

## The Antithesis Opposition

Are Christians still in confrontation with the world? Are they still waging the battle for Christ and against the forces of darkness? As I see it, there appears to be a revolt against the antithesis within the church of Jesus Christ. The fixed truth versus error distinctives on which the Bible insists is being questioned today. New thought forms are uncritically taken over from the powerful mass media. The secular spirit, relativism and pragmatism are influential. Many Christian leaders are putting more emphasis on solidarity with the world than on separation from it. The most subtle tactic – in the arsenal of Satan – in his opposition to the Lord and His agenda for the world and church is to soft pedal the antithesis, to encourage the spirit of accommodation, to erect a neutral zone in a spiritual no-man's land. The powers of darkness have always tried to make the church worldly-minded.

The biblical antithesis principle was revived through Abraham Kuyper's neo-Calvinism. Kuyperianism was a strong factor in The Netherlands until World War II. Afterwards, it went into a tail spin. Its influence rapidly waned. Why the strong opposition to the antithesis? I want to concentrate on two main reactions within the church. One is pietism, the other neo-orthodoxy.

### Pietism

Pietism, as a movement among Protestants, had its roots in the 17th and 18th centuries. It emphasized the necessity for good works and a holy life. Pietists looked for a deeper spiritual life. Pietism became an important force which brought many benefits to Protestantism. But some of its features led to the reduction of the Gospel. It doesn't see the world as the Lord's. The world is in the midst of darkness, including education, science, government, the arts. It cannot be redeemed. Christ didn't come to save the world but to save souls as branches out of the fire. The Gospel is restricted to personal salvation. Secret, intimate, and mystical fellowship with God is sought. Not world dominion, as commanded by the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28), but world flight is practiced.

Pietism avoids world involvement, avoiding the main problems of a society guided by non-biblical principles. But refusal to participate in the world is in conflict with our Lord's teaching (John 17:15).

From the beginning, Kuyper was opposed by a segment of the Dutch evangelical community. When he appealed for Christian communal action, the formation of Christian organizations, Pietists didn't respond. But not only evangelical Pietists, but also extremely conservative Reformed Christians, strongly influenced by Pietism, refused to become members of Christian organizations. When they did organize, they joined either a socialist or a "neutral" organization. I find this attitude inconsequential. Christians, who don't think it necessary to propagate a Christian world and life view and don't join the battle for a Christianized culture, have split lives. One part of their life is ruled by the Bible and the other by the spirit of the community.

Over against the privatized faith of the Pietists, the Bible teaches that when Christ saves, He saves not just the soul but the whole man. But in our current spiritual dearth, Christians of Reformed persuasion should thirst for a deeper relationship with God. Kuyper, the theologian and politician of the antithesis, taught and led a devout Christian life. One of his classical works is the *Practice of Godliness*. This book is still fine inspirational reading today.

### **Meo-Orthodoxy**

Neo-orthodoxy as a theological movement was spearheaded by Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. They considered themselves as the true heirs of the Reformation. They believed (that the Bible is not revelation itself but a witness to revelation. Religious certainty is not to be found in an inerrant Bible but in the confrontation of man by the Word of God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit. God is the Wholly Other who is not to be identified with anything in the world. Everything stands under the judgment of God. Barth thought it irreverent to turn the Gospel of Christ into human ideology. Barth warned, therefore, against identifying the Gospel with a humanly conceived social program. He scoffed at Kuyper's Christian political program, the Christian approach to art, social questions and education. He was a harsh critic of Christian organized action. Christians should not organize themselves in separate organizations. The only separation for the Christian is the fellowship within the church. The Christian, wrote Barth, "is never led astray ... from the path of fellowship with the enemy ... Christians do not need to form a party in the struggle against the wicked, but can and must continue undismayed to tread the way of fellowship with the latter." He asked, "Can there be any other Christian party in the State but the Christian fellowship itself, with its special mission and purpose? . . . The Church's supreme interest must be . . . that. Christians shall not mass together in a special party, since their task is to defend and proclaim, in decisions based on it, the Christian gospel that concerns all men."

Barth's followers initiated the "break-through" (Doorbraak) in The Netherlands. Their success was particularly noted in the post-World War II years. Christian organizations were feared. The churches were told to be in solidarity with the world and to forget about the antithesis. A whole shift in spiritual life took place.

Barthianism doesn't accept the fact that the forces of evil can disrupt man's solidarity so severely that there is no choice left but to organize into separate Christian organizations.

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