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Common Grace as a Hermeneutical Approach to Globalization? Kuyper's Teaching of Common Grace in Current Public Theological Reflection on Globalization

Frederike van Oorschot

Introduction

Public theology is an emerging international paradigm in present social ethics¹. The term came up in the U.S. in 1974 during the debate on civil religion. Martin Marty used it to describe the work of Reinhold Niebuhr as an attempt to address social public issues on the basis of biblical or dogmatic sources (Marty 1974, 333). Since the 1990s the term has spread worldwide in other contexts. Innumerable political, social, economical and other issues have been discussed under that name from a theological perspective ever since. One of the first thinkers on public theology, Max L. Stackhouse emphasized the emerging processes of globalization as a cause of and challenge for every public theology. Unlike most other contemporary theologians, Stackhouse develops an affirmative understanding of globalization based on theological arguments. His theological understanding of globalization will be explored in five theses, with special reference to the influence of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace and affiliated problems.

1. Thesis: Stackhouse describes globalization not only as a social phenomenon, but as a genuine theological process

A theology, which is constitutively linked to different 'publics', needs to consider the emerging globalized public. That has been Stackhouse's claim since 1989. Stackhouse interprets the end of the Cold War as a 'world historical transformation' (Stackhouse 1990, 17; Stackhouse/McCann 1991), very close to Francis Fukuyama's understanding in his essay 'The End of History' (Fukuyama 1989; Stackhouse 2001)². Stackhouse emphasizes the providential aspect of this situation but warns against triumphalism (Stackhouse/McCann 1991, 45). This transformation has an economic, religious-historical, and socio-historical dimension. The economical dimension for him is the least important: the failure of socialism requires a theological reflection, as many theologians sympathized with it in social and economic ethical issues (Stackhouse 1990, 17-19). Since socialism has been proved viable neither in political nor in theological areas, Stackhouse argues for a reformed capitalism (Stackhouse/McCann 1991, 44-47). Secondly, Stackhouse describes a religious-historical dimension, as one can see in his interpretation of the fall of the Berlin Wall: 'What fell was the post-religious, post-theological way of understanding civil society and economic realities. Secular prophecy – right, left, and backward – proved incapable of discerning the real forces of history' (Stackhouse 1995a, 43). The year 1989 therefore marks the beginning of a post-secular post-postmodern era, or the 'other postmodernism', which is characterized by the

¹ Concerning public theology as a "paradigm" see Smit (2013).

² Stackhouse refers to the analyses in Albrecht (1991), Berger (1991), Berger/Huntington (2002), Hollenbach (2003), Petersen (2004), Robertson (1991), and Roof (1991).

alliance of religion and humanism (Stackhouse 1997, 25; Stackhouse 1999a, 67). Stackhouse describes the third, socio-historical dimension of the end of the Cold War with the term “globalization”. It describes ‘the fact that we are all caught up in a network of worldwide interdependency, and that the destiny of each part of the human community is inextricably linked with that of any other part’ (Stackhouse 1990, 16). For Stackhouse, globalization needs to be understood as a complex phenomenon comprising ‘a worldwide set of social, political, cultural, technological, and ethical dynamics’ (Stackhouse 2007, 8). It is characterized by international interconnectivity, by the growing extensity, importance, and pace of global interactions. Specifically, for Stackhouse, globalization refers to the expansion of global communication systems, development of democratic systems to protect human rights, the advance of science and technology, the emergence of a global economic system, and the increasing importance of corporations (Stackhouse 2002c, 9). Following David Held, he defines globalization as ‘a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity, and impact – generating transcontinental or inter-regional flows and networks of activity, interactions, and the exercise of power’ (Held 1999, 15; Stackhouse 2002b, 4). The scientific descriptions of these phenomena always offer incomplete perspectives, since a monolithic description of the processes of globalization is not possible (Stackhouse 2007, 8-10, 230-233). Stackhouse therefore repeatedly warns against reducing the complexity of globalization to the economic sector, i.e. the propagation of capitalist economy (Stackhouse 2000c, 19; Stackhouse 2005b, 101). Rather, all public spheres are subject to increasing global interdependence. Since public spheres are no longer organized merely by local, regional, or national identities, public theology needs to develop an inclusive, ecumenical, and catholic theological approach to globalization processes (Stackhouse 2005a, 443).

Stackhouse emphasizes deprovincialization, internationalization, and universality as characteristics of globalization (Stackhouse 1990, 16; Stackhouse 1991b, 247). Therefore, globalization not only leads to the increasing interdependence of individual states, but it also relativizes particularistic contexts and creates new identities beyond national control. Thus Stackhouse is convinced that a new “public” is arising, a global civil society (Stackhouse 1987, 179; Stackhouse 2007, 10). Public life is no longer exclusively organized by national identities; rather, a new, more inclusive, ecumenical, and catholic self-understanding arises to form a spiritual and moral framework for a global society (Stackhouse 2004c, 181; Stackhouse 2005a, 443). Stackhouse therefore describes globalization as a ‘massive ethos shift’, which is marked by a growing ‘moral infrastructure’ and contains the potential for a new global civil society (Stackhouse 2010, 417). This global civil society is in ethical terms a novelty: ‘Religion may hold a particular society together, but we live in a matrix of particular societies that is being formed and transformed by an emerging global society. This emergent global society is not rooted in common memory or a common historical experience. Insofar as it is developing as a novum, it is an artifact [...]’ (Stackhouse 1995b, 39). Stackhouse is convinced that in order to avoid new forms of imperialism or fanaticism, a reliable ‘global ethos’ must be developed to organize this increasingly complex and global civil society³: ‘These [globalization processes] bring with them new demands for intercontextual

³ He argues: ‘In short, the really existing dynamics of globalization cannot be grasped or guided without theologically studying the relationship of faiths to cultures, cultures to societies, and societies to the formation of a new public – a worldwide civil society from which political, economic, and theological developments cannot be isolated.’ (Stackhouse 2010, 426)

definitions of justice, fresh patterns of cross-cultural cooperation and mutuality, and more universalistic modes of interaction than previous interpretations thought were possible' (Stackhouse 1995b, 39).⁴

Stackhouse's concept of globalization and its theological interpretation refer to contemporary analyses in the social sciences from his time. However, it is also grounded in his theological interest. His conclusion in *God and Globalization*, his most important work on globalization, summarizes his theological interpretation: '[...] We can understand that globalization involves error, destruction, and sin, but it also rests on and evolves good, reconstructing, and transforming Grace – and thus invites a vision that it anticipates in serious measure: an ultimate destiny symbolized as an inclusive Heavenly City, the image of a complex and holy civilization which comes to us by grace. [...] Globalization is, thus, a form of creational and providential grace coming to a catholic and ecumenical partial fulfillment that points us toward a salvific vision for humanity and the world' (Stackhouse 2007, 249).

2. Thesis: Stackhouse's theological interest in globalization processes originates in the religious influence on globalization itself

Based on his interpretation of the end of the Cold War as the beginning of 'another postmodernism', Stackhouse describes the religious character of globalization processes. Firstly, referring to his historical examination of globalization processes, he points to the influence of the U.S. on globalization (Stackhouse 1990, 18; Stackhouse 2000c, 20; Stackhouse 2007, 11-15, 89). On the one hand, the short- and medium-term developments are primarily stimulated by the economic spread of capitalism, with roots in the U.S. and Europe. On the other hand, the prominent political position of the U.S. in the world reinforces this impression together with influences in the cultural sphere. For Stackhouse, these American influences also cause a Christian shape of globalization processes, since American society is deeply shaped by a Christian creed⁵. Therefore, Stackhouse reflects his perspective as an American theologian very carefully, and he states a special responsibility for Christian theologians from the U.S.: 'We may well have an emergent, pervasive, and powerful ethos, made of partial incarnations of Judeo-Christian motifs, that is reshaping our world and that needs both theologically guided critique and cultivation' (Stackhouse 2010, 417). In this situation, American Christian theologians are called to exercise their responsibility in stewardship (Stackhouse 1992, 52).

Secondly, Stackhouse argues on the basis of his cross-cultural analyses that globalization processes are accompanied by the resurgence of religions and new religious movements (Stackhouse 2007, 21). With the revival of religions across national boundaries, no nation or culture can exist in a self-contained and fully sovereign way (Stackhouse 1995b, 40; Stackhouse 2004c, 181, 193). Therefore, the processes of globalization are an expression of an alternative postmodernism, which encompasses a new sense of universalistic principles in spite of the awareness of the fragmentary and the relative (Stackhouse 2007, 8). For Stackhouse, globalization is the 'most plausible candidate for the 'real post-modernism', one that is bringing the prospect of a world-comprehending culture, with a new recognition

⁴ Cf. Wuthnow (1991), 36.

⁵ Cf. Van Leeuwen (1966), 307-342.

of certain common moral standards' (Stackhouse 1999-2000, 106). He relates this analysis to world-systems theory⁶.

For Stackhouse, the analyses of these complex developments are the crucial task for social sciences and ethics today: 'There is no greater issue before us today than the fact that a new transactional public ethos is emerging in the complex dynamics of globalization. Religiously laden and legitimated by an indirect but distinct and discernible theological symbol set, this new ethos is essentially ethical in nature and is taking shape in an international cluster of civil society institutions that have outstripped political developments' (Stackhouse 2010, 417). Because of its religiously laden character these processes must also be investigated by theology. Concerning the moral infrastructure of globalization, theology needs to form the inner moral structure of globalization by taking religious analysis in inter-religious dialogue into account (Stackhouse 2001, 156-159; Stackhouse 2007, 2). For Stackhouse, this analysis also includes a theological assessment under the aspect of God's grace: even if present developments are marked by errors, they contain grace-filled moments (Stackhouse 2007, 249). This theological interpretation is deeply stamped by Kuyper's understanding of common grace.

3. Thesis: Stackhouse's theological assessment of globalization processes is rooted in his reading of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace

Since his time in the Netherlands in 1957-1958, Stackhouse has studied Kuyper's work extensively. Kuyper's doctrine of common grace had a special impact on his theological approach to globalization. He mainly refers to Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism*, held in Princeton in 1898.⁷ I will briefly sum up Kuyper's thoughts on common grace as contained in these *Lectures*.

The doctrine of common grace is the foundation of Kuyper's description of Calvinism as a 'life-system'. Kuyper distinguishes common grace from particular grace, the latter being at work in redemption. In Calvinism, Kuyper sees 'the great principle that there is a particular grace which works salvation, and also a common grace by which God, maintaining the life of the world, relaxes the curse which rests upon it, arrests its process of corruption, and thus allows the untrammelled development of our life [...]' (Kuyper 1932, 56).⁸

This distinction is based on the belief that man is created by God with a *sensus divinitatis* which enables him to experience common grace (Kuyper 1932, 79, 209). Therefore, knowledge of God is possible both from Scripture and from nature (ibid., 185). Because God prevents the complete destruction of human beings by sin with the help of

⁶ Stackhouse continues: 'If the world-systems theorists are correct, we would have to say, instead, that very complex and quite dynamic, but clearly objective, nomothetic patterns exist in social history that, on the surface, only appear to exemplify variety, particularity, and uniqueness. [...] There is a logos in the socius of all cultures after all. [...] We do live in a universe, a historical and social as well as biological and physical one, an extremely variegated one that we do not understand terribly well, but one which has a nomos.' (Stackhouse (1991b), 258f) Stackhouse refers to Roof (1991).

⁷ Stackhouse does not refer to the detailed presentation in Kuyper's *De gemeene gratie*. Cf. Stackhouse (2007), 60, 144; Stackhouse (1991c), 175.

⁸ Cf. Kuyper (1932), 90: '[...] His grace also extends itself, not only as a special grace, to the elect, but also as a common grace (*gratia communis*) to all mankind.'

common grace, sinful human beings can use their *sensus divinitatis*: ‘Where evil does not come to the surface, or does not manifest itself in all its hideousness, we do not owe it to the fact that our nature is not so deeply corrupt, but to God alone [...]’ (ibid., 191). Although sin alters man’s epistemic and social capacities, it does not distort them completely. In this respect, the doctrine of common grace even enables a deeper understanding of sin⁹.

Secondly, Kuyper concludes that religion concerns ‘the whole of our human race’ (Kuyper 1932, 90). Due to its universal character, the claim of religion extends to all areas of creation and ‘ordinances of life’ (ibid., 88). These express God’s will in and for creation and correspond to the ‘Laws of Nature’ according to Kuyper¹⁰. Therefore, God does not distinguish between the general orders of nature and the Christian commandments: the Ten Commandments rather offer a summary of the orders written on human hearts, revealed by the *sensus divinitatis* (ibid., 115-117).¹¹

This understanding of common grace forms the hermeneutical key for Stackhouse’s interpretation of globalization in three ways.

3.1. Common grace shapes the world as the grace of creation and providence (formative dimension)

For Stackhouse, common grace first has a formative dimension. He is convinced that common grace shapes the processes of the world as the grace of creation and the grace of providence. The grace of creation shows the basic patterns of the design of the emerging global civil society (Stackhouse 2007, 122-124, 131). These patterns can be discovered in the light of the eschatological vision of the covenantal Kingdom of God – the Heavenly City. The grace of creation also affects his doctrine of sin. In regard to globalization, he refuses tendencies within theology to evaluate globalization as another sinful fall of man (Stackhouse 2005b, 102; Stackhouse 2007, 4). According to him, this interpretation results from the abbreviated description of globalization as the ideological spread of capitalism (Stackhouse 2000c, 19; Stackhouse 2004a, 52; Stackhouse 2007, 5, 26). Instead globalization must be considered in light of providential grace (Stackhouse 2005b, 102; Stackhouse 2007, 118, 242).¹²

The light of this ‘second grace’ of providence shows that globalization is part of the providential guidance of God to build up a global society (Stackhouse 2004c, 181). Theologians are therefore encouraged to fulfill their responsibility to shape globalization according to the federal model of the covenant, which is based on the moral law (Stackhouse 2007, 239-246). Following Elazar, Stackhouse is convinced that covenantal structures can be found in every society: ‘The formation of covenant, a community or [*sic*] moral commitment, discernment, and engagement, then, becomes crucial to the moral task, and the test of ethical theory is its capacity to shape or evoke such a community. That is the

⁹ ‘*Ze [gemeene gratie] is niet opgekomen uit wijsgeerige verzinning, mar op de belijdenis van het dodelijk karakter der zonde.*’ (Kuyper 1902, 7)

¹⁰ ‘There is no life outside us in nature, without such divine ordinances, – ordinances which are called the Laws of Nature – a term which we are willing to accept, providing we understand thereby, not laws originating from nature, but laws imposed upon nature.’ (Kuyper 1932, 114)

¹¹ Cf. Kuyper (1954), 368-380.

¹² He refers to Goudzwaard (2001). This argument is also deeply linked to Kuyper’s understanding of the indirect influence of particular grace in the world as summarized in Zuidema (1972), 84-87.

chief end of ethics' (Stackhouse 1973, 181).¹³ For Stackhouse the formation of voluntary associations modeled on the covenant can build up a just civil society: the peculiarity of the 'confederated matrix' is not to apply direct control on parts of society but to exercise it through and by communities (Elazar 1995, 35-39; Elazar 1998, 291-315; Stackhouse 1996a; Stackhouse 2000b, 138; Stackhouse 2004c, 190). Consequently, networks with limited power develop which resist hierarchy on the one hand and individualism on the other. Such a 'community of communities' with limited power enables pluralistic structures with a high potential for peace and justice (Stackhouse 1984b, 63; Stackhouse 2000b, 138). Therefore, the model of federal pluralism forms a sufficiently complex model for an anticipatory vision of global civil society from a Christian perspective (Stackhouse 1999a, 70, 76; Stackhouse 2005b, 111; Stackhouse 2007, 249). Although grounded in the eschatological vision of a Heavenly City, the Kingdom of God is nonetheless not merely expected in the end of days but thanks to God's providential guidance, it is already coming into world history. Since the eschatological Kingdom of God will unify the people of the world in one common loving society, the globalization processes for Stackhouse are one important step toward this eschatological goal. Following Van Leeuwen, Stackhouse understands globalization therefore as a 'by-product of a kind of pre-evangelization'; e.g. the spread of democracy, technological means of production, and human rights (Stackhouse 1994, 109; Stackhouse 2004c, 181; Stackhouse 2010, 429; Van Leeuwen 1966, 9-29, 307-342).

3.2. Stackhouse's search for a shared global ethical orientation in a 'global ethos' is based on Kuyper's thoughts on the *sensus divinitatis* and common grace (epistemic dimension)

In addition to the formative dimension, common grace also has an epistemic dimension, which constitutes the rational and moral faculties of man (Stackhouse 2004b, 283)¹⁴. Stackhouse describes both individual-anthropological and structural effects. On the individual-anthropological level the epistemic dimension includes the *imago Dei*, human faculties (*intellectus*, *voluntas*, and *caritas*), and the mandate to preserve creation (the cultural mandate) (Stackhouse 1995c, 295; Stackhouse 2007, 132, 134). On the structural level, common grace forms the order of nature by natural laws and shapes an inherent structure of justice and love preserved by providence (Stackhouse 2007, 126, 140f).¹⁵ These form a rational world order, in which man discovers signs of the ordering hand of the Creator (Stackhouse 1978, 295; Stackhouse 2007, 59, 142).

Part of this dimension of common grace is natural law and moral law, by which Stackhouse means possible knowledge of moral laws by reason¹⁶.

¹³ Cf. Elazar (1995); Lee (2005), 209.

¹⁴ For a deeper understanding of Kuyper on this point see Zuidema (1972), 57-59.

¹⁵ These ordinances shall be discerned by a comparative analysis of the sociological structures in the world. Stackhouse (1985), 13-21.

¹⁶ For Stackhouse the term is the Catholic name for the Protestant concept of common grace, or general revelation. While the term *lex naturae* is also found in the Protestant tradition, it was exposed to many misunderstandings and mostly rejected. Therefore Stackhouse prefers the term common grace, following Kuyper. Stackhouse (2000a), 20; Stackhouse (2002a), 1132; Stackhouse (2007), 59, 140. Regarding Calvin's understanding see Schreiner (1997).

The first characteristic of the moral law is that it can be recognized by all men by reason (Stackhouse 1984a, 66; Stackhouse 1985, 13). This conviction is based on the preservation of human faculties by providence. However, Stackhouse acknowledges that the positive content of the moral law is difficult to detect (Stackhouse 1984a, 66; Stackhouse 1987, 29)¹⁷. Based on the first characteristic, Stackhouse then claims the universality of moral law: 'If we define 'universal' as something immediately obvious and agreed upon by all [...] moral laws would not qualify as universal. But if we say that in coming to moral judgments about human behaviors and attitudes we should both take account of their context and use the same principles as standards in similar cases, we are making a more ultimate appeal' (Stackhouse 2007, 171). Additionally, for example, the fact that reference to human rights can be found in many international agreements and legal systems and can be part of the vocabulary of any language serves as an empirical sign of the universality of the moral law. From this universality Stackhouse deduces the absoluteness of the moral law: 'The notion of an absolute also means that we can seek to discern which standards are trans-cultural and trans-national, as well as trans-legal, because at some level of consciousness we know them to be true and real. [...] This term 'absolute' thus implies a certain stability of moral principle that cannot be brought to an end by changing historical circumstance or conditions. [...] Such laws are 'written on the heart' of all' (ibid., 181). From absoluteness and universality results the normative validity of the moral law, as it contains the vision of eternal truth for all people and therefore serves as the basis of a global ethics (Stackhouse 1991b, 256; Stackhouse 2007, 167). In intercultural and inter-religious contexts Stackhouse considers human rights to be the best way to speak about moral law (Stackhouse 1983, 3B; Stackhouse 1999b, 27).

Stackhouse emphasizes the Christian grounding of his view: 'This pointing toward a universal moral law with a divine source that we almost know and to which we can appeal when all earthly appeals are exhausted is an indispensable factor in forming human character and civil society' (Stackhouse 2007, 61). Theologically speaking, the universality of moral law is based on God and therefore contains binding conclusions about God's law and its consequences (Stackhouse 1984, 65; Stackhouse 1985, 13; Stackhouse 1987, 28). Following Kuyper's description of a *sensus divinitatis*, Stackhouse affirms that people on the basis of all religions agree about the existence of such principles (Stackhouse 2007, 126, 172, 242).

Based on these epistemic premises, Stackhouse can face the challenges of globalization, which 'bring with them new demands for intercontextual definitions of justice, fresh patterns of cross-cultural cooperation and mutuality, and more universalistic modes of interaction than previous interpretations thought were possible' (Stackhouse 1995b, 39). Thanks to common grace, shared moral insights are possible and allow the ethical integration of a global civil society.

3.3. Stackhouse deduces the universality of theology and church from common grace (institutional dimension)

Thirdly, Stackhouse describes the importance of common grace in its institutional dimension¹⁸. The increased importance of the church is due to its similarity to globalization:

¹⁷ Often Stackhouse refers to human rights in this regard. Cf. e.g. Stackhouse (2004b), 283.

¹⁸ For a detailed analysis of this institutional connection of common and particular grace in Kuyper's theology, see Zuidema (1972), 76-79.

intercontextual and interreligious encounters and entanglements are not new to the church, but rather the universal frame forms its horizon from the very beginning (Stackhouse 1991b, 247). Christianity is not structured territorially, for its universalistic concerns defy ultimate loyalty to the nation state (Stackhouse 1987, 108)¹⁹. From this perspective globalization echoes the universality of the theological message and the catholicity of the church: 'Not only does the very idea of one universal God, of a "theology" based on a valid knowledge of that universal reality demand attention to the largest possible vision of reality, but our very context demands genuinely ecumenical orientations in faith and ethics' (Stackhouse 1988, 21).

Stackhouse therefore proclaims with the Catholic theologian R. Schreiter a 'new catholicity' of theology, as the church and theology need to rediscover their own catholicity (Stackhouse 2000c, 23, 29; Schreiter 1997). Therefore, globalization should be taken into consideration as an issue of the global ecumenical church (Stackhouse 2007, 228; Stackhouse 1994, 118). Since many ethical challenges today are embedded in globalization processes, Stackhouse concludes: 'That [dynamics of globalization] demands a theology that can illuminate, address, and frame the emerging global ethos where it needs regrounding on a universalistic basis. Our situation requires a constructive, catholic, ecumenical theology with an evangelical, reforming, apologetic edge, and perhaps more than a touch of Pentecostal zeal' (Stackhouse 2010, 418). This convergence of the context of present-day theologians and the context of the Gospel constitutes the responsibility of theology for a globally-oriented ethics. Therefore he repeatedly quotes Kuyper's famous dictum: 'The Church of Christ is not national but ecumenical. Not one single state but the world is its domain' (Kuyper 1932, 107).

In this context also the implicit function of the church needs to be reinterpreted based on a deeper understanding of its global mission: 'There is also the possibility that we will enter a new era of theological renewal and ecumenical interaction. [...] It is possible that this will give rise to a new missionary outreach to all humans and for human rights in all societies' (Stackhouse 1984b, 281). Christianity as a missionary religion aims for conversion understood as a change of existence through an intervention of God (Stackhouse 2007, 202). It is usually understood as an individual phenomenon, but for Stackhouse it also contains conversion towards a new moral and social frame of reference: new identity in Christ leads to new social structures which alter civil society, what Stackhouse calls a second or social conversion (Stackhouse 1991b, 248; Stackhouse 2007, 203-207). Mission must therefore be understood as an individual and social event whereby the shaping of society is recognized as part of *the Missio Dei*. Under the headline 'Thus, Globalization as Mission', Stackhouse says: 'Indeed, globalization fed by these developments may well be the new form of missions, a mandate for our time to invite all the peoples of the world to become participants in a global civil society that is marked by the empowerment of the people in these ways' (Stackhouse 2007, 246).

4. Thesis: Stackhouse's understanding of common grace leads to an unbalanced perception of globalization – not only on empirical but also on theological reasons

¹⁹ Stackhouse (1987, 75-81) points to the relation of globalization and the ecumenical movement.

Stackhouse's affirmative interpretation of globalization based on common grace evoked and evokes ongoing critique,²⁰ although one has to consider that Stackhouse is a child of his own time of theological formation in the fifties and sixties, in which a quite optimistic view of improvement of the world was part of the American soul. Critics mostly focus on Stackhouse's lack of empirical analysis. In his analyses, Stackhouse refers to a variety of contemporary American sociological theories on globalization. Given the scale of the debates in the social sciences on globalization phenomena, his analyses cannot be classified and discussed here. The debates in his time, much less the current state of relevant research, comprise too large a field to canvass here.

As I showed, his selective perception of empirical analysis is deeply rooted in his theological interest. This leads not only to a methodological problem of public theology, which I cannot discuss here,²¹ but also highlights a genuine dogmatic problem in Stackhouse's theology, which consists in the relation of general and special grace²². Stackhouse notes that both are distinguished in Scripture without determining this distinction or their assignment in detail (Stackhouse 1995a, 20).

Stackhouse mostly reflects on globalization based on his understanding of common grace. Very seldom does he point to the necessity of the light of special grace or grace of salvation, i.e. Christology and the future dimension of eschatology (*futurische Eschatologie*): 'Globalization, theologically seen, may be faith-based and grace-full, but its very openness can allow opportunities to deplete its own best resources, and it repeatedly reveals that, on its own, it does not and cannot finally overcome sin and death. The very best principalities and authorities of the emerging global civil society need salvation' (Stackhouse 2007, 198). He claims that the need these processes have for salvation has to be considered in the light of the future dimension of eschatology:

Globalization is neither the Kingdom of God nor the New Jerusalem, but the dynamics and patterns of globalization that manifest the effects of Christ's inauguration of the Kingdom, and that depend on the historic influences on social history by movements that structured institutions able to channel life toward a future of a complex, inclusive cosmopolitan civilization, are present in globalization. (ibid., 228)

Despite this emphasis on special grace, Stackhouse rarely considers special grace in his interpretation of globalization processes. The importance of the common grace of creation can be discerned through his whole interpretation of globalization. Given the high

²⁰ For references and a detailed analysis see van Oorschot (2014), 210-234.

²¹ While Stackhouse claims that public theology begins with empirical analysis of the present situation and then moves on to theological interpretation, his portrayal of globalization tends to follow theological interest rather than sociological data. Lombard criticizes this point very sharply: 'Somewhere in his approach, Stackhouse as the editor of this magnificent construct, 'underpinning' globalisation theologically so extremely positively, seems to have a dangerous blind spot, leading to serious over-simplification.' (Lombard 2010, 218) For similar claims on public theological methods, see Bedford-Strohm (2006); Bedford-Strohm (2008); Benne (1995), 4; Marty (1974); Thiemann (1991), 19; Vögele (1994), 422.

²² Despite the common translation of Kuyper's *partikuliere gratie* as *particular grace* Stackhouse uses the term *special grace*. This leads to the question whether Stackhouse – in contrast to Kuyper – understands common grace as a somehow non-special, unspecified grace. As Stackhouse uses *gratia communis*, natural law and common revelation as exchangeable terms and does not carefully distinguish the different meanings, the contrast to special grace cannot be defined specifically. Cf. footnote 16 and van Oorschot (2014), 113-118.

importance of common grace, especially in its epistemic dimension, it is not surprising that the doctrine of sin is given little treatment. Moreover, even though Stackhouse grants the destructive power of sin, his doctrine of providence immediately limits and weakens that concession. The importance of common grace and the marginal importance of the doctrine of sin in Stackhouse's interpretation of globalization remove the need for particular grace, i.e. the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ and eschatology. Classical elements of special grace, such as Christology and eschatology, are hardly considered.

Only once does Stackhouse explicitly describe his understanding of Christology. He emphasizes the importance of *Christus Victor*, which he describes as 'the good news of the triumph of the Godly powers of redemption' (Stackhouse 1996b, 66). He explains:

A more adequate Christology will not only focus on the crucified Christ, and thus on the suffering of the world, but on the powers of resurrection that lead to the empty cross. [...] The problems are not that people suffer, sin, and die. That the world has always known. It is that many do not know that something can triumph over suffering, sin and death. Ultimately that means that every good Christology will point to a life beyond this one, the promised Kingdom, the Heavenly City. (ibid.)

Christology should not only point out the failings of the world, but it must show their potential for transformation, which Stackhouse calls 'marks of holiness'²³. He describes the soteriological significance of Christ firstly in its historical dimension, i.e. in the incarnation, in the renewal of the covenant, and in Christ as *Logos*. Incarnation overcame the tension between transcendence and immanence and thus enables a providential shaping of history: 'The significance of the revelation of Jesus Christ is that the proper norms for historical discernment, for definition of the ethos are to be drawn from history and projected in a new constellation toward the *eschaton*, not from that which is over, behind, or under history' (Stackhouse 1966, 201). In Christ, God's covenant with the world was renewed, and Christ inaugurated his eschatological reign as Lord of the world (Stackhouse 1984a, 64; Stackhouse 2005b, 99; Stackhouse 2007, 188-191). Referring to the Gospel of John, Stackhouse emphasizes the significance of Jesus as *Logos*, which enables a renewal of wisdom, prophecy, priesthood, and kingship (Stackhouse 1987, 44; Stackhouse 2007, 191). In its individual dimension, the grace of salvation in Christ causes a new identity and a new relationship with God, which enables the formation of new social relations and new communities (Stackhouse 2000c, 35; Stackhouse 2007, 207-209). Concerning ethical abilities, i.e. ethical judgment and the knowledge of moral good, Stackhouse equates natural law and the law of Christ as *Logos*: since the ontological and ethical order of the world can be discerned by all men through reason, there is no tension between common and particular grace (Stackhouse 1984a, 65; Stackhouse 2007, 170, 197). This is also evident in his Federal theology (Stackhouse 2007, 166). Regarding his ethical hermeneutics, Stackhouse's understanding of the "effects" of Christology can also be described as effects of common grace. Therefore, the distinction between common grace and special grace collapses. This convergence of common grace and Christology results from a reading of Kuyper wherein

²³ He concludes: 'The prophetic challenges of our times are not those of protest, resistance, and negation; but those of holy reformation, reconstruction, and revisioning among the people who live in the midst of these changes.' (Stackhouse 1996b, 67)

both common grace and special grace are rooted in Christ²⁴. This leads to an imbalanced understanding of the common and special soteriological dimension of God's work.

Similarly, the consequences of the future dimension of eschatology for ethical hermeneutics remain untreated²⁵. Although the eschatological vision of the Kingdom of God serves as an interpreting model of historical processes, its most important contribution lies in the identification of divine action in today's society (Stackhouse 1972, 61-67, 141). This approach focuses on the demonstration of inherent providential structures and neglects future eschatological fulfillment, which needs to be considered as a *krisis* or judgment. Thus, while the intrinsic normativity of the Christian ethos is formed, the critical corrective of eschatological hope fades into the background.

As far as I can see, four dangers arise out of this approach. First, theological interpretation degenerates into mere affirmation of the status quo with no potential for criticism. The critical hermeneutical perspective provided by genuine theological loci, like sin, the cross, etc., remains blocked. This raises the question of whether Stackhouse's aim in interpreting today's society from an external Christian focal point in opposition to empirical analysis can actually be achieved, since the critical perspective of special grace – of the eschatological *krisis* and the need of all human action for salvation – almost entirely disappears. Secondly, Stackhouse is in danger of absolutizing his own position without a mature doctrine of particular grace. Stackhouse bases ethics on common grace, describing ethics as a normative, universal, and apologetic reflection. In my view, this tends to remove the possibility of criticism. Given his theologically motivated selection of empirical analysis and the priority of his own context, the risk of confusing sociological analysis and theological interpretation is greatly enhanced. Thirdly, the specific profile of Christian ethics will hardly be recognized if particular grace is not taken into account. Due to the subordination of Christology to common grace, ethics loses some of its distinctively Christian and theological substance. This is reinforced by and related to Stackhouse's doctrine of God itself: although the doctrine of the Trinity is mentioned as one of the motifs of public theology, it does not play a large role in his theological interpretation of globalization. Similarly, the missing pneumatological considerations deepen the question of the specifically Trinitarian character of his theology. Fourthly, the missing eschatological considerations lead to immodest theological reasoning: every theological interpretation of history is only an attempt to identify divine action in history, which is subject to mistakes and human limitations and will be recognizable only in retrospect.

5. Thesis: Public theology – especially when it focuses on the highly diverse issues of globalization – needs an approach of “checks and balances” based on common and particular grace

Stackhouse's approach to globalization based on common grace is very linear – and therefore sees neither the diverse empirical processes merged under the term “globalization” nor the essential tension between common and particular grace. If

²⁴ Despite this convergence, Stackhouse does not describe an equation: rather, special grace forms the basis of and surpasses common grace (Stackhouse 2007, 150f). See for the debate on Kuyper regarding this relation e.g. Anderson (2003) 126, 136f.; Kaltwasser (2011) 200-203; Zuidema (1972), 73-79.

²⁵ For Kuyper's more differentiated understanding of particular grace and eschatology see Zuidema (1972), 62.

Stackhouse's distinction between creation, providence, and redemption is understood not as converging and affirmative forms of grace but as a critical hermeneutical triangle of "checks and balances", it might be made fruitful, since criticism could thus reduce bias. A critical-complementary synthesis of the different forms of grace can combine the strengths of Stackhouse's approach to common grace with the specifics of special grace. While creation and providence complement and interpret each other as parts of common grace, common grace and special grace limit each other. In relation to common grace, the grace of redemption, i.e. grace in Jesus Christ, the doctrine of sin, etc., allows for an enduring soteriological critique. It refers to the need for the constant revision of all human analysis and interpretation and considers failures and mistakes, even in grace-based processes. An eschatological perspective shows that any interpretation of history needs to be open to the ongoing critique of the *eschaton*.

This re-lecture of Stackhouse's theology of grace overcomes simplifications in the fields of history, providence, eschatology and Christology. It does not form a closed system but rather a combination of dynamic parts in mutual excitation, irritation, and correction. This approach enables a sophisticated interplay of theological traditions and approaches for theological interpretation of history, preventing binary attributions of common and particular grace to historical processes by its constructive tension. That way a theologically and empirically sober analysis and interpretation of globalization processes can be part of a seminal public theology.

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