

WRITINGS OF R B KUIPER

by R.B. Kuiper

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by R.B. Kuiper, compiled for study and devotional reading.

4 Chapters

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S. Scriptural Particularism

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S. Scriptural Particularism

Scriptural Particularism by R.B. Kuiper

R.B. Kuiper (1886-1966) taught theology at Westminster Theological Seminary for twenty years, served Calvin Theological Seminary as president for seven, and pastored churches for seventeen. He was the author of nine books and innumerable articles. This particular article is taken from his book, *For Whom Did Christ Die? A Study of the Divine Design of the Atonement* (Baker: Grand Rapids, MI, 1959). The particularist view of the divine design of the atonement was taught by such great theologians and preachers, among others, as Augustine, Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Jonathan Edwards, Whitefield, Spurgeon, Charles Hodge, Archibald Alexander Hodge, Caspar Wistar Hodge, Thornwell, Kuiper, Bavinck, Warfield and Machen. It was upheld over against Arminianism by the Synod of Dort, which was constituted by representatives of most of the Reformed churches in Europe, and it is taught in all the Reformed creeds, notably in the greatest of them all, the Westminster Confession of Faith, as an essential element of that system of doctrine which is known as the Reformed faith. Today it is upheld by all consistently Reformed theologians and by those churches which are Reformed or Presbyterian not only in name but in reality.

Briefly stated, the particularist view of the divine design of the atonement is that God purposed by the atonement to save only the elect and that consequently all the elect, and they alone, are saved. Says the Westminster Confession: "As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in time in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved but the elect only."¹ Again it says: "The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same."² The Canons of Dort teach: "This was the sovereign counsel and most gracious will of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation: that is, it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation and language all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to Him by the Father; that He should confirm upon them faith, which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them, free from spot and blemish, to the enjoyment of glory in his own presence forever."³ In this

chapter that doctrine will be set forth primarily and positively in the light of the Word of God and incidentally by way of comparison with both unrestricted and inconsistent universalism. It will be argued that the glory of the Reformed doctrine of the divine design of the atonement is twofold. It does justice to all the Scriptural data bearing on the subject and, in doing that, it highly exalts the intrinsic value of the atonement. An elucidation of these claims is in order. The Word of God Honors the Particular Atonement

It was already shown that the particularistic view of the design of the atonement is in harmony with the universalistic passages of Holy Scripture. It remains to be shown that this view is expressly taught by Scripture. When an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph of Nazareth and told him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, that which was conceived in her being of the Holy Ghost, the angel added: "And she shall bring forth a son and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). In the allegory of the good shepherd Christ foretold that He would give and lay down His life for His sheep (John 10:11, John 10:15). Speaking to His disciples and referring to them He said: "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Paul declared to the Ephesian elders that Christ purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28), and he reminded all the believers at Ephesus that Christ "loved the church and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). And when Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome that God "spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all" (Romans 8:32), he was referring, according to both the immediately preceding and the immediately following context specifically to the elect. All of the statements just quoted are explicit in character. In another passage Christ teaches by inescapable implication that He gave His life for none other than those whom the Father had given Him. In His high-priestly prayer He said: "I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me" (John 17:9). Indisputably Christ's sacrificial work and His intercessory work are both priestly activities and therefore simply two aspects of His atoning work. Therefore the scope of the one cannot be wider than the scope of the other. If Christ prayed exclusively for those whom the Father had given Him, He also bought only these with His blood.

Both unrestricted universalism and inconsistent universalism deny certain unequivocal teachings of Scripture. For example, the former denies the plain Scriptural teaching of the eternal punishment of the wicked, and the latter denies, whether admittedly or unadmittedly, the equally plain Scriptural teaching of the sure efficacy of the divine purposes. These views stand or fall with those denials. No such thing can be said of particularism. In order to maintain itself it does not need to deny any truth of Scripture. Positively expressed, the particularistic view of the design of the atonement fits perfectly into the system of doctrine contained in Holy Writ. Reference to a few of the outstanding teachings of Scripture will illustrate that fact. The particularistic view of the design of the atonement does full justice to the sovereignty of God. God's purposes cannot be thwarted by man. God's plans are not contingent on the consent of man. God's counsel is sure to stand and He is certain to do all His pleasure. Therefore all those whom He designed to save by the death of His Son will be saved, not one excepted. Those whom God designed to save and those who will be saved are identical. Speaking of God's purpose to save the elect by the blood of the cross, the Canons of Dort assert: "This purpose proceeding from everlasting love toward the elect, has from the beginning of the world to this day been powerfully accomplished, and will henceforth continue to be accomplished, notwithstanding all the ineffectual opposition of the gates of hell."⁴ The particularistic view of the design of the atonement harmonizes perfectly with the

Scriptural teaching of the covenant of redemption. From eternity the persons of the Holy Trinity planned the salvation of a multitude whom no man can number. An essential element in that plan was the giving by the Father to the Son of all who ultimately would be saved. Repeatedly the Saviour spoke of those whom the Father had given Him. In His high-priestly prayer He distinguished sharply between them and the world and clearly identified them with the heirs of eternal life. Said He: "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name; those whom thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, save the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled" (John 17:6, John 17:9, John 17:11, John 17:12). At this point Calvin comments: "Judas is excepted, and not without reason; for, though he was not one of the elect and of the true flock of God, yet the dignity of his office gave him the appearance of it; and, indeed, no one would have formed a different opinion of him, so long as he held that exalted office." He substantiates this comment with the fact that Judas is here called "the son of perdition." "By these words," says Calvin, "Christ means that his ruin, which took place suddenly before the eyes of men, had been known to God long before; for the son of perdition, according to the Hebrew idiom, denotes a man who is ruined, or devoted to destruction."⁵ That Calvin's point is well taken appears from the unmistakable and most emphatic teaching of Christ elsewhere that not one of those whom the Father has given Him can possibly perish. Speaking of the sheep for whom He would give His life, the Saviour said: "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 12:28, John 12:29). Again the Saviour declared: "This is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (John 6:39). The Son as the Servant of Jehovah (Isaiah 53:11) was commissioned by the Father to bear the iniquities of those whom the Father had given Him, to lay down His life for them, and to accomplish fully for them the work of salvation which the Father had given Him to do (John 10:18; John 17:4). The particularistic view of the design of the atonement is a necessary corollary of the Scriptural doctrine of election. If God chose out of the lost race of humanity certain persons in Christ before the foundation of the world and predestined them unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself (Ephesians 1:4, Ephesians 1:5), it cannot but follow that God designed that those whom He had chosen in Christ would be saved by Christ. In his Systematic Theology Charles Hedge brings the history of Christian doctrine strongly to bear on this point. Says he: "It never was denied that Christ died specially for the elect until the doctrine of election itself was rejected. Augustine, the follower and expounder of St. Paul, taught that God out of his mere good pleasure had elected some to everlasting life, and held that Christ came into the world to suffer and die for their salvation. He purchased them with his own precious blood. The Semi-Pelagians, in denying the doctrine of election, of course denied that Christ's death had more reference to one class of men than to another. The Latin Church, so long as it held to the Augustinian doctrine of election, held also to Augustine's doctrine concerning the design and objects of Christ's death. All through the Middle Ages this was one of the distinctive doctrines of those who resisted the progress of the Semi-Pelagian party in the Western Church. At the time of the Reformation the Lutherans, so long as they held to the one doctrine held also to the other. The Reformed, in holding fast the doctrine of election, remained faithful to their denial of the doctrine

that the work of Christ had equal reference to all mankind. It was not until the Remonstrants in Holland, under the teaching of Arminius, rejected the Church doctrine of original sin, of the inability of fallen man to anything spiritually good, the sovereignty of God in election and the perseverance of the saints, that the doctrine that the atonement had a special reference to the people of God was rejected. It is, therefore, a matter of history that the doctrine of election and the Augustinian doctrine as to the design of the work of Christ have been inseparably united.” Hodge goes on to say: “As this connection is historical, so also is it logical. The one doctrine necessarily involves the other. If God from eternity determined to save one portion of the human race and not another, it seems to be a ‘contradiction to say that the plan of salvation had equal reference to both portions; that the Father sent his Son to die for those whom He had predetermined not to save, as truly as, and in the same sense that He gave Him up for those whom He had chosen to make the heirs of salvation.”⁶ The particularistic view of the design of the atonement is in perfect agreement with the Scriptural teaching of the special love of God. Occasionally one hears it said by Calvinists that God is good and benevolent to all the children of men but that He loves only the elect. According to Scripture, however, it may be said without the slightest hesitation that God loves all men. Did not Jesus say: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:44, Matthew 5:45, Matthew 5:48)? But what Scripture does not teach is that God loves all men equally. On the contrary, it tells us that His love for the elect differs qualitatively from His love for others. Now it is to “that peculiar, mysterious, sovereign, immeasurable love which passes knowledge, of which his own people, the Church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven, are the objects”⁷ that the gift of Christ as Redeemer is time and again referred. “Greater love hath no man,” said Jesus, “than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). “God commendeth his love toward us,” said Paul, “in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Speaking specifically of the elect, the same apostle said: “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” And in almost the next breath he exclaimed: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Romans 8:32, Romans 8:35) The apostle of love said: “Hereby perceive we the love of God because he laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16), and “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). The particularistic view of the design of the atonement is an integral part of that teaching which constitutes the very heart of special revelation — salvation by grace. The five points of Calvinism are often ridiculed as expressions of the narrowest kind of dogmatism. The truth is that they are nothing else than an undiluted presentation of the precious Scriptural doctrine of salvation by grace. Nothing is taught more emphatically in Holy Writ than that salvation is by the grace of God and by it alone. And yet there is no doctrine of Scripture which the church in the course of its history has found more difficult to maintain. Always there were influential leaders in the church who in one way or another sought to compromise this doctrine, and times without number the church gave heed to their siren songs. But beyond all doubt salvation by grace is the teaching of Isaiah, of Jesus, of Paul, of Peter, of the whole of Scripture. When the early church lost sight of it, Augustine rediscovered it. When the church of the Middle Ages lost sight of it, Luther and Calvin rediscovered it. When the churches of the Reformation were sorely tempted by Arminianism to depart from it, the Synod of Dort and the Westminster Assembly again confirmed it. And when

more recently several Reformed and Presbyterian churches relegated it to the limbus of outdated and outmoded dogmas, God raised up such men as the Hodges, James H. Thornwell, Benjamin B. Warfield, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Bavinck, not merely to defend it, but to exalt it. The doctrine of salvation by grace is the heart not only of Calvinism, but of Scripture and of Christianity. With it Christianity stands or falls. Every departure from it, no matter how small, is a departure from Christianity. Next to the Bible itself the clearest and purest expression of this doctrine is found in the five points of Calvinism. And they are just so many links of a chain, dependent on one another and supporting one another. God in His sovereign good pleasure from eternity elected certain persons in Christ to everlasting life. By nature the elect, like all other men, are totally depraved sinners who cannot save themselves. In order to save the elect God sent His Son into the world to purchase redemption for them by His precious blood and perfect obedience. By the atonement Christ merited for the elect the Holy Spirit, who effectually regenerates them and works the gift of saving faith in their hearts. That God's chosen, whom Christ has redeemed and to whom the Holy Spirit has applied redemption, should perish is entirely out of the question. Those are the five points of Calvinism. Together they constitute one doctrine — that of salvation by sovereign grace. The Particular Atonement Exalts the Saving Work of Christ The glory of the particularistic doctrine of the divine design of the atonement lies in its consistently Scriptural character. Small wonder that its glory also lies in its exaltation of the value of the atonement. For the value which Scripture ascribes to the atonement is high indeed.

Inconsistent universalism, like unrestricted universalism, seeks to convey the impression that it exalts the atonement far more than does Calvinism. It boasts of having an atonement for all while Calvinism is said to have an atonement for some only. It glories in a universal, a limitless, atonement in contrast with the limited atonement of the Reformed faith. But such boasting and glorying are vain. The notion is prevalent that, while according to inconsistent universalism a great many will be saved, according to Calvinism few will enter through the gates into the eternal city. But that notion is absurd. According to both Calvinism and inconsistent universalism, whether represented by Barth or by Arminianism, all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved and no others. On this point there is no difference. No less absurd is the charge, sometimes brought against Calvinism, that it teaches by implication, if not explicitly, that a truly repentant sinner may fail of salvation because he does not happen to be numbered among the elect, whose redemption Christ purchased on Calvary. It goes altogether without saying that all the elect, and only the elect, will truly repent of their sins and seek salvation in Christ, for repentance is a fruit of election as well as a benefit of the atonement. And it is the unqualified teaching of Calvinism that genuine repentance never comes too late. The Saviour's assurance, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37) is a favorite text with Calvinistic preachers. The Calvinist rejoices in the Biblical attestation that, when all the elect shall have been gathered in, they will constitute a throng which no man can number and which will be as countless as the grains of sand on the seashore and as the stars that sparkle in the black-blue firmament of night. Says Shedd in his Dogmatic Theology: "In saying that Christ's atonement is limited in its application . . . it is meant that the number of persons to whom it is effectually applied is a fixed and definite number. The notion of definiteness, not of smallness, is intended The circle of election and redemption must indeed be a circumference, but not necessarily a small one. No man is redeemed outside of the circle. All the sheep must be within the fold. But the circle is that of the heavens, not of the earth."⁸ In his sermon, already referred to, on 2 Corinthians 5:14, 2 Corinthians 5:15, Machen calls

attention in his own inimitably tender way to the comforting character of the Reformed doctrine of the design of the atonement and contrasts it with the gloominess of the teaching of Arminianism on the same subject. He begins: "People say that Calvinism is a dour, hard creed. How broad and comforting, they say, is the doctrine of a universal atonement, the doctrine that Christ died equally for all men there upon the cross! How narrow and harsh, they say, is this Calvinistic doctrine — one of the 'five points' of Calvinism — this doctrine of the 'limited atonement,' this doctrine that Christ died for the elect of God in a sense in which He did not die for the unsaved!" He continues: "But do you know, my friends, it is surprising that men say that. It is surprising that they regard the doctrine of a universal atonement as being a comforting doctrine. In reality it is a very gloomy doctrine indeed . . . Ah, if it were only a doctrine of a universal salvation, instead of a doctrine of a universal atonement, then it would no doubt be a very comforting doctrine; then no doubt it would conform wonderfully well to what we in our puny wisdom might have thought the course of the world should have been. But a universal atonement without a universal salvation is a cold, gloomy doctrine indeed. To say that Christ died for all men alike and that then not all men are saved, to say that Christ died for humanity simply in the mass, and that the choice of those who out of that mass are saved depends upon the greater receptivity of some as compared with others — that is a doctrine that takes from the gospel much of its sweetness and much of its joy. From the cold universalism of that Arminian creed we turn ever again with a new thankfulness to the warm and tender individualism of our Reformed Faith, which we believe to be in accord with God's holy Word. Thank God we can say every one, as we contemplate Christ upon the Cross, not just: 'He died for the mass of humanity, and how glad I am that I am amid that mass,' but: 'He loved me and gave Himself for me; my name was written from all eternity upon His heart, and when He hung and suffered there on the Cross He thought of me, even me, as one for whom in His grace He was willing to die.'"9

Calvinism does indeed hold that the number of those whom God designed to save by the death of His Son is limited, but it does not limit the intrinsic value of the atonement. This is a fact of the greatest moment. Inconsistent universalism seriously restricts the efficacy of the atonement. Arminianism teaches that the atonement does no more than make salvation possible; and, as was already pointed out, by unashamedly making the realization of salvation contingent on the will of man, it teaches in effect that the atonement makes salvation an unrealizable possibility. Calvinism, on the contrary, insists that the atonement actually saves all whom it was intended to save. Their doctrine of the divine design of the atonement being what it is, neither the Arminian nor Barth can take that position without concluding that all men will be saved. Therefore the evangelical Arminian rejects that position without hesitation. And Barth, leaning heavily toward unqualified universalism and yet not ready to embrace it, cannot accept that position. The conclusion is inescapable that of the three only the Calvinist teaches a truly effective atonement.

What does Calvinism mean when it insists that the atonement actually saves? By His passive obedience, that is to say, by His obedience manifest in His suffering,¹⁰ particularly in His death on the cross, Christ fully atoned for the sins of the elect; consequently there is no condemnation for them, nor will there be in the future. Not only that, but by His active obedience, His life in perfect harmony with the law of God, He merited for the elect the positive benefit of eternal life. Thus by His passive and active obedience, which are inseparable and together may be said to constitute the atonement, Christ wrought full salvation for the elect. It must not be thought, however, that the

elect are saved automatically. In bringing them to salvation God deals with them, not as so many things, but as rational and moral beings; that is, as free agents. Therefore He requires of them faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. However, the atonement guarantees that they will receive the gift of faith. Such ethical benefits of salvation as regeneration and faith are fruits of the atonement as well as is the forensic benefit of justification. In other words, by the atonement Christ merited for the elect the Holy Spirit, who imparts to them the new birth and saving faith. Still further, also the ethical benefits of sanctification and perseverance are guaranteed by the atonement and flow directly from it as their fountainhead. The same is true of ultimate glorification. All that is implied in the Pauline asseveration: "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:30, Romans 8:32). The expression "all things" does not embrace everything in the universe but, in harmony with the context, "the whole of what He has to bestow in accordance with the aim of the surrender of Jesus, . . . the collective saving blessings of His love shown to us in Christ."¹¹ In brief, the atonement not only renders the salvation of all the elect completely certain, but the realization of their salvation in all its parts was procured by the atonement. Says the Westminster Larger Catechism: "Christ, by his mediation, hath procured redemption, with all other benefits of the covenant of grace."¹²

Commenting on the statement by Arminian Henry C. Sheldon of Boston University: "Our contention is for the universality of the opportunity of salvation, as against an exclusive and unconditional choice of individuals to eternal life,"¹³ Warfield remarks: "There is to be noted in this declaration, 1) the conscious stress on universalism as the characteristic note of Wesleyanism and 2) the consequent recognition that all that God does looking toward salvation is to afford an opportunity of salvation; so that what is actually contended for is not that God does not save some only but that he really saves none, — he only opens a way of salvation to all and if any are saved they must save themselves. So inevitable is it that, if we assert that all that God does looking to salvation he does to and for all alike and yet that not all are saved, we make all that he does fall short of actual salvation: no one must receive more than he who receives the least."¹⁴ In sharp contrast with that view of the design of the atonement stands the Reformed view that God by the atonement designed to save and actually does save all who ultimately are saved. In reference to the popular notion that all men are entitled to "an equal chance" at salvation, Warfield says: "Shall we not fix it once for all in our minds that salvation is the right of no man; that a 'chance' to save himself is no 'chance' of salvation for any; and that, if any of the sinful race of man is saved, it must be by a miracle of almighty grace, on which he has no claim, and, contemplating which as a fact, he can only be filled with wondering adoration of the marvels of the inexplicable love of God?"¹⁵ That miracle of almighty grace is the atonement. The same scholarly divine draws the line of demarcation between Calvinism and Arminianism sharply when he asserts: "The issue is indeed a fundamental one and it is closely drawn. Is it God the Lord that saves us, or is it we ourselves? And does God the Lord save us, or does he merely open the way of salvation, and leave it, according to our choice, to walk in it or not? The parting of the ways is the old parting of the ways between Christianity and autosoterism. Certainly only he can claim to be evangelical who with full consciousness rests entirely and directly on God and on God alone for his salvation."¹⁶ According to the particularistic view of the design of the atonement, the atonement not merely makes salvation possible but actual; and that is another way of saying that the sinner is not saved by

himself but by God, and by God alone. That is Calvinism not only, but that is of the very essence of Christianity. Arminian universalism is a departure, and a serious one, from Christianity. Particularism is consistent Christianity. In the foregoing paragraphs the particular design of the atonement was contrasted primarily with Arminian universalism. There was good reason for so doing, for historically the Reformed doctrine of the design of the atonement acquired its most precise formulation in the crucible of the Arminian controversy in Holland. Not everything that was said is applicable to Barthian universalism. For instance, the charge of “autosoterism” does not apply to Barthianism as it does to Arminianism. According to Arminianism saving faith is not a gift of God but an act of the free will of man of which even the unregenerate is capable. That makes man his own saviour. According to Barth faith is indeed a human act but, prior to that, a gift sovereignly bestowed by the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ Salvation, then, belongs to the Lord. At this precise point Barth subscribes to the Biblical doctrine of salvation by grace, and that, no doubt, is one reason for his speaking repeatedly of “the triumph of grace” in his theology. Yet the fact remains that Barthianism, like Arminianism, does violence to the sovereign love and the loving sovereignty of God manifest in the atonement, by withholding assent to the proposition that the atonement saves all without exception whom God purposed to save by it. That, too, is a significant departure from the Reformed faith and, it must be said, from Christianity. Nor may it be forgotten that in important respects Barth departs much farther from the Scriptural doctrine of the atonement than does evangelical Arminianism. Beyond all doubt, evangelical Arminianism teaches a vicarious atonement; whether the atonement according to Barth is vicarious in the historic sense of that term is, as was already pointed out, highly questionable. Evangelical Arminianism teaches that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross appeased the wrath of God against sin; Barth holds, as does theological liberalism, that God did not need to be, and was not, reconciled to sinners by the death of His Son, but they were reconciled to God. Evangelical Arminianism is completely certain that not all men will be saved and therefore it definitely rejects unqualified universalism; Barth has strong leanings toward unqualified universalism and admits with reluctance that some will be lost. And Barth’s rejection of the Arminian error of foreseen faith as the ground of election does not prove that he holds a higher view of election than does Arminianism. In a most important respect his view is lower. For, although according to both Barth and Arminianism not all will be saved whom God designed to save by the death of His Son, yet Arminianism insists that all whom God predestined to eternal life will be saved, and to that position Barth does not hold consistently. In other words, historic Arminianism teaches an election which is not universal but unalterable; Barth teaches an election which is universal but not unalterable. Here Arminianism is on Scriptural ground, Barth is not.

Notes

1. III, 6.
2. VIII, 5, 8.
3. Second Head of Doctrine, 8.
4. Second Head of Doctrine, 9.
5. Commentary on the Gospel according to John, loc. cit.
6. II. 547f.

7. Ibid., II, 549.

8. II, 474.

9. God Transcendent and Other Sermons, p. 136.

10. When theologians describe Christ's obedience manifest in His suffering as "passive," they have in mind the Latin *pati*, to suffer, and do not mean to convey the thought that in His suffering Christ was merely acted upon and was not active. He was active in His very death, for He "laid down His life" (1 John 3:16).

11. Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament, loc. cit.

12. Question 57.

13. System of Christian Doctrine, 1903, p. 417.

14. The Plan of Salvation, p. 99.

15. Ibid., pp. 101f.

16. Ibid., p. 108.

17. Die Kirchliche Dogmatik, IV, I, 826ff.

S. THE CHURCH AND THE TRUTH

THE CHURCH AND THE TRUTH

R.B. Kuiper In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* John Calvin teaches that the first and foremost mark of the true church is faithfulness to the Word of God. Adherents of the Reformed faith have ever taken the same position. If that position is correct, the relationship of the church to the truth of God's special revelation must of necessity be exceedingly close. As a matter of fact it is so close that to do full justice to it is next to impossible. The following paragraphs will indicate that relationship from a few of its many angles.

PRODUCT OF THE TRUTH The church was brought into being by the revelation of truth. When man fell into sin in the garden of Eden, God at once appeared on the scene. He pronounced judgment on the man and the woman as well as the serpent. But He also gave to fallen humanity a promise which has come to be known as the *protevangelium*, the first announcement of the gospel. Said God to the serpent: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). That promise spoke of the victory of Christ crucified over Satan, sin and the world. It may be taken for granted that Adam and Eve embraced it in faith. If so, they constituted the first Christian church, for the church consists of the believers of all ages. In the days of Abraham God established His church in a more formal way, and again He did it by the revelation of truth. His numerous revelations to Abraham culminated in the promise: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee" (Genesis 17:7). Abraham believed and became "the father of all them that believe" (Romans 4:11), whether of the old or the new dispensation. Collectively they constitute the church of God. The church in its New Testament aspect was founded when the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost. Numerous souls were added to the church from every part of the inhabited world. That also came to pass through the revelation of truth, particularly through the inspired preaching of the apostle Peter. From the fall of man to the end of time God builds His church. And His invariable method of doing it is by His Word of truth and the Spirit of truth. The Heidelberg Catechism says: "The Son of God, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers . . . to Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life" (Lord's Day XXI, Question 54).

Surely, the church is a product of the truth.

CONVEYOR OF THE TRUTH On rare occasions God has used angels to convey His truth to men. For instance, angels first proclaimed the Saviour's birth and His resurrection. Ordinarily, however, God has reserved this honor for human beings. The men whom God employed as conveyors of the truth in the old dispensation are commonly called prophets. It has been said aptly that their task was not so much to foretell as to forth-tell. God first spoke to them and then they told men what God had told them. They were God's messengers to men. Therefore they did not present their own opinions but declared authoritatively: "Thus saith the Lord." That expression or its equivalent

actually occurs hundreds of times in their writings. Peter tells us: "The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). The men through whom God conveyed His truth in the new dispensation are known as apostles. They were instructed in the truth by the Lord as they walked with Him during His public ministry. When He was about to leave, He promised them "another Comforter . . . even the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16, John 14:17). Controlled by this Spirit, they, too, proclaimed not their own wisdom but the wisdom of God. When the apostle Paul came on the scene as one born out of due season, he certified that the gospel which he preached was not after man and that he had not received it of man but was taught it by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11, Galatians 1:12). All the books of the New Testament were written either by the apostles themselves or by others under their guidance or influence. Not every one whom the Bible calls a prophet or an apostle was a true child of God. Balaam, for instance, was not, nor was Judas Iscariot. Nevertheless, the prophets and apostles by and large bore the closest relationship to the church of God. They were members of the church. They constituted the foundation of the church, and the foundation is an integral part of a building. By virtue of their office they represented the church. Therefore it may be asserted without hesitation that God has been pleased to employ His church as the conveyor of special revelation.

CUSTODIAN OF THE TRUTH To the church of the old dispensation "were committed the oracles of God" (Romans 3:2). Its task was the keeping, the guarding, the conserving of special revelation. That such is likewise the task of the church of the new dispensation is unmistakably explicit in Paul's description of the church as "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). The function of pillars is to uphold structures. One important function of the ground is to uphold numberless things. If the earth failed to perform that task, this planet would obviously be chaos. The function of the church as the pillar and ground of the truth is to uphold the truth.

There have been times in the history of the church when it took that task seriously. During the first centuries of the Christian era and again in the age of the Protestant Reformation the church was much more concerned about the truth than about its own immediate peace and prosperity. The truth was dearer to the hearts of men than were their possessions, their lives, even their wives and children. In comparison, how sad is the church's plight today! The cancer of doctrinal indifference is gnawing at its vitals. The insistent and wide-spread demand for church union and the truly tremendous emphasis on ecumenism are in many instances symptoms of that disease. And instead of casting out deniers of such cardinal Christian truths as the Holy Trinity, the deity of Christ and the substitutionary atonement, the church often bestows upon them its highest honors. Thus it has come to pass that in numerous instances the church, having ceased to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints, has ceased being the church. Will the church pass out of existence and the truth fail? No, never! The Spirit of truth will abide with and in the church forever (John 14:16). One denomination after another may become a false church, but there will always be a remnant according to the election of grace. The pillar and ground of the truth cannot be destroyed. Not even the gates of hell surpass it in strength. God Almighty Himself will see to it that His church continues to the end of time as custodian of the truth. Martin Luther was right when he sang: And though this world with devils filled Should threaten to undo us, We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us.

INTERPRETER OF THE TRUTH

Rome teaches that special revelation is not complete in the Bible and that it is the church's task and privilege to add to it. Therefore it places the teachings of the church on a par with — and sometimes above — Holy Scripture. It is as certain of the immaculate conception of the virgin Mary and her assumption into heaven, neither of which has the slightest basis in Scripture, as it is of the unmistakably Scriptural teachings of the virgin birth of Jesus and His ascension. The Protestant Reformers rejected this view of revelation as grievous heresy and insisted on the sufficiency of Scripture. At the same time they strongly stressed the duty of the church to interpret the Word of God. How right they were! In order that the church may rightly divide His Word, God has given to it the Spirit of truth.

Some Protestants of the Reformation age stressed the individual believer's right of private interpretation out of all proportion to the church's function of interpreting the Word of God. But most of the Reformers had the good sense, while insisting on the right of private interpretation, to hold high the honor of the church as divinely appointed interpreter of Holy Writ.

How the churches of the Reformation worked at that task! The energy displayed by them in its performance was truly prodigious. Numerous confessions and catechisms were the result. And almost all of them are masterpieces of Scripture interpretation.

Today there are a few Christians — very few in fact — who regard the creeds as practically sacrosanct and hesitate exceedingly either to add to them or to subtract from them. They overlook the fact that the church of all ages must continue active as interpreter of God's truth. All the creeds of Christendom put together do not nearly exhaust the truth of Holy Writ. Nor are they infallible. However, those who hold the creeds in contempt are far more numerous. They are also more vocal. Most modernists laugh the creeds out of court as outdated and outmoded products of "the pre-scientific age," while many fundamentalists keep repeating the vapid phrase "No creed but Christ." Both belittle, not only the church, but a most significant work which the Spirit of truth has accomplished through the church.

PROCLAIMER OF THE TRUTH The church has no more important task than that of preaching the Word of God.

Some would have the Word preached by individuals rather than the church. There have been in the past, and there are today, evangelists and other preachers so called who have never been ordained to the ministry or sent out by the church. That savors of unwholesome individualism. While no one has the right to say that God will not use the labors of such men, it may be asserted without hesitation that their position is far from ideal. Most assuredly, all Christians must witness for their Lord, but the preaching of the truth of special revelation is the official task of the church. For a bit of Scriptural proof, were not Paul and Barnabas sent out as missionaries by the church of Antioch with the laying on of hands, and did not that church send them out at the express command of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-3)?

How stupendous a task is preaching! Not only isolated portions of the Bible but "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) must be declared. Preaching involves both explanation and application of the Word of God. And the Word must be applied, not merely to the needs of the individual hearers, but to all those social problems that have a religious import. The truth of God must be proclaimed to all men: to those who are nigh and to those who are afar off, to rulers and subjects, to rich and poor,

to adults and children, to the learned and the ignorant, to the cultured and the uncultured, to the converted and the unconverted, to men of every race, nation and language. That stupendous task the exalted Christ has committed to His church. And on its performance hangs the salvation of the world.

* * * *

Much more might be said on our theme, but enough has been said to make it clear that the relationship of the church to the truth is exceedingly intimate. Some conclusions are now in order. The church that has grown indifferent to the truth is, to put it mildly, on its way out. And the church that knowingly tolerates in its midst denial of the basic truths of the Word of God is itself guilty of such denial and by that very token has ceased being a true church. A church with a large membership, an imposing edifice, an elaborate ceremonial, an efficient organization and dignified vestments, but without the truth, is not a church. On the other hand, a church with a numerically negligible membership, with no building other than a lean-to, with the simplest order of worship, with a minimum of organization and with no clerical vestments at all, is a church of Jesus Christ if only it is loyal to the truth. In this world, which under the spell of the liar from the beginning has become a dark den of falsehood and deception, there is one institution whose sole concern is to hold high the torch of God's special revelation. That distinction belongs to the Christian church.

S. Unity, Diversity, and Division

Unity, Diversity, and Division

R.B. Kuiper UNITY AND DIVERSITY

Some years ago Wendell Willkie wrote a best seller entitled *One World*. It was a plea for the harmonious co-operation of all nations. Mr. Willkie's aim was most laudable, but his book suffered from oversimplification and superficial optimism. He did not reckon sufficiently with the depravity of human nature in general nor with the ungodliness of Marxian Communism in particular. Today the world is exceedingly far from being one. Scripture tells us that it will not be one until God has established the new earth. The plight of the Christian church seems almost as sad as that of the world. To all appearances it, too, is a house divided against itself. It resembles a beautiful vase that, fallen from its perch, lies shattered in a thousand pieces. It is like a grand structure transformed by an exploding bomb into a tangled heap of wreckage.

ONE CHURCH Unbelievable though it may seem, the church of Jesus Christ is really one. This truth is presupposed in the Apostles' Creed, which makes mention of "a holy catholic church" in the singular and defines this church as "the" — the one and only — "communion of saints." To be sure, according to the same creed the church's unity is a matter of faith rather than sight, but that does not detract a whit from its reality. The Word of God teaches the unity of the church unmistakably, repeatedly and emphatically. It is no exaggeration to assert that this is one of the most outstanding teachings of the New Testament. It tells us, for instance, that the church has one Head (Ephesians 1:22), one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13), one foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11), one faith and one baptism (Ephesians 4:5), and that it is one body (1 Corinthians 12:12'). That being the case, the question arises why Jesus, in the seventeenth chapter of John's gospel, prayed for the unity of believers. Referring to the apostles, He said in the eleventh verse: "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are." And in the twenty-first verse, with the believers of succeeding ages in mind, He continued: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." Surely, if the unity of believers is a reality, it would seem superfluous to pray that it may come to pass.

Many present-day advocates of church union take it for granted that Jesus prayed in John seventeen for the organizational unity of His followers. Glibly they quote the Saviour's prayer for the unity of believers in support of the wholesale wiping out of denominational boundaries. But even he who runs may see that Jesus was thinking primarily of the spiritual unity of believers. He prayed that they might be one as He and the Father are one. No doubt, He also desired that this unity might become manifest, for He added: "That the world may believe that thou hast sent me"; but that in no way alters the fact that the unity for which He prayed was specifically spiritual.

Indisputably, the Lord prayed for the spiritual unity of His church. And so the question remains how this prayer may be reconciled with the fact that spiritually the church is one. A comparison may help discover the answer. The Christian is holy. Every Christian is a saint. It may even be said that

in principle he is perfect. And yet, how obvious that the very best Christian needs to grow in holiness and has a long way to go before he shall have attained the goal of perfection! In much the same way the spiritual unity of all who believe in Christ is indeed a present reality, but its fullest realization and the attainment of its highest degree lie in the future. The spiritual unity of the church is both real and to be realized. The fact remains that the church of God, far from being a tangled heap of wreckage, is even now God's own perfectly proportioned temple, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself as the chief cornerstone, in whom all the building is fitly framed together and all believers are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:20-22). God omniscient sees it thus. So does God's child with the eye of faith.

MANY FORMS That there is considerable variety among individual Christians and also among groups of Christians cannot be disputed. There is no good reason why anyone should care to dispute it. Uniformity among Christians is not necessarily a good. When carried to extremes, it becomes an evil. It can be shown that complete uniformity within the church would not enhance its beauty but rather detract from it.

Theologians often speak of the multiformity of the church. By and large they regard it as a good. However, few have stopped to define the term, and that has led to confusion. Sad to say, the term multiformity has even been used to cover a multitude of sins.

It has been made to include heresies. One instance may be cited. There are, no doubt, greater heresies than Arminianism. Pelagianism is far worse. But Arminianism, too, is error. Let no one say that the difference between the Reformed faith and Arminianism is merely one of emphasis, the former stressing the sovereignty of God, the latter the responsibility of man, and that therefore it is desirable that there be both Reformed churches and Arminian churches. Obviously, human responsibility is a corollary of divine sovereignty. Because God is sovereign, man is responsible to Him. Therefore, precisely because of its strong emphasis on divine sovereignty the Reformed faith stresses human responsibility strongly also. But Arminianism does violence to both. Not only does it encroach upon the absolute character of God's sovereignty, it also adjusts the demands of God's law to the enfeebled powers of man. Now all doctrinal error, Arminianism too, is sin. And to make sin look respectable by casting about it the cloak of multiformity is itself sin.

Again, the term multiformity has often been employed to excuse schism within the church. Schism is sinful division. To leave one denomination in order to found another is an extremely serious matter, and it may be done only for compelling reasons. When division occurs in the body of Christ on some insignificant issue as, for instance, whether leavened or unleavened bread should be used in the Lord's Supper, there is joy among the fallen angels. Multiformity and schism are by no means synonymous.

If churchmen could make up their minds to use the term multiformity only for permissible differences and not for sin, that would remove much misunderstanding and might well promote the unity of the church.

It is not difficult to think of permissible differences. In the interest of uniformity Rome has adopted one language, Latin, for its services of worship throughout the world; but surely there is room within the church of Christ for any number of languages. Three legitimate modes of baptism are

found within the church — immersion in water, pouring on of water and sprinkling with water. What does it matter whether a minister wears a Geneva gown, a Prince Albert, a cutaway coat with striped trousers, or just an ordinary suit of clothes in the pulpit? The Scotchman has the reputation of being stolid and usually there is something stolid about his worship, while the African is more emotional and this, too, is reflected in his mode of worship; but instead of finding fault with each other for this difference, they should hold one another in high esteem.

Such multiformity does not obscure the unity of Christ's church, but rather causes it to stand out the more boldly. Unity that comes to expression in uniformity may well be, and usually is, superficial. On the other hand, unity that constitutes the background of multiformity is necessarily deep. For us to be at one with those who are like us is easy; to be at one with those who are unlike us is possible only if a profound unity underlies surface differences. Cicero, pagan though he was, made the wise observation that love surpasses friendship in that, while friendship is esteem of one for another who agrees with him, love is esteem of one for another who differs from him. By the same token, diversity short of sin, instead of detracting from the glory of the church, enhances it. How much more beautiful is a building constructed of stones of different shapes and sizes than is a structure of blocks all of which look alike! As the human body derives its beauty from the variety of its members, so does the body of Christ. When love rises above uniformity and embraces multiformity, the greatest of Christian virtues comes to glorious expression.

UNITY AND DIVISION The spiritual unity of Christ's church is an undeniable reality. It is one body, even the mystical body of Christ.

Nothing can destroy this spiritual unity. Not even the apparently hopeless division of the church into almost countless sects and denominations destroys it. On the other hand, it must be admitted that the present division of the church does greatly obscure its unity. And that is a sad fact. It gives rise to the question whether the church is not in sacred duty bound to put forth a concerted effort to remedy this evil. In the main there are three attitudes to that question. They may be called extreme denominationalism, extreme unionism and realistic idealism.

EXTREME DENOMINATIONALISM A great many Christians are of the opinion that the spiritual unity of believers is the only thing that matters and that their organizational unity is of little or no account. Some go so far as to regard organizational disunity as a virtue rather than a vice. As might be expected, those of this persuasion do not hesitate to found new denominations for insufficient reasons. The Reverend Smith, let us say, cannot see that Scripture teaches the secret rapture of believers. Elder Jones is not only convinced that this tenet is Scriptural, but he makes it a hobby. His conscience will give him no rest unless he stirs up a rumpus. If the outcome is a split in the church, what of it? Briefly put, extreme denominationalism makes the blunder of identifying multiformity with denominationalism.

Perhaps the most striking manifestation of extreme denominationalism is the "undenominational" church. Its members will vow that they have no use for denominationalism, but the fact is that they would carry it to the nth degree, for they want every particular church, every single congregation, to be a denomination by and unto itself. That such denominationalism is far removed from the pattern of the apostolic church is evident. In the days of the apostles there were significant differences among believers in various localities, yet all particular churches were united in one Christian church, and denominations were entirely out of the question. The fifteenth chapter of

Acts tells us that certain problems which plagued the gentile churches were considered by the apostles, together with the elders of the mother-church at Jerusalem, and that their decisions were deemed binding on all the churches. It is a very far cry from the teaching of Acts fifteen to the undenominational church.

It is just as evident that extreme denominationalism puts the spiritual unity of the Christian church under an opaque bushel and thus detracts in no small measure from its glory. And that is really sinful. The conclusion is warranted that this attitude toward division within the church of Christ deserves unqualified condemnation.

EXTREME UNIONISM The opposite pole from extreme denominationalism is extreme unionism. It is advocated by the Roman Catholic Church and by most modernist churches of our day.

Rome takes the position, not merely that there ought to be but one church, but that there actually is but one church. That one church is the Roman church itself. All other churches so called are said to be utterly unworthy of that name. They should repent of their departure from the true church and return to it. The modernist plea for union, while hardly less urgent than the Roman plea, is differently motivated. Back of the latter plea lies the preposterous assumption that Rome has a monopoly on the truth; behind the modernist plea lurks the flippant notion that doctrinal differences among denominations are negligible, that doctrines, in fact, do not greatly matter. Indifference to truth is one of the most outstanding characteristics of the modernist ecumenical movement of our day. Forgetting theological dissension that is behind, the churches should merge, we are told, for a united campaign to do away with social injustice and to evangelize the world. The folly of that sort of reasoning is both great and obvious. According to the Word of God the church of Christ is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). The church is custodian and defender of the truth. It follows that the truth is far too great a price for the church to pay for organizational unity. If it should attain to perfect organizational unity at that price, it would only have succeeded in destroying itself. For the church is where the truth is, and the church which sells such truths as the deity of Christ and the satisfaction of divine justice by His sacrificial and substitutionary death on the cross has been transformed into a "synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 2:9).

More than one leader of the liberal ecumenical movement would unite the church of Christ by annihilating it.

Revelation 13:1-18 informs us that all that dwell upon the earth whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life will worship the beast that has risen out of the sea (Revelation 13:8). The fulfillment of that prophecy probably has several stages, but beyond all doubt the final stage will be the religious unification of practically the entire human race under Antichrist. That the vaunting, but compromising, ecumenism of our day is contributing to the hastening of that event, must be set down as a distinct possibility.

* * * *

Neither extreme denominationalism nor extreme unionism has a remedy for division within the church of Christ. The former has no interest in a remedy and would let the disease run wild. The latter offers a remedy that is more fatal by far than the disease. Must we conclude that there is no remedy? The answer of realistic idealism to that question remains to be presented. In the

meantime it must be remembered that the spiritual unity of Christ's church continues a reality. Existing division obscures the church's unity but does not destroy it. Extreme denominationalism accelerates division and thus obscures the church's unity more than ever, but cannot destroy it. Extreme unionism spells the destruction of the church, but will never be permitted actually to destroy either the church or its unity.

Christ Jesus, the glorious and omnipotent Head of the church, at the right hand of God, guarantees its continuity. With the continuity of the church itself is bound up the continuity of its unity. For unity is of the essence of the body of Christ.

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