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THE EVANGELICAL WORLD-VIEW FROM REFORMED STANDPOINT¹

I

IF anyone wishes to speak about the Evangelical world-view, the first thing he has to do is to declare what he means by the word world, and if he is a Calvinist he comes by doing so *in medias res*. In the Bible the term world is used in more than one sense. So we read: "for God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son". Here we think of men forlorn in sin. But if we read: "Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein", we think of the whole earth, and of all things, created by the Lord. There are more usages of the word world in the Bible but it is not necessary to name them now. The only thing I have to prove is this, that we are obliged to describe more precisely the significance of the term world, when we speak of a world-view, that there may be no misunderstanding. In world-view we mean by world—and this is the Calvinistic standpoint—the whole of things created by the Lord, the earth and the sky, the earth and the fulness thereof, all that is not God. And the Calvinist is of the opinion that he has to do something with this world, that it is not allowed to be left to itself; that he has to search the world, to admire the great things in the world and that he has to praise the Lord, because He created and sustains such a wonderful world.

I say this is the Calvinistic world-view and I have to explain that. You know there has always been a dispute about the question: what is the fundamental principle of Calvinism? I will try to state briefly what, according to my opinion, are the principles of Calvinism. Often people declare it is belief in predestination. But that cannot be right. The old Lutherans also believed in predestination. Even in the Roman Catholic Church there are those who maintain election and reprobation without

¹ An address delivered at the Fourth International Conference of Evangelical Students, Cambridge, 1939.

any doing of man. And no wonder because it was St. Augustine who first distinctly confessed predestination. It is his spirit that is at work to-day in all churches. Nevertheless, it is easy to understand how many learned men saw the essence of Calvinism in belief in predestination. For Calvinism is strictly theological not soteriological or mystical. Calvinism tries to make full use of the belief, that the Lord is the beginning and the end, the Creator of all things and that, therefore, He is worthy to receive all the glory not only in the Church but in every department of life.

II

So firstly we have to define the relation of man to God. God is not one of the creatures, for He is the Lord, He changeth not (Mal. iii. 6), He only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see; to whom be honour and power everlasting (1 Tim. vi. 16). But also God is not disengaged of His creatures, for in Him we live, and move, and have our being (Acts xvii, 28). There is communion between God and the redeemed man in Christ by the Holy Ghost. True Calvinism always maintained the significance of the work of the Holy Spirit. It is He, who unifies us men on the earth with the Lord in heaven. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God (Rom. viii. 14).

Calvinism sees man as the image of God. For God therefore, all men are equal. They are all made of one blood (Acts, xvii. 26) They all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom. iii. 23, 24). If we so see the relation of man to God according to the Scriptures, we can describe the Reformed world-view. We see the world as created by the Lord our God, created with the grass, the herb yielding seed and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his mind, created with moving creatures that have life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heavens, created also with the beasts of the earth, with cattle and everything that creepeth upon the earth after his kind, created with man, the image of God (Gen. i.). Therefore, the Reformed world-view opposes every theory of absolute evolution. Intentionally, I say absolute evolution. For it is not excluded that living beings change

during the existence of the earth. But the fact of the matter is, that man is created as man, and springs not from animals. Not only the material world is created by the Lord, but also the immaterial. God is the God of the spirits of all flesh (Num. xvi. 22). The Lord speaks to Moses: "And I, behold, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah and I have filled him with the spirit of God in wisdom and in understanding and in knowledge and in all manner of workmanship" (Exod. xxxi. 1, 2). God is the God from whom all blessings flow. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (Jas i. 17).

God is not only the creator of the world, it is He and only He, who sustains all things created. The Lord is good to all and His tender mercies are over all His works (Ps. cxlv. 9). Sing unto the Lord with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God: who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food and to the young ravens which cry (Ps. cxlvii. 7-9).

III

If we revere the Lord our God as the creator and the sustainer of all things, we have therein the starting-point to come to our world-view. We have to honour, and not to be contemptuous of the world. It is not allowed us to retire into a cloister and not to care for the world. We have to keep the commandment to subdue the world and to have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Gen. i. 28). We have to stay in the world and to give ourselves to the world. The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein (Ps. cxi. 2).

But now there arises a difficulty. In the world we meet with sin and death. The apostle warns us: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. v. 11). The world is the work of the hands of God, but sin is not. The prophet says of the Lord: 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity (Hab.

i. 13). How can we honour a world which lies under the power of sin and a curse? The Bible gives us the answer. No; we cannot have peace with sin. We have to condemn all sin, all iniquity, that is the commandment of the Lord, who orders us to hate even the garment spotted by the flesh (Jude. xxiii). But sin does not belong to the proper character, the essence of the things. It is man who is fallen in sin. Sin does not adhere to *the matter* of the human soul. Nature is cursed by God in consequence of the sin of man but nature is not sinful in itself. The great antithesis is not nature and grace but sin and grace. And therefore the Christian can honour the creation, although sin works in the world. Grace gives us the solution. Grace acquired by the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour in His death and resurrection. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. viii. 3). First there is what we call common grace, *gratia communis*, that is to say grace which is common to the believers and the unbelievers. The dogma of common grace is a special Reformed one. It tries to give an explanation of the well-known fact that there are many good things done by unbelievers. But it is more than an explanation of a human question. It is the doctrine of the Scriptures. There we read not only that God gives His gifts to all men commonly but also that He uses even unbelievers in His service. God maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust (Matt. v. 45). He calls Balaam and Caiaphas to prophesy.

In His common grace the Lord stops, checks the working of the sin in the world; He tempers the curse. If there was no common grace we would have on earth the same situation as before the deluge. And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and it grieved Him at His heart (Gen. vi. 6). Even in the days before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ there will be some working of common grace. For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened (Matt. xxiv. 21, 22). Through common grace life is possible on the earth. Men do not yet bite and devour one another (Gal. v. 15), there is love, kindness in the world.

All this is of great interest for our world-view. Let me say it in this manner; there is no nature without grace. Everywhere there is a working of the grace of God. Therefore, we can honour the world as a creature of the Lord, we can search the great works of the almighty God and glorify as new men the Lord, who has given and gives all things.

All grace is obtained by Christ. Also common grace. If He had not given Himself into the death, if not unto Him was given all power in heaven and in earth (Matt. xxviii. 18) there could be no common grace. That already brings us to the central significance of Christ for our world-view. But there is more. Only through Him can we as Christians come to just view of the world, that is, to a religious one.

Man is fallen in sin. And in consequence the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. ii. 14). He has his understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God "through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. iv. 18). So the natural man cannot come to a right view of the world. It is impossible for him, because he does not believe; and he cannot believe that the world is created by the Lord. The world is his all, his only certainty, he cannot get free of the world, nor be above the world. This is the curse of the unconverted man. But if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new. In Jesus Christ we see things as they are, we can search things, we can glorify the Lord.

The peculiarity of the Reformed world-view is, that it is a religious one. I don't say that all Calvinists have always seen that. There were many faults, trespasses. But that does not alter the fact that we must say the Reformed world-view is a religious one. That means, that for the Reformed there are not two departments, one of nature and one of grace; one of the world and one of the Church; one where the devil reigns and one which is under the power of the Lord. The Reformed already see, be it partly, that God in the dispensation of the fullness of times might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth even in Him; in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things

after the counsel of His own will: that we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ (Eph. i. 10, 11, 12).

The Reformed world-view is a single one. Not because we can explain all things or give a system without any gap or antinomy, but because we believe that the Lord is one and that His work is one and that we will see that in a new world, which the Lord will create, so that the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind (Isa. lxx. 17). Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear (Heb. xi. 3). To all intents and purposes world-view signifies dominion. Christ has made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth (Rev. v. 10).

F. W. GROSHEIDE.

Amsterdam.