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## EDITORIAL

 NE wearies of the constant iteration, even on the part of many evangelicals that argument is futile when dealing with men and women who do not accept the gospel. Apart from the logical error in such a notion, there is a practical objection—argument is of great value when one endeavors to solve the doubts and misgivings of students, for instance. It is when the Word of God is allowed to present untrammelled its own claims in the face of hostile objections; when it is given an opportunity to parry with erroneous views concerning it that men begin to see its impressive truths. Many who decry argument, or debate do so because they employ those terms in an oblique or remote sense. Dialectics as such are not sinful; they have a place in Christian thought.

We are not contending for one moment that the mind of man and human reason unaided are sufficient for spiritual rebirth. "Who hath known the mind of the Lord?" It is evident, however, that to know that mind, God must have revealed it; and to accept that revelation there must needs be minds to receive it. All we are saying is that—granting the Holy Spirit works only through the truth, such working necessarily implies the use of reasoning processes.

Even the Lord Jesus employed reasoning. Witness His classic discussion with the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Scribes. His answers to their questions were full of argument, that is, reasoning. His parables are packed with reasoning—from the simple to the complex; the known to the unknown. And what but reasoning is His sublime utterance, "Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

The Word informs us that it is the mind, (or the *heart* as Scripture sometimes designates the thought life of man) that is sinful, and needs redemption quite as much as the emotions or the affections. "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the *minds* of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." (II Corinthians 4:4). "Having the *understanding* darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the *ignorance* that is in them, because of the blindness of their *heart*". (Ephesians 4:18). These Scriptures clearly imply that the darkness of sin confounds men through error, and that the light of the gospel can come to them only through the truth. And surely truth implies mentality, or reasoning, since it is the "*minds*" which are blinded, and the "*understanding*" that is darkened, as the emphasized words indicate.

## JUST WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

R. B. KUIPER

**T**HE term *Christianity* is often used very loosely. There is much vagueness in the minds of many about the content of this term. I believe it is being abused badly. In this address I shall try, popularly put, to come down to "brass tacks". I wish to state in a plain and pointed way just what Christianity is.

Let me seek to get at the matter by a process of elimination. First, I call attention to a thing which in appearance resembles Christianity quite closely, yet is its very opposite. Then I shall name a number of things which are necessary for Christianity and yet do not constitute its very essence. Finally, I shall attempt to state positively what Christianity really is.

Hypocrisy looks like Christianity, so much so that in certain cases only God, who knows the hearts and tries the reins, can detect the difference; yet all who lay any just claim to Christianity are agreed that hypocrisy is its exact opposite.

There are elements of hypocrisy in the lives of the best Christians. That is to say, their lives do not always square with their professions. There are no perfect Christians on earth. So exalted, so ideal, a religion is Christianity that the very best Christian is still a very poor one. A minister met a perfectionist brother on the street. To the preacher's question where he was going, the other replied: "I'm going on to perfection." "Then", came the retort, "I won't detain you, for I realize that you still have a long way to go." That may be said to any Christian. But it makes all the difference in the world whether one can honestly say that whatever sins are still found in his life are there against his will and that he is earnestly striving to reach the goal of perfection, or one just pretends to be a Christian while his heart yearns for sin and in secret he wallows in it. In the latter case one is a hypocrite, not a Christian.

The constant and bitter conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees is proof that Christianity and hypocrisy are opposite poles. How scathingly Jesus denounced the Pharisees for devouring widows' houses while offering long prayers in public! He told them indignantly that they resembled sepulchres, whited without, but within full of dead men's bones.

It happened in a small city in western Michigan. A teacher was explaining to her class in Sunday School the Biblical term *abomination*. Then to test the boys, she asked: "Now what do you think is the greatest abomination in the sight of God?" A bright little fellow with a twinkle in his eye quickly replied: "The prayer of the Superintendent." It so happened that this particular superintendent—an exception, of course—was known as a crook in business. Who knows but the lad may have been right?

In his autobiography Mr. Barnum of circus notoriety tells how he came to lose interest in religion. It came about in part through the hypocrisy of his father, a deacon in the church. The elder Barnum had

a grocery, over which the family lived. Early one morning the following conversation took place between the proprietor of the store at the head of the staircase and the clerk below. "John, have you put water in the vinegar?" "Yes, sir." "John, have you put dust in the pepper?" "Yes, sir." "John, have you put chalk in the sugar?" "Yes, sir." "Good, John; then come up to morning prayers."

Of all things Christianity stands for honesty, uprightness, truthfulness. Anybody who would be rightly called a Christian must be absolutely on the square.

What has been said so far is self-evident. We come to something which may not at first blush seem quite so obvious but is just as true.

There are a number of things which are essential to Christianity and yet do not constitute its very essence. An illustration may elucidate the point. The great majority of us are agreed that salt is essential to a good dinner, but not one of us would care to assert that salt is the essence of a good dinner. If the latter were the case, then salt alone would constitute a good meal. It does not. When I was a boy one of my brothers once dared me to swallow a teaspoon of salt. I did it. The result was far from pleasant. In much the same way certain things are necessary to sound, healthy Christianity but are not themselves Christianity. By the way, Christianity is sound and healthy throughout; nothing unsound or unhealthy is of it. Again, correct time is absolutely essential to good music; yet it is conceivable that a musician who is a crank in the matter of time might play but poorly. In the same way certain things are essential to Christianity, and yet in spite of their possession one may not be a Christian at all.

You and I, who live in a so-called Christian land in this twentieth century after the birth of our Lord, can hardly maintain our Christianity without some regard for tradition. Nor do I, when saying this, make tradition tantamount with Holy Scripture. There has come down to us in the course of the history of the Christian church a body of valuable beliefs and practices. To assign them all to the junk-pile would not only be exceedingly foolish and frightfully flippant, but positively unchristian. Many of these traditions, especially the great creeds of Christendom, are the fruit of the illuminating influence of the Holy Spirit. To discard them would constitute a flouting of the work of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. Precisely that, I fear, is being done by many. Young people, especially students who have come under the influence of Modernism, are apt to sneer at the creeds as altogether out of date. But certain Fundamentalists as well undervalue the creeds. An old man who never read anything but the Bible once told me that he had a great advantage over all ministers in studying Scripture. According to him, they were biased by their knowledge of the creeds, while he was guided by the Holy Spirit. No, I am not denying the right of private interpretation, but I will say emphatically that this man was making the serious error of placing his own interpretation of Scripture above that of the historical Christian church. He forgot that Christ has throughout the centuries

been keeping His promise to lead the church in the truth by the Holy Spirit and that the great creeds are obviously the result of this operation.

As a matter of fact, it is exceedingly difficult to conceive of anybody's breaking altogether with tradition. Not even H. L. Mencken has done that. But if someone should actually cast all Christian tradition overboard, he would thereby be denying divine guidance in the history of the church and thus practically sever his connection with that body.

But who will care to assert that mere traditionalism is Christianity? The strictest adherence to established church customs does not make one a Christian. One might conceivably lay his head on the block for the creeds without being a Christian. Christianity is infinitely more than a mere holding to the beaten path.

The observance of certain forms is essential to Christianity. How we shall worship in the life to come is difficult to say, but it must be perfectly obvious that so long as we are in this world of time and space we cannot get along without forms. God Himself has commanded us to observe the Sabbath, to study His Word, to attend church services, to offer prayers, to celebrate the sacraments. Wilful neglect of these practices surely spells forfeiture of Christianity.

But who will say that the mere observance of forms constitutes Christianity? To identify forms with Christianity is formalism. For that, Jesus denounced the Pharisees. They drew nigh to God, said He, with their mouths, and honored him with their lips, but their hearts they kept far from Him. They offered prayers on street corners, they gave alms in public, they occupied the front seats in synagogues, they paraded the streets with phylacteries, bands of parchment displaying texts from Scripture, on their arms and foreheads, but for all that, were Jesus' most bitter foes. It is conceivable—I do not say likely—that one might attend church twice a Sunday for fifty years straight and never miss a week-day prayer meeting in all that time, then die, and go to perdition.

Religious forms have value only in so far as they are expressions of an attitude of heart toward God. That is one lesson which Jesus' conversation with the woman of Samaria teaches. "God is spirit", said the Lord; "and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (R. V. margin).

May I tell the story of a Puritan preacher? Let no one think that it is my purpose to ridicule Puritanism. I firmly believe that it has often been criticized very unfairly. But the story seems to apply here. He had scruples about shaving on Sundays and therefore was in the habit of doing it Saturday nights. This particular Saturday evening he had worked in his study to an exceptionally late hour. When one side of his face was shaved he happened to glance at the clock and discovered to his dismay that it was just two minutes before midnight. He could not possibly complete the task before the Sabbath. Instantly he jumped on a chair and moved the large hand of the clock back ten minutes. That was formalism rather than Christianity.

Closely allied with formalism is legalism.

The number of those who would do away with the law of God is being multiplied. Here is a striking instance of the meeting of extremes. Extreme Liberals as well as extreme Fundamentalists make this error. The former proclaim the destructive doctrine of relativism. They teach that truth changes and that there is no absolute standard of goodness. Not even the Ten Commandments are said to hold any longer. The latter are being involved in the dangerous error of antinomianism. They posit an absolute antithesis between law and grace. Since we are living under grace, we are told that we can well afford to ignore the law completely. In one of my charges I made the acquaintance of a man who was so firmly convinced that salvation is by grace that he had no scruples about getting dead drunk once a week. While I am well aware that this case was exceptional, I greatly fear that some Fundamentalists have a wrong conception of Christian liberty. Surely, the Christian is free from the law, from the moral law as well as the ceremonial. That is plainly taught in Romans seven. But does this mean that he has nothing to do with the moral law, not even as a guide for grateful living? Far from it. It rather means that, controlled by the Holy Spirit, he willingly, gladly, spontaneously, though not yet perfectly, obeys the law of God; that he has a delight in the law of God after the inward man. That, not license or disregard of the law, is genuine liberty. And that Paul had in mind when he wrote: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

Christianity stands for obedience to the law of God.

However, that mere law observance is not Christianity is plainly taught in Scripture. I am thinking of the parable of the elder brother. He had not spent his substance in riotous living as had the prodigal. All his days he had labored faithfully for his father. At the very time of his brother's return he was at work in the field. His father did not deny the bold claim that he had never transgressed one paternal commandment. But he was only a legalist, not a Christian.

Here I would remark that in reality he had not kept the law at all. Its letter he had observed scrupulously, but its spirit he flouted most flagrantly. The one big demand of the law is love, and that he lacked. He loved neither his big-hearted father nor his repentant brother. Strictness and Christianity are by no means synonymous.

Intimately related to legalism is negativism. This need occasion no surprise, for the law is largely negative in form. Prohibitions abound in the Ten Commandments.

I am very much afraid that in certain circles the notion prevails that Christianity consists largely, almost exclusively, of not doing certain things; for instance, not smoking, not drinking, not playing cards, not attending theaters, not dancing. Now I would not be misunderstood. There are many things which worldly people do and Christians should not do. I cannot imagine, for example, that a Christian would frequent our modern theaters or engage in the shamelessly suggestive dances of our day. But the point I wish to make is that Christianity does not

consist merely of refraining from evil but rather of the doing of positive good. Negative Christianity is a contradiction in terms. Christianity is essentially something positive. The servant who had received the one talent was condemned, not because he had wasted the talent, but simply because he had done nothing with it. On the day of judgment the goats will be assigned to everlasting hell-fire, not because they saw the Saviour hungry or thirsty and robbed Him of his last crust of bread or turned upside down His last cup of water, but simply because they did nothing for Him. Some folks seem to think that going to bed for a whole year would keep them from many a sin. Fact is that for a healthy person to spend a year in bed would in itself be an awful sin. All those who live under the gospel and perish will perish for a sin of omission, because they failed to believe in the only Name given under heaven by which men must be saved. The easiest way to get to perdition is by doing nothing. It is also a very sure way.

Legalism and negativism are twin sisters. Moralism is their first cousin.

That Christianity stands for morality of the highest type hardly anybody will care to dispute. The Christian does not claim that he is good, but he is tremendously anxious to be good. Like Paul he strives with might and main to reach the goal of moral perfection.

But there are many who would identify Christianity and morality. The sum total of Christianity to them is to emulate the beautiful moral example set by the man of Nazareth. Hence about the only gospel heard from many a so-called Christian pulpit is *Be good and do good*. What a gospel! Gospel means glad tidings. Here is a man behind prison bars. Comes a friend who shouts out to him: "I have good news for you!" To the burning query: "What is it?" comes the reply: "Be good." Suppose you were the prisoner. Would not such a gospel drive you mad? It is much like telling a man who is sinking into quick-sand not to worry.

There is a young man in Gospel history to whom I feel strongly attracted. He is one of my best friends. Men commonly call him the rich young ruler. He is as clean as you find them. His life is exemplary. When the Lord reminds him of the Ten Commandments, he frankly asserts that he has kept them all from childhood. Nor is this a vain boast. When he makes this claim, the Lord, who has no need of being told what is in man because He himself knows it, admires him, loves him. If he were here today, no doubt he would be acclaimed a splendid Christian. But the inerrant Word tells us that he turned his back upon the Saviour and says not a word of his return. I verily believe that many a fine young man and virtuous young woman and some good old folks are in great need of salvation.

Orthodoxy is essential to Christianity. When making that statement I am well aware that nobody is perfectly orthodox. No human being has a perfectly pure, unalloyed conception of the truth. Nobody can interpret the Word of God infallibly. For that reason it is very difficult

to say just how orthodox one must be in order to be a Christian. Yet the fact remains that orthodoxy is essential to Christianity.

In his first epistle John states an irreducible minimum of orthodoxy essential to Christianity. It is belief in the Deity of our blessed Lord. "Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, even he that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father". (R. V.)

But again, as salt alone is not a dinner, so orthodoxy alone is not Christianity.

What the bones are to the human body, that orthodoxy is to Christianity. Here is a body without bones. Is it a body? Of course not. It is but a lump of flesh and tissue. So Christianity without orthodoxy is not Christianity. Yet how much of that sort of thing is found in the church today! On the other hand, here is a body consisting solely of bones. Is it a body? Just as emphatically not. It is a skeleton, and, so far as my knowledge goes, skeletons are wont to be dead. Such is orthodoxy without Christianity.

Can you stand a bold statement? The demons are pretty good Fundamentalists. James tells us in his letter that they believe that there is but one God. The Gospels inform us that on different occasions they confessed Jesus to be the Son of God. For all our orthodoxy we Fundamentalists might conceivably be demons. Am I running down Fundamentalism? God forbid! The demons are right in these beliefs. In fact, in their acceptance of Jesus as the Son of God they go our Liberals one better.

I have discussed several things which are essential to Christianity but are not Christianity itself. Not one of them is Christianity, nor are all of them put together. Proper regard for tradition, observance of certain forms, obedience to the law, morality, and orthodoxy are all of them necessary, but, when added, their sum total does not yet equal Christianity.

*What then is Christianity?*

In answering this question it is necessary that we distinguish between objective Christianity and subjective. I shall speak of each. Intentionally my words will be few. Perhaps brevity will be conducive to clarity.

There is such a thing as the historical usage of the term *Christianity*. *Verba valent usu*. To put another content into the term is, to say the least, confusing, and may well prove deceiving. I have in my hands an apple and a lemon. Before me are standing two men. I ask each of them to tell me which fruit is an apple. One says that the apple is an apple. The other insists that the lemon is an apple. Here are two conceptions of Christianity; one sanctioned by history, the other not. Before me stand two men: an Evangelical Christian and a Modernist. I ask them to tell which conception is Christianity. The Evangelical says that what has always been called Christianity is Christianity. The Modernist insists that the other thing is. In other words, the Evangelical Christian calls an apple an apple; the Modernist takes the liberty to call a lemon an apple.

Through its history Christianity has always stood for supernaturalism. It has ever put forth the claim of being not merely *a* supernatural religion, but *the* supernatural. Its supernaturalism has from the very beginning been its distinctive attribute. It has a supernatural origin, appeals to a supernatural book, is rooted in supernatural events, proclaims supernatural salvation, looks forward to a supernatural consummation of history. Today many would strip it of its supernaturalism and still call the remainder Christianity. But I maintain that to deprive a thing of its essence is to destroy it. Can you take all the corpuscles out of blood and still have blood?

What is historical Christianity in the objective sense? Christianity has been said to be not a doctrine but a life. Fact is that historically it is a doctrine as well as a life, and, prior to either of these, a story.

Christianity is a story. It is, in the words of a familiar hymn, "the story of Jesus and his love." It comprises the story of His incarnation through the virgin birth, the story of His death by crucifixion, the story of His bodily resurrection, the story of His ascension into heaven, the story of His outpouring of the Holy Spirit. These events constitute the very foundation of Christianity. If they be removed, the whole structure will topple into ruins like a house of cards.

Christianity is a doctrine. Christian doctrine is an interpretation of the Christian story. What is the meaning, for instance, of Christ's bloody death on the tree? Was He the victim of circumstances? Did He seal His convictions with His blood as so many martyrs have done? Or is it true that He bore the curse of God which was due us for our sins, that He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, that the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and that we are healed with His stripes? The last is the Biblical and historical interpretation of His death. It is the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement. And it is the very heart of Christian truth. To pluck it out is murder.

"This did I for thee; what doest thou for me?" These words, which Count Zinzendorf put on the lips of the dying Redeemer, are a challenge to that life of love and holiness and sacrifice and devotion which is known as Christian. Christianity is a life.

What is Christianity subjectively considered?

Again I take my clue from the saying that Christianity is not a doctrine but a life. How superficial a statement! What! Christianity just a way of living, a mode of behavior? Shame on him who says it! Listen! Christianity is not only *a* life; it is *life*, LIFE ITSELF.

Christ means Anointed. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit. So is the Christian. To change the figure, a Christian is a person who was born again, born from above, born of the Spirit. I know no better definition of a Christian than this one: *a Christian is a regenerated person.*

May I say briefly how the new life which is Christianity manifests itself? Christ was anointed to the three-fold office of prophet, priest, and king. In the Christian's activity as prophet, priest, and king his Christianity appears.

He was the only Christian in the company. It had long been his custom to kneel in prayer before he went to bed. He kept this up in the army. His comrades sneered and jeered at him, pelted him with pillows, shoes, and what-not. The day came when he was killed in action. Seldom did a private receive so honorable a burial. As his body was lowered into the earth, tears coursed down furrowed cheeks. When the grave was filled, one of the boys cut the words *A Christian Hero* into a board and planted it on the mound. Here was a prophet, boldly confessing his Lord.

As priest the Christian offers up himself, all he has and is, to his God, and he does it willingly. A French lad's right arm was shot away in the World War. A nurse in the hospital expressed her sympathy in the words: "What a pity that so young a boy should lose an arm, a right arm at that!" Up spoke the soldier: "I never lost it; I *gave* it." The Christian does not merely lose himself to his Lord; he gives himself.

In ancient times kings were wont to fight in the front ranks of their armies. Today that is no longer customary. Do you recall how many kings and kaisers were killed in action during the world conflict? You could count them on your fingers if you had none. But the Christian is a king of the old-fashioned kind. He fights hard against Satan, the world, and the flesh. He is positively militant in his opposition to error. As he fights he begins to reign. Some day he will sit with Christ as victor in His throne and reign as king forever.

What I have said altogether too prosaically is admirably summed up in that rich hymn:

"When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ my God;  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

That is an expression of Christianity.