, the immediate, direct divine miracles have restored faith in the majesty of God's omnipotence, in His power and authority over a nature that had gone berserk under the curse. Likewise, in Christ's miracles human rule over nature was restored. It is important that we distinguish sharply between these two series of miracles. In God's direct, immediate miracles we see the revelation of the majesty of the Lord of Lords, but when Jesus restrains the angry waves of the Sea of Galilee, we witness the Son of Man subduing nature to His will as the King of nature.

Then there is the unique significance of the miracle of Jesus' giving His disciples the ability to do likewise and even more, as in His promise to them that they would do even greater things that He did (John 14:12). The first time we hear about this is when Jesus sent His disciples out in order to announce to the children of Israel the coming of His kingdom. Matthew tells us that Jesus "gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness" (Mat. 10:1). The disciples crisscrossed the country and returned to Jesus in holy ecstasy, rejoicing that the spirits submitted to them and that they had been able to perform miracles (Luke 10:17). It appears that they attached too much significance to this new experience, for Jesus had to warn them not to "rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). This warning clearly implies that the power they displayed during their ministry of healing and miracles belonged to the sphere of this earthly life and that they were to pursue the highest state that

was not to be found in this stage of their earthly life, but in the coming state of human glorification.

We receive further explanation about this miraculous power given to the disciples after Jesus' descent from the mountain of transfiguration.

Only three of His disciples were present at this wonderful event, while the others were left at the foot of the mountain. While Jesus and the three were on the mountain, an agonizing father turned to the waiting disciples at the foot of the mountain with his epileptic son. He begged them to deliver his son from the demon that possessed him. The disciples tried, but they were not successful. When Jesus came down from the mountain, the man turned to Him for help and told Him the disciples could not deliver him. Jesus rebuked the demon and it left the boy. He reprimanded the disciples with these strange words, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move" (Mat. 17:20). In the account of Mark, Jesus adds, "This kind can come out only by fasting and prayer" (Mark 9:29).

There are three clear implications in these words of Jesus.

(1) The power of healing given them was not a magical power, but an ability that requires the foundation of faith. (2) This power of faith was to serve as an exercise of the power of the spirit over the power of the material in its demonic substratum. (3) This ability or gift can be developed or improved by means of fasting and prayer. The gift or ability to perform such miracles was not merely an outflow of divine power for which this gift served as a mere funnel. Rather, it was an ability or gift that emerged from human nature, though a nature sanctified by faith and strengthened by fasting and prayer.

We ought not to circumvent the strong statement of Jesus that the disciples would be able to move mountains if they had faith.

Usually people explain this statement moralistically by referring to a "mountain-moving faith." What is meant with this explanation is merely that faith will ultimately triumph over all difficulties of life, even if such difficulties appear to us like high mountains. This explanation does not fit the context. The story here is about an epileptic boy, possessed by demons, that the disciples tried to deliver but failed. Jesus located the reason for their failure in their lack of faith. Over against this lack and subsequent failure, Jesus pointed out which faith and what power of faith was required for them to be able to heal such people and to perform such miracles. Jesus' reference to moving mountains is not about a faith that can overcome moral problems, but about one that is able to heal the diseased. The moralistic interpretation is irrelevant in this context. The subject here is that of power to perform miracles and of unlimited power over disease.

Neither is the explanation acceptable that turns "faith like a grain of mustard seed" into an extremely weak faith, one that is in its beginning phase. True, a grain of mustard seed is a very small seed, but Jesus' point here is not about a weak, beginning faith. In no way does Jesus deny that the disciples had faith. Their faith was proven by the many miracles and healings they already had performed. Jesus rebuked them because their faith was not strong enough. That is to say, it was not strong enough to cope with this special kind of demon. This specific kind was so powerful that it could not be driven out by faith except it was accompanied by fasting and prayer. Thus the mustard seed is not regarded here in terms of its small size compared to other seeds, but from the point of view of its power, that in such an exceedingly small seed there is a power resident that can turn it into a tree. It is also this aspect of the power of this small seed

that impressed Jesus the most, as in Mat.13:31. There Jesus emphasized that though it is the smallest of seeds, it grows into "the largest of garden plants" and eventually turns into a tree large enough to house birds. The disciples did have faith, but it lacked power to deal with this special kind of demon. Like the mustard seed, their faith may have been small, but out of the small faith a power was to be developed so unbelievably strong that it would grow into a tree in which the birds would nest. The emphasis is on the surprising and unexpected power of the tiny mustard seed, the same surprising and unexpected power to be resident in and to develop out of the small faith of the disciples. They definitely had faith, but the stem did not shoot up from the seed of their faith with sufficient power.

When Jesus applied the same thought to the mountain that could be cast into the sea, He was not referring to magical experiments, but to the tiny seed of faith that can develop itself into a mighty power that can withstand all opposition of flesh, material and nature and that can defy the demonic powers hiding behind these. The gift of Jesus to His disciples to perform miracles was the power of the spirit that was natural to the human race at creation, that was lost through sin, but can be restored through faith. More even, through faith this power can be enhanced to a higher level. It is also clear that Jesus directed this ability of theirs first of all to doing away with the effects of the curse. They would drive out demons and heal the sick. The spiritual character of the power of their faith was emphasized to such an extent that Jesus, who in all diseases always penetrated to the demonic effects of the curse, ensured that in their spiritual power the holy would triumph over the demonic.

It will be useful for us to pay attention to the comments of Jesus in John 14:11-12. There Jesus pointed to His works and

invited people to "believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves." He added, "Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these." Here, too, it is clear that Jesus located His own powers to perform miracles within human nature and did not attribute them to His divine nature. If His miracles derived from His divine nature, it would not have been possible for the disciples to inherit these same powers, for they shared only His human nature. Jesus did not separate Himself from the disciples, but He chose a terrain where He and His disciples had common ground, He as the Son of Man and they as the children of men. In this same passage it is also clear that the works the believers were to carry out, would include having spiritual power over nature in order to free the latter from the curse itself and from the demonic activities that are activated by the curse. This power was to be exercised on basis of the power resident in their faith.

There is still more to it. Jesus said that the disciples would have this power BECAUSE He is going to the Father. As they performed these works and even greater ones, they were doing so in relation to Christ. They were seen in unity with Christ, as being in Him, as mystically being present in His body, as working out of Him as their Head. However, this relationship or condition would not be in place till after He had died, risen, gone up to heaven and was seated at the right hand of God. That is what He meant, when He said, "I will do whatsoever you ask in My Name." Again, "You may ask Me for anything in My Name, and I will do it." Jesus presented Himself as the source of this power that would operate in His believers and that would inspire them. He did not say that God would do it, but He, the Son of Man, their Head and Lord, would be active in the members of His spiritual Body. Neither was there any reference to a power or gift over

which they themselves would have independent control. This was a royal-human power that resided in the Son of Man and that would be revealed as it radiated from Him to the believers as members of the spiritual Body. This was the royal authority of mankind at work, but that, because of the curse upon creation, was lost by the sinful race. This authority was revived in Jesus as the Son of Man and radiated from Him as Head of the Body, to His believers.

In all this it becomes convincingly clear how extremely superficial the opinion is that Jesus' words were intended solely to reveal His divine power. Such an opinion would not leave room for the fact that the disciples also received this power of miracles, even though they were ordinary human beings. This opinion would render it totally impossible that the disciples would do even greater works than Jesus Himself. This whole development makes sense only if you regard the miracles performed by Jesus as done by the Messiah, that is, as done by the One promised by the Father, who came from God and who shared in our human nature. Furthermore, this development can be appreciated only if you recognize in this Son of Man the restoration and the further elevation of powers that at creation were impressed on the human race by God. Only when seen in this perspective can you relate the miracles of Jesus with creation itself, with the fall, with the curse and with the penetration of demonic powers into this world. In this perspective these miracles form an indispensable link in the history of salvation. Only then can one see the miracles of Jesus in the framework of this history. And only then can they be shown to have controlled the further development of human domination over the material element of creation, over nature, over the curse and over the demonic powers that operate in and through this curse. As soon as the apostles became public witnesses to the

Lord, they showed they had the same kind of miraculous power as Jesus. The first specific apostolic miracle about which we read is the healing of the cripple (Acts 3). The apostle Peter showed his strong consciousness that the secret of their authority was not in magic, but in their communion with Christ their King. "Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?" Peter asked the crowd. "By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong." Faith makes possible the restoration of spiritual power to human nature. It is not something independent, but is valid only in relationship to the Son of Man. That faith was operative in this event in both Peter and in the lame man. This faith that breaks the power of demons and that reconciles us to God through Christ, was given to the apostles and to the lame. That is why Peter added, "It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through Him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see." The revelation of the apostles' miraculous power made such an impression on the people, that they carried all their sick to them wherever the apostles went.

Although Paul was not among the original disciples of Jesus, after his conversion it soon became clear that this same power was also operative in him. After all, this power did not depend on the physical presence of Jesus, but it was given by Him and could be developed to its highest level only after His elevation to the right hand of God. It could radiate from Him fully only as Head of the Body, as the King of the new humanity. In James 5, we read that the elders would anoint the sick, pray with them and heal them. This practise was merely the continuation of the practise of Jesus and the apostles. This power to heal through prayer is available to us even today; it has not been abrogated.

It is not possible to attribute all these stories of miracles and healing to imagination and deceit. If these healings of specific persons in specific places had not really taken place, they would have been discredited long ago. Without having conducted careful research, no one has the authority or right to deny the possibility that this same miraculous power is still available to us today. Some might reason that, since these miracles are not as common today as they were in that distant past, they did not take place then either.

However, anyone reasoning along that line does not understand the unique character of revelation. Israel became a nation of God's people by means of the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea and the provision of the law at Mount Horeb. But this does not mean that all people have to have originated in the same way. In Israel a new faith had to be developed. Other nations have inherited it from them.

Even in the developments of nature it is recognized that there are certain climatic events of special importance. A tree develops from a seed that may go through various stages that never re-occur. The characteristics of a child are very different from those of an adult, while the adult displays qualities that would be unthinkable in a child. Similarly, age brings unique qualities to people that are not found among those of middle age. The same holds true for all historical developments. All historical developments go through various stages, each with their own peculiarities. Here, too, there is the parallel of the tree that begins as a seed and ends up bearing fruit.

As far as revelation is concerned, in its first period the miraculous has a special meaning and function, but it should not be concluded that in the next phase of revelation, that is, its dispersion among the nations, the same phenomena must repeat themselves in the

same way. Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that, according to the Scriptures, seducers and tempters and even the Antichrist himself could perform miracles. For this reason, it is necessary that whenever we hear reports of miracles, we must pay close attention to the source of power that is said to have performed such miracles.

There is no reason at all to deny the existence of a spiritual healing power in our present day, provided we keep in mind both the special character of the first historical phase of revelation and the danger of demonic miracles. We may not deny the possibility that it could please God to perform miracles today or that a power could radiate from faith in Christ to heal the sick. This statement does not mean that we have simply to accept in good faith all the stories about miracles and healings that we hear about these days. The facts must be investigated and established objectively. Gullibility has no place in this context.

There are two questions on which the whole matter depends.

First, the kind of power that our souls have over our bodies.

Secondly, the kind of power faith can raise in our souls. The relationship between soul and body is until this day all but clear. We have earlier pointed to the doubling of muscular strength that may take place in a mentally disturbed person. Though it may be hidden to us, somewhere within us there is a point where the soul makes contact with our nervous system. Through that contact point the soul exercises influence on our muscular system. It is not our body that sees, hears, moves, lifts or drops, but it is the soul that uses the body as its medium. In the sleepwalker it is the soul that guides the body while the latter is unconscious of it. Courage has its seat in the soul and it has been shown that courage can perform greater miracles than the most muscular giant. Joshua and the people of Israel had their spirits

lifted seven times by words, "Be strong and of good courage." This admonition was given on the assumption of the powerful influence of the soul on the body. Who then will deny that under certain circumstances the soul has powers to evoke superior strength in the body? Even medical doctors value the role of the patients' morale in the healing process more than you may think. The soul can be subjected to intense cultivation so as to exert healing influence on the body. This cultivation can be the result of faith that, in turn, can have a special focus on one's own healing. Faith in the possibility of one's own healing can have various sources in the hearts of the sick. It can be inspired by what they hear from or see in others. It can originate in the prayer impulse in one's soul. Another factor to be considered here is the spiritual influence of one soul on another. It is possible to approach the soul of another without having physical contact. Napoleon, for example, inspired his armies from long distances by the mere sound of his name. Both biology and hypnotism have demonstrated beyond any doubt that one spirit can exert direct influence on another spirit. Faith on the part of the one spirit can directly evoke faith on the part of the other.

We do not intend here to trespass on psychology. Faith in healing always requires faith in Christ as the basis. This faith that turns the soul or converts it comes only from above. As Peter expressed it, this kind of healing comes about only in communion with Christ and through His name. Thus we resist all attempts to declare healing by spiritual power as impossible for our day or as based purely on deceit. At the same time, we admit that deceit and fabrication are not infrequently used to pretend the possession of healing power. We also realize that there has never been a lack of unique individuals who possess great biological strength that they have confused with a

spiritual consciousness so as to regard themselves as miracle workers and abuse the gullibility of the people for their own glory and to their advantage.

However, as we shall soon see, it is not to such spiritual healing that we must look for the further development of Christ's rule over the powers of nature. For that development we must look elsewhere.

Chapter 4: THE ENHANCEMENT OF OUR HUMAN POWER

THE ENHANCEMENT OF OUR HUMAN POWER

In summary, we have so far proposed two points. First, miracles had a special significance in the days of Jesus and the apostles that fell away once Revelation had been completed. Secondly, it cannot be concluded from the first point that there is no further possibility of miracles. Christ our King lives at the right hand of God as Head of the congregation and as Head of humanity. There is power radiating from Him and there is no good reason to think that that power can no longer triumph over nature. We insist on the continued possibility of miracles.

At the same time, we have to agree that neither the miracles performed by the apostles nor those of later times were greater than those performed by Jesus Himself. We have only to think about the miracle at Cana, about the feeding of the multitude, about walking on the sea or stilling the storm, or about the three raised from the dead to sense that the glory of the apostolic miracles in no way surpassed those of Christ. We do not mean to belittle the apostolic miracles or to demean their significance, but we do deny that the miracles of the apostles outranked those of Christ. Nevertheless, Christ has emphatically declared that His church would perform more and greater things than He Himself has done. The difficult question then arises as to where we are to look for this "greater" and of what it consists.

We are not satisfied with what certain commentators offer in this respect. They point to four things. They say that the apostles shared the Holy Spirit with others through the laying on of

hands. Further, they point to their speaking in unusual languages, to the spreading of the Gospel throughout the Roman empire and, finally, to what is recorded in Mark 16:17-18, where we read, "And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well." [12] It is obvious that not every believer would be able to perform such miracles. It can only mean that throughout the ages such things will occur.

Still we are not convinced that in those works of the apostles there was something "greater" than we find in the works of Christ. This assertion is especially true for their spiritual works.

True, the preaching of Jesus was restricted to Palestine, while Paul preached in Spain and Peter in Babylonia, but this difference does not qualify the work of the apostles as "greater." It is no more than an extension and continuation of what Jesus started. They were no more than imitators. Those who are today bringing the gospel to the farthest corners of the earth still do not perform works greater than those of Christ. Similarly, the laying on of hands by the apostles cannot be described as greater than when Christ breathed on his disciples, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Even the speaking in unusual languages is not a miracle performed by the apostles. Rather, it was an expression of their souls that occurred without any intention on their part. It was more in the nature of a momentary ecstasy.

Besides, who would argue that speaking in other languages is superior to the stilling of the storm or the feeding of the five thousand? And when you take the acts of the apostles referred to in the passage quoted above, one can hardly regard these as greater than those

performed by Christ. Besides, till today people in various cultures, whether Africa or India, conjure and control snakes. He who refuses to be diverted by superficial arguments will realize that these commentators fail to do justice to the promise of Jesus.

Allow me to recommend a totally different point of view.

The opinion we are about to advance is based on the difference or contrast between two approaches or attitudes to nature. The one can be described as a general lack of awareness that leads to instinctive action. We could call that an attitude of "instinctive unconsciousness." The other attitude is developed by a conscious studious manipulation of nature. We will refer to it as the "conscious analytical" or some variation of that. [13]

Let us illustrate this contrast by a reference to cooking.

The average housewife in any culture is a good cook who knows exactly what spices to put in a dish and how much. If you were to ask how much spice to put in or why, she would not be able to answer, for her knowledge is instinctive. She has never consciously analyzed her recipes. She just knows. Now you take that same cook and put her through a home economics course where everything is analyzed and explained. Her attitude will change from a natural, instinctive unconscious application of skills learned in someone's kitchen to a kind of conscious, studious, academic approach. What used to be done well unconsciously is now done consciously, aware of all the whys and wherefores, of the exact measure of each ingredient, a teaspoon of this or a cup of that. In some countries, such a cook may not have taken a course, but she has at her disposal a library of cookbooks that have the same effect.

A further illustration comes from "farming," an occupation associated with the world of instinctive unconsciousness, or

"agriculture," a term more related to the studious, conscious approach to that endeavour. In Isaiah 28:24-29, we have the picture of a traditional farmer who knows his trade very well. From where does he get his skill and knowledge? The prophet explains that "his God instructs him and teaches him the right way." "All this comes from the Lord Almighty, wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom." Here is a description of farming as conducted by unschooled people who go about their business in an instinctive way. They have a talent, a gift, a practical, instinctive but unconscious way of doing things that God Himself has taught them through the generations. Such farmers may never have heard about agricultural schools, extension services, intensive agriculture or any other modern agricultural phenomena. However, once people begin to avail themselves of modern developments in agriculture, they change over from an instinctive, unconscious approach to a more conscious, studious method, which enables one to explain and give adequate reasons for the methods used. As modernization progresses in this area, the modern farmer will become more conscious about the chemical composition of the soil, the requirements of the various seeds and all the factors that influence the growing process. The motivating factor will no longer be that the forefathers have handed down this or that method.

In some cultures this change from the unconscious to the conscious approach has gone further than in others. And as we illustrated it by reference to cooking and farming, two basic human activities, so it either is developing or has developed in all aspects of culture. Traditionally, parents raised their children without any knowledge of pedagogy--and they often did a good job. But today one will find mothers, especially in the Western world, reach for various books about raising children. Traditionally, people would learn

various trades and establish all kinds of industries, usually small, without conscious analysis or feasibility studies. There were no trade schools or technical colleges. Today such knowledge is despised and not recognized. Everything must be learned and consciously analyzed in a recognized institution. Traditionally, all improvements in whatever area were expressions of life itself, of the instinctive urges that motivated people, but that instinct is now in danger of being stunted, dulled, discouraged. It is being or has been replaced by the conscious, analytical studious approach.

Another example is that of the field of art. Artists of all kinds have presented their artistic products, all of them motivated by this same instinctive unconscious urge. Often they produced art at such a high level that they are admired for generations and even centuries. All modern societies look back upon the artistic heritage of their unconscious stage with admiration, as glorious artifacts of their past. All peoples tend to admire the paintings, music and other forms of art of what they consider their classical heritage of past centuries, the products of their instinctive unconscious phase. The artists of the past seldom, if ever, read any books on art or attended art schools. They all worked instinctively, by inspiration.

Today, the modern artist must increasingly avail herself of the new institutions of art colleges or academies, of literature that discusses true and false art, of conferences and workshops where new methods may be developed. Art criticism has become a field for professional engagement. Libraries have large sections of literature on aesthetics.

There is thus an evolution taking place in all cultures, advanced more in some than in others, from the instinctive to the conscious approach. Now that these instinctive factors are gradually

receding and even disappearing, we find ourselves motivated by a conscious penetration into the laws of nature to achieve a higher, more communal and much more powerful mastery over nature and even over life itself. This more conscious approach of today misses some of the charm that was associated with the earlier attitude, but it puts us on a higher level, multiplies our powers and equips us as rational beings for greater achievements. Under the former approach, each triumph over nature was an independent achievement with hardly any relationship to other discoveries or inventions. Today, our power over nature has become communal property; everyone share in it. In distinction to the former piecemeal approach to nature, we now confront nature as a whole with our communal power. Together, we have penetrated the mysteries of nature. We have discovered its composition and the laws that govern her movements. In this shift from the instinctive unconscious to the conscious, analytical approach to nature we face an evolutionary development of extraordinary proportions, for it places the human race over against nature with a much higher measure of power and control. Our human civilization started with the instinctive unconscious approach rather than the conscious analytical. The instinctive stage is the one during which God Himself, directly, without any mediation, shows humanity the way and helps it develop this inner power. It is exactly as the prophet Isaiah put it in the earlier quotation. It was impossible for civilization to start with the conscious analytical, for the conscious knowledge of nature had not yet developed. If cultural development had to wait for the analytical approach, no progress would ever have been made, for no one possessed the wherewithal to analyze nature. Thus it was wonderful grace that God enabled the human race to achieve such great heights through this instinctive approach during the first period. The original mastery

over nature that was part of mankind's created inheritance broke down under sin and the curse, but it did not disappear completely immediately after the fall. It continued to operate among the nations in slackening measure, slowly fading away. Its after-effects, however, soon degenerated into magic and eventually shriveled away. Nevertheless, the inspiration of the instinctive life continued through the ages to carry cultural development along. It was able to carry civilization to a high level. [14] Archeology has surprised us with its discoveries of high civilizations like those of Egypt and Canaan in the days of Abraham.

Of course, it cannot be denied that even in those eras of long ago the analytical was not lacking altogether. Imitation has always been part of human life and imitation involves study. Without denying that factor, we insist that the peculiar character of cultural development was basically that of inherent talent, of instinctive motivation, while whatever analysis was done was practiced in a superficial way and remained peripheral.

This stage could not last indefinitely. Once our race began to research into the deep recesses of nature and discovered the hidden powers within it to make them subservient to culture, we achieved a much greater power over nature. It will not serve us well to lament over the romance and poetry of the past that was lost in the process and replaced by cold, prosaic analysis. This prosaic evolution was inevitable and could not be postponed indefinitely. Given our created urge to exercise dominion, humanity had eventually to penetrate into the depth of nature to find its hidden powers and thus to re-establish dominion.

And so it happened. First there was the period of the after-effects of our original powers from the Garden of Eden. This

period was followed by the flowering of our instinctive life. Today we find ourselves in the third period in which our mastery over nature increases rapidly through systematic analysis. This difference can be illustrated in the difference between the way in which traditional societies seek to heal the sick with amulets and incantations on the one hand and the diagnosis and treatment of the sick by the modern medic on the other hand, who has analysed the human body from within and is able to discover the basic cause of the disease. This is not to deny that traditional medicine men do heal people. It can even be acknowledged that there were certain effective diagnoses and medications in the past that are now ignored to our own hurt. Modern medical technology continues to be plagued by the way it has contempt for much healing in the past. But surely we all realize that the understanding of disease, the level of knowledge and of medical technology has reached a much higher plateau. We also realize that in this period of conscious research we have taken a much stronger position vis a vis diseases than was the case in the era of tradition and instinct. Thus, we ought not to look back to the era with nostalgia, even though we should recognize its relative successes. Our rational power resides in the conscious life, not in the instinctive approach. Only when we approach nature with our consciously analytical methods can we once again exercise dominion over nature that reminds us of our royal calling to subdue it. Compared to the past, we recognize in this conscious approach something of the greater works of which Christ spoke.

In this context I want to return to Jesus' parable of the mustard seed as well as that about yeast or leaven (Mat. 13, Mark 4). It is common for us to spiritualize these parables, but in so doing we miss their point entirely. Throughout Jesus' works and words He always

kept body and soul, spirit and matter, visible and invisible together in one totality. In the light of that, what right do we have to exclude the empirical, the physical, and the visible that are so prominent in these parables from Jesus' prophecy and to consider only their spiritual aspect? When Jesus spoke of the "more" that was awaiting us, He referred precisely to His works, among which His miraculous works automatically drew the most attention. Most of those miracles revealed His power over the visible, the material and physical aspects of nature. Hence, let us not separate what Jesus always regarded as one. He concerned Himself with the whole person, both with poverty of the soul and with misery of the body. Over against both of these He was Redeemer, the Liberator. He delivered from sin as well as from the misery that encompasses us.

It was in this context that Jesus pointed to the little mustard seed. It is so very, very tiny. But this tiny seed sprouts, grows up and goes through a process at the end of which we have a tree with its branches reaching out far and wide within which the birds of heaven make their home and which provides shade from the heat of the sun. And so, said Jesus, it would be with the seed of the Kingdom. It looks insignificant and trivial at the time it sprouts. But then it begins to grow and go through an organic process until it is like the tree with its wide branches in the middle of the world to offer comfort and protection to people in their sin and in their physical miseries. The parable points to a dynamic situation in which we proceed through a series of stages of history. It points to a penetration of the seed of that kingdom influence throughout our lives and to a future wherein both the spiritual and the material effects of that seed will become plain for all to see. There is a constant "more."

Similarly, the parable of the leaven or yeast illustrates

for us the same process in its hidden action. The miracle here is that when the yeast has come into contact with the flour, it sets into motion a mighty process. Jesus' interest here was not in the external, instinctive action of the woman who bakes, but in what happens with that yeast in the flour as it works quite independently from the woman to obey the powers hidden within it. Jesus penetrated the secrets of nature and showed how powers are hidden within it that would automatically set the process into motion until it would reach its fulfillment according to the natural laws governing this process.

What right or reason would we have to restrict the significance of this meaningful prophecy about this kingdom process to the spiritual? Is it not more legitimate to relate this process of the Kingdom to all of human culture? Does not the power of this Kingdom touch our lives at all levels--spiritual, social and material? And is that penetrative action in all areas not the result of that yeast or leaven? When the Christian faith entered the world, it touched all the factors and laws of human society and by so doing completely changed the face of society. Contrast the cultures that have been penetrated by that yeast and those that have not. Where this faith has motivated people, it has affected their lives at all fronts, spiritually, socially and materially, and has elevated life to a higher level just as the bread rises through the fermentation of the yeast hidden in it. When you take the above perspective, you do not have to search long for evidence, for it is plain for all to see that wherever this liberation and elevation of the spirit has taken place, it is there that people have dedicated themselves to research and knowledge of nature and there that the control of nature has been increased in such a wonderful way. True, the Greeks and Romans were also engaged in some research and among the Arabs considerable successes were booked.

Nevertheless, the greatest scientific revolution was initiated and developed where the Spirit of God had liberated the human spirit with His touch. And though it is true that science has subsequently turned its back to the Christian religion, the spirit, the motivating force that has guided this process arose and developed where that spirit had penetrated society. If it were not for Jesus and the penetration of His Kingdom in the West, its people would still cringe helplessly before the gods of nature as did their ancestors. It would be an insult to His greatness, were we to deny that Jesus did not foresee or intend this development. He is the King of this process. Unto Him is given all power in heaven and on earth. When Jesus placed the leaven of His Kingdom in the bread of human society and promised the disciples that they would do works greater than His own, He in fact prophesied that this leaven would one day elevate all of society. Though we admire His miracles, wherever His spirit of liberation strode, we see those greater works, we see a new and wonderful power and authority over nature that has been achieved through persistent, conscious analysis of its secret powers. And the works emerging from that development Jesus described as greater than His own.

[12] Kuyper's day, Bible translators have generally agreed that these last few verses of the Gospel of Mark were not part of the original manuscripts. Most recent Bible translators relegate them to a note. However, the passage does correctly summarize what in fact took place, according to the book of Acts.

[13] As already mentioned in the Introduction, I, the translator, consider Kuyper's writing to be an example of a style emerging from the "instinctive unconsciousness."

[14] I know a young Nigerian who created a new type of Christian songs

that combined aspects of the traditional music of his ethnic group with Christian themes. In a short time he composed a considerable number of songs that were so popular that his songs were sung even by people of other ethnic groups. Then the young man went to a teachers' college - and that was the end of his creativity. His instinctive unconscious approach was stunted by the new consciousness he achieved through study. However, since his was not a music or art college, he simply dropped his artistic activities. His new consciousness did not help the development of his musical and poetic talents. It appears that it was impossible for him to combine the earlier instinctive approach in art with a more conscious attitude to life in general. The two approaches seem mutually exclusive. In Nigeria, the emphasis on paper credentials has seriously contributed to this partially unfortunate development.

Chapter 5: THE SHREWDNESS OF THE WORLD

THE SHREWDNESS OF THE WORLD

Already in the Garden of Eden mankind was ordained to rule over nature, but because of the fall into sin and the subsequent curse that came upon all of creation, the severely weakened race lost his sovereignty. However, in Christ, the Son of Man, this rule is restored and that in a three-fold manner. First, immediately by means of the power to perform miracles directly, a power that His disciples inherited from Him. Secondly, mediately by means of the enhanced development among mankind of its spiritual factors wherever the Christian religion triumphed. Thirdly, at the time of His return, an event to which the New Testament does not tire of pointing as an indispensable component of the great work of deliverance.

This then is the three-fold situation arising from the above. First, Jesus restored human control over nature by giving the power of performing miracles. Secondly, Jesus restored this same power on a much broader and lasting scale by means of the light that has gone through the nations and that has renewed their cultures. Thirdly, at His return, Jesus will lead nature to its highest goal by means of final glorification.

It would lead us too far astray from our present purposes to fully explain this third item. Let a reference to the prophet Isaiah's statement suffice:

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The

infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child will put his hand into the viper's nest (11:6-8)

This is obviously the promise of the final restoration of affairs to a situation similar to that before the fall. The promise is expressed in Eastern poetry, but it is a powerful way of depicting the full restoration of peace within nature and of human control over nature. This full restoration will not be realised until the return of Christ, but then it will spell the everlasting defeat of the power of Satan and the end of all the resistance evil spirits now offer us daily. This restoration will come at the end of days, when the struggle is completed and the kingdom of glory has finally triumphed. While the above victory awaits the future, we already reap the benefits of the restoration of mankind's mediate control over nature. This control comes to us in the second of the three phases. It is the power that we now have at our service and that has especially during the last century and a half developed at such a startling speed. This is not the immediate power to perform miracles as Jesus practised it when He was on earth. This is a power of a totally different order that operates in a very different way. In both kinds of power Jesus exercised over nature, that is both the power of working miracles as well as His mediate power, it is the spirit that subdues the physical but does so in a direct manner without using means. In our present phase the spirit governs the physical mediately, that is, by means of the development of the human spirit. This is the power of the spirit over the physical by means of science and technology. In addition to science, we have resourcefulness, the brilliant move, the energy and the talent, perseverance and the will. Nevertheless, all this is analyzed and explained primarily through science and technology. Technology is the ability of mankind to subdue nature and

includes medical science. This immediate, direct power of ours over nature is a wonderful power, but it is not the same as miraculous power.

This scientific and technological power has come to us through Christ. His gospel has called forth a totally different and much higher development of the human spirit. Wherever this gospel has taken hold, this development has taken place. Out of this newer, richer and higher development of the spirit arose automatically the superior knowledge of and power over nature. The credit for this development must go solely to Christ, not to any nation or race. It cannot be denied that through this second indirect, mediate phase of the restoration of control over nature we received through Christ, we achieve more than what Christ did through His miracles. This is not to be seen as a higher power, for who has displayed higher power than Christ when the wind and storm obeyed Him, when He multiplied loaves of bread and raised the dead? Nothing can be higher than that. Our achievements are not greater in the sense of higher, but their superiority lies in their extent, their magnitude, their scale, their scope and their duration. Jesus' miracles were always performed on a single individual or a single crowd and were restricted to a limited area. Our present direct, mediate control over nature, the scientific, affects and influences all nations and people equally, year after year, and constitutes a blessing to millions simultaneously in all their problems and diseases. And so this declaration of Jesus that His followers would do greater works than He did, strange as it may seem at first glance, can thus be fully explained.

The above issues have frequently been misunderstood. Many have assumed that anything that did not come out of the Christian faith

was also beyond the sphere of Christ Himself. The inventions of unbelieving scientists and the production of unbelieving artists have often been regarded as the works of the devil. Jesus had nothing to do with these works. His rule was limited to all that related to the salvation of souls for eternity. The terrain where Christ exercised His royal sovereignty was regarded as excluding the evil direction of the spirit that guides the "world," that is the community of unbelievers, as well as all common human life. The Biblical statement that God so loves the world that He gave His only son to deliver it was understood exclusively as referring to the elect. The world itself was abandoned, while Jesus' coming was only for the salvation of the elect. Such a reduction of the Gospel flies in the face of what the Scripture teaches about the restoration of paradise, about the new heaven and the new earth and about the glorification of our body. Thus many ended up with the untenable position of admitting that where the Christian religion has taken deep roots, culture has reached a higher degree of development, but denying that this development has anything to do with King Jesus and even regarding these developments as hostile to Christ. The rich and comprehensive meaning of the Biblical assertion that "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," was not understood. It is time we broaden our spiritual horizon and recognise that Jesus, as King, has sovereignty over the totality of human culture. Once that is realised, it becomes inevitable that both our spiritual development unto eternal life and our general cultural development that has led to such an amazing increase in our knowledge and control over nature, are placed under His rule. The contrast between human development in Muslim and other countries where the Gospel had not taken root and the West is sufficient evidence for this thesis. Our spiritual awakening unto eternal life and our general

human development are not independent from each other. These are two operations within the one organism that exercise mutual influence on each other. He who refuses to honour the majesty of Christ in both of these developments, robs Him of the full glory due to Him.

Though we cannot accept it, it is not difficult to see how this failure to recognise the Kingship of Jesus over general cultural development has come about. It is a fact that unbelievers have generally contributed more to the development of culture than believers have. It is no accident that scientists who worship the Lord are a small minority among them. The Lukan statement that "the people of this world are more shrewd...than are the people of the light" (Luke 16:8), has been true throughout history. That is to say, when it comes to nature and to the visible affairs of this world, unbelievers usually know how to exert greater power than do followers of Christ. This statement does not constitute disapproval, for Jesus praised the manager for his shrewdness, though, it must be emphasised as well, not for his corruption. There is no explanation here as to why this should be so. The cause for this situation is not explored. It is simply observed from experience that this is usually the case. In the area of general cultural development, unbelievers often outdo the followers of Christ.

The above trend can be observed already early in the Old Testament. Abel prefers to wander around pensively with his flock, while Cain exerts himself with his spade in his farm. Of Cain it is said that he built a city, though we must recognise that this would not be much more than a primitive community that protected itself against wild animals. Nevertheless, Cain, the son of darkness, is associated in the Bible with the first technological advance. In the next generations, it is not the descendants of believing Seth who are at the

edge of progress, but those of the worldly Cain. The credit for original development of the harp and flute goes to Jubal, of tents to Jabel and of bronze and iron tools to Tubal-Cain (Genesis 4). And so it continues throughout history. Egypt was known as a pagan country, but it is there that Israel grew into a people and it is there that Moses was educated to prepare himself for his role as leader of his people. King Solomon had to send to pagan Tyre to get Hiram, a craftsman "experienced in all kinds of bronze work" (1 Kings 7:13-13), to work on the temple. In the days of King Saul there were no blacksmiths in Israel. When they needed such craftsmen, they had to resort to other nations around them. During its glory days, Israel never excelled in any area of science or art. Commerce was mostly controlled by the Canaanites. Israel's maritime fleet was puny compared to that of her neighbours. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Persia all surpassed her in every science and art. And then we have not yet mentioned the achievements of the Greeks and Romans. The best historical musea in the world have very few artifacts from early Israel among their displays. During the reign of Solomon there seems to have been a temporary unusual increase in wealth in Jerusalem, but even here there are good reasons to surmise that the artists employed were foreigners.

This tendency can also be noted during the days of Jesus.

The new cities of Caesarea and Tiberias sprang from foreign inspiration. Even Jesus surrounded Himself with mostly simple fishermen from Galilee. Among His followers were few intellectuals; Paul, Apollos and Luke represented the intellectuals in the New Testament church. Apart from Paul's writings, New Testament and subsequent apostolic writings are products of divine inspiration; they are not the products of scholarship.

The phenomenon we are describing is no accident. Its basic cause is to be found in the psychological fact that for most of us our spiritual power is not sufficient to embrace both spheres, that of the kingdom of heaven and human culture. Often, or, perhaps, usually, when the human spirit concentrates too much on cultural human development, the resulting science or art will encourage our ego, our selfishness, with such force that it becomes very difficult for the child of God in us not to be suppressed by our pride. Some, like Newton and Agassiz, have taught us how to overcome this problem, but these two men are among the exceptions. For most people it would appear that their achievements in science or art give them such satisfaction and pride that it becomes impossible for them to humble themselves in the worship and service of God. The doubts that science and art can arouse in your heart can create a degree of spiritual confusion and temptation of which the ordinary believer can form no idea. Engagement and success in these endeavours can create such pride and elevate the human being to such an extent that worship of the Almighty suffers severely. Pride and humility do not make good bed partners. How often do not our young people enter the university with a true confession of Christ, only to graduate as unbelievers? The demands of this area of life are so absorbing, so comprehensive that it tends to keep people from looking up.

There is another side of the coin. The fear of losing their faith has kept many Christians from involving themselves in society. The most concrete examples of such withdrawal are the hermit and the monk who lock themselves in their cell. Believers are seeking after God, they want to enjoy fellowship with Him, but the world tends to divert their attention from this quest. The result is that they will avoid the world altogether, avoid the temptation to be

side-tracked and withdraw from society in order to achieve intimate communion with God. The examples of hermit and monk are extremes. They do not represent the mainstream of Christians, but the tendency to avoid the world and to isolate yourself in your own circle of believers is still as overwhelmingly strong in many quarters as it has been throughout church history. Though Calvinists have generally had a different perspective and have resisted the withdrawal symptom because of their doctrine of common grace, it cannot be denied that during the 17thth and 18th centuries they became unfaithful to their best insights and also tended to isolate themselves from society.

Now, we may look down upon these negative escapist withdrawal tendencies and we must surely reject them, but not without honouring the quest for holiness that forms its deepest motive. The wisdom of the Biblical rhetorical question, "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26) stands. When you involve yourself in the world, you will immediately be confronted with what is called the "world" that is, its unholy spirit, its pretentious temptations and the demonic background of its life. True the Christian can overcome this "world," but when you feel insufficient and weak in your faith, it may be better to withdraw into the light than to fall away from it into the darkness of the world.

As we devise a Christian approach to the world, we must keep in mind the tendencies and difficulties discussed so far. The spiritual struggle demands that we constantly concentrate on all spiritual powers available to us. If you work in the world, in order to achieve, you must concentrate all your spiritual power on the material and visible. Both streams will continue to follow their own beds. So it has been in the past, so it is today and so it is likely

to continue. On the one hand, there is a powerful development of human knowledge and skills, a development especially encouraged by people who concentrate all their spiritual powers in this area, but who for that very reason remain strangers to the mysteries of godliness and piety. On the other hand, there is that powerful development of the spiritual or religious life that is encouraged by the children of light who expend all their spiritual powers in this area.

There are some reasons that would lead us to acknowledge that this tension was designed by God Himself. After all, He is the almighty dispenser of gifts and talents. In addition, it would seem that history itself shows that God was pleased to distribute His gifts and talents to develop human knowledge to the pagan peoples rather than to His own Israel. Did not the pagan nations of Egypt, Babylon, Greece and Rome possess gifts for science and art of which Israel was deprived? Can we not clearly discern the difference between the sons of Seth and the sons of Cain throughout history? Even when we come to our own time, do we not see the same tendencies at work? We may pray all we want that those eminent scientists and artists humbly bow before Christ. Sadly we may enquire why we cannot count such people in our fellowship. But it does not seem to change. It continues to be true that the gifts and talents necessary for general social developments are more generously distributed among the children of this world than among the children of light.

It is only Calvinism that in its most flourishing periods has broken this general rule. Calvinism has revived in us the realisation and hope that there are historical exceptions, not only of individuals, but of entire communities, that have followed a different spiritual direction. [15] Exceptions to the rule are possible, they exist, but this fact does not invalidate the general rule itself.

Let us never lose sight of that fact that, even where this basic rule is operative, where the torch of higher scientific knowledge has been lit and power over nature has been greatly increased by people who personally reject the kingdom of Christ, such developments never take place outside of His divine ordinances. Thus in this general cultural development, without forgetting its sinful and negative elements, we must recognise and honour the fact that these gifts have come to us through Christ.

[15] Kuyper is likely referring to the Calvinist revival in The Netherlands, a revival of which he was the major architect. See Introduction.

Chapter 6: THE WORLD OF THE SPIRITS

THE WORLD OF THE SPIRITS

We have seen that the restoration of sovereignty over nature by the Son of Man has two aspects. First, there is the immediate, direct power exerted by means of His miracles. Secondly, there is the mediate, indirect power that through Christ has developed by means of the rise of scientific knowledge. We have also seen how Christ referred to the effects of this scientific development as "the greater works" that His followers would perform. This development took place thanks to the work of Christ, for He added the explanation, "because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12).

This latter point is so important that it requires further explanation. It cannot be denied that our superior knowledge of and control over nature arose in those cultures where the Christian religion took deep root. However, that fact itself does not explain the relationship between this superiority and the influence of Christ on the hearts of men. It might be self-explanatory if the scientists who discovered all this knowledge were mostly faithful Christians, but the opposite has largely been the case, with non-Christians having taken the lead, while Christians often avoided the enterprise. There seems to be an inner contradiction here when we remember that Jesus emphasised that those who would do those greater works would be those who have faith in Him. It is not possible to locate the origin of this higher power over nature in Jesus' royal reign and at the same time to separate this development from the faith. Thus we are confronted with the question how it is possible that Jesus tied this development so closely to faith in Him, while in fact science has been practised

without reference to Him and even in a spirit hostile to Him. If we are to hold on to both of these, we will have to find a point of contact between them that will dissolve the apparent contradiction.

Let us return to Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (Mat.

4). The Messiah appeared as the Son of Man in order to restore to us our rule over this earth. Before He began His public ministry among Israel, the devil himself appeared to Him in the desert. The devil claimed to have control over the kingdom of this world and to have the authority to hand over this rule to Jesus, provided Jesus would bow before him and worship him. It will not do to regard this claim of satan as a baseless pretence, for Jesus Himself at one time referred to satan as the ruler of this world, a term that in effect makes satan the king.

It was not only at this particular time in the desert that Jesus struggled with him over the power of this Kingdom. Christ struggled with him throughout His ministry. This struggle would not come to its victorious climax until its conclusion on the cross.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, deliverance from demons was a prominent part of His programme. The power He gave to His disciples included that of casting out demons. In a moment of holy ecstasy Jesus claimed that He "saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). This struggle against Satan was so much in the foreground that in the Lord's Prayer, He included the phrase "And deliver us from the evil one." It would be a thorough distortion of Jesus if we were to explain away His struggle with the devil psychologically, for this struggle was the essence of His ministry. It is not without reason that the Apostles constantly emphasised the struggle between the Spirit that Jesus poured out and the spirit of Satan. They opposed every attempt to cast the struggle of believers into an ordinary moral struggle. As believers

who have been delivered, we struggle "not against flesh and blood, but against ... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm"(Eph. 6:12). Till this day, "the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). When the final triumph of the church was depicted on the island of Patmos, the further outworking of this spiritual drama showed that Satan was once more freed, after which he is to be cast into the lake of fire, the event which will spell the complete defeat of all anti-Christian and anti-godly forces. "The man of lawlessness" which Paul mentioned in II Thessalonians 2:3-12 "will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders." As in Jesus the Son of God became human and the eternal Word became flesh, so Satan attempted to incarnate himself, an attempt that constituted the height of blasphemy and that led to his eternal downfall. Luther expressed this in his description of Satan as the ape or imitator of God in so far as he, in his struggle against God over control of this earth and of the human race, imitates or apes God in what God in His mercy prepared for our redemption.

Liberal, modern theological studies have completely divorced the study of Jesus' work from this most crucial demonic background to His entire ministry and ignored it. All the stories and sayings in the Gospels and apostolic writings concerning the world of spirits and demons are explained away as the result of imagination and superstition. These were the categories of thought, it is alleged, of the superstitious civilization in which Jesus was brought up and that He also accepted. Those superstitions, of course, were all in error. We modern people know better today and we must therefore re-interpret the Bible to suit the modern mind, thus dropping all serious considerations of this aspect of the Bible. References to demons and

spirits must be explained psychologically. Such methods of re-interpreting the Bible have sometimes been referred to as demythologizing, that is, taking the myths out of the Bible by explaining them away.

It should not surprise us that such interpretations are advanced by scholars who see no more in Jesus than a prominent Jewish rabbi or teacher, or, perhaps, a religious genius. Such scholars cannot accept Him as the Bible presents Him and therefore must make Him palatable to their own tastes and theories.

What is more difficult to understand is that even some scholars who regard themselves as orthodox believers and who claim to honour Christ in all His divinity, go along with various types of demythologizing by suggesting that Jesus not merely went along with the world view of the ancients, but that He actually shared their mistaken views. Since we now know better, we are free today to reject that world view, including the demons and evil spirits.

These views are mutually exclusive. You cannot at the same time hold the opinions that Jesus is divine and that He was wrong. Some try to get around this difficulty by asserting that Jesus realised that their world view was false, but in order to have access to the hearts of the people He adjusted Himself to their way of thinking and complied with it. This attempt is based on pure nonsense and flies in the face of all facts. The temptation in the wilderness was a struggle into which He was led by the Holy Spirit and which was witnessed by none of His disciples. Jesus' casting out of demons cannot adequately be understood as merely an attempt to adjust Himself to a wrong world view. It constituted a serious struggle with demons during which they themselves spoke to Him. Without any inducement from the disciples, Jesus said on His way to Gethsemane that the ruler of the world was

about to make his last attack. And how could Jesus possibly include a prayer for deliverance from the evil one in the Lord's Prayer, if Satan did not work in the hearts of people? All such explanations are to be rejected without reservation. His struggle with Satan to deliver the sheep of His pasture from the claws of the world is not a side issue in Jesus' life, but a dominant concern. In fact, the entire history from the days of the Garden to Christ's return makes no sense whatsoever, unless one recognised the overwhelming dominance of the motif of the struggle between God and Satan for the soul of mankind. Actually, during the days of Jesus' ministry the demons worked harder and had greater influence than normally. The influence of spiritual powers, whether angelic or demonic, can vary from time to time. At the time the battle between God and Satan was about to be decided, angels and demons intensified their activities beyond that of normal times. Thus, to eliminate or to discount the influence of demons is in effect to completely distort a central aspect of the ministry of Christ among us. When you look at these issues carefully, you will realise that they are not only related to the reality or otherwise of angels and devils, but that they also touch spiritual life in general. The conclusions of those who deny the existence of demons reach further and eventually lead logically to the denial of the existence of the soul, of the resurrection, of the very existence of God and finally forces upon them a reality that consists only of nature, of the body and of the physical. Of course, for all these concerns are intertwined. When you lock yourself up in a finite, closed world, you will turn that restricted vision into the measuring rod of all reality. That measuring rod will then determine for you what is possible and what can or cannot exist. You will have pulled the shutter over the window that gave you a view of the spiritual world and no longer see anything of

the world.

The measuring rod of the visible cannot measure the spiritual. The spiritual is of a different nature, operates with different powers and proceeds according to other laws. If you try to measure the spiritual world by the categories or laws of the physical and visible, and you are consistent, you are almost sure to arrive at a position that has no room left for miracles, spirits, souls or even God. A fish cannot appreciate the grandeur of a great mountain range, because his vision and experience is restricted to its watery abode. Similarly, when you restrict your vision to the world of the visible, you will have no eye for the beauty and glory of the spiritual world. Even if you were still to acknowledge the reality of all that is beautiful and good, you will find yourself measuring it by the standard of the visible, as if it emerged from matter. You will not know or recognise another, separate realm that has its own composition and that is not within reach of the measuring rod of the visible. Science that takes a position above faith and against it ends up negating the entire spiritual realm. Such science excluded the spiritual and is in fact another kind of distorted faith that has conformed to a one-sided science. Such science has forfeited a place of honour that is rightly reserved for true science.

The tense relationship between faith in such one-sided science and scriptural faith has somewhat softened in the Western world with the rise of a series of phenomena that are related to movements like spiritism, telepathy and clairvoyance. This development has influenced a sizeable community to recognise certain puzzling phenomena and mysterious powers that would be worthwhile examining, even though such examination is not likely to lead anywhere, since we cannot penetrate that shadowy world with our reason. Nevertheless, this

situation has yielded us some gain in that even among non-Christian scholars there are those who admit to the existence of something like a spiritual world that wields a certain influence on our psychology and life.

Though meager, this situation has yielded something positive for us. It is now more generally admitted that there is more to reality than scholars had wanted to acknowledge. People are once again becoming used to the idea that there exists another order of reality that is distinguishable from that of the visible. It is realised now that we relate to this other world in a very different manner from that of the visible world around us. It has been noted that, while some people have experienced nothing of this other world and laugh at it, others have contact with it and believe firmly in it. It can no longer be denied that there is a certain similarity here with what was earlier revealed by the prophets and apostles about another spiritual realm.

Though the similarity is there, we should not jump to the conclusion that the prophetic and apostolic revelation was the same as that of spiritism, clairvoyance and the rest of them. In fact, the differences are emphatic. Nevertheless, the two share the affirmation of a realm other than the physical and that there are means whereby entities and powers from within that realm can communicate with us. There have even been those who were about to lose their Christian faith because of its affirmations about that realm, but who, under the influence of these newer movements, once again acknowledge that after all there is an eternal life after death. To them the spirits causing tables to dance are as reliable evidence as the resurrection of Christ. Of course, faithful Christians will never stoop down to such outright heresy. Their communion with the spiritual realm is of a

totally different character. The Christian relationship to that realm does not depend on spiritualistic witnesses but rests on faith in God, a foundation as solid as a rock.

Though Christians do not attach the great value to these phenomena that others attribute to them, there is nevertheless something positive about this development in the struggle between Christian and scientific faith. The short-sighted pretence of scientists who deny the possibility of that other realm has been dealt a serious blow. The existence of this other realm is now admitted along with the fact that there are powers in that realm that cannot be explained scientifically. The world of spirits with which they have come into contact almost automatically opens the way to believe in the existence of a spiritual world. By this means the question arises spontaneously and necessarily as to what to make of this spiritual world and in which way this realm exerts its influence on the visible world and on mankind.

In psychology the same development is taking place. It is no longer satisfied with the vague data with which its practitioners used to operate. It is assumed that psychological phenomena must reveal themselves in one or another in or through the body to the outside. In so far as these phenomena, whether they are healthy or sickly, normal or abnormal, are visible or audible outside a person, they can be observed, touched, compared or contrasted, seen in relation to other phenomena and conclusions can be drawn from them. Though there are many who would prefer to explain such phenomena purely by determining their cause solely in the body, and though not a few deny the existence of the soul, the fact continues to impress itself upon us that the physical data are insufficient to explain what is observed. Thus, researchers are forced to accept that there is something in a

person that does not have its origin in the physical and to acknowledge at the same time that this spiritual dimension has its own sphere in which other, peculiar laws operate and where the normal laws of nature do not apply. In many aspects of the person, such as in thought life, imagination, dreams, artistic expression, sense of beauty, moral motivations and, yes, even in the way our sense of right and power is shaped, you run into phenomena that are shrouded in a mystery. You could go on to the power of religion, to the mystery of love, to heroism and so much more, all of which touch our lives deeply in ways that defy explanation unless you admit to the influence of the spiritual realm on mankind.

The materialistic attitude that has been so prevalent has lost some of its adherents among the finest thinkers. A more spiritual attitude is gaining acceptance. People are increasingly feeling and acknowledging that there is a mystical world to which we somehow stand in a certain relation. The previous indifference is being replaced by the tendency to search for a mystical relationship to that world. It is felt that there surely is that other sphere of spiritual life, knowledge of which such people deeply desire. They thus open the portals of their hearts deeply in order to allow the influence of that mystical world to penetrate. Hence, among our greatest scholars there is at present an excessive receptivity towards the spiritual. The callous materialism that half a century ago was so rife in scholarly circles is now largely restricted to the pseudo-scholars, to business people and to the revolutionaries among the lower classes. Nevertheless, it is characteristic of our day that same circle of scholars that is presently so open to that mystical view, still wants nothing to do with the revelation of God that has come to us out of that mystical spiritual world in God's Word. These people

clamp on to what they have learned of Buddhism. They delve deeply into Theosophy. They attempt to resurrect the Spirit of the philosopher Hegel. They will lend their ear to anything at all. But as soon as you mention the special revelation of God that came to us in the prophets, in Christ and in the apostles, then you are suddenly faced with fierce opposition. They will agree that there is this spiritual world and that we have a relationship with it and that it is very important that we understand the relationship, but, that knowledge must come from within us, from our own conjectures and findings, from our own rational activities, from our own pondering and meditating. We human beings, we must be the source of this knowledge. That this knowledge might be revealed to us by God by His own means is not allowed.

Believers themselves certainly share in the responsibility for this development. I am, not suggesting that believers also have denied revelation. The contrary is true. Nevertheless, even with them the broad mysterious background of this revelation has been relegated to the insignificant. Ask yourself what significance the host of angels still has for most believers or how they regard the influence of demons and Satan. How many believers have not completely come to disregard these agents? They may not deny their existence, but they have become mere meaningless figures for them. [16] If these beings were to cease to exist, it would have no difference on their watered-down faith. Oh, of course, they adhere to the influence of the Holy Spirit on their souls. But casting out of demons by Jesus and His disciples is by many believers regarded as psychological healing of disturbed patients. Even in the preaching of the Gospel much of what the Gospels tell us about that spiritual world disappears without a trace. And if you point to Satan as the ruler of the world who took by

plunder what belonged to the Son of Man and that this kingdom was restored to its rightful owner through Golgotha and the open grave, then you are taking your audience to a terrain that is completely foreign to them. They have never regarded the power of Satan over this world and over the spirits as real, as actual. For this reason, they cannot recognise the greatness of Christ's victory over Satan. This is precisely the reason they fail to understand how Christ made possible the subjection of nature to the human spirit by His coming into the world and breaking the spiritual power of Satan, while freeing the human spirit. This attitude of believers has provided the basis for the rejection of the revelation of God on the part of scientists who are otherwise open to the existence of a spiritual realm. Thus the church shares the burden of responsibility for this development.

[16] Kuyper here describes the spirituality that marked most missionaries that came to Africa. This missionary spirituality is the explanation for the weakness of most of the Nigeria missionary churches in the face of African spirituality.

Chapter 7: THE EFFECTS OF THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

THE EFFECTS OF THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

It is clear, then, that we must continue to insist on the influence of the world of spirits on our world as Jesus attested.

Similarly, we must hold on to the fact that Satan and his demons have a real effect on our world. But we are then directly faced with the question how we must visualise their operation. We know absolutely nothing about this matter, except from the Scripture.

Hence we are faced with a mystery. That spirits can influence each other, we experience daily. We also know from experience that our spirit affects our body. But neither experience nor science can answer the question as to how one spirit can affect another or how our spirits influence our bodies. Those influences take place in a sphere where our powers of observation have reached their limits. Here we are dealing with feelings, impressions, emotions and experiences. However, it is beyond us to determine the way this all works. We know the effect; we do not know the method, and every effort to discover it has failed.

It is clear that sometimes the spirit of one individual person is stronger than that of another and can more easily make an impression than the spirit of another person. It is also true that one spirit is more receptive to another's influence than some are. It has, furthermore, been observed that it sometimes is easier to influence the spirit of a large crowd than each member of that crowd individually, but we are in the dark when it comes to the question of how this hypnotic or suggestive power works, on what power it is based and how it achieves its purpose. Even in a love affair we have an unsolved

mystery, especially in cases where one single momentary glance can make such an emotional impression on a young man or woman that they find themselves drawn to each other by an irresistible power as if magnetic forces fuse their souls to each other. We all have a spirit within us and we get in touch with other spirits daily, but no one can analyse what that spirit actually is. All attempts at describing it fail us.

We know what a spirit is not, but we do not know what it is. We know that a spirit has power, but how that power resides in the spirit, how it is activated or to what laws it is subject remains a hidden secret for us. We can observe that somewhere our soul makes contact with our nervous system, because it is through our nervous system that we absorb the experiences of our lives and of our senses into the soul, but where this point of contact is located, we do not know. One person holds the opinion that the soul is spread throughout the body; another locates it in our heart; a third puts it in the brain. Via amputation we can lose significant parts of our body without the spirit within us suffering at all. There are also parts of our body that cannot stand any significant damage without our losing consciousness immediately. Here you can guess, you can surmise, you can theorize all you want, but you will not arrive at any certainty.

So, most questions in this area remain unanswered and we are unable to account clearly for the way in which our spirit influences our body, but no one doubts the fact of this influence.

That fact is confirmed every moment of our lives.

If we apply the above concerns to the spiritual realm that exists in the world outside of the human race and we start off with the revealed fact that there is indeed such an external spiritual realm, then it is obvious that there must be a certain relationship between the spirits that exist out there and those that are within humans.

They have at least in common that both sets of beings are spirits and thus the characteristic features of our own spiritual life can also be found in those other spirits. We cannot go beyond this point. Our human spirituality may have peculiarities not shared by those other spirits and vice versa. Whatever gap there may exist, these others, too, are spirits and thus a type of being that shares certain basic characteristics with our own spirituality.

It is neither strange nor unnatural that these spirits could remain holy or desecrate themselves and that we can thus speak of good angels and fallen angels, of holy spirits and of demons. Of these evil spirits it may also be assumed that they can influence each other in the sense that one of them, as Satan, can exert a dominating influence over the other demonic spirits. Similarly, it can generally be assumed that both good and evil spirits can exert influence on the human spirit. Both demons and good angels can affect us. Going one step further, it can hardly be denied that, as our spirit affects our body and thus the material, so both good and evil spirits can affect the visible world.

The Scripture insists on this possibility. It teaches us that all spirits are serving spirits. That means a number of things: they have a service to perform; they are called to service; they have received the properties and powers necessary to perform it; this service is not restricted to heaven, but reaches out to this earth and its human inhabitants. Similarly, the good spirits affect our lives. They are partners in the great battle for the Kingdom of God. They rejoice in the fields of Ephratha. They are eager to participate in the work of deliverance. They are sent out to serve those who will inherit salvation. In the last day they will triumph along with Christ and those whom He delivered. We must not picture them as if they live

in isolation above, while we live in separation here below. They participate in all our affairs. They rejoice and sorrow along with us. That in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus the angels deposited poor Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham is an imaginative expression of the participation of angels in our lives.

Not only does the Scripture teach that the good angels can affect us, but the fallen angels, the demons, can as well affect us as they seek our destruction. This was not their original inclination, but Satan wants to separate us from God and to draw us into his own kingdom. Satan has been called the "brother of Christ" in order to emphasise his pre-eminence among the spirits. It is exactly that pre-eminence that tempted him to rebel against God. Since then, all of his energies have been directed against the Kingdom of God in order to promote his own kingdom. To this end he does all he can to subject mankind to his own designs. In this attempt he has the advantage of unusually strong powers that stand ready to do his bidding. His preeminence goes along with great gifts and unusual powers. These qualities were meant to be used by him in the service of God, his Creator. Satan did not lose these qualities after his fall, but instead used them against God and His anointed one. These powers were first displayed in the Garden at the time he deceived our ancestors to fall into sin. Since that time, the Scriptures portray him restlessly sowing spiritual destruction among mankind, frustrating the grace of God working for our liberation and promoting his own kingdom on earth. He has been called the "ruler of this dark world" (Eph. 6:12) and the "prince of this world" (John 12:31, 14:30). The government of this world, promised by God to mankind, has been taken over by him. Through the use of all sorts of unholy, secret powers Satan keeps the children of men and the nations caught in his traps. Charms and magic are among

his unholy arsenal of powers by which he retains the souls of people. This demonic rule stood unchallenged and unrestrained until the appearance of Christ. At that time he doubled his efforts and powers and turned the battle into a personal struggle against the anointed one in order to retain his own rule as prince of the world and to frustrate the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In this power struggle Satan exerts influence over other demonic spirits by subjecting them to his will and thus making them subservient to the fulfillment of his designs. Similarly, Satan works in the human spirit to lead people astray, to catch them in his net and to destroy the seed of piety in them. He also affects the body and the material, as we see so graphically in Jesus' days in those who were demon possessed. He even penetrated into Jesus' inner circle: he led Jesus to His destruction, brought Peter into danger and eventually tempted and led people astray everywhere, so that Jesus laid the prayer, "Deliver us from evil" on the lips of all His followers. In our own day, Satan's power comes and goes, wanes and waxes, but in Jesus' days, Satan's attacks were particularly vicious as we witness in the incidents of those possessed by demons in such overwhelming ways, that the demons themselves spoke to Jesus, "What do You want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are--the Holy One of God!" (Mark 1:24-26; Luke 4:31-35). Jesus cast them out and at one time even had them invade a herd of swine which then went berserk and jumped into the nearby sea (Mat. 8, Mark 5, Luke 8). We are talking here about a spiritual influence and power that is not restricted to affecting the human spirit but that can also affect the human body and even the human personality. The incident of the swine shows that even the animal kingdom is drawn into its orbit. It will not do to regard this influence of the spirits on

our lives an unusual circumstance, for such a view cannot do justice to the phenomena under discussion. The Scripture hardly encourages such an interpretation. To the contrary, it depicts Satan as "your enemy the devil" who "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (I Peter 5:8). Paul asserted that we are struggling "not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 5:12), a struggle that knows no relief, but in which we are restlessly engaged from moment to moment. We need to call upon our God every morning and every evening for Him to "deliver us from the evil one." And it is not only our own spiritual life that is constantly under threat of invasion and overpowering, but the same holds for all of nature. We read, "For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it." Further, "The whole of creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" in the hope that it "will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom. 8:19-22).

We are not talking here about occasional exceptional events, but about a constant and dark influence exerted over all aspects of life and creation, of a demonic oppression that is exercised everywhere in our human society as well as throughout our world. That oppression came with the curse and as the nations wandered farther and farther away from God, it increased. That curse was dealt its lethal, principal blow with the coming of the Messiah, and, thanks to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, it is significantly tempered or restrained where the Christian church is present. However, this oppression will not be totally done away with until Satan has been

bound for eternity and the glorification of God's children, along with the establishment of the new heaven and the new earth, will have taken place at the return of Christ.

The spirit does not simply repose or rest in the material, but it carries the material along. Through His almighty providence and the majesty of His will, God preserves the universe in its make-up. That almighty providence is present everywhere. There is not one creaturely spirit and not even one unit of the most microscopic material that does not owe its preservation to that almighty providence. All creation is at each point and at each moment carried along, preserved and empowered through this providential power of God, that resides everywhere in creation and motivates it. God, of course, is a spirit. To Him clings nothing that is visible or physical. Thus it is the almighty Spirit of God that created and upholds not only the creaturely spirit, but also the realm of the visible. No matter how deeply the sciences may penetrate into the composition, laws and powers of nature, they will never be able to touch the spiritual essence or base on which it all rests. Even when the physical material turns out to be all motion and power, science will not get beyond the motion and power. It is beyond the reach of science to determine how God, a Spirit, works within this material creation and motivates it. It is simply impossible to know anything about this subject, unless God reveals it to us. For this reason it is necessary for those of us who desire to form at least a vague conception of the spiritual base, constantly to return to His revelation.

Attempts have been made to prove the above without resort to divine revelation, but these have led from one error into another, from the pan into the fire. A superficial attempt has been made by appeal to Deism. This is the view that God has created this universe

like a clock that automatically runs on and on without God having anything further to do with it. Still others have sought comfort in Pantheism. This view has it that as human beings have bodies infused with a soul that inspires and enlivens it, so can the entire universe be seen as a gigantic body of which God is the soul. In this view God has no existence apart from His creation and is exhausted by it. This God becomes conscious only in the human consciousness, but He has no independent existence or consciousness and is not marked by holiness. These views represent worldly wisdom to which they resorted who were interested in such questions but who would not accept God's holy revelation.

It was over against this pseudo-wisdom that Jesus and the apostles placed the divine wisdom that was hidden from the learned and wise for generations, but that was eventually revealed to little children (Mat. 11:25). Thus, we do not just have this little earth with our God far and high above it with nothing in between but death, but we have a creation of God that is filled with wonderful and rich life. There are 10,000 times 10,000 angels, as the apostle of Patmos expressed it. Those innumerable spirits are not just a jubilating and praising host, they are not merely marginal figures in the great drama of creation, but they are powerful heroes that carry out the Word of God. All these hosts are His servants who carry out His pleasure. They have a service to perform, a call, a task that basically is nothing else than to obey the voice of His word. They neither sleep nor rest, but they are forever busy in the fulfillment of their service. They are borne up by God Almighty, who appears in and through them as a personal power. Christ is appointed head over all this host. Under Him are the good angels of God, who form the host that restrains all demonic influences and seeks to overcome and destroy

them.

It is not possible to restrict all this to the spiritual realm. There simply is no barrier that would prevent any point of contact between the spiritual and the material. The angels also affect the material, as the Scriptures show us repeatedly. This effect is demonstrated especially by the demonic spirits. It is precisely through the visible that they try to tempt us and bring us down. At first glance, the sin of pride would seem the most purely spiritual in nature, but even this sin often expresses itself in the material through money or goods, through honour or power.

Over against those angels that serve God without ceasing, there are the fallen angles. The latter did, of course, cease to serve God and now have no other task than to break down the Kingdom of God, but they do so with the powers and gifts with which God at one time equipped them for His service. They have retained the ability of approaching souls, to entice and tempt them, to affect our souls and thus exert influence over the material. This phenomenon is stronger in those possessed by demons than most of us experience today, but this "service to destruction," as the apostle called it, continues so that all of life's evil and abuse that cannot be squared with God's love and holiness, must be explained on basis of these demonic influences. Life is covered by an impenetrable veil behind which takes place a struggle of spirits that we cannot explain and of which we only observe its effect on our lives.

All superstition has its cause in that mysterious background of our lives. People sensed the effects of this mysterious power in their lives and they felt the need to oppose it. But, instead of seeking help against this oppressing power and deliverance from it from God and His good angels, people depended on their own wits and

sought to overcome evil by means of magic. This practice was, in fact, tantamount to serving and worshipping the demonic spirits themselves. People feared the power of these spirits and tried to gain their favour. In some circles this has actually developed into an open, unabashed service and worship of the evil one. Whatever form it took, the intent of this superstition and demonic magic was invariably to control this demonic influence by means of the demonic. The result has been that spiritually the nations found themselves tied more and more to the demonic. The spiritual was feared as a threat rather than recognised as a liberating force. People sensed the net in which they were caught, but they did not know how to extricate themselves from it. People felt themselves surrounded by a demonised nature. Over against such a situation, Moses spoke these words of God, "The nations listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him" (Deut. 15:14-16). By this means, it was only among Israel that this demonic power was broken in principle. When the promised Prophet finally was announced victoriously, "This is my beloved Son. Hear Him," the struggle in the wilderness between Christ and Satan began immediately. It was then that Satan's head was crushed on the cross. It was then, in the hour of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that a new power was released through the church to enter the world. This new power created an atmosphere of liberation for the human spirit so that the children of God could begin to develop themselves in freedom. That moment signaled the unfettered development of the human spirit. Gradually superstition was pushed back, this time not by resorting to magical tricks, but by research. By hard and serious scientific study, liberated mankind was

able to recover its power over nature.

Chapter 8: CHRIST AND SATAN

CHRIST AND SATAN

When you meet anyone who professes not to believe in the existence of Satan and his demons, you can generally be sure that person has fallen into the clutches of Satan. Christ and Satan work in opposite ways. Christ does not leave a stone unturned to reveal His Name and thus redeem, but Satan does all he can to keep himself hidden from you so that he can destroy you by means of the mysterious influences he exerts over you. Here light and darkness stand over against each other. Christ is the light that constantly extends its rays farther and farther, while Satan represents the darkness that forever withdraws itself into dark and shadowy places in order, eventually, to lose himself along with all the world in the terror of the night. Not to believe in the existence of Satan and his influence is extremely dangerous, for this is just the attitude that will allow Satan to capture your heart. It is a form of backsliding and evidence of a weakening faith so that even in the Church of Christ and in the proclamation of the Gospel, these demonic powers are increasingly ignored.

There is some evidence for this alarming development. When people recite the Lord's Prayer, they all pray, "Deliver us from the evil one," but in free, spontaneous prayers we seldom call upon God to cover us with His shield against the poisonous arrows of Satan.

Therefore, if the Kingdom of Christ is to regain its glory also in our eyes, it is imperative that we emphatically insist that Jesus Himself saw His life struggle as one fierce battle against Satan and that Jesus' view of Himself is of decisive importance for us. We know

nothing about the spiritual realm from ourselves, but He who came down to us from heaven, from the spiritual world, He has every right to speak in this respect. What we received from His lips was revelation and all those who confess that Christ is the way, the truth and the life, must take that revelation seriously. True, belief in the existence of this spiritual realm has been mixed up with superstitions against which we cannot struggle enough. However, to assert that faith in the existence of a demonic world is the fruit of mere superstition is nothing more than short-sighted superficiality. Throughout the centuries it has been the most profound and sensitive souls who have sensed that they were engaged in a mighty struggle for life against this demonic world.

Our point of departure is thus the sure data of revelation. These include the following twelve points:

1. There exists a spiritual world outside of and apart from our human race.
2. There are two hosts or groups of these spirits, namely angels and demons.
3. The host of demons is subject to the rule of Satan.
4. Both angels and demons have powers, gifts and talents that they received from their Creator.
5. These spiritual beings have been called to use their powers and gifts in the service of God, not only to praise Him, but also as instruments for the development of His Kingdom.
6. These spirits exert all kinds of influence on this earth, not only in the spiritual realm, but just as much in the physical, visible and material realm.
7. After their fall, the demons have misused their powers in order to destroy both this earth and our human race.

8. Until the coming of Jesus and with the exception of Israel, these demons had established the kingdom of Satan over the peoples and nations that made Satan in effect the ruler of the world.

9. Christ has come in order to destroy the works of the devil and to establish Himself as Head and King over this world.

10. The temptations of Christ in the wilderness and the gradual casting out of demons must be understood in the context of that struggle.

11. The power of Satan was broken down in principle during this struggle, so that Jesus could exclaim, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18).

12. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost introduced into this world a holy spiritual force that was designed to ceaselessly push back that demonic atmosphere that had for so long oppressed the life of the nations.

Scripture testifies that from the time of Pentecost Satan has been bound. At the end of days he will once again be released with all his demonic powers (Rev. 20:7). Among the implications of the prophecy is that in our present age, Satan is not in full control of himself. This is true not only in the sense that Satan's plans could never go beyond what God would allow him, but also that the Kingdom of Christ constantly chips away at the kingdom of Satan, so that the spiritual environment that through the Holy Spirit dominates in the church of the living God radiates out into the world and restrains the effects of Satan's power. This is not to be understood as if Satan's power has already been destroyed and thus can be ignored. The Lord's Prayer teaches us that this struggle of the evil one to destroy us continues and the apostle emphasised that behind the flesh and blood lies the fearful struggle with "the powers of this dark world and

against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12).

Since the coming of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a great change has come about. Presently we recognise the existence of two very different, opposing, kingdoms on earth. One is that of the demonic that can be identified by its operations and influence among the unbelieving communities of this world. The other, standing next to and opposed to the former, is a totally different kingdom that is covered by holy baptism and where the Holy Spirit is the dominating power.

This symbolism is implied in the sacrament of baptism. The origin of baptism lies in the ancient image that, as water can clean the dirt from our bodies and clothes, so can spiritual cleansing take place by water, whether by sprinkling or immersion. Such religious water rituals are found among almost all the peoples of the world. Members of pagan nations who wanted to be incorporated into Israel had first to undergo the so-called proselyte baptism. That is to say, they were to be symbolically cleansed from the contamination that clung to them as pagans. The symbolic meaning of this proselyte baptism was enhanced in various ways. For one, the baptismal candidate had to break all his relationships with home and family. The laws of Moses strongly emphasised the difference between the clean and the unclean. Many objects and beings were considered unclean or unholy such as various types of animals, the sick, human corpses, cadavers and others. Rituals for cleansing abounded in their culture in order to emphasise that demons affected not only the soul and the intangible world, but also the body, the physical.

For this reason, the baptism of John, Jesus and His apostles touched the raw nerve of Jewish pride so dramatically. This

new baptism included Israel in the categories of the unholy and the unclean. It prophesied the coming of a new Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, which by its nature excluded both Jew and Gentile, so that both had to undergo this cleansing before entering that new Kingdom.

That is the reason the early church tied the rite of exorcism to that of baptism. Before being baptised, the candidates had to deny Satan and free themselves from his service and influence. This promise was made on behalf of baptised infants by those who presented them for the sacrament. This practice of combining these two rites served to emphasise the rich meaning of the sacrament of baptism in a concrete way.

The problem arose with the second generation of Christians. The children of Christians could not possibly be placed on the same level as those of Jews and Gentiles. Born of Christian parents, these children are considered holy and clean in the New Testament. They were not born in demonic territory, but in territory where the Holy Spirit held sway. For this reason, the rite of exorcism did not make sense when applied to such children. Hence some of the churches of the Reformation rejected the association of infant baptism with exorcism.

With this the question has not been answered as to whether or not the old practice should not apply to the baptism of converts from other religions, whether, Jew, Secularist, Muslim or Traditionalist. Such converts do not come from holy, but from unholy territory. Through baptism they enter the holy territory. Literally, they move "from the dominion of darkness" into "the Kingdom of the Son" (Col. 1:13). It would seem to us, therefore, that when we take seriously the principal distinction between holy and unholy territory, it may be advisable that converts from other religions, when they are

baptised, also undergo the rite of renouncing the devil.

The difference between the baptism of John and that of the church was in fact that the latter was performed with the Holy Spirit.

This implies two things. First, children of Christian parents do not need to be transferred to this holy terrain, for they are born into it. Thus, there is no need for exorcism in their case. Secondly, those converted from other religions are born in unholy territory.

Through baptism they are transferred into the holy in order to make a clean break with the ruler of this world and replace him with Christ the King.

The entire doctrine of the covenant of grace depends on this distinction, a distinction that requires that we regard the work of the Holy Spirit in its broadest sense. Those who limit the work of the Holy Spirit to the regeneration of the soul, forget that the Holy Spirit radiates from our spirits throughout all the aspects of our lives and thus creates a totally different atmosphere. Satan created a demonic atmosphere through his effect on the souls of Gentile nations, but the Holy Spirit has an even greater effect when with divine omnipotence He penetrates human life once He has established His own center of radiation in the church.

With all this, we are not suggesting that the line of separation between the holy and unholy territories can always be observed. The church in the prosperous city of Corinth was little more than a very small oasis in a moral wilderness. The few Christians there were not very influential in the city. The dominant atmosphere of the city remained pagan. In fact, there was great danger that the demonic influences radiating from that pagan atmosphere would penetrate the church of Christ. That is the reason for Paul's sharp admonitions in his letters to this church. It was only later, when the majority

were baptised, that the church could influence public affairs.

This process of Christianisation took even more time among the tribes and nations of Central and Northern Europe. With such massive peoples' movements it was only to be expected that the Christian life at first would be no more than a veneer. Under the veneer of Christianity the old paganism continued with its destructive demonic influences. The continuation of this ancient pagan spirit revealed itself not only in the retention of pagan customs and in a low level of morality, but also in the tendency to restrain demonic powers by means of superstitious practices. Occasionally such situations could degenerate to such an extent that a kind of satanic worship was established. The ancient traditions encouraged attempts to incorporate these demonic powers, to seek reconciliation with them, to make them subservient, and all of this would find expressions in shameful orgies. These traditions would express themselves in many forms of superstition and they have left us with fearful memories of awful with-hunts and witch trials.

The church and, upon the church's insistence, the government sensed clearly the great danger that threatened the Christian community from the side of these demonic influences. Today there is the tendency to interpret all of this superstition as the result of ignorance and delusions. For those who deny the existence and the power of these unholy spiritual powers, that is the only interpretation possible. The Christian church never accepted that view. The church knew from the Gospel and from her Lord and King that these demonic powers were too real to deny. We have every right to regard such a widespread revelation of devilish appearances as a strong attempt of Satan to interfere in the Kingdom of Christ in order to retain his own influence and to prevent the expansion of the sacred

territory of the Holy Spirit. The mistake of the church and government of those days was not their recognition that they were dealing with demonic powers. Their mistake was that they sought to battle against these phenomena with sword and persecution instead of with spiritual means. Because of this mistake, the struggle of the Christian church against these demonic powers constitutes a very somber, dark and shameful page in its history. This was not the casting out of demons by means of high spiritual superiority of which we read in the days of the apostles. This was an attempt to achieve by persecution through fire and sword what could only be undermined and overcome by spiritual means.

The formula used in the Reformed Church for the Lord's Supper followed a better way. Here the demonic is attacked in its nerve center. It acknowledges that even in the Christian church traces of this evil are found, but the power to resist is sought in ecclesiastical discipline and in exclusion from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This spiritual attack has been so successful that in no church has superstition been erased as thoroughly as in Calvinist churches. The prime initiative came from the churches and their attack was purely spiritual in nature, [17] though governments also sought to suppress these evils.

One dangerous side of this continued demonic influence was that people thought they could break its power by means of magic. In other words, they sought to stem the fatal influence of Satan by means obtained from Satan himself! That constitutes superstition. It is the belief that there are secret means to resist the evil effects of demonic powers, whether these powers tempt us to sin, or lead to sickness or evil in person or animal, or disturb life by means of other fearful phenomena. Superstition seeks deliverance through amulet,

talisman, magical formula or incantation. Satan is thought to have created evil by magic, and superstition seeks to overcome him by even stronger magic. By trying to overcome the demonic with demonic means people in fact confirmed the rule of the demonic in their hearts. It looked better when deliverance could be attributed to a religious relic or symbol associated with the Christian religion. However, in essence it was still an attempt to meet the demonic with an external, secret magical power instead of facing it with the spiritual force of the Holy Spirit. The Christian veneer of relic or symbol did not render the attempt less magical.

Because of this fatal mix-up, it took centuries to erase this superstition from the public life of countries where the Gospel was slowly penetrating deeper and deeper. Among peoples still under the sway of traditional religions and Islam we find that all sorts of secret working of demonic origin, no longer common among Christianised people, are still daily occurrences. Such people continue to depend on magical formulas to resist demonic influences. [18]

Nevertheless, even now we should not fool ourselves into thinking that there are no traces of superstition left among the Christianised people of the world. Gambling and other types of games encourage belief in the effect of a mysterious fate on our lives. You will find fortune tellers and soothsayers in all large cities. Members of the highest social classes seek their advice. Various superstitious means are used throughout Christianised people to determine the number of people with whom a person should sit at the dining table or the day of arrival of a certain ship at sea. In even the most highly cultured circles where sensitivity and experience of the Holy Spirit is lost, you find that people resort to spiritism and clairvoyance, as if they have access to greater light there than they have in the Light of the

Gospel.

We do not deny that there is truth in all these phenomena or that they are worth our attention. But evil creeps in when the Gospel is pushed aside and people search for a higher revelation in these phenomena than has been given us in Christ. Do not forget that the Bible teaches that even Satan can work signs and miracles. For this reason, Christians have constantly to be aware of the need to test the spirits.

It is only the greater power that radiates from the Holy Spirit throughout private and public life that can deliver us permanently from the dominion of these demonic powers and superstitions. Christ, our King who is seated at the right hand of God, has poured out the Holy Spirit into the midst of our lives. By means of this Spirit, Christ has established the church, of which He is head, as a spiritual power on earth whose workings and influence already serve as instruments of His dominion. The influences of this Holy Spirit radiate far beyond the limited circle of this living church. You can find its traces in the life of the people, in public opinion, in the law, on morals and customs, in short, everywhere. Those influences of the Holy Spirit have formed a dam that obstructs the flow of the demonic. It is in this way that the Holy Spirit has gradually freed public life from demonic powers.

The Christianised peoples of the world are free. [19] The superstitious attempts to control the results of the curse by magical means has largely disappeared from among them. This freedom, this liberated spirit has awoken in them the power and realisation that, through scientific research, inventiveness and penetration into the mysteries of nature, it is possible once again to master the mysterious powers of nature that God has created.

Those who see in Christ only the Saviour of the souls of the elect may have difficulty understanding these broad concepts. But those who understand that Christ has been given all power on heaven and on earth, spiritual and material, will recognise the great drama surrounding Christ, the Lion of Judah. He is the center of that divine struggle involving the principles and powers, a struggle that will continue until its bitter completion, when Satan will fall from heaven like lightning and this world has been released from his grip, while God's holy dominion over this world will have been fully established. This process, during which the ruler of this world is dethroned and the glorious dominion of Christ is established over this world, constitutes the red line throughout history.

[17] The Reformed churches not only lost their superstition, but they also lost all sensitivities to that large spiritual world, the reality of which Kuyper is arguing so strongly. A case of the baby being thrown out along with the bath water.

[18] My experiences in Nigeria bear out these assertions as already indicated previously. However, these people not only use magical formulas to resist demonic influences, but the sorcerers among them also use formulas to harness these influences for their own benefit.

[19] It would appear here as if Kuyper had a very high and uncritical opinion of western culture. In fact, those acquainted with his writings and works know that Kuyper was a tireless champion against the secularism and decadence of his culture. His positive attitude here is directed to developments in science. In his days, people could be excused from failing to recognize the negatives associated with science and technology today. See Introduction.

Chapter 9: THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD

THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD

We now have before us the full picture with all of its relationships. It is the spiritual that governs the material. Among all the creatures on earth, mankind possesses the strongest spirit. God appointed the human race to exercise dominion over the earth and all of nature (Gen 1:16-18). Satan distorted this situation. His spirit being more powerful than that of mankind, he exerted his influence over the spirit of our race, led us to the fall, and since then has penetrated all of human life and, in fact, all creaturely existence and processes. This cancerous growth resulted in mankind losing its dominant position and Satan taking its place. He pushed mankind from the throne of honour and placed himself on it. For this reason, Christ Himself bestowed on him the title of "ruler of the world." The first prophecy was directed against this "ruler of the world" and predicted that one time the seed of the woman would crush Satan's head (Gen. 3:15). Then came the establishment of the nation of Israel that was protected in a special way over against the onslaughts of Satan on their own territory. Finally, Christ Himself came. Christ was both Son of God and Son of Man, but it was as Son of Man that He engaged Satan in the struggle to overthrow him as the "ruler of the world" and to dethrone him. The goal was for Him as head of the human race to restore to mankind the dominion over the earth that was lost because of the fall. This struggle between the divinely anointed King and the "ruler of the world" started with the temptation in the wilderness, continued to Gethsemane and Golgotha and came to its principal settlement with the resurrection of Christ.

During Jesus' days on earth, there was tremendous agitation in the demonic world. The country of Israel was full of possessed people. The most hellish intentions possessed a Judas, a high priest, a Roman governor. Over against the power of Satan and his demons, Jesus rose up with the superior royal power of the Spirit. He cast out demons and gave His disciples also power over them by means of the immediate power of His Spirit. That was not all. Since the demonic power of the ruler of the world was secretly behind the curse over nature and the miseries suffered by the human race, Christ exercised His power of the miraculous also over the physical realm. He not only cast out demons, but He also healed the sick and demonstrated the superiority of His Spirit over nature. He did all these directly, without resorting to means. Even the storm on the Sea of Galilee was stilled by no more than His word of power. The climax of it all came in His power over death. He recalled Lazarus from the grave, the daughter of Jairus from her deathbed and a young man from his bier. This power of the immediate work of the spirit He also laid upon the disciples after whom it continued to be exercised throughout the apostolic century.

This was only the beginning and in that beginning came also the prophecy of what is awaiting us at the end of the ages. Christ will one day return and then the power of Satan will be completely destroyed and a situation better than the original Garden will be established. Then the great miracle will happen, when this earth will be transformed into a new earth that will flower eternally before the face of God under a new heaven.

In between the day of Christ's initial principal victory and that end time lies a long interim period. During this interim Satan has suffered defeat in principle, but he continues to agitate the

world, especially the non-Christian peoples. That is why Jesus ascended into heaven, where He now sits at God's right hand with His royal dominion and is busy forming in this world even now a new humanity that is His body and that derives its life from Him as its head.

This church of the living God has received the Holy Spirit in two ways. She herself derives her life from this Spirit and, secondly, she spreads around her a new atmosphere of a higher and holier human society. This is the city on the hill that herself enjoys that light not only, but also has that light radiating out into the world. The atmosphere of the Holy Spirit pushes back that of Satan. There arose within that atmosphere a Christian approach to statehood, society, science and art. In this atmosphere magic and sorcery could not blossom and thus disappeared. The human spirit has been liberated in this atmosphere. In the sweat of its brow that liberated human spirit eats from the bread of knowledge and regains through science that power of nature which we have now achieved.

Alas, all that glitters is not gold. In place of honouring the Christ for this restored power, scientists increasingly regard the area of science as if its might is rooted in its own power and pit it against the King who restored this power to them.

Unfortunately, the Christian community shares in the responsibility for this unhappy development. With a narrow minded reductionist perspective she recognized only the direct, immediate power of the spirit that expresses itself through miracles while she closed her eyes to the development of that wider spiritual power over nature that was restored to mankind during the interim period in the form of inventiveness, utilizing of talents and gifts, and the application of serious research. The Christian community did not

recognize that wider liberation of the spirit and often regarded experimental research with suspicion. She has often sought to obtain via miracles what is available only through the sweat of the brow, that is, through hard work. An extreme example here is the refusal on the part of some to avail themselves of modern medicine and the insistence that healing come through prayer and miracle alone. Christians have readily appreciated the need for hard work in the area of agriculture, but have not always realized that it is required for all human powers of both body and spirit.

The result has been that especially unbelievers have applied themselves to this neglected area with the consequence that an attitude of hostility to science developed within the Christian church. Here we have the origin of that wide chasm between science and faith. The Christian church withdrew with a sense of helplessness. She no longer possessed the power to perform miracles and the power of science was left to the unbelievers. The other side of the coin was that scientists tended increasingly to reject the faith and to act as if their scholarship rested on purely autonomous human power that was pitted against the Kingship of Christ.

Gradually a change is coming about. The spiritual Israel, the church, is coming out of its tents. She is beginning to recognize her mistake. She seeks to make a break with her former narrow perspective and shedding her reluctance by accepting the advantages of the power that has been achieved over nature with gratitude. She is beginning to recover her sensitivity to the work of Christ as King to restore the dominion of mankind over the earth. A new light is arising. Christians are now reaching for the power of scholarship. They now realize that the power of Christ is also active in science and they now pay tribute to Christ as King in this area as well.

This new development, however, creates a new danger. Those Christians who reconciled themselves with science then went to the other extreme. Taking their cue only from scientific theories, they moved away from the mysteries of creation to replace these with the hypothesis of evolution . We should regard this development as a transition situation that victimizes only those afflicted with spiritual superficiality. Solid believers refuse to be caught in this trap. They draw a sharp line between the substantial results of science that are the outcome of strict research and those theories produced by the imagination of researchers who have gone off the deep end.

In addition to the restored power over nature, it is especially the steady increase of our knowledge that heightens our sense of human grandeur and that ends up with people elevating themselves with creaturely pride, while simultaneously rejecting the humility that is characteristic of the Gospel. You may remember the earlier discussion where it was observed that the blocking of the stream of religious life can be attributed to various factors, among them being our power over nature, but also and especially to the increase of human knowledge and to the high level that scholarship has been achieved in almost every area. It is therefore necessary to determine whether Christianity must in principle resist this high level of scholarship and be hostile to it or whether this scholarship is a blessing to us from Christ, even though many of its practitioners try their best to separate their work from Christ and even play them off against each other.

To begin with, it sometimes does indeed appear as if Christianity wants to attack scholarship and ban it altogether. Especially the apostle Paul never tired of speaking about the

foolishness of the wisdom of this world. "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" he wrote (I Cor. 1:20). "Philosophy" was considered illegitimate. The church is strengthened not by the noble and wise of the world, but by the simple, the foolish, those whom the world despises. Paul rejected the "philosophers of this age." He continued, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (I Cor. 1:21). The Greeks sought wisdom. Christ was not only "a stumbling block to the Jews," but also "foolishness to Gentiles," including the Greeks. In order "to shame the wise," God "chose the foolish things for the world." We are called upon not to be taken "captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world" (Col. 2:8). Jesus Himself had given praise and thanks to God that it had pleased God to "have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children" (Mat. 11:25).

This attack on the "wisdom of the world" is so emphatic and so insistent throughout the Scriptures that it should not surprise us that those who zeroed in on it and who would ignore the context in which these attacks occur, would despise all human scholarship and oppose all higher human knowledge.

This evil and negative development within the church could only be stemmed by a healthy proclamation of the Bible, but such preaching was sadly lacking. Theology withdrew to its own area and lost its relationship or dialogue with other disciplines. It paraded itself as the grand master whose duty it was to prevent the other disciplines from making further progress. Theologians almost completely forgot that which some of the Reformed creeds confess, namely, that we know God from two books, the book of Scripture and the

book of nature, the latter of which strongly emphasized the majesty of the Lord of Lords. Theologians were too eager to dominate through force, force by the church supported by force by the state.

Paradoxically, this attitude caused theology to become poor, emaciated, petrified and increasingly to find itself in a defensive position vis a vis the natural sciences that were blossoming.

The perspective that developed within the church was wholly wrong and completely contrary to the Scriptures. Nowhere does the Scripture insist that we glean all our knowledge about nature and the world from the Bible. The Bible tells us that there are certain things that you can learn only from nature and from the world, while there are other things for which nature or the world cannot help us at all. Some of those can be learned only from the Bible. Scripture does not have a low regard for knowledge derived from nature. Instead, we are told that from nature we learn about "the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands" (Psalm 19:1). It is an extreme form of foolishness to imagine that you can learn from the Bible all you need to know about nature and the life of the world, its historical progress, etc., without doing any further scientific research in nature or the composition of the world. The human body can only be known by investigating it. The crust of the earth can only be understood by digging into it. Animals can be known only by studying animals; plants only by studying plants. Similarly, the history of the human race can only be understood by studying its past. While we place Scripture in the forefront, of course, next to it lie open before us the kingdom of nature along with the history of mankind and the development of its powers in the various realms, as our legitimate sources of knowledge. Those who close the book of nature in order to concentrate on the Scripture do not honour God as much as those who conscientiously study

both the book of Scripture and that of nature. In nature as well as in human life a treasury of knowledge is awaiting us that God Himself brings to our attention and which it would be sin to push aside while we busy ourselves with reading the Bible. Yet that is exactly what people do all too much, with the result that we have two approaches, each as one-sided as the other. One side is content with the Bible and ignores the book of nature, while the other, equally one-sided, pushes the Scripture aside and considers the book of nature and of human life sufficient.

The same contrast was common also in the days of the apostles. In that Graeco-Roman culture, people were ignorant of the Scripture and sought their salvation in contemporary scholarship. At the same time, the Jews regarded the Old Testament as almost the only source of knowledge and they as good as ignored wider scholarship. True, there were various schools of thought among the Jews, but these were all varieties among those schooled in the Scriptures, all of whom concentrated on the explanation of the Old Testament and constructed a scholastic series of propositions on that basis. Then, too, there was the contrast between the Scriptures of the Old Testament on the one hand and the philosophy, scholarship and wisdom of the Greeks on the other. Since the Gospel showed both the rabbinical study of the Old Testament and the wisdom of the Greeks to be insufficient, Paul opposed both and concluded that the Gospel cannot but be an affront to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks.

It was an affront to the Jews, because it pulled down their national pride. The Jews laboured under the illusion that their special position in the world was a permanent arrangement. The Messiah whom they were expecting was an earthly king on the throne of David in Jerusalem. Of course, both Christ and the apostles annoyed and angered

them greatly, for they pulled the rug from under Jewish national pride and regarded the Jewish nation merely as a means for the coming of salvation. The Jews were invited to enter the Kingdom of heaven on the same basis as the Gentiles.

Similarly, the Gospel could not but be regarded as folly by the learned Greeks. After all, they considered themselves capable of constructing a complete system of knowledge concerning the origin and composition of reality on basis of their own independent reasoning. They felt insulted when the apostle unmasked their system and had the light of divine revelation penetrate into the darkness of their paganism. The wise and learned among the Greeks despised the idol worship that was practised by the peasants in the villages and the lower classes in the cities. As cultured, learned and developed men, they considered themselves far above such idolatrous nonsense and judged it all foolishness. When the new Christian religion appeared on the scene, these learned Greeks regarded it as another variety of the paganism of their own people they so despised and quickly applied the term "foolishness" to it as well.

When Paul first heard of this reaction, instead of withdrawing with hesitation, he accepted this caricature and turned it against them. The Gospel is not foolish, but their wisdom is! Through your imaginary wisdom, he challenged them, you have closed yourself to the Gospel. But true wisdom is found in that Gospel, for its source is not human wisdom, but the wisdom of God Himself. It pleased God, Paul asserted, to close the hearts of both Jewish rabbis and Greek philosophers and to recommend to both all that they considered the foolishness of the world, the weak, the ignoble, the humble.

The question now is whether the foolishness that Christ and His apostles rejected as the wisdom of the world is identical with

natural science, the science of history and the rest of modern scholarship. That is the basic question that we must face. The answer to that question is an unqualified "No!"

In order to understand this issue, we need to clearly distinguish between modern science that rests on strict and undisciplined research and those systems of knowledge constructed on basis of guesses, assumptions and their logical relationships. The results of experimental research are indisputable and must be accepted by all, for this approach can demonstrate to us the nature of things. Everyone knows that a lightning rod can attract lightning and then divert it in order to save the building. Yet, there are those who refuse to install a lightning rod on their house, not because they do not understand its operation, but because they are under the religious illusion that they may not protect themselves against lightning. Such religious timidity in no way diminishes the truth of well-researched facts. That none of us deny the truth of all these new scientific findings is clearly demonstrated by the fact that all of us without hesitation make regular use of its technological fruits in our use of cars, airplanes and telephones. In addition, most of us gratefully accept the services of a physician to take care of our aches and pains. The Greeks in the days of Paul had not yet penetrated deeply into either nature or history, though it cannot be denied that they had already made some significant discoveries in the realm of nature as well as in human anatomy. They had made remarkable progress with respect to certain diseases. It never occurred to the apostle Paul to reject these gains. In fact, on one of his missionary journeys, Luke, the physician, accompanied him. Nowhere in his letters do you find any hint that Paul would have turned against scholarship or against the science of nature. Anyone who thinks to find any such

sentiment in Paul's writing surely misunderstands him. Rather, his admonition to try all things and to retain the good is directly applicable in this area. Research into nature, history and the composition of the world and human life is not only not to be condemned, but it is to be encouraged and praised--provided, and this is something never to be forgotten, such research leads to retaining the true and the good while it leads to rejecting evil.

It is an important duty of Christians to test all that pretends to be scholarship. Already in those days the scholarship or wisdom of the Greeks mixed two different kinds of knowledge. On the one hand, there were the results of strict research and, on the other hand, the system of knowledge based on rationalistic guesses and assumptions. It was the result of their rationalistic activity that they recommended as their wisdom and their philosophy. The apostle in no way turned against their scientific knowledge; he only rejected the fruit of their rationalism.

Chapter 10: SCHOLARSHIP AND SCIENCE

SCHOLARSHIP AND SCIENCE

The distinction between the natural sciences and the "wisdom of the Greeks" against which the apostle inveighs in his letters, is embedded in our languages and terminology. The French use the term "les sciences exactes" to refer to that branch of scholarship that concerns itself strictly with the study of nature. In English, these sciences may variously be referred to as the "exact sciences," "natural sciences" or "physical sciences" in distinction from the "social sciences."

This distinction is not meant to belittle the great importance of the historical or social sciences, but it is intended to emphasize the fact that these are different from the exact sciences that depend on strict research into nature. The unique value of the results of natural science is that they are universally valid and cannot be called into question.

Of course, it has happened more than once that people announce premature conclusions that may be accepted for years, but which eventually are rejected, because they are found to be based on either inadequate facts or false generalizations. Examples of such corrections can be pointed out in many areas, especially within the medical sciences. There we have seen more than once how a cure or method that was recognized as valid for years is suddenly declared inadequate or even false. Thus, there are good reasons for being careful.

With the above stricture in mind, we have to gratefully acknowledge that, by careful observation, the natural sciences have

discovered facts along with the forces behind these facts. The regularity of natural laws has been observed. This has given us a sure base of knowledge and increased our control over the forces of nature. Because of this development, these exact sciences must be attributed a high degree of validity.

The research connected with these exact sciences restricts itself to the empirical. It does not concern itself with the spiritual and other areas beyond the empirical. The subjective element that can play such a large role in the historical and spiritual sciences hardly appears in these exact sciences. For this reason, the latter make a greater impression on those who possess an atrophied spirit than do those sciences that are more closely concerned with faith. The type of difficulties and disagreements that prevent unity and consensus in the spiritual area hardly occur in the natural sciences. In the physical sciences, as long as the observations have been reached via accepted methods, everyone accepts the conclusions. There is hardly room for any doubt here. Everyone accepts the new findings and takes them into account in their own work. The scientific method of strict and careful observation, the drawing of strictly logical conclusions from these observations and the subsequent verification that is part of the method provide us with a certainty and stability that erases all doubts from our minds.

We are not suggesting that faith provides less certainty than do the exact sciences, but it is certainty of a totally different nature. This certainty is based on the spiritual attitude of the researcher that may not be present in others. Those who possess this kind of spiritual certainty may be immovable in their conviction, but neither its base nor content can be demonstrated or proven to others, except to those who share the same basic faith. Thus, on the one hand,

there are the absolute and demonstrable exact sciences; on the other, the spiritual sciences, the results of which can be claimed only by those who have the required spiritual aptitude. A researcher who lacks the spiritual wherewithal can no more judge or accept the result of spiritual research than a blind person can judge colours or a dead person, sounds. This situation has brought it about that the exact sciences recommended themselves more and more as the only valid science or only valid scholarship and as the only avenue by which we can achieve truth. Science and faith have come to be thought of as mutually exclusive opposites.

Now, as long as scientists concerned themselves only with the empirical, and only with truth related to the empirical, that approach was acceptable. But this condition was not met. Scientists continually went beyond their own territory to trespass on areas not amenable to the exact sciences. They spent their energies on the construction of systems that lacked all certainty. At the same time, those who devoted themselves to the historical, psychological and spiritual sciences falsely demanded equal recognition of the kind of certainty that is valid in the exact sciences. Thus great confusion arose. The distinctions between the two types of science were ignored. Both sides insisted on the right to the term "science."

Theologians and other practitioners of the non-exact sciences began to insist proudly that even in their disciplines, scholarship had the right to place itself above or over against faith. They also arrogated to themselves the right to determine on the same basis as the physical sciences the nature of truth and error.

Among the greatest of the scholars this problem was not so serious, for they tended to be reserved in their judgements. However, among scientists of lower rank this boasting soon went beyond all

bounds. This was especially the case with those who did not engage in original research of their own, but who reached their conclusions on basis of the findings of others. Examples were unbelievers of the second rank among the teaching and journalistic professions. There especially this annoying idolatry of pseudo-science and their glorification of the sciences was set in opposition to the faith. It was a matter of course that under these circumstances, those who, because of an inner aptitude in their subjective existence, developed a higher appreciation for the organ of faith, became critical of all attempts to oppose anything spiritual in the name of the honourable, high-sounding, but misapplied name of science.

The situation in the pagan world of Greece and Rome was exactly the same at the time the Christian religion made its debut. Not one of the apostles has ever with a single word denigrated the results already achieved by the exact sciences of their day. It never occurred to them to do so. There is not the slightest trace of such an attitude found in any apostolic writing.

But the Scripture does attack and expose as wisdom gone astray and as pseudo-science the false pretences of "science" advanced by pagan thinkers who based their systems of guesses, suspicions and assumptions that were based on a rationalistic approach. The legitimate object of the exact sciences is the empirical world. At that level, the sciences are strong and, as long as they restrict themselves to that realm and base their findings on careful research, they deserve our support, trust, praise and gratitude. But those sciences know nothing about the origin of things, nothing about the spirit, nothing about the spiritual world that exists beyond our earth. Neither can they know anything about the way the spiritual can affect the material. The entire spiritual realm, so much higher and

more complicated than the empirical, escapes the exact sciences and lies beyond the reach of their research. They have nothing to tell us about the unity of the design of the course of the history of this world. The destination of mankind after death and eternity are hidden from them by an impenetrable veil. Similarly, the moral struggle between the holy and the unholy, the origin of that struggle, or what the end of that struggle will be are all issues that completely escape the exact sciences. These sciences can tell you nothing about divine providence by which God governs all. When it comes to the highest of all, the religious and the holy Object of our worship, these sciences are totally mute. There it behooves their practitioners to confess complete ignorance, if they want to be honest.

This point was difficult for the men of science to concede. They did sense clearly that all these spiritual concerns were of much greater importance for the inner life of people than those concerning the empirical world about which they had so much certain knowledge. For this reason they could not get themselves to confess their ignorance of this most important realm. As a result, they asserted their right to make high sounding declarations also in the spiritual realm. Using fantasy and incredible mental gymnastics, they advanced all kinds of fanciful notions concerning various spiritual issues and based it all on guesses and assumptions. Then they would offer the results of their system as the real truth, the real wisdom, the real science and the real philosophy, even though it lacked any kind of foundation.

The fragile nature of these constructions and their lack of trustworthiness was demonstrated by the sober fact that philosopher after philosopher would demolish the approaches of all his predecessors and seek to replace them with his own. Thus arose one school of thought

after another, each always opposing all the others. Each approach was based on a different world and life view. Through these false constructions they smothered the true thirst after God in the human heart and encouraged the spirit of haughtiness, sensuality and eternal doubt. The end result of it all was that, with all this puffed-up type of "wisdom," the finest impulses of the human heart withered away and the soul could find no peace in its unceasing search.

Then the Christian faith arrived on the scene. It aimed at the renewal of the impulses of the human heart unto a new life and to offer the heart, tired by the endless swings of the pendulum of the soul, a new peace from above that surpasses all understanding. The Christian faith by its very nature could not but sharply and principally resist all this imaginary "wisdom" that led people away from God, in order to disrupt it, expose its empty claims and expel it from the human spirit to make room for a Christian disposition.

It would be wrong to conclude from all this that the Christian faith adopted a hostile attitude towards true scholarship. In order to sweep away the barriers to the human heart, the Christian faith sought to demolish false scholarship that was promoted on a completely erroneous foundation. The situation of that time was similar to that of ours. We, too, enthusiastically embrace genuine scholarship and science, but we also insist that proper lines be drawn and limits be observed. Anytime we meet systems that are based on mere hunches and weak assumptions and that pretend to explain or even explain away spiritual phenomena about which nothing can be known apart from faith, we will deny them the right to the title of "scholarship" or "science." Over against them, we will proclaim that Christian world and life view that is based solidly on God's revelation.

You really cannot know anything about Australia, unless

either you yourself visit the country or someone who has lived there tells you about it. So it is with respect to the invisible world. We will not know what that world is like until either we get there or someone who has been there comes down to us to tell us about it. Until that happens, we know nothing about it. It is almost impossible to know anything about what goes on in the inner life of the spiritual world. The apostle Paul was correct in his observation that no one knows a person's thoughts, except the spirit within that person (I Cor. 2:11). Every personality is such a wonderful mystery to us that even a lifetime is too short to get to know just one other person well.

Gladstone was a great British statesman. Outside, at his front door, this great man hung a cage with a bird in it. Though that bird saw Gladstone come and go many times a day, it could never fathom or understand what went on in its master's head. Left to our own devices, we are a little like that bird when it comes to our knowledge of God.

Thank God that it is not quite like that. Humanity, created after God's image, has been equipped with a religious sensitivity and with the capability to serve God. It is entirely fitting, therefore, that God has not left us to wander about in darkness, but has radiated us with the light of revelation and thus allows people to know Him. That revelation is Christ, He who was in heaven but then came down to us. He attained to the highest perfection possible in this sinful world. He has been able to provide us with knowledge of the spiritual realm, about God's greatness, the origin of things, the government of this world, our inner soul life, our calling, our destination and our own future. Wherever this revelation of Christ entered the world and the Christian faith penetrated paganism, the latter collapsed and its imaginative but rationalistic wisdom with

which contemporary scholars entertained themselves, along with it. It was the little people of the world, the simple and the weak who first took hold of this glorious revelation. However, subsequently the higher classes followed and, after a fearful and hard struggle, the power of this revelation and the Christian faith triumphed over the highly developed wisdom of the Greeks.

In the early stage of the Christian faith, a certain tendency arose to withdraw into the area of revelation and to underestimate the significance of the exact sciences. That was to be expected. At the time, the exact sciences had not yet been designated their own territory. In every way they were mixed up with and absorbed into what was popularly referred to as "wisdom," as a system, as a world and life view. Because of this, all that went by the name of science at the time adopted a sharply hostile attitude over against the Christian religion. It was only natural that Christians would therefore first concentrate on defending their faith against this intellectualistic attack. This struggle coincided with the tremendous convulsions that led to the collapse of that culture and that destroyed the high civilization of the Greco-Roman world. The stream of the Christian religion flowed on into Middle and Western Europe, where primitive civilization still held forth. In this new and strange world everything had to be built anew.

During the initial period of the re-birth of these newly converted tribes no one even gave any thought to the development of scholarship and science. But the initial period was hardly over when scholarship was taken up again, so that before long universities began to appear. The time was now ripe for renewed interest in study and the day that the exact sciences would take new roots was near.

For example, it is significant that during the Reformation,

the Dutch government, as one of its first acts, established the Academy of Leiden. If you compare the accomplishments of European universities, beginning back in the 16th century, with the results of the pagan academies of Athens and Alexandria or with those of the Muslim universities of Cairo or Baghdad or Timbuktu, or with the Jewish schools at Tiberias and elsewhere, it cannot be denied that scholarship and science have come to their powerful bloom and development more among Christians than anywhere else. Though the proof was no longer needed, the establishment of the Calvinistic university in Amsterdam, the Free Reformed University, demonstrated once again how especially Calvinism has such high appreciation for scholarship and science. Those who are aware of the developments among Roman Catholics cannot deny that amongst them, also, scholarship has blossomed.

Proof based on history alone is not sufficient. We need to go back to Christ and the Scriptures. You can ask, for example, what connection there could possibly be between the plant kingdom and Christ. The answer to this and similar questions is that Christ is the eternal Word. Through that eternal Word all things, including the kingdoms of plants and animals, have been created. The eternal thoughts of God that have found their embodiment in all of creation--and thus also in the kingdoms of plants and animals--have come to their embodiment only through the eternal Word. There is not a single flower or single chirping bird that does not represent something of this eternal Word that has its mark placed upon all creatures. The Scriptures do not lock Christ up in the kingdom of grace or even in the world of mankind.

The Scriptures show that the entire creation, the visible as well as the invisible, depend directly on Christ. Already in the Old Testament, wisdom is glorified as existing from eternity with God.

It is not the discovery of the human race. In Proverbs 8:23-27, wisdom is shown to come from God:

I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began. When there were no oceans, I was given birth; where there were no springs abounding with water; before He made the earth or its field or any of the dust of the world, I was there when He set the heavens in place, when He marked out the horizon on the face of the deep.

The Son is not to be excluded from anything. You cannot point to any natural realm or star or comet or even descend into the depth of the earth, but it is related to Christ, not in some unimportant tangential way, but directly. There is no force in nature, no laws that control those forces that do not have their origin in that eternal Word. For this reason, it is totally false to restrict Christ to spiritual affairs and to assert that there is no point of contact between Him and the natural sciences. Rather, every deeper penetration into nature must lead to the greater glory of the majesty of the eternal Word.

This is not an unnatural, forced combination. The apostle said it loud and clear when he explained that in Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). Note well that Paul spoke not only of wisdom, but also of knowledge, and not merely some knowledge, but "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are hidden in Him. How could it be otherwise? He it is through whom all things have been created. He it is who gave embodiment to God's thoughts as they are expressed in all creatures, both high and low. He it is who embedded in all creatures the forces, laws and functions that have made them what they are. That being the case, how can anyone possibly think of anything whether material or spiritual, as having no relationship to Him? How could anything in all of creation exist without His having

brought it into operation? It is not only that He knows and fathoms all of nature, but He Himself has purposefully established all there is. Compared to the knowledge of nature that Christ has by virtue of His having created it, what is the knowledge that Linnaeus [20] or any other scientist has about plants? All science, whether it concerns nature, psychology, ethnology, or any other discipline, is a radiation, reflection of a new glory that was hidden, but that is now revealed in Christ. The tremendous increase in knowledge gained during the last century is used by those whose spirituality is atrophied and who are proud of their own wisdom, to deprive believers of their faith. But we, Christians, accept all new knowledge of nature with thanksgiving, because we recognize that through it shines the holy mark of its Source. We know that what we now see is a mere shadow of "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" presently hidden in Him.

[20] Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778) was a Swedish naturalist and botanist who established the modern scientific method of naming plants and animals.

This document is from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library at Calvin College, <http://www.ccel.org>, generated on demand from ThML source.

References

1. <http://socialtheology.com/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
 - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net