

*Particular
Grace*



Abraham Kuyper · Dr. Abraham Kuyper photographed at work in his study.

Particular Grace

*A Defense of
God's Sovereignty
In Salvation*

by
Abraham Kuyper

translated by
Marvin Kamps



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ASSOCIATION

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Translator's Introduction

The most beautiful scene in all the world is a church filled with repentant sinners and their children gathered for worship under the ministry of the Word and sacraments. Faces are lifted upward to face the undershepherd, hearts and minds are submissive to the infallible Word proclaimed, and in that moment the sovereign triune God is worshipped as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are come to worship the sovereign God who is God alone. The hearts of the people assembled are lifted heavenward by the truth that Jesus is a complete Savior who draws his own unto himself by the irresistible power of his grace. No natural wonder of creation is so beautiful. It is true that to behold the beauty of God in communion with his people through the Word requires that we look with the eye of faith. Many never see any beauty at all in this wonder of grace. The Psalmist did, for he wrote, "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple" (Ps. 27:4).

If you agree that this is beautiful, then consider what spoils it all and renders the scene repulsive to God's people. It is this: The preacher proclaims to the persons assembled for worship that the Bible is unreliable, Jesus was merely the good man of Galilee, Jesus did not by his death satisfy God's justice in regard to our sins, Jesus never rose bodily from the grave, and man's salvation is something he accomplishes himself through his own efforts as he strives to follow the dictates of his own conscience. This scene is offensive to God's people even if it takes place in cathedrals of gold with all the external adornments of ritual and pageantry and glorious music. The church of Christ has labeled such worship as modernism.

Modernism dominated the Hervormde (Reformed) Church of The Netherlands into which Abraham Kuyper was born in 1837. No doubt there were still many preachers and members of this state church who believed and confessed the gospel, but the church boards, synods, and classes were held firmly in the pow-

er of men committed to modernistic principles. Institutions of higher learning were under the control of the state, and young men who would preach in this denomination of some two million members (one-half of the nation's population) had no alternative but to be trained by university faculties of religion, which were generally, if not entirely, committed to modernism. Thus, modernism had a lock on the Reformed church.

What could God's people do? How could God-glorifying preaching be restored to the church? How was reformation to be accomplished? What must be preached anew with zeal and dedication? Who would God raise up to be the David who would confront the Goliath of modernism, on whose side stood nearly all the men of learning and renown who occupied the positions of ecclesiastical and civil power?

Our God gave the weary saints of that day Dr. Abraham Kuyper, no doubt the greatest theologian of his generation and maybe of that century. He was also a very effective politician who served his nation as a member of parliament and as Prime Minister. As earnestly as he labored for the reformation of the church, he labored also for social improvements. He was usually the voice of the poor and politically disadvantaged. He spoke and wrote with power and conviction, for he believed and confessed the absolute sovereignty of God in Christ Jesus. If one today denies God's sovereignty in salvation, how can one declare God's law and right before a materialistic, humanistic, hedonistic society such as ours? If one denies the sovereignty of God in the work of salvation, one's witness becomes impotent before today's modernistic powers in both church and society.

The Kuyper of church reformation and social action can never be understood unless we know what it was that constituted the pebbles he gathered and used to fell the giant. What was it that inspired and enabled the people to rally to his cause, to sacrifice, to endure scorn and hardships, and to do whatever was necessary to help him restore God's name to a place of honor and reverence?

Kuyper demonstrates the answer in his work *Dat De Genade Particulier Is*, which we have now translated. He believed that the

glorious truth of sovereign, particular grace had to be preached and confessed with renewed fervor. The church had to be called back to the old paths and to a conscious confession of the grandeur and majesty of their God, who will give his glory to none other.

It may seem strange that Kuyper was of this mind. Many of his supporters tried to dissuade him from testifying about this subject. It would be far too divisive, they said. People would be offended. They wanted him to write on issues that would gain the largest possible following. He said “No” to all their pleading. He would speak of election, the sovereignty of God in the salvation of men and the inability of the fallen sinner to cooperate in his own salvation. He would, if you will, proclaim the T-U-L-I-P doctrines of Calvinism. It was that truth, and that truth alone, that could break the back of modernism. Goliath would be slain with that pebble. It is that truth of which it has been said, “Satan abhors it; the world ridicules it; the ignorant and hypocrite abuse, and heretics oppose it; but the spouse of Christ hath always most tenderly loved and constantly defended it, as an inestimable treasure; and God, against whom neither counsel nor strength can prevail, will dispose her to continue this conduct to the end.”¹

The doctrine of particular grace emphasizes that the grace of God is strictly limited by God’s eternal decree of election, and therefore God saves in Christ Jesus only eternally chosen sinners. Kuyper’s conception is that the world, with elect man in Christ Jesus at its zenith, is redeemed and cleansed in the blood of Jesus. In this volume Kuyper explains, in the light of Scripture and in harmony with the Reformed confessions, that our salvation is certain, for every aspect of it is solely the work of God. God ordained his own to salvation, sent the Son for their redemption, and by the Spirit of the risen Christ imparts only to them the blessings of that salvation merited for them. The confession that Jesus is the Son of God, and therefore the risen Lord over all, had to be restored to the church’s witness.

1. [Canons of Dordt, V, Article 15].

By contrast, the commonly accepted theory of general grace repudiates the truth of particular grace. According to this position, God wills to save everyone, Christ Jesus died for every person who ever lived, every person can be saved, and God in Christ has done all he can do to accomplish the salvation of all men. Whether or not anyone or “all” will be saved is dependent on the free will of the fallen sinner.

The popular notion of general grace and its explicit denial of particular grace *insidiously prepares the way* for the acceptance of modernism in the church, since general grace undermines any commitment to the sovereignty of God and the honor of Christ as the foreordained Messiah for the elect alone. That a general grace theology prepares the way for open modernism to enter the church many saints did not understand. The doctrine of general grace was viewed by them as innocent and harmless and as that which softens the allegedly harsh witness of the Reformed church. These saints would not knowingly deny the doctrines of the Trinity, the infallibility of God’s Word, the bodily resurrection of Christ Jesus, or the reality of hell. Yet in Kuyper’s opinion they cherished a view of the cross and of grace that implied and prepared the way for these more open and bold rejections of God’s Word. Kuyper came to see this clearly. He had to be converted from the “Christ for all” teaching himself in order to be free from modernism. In Kuyper’s judgment, general grace was a denial of the glory of Christ Jesus. Thus, in this work Kuyper addresses and calls to repentance the weak brethren who failed to recognize the profound perversion of God’s Word in the general grace theory and its inherent capitulation to modernism.

Kuyper exhaustively treats the subject of particular grace. He evaluates the many objections people have in regard to this doctrine and proves from Scripture that it is the content of sacred revelation. He masterfully shows his brethren that the Bible, thus God himself, calls believers to love and confess the truth that saving grace is particular.

Although Kuyper’s main purpose in this volume is to expose the error of general grace and to present a solid, biblical defense of the Calvinistic doctrine of particular grace, the reader must

not overlook his edifying instruction on many other aspects of Christian doctrine and life. Allow me to call your attention to some of these. Kuyper's comments on prayer enable the reader to look at this subject with new insight. His constant return to the subject of God's being and the counsel and decree of God are spiritually refreshing. Repeatedly Kuyper finds it necessary to remind us of the infallibility and authority of sacred Scripture and the error of rationalism. He sets forth principles for the interpretation of the Bible that are of great value. His concept of the "mystical union" of Christ and the believer (chapter 9) is enriching and comforting. Kuyper demands of the church the emphatic rejection of all antinomianism, and with true pastoral concern he directs the church and believer in the way of sanctification of life. Often he touches on the evangelical calling of the church to preach the Word of God to all men out of obedience to the King of the church, Christ Jesus. Let the sanctified reader be alert to these aspects of Kuyper's profoundly spiritual interest in the people and cause of the Lord.

Since this material was published first as a series of articles in an independent weekly church paper, others in the state church were able, even during the weeks he was developing his topic, to criticize sharply Kuyper's work, condemning him and his theology. At times Kuyper responded to these attacks, as it were parenthetically, by making his response part of subsequent articles.

Today's reader may wonder at the population figures Kuyper gives for The Netherlands (four million) and for the world (1.4 billion). As small as these numbers may seem in our time, when the population of The Netherlands is now more than twelve million and of the world more than six billion, the statistics Kuyper gave for his own time were, indeed, accurate.

What may also surprise our readers are some patronizing expressions Kuyper makes in reference to other nations and peoples, remarks that today would be considered insensitive, if not demeaning. We do not believe this was done intentionally by the author. He may have betrayed in his writing the sense of superiority common to western society of his day, but Kuyper can

hardly be considered a racist. One will note the many times he speaks of the equality of races before God and of the truth that Jesus is our catholic Lord and Savior. Besides that, he condemns all human pride that would brand other races and nations as unworthy of our respect and of God's salvation.

While Kuyper's work addresses a situation in the Reformed state church of his day that forms the historical background for his writing, it is also pertinent and instructive for the church today. In addition, the material seen as a whole—even though we might not agree with every single point Kuyper makes—is biblically and confessionally sound. It is important that those who love the Lord Jesus Christ examine Kuyper's significant witness to the truth of God's Word.

Kuyper's Method

Kuyper's treatment of the issues is fresh and stimulating. At the same time he works his way through the issues in a methodical, careful, and exhaustive manner. Though his subject material is profound, he writes in a popular style. He frequently engages his reader in a hypothetical conversation concerning the statements of Scripture and the believer's personal religious experiences. Kuyper gently leads hesitant and fearful persons into a correct and biblical understanding of the truth. He scolds or dismisses the hard-hearted and impenitent, but the weak he tenderly persuades.

There are specific elements in Kuyper's reasoning that we should discuss in order that the reader may follow his presentation of the truth of God's Word. We will first list these elements and then briefly discuss each one: (1) Kuyper appeals to the *Reformed creeds* and to the Baptism Form used historically in Reformed churches; (2) he appeals to the *written testimony of Reformed theologians from the past* to show that the position he took was precisely that commonly held by the highly respected theologians who enjoyed the approval of the Reformed church of their day; (3) he bases his commitment to particular grace, in part, on an appeal to the *creedal doctrines of God's attributes and the person and foreordination of the Son of God to be the Christ*; and

(4) he directly appeals to the *sense of justice and fairness* that he knows lives in the hearts and minds of his readers by God's grace.

One may ask why Kuyper appeals to the *creeds*. Should not Scripture itself be the only basis of our faith? Our answer is that this method was his right and duty, not because he elevated the creeds above Scripture, but because the Reformed church believes that the creeds express the testimony of Scripture on the very points that in Kuyper's day the overwhelming majority rejected. This majority among the preachers, theologians, and members of the church wanted the name "Reformed," but not the Reformed faith. The state church had become a "people's church," that is, one for all citizens who were not Roman Catholic but who had some religion. This state church was very inclusive, tolerant, broadminded, and characterized by "love" towards one and all, *except* the man who appealed to the Reformed creeds as authoritative and definitive of what it meant to be Reformed. Kuyper had been trained and expected to treat the creeds as relics of the past; but his conversion, accomplished by the Lord Christ through the "little members" of a church in the village of Beesd, would no longer allow him to do that.

As far as Kuyper's *appeal to Reformed writers from the past* is concerned, we must remember that the author is ultimately not merely appealing to the authority of their great learning and position or to antiquity, but to the oneness of the faith of the people of God who are led into all truth through the Spirit of Christ. He recognized that to honor the Spirit of Christ meant that he had to acknowledge the Spirit's leading of the church in the past. Particular grace had always been the exclusive position of the Reformed church going all the way back to the Reformation. In the very first chapter Kuyper makes that appeal specifically, because he wants to show the reader that his position is not something new and novel, that he is not a self-willed maverick going off on his own, and that the then current "faith" of his church was completely contrary to the "faith of the fathers." Although this first chapter is a bit "heavy" on the academic side, the reader who perseveres will be greatly rewarded.

As regards Kuyper's discussion of particular grace in relation to *God's attributes and the Son of God's person and foreordination to be the Christ*, we should not reject these discussions as mere abstractions, philosophy, and "hair-splitting." He is pleading for theological "consistency" and harmony in our understanding of who God is *as God*. Kuyper calls us to deal *honestly* with all of God's self-revelation. His point is that what we say about the nature of grace ought not to spoil or contradict what God has revealed about his essential attributes. If one would permit that, it would be the same as to lose *God-as-God*. Kuyper thus appeals to the creedal doctrine of God's simplicity. Let us be mindful that the faith of the Reformed church is not the irrational witness of the apostate church that countenances doctrinal confusion and blatant doctrinal contradiction because of its refusal to accept the clear testimony of God's Word.

Finally, in regard to Kuyper's appeal to the *sense of justice and fairness in his readers*, we call attention to his remark about himself that he had been "cast out of the synagogue." The reader will recognize immediately that Kuyper is employing a reference to Scripture. In John 9:22 we read about the man born blind who was healed by Jesus: "These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue." And in verse 34 of the same chapter we read, "They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out." Kuyper complains already in the first chapter of his book that he had been made a "pariah" and had been "cast out" of the fellowship of his church. This had not as yet happened to him in 1879 in terms of some official deposition from office; that would come later. But what he is relating to his readers was the "cool treatment" and "rejection" he was receiving from other preachers and theologians in the church. The sin of the Jews in Jesus's day was the sin of the established Reformed church in Kuyper's day. Many of Kuyper's fellow saints would have been able to identify with that. Because of their stand for the truth, they had in many in-

stances undoubtedly experienced the same coolness and rejection.

Pertinent Biographical Data

Abraham Kuyper was the first son and third child of Rev. and Mrs. Jan Frederik Kuyper, who were living at the time of his birth, October 29, 1837, in Maassluis, The Netherlands. His father was a minister in the state church. Little Abraham's early schooling was undertaken at home by his well-educated parents. After what may be regarded as high school training at a *gymnasium* in Leiden for six years, Kuyper entered the University of Leiden in 1855 and its "school of divinity" in 1858. He was graduated with honors as a Doctor of Theology on September 20, 1862.

The spiritual and theological nature of the training in theology that Kuyper received at Leiden was thoroughly modernistic. Modernism is rationalism. More specifically, it is the exaltation of human reason above the divine revelation contained in Scripture. According to Frank Vanden Berg, one of Kuyper's biographers, Kuyper himself acknowledged, "I entered the university a young man of orthodox faith, but I had not been in the school more than a year and a half before my thought processes had been transformed into the starkest intellectual rationalism."² Vanden Berg tells us further of the impact that Leiden's modernistic professors had on Kuyper: "Under Scholten's influence, Kuyper, still in his early twenties, permitted himself with all the eagerness of his enthusiastic nature to be carried away with the current of rising and advancing modernism. And when Professor Rauwenhoff in one of his lectures declared that he no longer accepted Jesus' bodily resurrection as a historical fact and his students applauded, Kuyper applauded with them."³

Kuyper was converted from modernism to the gospel of

2. Frank Vanden Berg, *Abraham Kuyper: A Biography* (St. Catherines, Ont., Canada: Paideia Press, 1978), 17.

3. *Ibid.*, 21.

Christ Jesus while ministering in Beesd, his first charge. There the unyielding simple folk of the congregation impressed upon him the sole authority of holy Scripture. They taught him anew the Reformed faith. They called his attention to the Reformed creeds. They admonished him. Their sturdy faith in God and in his beloved Son deeply impressed him. Under the blessing of God's grace he was turned back to the faith of the fathers. We should note that Kuyper never forgot these "little members" who had labored for his conversion to the truth and with whom he now labored for the reformation of the whole church.

Though Kuyper had many achievements, including that of being Prime Minister of The Netherlands, his crowning accomplishment was undoubtedly the reformation of the church. In 1886 he and others led hundreds of ministers and over two hundred thousand saints in more than two hundred congregations out of the corrupt state church to form a new Reformed Church in The Netherlands. In 1892 these churches, under the influence of Kuyper and others, united with the churches of the Secession of 1834 to form a new denomination, the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (GKN).

If we compare Kuyper's historical circumstances to ours, it is utterly amazing that he was able to accomplish so much. He needed to address the whole church. There were no radios or televisions or tape recorders by which to address the people of his province or nation. His voice and witness were limited to the confines of the building in which he would speak. But if he were to lead a whole church back to the Reformed faith, he would have to find a way to get into the homes of believers throughout the nation. He would have to find a way to do that on a regular basis over a long period of time in order to provide doctrinal instruction in the fundamental truths of God's Word, for only after the people were thoroughly instructed would they find the courage to throw off the yoke of modernism. The weak brethren had to be built up in the truth in order to walk as men of conviction. Kuyper needed a vehicle to present his witness to the truth of God's Word. He needed something that those in power could not silence or corrupt. Kuyper and his supporters of the

Doleantie movement (those who grieved or sorrowed over the spiritual condition of the church) would have to be in control of that witness.

The solution was a weekly religious paper, *The Herald (De Heraut)*, which was published by a society of concerned believers of which Kuyper was chairman. *The Herald* was mailed to several thousand subscribers throughout the nation to reach them by Sunday, but many more than that avidly read his every word, because this paper was shared in every church community with friends and relatives. Through Kuyper's witness, and through the witness of other like-minded men, the saints were given a spiritual feast every Lord's day, even if, as often happened, they had to endure "stones for bread" from the pulpit in their own church worship service. Men could oppose, reject, and slander *The Herald*, but they could not stop its witness, nor could they silence its call to faithfulness and reformation.

Kuyper began writing and publishing a series in *The Herald* on the particularity of God's grace entitled "Dat De Genade Particulier Is." The first article appeared in the issue dated Sunday, April 20, 1879, and the series concluded on Sunday, June 13, 1880. As Kuyper makes plain in the final installment, his witness to the truth of particular grace was warmly received. Because of it, ministers and church members were influenced to return to the testimony of Scripture and of their Reformed fathers. The reformation of the church was well on its way in 1880 and would culminate in the reinstatement of the Reformed church in The Netherlands in 1886. For such a man and for such labors, we can only be profoundly thankful to God in Christ Jesus, who "gives pastors and teachers" to his church.

For further reading into the life of Abraham Kuyper, we refer the reader to the following three biographies:

- McGoldrick, James. *God's Renaissance Man: The Life and Work of Abraham Kuyper*. Auburn, Mass.: Evangelical Press, 2000.
- Praamsma, Louis. *Let Christ Be King: Reflections on the Life and Times of Abraham Kuyper*. Jordan Station, Ont., Canada: Paideia Press, 1985.
- Vanden Berg, Frank. *Abraham Kuyper: A Biography*. Translated from the Dutch by Theodore Plantinga. St. Catherines, Ont., Canada: Paideia Press, 1978.

Background to the Publishing of This Translation

Kuyper's witness to the truth of particular grace was always appreciated in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, as seen in a statement of Herman Hoeksema, one of the founders of the denomination, who wrote, "The great Dutch leader has written very much with which we are heartily in agreement. When we read his *Dat De Genade Particulier Is*, we are generally of the same mind."⁴

The faculty of the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches formally requested in 1989 that the Reformed Free Publishing Association underwrite a translation of Kuyper's work for the edification of the English-speaking world. This request was repeated by Professor David J. Engelsma of the same seminary in 1992. It was not until the late 1990s, however, that the Board of the Reformed Free Publishing Association placed the translation on its list of projects and then approved the manuscript that has become this book.

Translation Considerations

While Kuyper used the Dutch Staten Bible for his Scripture references, we have used the King James Version for the benefit of our English readers, who might otherwise become confused at the different wording. The same is true regarding Kuyper's quotations from the Reformed creeds. We used the English version of these documents in our translation.⁵

Kuyper either quotes or refers to the writings of many theologians of past centuries. Not all of these men are well known to us, and some of their works have never been translated. The titles of these works, as given in the original Dutch version, were frequently presented in Latin and abbreviated, and they often

4. Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema. *Van Zonde en Genade* (Concerning Sin and Grace). No place, publisher, or date indicated, [1923], 9.

5. This is the translation found in *The Psalter with Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and Added Chorale Section*. Rev. Ed. for PRC (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 30–80 (pagination at back).

lacked bibliographic information. We attempted to make these references as complete and detailed as we were able.

The Dutch publisher of the book version of the articles apparently made little change to the original material. What were then current events and part of the give and take of a debate carried on in the ecclesiastical papers of the day was neither deleted nor explained. In the pursuit of authenticity and accuracy, we have left the material as published in the book, except that we often use “chapters” in place of the word “articles” that the Dutch book publisher retained.

The author made extensive use of italics for emphasis and occasionally even put a word or phrase in all capital letters for special stress. We have followed this formatting.

In addition to Kuyper’s original footnotes in the work, we provided certain footnotes to aid the reader in understanding references that would otherwise be confusing and unclear to those far removed from the historical situation. Kuyper did not usually give any biographical material about the persons he referred to in his work. We provided what we thought would be helpful. Please note that all our intrusions into Kuyper’s dissertation are placed in [square brackets], both in the text and in footnotes.

Kuyper expressed himself frequently by means of long, involved sentences. At times it was necessary to split these into more than one sentence. To present Kuyper’s masterful Dutch in as flowing a translation as the original would be a marvelous gift in itself, one which I fear has not been fully communicated to the undersigned. However, we have labored to present an accurate and complete reproduction of this work into English. Whatever errors and inaccuracies may be discovered by the careful reader are solely the responsibility of the translator.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Professor Engelsma of the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches for encouraging me to undertake this work of translation and for his guidance and indispensable help in bringing this task to completion. As often as I

requested his aid, which was rather frequently, he graciously took the time out of his extremely busy schedule to assist me.

Thanks are due Dr. Martin Bakker, who recently retired as the Dutch language professor at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., for his careful comparing of the translation manuscript with the original work of Kuyper and for his many suggestions and instructions regarding the improvement of my translation.

I express my appreciation as well to Dr. Karin Maag, director of the H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies at Calvin College, for her diligence and expertise in providing information necessary to complete Kuyper's footnotes.

Further, I thank the board and office staff of the Reformed Free Publishing Association for their encouragement and editorial assistance, without which this effort could not have been accomplished.

Finally, and above all, I want to express gratitude to our heavenly Father for giving me the desire and spiritual strength necessary to perform this work.

It is my prayer that the Lord of hosts will place this volume of Kuyper into the hands of those whom he would bless with the knowledge of the truth of his Word and the certainty of their salvation.

MARVIN KAMPS
Translator

Part 1

No Christ for All

De Heraut

Zondag 20 April 1879. No. 71.

De Heraut wordt uitgegeven op Zondag van 12 uur tot 1 uur 's ochtmer. De prijs van de afzonderlijke nummer is 10 cent. De prijs van de afzonderlijke nummer is 10 cent. De prijs van de afzonderlijke nummer is 10 cent.

Abonnementen. Prijs van het jaar 12 maanden 1.80, per post 2.00. De afzonderlijke nummer is 10 cent. De prijs van de afzonderlijke nummer is 10 cent. De prijs van de afzonderlijke nummer is 10 cent.

Dat de genade particulier is.

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Dan de goederkerker.
door
PIERRE DU MOULIN.

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The first article in Abraham Kuyper's series on particular grace is seen as it appeared in Dutch on the first page of *De Heraut* for Sunday, April 20, 1879.

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What the Christian Church Has Always Confessed

*“I will have mercy
on whom I will have mercy.”*

Romans 9:15



In some of the so-called “orthodox” circles of our country, it is increasingly the custom to present the expression “Christ for all” (*Christus pro omnibus*)¹ as a criterion of evangelical truth.

By “Christ for all” is meant that Christ, according to the purpose and extent of his self-sacrifice, died for all men without exception.

People are very intent on the acknowledgment that this slogan is true. They insist on the confession of it so strongly that they make anyone’s participation in true Christianity dependent upon agreement with what this represents. So much is this done that an advocate of the idea shamelessly shouted out from the pulpit, “Whoever preaches another gospel is accursed!” A professor once expressed himself in this way in the company of his friends: “Whoever still questions the Christ-for-all view can no longer be taken seriously!”

In fact, those who are not committed to this “for all” view find themselves in a sad and painful situation. People not only accuse them of heresy and perversion of truth, but they also cut

1. [*Christus pro omnibus* is Latin for “Christ for all.”]

them off from fellowship and dismiss them as naive. What is still worse, they deny them the fellowship of the Spirit and bring the curse down on their heads!

The writer of these lines is also classified with these *pariahs*. With the best intentions, I desired with all my strength to believe this notion, but I could not live with *pro omnibus*, and I am of the opinion that it agrees even less with God's sacred Word. As a result I have asked myself whether the time has not come for me to venture at least a feeble attempt at a counter defense, and with a petition for greater light and better wisdom than is often offered by pulpit and lectern, to give a brief account of what I believe.

It is not as if I do not shrink back from such recklessness if I look to myself, or even if I compare all the talents and mental powers of the confessors of *particular* grace with the highly celebrated men who throughout the country are today the advocates of *universal* atonement. I do not deny in the least that, according to *that* standard, the ten talents perhaps belong to the opposition and I would be found with but one talent. Besides, neither the breadth of my own studies nor the certainty of my own conviction would enable me to escape the extremely oppressive feeling that arises in a person whenever, on some point, almost all who have a reputation for scholarship deny what he confesses.

What nevertheless gave me the courage to come out from under that oppressive feeling, and to speak out as I will presently, was not something found in myself, or anything associated with me or among my like-minded supporters. It was rather the valid consideration that the advocates of universal grace also stand fairly well isolated in their own situation as soon as they dare to confess the Son of God in circles of the highly educated.

In addition, it was really the fact that in such a dispute, the decisive vote is cast, not by the superiority of *knowledge*, but surely by the spiritual superiority of *faith*. And what especially encouraged me was that, no matter how isolated I may be among present-day theologians, I would have found any number of spiritual allies in earlier and spiritually *better* centuries, and

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that not among lay preachers in out-of-the-way places, but among stars of the first magnitude, among such men as Augustine and Calvin, and after that great Reformer—with the exception of Martini of Bremen—among the whole council of Dordt, that is, among the most illustrious gathering of theologians ever assembled. Similarly, I would have found spiritual allies among all those, *prior to* as well as *after* Dordt, who stood out among the theologians of our church for their brilliance and excellence and piety. Even the young [Johannes] Van den Honert, whose later departure from the truth is well known, in his *De Gratia Universali sive Particulari* still followed perfectly the old, pure paths, according to Comries' own testimony in his *Examen van Tolerantie*.

For please note, should it happen that you find the certain conviction of your heart validated by a whole cloud of glorious witnesses who were uniquely gifted by God's Holy Spirit with both spiritual powers and mental abilities, oh, then at last you cannot resist any longer the irresistible urge from within that, if possible, also in our day and for our contemporaries, the honor of God's holy name may again be uncovered from the dust under which it lies buried and the prejudice that obscures its luster. Though each one's conception of what constitutes God's honor is different, for us it must be the energizing principle and goal of life.



Meanwhile, today we are not even permitted this appeal to the old “cloud of witnesses” without further evidence. The confusion of language has already developed so far that people do not hesitate to place the opinions and ideas of the older generations in such a distorted light that they no longer say what they very surely meant, but now they appear to say what they before resolutely opposed!

Before I proceed, I must therefore demonstrate briefly that this cloud of witnesses actually did not know a grace that would *not* be particular.

If I may begin, then, with Calvin, read here his very explicit statement, which goes almost further than the Synod of Dordt:

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The words “but also for the sins of the whole world” are added for the sake of clarity, in order that believers would be firmly assured that the redemption gained by Christ actually extends to all who have received the gospel with a believing heart. But here a difference of opinion arises, how the apostle can say that the sins of *the whole world* are reconciled. I am not at all speaking of the insane view of those arrogant people who dare to say that grace has been obtained for all who perish and even for Satan. Such nonsense is not worth the effort of refutation. But others, who were too sensible for such foolishness, have claimed that Christ’s merit, though certainly *sufficient* for the reconciliation of the whole world, was actually *efficient* only for believers. This at least is what people teach in the seminaries. But even though I acknowledge freely that that distinction is valid, yet I deny that it agrees with I John 2:2, and I maintain that John has no other purpose here than to say that salvation is for *the whole church*. Consequently, this little word “all” does not include the reprobate but he applies this word exclusively to those who actually would believe and who are scattered over *the whole world*. After all, only then is the grace of Christ appropriately believed, when it is glorified as the only fountain of salvation for all the peoples of the world!²

In harmony with this, the Reformed church in these countries confesses the following in its official creed:

The death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin, and is of infinite worth and value, *abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world* (Canons of Dordt II, A, 3).

And, whereas many who are called by the gospel, do not repent, nor believe in Christ, but perish in unbelief; this is not owing to any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice offered by Christ upon the cross, but is wholly to be imputed to themselves (Canons of Dordt II, A, 6).

But as many as truly believe, and are delivered and saved from sin and destruction through the death of Christ, are indebted for this benefit solely to the grace of God, given them in Christ from everlasting, and not to any merit of their own (Canons of Dordt II, A, 7).

2. Joannis Calvinii (1509–1564), *Commentari in Epistolas Canonicas* (Amsterdam: Johannes Jacob Schipper, 1667), Tom. VII, 54b.

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For this was the sovereign counsel, and most gracious will and purpose 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 (Canons of Dordt II, A, 8).³

The Synod also briefly but vigorously added (and, as is well known, the *moderate* theology triumphed at Dordt) that the advocates of universal grace,

... while they feign that they present this distinction in a sound sense, seek to instill into the people the destructive poison of the Pelagian errors (Canons of Dordt II, B, 6).




Theologians who lived before the Synod of Dordt, both in our own country and abroad, taught the same thing. At Leiden, one of its first professors in theology, Trelcatius Sr., wrote:

Christ did not die for all, but only for the elect, for if one should ask “For whom did Christ die?” then this pertains to those in whom that death of Christ hath effected its purpose, and this can only include all and every believer.⁴

3. For example, the representation by Dr. J. J. Van Toorenbergen given in his *Contributions [Bijdragen tot de Verklaring, Toetsing en Ontwikking van der Leer der Herformde Kerk]* (Utrecht: Kemink, 1865), 142] rests on a misunderstanding, presented as if the universalism of Martini van Bremen remained without contradiction and as if the contradiction of the Reformed against the opponents of particularism had first appeared at the end of the seventeenth century. Concerning Martini, see *Brem. Jahrbücher*, 1878, Iken X, 11 ff.; and concerning the Synod of Dordt, Canons, Rejection of Errors, II, 6 where there is rejected as deceitful the ideas of those who teach “that God, as far as he is concerned, has been minded of applying to all equally the benefits gained by the death of Christ; but that, while some obtain the pardon of sin and eternal life and others do not, this difference depends on their own free will, which joins itself to the grace that is offered without exception.” Is this opposition or not? The advice of the Hessian deputies evidently merited little trust, because of their claims already in regard to Sybrandus Lubbertus.

4. Lucas Trelcatius Sr. *Locorum Communium S. Theologiae* (Leiden: Johannes Orlers, 1604), 262. See also Jacobus Kimmendoncius (died 1596), *De Redemptione Generis Humani* (Heidelberg: Abraham Smesmann, 1592), I. c. 11.

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And beyond the borders of our own country, Peter Martyr [Vermigli], in his *Loci Communes*, stated with equal candor,

One may not set it forth as though God's grace would be presented as a common grace to all men individually, so that it would now be in their power and will whether they would want to accept that proposed grace. Because in order for that death of Christ to be for us, it is necessary that we apply it, which we can do only by faith. But this faith is not of us, but is a gift of God. Accordingly, when the apostle says, "God will have all men to be saved," this is to be understood as if someone said, "God's will is the door of the house, and through that door all enter." But no one in ordinary life would ever conceive of it as if every person throughout the whole city actually then entered through that door. It means only this: "Whoever enters that house goes through that opening."⁵

Or if we want to hear testimonies from the period *after* Dordt, one should read the well-known *Synopsis* composed by the four Leiden professors, Walaeus, Polyander, Thysius and Rivet, which for almost a century remained the standard text of our theology:

The objects of grace are only the elect and true believers, both from the Old and New Testaments. For although the satisfaction of Christ, when viewed from the perspective of its scope, value, and sufficiency, could be extended to all men, yet it has been ordained specifically for those only whom the Father chose and granted to the Son.⁶

Or read H. Alting, the defender of the Heidelberg Catechism:

That Christ endured the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race does not mean that he bore the sins of every individual person. Rather, the term "world," or the human race, refers to the elect from the whole world. It was a wrath that had been aroused in God by the sin of the whole human race, and in that sense it was caused not by the sin of one man merely, but by the sin of all humanity. But the grace merited through the

5. Peter Martyr Vermigli (1500–1562), *Locorum Communium Theologicorum* (Basel: P. Perna, 1580), I, 850, 858.

6. Johannes Polyander, Andre Rivet, Antonius Walaeus, and Antoine Thysius, *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*; Disput. XXIX, Section 29.

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bearing of that wrath accrues to the benefit not of all, but only of believers, and is appointed only for the elect.⁷

In addition, Voetius emphatically opposed even the idea that *the sufficiency* of Christ's merit implied that his death actually offered sufficient grace to save all men, for he says,

Viewed in itself, the death of Christ is most certainly sufficient to that end, but in relation to those who perish, it is not only not sufficient; it is nothing.⁸

Now read Cocceius, who has the following unique conception of I John 2:2:

... but also for the sin of the whole world, which means for the sin of the elect, as long as the world endures, throughout all times, now and long ago and after us. Consequently, this stands opposed to the Pope's adherents, who keep repeating this sacrifice.⁹

Read also H. Witsius:

The death of Christ cannot have been substituted *for all*, because they for whom Christ died as an atoning sacrifice have been very really ransomed, then, out of the power of Satan, have a right to freedom, and cannot be throughout all eternity cast into hell any longer. At any rate, this is true if one does not want to maintain publicly the foolish claim that Christ has certainly paid all, but the payment made no difference. Accordingly, it can be no other way than that we must confess that Christ has given himself in death for people from every age and nation, and that God desires that all these be saved.¹⁰

Moreover, P. Van Mastricht wrote:


All Reformed theologians are in agreement in saying that there is in the death of Christ so great a value and worth because of

7. Henricus Alting (1583–1644), *Explicatio Catecheseos Palatinae* (Amsterdam, 1646), 206–215.

8. Gijsbertus Voetius, *Selectorum Disputationum Theologicorum* (Utrecht: Johannes Waesberge, 1648–1649), *Disput. Selectae*, II, 254.

9. Johannes Cocceius (or Coccejus) (1603–1669), *Opera Omnia Theologica* (Amsterdam: Janssonio-Waesbergias, Boom and Goethals, 1701), II, 4.

10. Herman Witsius, *De Oeconomia Foederum Dei Cum Hominiibus* (Leeuwarden: Jacob Hagenaar, 1677), II, VIII, 227, 228.

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the infinite value of his Person that it would be sufficient in itself to save and preserve all men and every man in particular. However, since neither the Father nor the Son decreed and ordained that death in order to redeem in particular all men and each man, therefore one cannot say that Christ died for all and every man individually.

Those who teach that, says Van Mastricht, are

the Pelagians and the adherents of the Pelagians. There are so many of them outside of the Reformed church who teach that Christ died equally for all, in such a manner that the application of, or fellowship in, the blessings of this death would depend upon their free will.¹¹

Finally, in order not to drift too far from Dort, we add to the above this brief statement of J. Van den Honert:

The merit of Christ's death and the grace of God that rests upon that death must extend equally as far as the purchase through which the Mediator has purchased his property. If, therefore, the merit of Christ's death were extended to all men, then all men should also be his property and consequently heirs of eternal life, which would be absurd! Therefore, this grace can only extend to the elect.¹²

One could cite exactly the same thing, in many varying expressions, for instance, from Pareus, in his notes on I John 2:2; from Jacobus Trigland,¹³ from Samuel Maresius,¹⁴ from J. à Marck,¹⁵ or from B. De Moor;¹⁶ likewise from Beza, Zanchius, Gomarus, Heidanus, Heidegger, Alstadt, Turretinus, Spanhemius, Pictet, and so many others.

11. Peter Van Mastricht (1630–1706), *Beschouwende en Praktikale Godgeleerdheit* (Rotterdam and Utrecht: Jacob Van Poolsum, 1749–1753), II, 744.

12. Johannes Van den Honert (1693–1758), *De Gratia Universali sive Particulari*. 325.

13. Jacobus Trigland (1583–1654), *Antapologia sive Examen atque Refutatio* (Amsterdam: Johannes Janssonius, 1664), 635a.

14. Samuel Maresius (1599–1673), *Systema Theologicum* (Groningen: Aemilius Spinneker, 1673), I, 10, section 31.

15. Johannes à Marck (1656–1731), *Compendium Theologiae Christianae* (Amsterdam: A. J. Douci, 1727), XXIII, 7.

16. Bernhard De Moor, *Commentarius Perpetuus in Johannis Marckii* (Leiden: Johannes Hasebroek, 1761–1771), IV, 449.

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Conversely, universal or general grace infiltrated the Reformed churches only later from without through the eccentricities of Crocius and Martini and Hildebrand of Bremen, and those especially of Amyraut and his followers from Saumur, among whom were L. Capellus, Dallaeus, and Blondel.



If people want to know, on the other hand, where this doctrine of general grace is readily accepted, let me say briefly, it is confessed by Rome: “Although Christ has died for all, yet only they receive the fruit of that death to whom the merit of that death is communicated.”¹⁷ It is the view of the Greek church that “Christ has redeemed the whole human race from eternal condemnation.”¹⁸

However, it is not the view of the Jansenist:¹⁹ “When the Bible says that Christ has died for all, this has in view the sufficiency of the value of his death; this does not pertain to the actual disposal.” It is, nevertheless, accepted very definitely, in part, by the Socinians.²⁰ The Mennonites²¹ also hold to this view of grace: “Since Paul speaks briefly of all men in regard to Jesus’ merit, so we know of no one to exclude from it.”²² The Arminians claim that “It is erroneously and unjustly asserted

17. *Canones Concilii Tridentini*. Sess. VI, c. 3.

18. *Orthod. Confessio*. Eccl. Orient. I, 9, 44.

19. Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638), *Augustinus* (1640). III, c. 21. [The Jansenists within the Roman Catholic Church were followers of Cornelius Jansen, who had thoroughly studied the writings of Augustine, had defended the doctrines of predestination and total depravity, and had opposed the Jesuit teachings of free will and man’s cooperation in the matter of salvation.]

20. [Socinians were the followers of Faustus Socinius (1539–1604), who rejected the doctrines of the Trinity, the atonement of Christ as satisfaction, and the total depravity of the fallen sinner. They were rationalistic and became forerunners of the Unitarian movement.]

21. [Mennonites are the spiritual descendants in The Netherlands of Menno Simons (c. 1492–1559). They were Anabaptists in faith and practice. They rejected the unique doctrinal emphasis of the Reformation. The Mennonite movement found its impetus in the Reformation’s alleged failure to go far enough to correct the moral and ethical abuses of the Romish church. They have been called “the step-children of the Reformation.” The Belgic Confession of Faith expressly condemns the more offensive errors of Anabaptism in Articles 18, 34, and 36.]

22. *Protocol, dat is de gansche Handelinghe des Gesprecks te Franckenthal* (1571), 198, 199.

that Christ died only for the elect.”²³ Also the Quakers²⁴ teach, “Christ has tasted death not only for a few persons of the good kind, but also for all persons of all sorts.”²⁵

Therefore, I think I can safely say, without exaggeration, that upon closer examination, in the era of our national glory—when there were theologians of the purer stripe and genuine theologians in abundance in the churches of this country holding forth brilliantly—the conviction that *grace is particular* was held as being the only scriptural and Reformed position. Conversely, the current doctrine of “Christ for all,” which is almost everywhere viewed as orthodox, hid in the dark like a condemned criminal, or roamed about outside our borders like an exile.

The above reminders seemed necessary to me to make clear to the reader how, despite the unfavorable times, I found nevertheless the courage of my conviction to express, confess, and urge, frankly and with boldness, in opposition to nearly all my contemporaries, a somewhat more detailed defense of what in my judgment is the truth according to God’s holy Word.

23. Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609), *Opera Theologica* (Frankfurt: Wolfgang Hoffmann, 1635), 161.

24. [“Quakers” is a term for the Society of Friends, who are the spiritual descendants of George Fox (1621–1691). They have their roots in England, where they reacted to the spiritual apostasy of the Church of England. They reject the instituted church’s offices, sacraments, and creeds. The motto of the Quakers is “the revival of primitive Christianity.” Their worship and faith is extremely subjective and mystical in that they appeal to the leading and prompting of the Holy Spirit in an inappropriate way.]

25. Robert Barclay (1648–1690), *Apologia Theologiae vere Christianae* (Amsterdam: Jacob Klaus, 1676), 63.

2

The Issues in the Dispute

*“Known unto God are all his works
from the beginning of the world.”*

Acts 15:18



Above all, it is necessary that we clearly perceive and rightly understand the question at issue in the dispute among the brethren in regard to such an extremely important aspect of the truth as *particular grace*. This second chapter, accordingly, will attempt nothing more than to elucidate the problem in this question that occupies our attention.

From the fact that we speak of a grace that is particular—that is, special—it immediately follows that there are others who teach that grace is *not* particular, but *universal* or *general*. If “particular,” in the present context, means “not in reference to all individuals but to some persons from among all,” it is self-evident that our opponents, the advocates of a universal grace, preach a grace “that is for all and is not limited to particular persons.”

At the same time, there is almost no ray of light cast upon the complicated subject matter by this vague distinction. For if we assert that grace, when viewed from the outcome, is in reality beneficial not for all, but only for particular persons from among all, then the opponents of a moment ago suddenly join our side and tell us emphatically that they themselves really had conceived of this no differently and would consider it scandalous if people ever dared to conceive of this in any other way!

That only some are saved is the position, not of a few, but of all who still confess Christ and the redemption in his blood. The only exception to that are those heretics, presently infiltrating the church again, who first whisper in your ear, and soon teach from the pulpit, that “to die unconverted” does not yet determine one’s eternal destiny, that people can still convert on the other side of the grave, and that *all* men will certainly repent in the hereafter, even after many centuries, and so in the end all will be saved.

Of course, those who teach and press that notion, and in that way even avoid purgatory, can no longer understand the *idea* of particular grace. For them the inexorable demand of God’s justice no longer applies. All further reasoning with them is pointless because, after all, as is evident from this heresy itself, they think they know better than holy Scripture.

If we exclude those people for a moment and take account of only such Christian confessors who still truly believe in harmony with God’s Word that whoever dies unconverted will not see life, then naturally all these people also confess with us a grace of which the result is particular and actually appears to be a means of salvation only for particular persons.

However, if we now imagine that we have won something by this admission, we are completely mistaken, because what they concede by it, when carefully examined, is nothing more than playing with words. It is like saying the same thing twice. It is a mere granting that a grace that really does not benefit all, is a grace that also brings the benefit *not* to all, a grace that is particular.



You do not gain anything, either, if you discuss completely in the abstract what the Eternal Being in himself would have willed. People usually ask you, then, whether—if you had been in God’s position—you would not have found enough love in your sinful heart to desire the salvation of all individuals. And they ask further whether you fail to appreciate God’s love if you dare to propose, for only a second, that God would not have

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willed salvation for all, and that he, the Father of all mercies, on the contrary, would have willed that most people perish.

In the first place, you could not be sure that your sinful heart at every moment of your life actually desired salvation for all individuals. At least our behavior is usually quite different from this. The way we so often envy others reveals, unfortunately, how little we usually grant each other even the lesser, temporal good. Besides, what the Lord God would have willed if man had *not* fallen is a supposition that, in the abstract, certainly allows for discussion, but it has no benefit for the reality of truth and the practice of life, because we are all sinners, and sinners are the only ones we ever meet. Finally, what settles the issue is that what God *in himself* would have willed is a supposition that is not germane, because if the subject under discussion is *grace*, we are contemplating the eternal God not in regard to himself, but in relation to his creature. And who, I ask you, will figure out to what extent God's act of forming the creatures involved for the infinitely high God the inclusion or exclusion of other conceivable possibilities?

If we would, therefore, grant for a moment that grace (if we contemplate merely the loving compassion in God's being) could be called not only *general* but even *infinite*, we would not have made an inch of progress even then, but we would again be confronted with the same word games, now with the word "universal." And we would discover that we agree only in this: that grace is not particular but is completely general so long as you focus not on particular persons but upon no person at all.

In order to escape these misconceptions and word games, our fathers were very properly accustomed to limiting the question more narrowly. In this way they would deliver you out of these circles of the witchcraft of general abstract notions, place you at once before the dreadful, naked reality of the cross of our Lord, and demand directly of your conscience, "Did that Christ die there at Golgotha for everyone, or only for the elect?"

It is not as if this question at once wipes out every trace of confusion and precludes all misunderstanding—not by any means! Still, by making use of this question, we depart from

the conjectures concerning the hidden being of God to the reality of what is revealed on earth, and we thus make some progress.

But first we must clear away several misunderstandings.

As soon as you face the issues in this way—before the cross of Calvary—immediately you are confronted with these questions: whether the death of the Son of God is insufficient to purchase freedom for everybody; whether the power of his death fell short of what is required; whether something must be added to his death, then, in order to deliver all men; and whether there be in heaven or on earth anything that can be conceived by which the value, the worth, and the preciousness of Jesus' death, of the blood of the unspotted Lamb, could be augmented or enhanced?

Of course, in response there is only one answer possible or conceivable: God's Son is God; God, and all that is of God, is infinite. Infinite, too, is the value and worth of the blood shed at Golgotha. So if you inquire about that, then—oh dear me—your “all men” is still as far removed from that cross as our “all the elect.” Just ask the great mathematicians whether one mile is equally as far away from “infinitely far” as ten miles. “Infinity” is inexhaustible. Even if you would cast all the sins of all men into one of two scales, and even if you mentally cast in, besides, a weight three times heavier containing the sins of ten human races that do not exist, plus the sins of the fallen angels, and even if you multiplied this weight by thousands, oh then that indescribable yet still measurable weight would always be a *finite* weight of sin. The other scale, wherein lies the *infinite* weight of Jesus blood, would not be lifted from the cradle of the scale, much less balance out the finite side.

Precisely because you prove too much, you prove nothing. Consequently, you gained nothing from our frank and unconditional agreement.

Or is there not emitted an abundance of light from the sun sufficient to illumine even the blind? And does this detract from the irrefutable truth that the light exists only for sighted humanity? Is there not plenty of room on the path for the lame,

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crippled, amputees, and the like? Does this detract, therefore, from the truth that people build these walkways only for those able to walk? Once again, is there not more than enough room in the seas, rivers, and lakes so that all could bathe in them? Does that remove the fact that these great bodies of water really do not exist for those who cannot swim? Well then, let us recognize and admit here also that to say, "In that ocean of value and treasure that was opened in Jesus' blood is a value abundantly sufficient for all" does not imply that therefore it is for all.

To this we must add that the whole notion upon which this reasoning is based is false. After all, Jesus' blood is not like a piece of gold or silver that has intrinsic value. Suppose you could have caught a drop of it and that you had sprinkled it on the heart of your child. Your child would obtain absolutely nothing from it for his salvation. The value and worth of Jesus' blood, accordingly, is not contained in the blood itself, but only in what Jesus attributes to that blood by his work of love. Although in the abstract we fully agree that the value of Jesus' blood cannot be measured, yes, that its value would be far more than sufficient to pay for the sins of the entire human race, this does not profit you at all if you fail to leave the abstract Jesus and come to the real Jesus, and if, standing at Golgotha, you ask yourself, "For whom did Jesus really die?"



People still persist and ask, "May it not be preached and should it not be preached to *all* individuals that the forgiveness of our sins must be found in Jesus' blood? And does not this message, which must be preached to all, imply in itself that he died for all?"

Here again we agree with you completely, except for one small consideration! Certainly, the gospel must be preached to all creatures among all nations. The complaint against the church of Christ is not insignificant that whole nations continue to exist without ever having heard the proclamation of the virtues of their King and Lord. However, the Bible also says,

“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine” (Matt. 7:6). To that extent we do not approve, on the basis of the command of our Savior, of all preaching of the gospel by everyone, to everybody, and in all places. Methodism, for example, sins greatly through excessiveness by way of a zeal that is off the track and shallow.

The calling of the church remains irrevocable, nonetheless. The church must bring the gospel to *all* creatures. And all nonsense talk concerning what you truly may or may not preach falls away as soon as preachers again seek the ways of the Lord only on his royal highways, and not on the dangerous side-paths of an unscriptural universalism. As long as pastors preach atonement of our sins *through faith* in Jesus’ blood without judging, as all-knowing gods, *who will believe*, and for whom, therefore, this atonement is intended, we have not only no criticism, but from the heart we applaud such preaching and insist that if the church of Christ is not to neglect her undeniable duty, this message may not be diminished in the least. But we do not understand at all how it would follow from this that Jesus died for all individuals.

Just because the crier—if we may use this figure for comparison—travels up and down the streets and alleys of the village to invite *all* to the auction sale, does this cancel out the condition that he really is inviting only: (1) those who desire to buy something; (2) those who have money to buy; and (3) those who have opportunity to go to the auction? By this illustration we can clearly see that by stating all these exceptions, one distorts the nature of the dispute, does not at all advance a solution, and unnecessarily prevents a meeting of the minds.

The only way by which you achieve clarity is to inquire about the *intention of God* and proceed directly to what thoughts filled the heart of Christ when he, the Son of God, died.

If Jesus died for all men, that must mean that while dying, he purposed to save all men. Or if he died for all the elect, that can and must only mean that while dying, he purposed to pour out his blood on the cross not for all men, but only for the elect. In this way, and only in this way, do we gain clarity.

2: *The Issues in the Dispute*

It all comes down to the divine *intention*, the *purpose* of Christ, and the men who burdened *Jesus' heart* when he died.



This being the case, people must not present the problem as something that arose only after the decay of Reformed theology, for already in the days of Dordt some among the common people understood very well that the controversy concerned this issue and only this issue.

I was reminded of that fact recently when I unexpectedly obtained a copy of an address that was given at a session of the Synod of Dordt at Leiden. According to the contents, it was delivered before a very unsophisticated audience. I found the following on page 19:

It is not the question whether Christ's death on account of its great value and merit would be sufficient to deliver all men from death and reconcile them to God if it were certain that they all believed. But this is the point at issue: whether Christ *according to his Father's counsel HAD TO and, according to his own intention and purpose, WANTED TO* die for all men, for believers as well as for unbelievers; or whether he had to and wanted to die only for those who believe in him (which are only the elect)?¹

Even as the speaker himself identified it, this was said clearly in the forthright language of the province of Zeeland. The issue in the dispute was plainly spelled out here, as we recognize, provided we are still on our guard for the devious ways of human pride.

There are Remonstrants [Arminians]² who would even sub-

1. *Oratie van het Synode Nationaal* (Leiden: Canin, 1619). [This could be David Pareus (1548–1622), *Oratie over het Synodi Nationaal, gehouden binnen Dordrecht* (Leiden: Isaac de Beer, 1619).]

2. ["Remonstrants" refers to those in the Reformed church in The Netherlands prior to the Synod of Dordt who signed the five articles presented at Gouda in 1610 by the leading theologians of the Arminian party. This document was entitled "Remonstrance," and therefore those who supported this position were called Remonstrants. The official Dutch version of the "Remonstrance" and an English translation are given by Homer C. Hoeksema in *The Voice of Our Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), 10–14. The other term, "Arminians," designates the same group, but now from the perspective of the founding father, Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609).]

scribe to that statement, but they would add to it, “Certainly not according to God’s natural inclination, but according to the will of his decree.”

With that addition you sense that everything is up in the air again. For the Remonstrants teach, further, that the omniscient God from the beginning knew who would believe; that he, the Father, had communicated this prescience to the Son; and that accordingly—since only those persons whom the Father knew from the beginning would one day come to faith and persevere—they were also chosen by him on *the basis of that foreseen faith*. In that way, yes, Christ was to shed his blood only for the elect, insofar as it was God’s counsel and Christ’s purpose to do so.

This is a view that is, relatively speaking, much sounder than the notions of many so-called orthodox preachers in our day. But it is, nevertheless, thoroughly Remonstrant to the bone and diametrically contrary to Scripture. It turns upside down the solidity of God’s works and his character as the creator and cause of all good things. We must, therefore, deny all access to that false subtlety in our contemplation of Scripture before we proceed in this discussion.

In God’s holy garden, we must not want to plant trees upside down—with their roots facing the sky and their branches in the soil! To turn things upside down from the very beginning is a perversion of the whole way. Let the cause, the fountainhead, the root, remain in God, and let nothing else ever be seen in us than the resultant effect, the stream that flows from its source, and the branch with its bud and blossom. There is no election, therefore, on the basis of a foreseen faith, but there is faith as the result of an antecedent election.

And if it is now established that Christ was *God*, and hence as God knew whom he had chosen and who would come to saving faith as the result of that election, then it is self-evident that our Mediator, who never desired to bring any other atonement than for those who would believe, intended the provision of the atonement solely and exclusively *for his own*.

That is why, when discussing whether Christ has died for all individuals or for all the elect, we can never employ the dis-

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inction between God's will and God's decree, as the Hessian and Bremen delegates advocated it at Dordt, since this distinction exclusively applies when considering *our* intention, but never may be given validity when there is discussion of *God's* intention.

When Joseph was about to be sold by his brothers, it was God's *revealed* will to Judah and Reuben, "Do not sell your brother!" Yet it was God's *hidden* decree that "Joseph will be sold by his brothers."

Accordingly, when we are talking about our activity, about what *we* are doing or what *we* intend, oh then most definitely, not only may we, but we must continually reckon with this golden maxim of evangelical wisdom: "Blind as regards the outcome, but fully obedient to the commandment!"

On the contrary, when, as here, we are discussing not what *we* but what *Christ* intended, and not what *we* but what *God* willed, then everyone senses that it is the height of absurdity to dare to distinguish in God himself between what he wills and, nevertheless, does not will!



The two ways of conceiving the issue stand in sharp contrast before us now. On the one hand, there are the *universalists*, or advocates of general grace, who maintain this position: When Jesus died on the cross, it was God's will and Christ's purpose to bring about the kind of atonement that, if need be, was sufficient for all men. In addition, they contend that this atonement, offered in Jesus' name to all men, would be a blessing to as many as, according to Jesus' intention, desired to accept this salvation, while the atonement would remain unused only by as many as did not believe, even though it was so appointed for them and even though Jesus had intended and expected that they would believe.

On the other hand, there are the *particularists*, or advocates of special grace, who teach this: The church must preach to all creatures that there is atonement obtained through Christ's death for everyone who believes, has believed, or will believe;

that is, because all believers are elect, atonement is only for the elect, not according to the [foreseen] result, but according to Christ's purpose and God's counsel. Particularists also teach concerning the application of this salvation that it is not concerned with possibly but as yet unconverted persons; on the contrary, it has to do with persons whom the Lord loves with an *eternal* love, even before they were born, and whom he *calls by name*.

We declare ourselves to be decidedly in favor of the opinions of the particularists. By saying this we do not claim in the least that there are no lines of thought remaining that are not problematic, or that there are no depths of it still to fathom. Rather, we frankly acknowledge the complexity of this in all reverence and humility.

What we do maintain, however, is that the doctrine of the *universalists*, instead of making the difficulties more manageable, broadens, expands, and greatly multiplies them. Besides, in connection with these extremely complicated weavings of God's movements with man's movements, we maintain that the universalists attribute all that exalts to man, whereas all that diminishes they dare to push off on God. The universal view cannot and may not be confessed by us because, far from being supported by the Bible, which is, after all, the fountain of all truth, it clashes directly with the Word of our God.