



"Christ is all and in all"

When the Catechism speaks positively about the church, it points to the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, and to His work.

Its response to the question "*What do you believe about the church?*" is brief and to the point. It declares that the Son of God *does* something, namely, to gather and defend and preserve. By this activity alone the church comes into and continues in existence.¹

The intimate bond

Thus in speaking about the church, the confession concentrates all attention on Jesus Christ. Clearly and emphatically it proclaims: If you would know the church, you must direct your heart and thought entirely to Jesus Christ. Insofar as you know Christ, you know the church. Whoever does not know Christ also does not know the church. At the same time, whoever truly knows Christ also surely knows the church. According to this testimony the bond between Christ and the church is so intimate that Jesus does not exist without His church. And conversely, the church without Christ is an impossibility!

Jesus without the church — that is Satan's world. But the church without the life-sustaining fellowship with Christ — that is the Devil's chapel.

The new life

When now reflecting on Christ and His church, we must above all be aware that Jesus Christ was crucified, dead, buried, and resurrected for His church, His congregation. Upon Him descended the entire burden of God's eternal wrath. Although He neither knew nor committed sin He was made to be sin² for His church and so entered everlasting condemnation in its place. But thereafter He also arose for His own and so obtained full salvation for them.

Cross and resurrection — the saving-events on Golgotha and in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea — signify therefore the beginning, the dawn of a new dispensation, a new age. In them has come the new definitive humanity, the new definitive and final world. Since the cross and resurrection man and the world live in "*the last hour*."⁸ What the last day in God's created order shall produce is nothing less than the complete accomplishment, the "consummation" of what Jesus Christ has done and bestowed by means of His cross and resurrection.

Thus the church participates in all that Christ accomplished and obtained. Whatever He achieved and received from the Father as the "reward" of His labor He achieved and received as the substitute, the head of the church which is His body or "corpus." Together with Christ the church was crucified and dead. In Him it now has death behind its back. So too, in Christ it now shares in the new creation brought into being and concentrated in Him. God's congregation has been raised with Christ unto a new life. Peter writes that the congregation has been begotten again by the resurrection of Christ from the dead.⁴ In Christ the church already now is "seated" in heaven; its "life is hid with Him in God."

In and through Jesus Christ the church has entered into a new reconciled relationship to God. It has received in Him a new mode of existence, produced and preserved by the Spirit of Christ.⁵

A stubborn evil

In connection with the church's union with Christ and its involvement with His work there exists within a church a stubborn evil. By this evil "the treasures and gifts" which Christ has obtained and possesses for His own are abstracted from Him, set apart by themselves, and thus secularized. In this way forgiveness of sins, righteousness, regeneration, holiness, and the new life are regarded as gifts, realities, things which exist by themselves. They are viewed much like material gifts which people give to each other.

Such a conception of Christ's "treasures and gifts" is thoroughly deceitful and therefore destructive for the life of faith. According to Scripture the salvation which Christ has purchased for His own is inseparably bound up with His person. Salvation is in Him; it always remains in Him. Only "in Him," therefore, can believers receive and possess them.

Here, then, we are concerned with nothing less than the heart of religion. All the so-called higher non-Christian religions have their founders. These men proclaimed one or another way of salvation. But now they are dead, absolutely dead. Their disciples must now walk the salvation-way outlined in their writing by themselves. Ultimately these followers must become their own saviors. To be sure, the founders of those religions were the first confessors of what they created. But they are in no sense their "content." They sustain no more than an external relationship to those religions. Should the founders themselves be completely forgotten, the religions would continue unchanged. In them the founders no longer play an active role.

He is Christianity

But with Jesus Christ everything is radically different.

In no respect is He the "founder" of the Christian religion. Nor is He the first Christian. To state the matter plainly, He is Christianity. Therein He stands central. Apart from His name, His person, His being, there is no longer a Christian religion. Christ is the one, true, perfect mediator between God and man. In Him the fulness of the godhead dwells bodily. He is not merely the guide to God and salvation; He is *the Way*. Nor does He simply proclaim truth and bestow life; He is *the Truth* and He is *the Life*.⁶

Scripture sets forth for us in the most persuasive manner the unique person, position and office of Jesus Christ.

Here we are told not only that Jesus established the kingdom of God in this world; rather, He is that kingdom.⁷ According to the impressive witness of the ancient church He is "*autobasileia*," which is to say that in Him the kingdom is concentrated and concretized. In His person He brings the kingdom into this world, making it a reality in men's lives by His Holy Spirit.

In like manner Jesus Christ is also the *covenant* wherein God seeks to dwell with men. According to the word of Isaiah God has given Christ "*as a covenant to the people*."⁸ Thus also the covenant of grace in its fullness is personified, concentrated, and realized in Him. It comes to man exclusively and only in His person and embraces in Him the life of all those called thereto in its every moment, expression, condition, and relationship.

He is full salvation

Christ therefore is not merely the leader and ruler of His church. Indeed not! He is the soul, the heart, the head of His congregation. The church is Christ's *body*. This designation more than any other expresses what the church is in its unique relationship to Jesus Christ. He together with those whom the Father has given Him constitute in their indissoluble union and communion the church of God. At one point Paul, pointedly and properly and without further qualification, goes so far as to call Jesus and all believers in their mutual and unbreakable oneness: *Christ*.⁹

This Christ, then, *is* wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, life, peace and salvation.¹⁰ Indeed, *He* is all that; He *is* all that; He is *full* salvation.

He is all and in all

Because our Lord Jesus Christ is all this, the church's life must focus itself also completely and solely on Him, the crucified and risen and glorified Christ. From beginning to end, from center to circumference, always and only that life is concerned with personal, living, and active fellowship with Christ. That life, to state the issue in somewhat other words, is always a life *in* and *through* and *with* and *for* and *because of* and *unto* Christ; above all a life *unto Him!*

In the words of Paul the chief concern of the church is to know Christ and the power of His resurrection,¹¹ to be conformed to His image,¹² to live no longer for self but so to live that Christ lives in us.¹³

Or to repeat those richly significant words of the apostle, the issue in the church is that everywhere and always and only Christ shall be *all and in all!*¹⁴

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¹ *Heidelberg Catechism*, L.D. XX, qu. 54

² 2 Corinthians 5:21

³ 1 John 2:18

⁴ 1 Peter 1:3

⁵ Cf. for being crucified, dead, buried, resurrected and seated with Christ in the heavenly places, esp. Romans 6:1-5; 7:4; 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:4-6, 14, 15; Colossians 1:21-23; 2:13, 14, 20; 3:3-4

⁶ Cf. Prof. H. Bavinck; *Het Christendom series Groote Godsdiensten*, II, 7), p. 23; also *Magnolia Dei*, pp. 263-264

⁷ Luke 17:21

⁸ Isaiah 42:6; 49:8

⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:12; cf. for "body of Christ: Dr. Herman Ridderbos: *Paulus*, pp. 404-442

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 1:30; John 1:4; 5:26; 15:26; Ephesians 2:14; Colossians 3:4

¹¹ Philippians 3:10

¹² Romans 8:29

¹³ Galatians 2:20

¹⁴ Colossians 3:11