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Editorial

Welcome to old and new readers. It is a great privilege to be invited by the Theological Commission of WEF once again to take up the General Editorship of the *Evangelical Review of Theology*. Since I handed on my pen to Dr. Sunand Sumithra in 1986 I have been serving as a presbyter or minister of a Hindi-speaking congregation in the Diocese of Delhi of the Church of North India. It has been an enriching spiritual experience and a deepening of my theological understanding. I will continue my church responsibilities.

In earlier editions of ERT we focused on sections including Faith and Church, Theology and History, Theology and Mission, Theology and Culture, Ethics and Society, Pastoral Care and Theological Education. However, for the next two years I want to develop issue-orientated numbers which I trust will have the value of being a mini-reference library on contemporary theological reflection by scholars worldwide. Our goal is to double the number of readers during 1991. I invite you to send me manuscripts, reprints of articles and book reviews for consideration for publishing. A year's subscription will be given to all whose submissions are published. Since our readership is international I would like to be able to publish in every issue articles and book reviews that emanate from different regions of the world, namely Latin America, North America, Europe, Africa, Asia and the South Pacific.

In this issue we are reflecting on the salvation and lostness of mankind. To all who are committed to the biblical faith, to world evangelization and to peace and justice in society, this issue is primary as it is to the heart of God. While we rejoice in the amazing growth of the Church, especially in the developing countries and now in Eastern Europe, we share God's pain in the lostness of the increasing number who have never heard the gospel or who have turned against the gospel misrepresented to them. Multitudes in affluent societies are content to live their lives without reference to God. In this edition we seek to grapple with both biblical and sociological concerns. We pray that God will throw more light on his Word, deepening our understanding, and lead us to greater commitment in discipleship.

Bruce J. Nicholls p. 4

The Salvation and Lostness of Mankind

Bruce J. Nicholls

In this lead article the author surveys the range of issues discussed in this number of ERT and raises some basic questions which demand a response.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the claims and experience of people of other religious faiths is an unresolved issue for those Christians who identify themselves as evangelical. For other Christians some form of universalism offers a possible solution.

Four major international inter-faith organizations are combining to observe 1993 as the year of Inter-Religious Understanding and Cooperation. The year marks the centenary of the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893, where Vivekananda's message of 'universal acceptance' marked the beginning of the inter-faith movement. These four organizations which plan to meet in India in August 1993 are The International Association of Religious Freedom, The Temple of Understanding, The World Congress of Faiths and The World Conference on Religion and Peace. It appears that the year of inter-religious understanding has the tacit support of the WCC's unit concerned with 'People of Living Faiths'.¹

The Seventh General Assembly of the WCC, to meet at Canberra in February 1991 on the theme 'Come Holy Spirit—Renew the Whole Creation', will determine the churches' response to this inter-religious challenge. Twenty years ago Metropolitan George Khodr of the Middle East, speaking of the economy of the Holy Spirit in a universal Pentecost, suggested that 'the non-Christian religions may be considered as places where his inspiration is at work. All those visited by the Spirit are the people of God'. Khodr adds that 'while waiting for the coming of the Lord we must secretly be in communion with all men and women and the economy of the Mystery within which we are moving slowly towards the final consummation, when all things will be gathered up in Christ'.² The implied universalism of this understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit is clear. How do we respond to this challenge?

The year 1993 is also the 200th anniversary of William Carey's arrival in India, marking the beginning of the world-wide Christian p. 5 missionary movement. Today the missionary structures of the Church have not lessened, despite the increasing restriction placed on missionary personnel. The younger churches of Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Pacific are sending forth their witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ with increasing fervour and the number of indigenous missionary agencies is multiplying. The emphasis is on reaching the unreached for Christ. The unashamed goal is to convert people of other faiths or no faith to Christ, and to plant churches among every people group.

Here then are two interpretations of the gospel that appear to be mutually exclusive. Evangelicals must take up this challenge and develop a coherent theology of mission in the context of the plurality of religions and ideologies. We must start with a biblical understanding of revelation, and then enter into authentic dialogue with people of other faiths in order to understand the dynamics of their spirituality, metaphysical framework and epistemology. At least two-thirds of the world's population have either not heard of Christ or have rejected him. What is their eternal destiny? Are there culturally orientated bridges of experience by which we may communicate the Good News of the gospel?

We begin our study with the belief that the critical issue of the next decade will be Christology—Christ as unique and Christ as universal; Christ in the context of the claims of other faiths; Christ in the midst of enormous human suffering, violence, poverty and oppression; Christ in relation to the ecological issues of human survival; Christ in the sphere of cosmic conflict with the Evil One and demonic evil in society.

One of the most agonizing questions for Christians living in the Two-Thirds World is: 'What is the eternal destiny of those who have never heard the gospel?' Someone asked Jesus as he was on his way through the towns and villages towards Jerusalem, 'Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?' Jesus did not explicitly answer the enquirer's question, but gave him a 'Yes and No' response. Jesus replied, 'Make every effort to enter

¹ *Current Dialogue*, 17 December 1989.

² *Living Faiths and the Ecumenical Movement of Geneva*, 1971, p. 140.

through the narrow door because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able'. Then after discussing the agony of the lost he continued, 'People will come from the east and west and north and south and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last' ([Luke 13:22-20](#)). This response comes as a warning to us not to look for simplistic answers to the mystery of God's sovereign work of saving those who enter the kingdom and condemning those who are lost.

The thought of the lostness of the greater proportion of today's world [p.6](#) population is unbearable. We must leave the judgement to God. Abraham felt that agony as he dialogued with the Lord over the imminence of the destruction of the people of Sodom. His only answer was, 'Will not the judge of the earth do right?' ([Genesis 18:25](#)). However, our mandate is clear; Christ commissions us to preach the gospel to all the world and to be his co-labourers in the building of his Church.

WHO ARE THE LOST

Evangelicals are committed to the spirit of Lausanne II, 'The Whole Church Taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World'. In recent years much attention has been given to identifying unreached people groups. Statistical details have been publicized from time to time. With an emphasis on cultural anthropology the primary focus has been on identifying ethnic groups, especially those in the less accessible regions of the world. While this analysis is important, we believe that the truly unreached peoples are those who live in the millions of ordinary villages in the developing world, and in the rapidly growing slums of their cities.

I am the pastor of a local church in the town of Gurgaon, Haryana, a satellite town of the capital city, New Delhi, India. Apart from the Roman Catholic church and several small splinter Protestant groups, I am the only pastor in a town of approximately 300,000 people. According to the government census the number of Christians in the State of Haryana is .01%, less than a tenth of one percent, while in many of the villages it is estimated only one in ten thousand is a Christian. I have travelled through many villages and towns with a heavy heart without ever seeing a sign of the cross. Our denomination, the Church of North India, has 15 local churches among 15 million people; and we are by far the largest church body! Probably more than 50% of the people are illiterate. They can't read the Scriptures. Christian radio does not reach them. Hit and run evangelism by zealous para-church groups leaves little result. These people are unevangelised, they have never heard the gospel. They are lost.

In each of the four main cities of India—Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Delhi—approximately one-third of the population live in dehumanizing slum conditions. Few have heard the gospel to the point of understanding it. They are poor, underemployed, sick, diseased and illiterate; they live lives that are dehumanizing. The evangelist who closes his eyes to this deplorable and distressing situation need not be surprised if the slum dwellers block their ears to his verbal preaching. [p.7](#) Words must be authenticated by deeds. If evangelism does not begin with the evangelist living an incarnated life among the people, it is not evangelism at all. We evangelical Protestants are largely middle class people who find it very hard to understand and identify with the lost. We are like the man standing on the sea shore throwing a rope to a drowning man and giving him good advice. We don't want to get our clothes wet.

The number of people who are lost is increasing rather than decreasing, despite the utopia dreams of some who expect to see the world evangelized by the year 2000 A.D. Today three-quarters of all humanity live in the developing countries, and by the year

2000 A.D. the proportion will probably have risen to four-fifths. The unevangelized live in these countries. At the same time there are millions of people of other faiths and ideologies who have misheard the gospel so that their minds are blinded to its truths. There are others who have not heard the gospel because the Christian messenger doubts the uniqueness of Christ or offers a gospel limited to political freedom and social justice.

Lostness has both vertical and horizontal dimensions, and we are called to proclaim a whole gospel which meets the totality of this lostness. Evangelism must include verbal proclamation of the revealed message from God. But it must also be experiential. People of other faiths expect to see a life style that is commensurate with the message. Hence the Asian ideal is a teacher, guru or master who shares only what he has experienced. At the same time the gospel must make sense to the hearer.

Different cultures have different epistemological values. While the West (with its history of emphasis on rational thought) emphasizes the cognitive basis of the gospel, the majority of the people of Asia give greater priority to intuitive knowledge, mystical experience and personal relationships. Communication is more symbolic. Poetry, parables, proverbs, songs, drama and movement take priority over rational discourse. Hinduism has been taught from generation to generation through symbolic action, analogies and myths rather than through logic and historical events. The goal of the Asian mind is 'to see God'. Multitudes remain in their lostness because we have been unable to translate and communicate the gospel in terms of their way of thinking and understanding. We are more interested in the content of the gospel than in the mind set of the hearer.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE LOVE AND THE JUSTICE OF GOD

The first eleven chapters of Genesis outline the universality of God's **P.8** love and justice in all of creation and for the whole of mankind. These chapters are an amazing introduction to the gospel. Again and again I am overwhelmed with their relevance to our Asian context. Genesis begins with God the creator finding satisfaction in everything he has created. He saw that it was good. He brought order out of chaos. The most incredible statement in the story is that God culminated his creative work by creating man, male and female, in his own divine image and likeness, giving to this special creature the capacity to relate in love and holiness with the Creator himself. But for this relational image to have meaning it must include the capacity for rational thought and to act with freedom of will. From Adam to Abraham God revealed himself as a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God, who demands a response of love and obedience among those with whom he chooses to enter into this divine-human relationship. In these early chapters the universality of the justice of God is also seen. God punishes those who rebel against him and his commands. Yet this judgement is tempered by mercy. God made a covenant with Noah and his descendants that the Great Flood would not be repeated. God accepted Noah's sacrifice of a burnt offering as a sufficient sign of his repentance and faith. Noah became the heir of righteousness that comes by faith ([Hebrews 11:7](#)). God scattered the rebellious people of Babel and confused their language. Yet this severe judgement was in fact an act of God's mercy to save them from total self-destruction.

From [Genesis 12](#) to Malachi the story is the same. The universality of God's love and justice is seen throughout the period of more than 1000 years. God chose a people to be his own, not for their own sake but to be the channel of blessing to all the peoples of the earth ([Genesis 12:3](#)). God's covenant with the descendants of Abraham was motivated by love and faithfulness to his promises to them. But to those who disobeyed his law and fell

into idolatry and immorality, the severity of his judgement was overwhelming. The greater the privilege, the greater responsibility to obedience and faithfulness.

God's redeeming love was not limited to Israel. The promise of the Messiah was not for Israel alone, but for all people. The most significant example of God's love outside the seed of Abraham was Melchizedek, king of Salem and a priest of God Most High. We presume he was a Canaanite, probably a Jebusite from the region of Jerusalem. In the name of God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, he blessed Abraham, who responded with a tithe of all his acquired wealth ([Genesis 14:19–20](#)). He is portrayed as a type of the coming Messiah ([Hebrews 5:6–10](#), [7:1–3](#)). He was an outsider who undoubtedly had a living relationship with his Creator God. The Bible [p.9](#) records a wide range of people to whom God revealed himself. God rebuked Abimelech, king of Gerar, in a dream for taking Abraham's wife Sarah ([Genesis 20](#)). Jethro, a Midianite priest, became Moses' father-in-law and offered sacrifices to the God of Moses ([Exodus 18:12](#)). We also remember the prophet Balam, the prostitute Rahab, the widow of Zarephath, Naaman the Syrian general, and Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon who having received a vision in a dream acknowledged the Most High God ([Daniel 4:2f](#)). After the miracle of the lion's den, Darius the Median king worshipped Daniel's God and decreed that he must be feared and revered, 'for he is the living God and he endures forever' ([Daniel 6:26](#)). The most striking example in the New Testament of God's special self-revelation to the pagan world was his disclosure to the Magi who appear to have been practising astrologers as well as astronomers but who came to worship the new born King. Much of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament reflects the divine wisdom independent of God's revelation to Israel. Job also appears to have been an outsider, but one who had a true knowledge of God. We do not know whether those who lived outside the knowledge of revelation given to Israel were reckoned by God as righteous through their faith, but we can affirm that there was a wideness in God's mercy.

The universality of the love and justice of God is central to the New Testament revelation. John declares that the goal of God's universal love is not to condemn the world but to save it ([John 3:17](#)). Eternal life is shown to be partaking of the life of God, through faith in Jesus Christ. Similarly, eternal death is an absolute quality of separation from the presence of God. However, says John, the light has come but men love darkness rather than light and flee from it. They prefer hell to heaven. But the terror of hell is that it is a state from which there is no return. It is a life sentence without parole. Eternal life is not in the immortality of the soul, but is to be experienced through resurrection of life in the body. The bliss of the resurrection life will transcend the bliss of our humanity. On the other hand the terror of the resurrection body in hell will be the inability to fulfil those desires which are partially fulfilled in the body on earth and in the remorse of living without forgiveness. In eternal life and eternal death there is both continuity with life on earth and the discontinuity which transcends it. Those who reject God in this life would find heaven in the next life intolerable. Ultimately, every argument in favour of universalism falls short of the justice of the love of God.

Paul writes to Timothy that God our Saviour wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth, for the one mediator [p.10](#) between God and man, Christ Jesus, gave himself as a ransom for all men ([1 Timothy 2:3–6](#)). In the midst of the joy and terror of the Final day of our Lord, Peter declares that the Lord is patient, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance ([2 Peter 3:9](#)). This is not a case for universalism, as William Barclay hints, but rather a statement that God has given freedom to all to choose. All have the freedom to resist the Spirit of God. At the same time we affirm that those who come to the light do so because the light of Christ draws them; they do not come on their own. Salvation from beginning to end is by the grace of God. It was true for

those who lived under the old covenant as it is for those who live under the new covenant. It is in this context of the universal love and justice of God that we understand divine election unto salvation. God predestines to eternal life those whom he will. This mystery of the relationship between the love and justice of God is beyond our comprehension. If we could rationalize it, we would be God ourselves. The tragedy of Islam is that it rationalizes the divine mysteries—the mystery of God’s triune nature, the incarnation and the redemptive work of the cross. The result is that though God is merciful he is not love. He predestines to hell as well as to heaven. The Muslim submits but he is not liberated. Allah is just, but there is no universality in his love.

The pivotal point of salvation and lostness is the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ; unique and final in his incarnation, his cross and resurrection. He alone is worthy to say, ‘I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me’ ([John 14:6](#)). Peter proclaimed, ‘There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved’ ([Acts 4:12](#)). Paul expounds that there is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus ([1 Timothy 2:5](#)). He alone is the one who can reconcile man and God and break down the wall partition between men ([Ephesians 2](#)). In the words of John, ‘He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only ours, but also for the sins of the whole world’ ([1 John 2:2](#)). Sir Henry Holland received his missionary call to the North West Frontier of India when he came to understand the meaning of a plaque on the mantelpiece of a home he was visiting: ‘Not for ours only’.

We affirm that the love and justice of God in Jesus Christ is the only ground for our salvation. All who have been, are, and will be saved and enter the kingdom of God will do so through the finished work of Jesus Christ. Salvation which is by grace alone is received through faith in Christ alone. But faith has no merit of its own; it is the outstretched empty hand grasped by the nail-pierced hand of the Saviour. This claim to the exclusiveness of salvation in Christ is undoubtedly the [p.11](#) greatest stumbling block to the religious mind. It is foolishness to the secular mind. Judaism in the modern state of Israel is bitterly anti-Christian. Fundamentalist Islam dominates the Muslim world. The Hindu is deeply offended when told that he is an anonymous Christian. To the Buddhist the exclusive claims of Christ are foolish and irrelevant, for all of life is in a constant state of impermanence and change. For Rajneesh, the modern guru, and for the masters of Zen Buddhism rationality itself is futile. As Christians, our glory is not in the superior claims of our religion but in the cross. We are bonded servants of Jesus Christ.

THE UNIVERSAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN THE WORLD OF RELIGIONS

Paul in [Romans 1:18–32](#) gives us the most profound explanation of God’s wrath against mankind. It is pivotal to Paul’s understanding of lostness. In anticipation of the criticism that God’s wrath is immoral, unjust and contrary to the nature of God as love, Paul argues his case to show that men are without any excuse ([1:20](#)). God punishes the wicked and abandons them to the hell they have created here on earth because they have rejected the universal knowledge of God. They have suppressed the truth by their wickedness. They gave only themselves to blame; they cannot blame God.

Our basic premise is that all men and women seek after God or Ultimate Reality because by nature they are created in the image of God and they find no rest until they rest in him. In the words of John B. Taylor, ‘Religion is a tradition of response’.³ Each religion has its own metaphysical and spiritual core, its own path to reaching that goal tested by many generations of followers and enshrined in a cultural way of life which

³ John B. Taylor, *The Go-Between God* (London, SCM, 1972), p. 82f.

reflects the dynamic essence of the religion. As Paul Tillich has well said, 'Religion is the substance of culture and culture is the form of religion'. The evolutionary theory of the development of religions is misleading.

Each religion is *sui generis*. Each is a tradition of response to fundamental issues of life, offering its own solutions. For example, the *samadhi* trance experience of conscious bliss or of total unconscious absorption in Ultimate Reality is the goal of millions of sincere Hindus. The few who achieve it experience inexpressible bliss within their own metaphysical framework. It is a real experience. The Christian outsider will acknowledge its reality but deny its ultimate truth because he [p. 12](#) believes its metaphysical assumptions are false. In a similar way, we say that the psychology of Christian conversion, which varies enormously from personality to personality and from culture to culture, is real to the one converted. While the reality of the experience cannot be denied, the truth of it may be, unless it coheres with the biblical criteria for conversion. The experience of conversion may be the work of the Spirit of God, or it may be self-induced or even demonically controlled, as it appears to be in so-called Christian sects.

Thus mankind made in the image of God is incurably religious and seeks for fellowship with God. Therefore the mind is not a blank page; it is already preconditioned towards God. This is abundantly true in all world religions. Every day millions of Hindus pray the Upanishadic prayer:

From the unreal lead me to the real,
From the darkness lead me to light,
From death lead me to immortality.

The search for God among many Hindu *sannyasins* puts us Christians to shame. The *sannyasin* will forsake his family and home, comforts, even clothes and food and retire to the stillness of a Himalayan cave or to the solitude of the jungle in order to meditate and wait for the *darshan* or vision of God. Why do people willingly endure such personal privations? Because they are created in the image of God. Their rationality and creativity will be directed to the single goal of knowing God. In authentic dialogue Christians will recognise this divine image both in themselves and in their interlocutor.

A second premise in understanding why all seek after God is that our God, the creator-redeemer God of the Bible, is not asleep needing to be awakened by the temple bells or by repetition of prayers. God is the living God; his nature is triune; his attributes of love and holiness are ultimately personal. He is the I AM—the eternal Present. He is the ever seeking God reaching out in love to all mankind.

God is not imprisoned by time for he is the creator of time and space. Yet for our salvation he chose to enter time and be subject to it. He was the Word who tabernacled among us. Yet this eternal Word has been present in the world since the beginning of creation. In the words of John, 'he is the true light that gives light to every man who comes into the world' ([John 1:9](#)). He is more than the impersonal reason of Greek philosophy. He is the eternal personal Word of God. His speaking is creative as it was in the original creation. This Word manifested himself in many forms in the past through the angel of the Lord, in dreams and visions and the quietness of the inner voice. He is the light that enlightens every man. All religious traditions give recognition [p. 13](#) to this light. It is a universal symbol for the ever-seeking God.

Another stream of the triune God's self-revelation to all men is through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God hovered over the chaos and was the agent of creation. The same Spirit is the missionary of God. He is there when the Word is preached. He is always ahead of Christ's missionary disciples preparing the way, and the wise and sensitive cross-cultural missionary will always be sensitive to signs of the work of the Spirit. Tukaram, the low

caste grain seller who lived in the village of Dehu near Pune in western India in the sixteenth century, cried out in one of his poems:

As on the bank the poor fish lies,
And gasps and writhes in pain,
Or as a man with anxious eyes
Seeks hidden gold in vain—
So is my heart distressed and cries
To come to Thee again.⁴

In most preliterate traditional societies there is a vague knowledge of the Most High Creator God. This has been well researched among tribal groups in West Africa. It is equally true of the Pacific Islands. In the earliest of Hindu scriptures, the Rig Veda, Varuna is the creator and ruler of the moral universe. In later Hindu mythology three gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva form a *trimurti* or triad representing three aspects of the Supreme. Brahma is the creator, but there are few who describe themselves as devotees of Brahma and remarkably few temples dedicated to him. God the creator is only vaguely grasped in the world of religions. He is too distant to become central to everyday religion.

A further evidence of God's universal love is his self-disclosure through creation itself. Paul declares that 'God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature' have been clearly seen and understood by all ([Romans 1:20](#)). Calvin described creation as a mirror which reflects the attributes of the universal God. Thus God is known by inference from his works.

The universality of God's love and justice comes into sharper focus in the universal recognition of moral law and justice. Paul argues that 'when the Gentiles who do not have the law [of Moses] do by nature those things required by the law they are a law for themselves, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness' ([Romans 2:14f](#)). Conscience is [p. 14](#) the human response to the divine law reflecting the *imago dei* intuitive in human personhood and enlivened by the ever-speaking Spirit. The response to a bad conscience is a sense of shame or loss of status in the eyes of society. Shame is the dominating factor in the religions and cultures of Asia dominated by societal relationships. In those religions which have a sense of the otherness of the creator God, who is moral and just, there is also an awareness of guilt, a sense of failure or coming short in the sight of the law-giver God. The monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam have this inner awareness of both guilt and shame, whereas the polytheism of Hinduism and the agnosticism of Buddhism are essentially shame-orientated. The spirit-dominated animist faiths, which are conscious of good and evil inherent in nature itself, also have some awareness of both guilt and shame.

The universality of moral principles is seen in the concept of *karma* or moral law, common to both Hinduism and Buddhism. *Karma* is the law of cause and effect. It expounds the biblical principle that 'as a man sows so shall he reap' ([Galatians 6:7](#)). *Karma* is central to these two religions. The awareness of man's inability to outweigh his evil deeds by good deeds in a time span of one life led to the development of the companion doctrine of *samsara* or rebirth, in order to overcome the evil *karma*. This *samsara* is an admission of failure before absolute moral law. The common element in the moral codes of all religions testifies to the intuitive moral nature of mankind created in the image of God and to the working of the Spirit of God among all people.

⁴ A. J. Appasamy, *Temple Bells* (Calcutta, YMCA Publishing House).

The more difficult question is to know how far the universal knowledge of God as creator also includes some awareness of God as redeemer. I think it does for without this knowledge Paul could not claim that all of mankind is without excuse. The universal awareness of a need for forgiveness, however vaguely understood, points to the intuitive longing for a redeemer. In the first chapters of Genesis the practice of sacrifice to God is introduced without explanation. It is the natural response to a sense of guilt and shame. It may take the form of appeasement rather than propitiation or expiation, but the latter is sometimes present. In the Vedas we meet the creator as *prajapatti*, the god who sacrifices himself for the salvation of the people, a theme which the early 19th century convert K. M. Banerjee used in his discourses with Hindus. The elaborate details and year long preparation for the *aswamedha* (horse sacrifice) in early Hinduism suggests a highly developed sense of shame and guilt and the belief that salvation or liberation from *karma* can only come through sacrifice. In animist faith the concept of appeasement to the spirits through blood sacrifices is a central motif of their religious life. Thus we conclude that God's p. 15 universal revelation as creator cannot be isolated from his revelation of redemption through sacrifice. God's universal revelation is one.

This concept of God's universal or general revelation, as distinct from his special and final revelation in Jesus Christ, has had an important place in the history of Christian doctrine. Augustine and the Catholic tradition culminating in Anselm and Thomas Aquinas laid the foundation for the doctrine. The Reformers Luther and Calvin put the doctrine on a biblical foundation and stressed that all people possess a general knowledge of the creator God and of his moral law. Calvin stressed the internal and intuitive knowledge of God through the *imago Dei* and the external and inferential knowledge through the creator's works in the space-time world.⁵ Demarest traces the alternative Reformed approach, beginning with Abraham Kuyper, going on to G. C. Berkouwer and more recently Cornelius Van Til, all of whom reject the idea that Calvin taught, that a true knowledge of God is mediated through God's general revelation in nature and in providence. Demarest then analyses the 'Barthian backlash' and the rejection of the distinction between the general and special revelation by many contemporary Protestant and Catholic scholars. Such a historical survey is beyond the scope of this study.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF GOD'S WRATH

In discussing Paul's positive approach to God's universal revelation through creation and moral law, it is sometimes overlooked that the primary purpose of [Romans 1:18-32](#) is to show that the wrath of God is being revealed against all godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. Paul argues that all who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law ([2:12](#)) and that there is no one righteous, not even one. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ([3:10](#), [23](#)). Clearly in Paul's mind there is no salvation in God's universal revelation in nature or in conscience, not because they are not valid paths to a true knowledge of God, but because of the enormity of human sin and rebellion so that all men are blinded to their truths. Paul argues, 'Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened' ([1:21](#)). Paul then P. 16 shows that humankind expresses its rebellion against God's self-revelation by creating images of God in humankind's own image or that of creation and by worshipping and

⁵ For an excellent historical review see *General Revelation* by Bruce A. Demarest (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1982). This is the most comprehensive and up-to-date study on the theme of general revelation known to this author.

servicing our own created gods. Finally, God gives the human race up to natural consequence of the cause and effect of their sin, but as a just and holy God he will punish with retributive justice all who wilfully rebel against him. The universality of idolatry, explicit or implicit in all religions, is universal evidence that humans have become corrupt in the totality of our being. [Romans 1-3](#) is a profound theological commentary on the story of the creation and fall in [Genesis 1-3](#). Images may be in the form of human gods and goddesses; or animals; or part of each, as in Hinduism; or they may be in the subtle form of sacred scriptures or of mystical experience. Idolatry may also take the form of moral perversion ([Colossians 3:5](#)). The idolator seeks to manipulate his own god through cultic practices, through *mantras* or incantations, or through subtle forms of mental images such as the *atma* or self being absorbed into the *brahma* or ultimate Self.

Paul's argument—that men in their wickedness suppress the truth and exchange the truth of God for a lie, and worship the gods they have created—is born out in the world of religions. For example, the concept of *karma* or moral law in Hinduism and Buddhism enshrines the biblical principle of justice but it becomes an end in itself. *Karma* is independent of God and even the gods are subject to *karma*. The cyclic wheel of illusion revolves by the inherent forces of *karma*, over which neither the gods nor God can exercise any control. In the stricter sense there is no possibility of forgiveness for *karma* is unalterable. Thus *karma* becomes the abuse of true law. Such a doctrine leads to fatalism and in the allied doctrine of *samsara* or rebirth, to despair and pessimism. *Karma* which rose as a standard of justice in human behaviour has become the curse of Hinduism and Buddhism. I have no hesitation in saying that casteism is at the root of the fragmentation, poverty and corruption in Indian society today. As a social principle under the strictures of religion every Hindu is born into a particular caste and cannot change his caste status. Casteism is not far removed from the principle of apartheid.

Another example is the abuse of the concept of grace, a concept which is not exclusive to Christianity. There are different schools of grace in both Hinduism and Buddhism. Grace is inherent in the Hindu school of thought that advocate *prapatti* or absolute surrender to God. The *charama slok* of the Bhagavad Gita ('abandoning every duty, come to me alone for refuge; I will release thee from all sins; sorrow not' [17:62, 65]) is the classic statement on grace. However, the [p. 17](#) clearest expression of grace is found in the southern school of Vaishnavism in the worship of Vishnu. The leader of this school, Pillai Lockachari (1264-1327) took his stand on the *charama slok* of the Gita, teaching that salvation is by grace alone. He defied the karmic law and rejected *bhakti marga* as a way of salvation; yet even this understanding of grace, which comes closest to the biblical revelation, falls short of saving grace. He worshipped God as Krishna, who is an indulgent god and whose attributes cannot be compared with the love and justice of God in Jesus Christ. There is no doctrine of atonement in Lockachari's grace for he has no concept of the cross. Grace without the cross remains an aid to salvation, not salvation itself. Hence we may conclude that though all men have the possibility of a true knowledge of God, all are under the wrath of God, for there is no salvation for those who reject or pervert God's universal revelation of love and justice.

We have thought of a religion as 'a tradition of response'. It is the response of mankind created in the image of God and the calling of the Spirit of God to a perpetual search for God and his peace. Man is incurably a God-seeker. But at the same time all religions are a tradition of response of man in his sinfulness rebelling against God's lordship and creating his own gods in idolatrous worship.

RESPONSE TO THE EXCLUSIVENESS OF SALVATION IN CHRIST

The *impasse* created by mankind's idolatrous response to the universal revelation of God can be solved only by God himself. Salvation is God's work from beginning to end. God's response was to send his only Son as a once-and-for-all accomplishment of redemption in his incarnation, death and resurrection. The cross is God's event in time which has significance for all time. The Eternal Son of God is the lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Thus the cross is efficacious both for those who lived before Christ and those who have lived after Christ. All who enter the kingdom of God, whether past, present or future, do so because Christ died for their sins and rose again for their justification. As human beings immersed in the stream of time we cannot comprehend the whole of time or the mystery of eternity. Only God, who is both inside and outside of time, can do so. It is therefore not surprising that people of other faiths find our claims of the finality and exclusiveness of salvation in the cross incomprehensible. Mahatma Gandhi exclaimed, 'I may suggest that God did not bear the cross only 1900 years ago, but he bears it today and he dies and is resurrected from day to day. It would be poor comfort to the world if it had to **P. 18** depend on a historical God who died two thousand years ago'.⁶ For Gandhi, as for the Hindu mind generally, no event in time could have eternal significance, for time and space belong to the phenomenal world of relativity and are less than ultimately real. Reality is beyond time. History is reduced to suprahistory and the objective to the subjective. Only the existential is real. Contemporary Christian missiologists are grappling with the same problem of the exclusiveness and inclusiveness of salvation in Christ in the midst of the plurality of religions. Many reject any exclusive uniqueness of Christ and argue for inclusiveness. Raimundo Panikkar argues for the universal saving power of the anonymous Christ in Hinduism, but through the sacraments of Hinduism.⁷ Others, including the process theologians and the explicit universalists such as John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, argue for a theocentric christology and the relational uniqueness of Jesus in religious experience. Karl Rahner's transcendental christology belongs to this category of understanding: for him Jesus is the symbol of what human beings really are. God in the man of Nazareth is 'the realisation of the highest possibility of man's being, the unique, supreme case of the total actualization of human reality'.⁸

The logical consequence of the rejection of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in his incarnation, cross and resurrection is universalism; the belief that in the end the love of God will triumph and all will be saved and hell emptied. The advocacy of universalism goes back to Origen, but until recent time has been a minority view. Today it is a live option for both Protestant and Catholic scholars. Mission theologians such as Nels Ferré, John Hick and Paul Knitter openly espouse the cause of universalism. Others are more cautious; their universalism is more implicit than explicit. This was true of D. T. Niles of Sri Lanka, who argued for an agnostic universalism. He asks, 'Will not all finally arrive in the Father's kingdom, can it be that anyone can reject him even at the last?'⁹ Karl Barth, whose influence on the theological thinking of Asia has been enormous, denied that he was a dogmatic universalist. He maintained an agnostic stance on the extent of God's saving work because he felt that to affirm or deny universalism would be equivalent **p. 19** to denying God's freedom. However, his emphasis on the divine election of all in Christ,

⁶ M. K. Gandhi, *The Message of Jesus Christ*, p. 37f.

⁷ Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964).

⁸ Cited by Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?* (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1985), p. 188. Knitter gives a comprehensive survey of Christian attitudes towards world religions. He advocates the unitary principle of revelation and salvation.

⁹ D. T. Niles, *Upon This Earth* (Madras, CLS, 1963), p. 95.

and on the triumph of grace, opened the door to an implied universalism. Emil Brunner declared that Barth taught the most radical form of universalism that has ever been proposed and is more far-reaching than that of Origen. According to Barth the difference between the believer and the unbeliever is that the believer 'knows that he has been reconciled whereas the unbeliever does not and tries to live as if he is not'.¹⁰

The contemporary dialogue movement is more implicit than explicit on the issue of universalism, though the present director of the WCC Unit on Dialogue with People of Other Faiths, Dr. S. Wesley Ariarajah, is increasingly explicit in his espousal of universalistic salvation. For these scholars the title of this paper, 'Salvation and Lostness', is a misunderstanding of the central questions confronting the plurality of religions today; but evangelical scholars see lostness as the most agonising question confronting the Christian church especially in those contexts where Christianity is a minority faith. The issue again brings us back to the earlier question: 'Have those who have never heard the Gospel no hope?'¹¹

In summary we may say that because God's general revelation is a true revelation, all are without excuse; because all are sinners all are under the wrath of God. Salvation is not possible in general revelation; salvation is only in the special revelation in Christ. However, it is significant that many converts from other religious faiths recognise the continuity between their new experience of God in Christ and their former search for God. Professor J. N. D. Anderson, a noted evangelical authority in comparative religion, states, 'I have also found that converts from Islam never regard the God whom they previously sought to worship as wholly false but rather rejoice that they now, in Jesus Christ, have been brought to know, and have fellowship with, that God as he really is'.¹² For many, the attributes of Godhead dimly perceived before are now made explicit through faith in Jesus Christ. It is for the same reason that many tribal communities immediately respond to faith in Christ on hearing the gospel, for they see in it the fulfillment of their search for atonement or appeasement in sacrifice.¹³ p. 20

One final question needs to be considered. Must faith in Jesus Christ which is a necessary response to God's offer of salvation always be explicit? Could an implicit faith in Christ, but a Christ whose name was never known, be accepted by God as a sufficient response to his offer of salvation?

All the examples of conversion in the New Testament era follow from explicit faith in Jesus Christ. Paul argues, 'How can they believe in one of whom they have not heard? How can they hear without someone preaching to them?' ([Romans 10:14](#)). The necessity of preaching the gospel to the unreached who have never heard his name has always been a strong motivation for missionary service, and rightly so. The Great Commission offers no substitute for the proclamation of the gospel.

But this problem is not new. The people of God who received salvation under the old covenant did not know the explicit name of Jesus, although they were saved by Jesus Christ alone through the typology of the sacrificial system. Similarly, we believe that children who die below the age of discretionary knowledge, or who are mentally retarded, also experience God's redeeming love. But is there any hope for those who have never heard the name of Christ through no fault of their own? As we have earlier argued, their

¹⁰ Cited Ajith Fernando, *A Universal Home Coming?* (Madras, ELS, 1983), p. 24.

¹¹ See C. Evert Osburn's article, 'Those Who Have Never Heard; Have They No Hope?' in this *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, September 1989, pp. 367-372, reprinted in this issue of *ERT*.

¹² J. N. D. Anderson, *The World of Religions* (London, IVP, 1975), p. 236.

¹³ See D. Richardson, *Eternity in their Hearts* (Ventura, Regal, 1981).

numbers are increasing day by day. Have the accumulated generations of human history no possibility of knowing salvation in Jesus Christ? The answer must be No and a cautious Yes. No, because Scripture gives no clear statement on the salvation of those who have never heard the name. But at the same time a cautious Yes, cautious for we have little evidence of those who without knowing the name of Jesus fulfil the condition of salvation. We can only affirm that salvation from beginning to end is the work of God in Christ. None are saved by their good works or because they have lived according to the light they have received. In practice general revelation becomes a vehicle for divine judgment and not for salvation. The biblical response to God's offer of salvation is repentance and faith in the triune God. Both are a gift of God in Christ. Could it be that those to whom God has uniquely revealed himself as Saviour, but without revealing his name, be saved if they have responded by casting themselves wholly in repentance and faith upon the God of whom they are dimly aware? Professor J. N. D. Anderson thinks so.¹⁴ p. 21

Should God save such, it is only by his grace; for there is no merit in repentance and faith. Would Cornelius the Roman centurion have received eternal salvation if Peter had failed to obey the heavenly vision, and had not gone to his house to preach the gospel to him and his family? Would Cornelius' knowledge of the true God of Judaism save him? I doubt it. It remains an open question. My final question is this: 'Would the Hindu who in all sincerity casts himself on Krishna find salvation?' My answer is No, because Krishna is not a projection of the true God. The true God is both creator and redeemer. There is no sacrificial principle in Krishna, and no moral perfection. The knowledge of the true God as the creator-redeemer can only come through revelation of God in Christ. Apart from direct grace there can be no I-Thou relationship between the sinner and his God.

We are distressed but not in despair on these perplexing questions. We do not play God. Our knowledge and understanding is limited and fallible. We put our confidence in him, the living God. He will judge rightly and reward and punish according to his sovereign wisdom. Our commission is clear: we are to preach the gospel, to baptize, to establish his church and to do works of service and justice in the world. Jesus said, 'As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you' ([John 20:21](#)). This is our mandate. p. 22

Universalism: A Historical Survey

Richard J. Bauckham

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This valuable and often quoted article is worthy of a reprint, despite the fact that it was written 12 years ago. As a historical survey of universalism in salvation it lays the foundation for a better understanding of the contemporary debate and the reasons for the widespread acceptance today of universalism or its alternatives, conditional immortality and annihilation. The author shows the influence of platonistic philosophy on Origen, the stand taken by Augustine and the Reformers, the effect of evolutionary thought on the 19th century debate and questions raised by the neo-orthodox theologians Karl Barth and Emil Brunner.

¹⁴ J. N. D. Anderson, *Christianity and Comparative Religion* (London, Tyndale Press, 1970), pp. 91–111.

The article ends with a discussion of the views of J. A. T. Robinson and John Hick. Since the 1970s the debate has moved to a discussion of universalism in the context of the plurality of religious faiths. A companion survey of contemporary views is much needed. Here is a good but difficult assignment for a doctoral dissertation!

The history of the doctrine of universal salvation (or *apokatastasis*) is a remarkable one. Until the nineteenth century almost all Christian theologians taught the reality of eternal torment in hell. Here and there, outside the theological mainstream, were some who believed that the wicked would be finally annihilated (in its commonest form this is the doctrine of 'conditional immortality').¹ Even fewer were the advocates of universal salvation, though these few included some major theologians of the early church. Eternal punishment was firmly asserted in official creeds and confessions of the churches.² It must have seemed as indispensable a part of universal Christian belief as the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation. Since 1800 this situation has entirely changed, and no traditional Christian doctrine has been so *p. 23* widely abandoned as that of eternal punishment.³ Its advocates among theologians today must be fewer than ever before. The alternative interpretation of hell as annihilation seems to have prevailed even among many of the more conservative theologians.⁴ Among the less conservative, universal salvation, either as hope or as dogma, is now so widely accepted that many theologians assume it virtually without argument.

The history is a complex one, partly because the issue of hell and universalism is closely interconnected with other difficult and debated theological issues, such as predestination and free will, the validity of retributive punishment, the authority of the Bible, and (most centrally) the nature of God, the meaning of and the relationship between his love and justice. The issue of universal salvation is not related to these other issues in a straightforward way. Absolute predestination, for example, has been held to be the basis either for a doctrine of hell (Augustine, Calvin) or for a doctrine of universal salvation (Schleiermacher); while, conversely, free will has been held to support a doctrine of hell (C. S. Lewis) or a form of universalism (Origen). Nineteenth-century advocates of universalism frequently emphasized the role of retributive punishment in their scheme, but more modern universalists often reject hell as a result of rejecting the idea of retributive punishment. Thus the problem of universalism cannot be reduced to a simple choice of alternatives. Only the belief that ultimately all men will be saved is common to

¹ For details see L. E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers* (Washington, DC, Review and Herald, 1965–1966).

² Athanasian Creed; Fourth Lateran Council, Canon I; Augsburg Confession, ch. 17; Second Helvetic Confession, ch. 26; Westminster Confession, ch. 33; Dordrecht Confession, art. 18.

³ Already in 1914 H. R. Mackintosh could write: 'If at this moment a frank and confidential plebiscite of the English-speaking ministry were taken, the likelihood is that a considerable majority would adhere to Universalism. They may no doubt shrink from it as a dogma, but they would cherish it privately as at least a hope': 'Studies in Christian Eschatology, VII, Universal Restoration', *The Expositor* 8th Series 8 (1914), pp. 130ff.

⁴ The following are almost random examples of 20th-century English theologians who favour annihilation: C. Gore, *The Religion of the Church* (Oxford, Mowbray, 1916), pp. 91f.; W. Temple, *Christus Veritas* (London, Macmillan, 1924), p. 209; O. C. Quick, *Doctrines of the Creed* (London, Nisbet, 1938), pp. 257.; U. Simon, *The End is Not Yet* (Welwyn, Nisbet, 1964), pp. 206f.; G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St John the Divine* (London, A. and C. Black, 1966), pp. 186f., 260; cf. J. W. Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (London, IVP 1974), ch. 2 (leaves the issue open between ever-lasting punishment and annihilation). The Lausanne Covenant (ch. 3) speaks of 'eternal separation from God'. Annihilation is strictly not a possible option for Roman Catholic theologians, since it was formally condemned by the Fifth Lateran Council (1513).

all universalists. The rationale for that belief and the total theological context in which it belongs vary considerably. p. 24

ORIGEN AND THE EARLY CHURCH

The most famous and influential advocate of universalism in the early church was Origen, whose teaching on this point was partly anticipated by his predecessor Clement of Alexandria.⁵ Origen's universalism⁶ belongs to the logic of his whole theological system, which was decisively influenced by his Platonism and depended on his hermeneutical method of discerning the allegorical sense of Scripture behind the literal sense. According to Origen all intelligent beings (men, angels, devils) were created good and equal, but with absolute free will. Some, through the misuse of free will, turned from God and fell into varying degrees of sin. Those who fell furthest became the devils; those whose fall was less disastrous became the souls of men. These are to be restored to God through a process of discipline and chastisement, for which purpose this material world has been created and the preexisting souls incarnated in human bodies. The process of purification is not complete at death but continues after this life. Nor is it an inevitably upward path: the soul remains free to choose good or evil, and so even after this life may fall again as well as rise. Within this scheme punishment is always, in God's intention, remedial: God is wholly good and his justice serves no other purpose than his good purpose of bringing all souls back to himself. Thus the torments of hell cannot be endless, though they may last for aeons; the soul in hell remains always free to repent and be restored.

Logically it might seem that Origen's conviction of the inalienable freedom of the soul ought to prevent him from teaching both universalism (for any soul is free to remain obstinate for ever) and the final secure happiness of the saved (who remain free to fall again at any time).⁷ In fact Origen seems to have drawn neither conclusion. Given unlimited time, God's purpose will eventually prevail and all souls will be finally united to him, never to sin again. The final restoration includes even Satan and the devils.

Origen's scheme conforms to a Platonic pattern of understanding p. 25 the world as part of a great cycle of the emanation of all things from God and the return of all things to God. Despite the appeal to such texts as [1 Cor. 15:28](#) ('God shall be all in all': this has always been a favourite universalist text) the final unity of all things with God is more Platonic than biblical in inspiration. The Platonic pattern of emanation and return was widely influential in Greek theology and provided the same kind of general world-view favouring universalism as Darwinian evolution was to provide for some nineteenth-century universalists. In both cases universalism is achieved by seeing both this earthly life and hell as only *stages* in the soul's long upward progress towards God, whereas

⁵ Clement's universalism is less clear than Origen's: see C. Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2nd ed., 1913), pp. 147f.; W. E. G. Ford, *Clement of Alexandria's Treatment of the Problem of Evil* (Oxford, OUP, 1971), p. 40, n. 9, pp. 72f.

⁶ See Bigg, *op. cit.*, pp. 273–280, 343–351. According to H. Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 119, universal salvation was 'more his hope than his assured certitude'.

⁷ Later critics of Origen accused him of denying the final security of the blessed: e.g. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei* 21:187.

mainstream Christian orthodoxy has always regarded this life as decisive for a man's fate⁸ and hell as the *final* destiny of the wicked.

The doctrine of the final restoration of all souls seems to have been not uncommon in the East during the fourth and fifth centuries. It was clearly taught by Gregory of Nyssa⁹ and is attributed to Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia,¹⁰ and some Nestorian theologians.¹¹ Others, such as Gregory of Nazianzus, regarded it as an open question.¹² Augustine took the trouble to refute several current versions of universalism, as well as views on the extent of salvation which stopped short of universalism but were more generous than his own.¹³

Origen's universalism was involved in the group of doctrines known as 'Origenism', about which there were long controversies in the East. A Council at Constantinople in 543 condemned a list of Origenist errors including *Apokatastasis*, but whether this condemnation was endorsed by the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553) seems in doubt. At any rate the condemnation of Origenism discredited universalism in the theological tradition of the East. In the West, not only Origen's heretical reputation but also Augustine's enormous influence ensured that the Augustinian version of the doctrine of hell prevailed almost without question for many centuries. During the Middle Ages [p. 26](#) universalism is found only in the strongly Platonic system of John Scotus Erigena (dc 877) and in a few of the more pantheistic thinkers in the mystical tradition, for whom the divine spark in every man must return to its source in God.¹⁴

16TH–18TH CENTURIES

The intellectual and religious upheaval of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries produced some examples of almost every possible religious opinion, and so it is not surprising to find some universalists. A few sixteenth-century Anabaptists and Spiritualists, notably John Denck,¹⁵ and a few of the most radical religious thinkers of the English Interregnum, notably Gerrard Winstanley and Richard Coppin,¹⁶ were universalists.

Universalism in the seventeenth century should be seen partly as reaction to the particularism of high Calvinism, which with its doctrine of limited atonement excluded

⁸ Despite the general resemblance between Origen's understanding of hell and the medieval and Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory (both concern purgatorial suffering after death), they differ very significantly in that the latter regards a man's fate as decided at death. Purgatory does not offer fresh opportunities of repentance and faith after death; it purifies those who repented and believed during their earthly life.

⁹ E. H. Plumptre, *The Spirits in Prison* (London, Isbister, 2nd ed., 1893), pp. 138–140; Bigg, *op. cit.*, p. 344, n. 1.

¹⁰ Bigg, *op. cit.*, p. 343; Plumptre, *op. cit.*, pp. 140f.

¹¹ Plumptre, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

¹² Bigg, *op. cit.*, p. 344, n. 1.

¹³ *De Civ. Dei* 21:17–27.

¹⁴ J. H. Leckie, *The World to Come and Final Destiny* (Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 2nd ed., 1922), pp. 260–263.

¹⁵ G. H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1962), pp. 202, 246, 252, 843; on Denck, pp. 155, 157. This Anabaptist universalism was condemned in ch. 17 of the Augsburg Confession and in the 42nd of the English Articles of 1553.

¹⁶ C. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London, Temple Smith, 1972), pp. 140–143; on Coppin, pp. 177f.

any kind of divine will for the salvation of all men. Revulsion against the apparent cruelty of the God who cheated the reprobate for no other purpose than to damn him, led firstly to Arminianism, in which the Gospel genuinely offers salvation to all men; a further step leads to the Quaker doctrine that saving grace is given to all men, but may be resisted; the extreme position is that all men will actually be saved. A further factor promoting universalism was the Platonic tradition, revived during the Renaissance, along with an interest in Origen and the early Greek Fathers, who could plausibly be thought to represent a form of Christian doctrine earlier, and therefore purer, than Augustine, to whom the Calvinists appealed.¹⁷

So it is no surprise to find that some of the Cambridge Platonists in seventeenth-century England were universalists. Peter Sterry and Jeremiah White held the Platonic scheme of emanation and return, the preexistence of souls, and the remedial character of all punishment. The love of God is his supreme attribute. His wrath is an aspect of his p. 27 love, directed not against the sinner but against the sin. So the sinner's torment in hell will be the agony of enduring God's holy burning love until his sins are burned up and he himself is pure.¹⁸

Universalism also appears at the end of the seventeenth century among some of the German Pietists,¹⁹ and was again popularized in eighteenth-century England especially by the devotional writer William Law.²⁰

One very strong objection to universalism in these centuries was the deep-rooted belief that the threat of eternal torment was a necessary deterrent from immorality during this life. So weighty was this objection felt to be, that some who believed in universal salvation (or even in annihilation) held that this belief must remain an esoteric, secret doctrine for the few, while hell must continue to be preached as a deterrent for the masses.²¹ Even in the nineteenth century, when such esotericism was seen to be indefensible, universalists found it necessary to meet the objection by emphasizing as much as possible the severity and length of the torments which the wicked must endure before their eventual salvation.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

F. D. E. Schleiermacher was the first great theologian of modern times to teach universalism.²² He taught a predestination as absolute as that of Augustine and Calvin, but he rejected any form of *double* predestination. All men are elected to salvation in Christ, and this purpose of divine omnipotence cannot fail. In this respect Schleiermacher

¹⁷ D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), pp. 11–18.

¹⁸ On Sterry and White, see Walker, *op. cit.*, ch. 7; for other 17th-century universalists in the Platonic tradition, chs. 8 and 10.

¹⁹ Notably J. W. Petersen and F. C. Oetinger. Petersen learned his universalism from the English visionary Mrs Jane Lead. On Petersen, see Walker, *op. cit.*, ch. 14; on Mrs Lead and the Philadelphian Society, ch. 13.

²⁰ Leckie, *op. cit.*, pp. 267f. Another 18th-century English universalist was bishop Thomas Newton; Plumtre *op. cit.*, pp. 203–205. Many forgotten universalist writers of the 17th and 18th centuries are listed in Ezra Abbot's bibliography appended to W. R. Alger, *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life* (New York, W. J. Widdleton, 3rd ed., 1878). For Joseph Priestley and Unitarian universalism, see G. Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974), ch. 3.

²¹ Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–7. The idea goes back to Origen, *C. Cels.* 6:26.

²² *The Christian Faith* (ET, Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1928), paras. 117–120, 163.

represents a 'Reformed' universalism, founded on the all-determining will of God. Only a Pelagian, on this view, could argue from human free will to the possibility of hell. But Schleiermacher rejects what he [P. 28](#) sees as the capriciousness of the Calvinist God who arbitrarily elects only some men to salvation. For Schleiermacher a sense of the unity of the human race is a high virtue in men and cannot be thus disregarded by God.

Most interesting of Schleiermacher's arguments against hell is his deeply felt conviction that the blessedness of the redeemed would be severely marred by their sympathy for the damned. This is precisely the opposite of the conviction of many earlier theologians that the blessedness of the redeemed would be actually enhanced by their contemplation of the torments of the damned.²³ The latter view has a kind of reason on its side: Those who are wholly at one with God's will should rejoice to see his justice done. But it has largely disappeared from the doctrine of hell since the seventeenth century,²⁴ and the modern Christian's instinctive sympathy with Schleiermacher's contrary view places him on Schleiermacher's side of a great transition in the history of attitudes to suffering. With Schleiermacher we now feel that even the justly inflicted suffering of other men must be pitied, not enjoyed.²⁵ Schleiermacher's argument is typically modern in its appeal and is one element in the increasing popularity of universalism since his day.

Schleiermacher's universalism had surprisingly few successors in nineteenth-century Germany,²⁶ but in nineteenth-century England the problem of hell and universal salvation (with other aspects of the future life) became a matter of widespread concern.²⁷ This can be gauged from the attention given to three cases, all notorious in their day. In 1853 F. D. Maurice was dismissed from his professional chair at King's College, London, for what was little more than a cautious modification of the traditional doctrine of hell: a storm of controversy broke over this 'proto-martyr of the wider hope'.²⁸ Then in 1862, for his very [p. 29](#) tentative assertion of universalism in *Essays and Reviews* (1860), H. B. Wilson was condemned in the Court of Arches, guilty of contradicting the Athanasian Creed, though the judgment was subsequently reversed on appeal by the Lord Chancellor.²⁹ Thirdly, F. W. Farrar denied eternal punishment in a famous series of sermons in Westminster Abbey in 1877 (published as *Eternal Hope*, 1878), though he remained agnostic as to the alternatives. But he was commonly understood to be teaching universalism, and his sermons provoked a learned defence of the traditional hell from E. B. Pusey.³⁰

Dogmatic universalism was in fact much less common in nineteenth-century England than a general uneasiness with the traditional doctrine of hell. This led to arguments for

²³ This was taught, e.g., by Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, Robert Bellarmine: references in Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

²⁴ See Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 29–32.

²⁵ Note that C. S. Lewis, a competent modern apologist for hell, answers this argument of Schleiermacher's by denying that heaven and hell co-exist 'in unilinear time': *The Problem of Pain* (London, Bles, 1940), pp. 114f. He does *not* argue, as earlier theologians would have done, that pity for the justly punished would be misplaced.

²⁶ Mackintosh, *art. cit.*, p. 134, n. 1, can name only Schleiermacher's disciple Alexander Schweizer.

²⁷ A perceptive and informative study is G. Rowell, *op. cit.*

²⁸ Plumtre, *op. cit.*, p. viii. For Maurice's views and the controversy, see Rowell, *op. cit.*, pp. 76–89. In his *Lectures on the Apocalypse* (1861) Maurice appears to reach a more definite universalism (cf. pp. 400–405).

²⁹ Rowell, *op. cit.*, pp. 116–123.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 138–147.

conditional immortality³¹; to undogmatic hopes for universal salvation³²; and to the idea that a man's fate is not sealed at death, but that the intermediate state offers fresh opportunities for attaining salvation.³³ The two leading dogmatic universalists were Andrew Jukes (*The Second Death and the Restitution of all things*, 1867) and Samuel Cox (*Salvator Mundi*, 1877).³⁴

Common to almost all versions of the 'wider hope' was the belief that death was not the decisive break which traditional orthodoxy had taught. Repentance, conversion, moral progress are still possible after death. This widespread belief was certainly influenced by the common nineteenth-century faith in evolutionary progress. Hell—or a modified version of purgatory—could be understood in this context as the pain and suffering necessary to moral growth. In this way evolutionary progress provides the new context for nineteenth-century universalism, replacing the Platonic cycle of emanation and return which influenced the universalists of earlier centuries. [p. 30](#)

INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The transition from Victorian to more modern forms of universalism is marked by some changes, of which the most important concerns exegesis. Almost all universalists before this century thought it necessary to argue for a universalist interpretation of those texts of the NT which seem to teach eternal punishment or final condemnation, and the standard approach to such texts was to deny the everlasting or final character of the punishment. Texts such as [Matthew 25:46](#) or even [Revelation 14:10f.](#) were held to refer to a very long but limited period of torment in hell, from which the sinner will eventually emerge to salvation. The nineteenth-century debates always included extensive exegetical discussions, especially over the meaning of *aionios*. In this century, however, exegesis has turned decisively against the universalist case.³⁵ Few would now doubt that many NT texts clearly teach a *final* division of mankind into saved and lost, and the most that universalists now commonly claim is that alongside these texts there are others which hold out a universal hope (e.g. [Eph. 1:10](#); [Col. 1:20](#)).

There are two ways of dealing with this situation. One is a new form of exegesis of the texts about final condemnation, which acknowledges the note of finality but sees these texts as threats rather than predictions. A threat need not be carried out. This, as we shall see, is the approach adopted by the most persuasive of modern universalists.

³¹ *Ibid.*, ch. 9.

³² E.g. S. T. Coleridge believed universal salvation to be a possibility which, in view of 'the exceeding sinfulness of sin', might not be presumed on: *ibid.*, pp. 67f.

³³ The classic statement of this idea of 'extended probation' was E. H. Plumptre, *The Spirits in Prison*: the sermon from which this work grew was preached in 1871. Evidence was found in [1 Peter 3:18–20](#) (hence Plumptre's title) and the traditional doctrine of Christ's descent into hell; but [1 Peter 3:18–20](#) cannot really be interpreted in this way: see the extensive study (including history of exegesis) in W. J. Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits: A Study of 1 Peter 3:18–4:6* (Analecta Biblica 23; Rome, Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965). For the popularity of the idea of 'extended probation' in the 19th century, see J. Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (Edinburgh, A. Elliot, 2nd ed., 1839), p. 394.

³⁴ Rowell, *op. cit.*, pp. 129–133.

³⁵ Attempts to show that the NT texts refer to a temporary hell to be followed by ultimate salvation are still sometimes found: cf. W. Michaelis, *Versöhnung des Alls* (Berlin, Siloah—Verlag, 1950); M. Rissi, *The Future of the World* (London, SCM Press, 1972). But they no longer carry conviction.

The second approach to the exegetical problem is simply to disagree with the NT writers' teaching about a final division of mankind, which can be said to be merely taken over from their contemporary Jewish environment, while the texts which could be held to support universalism represent a deeper insight into the meaning of God's revelation in Christ. Here the doctrinal authority of the Bible is understood much more flexibly than by most nineteenth-century universalists. C. W. Emmet's essay, 'The Bible and Hell' (1917), is something of a landmark.³⁶ After a survey of the NT material, showing that final division and judgment are clearly taught and hesitating to find full universalism even in Ephesians and Colossians, Emmet declares: 'It is best in fact to admit quite frankly that any view of the future destiny of [unbelievers] which is to be tolerable to us today must p. 31 go beyond the explicit teaching of the New Testament ... [This] does not really give us all we want, and it only leads to insincerity if we try to satisfy ourselves by artificial explanations of its language. And we are in the end on surer ground when as Christians we claim the right to go beyond the letter, since we do so under the irresistible leading of the moral principles of the New Testament and of Christ Himself'.³⁷

Thus the modern universalist is no longer bound to the letter of the NT; he can base his doctrine on the spirit of NT teaching about the love of God. The same principle can even be extended to the teaching of the historical Jesus, though some have been able to persuade themselves that the Gospel texts about final judgment are not in any case authentic words of Jesus.³⁸ This more liberal approach to Scripture has probably played quite a large part in the general spread of universalism in this century.

BARTH AND BRUNNER

Neither Karl Barth nor Emil Brunner was strictly a universalist, but both regarded the final salvation of all mankind as a *possibility* which cannot be denied (though it cannot be dogmatically asserted either). This is a significant step beyond traditional theology, which always asserted not only that final condemnation is a real possibility but also that some men will actually be lost. It is also a position which has probably had more appeal to conservative Christians (including Roman Catholic theologians) than dogmatic universalism; it allows us to *hope* for the salvation of all men without presuming to know something which God has not revealed.

Barth refashioned the Reformed doctrine of predestination by making it fully Christological. It is Jesus Christ who is both rejected and elected. The rejection which sinful man deserves, God has taken upon himself in Jesus Christ, and in Jesus Christ all men are elected to salvation. He is therefore in the true sense the only rejected one. Predestination thus becomes not an equivocal doctrine of God's Yes and No, but a fully evangelical doctrine of God's unqualified Yes to p. 32 man. The reality of man—of all men—is that in Jesus Christ the reconciliation of all men has taken place. The Gospel brings to men the knowledge of what is already true of them: that in Jesus Christ they are already elect, justified, reconciled.

³⁶ In B. H. Streeter ed., *Immortality* (London, Macmillan, 1917), ch. 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

³⁸ Cf. J. Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (London, Collins, 1976), pp. 243–247. Hick's case is unconvincing because it does not take full account of all Synoptic sayings about final judgement. While it can plausibly be argued that much of the imagery of hell belongs to Matthew's redaction, the warning of final judgment cannot be eliminated from Jesus' authentic words even by stringent use of the generally accepted criteria of authenticity.

It might be thought that this line of thought logically entails universalism, much as Schleiermacher's doctrine of universal election did, but Barth refuses to follow this logic. There remains an irresolvable tension between the election of all men in Jesus Christ and the phenomenon of unbelief. The unbeliever's true reality is that he is elect, but he denies that reality and attempts to change it, to be instead the rejected man. In this perverse attempt (it is no more than an attempt) he lives under the *threat* of final condemnation, which would be God's acquiescence in his refusal to be the reconciled man he really is.

Will this threat be carried out? Barth does not here appeal to man's freedom to continue in unbelief: he is committed to the sovereignty of God's grace. The reason why universal salvation cannot be dogmatically expected lies in *God's* freedom: 'To the man who persistently tries to change the truth into untruth, God does not owe eternal patience and therefore deliverance.... We should be denying or disarming that evil attempt and our own participation in it if, in relation to ourselves or others or all men, we were to permit ourselves to postulate a withdrawal of that threat and in this sense expect or maintain an *apokatastasis* or universal reconciliation as the goal and end of all things. Even though theological consistency might seem to lead our thoughts and utterances most clearly in this direction, we must not arrogate to ourselves that which can be given and received only as a free gift'.³⁹ But universal salvation remains an open possibility for which we may hope.⁴⁰

That universal salvation must remain an open question is also the conclusion that Brunner reaches by a different route.⁴¹ He stresses that we must take quite seriously the two categories of NT texts: those which speak of a final decisive division of men as the Last Judgment, p.33 and those which speak of God's single unqualified will for the salvation of all men. The two are logically incompatible and are not to be artificially reconciled by attributing to God a dual will (double predestination) or by eliminating the finality of judgment. The texts are logically incompatible because they are not intended to give theoretical information. To the question '*Is there* such a thing as final loss or *is there* a universal salvation?' there is no answer, because the Word of God 'is a Word of challenge, not of doctrine'.⁴² It addresses us and involves us. Its truth is not the objective truth available to the neutral observer, but the subjective truth of existential encounter. The message of judgment, then, is not a prediction that some will be lost; it is a challenge to me to come out of perdition to salvation. The message of universal salvation is not a prediction that all men will be saved; it is an invitation to me to make the decision of faith which accepts God's will to save me. The Gospel holds the two together in proclamation. Theology may not objectify either.

TWO MODERN UNIVERSALISTS

³⁹ *Church Dogmatics* IV/3 (ET, Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1961), p. 477.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 478; 11/2 (ET, Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1957), p. 418. For criticism of Barth's position on election and universalism, from two different standpoints, see J. Hick, *op. cit.*, pp. 259–261; G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (London, Paternoster, 1956), ch. 10. But note that Berkouwer wrote before the publication of the important passage *CDIV/3*, pp. 461–478.

⁴¹ *Eternal Hope* (ET, Edinburgh, Lutterworth, 1954), ch. 17; *Dogmatics* III (ET, London, Lutterworth, 1962), ch. 10. For a similar approach to the problem, see G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 390–419.

⁴² *Eternal Hope*, p. 183.

Two of the most persuasive of recent arguments for dogmatic universalism are those of J. A. T. Robinson and John Hick. We shall conclude this survey with a brief account of their positions.

Robinson⁴³ approaches the texts in a way rather similar to Brunner's. The NT contains two eschatological 'myths': universal restoration and final division into saved and lost. But whereas Brunner gives both the same status, Robinson maintains that they represent 'the two sides of the truth which is in Jesus ... though both are the truth, one [universal restoration] is the truth as it is for God and as it is for faith the further side of decision; the other [heaven and hell] is the truth as it must be to the subject facing decision'.⁴⁴ Hell is a reality in the existential situation of the man facing the challenge of the Gospel: the seriousness of his decision must not be weakened by universalism. But universal salvation is the reality which God wills and which therefore must come about. For all that Robinson tries to give proper weight to the myth of heaven and hell, it is clear that universalism has the last p. 34 word. As God's viewpoint it has a final validity denied to the viewpoint of man in decision.

This is because, for Robinson, only universal salvation is consistent with God's nature as omnipotent love. Final judgement would be a frustration of his purpose. But what of freedom to resist God's love? Omnipotent love must in the end force every man to yield to it—not as an infringement of freedom, but as free choice elicited by love. Man's freedom is compatible with the victory of omnipotent love.

Robinson's is an eloquent expression of the case for universalism as a necessity of God's nature as omnipotent love. Hick's argument is parallel at some points. He too regards the two categories of NT texts as different kinds of statement. The warnings of hell are existential preaching, warning men that they will be damned *if* they permanently refuse to repent. Paul's statements about universal salvation, on the other hand, are detached theological conclusions. The two types of text are compatible because no-one will in fact permanently refuse to repent.⁴⁵

Hicks feels the strength of the objection that universalism is incompatible with human freedom. His answer essentially is that human nature has a created bias towards God, which means that we naturally tend towards him of our own free will. Therefore, given time, his love must in the end evoke a response from all men.⁴⁶

Hick's distinctive approach to universalism, however, lies in his concern for theodicy, which colours a great deal of his theology. The suffering and evil of this world can be justified only if God is going to bring to a good end every individual personal life he has created. If there is either eternal punishment or annihilation for some, then either God is not perfectly good—since he does not desire the salvation of all his creatures—or he is not omnipotent—since his purpose has finally failed in the case of some. Only universal salvation can vindicate the omnipotent good God in whom Christians believe.⁴⁷

⁴³ *In the End God* (London, Collins, 2nd ed., 1968), chs. 10 and 11. Robinson's case for universalism as a necessity of divine love was earlier argued in 'Universalism—Is it Heretical?', *SJT* 2 (1949), pp. 139–155; to which T. F. Torrance replied in 'Universalism or Election?', *SJT* 2 (1949), pp. 310–318.

⁴⁴ *In the End God*, p. 130.

⁴⁵ *Death and Eternal Life*, pp. 247–250.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 250–259.

⁴⁷ *Evil and the God of Love* (London, Macmillan, 2nd ed., 1977), pp. 341–345; *God and the Universe of Faiths* (London, Collins, 2nd ed., 1977), pp. 70–74.

More than most other modern forms of universalism, Hick's bears a striking resemblance to both the Origenist and Victorian types, in that he envisages his life as merely the first stage in a long—in many cases, unimaginably long—post-mortem progress towards final salvation. Within this process hellish or (more properly) purgatorial experiences take their place. In his most recent work, Hick (drawing eclectically on p.35 Eastern, rather more than Christian, ideas of the future life) sketches a highly speculative account of the many subsequent lives through which men will pass in their gradual approximation to the divine purpose.⁴⁸ It is typical of this variety of universalism that our ultimate salvation becomes a prospect so distant as to be hardly capable of concerning us at all in this first of our many lives.⁴⁹ This is a far cry from Jesus' message of present salvation to be apprehended or lost in immediate response to his preaching.

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The Salvation of the Gentiles Implications for Other Faiths

Evangelical Alliance (UK)

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A group of evangelical Christians prepared a booklet of 40 pages to help concerned Christians relate to their immigrant neighbours of other faiths in urban Britain today. This article, which is one of three chapters, studies the salvation of the Gentiles in biblical history and its implication for the status of other faiths. While the article covers ground outlined in other articles in this issue of ERT, it makes its own special contribution to our witness and dialogue in a multi-faith society.

(Editor)

In assessing the status of other faiths in relation to his own and to God's plan for his creation, the Christian will naturally start with the witness of the Scriptures.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the first eleven chapters of Genesis we read of God's dealings with the *whole* of mankind, before the calling out of a special people. We read of his creation of human beings 'In his own image', i.e. with the gifts of reason and conscience and with the capacity

⁴⁸ *Death and Eternal Life*, ch. 20.

⁴⁹ Hick admits this: *ibid.*, p. 420.

to respond to God in a personal way, of his giving them dominion over other creatures, of his provision for their family life, and of their rebellion and punishment. We also read that sin continued in the human race from generation to generation, but that some at least were accepted by God through the means of sacrifice offered in faith ([Gen. 3:3](#); [8:20](#)) and that one person, Enoch, for many years 'spent his life in fellowship with God' ([Gen. 5:24](#) GNB). With the great flood, the survival of Noah and his family and the offering by Noah of an acceptable sacrifice, comes the account of God's first and everlasting covenant with mankind ([Gen. 9:16](#)), a token of God's mercy, a 'cosmic covenant' which was never cancelled or forgotten. This was followed by the event of Babel ([Gen. 11](#)), speaking once more of human sin and divine judgement. This whole section is vitally important as indicating God's relations with all people, before the call of Abraham and his descendants, **P. 37** with the special covenants which were given to them. Kenneth Howkins's comment (in an unpublished essay) is apposite: 'God has not entirely ceased his gracious activity among men; there is the "common grace" of God operating in the world, preventing it from becoming entirely corrupt'.

The rest of the Old Testament is mainly the story of the people of God, chosen not for their own sake, but to be the channel of blessing eventually for 'all the families on earth' ([Gen. 12:3](#)). To them he reveals something of his glory and majesty, his mercy, holiness and judgement. He gives them his law, making a covenant with them through sacrifice. Those outside the Mosaic covenant (including of course many descendants of Abraham and Isaac outside the chosen line) mostly figure as the enemies of Israel, who worship false gods, whose customs (which include idolatry and human sacrifice) are abominable to God, to such an extent that close contact with them itself brings defilement and judgment and so is forbidden to God's people. Some writers have sought to tone down the Old Testament denunciation of idolatry on the ground that idol-worship is mainly denounced when it involves unfaithfulness on the part of Israel to their covenant God, like that of an unfaithful wife. But the frequent occurrence of the phrase 'the abominable customs of the nations' (e.g. [Deut. 18:9](#)) makes it plain that such practices were hardly less blameworthy among other nations than in Israel.

While due weight must be given to this important strand of Old Testament teaching, there are other strands which appear to reveal a somewhat different attitude.

1. *Many individuals among the Gentile nations are shown in living contact with God.* Melchizedek, king of Salem, presumably a Jebusite, was 'priest of God Most High', and pronounced this blessing on Abraham:

Blessed be Abraham by God Most High, creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your power.

Abraham gave him a tithe of all the booty ([Gen. 14:19-20](#)). Thus Melchizedek earned for himself a place of honour among the types of the Messiah ([Ps. 110:4](#); [Heb. 5:6-11](#); [7:1-3](#)). Abimelech, king of Gerar (near Gaza) received a message from God in a dream rebuking him for taking Abraham's wife Sarah; he obeyed God, returned Sarah and made a pact with Abraham; his family was healed of barrenness of Abraham's intercession ([Gen. 20-21](#)). Jethro, a Midianite priest, became Moses' father in law and 'rejoiced at all the good the Lord had **p.38** done for Israel in saving them from the power of Egypt'. He also blessed the Lord as 'the greatest of all gods' and offered sacrifices to him ([Ex. 18:9-12](#)). We might look on him as a convert to the true God, but Scripture does not suggest this nor record his circumcision. The prophet Balaam, apparently a Moabite, received messages from God and 'the spirit of God took control of him', so that he uttered prophecies of God's blessing on Israel ([Num. 22-24](#)), Rahab, the prostitute at Jericho, was spared by the invading Israelites because she protected Joshua's spies ([Jos. 2:1-6](#); [6:23](#)), and so she was included

in the roll of honour of the people of faith ([Heb. 11:31](#)). Ruth, a woman of Moab, was drawn through misfortune into the company of God's people and became an ancestor of the Messiah. A widow of Zarephath in Phoenicia fed the prophet Elijah and received a gracious promise from God whereby her family's needs were supplied through a long drought; her child was restored to life in answer to the prophet's prayer ([1 Kings 17](#)). Naaman, the Syrian general, believed in God through the ministry of the prophet Elisha, yet stayed within his own community and made no open breach with idolatry ([2 Kings 5:1-19](#)). The people of Nineveh in Assyria repented at the preaching of Jonah and were spared from destruction ([Jonah 3](#)).

Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, the worshipper of a golden image, received a vision from God in a dream and acknowledged the Most High God ([Dan. 3](#) and [4](#)). Darius, the Median king, was brought to worship the God of Daniel as 'the Living God the Everlasting' ([Dan. 6](#)). Cyrus, the Persian emperor, was called by God to fulfil his purpose by restoring Judah from captivity and is named the Lord's shepherd and his anointed ([Is. 44:28](#); [45:1-7](#)), 'whom he has taken by the hand', and receives the promise, 'I will go before you and level the swelling hills ... I will strengthen you, though you have not known me'.

2. *Gentile nations are declared to have their place in the gracious purpose of God.* Amos reports his action on their behalf as parallel to the great deliverance of Israel from Egypt: 'Are not you Israelites like Cushites to me? says the Lord. Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor, the Arameans from Kir?' ([Amos 9:7](#)). They too like Israel are subject to God's judgement ([Amos 1:3-2:8](#)). Egypt and Assyria have with Israel a special place in God's plan and one day will be numbered among his people: 'When that day comes Israel shall rank with Egypt and Assyria, those three, and shall be a blessing in the centre of the world. So the Lord of Hosts will bless them: A blessing be upon Egypt my people, upon Assyria the work of my hands, and upon Israel my possession' ([Is. 19:24-25](#)). Among many nations God is being worshipped with pure offerings ([Mal. 1:11](#)—the context requires [p. 39](#) the present tense, not the future, and any reference to a wide-spread Jewish dispersion—'from furthest east to furthest west'—is inappropriate in the 5th century B.C. when Malachi was writing).

3. *The Wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and some of the Psalms) speaks of the divine wisdom and of living one's life in accordance with it without reference to God's revelation to Israel.* It has close links in spirit, content, form and method with similar literature in Egypt. God is referred to as the creator and guide of mankind and the source of wisdom, but not as the great law-giver and deliverer of Israel; historical allusions are entirely lacking and references to worship are few and far between. In Job particularly we read of God speaking to a Syrian chief ('my servant Job') outside the context of Israel and revealing his majesty and glory to him.

We may conclude therefore that though God chose Israel as his special channel of blessing to mankind, acting powerfully on their behalf and giving them the law and the prophets, he did not confine to Israel his dealings with the children of Adam; he still had his faithful ones in other nations, men and women enlightened by his wisdom, conscious of his majesty and offering acceptable worship to him, though continuing in the traditions of their own people, and others whom he used in various ways, though they lacked a living relationship with him.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Here we are faced with the question: what status does the New Testament give to other faiths in view of the unique and absolute claims made for 'our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ' ([Titus 1:18](#)) as the one way to God and the one and only Saviour of mankind? For many the answer would seem to be simple. In him alone is salvation ([Ac. 3:12](#)), he alone can reveal the Father ([Matt. 11:27](#)), no one comes to the Father but by him ([John 14:6](#)), he is the one mediator between God and man ([1 Tim. 2:5](#)). The gods worshipped in other faiths are nonexistent beings ([1 Cor. 8:4-6](#)) or even demons ([1 Cor. 10:20-21](#)), and their worshippers are really 'godless' ([Eph. 2:12](#)). But if the whole emphasis is placed on these and similar passages (of which there is no lack), we are faced with the problem of finding a place in the scheme of salvation for God's ancient people, Israel, and for those other men and women of faith who, as we have seen, were in living contact with him. Clearly they must be included in the scheme of salvation, though it was God's purpose that 'only in company with us would they be made perfect' ([Heb. 11:40](#)). P. 40

Besides these there are other strands of New Testament teaching which must be taken into account.

1. God's universal revelation of himself, as witnessed in [John 1:9](#), 'the light that enlightens every man'. William Temple's comment on this verse in *Readings in St John's Gospel* is apt: 'From the beginning divine light has shone; it has always enlightened every man alive in his reason and his conscience. Every check on animal lust felt by the primitive savage, every stimulation to a nobler life, is God self-revealed within his soul. But God in self-revelation is the Divine Word, for precisely this is what that term means'. Similarly John Stott declares: 'We should not hesitate to claim that everything good, beautiful and true, in all history and in all truth, has come from Jesus Christ, even though men are ignorant of its origin'. But this light is not in itself salvation; light judges as well as enlightens, and 'men preferred darkness to light because their deeds were evil' ([John 3:19](#)).

2. While idolatry springs from the rejection of the knowledge of the true God ([Rom. 1:20-23](#)), it incurs condemnation in proportion to the light which people have received from God. So St Paul could speak of 'the times of ignorance' when referring to the idolatry of the Athenians ([Acts 17:30](#)).

3. God's providential supply of human needs bears witness to people of all races of his goodness and mercy. St Paul tells the pagans of Lystra, 'God has not left you without some clue to his nature, in the kindness he shows: he sends you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons, and gives you food and good cheer in plenty' ([Acts 14:16-17](#)). In this way people are prompted to 'seek God, and, it might be, touch and find him; though indeed he is not far from each one of us' ([Acts 17:26](#)). Similarly St Paul writes to the Romans of a revelation of God's 'everlasting power and deity' through nature, though people have rejected this knowledge by 'stifling the truth', by refusing to honour him and lapsing into idolatry ([Rom. 1:18-23](#)).

4. 'There's a wideness in God's mercy' which exceeds the limits we often place upon it. Peter's word to Cornelius is the clearest testimony to this: 'God has no favourites, but in every nation the man who is godfearing and does what is right is acceptable to him' ([Acts 10:34](#)). But in assessing the significance of this statement we must bear in mind that Peter goes on at once to proclaim that Jesus Christ is 'Lord of all' and that forgiveness is through faith in his name (vv. [35](#), [43](#)). Further it is clear from the next chapter that Cornelius and his friends found 'salvation' and 'life' only through repentance and faith in Jesus ([Acts 11:14, 18](#)), even though his prayers and acts of charity had gone up to heaven ([Acts 10:4](#)).

p. 41

CONCLUSIONS

1. *Jesus Christ is supreme over all.* That Jesus is Lord is the basic confession of the New Testament. That he is Lord of all was Peter's proclamation to Cornelius and others like him. He is 'the first and last, the beginning and the end' ([Rev. 22:13](#)). 'In him everything in heaven and on earth was created ... The whole universe has been created through him and for him ... He is ... the first to return from the dead, to be in all things supreme' ([Col. 1:16-18](#)). In Jesus of Nazareth the eternal God came once for all in great humility to dwell for a season in a human life, not in the mere appearance of a man but as a real human being like ourselves, yet without sin. He offered once for all one sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, then rose triumphant, to reign for ever as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

2. *No form of syncretism is acceptable to Christians.* In the light of these tremendous claims no solution which makes Jesus one of many 'lords' or which acknowledges many paths to God can possibly be accepted. If this may seem narrow-minded or intolerant, we must remember that truth in its very nature is intolerant. Some people are seeking a 'deeper' or 'higher' truth which would transcend the differences of the religions or a kind of federation of religions, each acknowledging the truth of the others and influencing one another by a sort of osmosis, or a core of religious experience common to all religions. Typical, perhaps, is the Liverpool parson who recently said, 'Christianity will have to negotiate a new system of belief with other faiths, a new understanding of God'. He, like others engaged in such a quest, was ignoring 'the faith which God entrusted to his people once for all' ([Jude 3](#)) and the Bible's and the Church's claim for Jesus Christ. These matters are not negotiable—either Jesus is Lord of all or he is not Lord at all.

3. *Other faiths are not devoid of truth.* Our acknowledgement of Christ as Lord of all does not oblige us to think of other faiths as entirely in error. Lesslie Newbigin well says, 'The Christian confession of Jesus as Lord does not involve any attempt to deny the reality of the work of God in the lives and thoughts and prayers of men and women outside the Christian church. On the contrary, it ought to involve an eager expectation of, a looking for, and a rejoicing in the evidence of that work ... If we love the light and walk in the light, we shall also rejoice in the light wherever we find it.' (*The Open Secret*, S.P.C.K., p. 198). There is much in other faiths which is in harmony with the Christian faith, e.g. the sense of the tremendous majesty of God, so [p. 42](#) clearly proclaimed by Islam and also by the Bible (e.g. [Isa. 40](#), [1 Tim. 6:15-16](#)), and the love and adoration of a personal God, found in Sikhism and the *bhakti* movements in Hinduism. We can see here the Divine Word enlightening all men, the Word which is Jesus himself; for all truth is his truth. Sir Norman Anderson writes, 'It is, of course, a common experience for a Christian to learn much from men of other faiths—in devotion, humility, courage and host of other virtues; and it is perfectly possible for him to learn from the teaching of some other religion a lesson he has failed to learn from his own' (*Christianity and Comparative Religion*, I.V.P., p. 93). But our glad acknowledgement of this fact must be qualified by our conviction of the supremacy of Christ. At night the moon and the planets glimmer with the sun's reflected light and dispel a little of the darkness, but when the sun rises in all his glory the planets vanish from sight and the moon's light become a pallid glow.

4. *There are sinful and demonic elements in all religions.* This was true of Israel—when the high priest entered the holy place, he was commanded to wear on his forehead a plate of pure gold engraved with the words 'Holy to the Lord'—'Aaron shall take upon himself any guilt incurred in the holy offering which the people of Israel hallow as their holy gifts; it shall always be upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord' ([Ex. 28:38](#) RSV). It was not simply the official leadership of Israel, the Sadducean priests, but the most

devout, the Pharisees, who rejected Jesus and demanded his death. Religion itself can easily become the enemy of truth, man's self-protection against the living God. This is evident in tribal religions, witness the ritual murders which occur from time to time. It is true in other religions, witness the clerical regime in Iran, which claims to be God's rule in opposition to Satan. It is true too in Christianity, seen as a historical phenomenon (and that is how people of other faiths view it, and how we are bound, at least in part, to view other faiths): we may cite the horrors of the Crusades, the appalling persecution of Christian by Christian in many eras, the acceptance by Christian leaders of slavery, oppressive wars and the ruthless exploitation of the poor in the past and of racial oppression in South Africa today. So religion, Christian and other, often results merely in self-righteousness instead of an encounter with God in his holiness and majesty.

5. *People without Christ are lost*, though not precisely as this has been generally understood. The teaching of the New Testament on this subject seems perfectly clear. It would be obviously wrong to interpret Peter's words to Cornelius ([Acts 10:34](#)) to mean that for people of other p. 43 faiths ordinary human goodness and piety earns them salvation, as this would run counter to the whole teaching of St Paul and St John. Those who receive Christ are saved; those who reject him are lost. But what of those who have never really had the opportunity to receive him, because they have never heard the gospel or have been presented with only a distorted picture of the Christian faith? In considering their situation we must bear in mind that judgement is in proportion to light received; Lesslie Newbigin (*The Open Secret*, p. 196) reminds us that 'we are warned to judge nothing before the time ([1 Cor. 4:1-5](#)) ... It is simply honest to refuse to answer the question which our Lord himself refused to answer ([Luke 13:23-30](#))'. Sir Norman Anderson examines the question carefully (*Christianity and Comparative Religion*, pp. 100-107). After referring to the salvation of people in the Old Testament through the merits of Jesus Christ he continues, 'May we not believe that the same would be true of the follower of some other religion in whose heart the God of all mercy had been working by his Spirit, who had come in some measure to realise his sin and need of forgiveness, and who had been enabled, in the twilight as it were, to throw himself on the mercy of God?' He refers to many precious promises made in the Bible to those who seek God and quotes Zwingli's 'somewhat sweeping' words, 'There has not lived a single good man, there has not been a single pious heart or believing soul from the beginning of the world to the end, which you will not see there in the presence of God'. He adds that this view should not lead to any diminution in evangelism; for such people still lack the *knowledge* of salvation, the assurance of sins forgiven, they do not yet know 'the present experience of joy, peace and power, which a conscious knowledge of Christ, and communion with him, alone can bring', and they have no clear message to pass on to others.

Salvation is indeed through Christ alone, won for humanity through the 'one full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world' which he offered upon the Cross; but this does not necessarily mean that it is limited to those who hear, understand and consciously respond in a positive way to his message. There are those too who, like Cornelius, have a sense of loving dependence upon God and a hope in his mercy without ever having heard that message—can we doubt that God's mercy extends to them?

The Evangelical Alliance Study Group, London, included the late Canon R. W. F. Wootton and Canon Patrick Sookhdeo. p. 44

Those Who Have Never Heard: Have They No Hope?

Evert D. Osburn

Reprinted with permission from the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, September 1989.

In this article the missionary author argues that there is a possibility of salvation for the hidden peoples, who by the way of grace through faith recognise their need and repent before God, seeking his forgiveness. He discusses the biblical texts that suggest that God does save some apart from an explicit knowledge of the gospel. Many evangelical scholars will disagree. However, the issues raised here deserve serious consideration. Letters to the editor on this are welcomed.

Anthropological studies have revealed that the Yoruba people of Nigeria worship a Supreme Being whom they call Olodumare. Olodumare is known as the Creator (cf. [Isa. 40:28](#)), the Most High (cf. [Ps. 91:1](#)), and the King who dwells in the heavens (cf. [113:5](#)). He possesses all superlative attributes, executes judgment (cf. [75:7](#)), is the discernor of hearts who sees both the inside and outside of man (cf. [Heb. 4:12-13](#)), and he alone can accomplish his work merely by speaking (cf. [Gen. 1:3](#) ff.). Olodumare is the all-powerful Creator who deserves to be worshipped by mankind. He cannot be represented by images, but he can be approached as the Father.¹

It is not known when the Yoruba traditions about Olodumare originated, but research has shown that the High God [of the Yoruba] was not a later insertion through contact with Western Christianity'.²

Where did the Yoruba obtain their knowledge of God? More importantly, could a Yoruba tribesman who recognizes his need cast himself upon the mercy of God as he knows him and still be saved without ever hearing the gospel?

What about those who have never heard the Christian message? M. Erickson says that this is one of the most troublesome questions p. 45 asked him by undergraduates in a Christian liberal-arts college, second only to the problem of evil.³

The words of William Cowper, written two hundred years ago, still express the sentiment of many hearts toward this perplexing issue:

Is virtue, then, unless of Christian growth,
Mere fallacy, or foolishness, or both?
Ten thousand sages lost in endless woe,
For ignorance of what they could not know?
That speech betrays at once a bigot's tongue,
Charge not a God with such outrageous wrong.

¹ E. D. Adelowo, 'Yoruba Oral Traditions, the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the Bible', *African Theological Journal*, 15/2 (1986), pp. 129-130.

² M. Welton, 'Themes in African Traditional Belief Ritual', *Practical Anthropology* 18/1 (January-February 1971), p. 2.

³ M. Erickson, 'Hope for Those Who Have Never Heard? Yes, But ...', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 11/2 (April 1975), p. 122.

Truly not I—the partial light men have,
My creed persuades me, well employed, may save.⁴

Cowper's words reflect what perhaps many of us hope is true. The problem at hand is so difficult because like [John 14:6](#), [Acts 4:12](#) and [Rom. 10:14–17](#) seem to exclude the possibility of salvation apart from the gospel of Christ. Yet it seems unfair to many that millions of unreached people would be condemned by a just and loving God even though they never had a chance to hear of Jesus.

HOPE FOR HIDDEN PEOPLES?

It is my contention that there is a possibility of salvation for the hidden peoples who, by the way of grace through faith, recognize their need and repent before God, seeking his forgiveness.⁵ Just as the Israelites of the OT brought sacrifices to God and, through faith, placed themselves on his mercy, so may the unreached 'heathen' come to the one true God in repentance and faith and be forgiven (of course, they must have a knowledge of the right God). This forgiveness was extended to them through Christ's work on the cross ([1 Tim 2:6](#)). Thus the God of mercy may work in the heart of the 'heathen' by his Spirit, 'bringing him in some measure to realize his sin and need for forgiveness, and enabling him, as it were, to throw himself on God's mercy'.⁶

If such a person were to subsequently hear the gospel he would [p. 46](#) instinctively recognize its truth ([John 8:47](#); [18:37b](#)). Of course God knows who would accept the gospel if he had a chance to hear it. I believe this explains why, on occasion, previously unreached tribes wholeheartedly accept the missionary's message when he does arrive and ask, 'Why didn't you come here sooner?'

Since the position taken here is opposed by many, we must now look at the arguments that support it. To begin with, [Rom. 3:25](#) offers an explanation for such exclusivistic passages as [John 14:6](#); [Acts 4:12](#). The latter teach unequivocally that it is only through Jesus Christ and the cross that anyone's salvation is actualized. There has been no other, and this is true even for those who existed before Christ's life on earth.

[Rom. 3:25](#) teaches not that God simply forgot about the sins committed by the OT saints but that he passed by the debt incurred by their sin by looking forward to the satisfaction of his broken law at the cross, which is the means by which sins were paid for for all believers ([1 John 2:2](#)). The ultimate basis for salvation for OT saints was faith in God ([Gen. 15:6](#); [Rom. 4:3, 22](#); [Gal. 3:6](#)), who knew what he was going to do through the cross.

Thus the atonement of Christ, though it occurred at a particular time in human history, extended to all time in its effectiveness. If the eternal God, who does not necessarily view time sequentially, has applied Christ's blood to people of faith in the OT who had no knowledge of Jesus, why can he not do likewise for the unreached person who has no explicit knowledge of Christ but may believe in the One who raised Jesus from the dead (cf. [Rom. 4:23–24](#))?

In this sense, then, Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and his name is the only one by which we must be saved. It is only through his work on the cross that anyone ever has or ever will come to salvation.

⁴ W. Cowper, *Poems* (London, Proprietors of the English Classics, 1794), p. 51.

⁵ N. Anderson, *Christians and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984), pp. 148–149.

⁶ *Ibid.*

[Rom. 10:11-17](#) is often invoked to prove that the preached Word must be heard before the 'heathen' can come to God. Verse [18](#), however, is often overlooked. In v. [17](#) Paul states: 'So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ'. In the following verse he asks the rhetorical question: 'But I say, surely they have never heard, have they?' He then answers, 'Indeed they have', and goes on to quote [Ps. 19:4](#), which is part of a classic passage on God's general revelation via the natural world (191:6).

GENERAL AND SPECIAL REVELATION

Apparently some of the gospel of Christ is known through general revelation apart from the written Word. This makes sense in view of [P. 47](#) the fact that Christ is the agent of creation and the sustainer of the universe ([1 Cor. 8:6](#); [Col. 1:15-17](#); [Heb. 1:3](#)).

That this inferred knowledge of God is by itself insufficient for salvation seems evident from the context of [Rom. 1:18-21](#), due to man's rejection of the God he sees in creation. But God has also provided man with an intuitional knowledge of himself ([2:12-16](#)). Because man is created in God's image ([Gen. 1:27](#); [9:6](#)), he has God's moral law written upon his heart. Man's conscience bears witness to those moral laws and renders judicial decisions as to whether they are being followed. If he sincerely accepts the verdict of guilty handed down by his conscience, thereby recognizing that he is a sinner in desperate need of the Lawgiver's grace, then the stage is set for that person's encounter with God's special revelation. This may consist of the gospel or the Scriptures, but it may also be in the form of dreams or visions ([Daniel 2](#); [Acts 9:3ff](#)), an angel ([Revelation 14](#)), or through oral tradition.

Traditions may be thought of as a possible form of special revelation because of the possibility that they are based upon the ancestral knowledge of God. This knowledge has its roots in man's common ancestors in the Garden of Eden and in the post-flood era. God spoke directly to Adam and Eve ([Genesis 3](#)) and Noah ([6:13-7:4](#); [8:15-17](#); [9:1-8](#)). It seems presumptuous to assume that none of the truths known by them have been passed down and preserved in oral tradition.

This is not to say that all traditions contain truths of God, of course, but could it be that this explains why some unreached peoples at various times and locations have been found to have an amazing awareness of the one true God? They may not know where they got this truth, but does that matter? Perhaps this is why the eminent anthropologist W. Schmidt found that many of the preliterate peoples he studied were worshipers of only one God, causing him to theorize that primeval revelation is the ultimate source of primeval monotheism.⁷

C. H. Kang and E. Nelson believe that the ancient Chinese worshipped the one true God and that their writing system reveals that traditions about man's origin were passed down to them from the time of Genesis. For example, the character for 'flood' consists of symbols that indicate that eight people were united with hands joined, forming the total number of those left on earth (Noah and family?).⁸ [p. 48](#)

Some of the spiritual truths found within traditions may also in fact be based upon past contacts with Christians, even though those contacts themselves may be forgotten. It is interesting that Luke points out that 'devout men from every nation under heaven' were present in Jerusalem during the events of Pentecost ([Acts 2:5](#)). Since three thousand of

⁷ H. Zimon, 'Wilhelm Schmidt's Theory of Primitive Monotheism and Its Critique within the Vienna School of Ethnology', *Anthropos* 81 (1986), p. 248.

⁸ C. H. Kang and E. Nelson, *The Discovery of Genesis* (St. Louis, Concordia, 1979), pp. 97-98.

them accepted Christ ([2:41](#)), is it not possible that portions of the gospel were then diffused throughout the world?

In connection with this, note that Paul said that the gospel 'was proclaimed [past tense] in all creation under heaven' ([Col. 1:23](#)). Could it also be that some of the 'heathen' heard part of this gospel and preserved it in their oral traditions? Of course some of them may have come to the gospel instead of the gospel coming to them, as was the case of the Ethiopian eunuch in [Acts 8](#).

Perhaps this may partially explain how lost peoples like the Karen of Burma had a tradition of y"wa and his lost book that would someday be brought back to them.⁹ This is the type of phenomenon that led J. H. Bavinck to state that 'everywhere in Asia we can see a trace of faint influence of the ancient preachers of the gospel'.¹⁰

Further support for the argument presented here is found in [Rev. 5:9; 7:9](#), which indicate that individuals from every nation, tribe, people and language will be found in heaven. This is not only a great source of comfort for those missionaries who feel that their work is bearing no fruit but also a fulfillment of [Gen. 12:3](#). Yet if there will be Christians in heaven from among every people-group and language, what can be done with those civilizations and small tribes who have disappeared without ever having a missionary witness because of war, or disease, or natural calamity? These verses seem to indicate that there may be members of even these peoples who will be in heaven, so God must have dealt with them in a special way.

In all of what has been said up to this point, one must be careful not to overlook the work of the Holy Spirit. [John 1:9](#) says that Jesus, the true light, 'enlightens every man'. Christ promised that the Holy Spirit he would send would 'convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment' ([John 16:8](#)). Thus the light Christ provided, working through the Holy Spirit, is vital to anyone's salvation. What is known through creation, combined with truth found in oral traditions, dreams, miracles, and/or visions, may be utilized by the Holy Spirit to bring one to the point of repentance. [p. 49](#)

Another important consideration concerning the question of those who have never heard the name of Christ is found within the doctrine of the Trinity. Since Christ and God the Father are equal ([John 5:18; 10:30; Phil. 2:6; Heb. 1:3](#)), then sincere belief in the God of creation as the one and only true God is implicit belief in Christ (and the Holy Spirit, the other co-equal member of the Godhead). This is why A. H. Strong could write:

A humble and penitent reliance upon God, as a Saviour from sin and a guide for conduct, is an implicit faith in Christ; for such reliance casts itself upon God, so far as God has revealed himself—and the only revealer is Christ.¹¹

Of course one who believes in the one true God would instinctively accept the gospel of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were he to ever hear it. If his faith was real and based upon the correct God, Christ would not be a stumbling-block to him.

THE CASE OF MELCHIZEDEK

One argument against the possibility of salvation apart from explicit knowledge of the gospel is that there are no examples in the Bible of such an event. Admittedly there are no

⁹ D. Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Ventura, Regal, 1981), p. 84.

¹⁰ J. H. Bavinck, *The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 19049), p. 106.

¹¹ A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwoods, Revell, 1907), p. 843.

clear examples of this in the NT (Cornelius was not saved prior to hearing the words of Peter; cf. [Acts 11:14](#)), but there are possible instances in the OT.

Melchizedek, Job and his friends, Naaman the leper, Jethro, and Rahab were all believers outside of the Israelite fold. Since the latter three all had contact with Israelites, it could be argued that their knowledge of Yahweh was through them. But where did Job and his friends, and Melchizedek, receive the knowledge of God they needed to be saved?

The account of Melchizedek is much clearer concerning its dating (c. 2100 B.C.) than is that of Job, since the former had direct contact with Abram ([Gen. 14:18-24](#)). It is interesting to note that even before the formation of the nation of Israel a 'heathen' king was known to be 'a priest of God Most High'. The title for God used in v. [18](#) is a proper name for the Supreme God of Abram, and Melchizedek indicates that he is serving the one true God by calling him the 'possessor of heaven and earth' (v. [19](#)).

B. Demarest explains that [Heb. 7:1-10](#) 'fully regards Melchizedek as an historical figure who united kingship with the worship and p. 50 service of God in the midst of a pagan culture'.¹² Naturally this historical priest-king must have been serving other worshipers of God Most high in Salem, since a priest needs some believing followers in order to be a priest. Could, then, Melchizedek represent an independent line of believers in Canaan? Is it not possible that God provided them with special revelation of himself that we do not know about and that he could do so for others today?

For the reasons stated above I feel that a sincere believer in the one true creator God may possibly be saved apart from explicit knowledge of the gospel of Christ. This does not lessen the urgency of the great commission ([Matt. 28:19-20](#)). Since God's normative way of reaching people is through the gospel, the vast majority of all people must hear the Word before they will ever consider seeking God, and even a saved unreached person would have no assurance of salvation and could not mature in the Lord apart from the scriptural knowledge of Christ.

It must also be cautioned that sincerity alone is not enough; one must sincerely seek and believe in the right God. The thesis presented here is not an escape-valve for followers of other religions. This is true even for modern-day monotheistic Jews and Muslims, both of whom have some knowledge of Christ but have distorted it and rejected him as the Saviour.

Perhaps conservative Christianity should at least allow for the possibility of the salvation of those very few unreached people who apparently do seek God, grope for him, and find him (cf. [Acts 17:27](#)). Possibly even some of the unevangelized 'heathen' of centuries past are among the elect who will be found in heaven. By avoiding a too-confident and sweeping dogmatism against the feasibility of salvation for some of those who have never heard, we will be refraining from adding unnecessarily to 'the offence of the cross'.

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¹² B. Demarest, *A History of Interpretation of Hebrews 7:1-10 from the Reformation to the Present* (Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr, 1976), p. 131.

The Lostness of Urban Squatters: Is There Any Hope?

Viv Grigg

Reprinted with permission from Urban Mission, May 1989.

This is a very distressing article. The author, a New Zealander who, with his Brazilian wife, has pioneered church planting among the urban poor in Manila and now in other cities in Asia, outlines the findings of his extensive research on the lostness of the urban poor. He estimates that by the year 2000 twenty million urban poor, mainly squatters, will live in Dhaka, Bangladesh. This is mind-boggling to say the least! He states further that in all cities of Asia (except in Korea) not more than 4% of the churches are located in squatter colonies and slums. The author suggests reasons why squatters, as distinct from slum dwellers, are potentially the most responsive people today. From this it is clear that reaching the urban squatter is no armchair task.

What if the Muslim or Hindu worlds doubled every ten years? What if they were some of the most responsive peoples on the globe? How would this affect mission strategies?

Urban squatters are a bloc as large as these two worlds, doubling every decade. All indicators show them as responsive peoples. Logically, missions must adjust their strategies to make them their priority target.

The majority of migrants to the mega-cities will move into the *slums* (Bangkok), *squatter areas* (Manila), *shanty towns* (South Africa), *bustees* (India), *bidonvilles* (Morocco), *favelas* (Brazil), *casbahs* (Algeria), *ranchitos* (Venezuela), *Ciudades perdidas* (Mexico), *barriadas* or *pueblos jóvenes* (Peru). I will use the term *squatter areas* to refer to all these settlements.

These tend to be slums of hope whose occupants have come in search of employment, found some vacant land, and gradually become established, building their homes, finding work, and developing some communal relationships similar to the *barrios* or villages from which they have come. In the slums of hope, social forces and expectations create a high degree of receptivity to the gospel.

OTHER URBAN POOR

Squatter areas need to be differentiated from the inner city slums—decaying tenements and houses that were once good middle and upper class residences. These may be described as slums of despair; they are home to those who have lost the will to try, and those who cannot cope. Yet here too are recent immigrants living near employment opportunities, and students in the hundreds of thousands, seeking the upward mobility of education. P. 52

In these slums of despair there is little social cohesion, or positive hope that facilitates a responsiveness to the gospel. As they are older poor areas of several generations of sin, they are not responsive areas and hence not as high a mission priority. It is more strategic to focus on the squatter areas.

THE EXTENT OF THE SQUATTER AREAS

Estimates of the rates of growth of the squatter areas indicate that they are growing faster than the cities at annual rates of about 6–12 per cent. The squatter areas of Kuala Lumpur, for example, grew at an average annual rate of 9.7 per cent from 1974 to 1980. Much of this can be attributed to the growth rate of cities in general. Worldwide urban growth has been pegged at 2.76 per cent a year. Thirty to sixty per cent of this is due to migration from the rural areas. At that rate, city populations will double in twenty years. But the mission field among the squatters will double every ten years or so.

In the year 2000, 2,116 million or 33.6 per cent of the world will be in cities in less developed regions and 40 per cent (a conservative figure) will be squatters (846 million). This would indicate a world that is about 13.6 per cent squatters by the year 2000—a bloc nearly the size of Muslim or Hindu populations, doubling each decade—a distinct entity in their own right for evangelization.

When one includes both slum and squatter figures for these Third World mega-cities, in none of them is the percentage of poor less than 19 per cent. In many it is over 60 per cent.

Including the less reachable, decaying inner city slums, and street people in these cities, a reasonable estimate is that 50 per cent of the population of these cities in the year 2000 will be urban poor (1 billion), which is 16.8 per cent of the world's population.

The urban poor as an entity cannot, in contrast to the squatter communities, be generalized as a reachable bloc with cultural affinities. They do not identify themselves as communities with common characteristics or affinity for other types of urban poor. The urban poor as a larger class are defined in contrast to the people of the city, rather than as an entity in themselves. [p. 53](#)

THE MOST RESPONSIVE INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL BLOC

Not only do the squatters share a common economic history and system that is nearly universal, but they also share universal religious characteristics, an animism that is far stronger than the prevailing 'high' religions. Cultural characteristics in the slums are as much universal as they are subculturally related to the prevalent cultures. We may define them as a cultural bloc with as much ease as we define Muslims or Hindus who span a broad range of ethnicity and culture. Animists in general are more reachable than other high religions.

Socially, each squatter community of reasonable size perceives itself as a distinct social entity, linked to the city, but with a life and society and subculture of its own. In any city, the squatters have coping strategies independent of middle class life, including middle class religious life to which they have little or no relationship. If you have ever been present when two squatter churches meet, you would understand the affinity evident between these people as a social class with similar occupations and patterns of residence.

Language in the squatter areas tends to draw migrants together as all learn to speak the *lingua franca* of the city. Yet almost all realize that they cannot read and write properly and are, unlike the middle class, uneducated. As a result, ethnic barriers lower but a strong class barrier towards the middle class emerges.

Such communities are more responsive than the closed rural village or the isolated middle class person. Poverty creates a positive responsiveness to the gospel, according to the apostle James. The changes migrants go through create a responsiveness.

Faced with universal responsiveness in the international subculture of poverty in these squatter areas, we must develop specific missions and plans for evangelization.

WHERE ARE THE SQUATTER CHURCHES?

Where are the existing movements among the poor? The accompanying table summarizes recent research into church growth in the squatter areas and slums in various cities.

ASIAN CITIES: MISSION TARGET

The target of world evangelism, the greatest unreached areas, remains in Asia. Here we find the slums of the cities relatively unreached by the love of God. Nowhere in Asia, with the exception of Korea, does the [P. 54](#)

The Squatter Churches (Millions)

City	Pop 1985	Slum/Squatter	Slum/Squatter % of Pop	Number of Squatter Areas	Number of Churches In City	Number of Churches in Squatter Areas	% of Churches in Squatter Areas
Asia							
Calcutta, India	11.9	6 plus million live in one family/rm	57	300 plus	58	0	0.2 house churches
		3.15 million in bustee	33	in bustee			
		48,000 plus on streets					
Manila, Philippines	8.5	2.4-3.5	415	677	29	4.3	
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	2.0	.243	24-35	177	100 plus	1	1
Karachi, Pakistan	6.7	1.65	33	500 plus	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Dhaka, Bangladesh	2.3	.73	32	771	n.a.	4 or less	n.a. p. 55

Bangkok, Thailand	6.0	1.2	19.6	1024	97	2	2
		600,000 Prostitutes				3	work w/prost.
		500,000 Addicts				2	work w/addicts
Latin America							
Sao Paulo, Brazil	17.35	700,00 street children 800,000	7	5294	3500	66	
		1.5 favelados	mil7-17				
		3.0 corticos	mil24% poor				
Rio de Janeiro	13.1	3.9	30	500 plus	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Lima, Peru	5.5	2.7	50-55	598	610	306-594	60-90
Mexico	19.7	2.7	15-25	500	1015	600-900	60-90

p. 56

church in the slums have more than four per cent of all the existing churches in the city. In each city, there are only a handful of slum churches. In no city is there a movement of poor people's churches.

The urban church of Asia is a middle class church. 'Urban mission' as a call unfortunately increases this bias. The target needs to be redefined urgently as 'urban *poor* mission'.

Bangkok

The church in Thailand has faced much resistance to growth, but in the last ten years a growing openness has developed. The Church Growth Committee estimates that there are ninety-seven churches in Bangkok, about 25 per cent of which are relatively small and new (i.e., one church/60,000 population).

However, in the 19.6 per cent of the city that constitutes the 1,020 slums, there are only two churches and two house groups (1986). That is, only two per cent of the churches

are among the migrant poor, many in shacks of galvanized iron, others in overcrowded but well-built old-style Thai houses. Many of these migrants are from the more responsive North and Northeastern Thai ethnic groups. In 1986, we were able to initiate the first team of foreigners to live in these slums. For the 600,000 prostitutes, there are only two ministries and for the 500,000 drug addicts, only one drug centre.

Manila

Manila is more evangelized than any other Asian city, because of the influence of a Catholic heritage. There are 677 churches. But at last count, there were only twenty-nine church-planting ventures among the 500 squatter areas that contain over 30 per cent of the 8.5 million population. There is still the need for someone to develop a churchplanting pattern that will generate an urban poor movement such as has occurred in Latin America.

Kuala Lumpur

Kuala Lumpur, in Malaysia, is a dynamic city, growing rapidly and exploiting well the natural resources of its country by utilizing money pouring in from its Muslim brothers. The 24 per cent of its 2 million squatters include 52.5 per cent reachable Chinese and 14.9 per cent reachable Indians. It is one city where there has been a consistent and reasonably humane programme for uplifting these poor. A former rock [p. 57](#) musician turned accountant-evangelist heard the cries of the poor and is building a church among them.

Chinese and Indian communities are open to the gospel. In general, the Chinese Malaysian church has been locked into an older style of church growth-oriented evangelicalism which does not understand issues of poverty, or a newer Pentecostalism that is dominated by a theology of affluence. Yet in the last ten years the church has become more open to ministry among the poor as a result of the charismatic renewal.

Dhaka

The destitution of the poor in Dhaka is greater than in any city, even Calcutta, perhaps because Bangladesh is one of the most bereft nations on earth, despite its luxuriant agricultural resources. Houses are made of mud thatch, a few feet tall, and the people possess virtually nothing. This year the poor number 3 million. By the year 2000 that figure is projected to be 20 million. The majority of these poor will become squatters.

There are Hindu converts in the 771 *bustees*. But the majority of people are Muslim and have never heard or seen Jesus. The country is open to many forms of foreign development assistance and this gives open doors to respond to the cries of the poor.

Calcutta

Sixty-six per cent of its 10 million people live one family per room. Two and one half million live in *bustees*, 500,000 in refugee areas, 48,000 (officially)-200,000 (generally accepted figure) live on the streets. There are other migrant squatter communities with homes of thatch and mud. There is no church, only two small house groups among these slums. Of the fifty-eight churches in this city of 10 million, many contain the poor, for 60 per cent of the city is underemployed. None is a church of the slums reaching out to the slums.

Jesus has sometimes been seen in these slums in the persons of a few varied saints, for there are many good Christian aid programmes. But he has not been heard for two generations and his body has not been formed: there are none to live among the poor and form it.

LATIN AMERICAN CITIES

Mission Source

In contrast with Asia, Latin America's cities are centres of amazing [p. 58](#) kingdom growth. The majority of the churches in Latin cities are among the poor. Why this difference? And what are the implications for missions?

Lima, Peru

Once the capital of Spanish South America, today Lima is predominantly a city of 5.5 million migrant, Hispanicized Indian peoples. In 1940, 35 per cent of Peru was urban. By 1984, 65 per cent lived in urban areas. Thirty per cent of the total population live in Lima.

These waves of landless, homeless people have resulted in the sprouting of *pueblos jovenes* (young towns), which now comprise 50 per cent of the city. Most spring up unplanned and without government assistance. After a period of time, facilities are extended to them by the government including water, roads, and electricity. There are 598 *pueblos jovenes*, mostly on desert or mountains surrounding the city. There are also hundreds of thousands in over-crowded inner city tenements known as *tugurios*.

Of the 610 churches and 1.93 per cent evangelicals in the city, church leaders indicate that 90 per cent of the churches are in the *pueblos jovenes*. There is, in Lima, a movement among the urban poor of a size much larger than in any Asian city. However, 598 *pueblos jovenes* compared to 610 churches means that there are still many without churches.

The *tugurios*, the inner city tenements, are probably largely unreached as no church leader I talked with was aware of believers or churches in these areas.

Mexico

The rich and poor among the 18 million people of Mexico City often live side by side on the same block. Other poor live in the *cuidades perdidas* (lost cities), where rundown and abandoned buildings become home. The School of Civil Engineers in 1984 counted 500 of these *cuidades perdidas* with 2.7 million people. There are also areas of squatters known as *paracaidistas* (parachutists) where 200 families suddenly descend overnight onto unused land, moving from the *cuidades perdidas*. The 1985 earthquake left 40,000 families relocated into what has become for them permanent-temporary housing.

Again, of Mexico City's 1,015 churches, the majority are among the poor. [p. 59](#)

São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

São Paulo is a vibrant, sprawling metropolis that covers an area of 1,400 square miles, where 15 million people live and 106 languages are spoken. It has 115,000 industries, three major soccer teams, and thirty-four universities. Poverty is far less than in other world class cities: only 800,000 (1982) lived in the *favelas*—a mere 7 per cent. But this figure hides the reality of an estimated 500,000 Brazilians who are moving annually to São Paulo and the 3,000,000 (17 per cent) living in *corticós*—decaying, inner city buildings. Only 5 per cent of *favelados* in São Paulo have claim to their land. A mere 3 per cent of them earn minimum salaries.

Seven hours away, the city of Rio explodes into the skyscrapers dotting the beaches. In the midst of the wealth and the tourism lie some of the most beautiful *favelas* in the world. If one is going to be poor, it is smart to be poor in the most beautiful city in the world—and about 30 per cent of the population are.

There are more churches in São Paulo and Rio than in other cities of Latin America or Asia—5294 in São Paulo. There is a greater movement among the poor. Many *favelas* have

three or four churches. The majority of these are Pentecostal, particularly Assembly of God.

POOR PEOPLE'S CHURCHES

Traditional churches are virtually nonexistent in any country among the urban poor. My research confirms this. Traditional churches that target the urban poor should plan for Pentecostal-style leadership, worship, and theology if they would succeed.

These churches have what poor people need. Simple patterns of noisy, emotionally healing worship, strong authoritarian leadership, and many legalistic rules. They are very dependent on the leading of the Spirit of God. They tend to lack in good Bible teaching, and reject book learning, partly because of the rapid growth which precludes extensive training of pastors and deacons. (This last factor is neither an essential nor healthy characteristic. Wesley modelled a way of developing theologically competent leadership among the poor). I have not found in any city a church formed among the poor that was not the result of healings, deliverance, and signs and wonders.

MOVEMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA; NOTHING IN ASIA

There has been a dynamic of church-planting in Latin rural areas. P. 60 Then, as migration has occurred, the pastors have moved with their people to the cities and the *favelas* and *pueblos jovenes*. Why has the same pattern in Asia not resulted in churches among the urban poor?

Perhaps the reason, assuming that mission over the last decades has predominantly been North American, is that the middle classes in Latin America have been identified with the Spanish and Portuguese, who have traditionally been closed to the gospel and opposed to North American influence. The poor, on the other hand, come from the more oppressed indigenous cultures with a suppressed opposition to the Spanish culture (though they are attracted by it). This is in contrast to the Asian scene where a positive attitude towards American culture by the upper and middle classes has meant a responsiveness to mission efforts.

NEXT PHASE: LATIN POOR MISSIONS TO ASIA

It is possible that God will raise up some apostles from among the middle class church of Asia to bridge the gulf to their own squatter communities. Perhaps he will call some rich to live among the poor.

On the other hand, why not steal some of these trained Latin Americans—perhaps several hundred—to catalyze this? They have the faith. In fifteen months, Pastor Waldimar of Brazil, while developing the project *SERVOS Entre as Pobres* under his mission *KAIROS*, has recruited 170 potential missionaries for this task. Bankrupt Brazil does not have the finances for their transportation or support. By faith they wait on God who will overcome this barrier.

We would not expect significant church-planting among the Asian squatter areas from the affluent West; affluence makes it too hard to live among the poor. Mission to the poor tends to be defined as development. Traditional Western theology and structures do not meet the needs of the poor. I say this despite having set up two missions from Western nations to accomplish this goal and having an extensive background in community development.

Foreigners, WASP or Latino, are an important catalyst to the national Asian churches, but only a catalyst. We must model in such a way that indigenous works, indigenous leadership, and indigenous missions emerge. The aim is not missions. This is too small. Nor is it church growth. This is too limited. The aim is the discipling of the peoples—indigenous squatter discipling movements. These will not emerge from highly financed mission programmes. Missions that would catalyze these must be missions of workers who choose lifestyles of voluntary poverty among the poor. [p. 61](#)

God is calling for Latin missions with commitments to lifestyle of non-destitute and incarnational poverty (and for many, years of voluntary singleness) to catalyze indigenous movements of churches among the unreached squatters of Asia.

HOW MUCH COULD GOD DO?

God will do what we ask. As you read, would you bow and pray for:

1. Two incarnational workers in every squatter area.
2. A church in every squatter area.
3. A movement in each city among the poor.
4. Transformation of slums and squatter areas in some cities.
5. Incarnational workers from among the poor who can affect economic and social structures and political options.
6. Mission leaders to make the squatters a priority.
7. A major thrust from Latin America to the Asian squatter areas.

Abraham prayed for a city.

God heard.

Nehemiah prayed for a city.

God gave.

Jonah spoke to a city.

What are we trusting God for?

Viv Grigg is director of SERVANTS International Resources. [p. 62](#)

Concepts of Salvation in Buddhism

Tissa Weerasingha

This detailed and somewhat technical account of salvation in Buddhist thought reveals the gap between Christian and Buddhist language and concepts. While the Christian evangelist preaches salvation as rebirth the Buddhist seeks for deliverance from rebirth. The former assumes the reality of personhood in man and God, the latter rejects the self as impermanent and without identity. The idea of forgiveness of sins is meaningless to him. Most Buddhists have never heard the gospel because they have misheard it. The author of this article cautiously suggests some bridges in understanding of proclaiming the gospel to Buddhist seekers.

Buddhism embraces a wide body of religious phenomena, and the canonical texts found in four major languages—Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese. There are two main schools within Buddhism, Hinayana and Mahayana. The concept of salvation or liberation in Buddhism is contained in the term *Nibbana* (skr-Nirvana).

THE MEANING OF SALVATION IN BUDDHISM

To be properly understood *nibbana* has to be seen in the context of the other major doctrines of *anicca* (impermanance), *anatta* (no-self) and *dukkha* (suffering).

According to the doctrine of *anicca*, all conditioned things or phenomenal processes that make up the sphere of existence (*samsara*) are impermanent and constantly in flux. This covers everything that is animate, inanimate, organic and inorganic. According to the doctrine of *anatta* (no-self) the empirical person is without a self or lasting identity. The concept of self is an imaginary notion that produces thoughts of desire, which is the root cause of suffering. The 'person' is an aggregate of five factors which are constantly in flux—sensation, perception, consciousness, volition and matter. These are called the five *Khandas*. The clinging together of these five factors is what causes human existence. Human existence is sorrowful. The cause of sorrow (*dukkha*) is craving or desire which leads to rebirth. *Nibbana*, which literally means extinction, is the highest goal of the Buddhist way of life and constitutes what we call salvation. Salvation is the extinction of the fires of greed, hate and delusion and consequently the deliverance from *samsara*, the cycle of rebirth. p. 63

Salvation in the Hinayana (Lesser Vessel) School

Nibbana is the *summum bonum* of Buddhism. In a real sense it defies definition. Although it is a cry for bliss, no amount of rational speculation can explain it. Narada claims that it has to be expressed intuitively.

However clearly and descriptively one may write on this profound subject, however glowing may be the terms in which one attempts to describe its utter serenity, comprehension of *Nibbana* is impossible by mere perusal of books. *Nibbana* is not something to be set down in print, nor is it a subject to be grasped by intellect alone; it is a supramundane state (*Lokottara Dhamma*) to be realised only by intuitive wisdom.

A purely intellectual comprehension of *Nibbana* is impossible because it is not a matter to be arrived at by logical reasoning. The words of the Buddha are perfectly logical, but *Nibbana*, the ultimate goal of Buddhism, is beyond the scope of logic. Nevertheless, by reflecting on the positive and negative aspects of life, the logical conclusion emerges that in contradistinction to a conditioned phenomenal existence, there must exist a sorrowless, deathless, non-conditioned state.¹

Gautama Buddha describes this deathless realm:

There is, O monks, a realm, where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor wind, neither the sphere of Boundless Space, nor the sphere of Boundless Consciousness, nor the sphere of Nothingness, nor the sphere of the Neither-Perception-Non-Nonperception, neither this world nor the next world, neither sun nor moon: this, O monks, I call neither a going, nor a coming, nor a standstill. Without bases is it, without continuity, without support; this is the end of suffering. Hard is it to perceive the Deathless Realm, not easy is it to perceive the truth. Yet penetrated by the Master is the craving. To nothing more the seer is attached.

¹ Ven. Narada Thera, *The Way to Nibbana* (The Buddhist Missionary Society, Malaysia), p. 63.

There is, O monks, an Unborn, Unoriginated, Unformed, Uncreated. For if there were not this Unborn, Unoriginated, Unformed, Uncreated, there would be no escape possible from the born, originated, formed, created.²

Nibbana is not nihilism. The *Dhammapada* states:

Nibbana is neither eternalism nor nihilism. In *Nibbana* nothing is eternalized nor is anything, except passions, annihilated.³ p. 64

From the Buddhist perspective *Nibbana* is not necessarily seen as a negative but a positive outcome. The *Dhammapada* further states:

Nibbana = *ni* + *vana*, lit., departure from craving. It is a supramundane state that can be attained in this life itself. It is also explained as extinction of passions but not a state of nothingness. It is an eternal blissful state of relief that results from the complete eradication of the passions. Metaphysically *Nibbana* is the extinction of suffering; psychologically it is the elimination of egoism; ethically it is the eradication of lust, hatred and ignorance.⁴

Some may ask why, then, *Nibbana* is referred to as Void. To answer this question we must refer to Buddhist anthropology. According to Buddhism there is no individual eternal identity. What is referred to as 'I', 'Me' or 'Mine' is nothing more than five factors such as volition, mental formations, consciousness, perception and matter which are in a constant state of flux. So the void is not the void of a self, since the self never had a beginning to begin (the doctrine of *anatta*). The 'voidness' is the voidness of passion and ignorance, not because it is nothingness or annihilation.

There are two spheres of *Nibbana*. Depending on whether the person who is liberated is dead or alive. The distinction is between Pre-mortal and Post-mortal *Nibbana*. In Pre-mortal *Nibbana* 'Extinction of Impurities' (*kilesaparinibbana*) is reached at the attainment of Arahathship or Holiness, which generally takes place during one's lifetime; in the *Suttas* it is called *saupadisesanibbanna*, i.e. 'Nibbana with the Groups of Existence still remaining'.⁵

In Pre-mortal *Nibbana* the factors which bind a person to re-birth are destroyed. In Post-mortal *Nibbana* the extinction of the Five-Khandhprocess (*Khandha-parinibbana*) takes place at the death of the Arahath, called in the *Suttas* *an-upadisesanibbanna*, i.e. 'Nibbana without the Groups remaining'. In Post-mortal, the person also arises no more.

Existence itself is sorrowful and the attainment of salvation means ultimately deliverance from existence itself. The cycle of rebirth continues because it is fuelled by ignorance and desire. And in order to achieve liberation, both ignorance and desire have to be rooted out. The store of unwholesome *kamma* (*akusala*) keeps on feeding rebirth. The only way to cancel the unwholesome *kamma* is by generating action—in turns free from hatred, delusion and greed. These actions are called *kusala*. p. 65

The ignorance that is referred to is the ignorance that is related to not understanding the true nature of existence. The realization about the sorrowfulness of all existence is what brings enlightenment. When enlightenment is attained one becomes a saint (*arahath*).

² Nyanatiloka, *The Buddha's Path to Deliverance*, 4th edn. (Kandy Offset Printers, 1952, Ud. VIII, 1-3), p. 37.

³ *Dhammapada*, Pali Text and Trans. by Narada Thera (Lam An Thu Quan, Vietnam, 1963), p. 87.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 26.

⁵ Nyanatiloka, *The Word of the Buddha* (Kandy Offset Printers, 1981), p. 23.

According to the Hinayana School, attainment of salvation is by following the Eightfold Way which enumerates the precepts and rules of conduct which will bring people closer to liberation.

Salvation in the Mahayana (Greater Vehicle) School

The Mahayana School, which arose from four hundred years after the Buddha, is a modification of the original teachings. While in the Hinayana, the historical Buddha was considered a natural man, in the monastic Mahayana he is treated as a projection of the Absolute. The Mahayana is the 'Greater Vehicle' because it allows for the assistance of other powers in the quest for liberation. Therefore it also incorporates the possibility of the transference of *karmic* merit. Connected to this is the idea that most Mahayanists reach for an intermediate goal of being *bodhisattvas*—people who help others on the path to deliverance. Obtaining their own deliverance is only a secondary goal. The Mahayanist has a greater this-worldly orientation because of the desire to help others. It must be said that the ultimate goal, however, even of the Mahayanist is total extinction between *nirvana* and *samsara*. The internal diversity within the various sects of Mahayana defies any exhaustive description. I will therefore briefly comment on some of the emphases regarding *nirvana* in some of the sects.

(1) *The Pure Land Traditions*. These traditions gave *nirvana* an other worldly interpretation. Moreover, the idea of salvation by 'other power' because of faith in Amida. By being born in the Pure Land people could attain enlightenment and even come back as *bodhisattvas*.⁶

The Pure Land is a place ideally suited for Buddhist practice. In that Pure Land people could attain enlightenment and even back into the world.

(2) *East Asian Buddhism*. In the Tien-tai and Hua-yen theories we find a recurrent, distinctively East Asian interpretation of *Nirvana*. Just as the Confucians sought harmony within the social order and the Taoists harmony within the natural order, so the Tien-tai and Hua-yen Buddhists understood enlightenment in terms of harmony.⁷ p. 66

(3) *Zen Buddhism*. The Zen school de-emphasized the role of formal doctrine and religious texts and focused on the interpersonal aspects of the enlightenment experience. There was division as to whether it was a sudden or gradual experience.⁸ It stressed meditation as a means to bring realization of the Buddha nature and enlightenment.

(4) *Esoteric Tradition: Dharmakaya*. In terms of their understanding of *nirvana*, the esoteric traditions added an important dimension to their otherwise generally Mahayanistic outlook, namely, that enlightenment should be understood as participation in the enlightenment of the Buddha-as-reality (the *dharmakaya*).⁹

As in Hinayana the concept of *Nirvana* in Mahayana is divided into two spheres. In active *nirvana* (*apratishtita*) the individual has attained sainthood, but chooses not to become extinct but rather live on as a Transcendent *bodhisattva* in order to assist others on the road to liberation. A transcendent *bodhisattva* is no longer bound by natural laws and is able to appear at will in any place at any time.

⁶ Joseph M. Kitagawa and Mark D. Cummings, eds. *Buddhism and Asian History* (Macmillan, New York, 1987, 1989). Part 5: 'Nirvana', by Thomas P. Kasulis, p. 402 ff.

⁷ Kitagawa, *op. cit.*, p. 400.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 401.

⁹ Wolfgang H. Schumann, *Buddhism: An Outline of its Teachings and Schools*, translated by Georg Geuerstein (Quest Book, 1974).

In static *nirvana* (*pratishtita*) the liberated one loses individuality, at the moment of death. He is now in the Absolute.

The realization or awareness that one is already liberated does not arise because of ignorance and craving. Therefore in order to attain liberation these two causes have to be rooted out. The realization is that *sunyata* (emptiness) is the reality in all appearances. Even buddhahood and *nirvana* are seen as illusory ideas useful for the purpose of attaining liberation. This realization alters the attitude of the person radically.

A Comparison of the Hinayana and Mahayana views of salvation

The differences may be summarized as follows.

In relation to the concept of liberation, while Hinayana insists that it is only by one's own efforts, the Mahayana system allows for obtaining assistance from outside powers in order to achieve deliverance. In the Mahayana tradition, the *bodhisattvas* actively participate in the liberation of others.

The concept of the liberating insight in Hinayana is the 4 Noble Truths; in Mahayana it is awareness. While in Hinayana, one has to create one's own liberation, in Mahayana, one has to become p. 67 conscious of one's own absoluteness which has been there from the beginning.¹⁰

The transference of karmic merit is prevalent in Mahayana and not in Hinayana except in practice.

In Hinayana, liberation is understood as the exit from the cycle of births while in Mahayana it is a becoming conscious of one's own buddhahood and then assisting others to achieve the same.

The common ground and core of meaning in relation to *nirvana* may be summarized as follows.

The final goal is extinction.

Liberation is only achievable by eradicating *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hatred), *moha* (delusion).¹¹ It is an everlasting state of happiness. Help is available on the path, even though limited to instruction regarding the way in Hinayana. There is both a psychological and ontological aspect to liberation.¹²

Both schools divided *nirvana* into two spheres—post-mortal and pre-mortal, and active and static *nirvana*.

Nirvana is not a place or a heavenly realm to go into. It is something that can be experienced in the here and now. There is no self or person to become extinct; it is the extinction of the fires of passion, greed and hatred. This extinction is an immortal, eternal state of bliss and happiness. The 'immortal' is that something which latently remains beneath the surface of the phenomenal world.

PATHS TO SALVATION IN BUDDHISM

The doctrine of the Buddha is a path or vehicle used to cross from the shore of worldly experience, ignorance, suffering and craving to the other side of transcendental wisdom. This is liberation from suffering or extinction. The Four Noble Truths explain the origin and cessation of suffering and the Eightfold Path enumerates the way that leads to the

¹⁰ Cf. Schumann, *op. cit.*, pp. 92, 93.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹² Schumann, *op. cit.*, Heinrich Dumoulin and John C. Maraldo, *Buddhism in the Modern World*, (MacMillan, New York, 1976), p. 17; Kitagawa, *op. cit.*, p. 404.

cessation of suffering. The way to deliverance is called the Middle Way because it teaches that in order to attain liberation one must avoid two extremes—self-mortification on the one hand and sensual indulgence on the other. The Middle Way is a humanistic ethic, is rooted in discipline and self-reliance and hence its appeal to **P. 68** intellectuals. There is no Supreme Being who acts as a deliverer. Although there are different types of beings, such as spirits, gods and animals, being born as a human being is the most conducive state to achieving liberation. And *arahats* (saints) are superior to all these divine beings also. The *buddhas* stand at the top of the ladder. The path involves discipline, meditation, concentration and intuitive insight to the nature of all existence at which point one is enlightened.

The Hinayana Path of Salvation

The Hinayana way of salvation is salvation purely by one's own efforts, by following the *Middle Way*. The path to deliverance is by the termination of the karmic process of action-reaction utilising the Noble Eightfold Path which can be divided into three stages:

MORALITY (*sila*) is right speech, right conduct, right livelihood;

CONCENTRATION (*samadhi*) is right effort, right awareness, right meditation;

WISDOM (*pragna*) is right view, right resolves.

Morality is not mere manifestation of physical phenomena, but constitute a state of mind and volition which results in Right Speech, Right Conduct and Right Livelihood. There are, however, the five Moral Rules (*panca-sila*), the Ten Vows (*dasa-sila*) and the Eight Vows (*ata-sila*) which are prescribed rules of conduct. There are also 250 precepts for monks and 348 for nuns contained in the Buddhist Canon, the *Vinaya*.

Concentration refers to the attainment of calm and perfect peace of mind and spiritual development. It is the state of mind of total absorption of thought in a single object.

Wisdom is the third stage on the way of deliverance and involves obtaining a penetrating view of the true nature of existence. When this penetrating wisdom is suddenly achieved ignorance disappears and one is able to see the true nature of things that all is *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*.

The Mahayanic Paths of Salvation

The Mahayanic ways of salvation should be understood in the light of two important philosophical developments. Firstly, Mahayanic Buddhism with its *Trikaya* (Three Bodies) doctrine and the doctrine of the transference of *karmic* merit. This is connected to the **p. 69** *bodhisattva* idea in which the *bodhisattva* voluntarily takes suffering on himself to bring liberation to others. I point out the key points in the ways of salvation in Mahayana.

(1) The Way of Self-Discipline. This is the way for the specially gifted and corresponds to the Eightfold Path of Hinayana.

(2) The Way of Wisdom. This is recognition of the illusory nature of existence and *intuitive* identification with the reality of all being. This is considered to be omniscience which is synonymous with enlightenment. The sage sees emptiness as the sole reality in all appearances and this Wisdom—realization of emptiness—radically alters the attitude of a person. After this realization he is not threatened by future rebirths.

(3) The Bodhisattva Way. This is one of three ways of liberation for those who need assistance on the path to liberation. To become a *bodhisattva* there are ten stages.

The basic principle is that the accumulated merit of the *bodhisattva* can cancel the evils of the seeker, if the seeker were to ask for his help. Hence one has to invoke the *bodhisattva's* help and it will bring the seeker to a re-birth closer to emancipation.

There is a reliance on the *mahakaruna* (Great Compassion) of the *bodhisattva* who *never refuses help*. Nevertheless it is a difficult path for the *bodhisattva*, because it requires self-denial on his part. By giving away his karmic merit he gains more merit and so a *bodhisattva's* store of *karmic* merit is inexhaustible.

There are two types of *bodhisattvas*—earthly and transcendent. The earthly are human beings recognizable by their compassion. Everyone may be one. The transcendent are those who have attained liberating wisdom and sainthood from which there is no relapse and at the moment of their death refuse to enter static *nirvana* but instead accept active *nirvana* so that they can continue to work for the benefit of the world.

(4) The Way of Faith. This is the effortless way for the masses. By hearing and trusting in the name of a *buddha* such as Amida or Avalokiteswara, one may be born in a Pure Land. Here the believer matures to wisdom and attains *nirvana*, since he is relieved of unwholesome *karma*. There are numerous paradises. In the future Buddha *Maitreya* will establish a Pure Land on earth.

(5) The Cultic Way. The idea is that performance of ritual leads to liberation. This is for people of weak will. The belief is that ritual leads to liberation. It is the most unassuming form of Buddhism. The worship of relics, stupas, and offering flowers are all acts of merit. [p. 70](#)

Stages of Attainment on the Path.

(1) *Sotapanna* (Stream-Winner). This is the first stage and it refers to the one who has attained freedom from the three fetters which are personality-belief, sceptical doubt about his path and attachment to the rules and rituals. He can no longer be reborn below the human level.

(2) *Sakadagami* (Once-Returner). This is the second stage of attainment. Here the individual has overcome the fourth and fifth fetters, namely sensuous craving and ill-will. He needs to return once only to this world as a human being.

(3) *Anagami* (Non-Returner). The one who is fully free from the above five fetters, so that he need not return to the earth. He will be once reborn in heaven.

(4) *Arahat* (Saint). This is the final stage on the road to liberation. One becomes free from the five higher fetters, namely, craving from fine-material existence, craving from immaterial existence, conceit, restlessness and ignorance. The *arahat* is exempt from re-births and attains *nirvana*. This release must be achieved in this order.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF SALVATION FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

In dealing with Buddhism and the concept of salvation, it is important to make some comments about its approach to the world and to the individual. Buddhism is essentially world-denying, the world is considered vain and empty. Furthermore, the reality of individual selfhood is denied and rejected altogether.

The Nature of Salvation

The total dissimilarity between the nature of salvation in Buddhism and Christianity is evident when we see the Buddhist concept of the person. The individual is merely an aggregate of Five *Khandas*. There is no real objective individuality. Salvation itself is the

realization of this No-Selfness (*anatta*) and the awareness of 'voidness' (*sunyata*). We could say that Buddhist salvation is obliteration of individual personality. The belief in individual personality is considered an erroneous belief. The nature of this salvation experience has nothing to do with experiencing deliverance from sin or receiving forgiveness. The relentless, impersonal law of *karma* operates and one stores up or diminishes one's capacity of merit by good works.

The moment of salvation is the eradication of ignorance and desire, even the desire to be liberated rather than freedom from sin. p.71

In Buddhism, there are the obscure and dispersing feelings of ecstasy, of mystical deliverance, of nirvana. This is not concrete and well defined, but a state of existence, in the same way that a human being is nothing concrete, neither a thing nor a person, but actually nothing other than sum of states. Thus, the possession of salvation is a state of existence, a state in itself. But, what kind of state? All Buddhism affirms that to ponder on this is heresy, indeed the prime heresy.¹³

In terms of a future consummation eschatologically, there is no place for souls in Buddhism. It negates the concept of eternal life and discourages speculation as to the beginning and end of the world. The reason being that it is assumed that such speculation does not contribute positively towards the goal of achieving liberation. The contrast in regard to the ultimate state in Buddhism and Christianity is therefore quite stark. *Nibbana* is extinction or non-becoming while the ultimate state in Christianity is fullness of becoming in heaven. *Nibbana* is not a place to go. It is merely a state of being or rather nonbeing (Post-Mortal *nibbana*).

That the ultimate reality of *Nibbana* is formless and empty while in Christianity the ultimate is a personal God with whom in salvation there is restoration of true fellowship with man. In Buddhism, as Otto has stated, 'the Absolute is possessed in Nirvana while in Christianity the Absolute is not in salvation'.¹⁴ The Absolute is a personal Creator *God*.

CONCLUSION

The Means of Salvation

Buddhism is proud of the fact that it has a means of salvation which is based on self-deliverance through knowledge and wisdom. Even the Buddha did not ask for faith in himself nor in his teachings. To attain liberation what is necessary is to understand the Four Noble Truths and follow the Noble Eightfold Path by right action. The idea of revelation is limited to the revelation that the historical Buddha received when he was under the Bo tree and obtained enlightenment.

The self-deliverance of Buddhism is based on the law of *karma*, cause and effect. It is ethical retribution through *prajna* (wisdom), p. 72 *samadhi* (concentration) and *sila* (morality). There is no principle of grace or forgiveness strictly speaking. Even though ultimate liberation is the fruit of one's own doings in recourse to other powers such as *bodhisattvas* there is an accommodation to this position. The *bodhisattvas* look after the ones who seek their help graciously and the transference of karmic merit alters the self-deliverance concept substantially. Even though the liberating insight has to be gained ultimately by the follower.

¹³ Rudolf Otto, *Buddhism and Christianity—Compared and Contrasted*, ed. & trans. Philip C. Almod (The University of Queensland, Australia), p. 99.

¹⁴ Otto, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

The *Lotus Sutra* describes exhaustively the divine powers of the *bodhisattvas* and their ability and willingness to help those in need. The East Asian Buddha Amitabha, it is claimed, created a Buddha Paradise called the Western Paradise of Pure Land Buddhism in order to help in salvation. The follower who is reborn in this Paradise is cleansed, matures and obtains *nirvana* by 'grace' of the Transcendent Buddha. The Buddha Paradise though is only an intermediate state to liberation. And the follower must receive liberating wisdom from the Transcendent Buddha to attain *nirvana*.

Even in Hinayana Buddhism, which claims to be the system of liberation by self-effort, when the Buddhist repeats the words 'I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the *Sangha*, I take refuge in the *Dhamma*' there is an elevation of the Buddha to a level of a deity as a factor in salvation.

A Comparison of Ethical Implication in Buddhism and in Christianity

Linked to the concept of salvation in Buddhism is the virtue of compassion. It is at the heart of the process of the attainment of liberation. However in relation to the Buddhist analysis of the individual as being nothing more than a composition of Five Factors in constant flux, one must raise the question as to how this virtue can be manifested. Can states of existence devoid of individual personality express love and compassion?

Moreover, a sense of moral responsibility can arise only where there is an 'I' or a person. When the 'person' is a mere process rather than an entity, can even a guilty conscience arise? As Otto has well said:

Guilt must be lacking where there are only states of existence, which drift in infinite enchainment through the ocean of rebirth, like the waves of an ocean, in accord with a spiritual law of nature.¹⁵ p. 73

Furthermore, as Callaway has pointed out, good and evil are possible in Christianity because it supplies an objectively real and eternally unchanging criterion of morality. This criterion of morality is God himself.¹⁶ Herein lies the lack of Buddhism. It is not surprising therefore that in Buddhism we do not find a clear definition of sin. Sin is, if at all, some act that brings about a reaction because of the law of *karma*. One may counter and query what the purpose of the Buddhist prohibitions are. The prohibitions are tools to be used for aiding concentration so that ignorance may be dispelled. If there is a strict dichotomy between good and evil, it would serve as a hindrance to attaining liberation. For, when one attains liberation, one is delivered from the illusory belief in the evil and the good. In fact, since there is no God to obey or disobey, there is no sin from which to be delivered.

Moral accountability is based on individual personality and identity with the freedom and capacity to choose. The Buddhist anthropology negates this. The virtue of compassion is exalted in Buddhism and is at the heart of the process of liberation especially in Pure Land Buddhism and the Bodhisattva ideal. However, viewed from the Mahayanistic monistic perspective, it becomes reduced to compassion of oneself.

Seen from the standpoint of Christian pluralistic realism, the Buddhist doctrine of compassion leads each man to practice an exclusive form of self-love.

According to Buddhism the goal is to escape from the trap of suffering which is due to the cycle of rebirth. Salvation is that state of being unfettered. It is liberation from suffering rather than liberation from sin. Even the concept of sin is completely differently

¹⁵ Otto, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

¹⁶ Tucker N. Callaway, *Japanese Buddhism & Christianity* (Shinkyō Shuppansha, Protestant Publishing Co., Tokyo, Japan, 19578), pp. 212, 213.

defined in Buddhism. it is merely an evil act with evil consequences, as against the Christian definition of transgression of God's law. The cleansing of sin is done through the practice of morality (*sila*) based on the *dhamma* (teaching). There is no hint of an encounter with the Supreme Being for moral regeneration or cleansing. Sins cannot be forgiven, for what one sows, one reaps. But they can be counteracted by good deeds according to the law of *karma*.

If we were to summarize, we could say that the Buddhist concept of salvation or *nirvana* is freedom from desire, ignorance, delusion, hatred and rebirth. It is not a place, but a state of being. Actually, no definition can be given of *nibbana* in the same way that we can define p. 74 the concept of eternal life in Christianity. In comparison to heaven, *nibbana* is not a place. In fact *nibbana* refers to non-reality while heaven speaks of reality. In heaven there is a perfecting of our state; corruption will put on incorruption, mortality will put on immortality; but in the concept of *nibbana* one moves into the formless and the void. Heaven speaks of eternal life and activity while *nibbana* is nonactivity and the point of the extinguishing of life.

The Proclamation of Salvation to the Buddhist

In formulating our Christian doctrine of salvation in the Buddhist context, the following should be emphasized.

While according to Buddhism the fundamental course of suffering in this world is ignorance of the true nature of existence, we need to press the claim that it is man's rebellion against God that is the root cause of the human predicament. It is therefore a Creation and Fall message that speaks to the Buddhist analysis.

The Buddhist definition of sin has no vertical dimension to it. Even though the law of *karma* is being the retribution, the sin is committed against oneself and not against a Supreme Being, or even against the cosmic law of *karma*. Hence we need to proclaim human depravity and moral accountability to a Holy God. The Buddhist anthropology of man as a sum of states weakens moral accountability.

Since the law of *karma* is the final point of orientation of all things, true repentance to the Buddhist must involve the rejection of the supremacy of the law of *karma* and submission to the authority and omnipotence of Christ. Salvation must be seen as the dethronement of the existing centre of one's life and enthronement of Christ.

The over-riding emphasis of Buddhism is self-deliverance. In this context the doctrine of justification by faith has particular relevance. At this point, it is appropriate to insert a missiological observation from our own experience of serving in the midst of a shame-orientated culture. There are two-dimensions to our message to the Buddhist. First is the omnipotence of God in Christ as the Lord of all. His sovereignty and supremacy is over all created beings, spirits, demons, cosmic powers. A recognition of this authority is usually seen in the case of power encounters. At this point, the Buddhist has an awareness and realization of the supremacy of Christ. The second dimension to the message is that the supremacy of Christ demands moral accountability to a holy God who judges sin and sinful man. This awareness of guilt, and the need for moral regeneration, in shame-oriented cultures is a later awareness. It comes as a consequence of the understanding of p. 75 God's holiness, his law, his justice and his love. Therefore in shame-oriented cultures we may be expecting too much if we look for a rapid awareness of guilt when we have not laid the foundation of the omnipotence and sovereignty of God. For this reason, it may be helpful to view the process of conversion in two stages; the first being a recognition of Christ's authority resulting in a rejection of previous Buddhist practices, and the second being the experience of moral regeneration.

The Buddhist's so-called progression into *nirvana*, the absolute, is in reality a regression into the void. In order to maintain his logical consistency, since he had denied a transmigrating soul (as in Hinduism), the Buddha had to affirm that the ultimate state is extinction. The biblical proclamation of salvation as the bliss of fellowship with God and the ecstasy of union with one's Master, though it seems to be contradictory to the Buddhist notion of salvation, may be the most appropriate doctrine to fill the Buddhist void.

Finally, another concept related to salvation in Buddhism needs mention. The concept of *pattidana* or transference of karmic merit and the related *bodhisattva* ideal. This is particularly relevant in proclaiming the message of the Cross. Karmic merit transference, which in a sense is a departure from the strict law of moral causation, has developed in both forms of Buddhism. This is a usable bridge for the biblical doctrine of imputation. In the Buddhist practice, an individual may transfer his karmic merit, even to another dead person, to cancel that dead person's demerits, by volitional action. It is called the *kusala/akusala* phenomenon. This is further developed in the *bodhisattva* ideal. Where *bodhisattvas* are helpers of salvation, they postpone their own liberation, in order to liberate others. They are saviours and transferers of merits. In the proclamation of the salvation message, one might ask whether it would be considered sacrilegious, or creative theology, if at least as a starting point we were to proclaim Christ as the Immortal, Infinite, Uncreated, Unoriginated Supreme *Bodhisattva*? His *kenosis*, incarnation, substitutionary death and glorious resurrection generated an infinite quantum of *kusala* (merits) which is able to cancel the evil *akusala* (de-merits) of man. This 'karmic Christology' may be the answer the Buddhist void is waiting for. May God enable us to theologize and communicate with sensitivity and caution, precision and concreteness.

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Responses to Lostness in Modern Japan

Hisakazu Inagaki

At a first reading this article may appear to have little relevance to the theme of salvation and lostness. However, its importance lies in the clarity with which it discusses the conflict between the pragmatic modernity and utilitarianism of Japan as a modern industrial power and Japanese traditionalism based on animist culture and ancestral worship. The people of Japan who are no longer finding spiritual values and the basis for national identity in modernity are turning to their traditional pagan values in search of personal and national salvation. The author of this article shows how in the present ecological crisis the traditionalists are arguing for an organic view of nature as a living organism. In the growing tension between modernity and traditionalism he discusses the significance of the revival of the kokutai ideology surrounding the enthronement of the new Emperor. He calls for a much deeper understanding of the gospel as the basis for inner reformation of the thought and culture of Japan.

We may add that this discussion is very relevant for other developing nations in Asia and Africa but also for the post-Christian cultures of the West. It is significant that though the

church in Japan is barely one percent of the population, yet there is enormous goodwill for Christianity. Some pollsters claim that up to 35% of the younger generation say they would opt for Christianity if they had to choose a religion. This tension between modernity and cultural traditions remind us of the crisis faced by the early Church and of how God raised up his apologists and martyrs, who, in the words of Glover, 'outthought, outlived and outdied the pagan world'. In Europe the Christians turned the tide from pagan lostness to salvation in Christ. Today we face worldwide a parallel and equally gigantic task.

Japan has now become a major world power, at least as far as economics is concerned. At first glance the Japanese people seem to be enjoying materialistic prosperity, but, on a deeper level, it is clear that they are not satisfied with respect to their daily needs. They sense something lacking in their spiritual lives.

In the forty-five short years since the end of World War II, Japan has risen dramatically from the ashes of destruction. The Pacific War was a reckless war led by an unjust and ignorant power. The phenomenon is far too recent for us to be able to forget the role played by nationalistic ideology, known as *kokutai*, during the years when Japan invaded its p.77 neighbours, spreading the flames of war around the world before finally bringing self-destruction upon itself. This ideology, having thrown Japan into destruction as well as having incurred great loss upon other Asian countries, is now beginning to raise its head once again. This ideology, being essentially a religious one, unfortunately loses its ability for self-critique. It also lacks a sense of moral justice. Inspired by this ideology, Japan in the past made military raids into other Asian countries. Today the same ideology has become active as a motivating force behind the economic invasion of the world market. Confronted with this situation, Japanese Christians, who comprise only 1% of the total population, must warn the people against their immoral behaviour within the international community, in addition to assuming a priest-like role in praying for their country.

Many Western authors have written about Japan, from *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (written during the War by Ruth Benedict) to the recent *The Enigma of Japanese Power* by Karel van Wolferen. There are, however, few books which pay proper attention to the religious motive of Japanese culture and thought. I will here try to give a brief transcendental critique of modern Japanese thought.

Herman Dooyeweerd (Dutch Christian philosopher, 1894–1977) showed that there are two basic religious ground motifs, two central mainsprings operative in the heart of human existence. There is the dynamic of the Holy Spirit and the dynamic of the spirit of this world. The ground motif of the Holy Spirit is the one revealed by the divine redemption by Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit. As for the worldly spirit, Dooyeweerd showed its manifestation in two forms in the history of Western civilization: first, the form-matter distinction as the motif of ancient Greece, and second, the modern motif of nature and freedom. A synthesis between the Greek and Christian motif is called the motif of nature and grace. The religious ground motifs are the spiritual driving forces operating from out of the supratemporal heart, and govern and direct all the temporal experiences of life in human culture and history. But human history surely includes the Eastern civilizations as well as Western civilizations. Thus in the Japanese case we have to ask, 'What types of ground motifs exist in Japanese culture?'

Dooyeweerd also showed that all of the non-biblical ground motifs are of a dualistic nature, internally divided against themselves. A nonbiblical ground motif deifies and absolutizes part of created reality. This absolutization calls forth, with inner necessity, the correlates of what has been absolutized. That is, the absolutization of something relative simultaneously absolutizes the opposite or counterpart of what p.78 is relative, since one

relative part of creation is necessarily related to the other. The result is a religious dialectic, a polarity or tension between two extremes within a single ground motif.

I will here propose the religious dialectic of modernity-tradition as religious ground motif for modern Japanese culture. Modernity and tradition form antipodes to each other, as is easily seen in the Japanese culture. All foreigners who visit Japan immediately notice a sharp contrast between modernity and tradition. Walking downtown in any city, for example, they might find a modern Western-style museum just next to a traditional Shinto shrine. And before constructing a nuclear power station people usually request the performance of a ritual Shinto ceremony intended to appease the spirits of the ground. Japan has first-rate electronic engineering, computer technology, automobile factories and chemical industries, thereby showing itself to be in the forefront of the highly advanced, industrialized countries. This is a manifestation of the modernity motif. And yet, at the same time Japan clearly belongs to non-Western cultural tradition with respect to the spiritual lives of the Japanese. The tradition motif becomes visible, for instance, in the widespread custom of ancestor worship, the moral values and principles of the people's action, the political system, and the management of various enterprises. Although a similar contrast between modernity and tradition is more or less seen in non-Western countries, Japan experiences it to an extreme. On the one hand, the dualism of the ground motif of modernity-tradition splits apart, with each pole claiming absoluteness and thus both mutually cancelling each other, but on the other hand, each pole also determines the other's religious meaning, since each is necessarily related to the other.

MODERNITY

Here the concept of modernity is almost synonymous with the 'nature' motif in modern Western culture, where 'nature' is understood to be a closed mechanistic system. Modernization in Japan started with the Meiji Restoration in 1868. The government promoted a policy of importing Western modern technology, which since the Enlightenment had been based on the concept of 'mathematical nature'. The government policy was reflected in the slogan 'Japanese spirit and Western technology'. Although the metaphysical meaning of mathematical nature, as found in the thought of Galileo and Newton, was not understood well by the Meiji era Japanese, the utilitarianism P. 79 resulting from the industrial revolution and the optimistic progressivism of Western countries were welcomed by the Japanese.

And even after World War II this kind of ruthless pragmatism, at the cost of morality and justice, has been the driving force behind the nation's remarkable economic success. For most Japanese, there are no deep religious introspections which might restrain the idea that worldly success is the final goal or supreme value in life. The severe competition of free enterprise in the market is not a story restricted to the sphere of economics. It permeates, for instance, the realm of education. Competition among children for getting high marks in academics really begins with the lowest grade in elementary school. Children are pushed to train for passing severe entrance examinations for advancing to the higher schools. In the course of their education, there is no time or provision for developing the ability to think creatively, which of course is essential for producing fresh and novel ideas. And in addition to compulsory school education, children sometimes, even on Sunday, go to extra-curricular 'cram-schools' to prepare only for the entrance examinations. This presents a great challenge for children of Christian homes, since time for religious education must be sacrificed when they are involved in such activities. The true meaning of education is lost. Sphere sovereignties among societal systems are broken down. All aspects of human lives are exposed to mechanical competition. It is the

inevitable result of uncritically importing one of the modern Western motifs. People are surely incapable of tolerating this mechanistic view of human life.

TRADITION

In reaction to the above mentioned modernity motif in Japan, the motif of tradition which is the opposite pole from modernity, having previously been hidden from sight within the culture, begins to raise its head. Wishing to escape from the mechanistic world, the Japanese people are now rediscovering traditional values. They hope that 'the Japanese spirit' will save them from their current wretched situation. Examples of the move toward restoration of the traditional life and value system, which could be called 'Japanism' when viewed in a systematic way, can be found in many aspects of the culture, from politics to the foods people eat. This trend also seems to be being strengthened by recent scholarly developments, especially in philosophy and cultural anthropology. Japanese intellectuals sometimes use 'post-modern', the term often used by French thinkers, to mean 'antimodern' [p. 80](#) or the recovery of the uniquely Japanese tradition. Recent anthropology usually claims to place equal value on all types of cultures or all types of religions, lending itself to the position of so-called cultural relativism. Thus animism, being the core of Japanese religiosity, is not at all regarded as a lower religion. A refined animism might be considered even to be a positive cultural response to Western materialism. Such Western thinkers as Claude Lévi-Strauss are often invited to international meetings held in Japan to give lectures to Japanese leaders, governmental bureaucrats and statesmen. Upon being told that Western culture is not the unique-advanced culture it is sometimes thought to be, but merely is one among many cultures, the audiences feel reassured. In addition to this current tendency in the sciences, the present economic power of Japan provides practical encouragement to Japanese traditionalists. Opinions of many Japanese intellectuals have recently shifted, so that they are now suggesting that, at the time when the influence of the major Western powers is diminishing, Japan should take on a leadership role in the international community by recovering its Eastern traditions.

Those who want to revive traditional values are presenting their case by emphasizing two points. *First*, they propose an organic view of nature as a new paradigm with the intention of remedying the mechanistic view of nature popular among the modern Western world. The organic view of nature is common in Japan, because its animistic natural religion, in which nature is looked upon as a living organism, is still vital to the Japanese world view. Some traditionalists say that their view might play a prominent part in future technological societies. Their ideas are very similar to what recent Western ecological movements have been lamenting. (Some Western ecologists are in fact influenced by Eastern religion.) Further, the animistic world view leads many Japanese thinkers to the point of believing that ultimate reality can be grasped only through intuitive feelings, and not through rational analyses. In the context of this intellectual trend, it is important for Japanese Christians to know and understand the true meaning of the creation motif in biblical Christianity.

Second, traditionalists are inclined to defend the Japanese community as such against any criticism from foreign countries. They think it is not necessary for Japan to accept Western standards and ways of thinking. In fact the form of the community is clearly influenced by the tradition motif. The present Japanese constitution certainly borrows certain concepts from western democracy, as, for example, the concept of the separation of the three powers (judiciary, executive, legislative), the declaration of sovereignty resting with the people, [p. 81](#) respect of fundamental human rights as well as the

guarantee of freedom of religion. But in actuality the legal system does not function without traditional Japanese values and practices concerning human relations. In fact values and practices of human relationship valid only in a small village sometimes play an important role in national politics as well. Collective behaviour as a national characteristic is noticeable even if the constitution is written on the basis of individualism. Men who hold convictions governed by a universal principle as often excluded from the community. These traditional views of human relationships have been fostered by Confucianism adapted to a Japanese style and context. Traditional human relationships also play an important role in the management of enterprises. Japanese companies are not so-called 'Gesellschaft', but rather a kind of community to which people give a high degree of commitment which demands all of their energy. The Japanese sometimes exhibit extraordinary power as a group, even if a given individual person within the group is not especially talented. This peculiar Japanese characteristic of effective operation as a group is surely one of the reasons why Japan has achieved such a high GNP in recent years.

THE ISSUE OF EMPEROR WORSHIP

The practice of ancestor worship, so common to the Japanese family, is the result of Confucian ethics mixing with animistic religiosity. In fact, ancestor worship is the basic religion in Japan, and it functions as a unifying element on various levels of community in Japanese society, from the family to the village, and finally to the state itself. On the national level, ancestor worship has strong connections with the Emperor system. Before the War, the state was likened to a large, extended family, in which the Emperor was compared to a father in the home. It was very much similar to undifferentiated patriarchal folk groups in ancient times, but in the case of Japan it was actually constitutionally justified. That is, the system of divine imperial sovereignty, as codified in the Meiji Constitution of 1889, sought to place the ultimate basis for political authority in the myths surrounding the oracles of the sun-goddess, Amaterasu, who was said to be the ancestor of the imperial family. Under this system, the people of Japan were forced to believe in a pseudo-religion, *Kokutai* ideology, which centred on the worship of the Emperor as a 'living god'. Thus it is not incorrect to say that the Japanese Emperor system had its foundation on the customs of ancestor worship, practised in every home. The sphere sovereignty between home and state was completely destroyed. **P. 82** It is known that during the War some Christians, especially in Korea, chose martyrdom by refusing to worship the Emperor.

Looking back on this history, it is only natural that we should make clear distinction between the provisions of the present constitution which define the emperor as the symbol of state and the former system of divine imperial sovereignty, and that we should maintain strict vigilance to guard against any move toward a restoration of the old system. Nonetheless, we are deeply grieved to observe that now, at the time of the succession of a new Emperor, attempts are consistently being made to accept a series of ceremonies which have no basis in the current Imperial House Law. It appears that there is an attempt today to revive ceremonies which were once authorized in the by-laws of the now abolished pre-War Imperial House Law, by using the argument that they derive from tradition and convention.

Today freedom of religion without any restrictions is constitutionally guaranteed, along with the separation of state and specific religious institutions. The government, however, has already made the decision to perform the enthronement of the new Emperor, Akihito, which will be held on November 22-23 in 1990, as a purely traditional Shintoistic rite. Called the *Daijo-sai*, this is a ceremony in which the Emperor is considered

to be deified, or to be transformed into a 'living god'. Although the religion of the imperial family is Shintoism, the religious practices in the imperial household are now rigorously limited by law to the private sphere. But it is exceedingly difficult to draw a boundary line between the private and the public realm, since the Emperor is constitutionally defined as the symbol of Japan. This problem is amplified if the government sponsors the *Daijō-sai*. In that case the ceremony can not be limited to the private sphere, but inevitably becomes a public matter. Actually the government has decided to make a special budget of one billion yen for this Shinto ceremony.

The *Daijō-sai* has a long history. It is said to have been celebrated already in the seventh century A.D., when the Emperor system was actually established. This ceremony is based on a Japanese myth which connects the festival of thanks giving for the harvest of grain with the enthronement of a king. Recent developments in cultural anthropology, folklore and comparative mythology show that similar ceremonies were widely performed in ancient times in various cultures. For instance there are some common factors between Greek and Japanese myths. The Greek myth tells about a goddess of grain and growth, Demeter, who was actually worshipped by kings in Eleusis in a mysterious rite. Several mythologists recently point out that [p.83](#) Demeter was a model of Amaterasu, the ancestor goddess of the Japanese Emperor. In the Japanese myth Amaterasu in heaven gave the people on the earth the seeds of rice through the ancestor of the Emperor, while Demeter gave the seeds of wheat through the kings in Eleusis. The difference is that the highest god in the Greek myth is male (Zeus, brother of Demeter) but in the Japanese myth the highest deity is female (Amaterasu). The Japanese myth, written in the eighth century A.D. by the Royal court, claimed that the Japanese Emperors were the direct descendants of this highest goddess. It is interesting to notice the fact that the *Daijō-sai* ceremony surely started during this period of the completion of recording of the Japanese myth. Since that time about one hundred Emperors, who are believed to be in the same family line, have succeeded to the throne, and many of them have celebrated the *Daijō-sai*. The story of the myth, about a goddess who gave to the ancestor of the Emperor seeds of rice as well as an 'Emperor spirit', reappears symbolically in *Daijō-sai*.

One of the reasons why the government has decided to sponsor this Shinto ceremony concerns the problems of a national identity for Japanese. Surely, it is said, the economically powerful nation of Japan needs some spiritual backbone. It is distasteful for the people not to have a sense of values other than mere utilitarianism. Thus national leaders try to find some spiritual identity in Emperorism. For them the succession ceremonies of the new Emperor provide a good occasion for strengthening national identity and patriotism.

The Christian churches in Japan clearly oppose the *Daijō-sai*, since it is supported by the state. This ceremony is so thoroughly religious in its core that we need to battle 'against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places' ([Ephesians 6:12](#)).

The religious ground motif of modernity-tradition thus seems clearly to be operative today in Japanese culture. This religious dialect breaks the heart of the modern Japanese. On the one hand, Japanese culture is very pragmatic, being rooted in modern utilitarianism. On the other hand, Japanese culture is reactionary and is based upon ancient tradition. The purpose of Christian theology in Japan is first of all to analyze this kind of schizophrenia in culture and thought. Then, as an alternative to the life and world view of 'Japanism', we have to demonstrate the Christian ground motifs: creation, fall and redemption through Jesus Christ, in communion with the Holy Spirit, for the inner reformation of thought and culture in Japan.

Issues in Evaluating Theological Education by Extension

Patricia J. Harrison

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The author, a pioneer in TEE, writes from wide experience in Distance Education in the Pacific area and in other regions of the developing world. She gives a very clear and comprehensive summary of that area of Distance Education that seeks to combine home study (with adequate materials), practical field experience in the church and in the community and regular seminars for interaction between tutors and students. She discusses the difference between formative and summative evaluation, and qualitative and quantitative factors in evaluation. The author raises issues concerning degrees of success in the transfer of learning to life and in involving the whole church in continuing education. For pastors and theological educators, this is a helpful and an insightful article.

DEFINITION OF TEE

It has long been my practice to define narrowly rather than broadly what I mean by Theological Education by Extension. We already have a considerable stock of general cover terms in the area of Distance Education; it is thus more helpful to add precise terms to our working vocabulary rather than more general ones. This is not to devalue other forms of Distance Education or the right of others to define TEE differently.

I use TEE to indicate that type of distance theological education which combines home study materials and practical ministry experience with regular seminars in which tutors and students can interact. In TEE proper, the weight of the cognitive input is carried by the home study materials; it is not given in lectures. The seminars provide opportunity for interaction and for learning experiences which cannot readily be obtained through home study, e.g. drama, videos, group study and discussion. The three strands of TEE—home study, seminar learning and practical ministry—should be integrated as far as possible. p. 85

The present discussion considers only TEE programmes of serious intent, whether focussed on lay or ministerial formation.

DIFFICULTIES IN EVALUATION

Since I have turned over my role as a tutor in the Australian Anglican programme known as New England TEE to local tutors, I no longer have in-depth contact with that programme. So I must evaluate it according to the best information I have been able to obtain. This was difficult since the programme director moved to another position several weeks ago and I have been unable to contact him.

As a theological college teacher who works part-time as a consultant and seminar leader in ministerial formation in many parts of the world, I have helped initiate or further develop a number of TEE programmes, so it is easier for me to discern broad needs and trends than to analyze one particular programme. Consequently, I have used this opportunity to think and work through various approaches to the evaluation of TEE and some of the questions one might ask in such an evaluation. I have based this material on general practical usage in my own work, and have in some cases, given examples from programmes in the Pacific region.

Only a few formal programme evaluations of TEE appear to have been attempted. One, done for the Anglican General Board of Religious Education in Australia, assessed their imported Education for Ministry programme, a lay training course based on one from the University of the South (USA). This evaluation was undertaken by Archdeacon Ray Smith, former director of a separate Anglican programme, as part of an M.A. thesis.

TEE is not always easy to evaluate, since it varies enormously from place to place in goals, methods and ethos—more so than institutional theological education. This is as it should be, and reflects the flexibility which is a special strength of extension education.

SOME POSSIBLE APPROACHES TO EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION TODAY

There is a vast literature on educational evaluation. So one must be quite selective. It is useful first to mention that TEE needs both *formative* and *summative* evaluation. It should consider courses and programmes as they develop (formative evaluation) and assess their strengths and weaknesses on completion of certain phases (summative evaluation); e.g. evaluating a new TEE workbook after it has been **P. 86** written and given a basic trial. These two forms of evaluation will often overlap.

Values are at the core of any evaluation, and some subjectivity is therefore inevitable. One may, for example opt for a basically *quantitative* approach, such as is popular in much educational research today and in sociology. This assumes that much which is important in education can be quantified. Many accreditation bodies make substantial quantitative evaluations—how many books are in the library?—How many teachers hold a Ph.D?—and so on. Counting—and probably even some of the complexities of educational statistics—may be easier than undertaking the *qualitative* evaluation, preferred in more avant-garde educational circles and journals (e.g. *discourse*, from the Department of Education, University of Queensland, Australia). I believe there is a place for both qualitative and quantitative research and evaluation, but lean towards the former, despite its difficulty.

Approaches taken to educational evaluation have often included the following:

- (a) 'Greenwich' Evaluation (my term);
- (b) Evaluation by experts;
- (c) Evaluation by objectives;
- (d) Responsive, or values-sensitive evaluation (often done informally, but recently recognized as a type of evaluation).

(a) '*Greenwich* Evaluation' is the attempt to set up external standards, just as, in Greenwich, standards are set for world time and for British weights and measures. Robert Ferris alludes to 'accreditation by the metre' in his booklet 'Accrediting TEE' (Asian Perspectives 34, A.T.A., Taiwan) with reference to the platinum—iridium metre rod kept in France until 1960 to define the length of a metre. (This length is now redefined in terms of wave-lengths from the light of the isotope krypton-86.) Greenwich-type evaluation certainly has its value, but it would be dangerous to assume that everything which is

important in TEE can be weighed, measured or counted. Such a materialist approach would do violence to the essence of theological education.

(b) *Evaluation by experts* is often favoured in theological education, and may be allied to Greenwich approaches. The idea is to call in the experts to examine our teaching, our course books, our curriculum—or, by external examination, our students.

This again is very useful, but is not the whole answer. ‘Those who p. 87 assume all experts agree have encountered very few experts.’ And all too often, experts allow little room for innovation.

(c) *Evaluation by objectives* has been a widely-used and valuable technique in TEE. The need to spell out clear goals and a programme can then be assessed in terms of what it is actually trying to achieve—indeed it can scarcely be assessed any other way! But there is more to evaluation—how, for example, is the set of objectives itself to be evaluated?

Objectives have been important in the preparation of TEE materials, dating from the time when programmed instruction was their primary instructional medium (in the sixties and early seventies). Without clear and specific objectives it is virtually impossible to programme instruction. From the outset, however, these trainers of course designers shared with others certain misgivings about too rigid or mechanical a use of objectives, valuable though they have proved to be. Other means of evaluation were needed and added, often informally.

(d) *Responsive, or Values-Sensitive Evaluation* Much attention in recent years has focused on this more ‘global’ form of educational evaluation in which emphasis on objectives has moved to emphasis on how well a programme responds to the values of those who participate in it, and to the context. Capacities and outcomes including unintended outcomes are noted.

Ferris cites three distinguishing factors in this approach: (1) Responsive evaluation is aimed at programme improvement rather than at conformity to external expectations; (2) it is done by insiders rather than outsiders, and it stresses values; (3) this means the values of ‘stakeholders’ in the programme are allowed to give it shape. Human concerns are at the core of this type of evaluation.

I would recommend a mix of the above approaches as fits a given situation, but with some emphasis on responsive evaluation. The approaches are not mutually exclusive. Objectives are still useful, and some external ‘standards’ may be necessary for accreditation purposes. Experts have a useful role to play, but this must not exclude the role of the ‘stakeholders’.

WHAT DO WE EVALUATE IN TEE?

Traditionally, students were assessed. Little other educational evaluation was often undertaken. Today, in TEE, we may well wish also to p. 88 evaluate an overall programme, tutors, materials, administration, financial management, venues, curriculum, seminars and so on. I shall confine my comments to non-administrative areas—the areas which primarily impact the educational process and the resultant lives and ministries of students (though all aspects of a programme ultimately influence these areas, of course).

The remainder of this paper will suggest questions which it may be useful to ask with reference to various aspects of a TEE programme. These questions combine several of the approaches to evaluation noted above, and include evaluation of various aspects of the programme. They represent only a few of the many questions which could be asked, and not all will be relevant to all programmes. This list is suggestive, not exhaustive. In some

instances, I have recorded my own answers to a question with reference to programmes in the South Pacific with which I am acquainted.

In the same way, general quantitative questions evaluating various aspects of theological education are available in any accreditation manual and a number are applicable to TEE. There is no point in repeating such questions (about size of library, student/faculty ratios, faculty qualifications and soon) in this paper. The questions I have asked will inevitably betray my own value system in education, but this is inevitable.

Structural Aspects of the TEE Programme (as these relate directly to the education given)

1. Does the TEE programme have clearly-stated overall goals?
2. Is the programme geared to a well-defined target group (or more than one such group)? New England TEE (Australia) aims at developing Christian knowledge for living and service among lay Anglicans (and others), mainly in rural areas. It operates at 2 academic levels, ordinary and advanced, but both of these are of high school level, which is about right for the majority of participants.
3. Is the programme denominational? If so, what steps are being taken to incorporate a degree of ecumenicity and to broaden perspectives and prevent parochialism? NE-TEE welcomes participants from other denominations but has done little else actively to promote ecumenicity.
4. Do the structures of the programme reinforce and communicate the same value system as is overtly taught? That is, does the para-message of the administrative structures agree with the message of materials and classroom?

For example: If we believe in and teach mutual (rather than solely p. 89 clerical) ministry, do we model this? If we encourage the priesthood of all believers and the use of various gifts, do we give students the chance to participate in all levels of planning? Do we identify, acknowledge and use their gifts? If we teach a preferential option for the poor, are they catered for and present in our programme? Is it genuinely accessible to the poor? If we teach equality of races and the sexes, does our staffing and student intake reflect this? If we teach a servant orientation (rather than an authoritarian approach to leadership) and humility in service, do we model this? In some countries, churches and/or theological training programmes may be the only model students ever see of non-authoritarian, humble, servant leadership and of participation in decision-making.

5. How does our programme relate to local churches? While cooperation is most desirable, too close an identification is not always desirable. Some people are 'over-churched' at the local level, and have narrow tunnel-vision as a result. TEE needs to help them expand their horizons. It may also need to help the church constructively to criticize itself.
6. How much community input is there in our TEE programme? Are we listening to the fears, hopes, struggles and needs of those we seek to survive? How? (It is not enough to consider the *church* only). Most programmes I know do not very consciously acquire community input.

Biblical/Theological Considerations

1. Does the programme provide ample biblical and theological material at an appropriate depth for its target group(s)? NE-TEE provides this at a very basic level, but probably not at sufficient depth to provide much challenge, CLCTC-TEE (New Guinea) provides somewhat greater depth, and Education for Ministry (Australia) somewhat more again than either.
2. Is material provided in a form which will facilitate the *doing* of theology in interaction with real-life situations in the student's contexts? This occurs in NE-TEE and CLCTC-TEE,

at this stage, only as the material relates to personal spiritual life or to church ministries, generally speaking; not at a communal level.

3. Does the theological stance generally reflect that of the sponsoring churches, but with ample room for ecumenical understanding, prophetic challenge and creative new insights? Does it stand in reasonably close relation to the *consensus fidei* today and through history and avoid eccentric or cultic interpretations or doctrines? p. 90

4. Is academic integrity maintained, with respect to hermeneutics, exegesis and scholarly work?

5. Is indoctrination avoided? Where Christians sincerely differ, are students given opportunity to hear some views other than those of the course sponsors, and to hear these presented with integrity? This is particularly important with regard to students who have little general education, or who are isolated from other Christians and access to wider sources of information.

General Educational Considerations

1. How far does the TEE programme meet its own overall goals?

2. What happens to graduates five or ten years later? Does this represent in general a desired outcome?

3. What kind of comments and testimonies do graduating students give? How do they perceive and evaluate the programme?

4. What ongoing plans for formative and summative evaluation are in place? How will future improvements be made in response to the finding?

5. What role do 'stakeholders' have in determining the future shape of the programme?

6. Does the programme consciously utilize the best available insights of modern adult education, including research in the areas of moral development and (if relevant) cross-cultural education? Are these insights adapted to local learning styles as needed?

7. Are there various strands of training to cater for different needs, living styles, backgrounds, etc.?

8. Has the curriculum been designed with an understanding of curriculum theory? As an integrated whole rather than as a 'smorgasbord'; offering ample choice to cater for different needs? Does this integration preserve the integrity of *theologia* (cf. Edward Farley), yet avoid an ivory tower elitism divorced from life? Are there ample 'open elements' (choices and flexibility) in the curriculum?

9. If the poor and less educated are catered for in the programme, is that programme educationally suited to their needs? Is it understood that excellence in ministerial formation can be pursued at any academic level (not just at the highest level)? At CLTC New Guinea, the Pidgin TEE will pursue this goal. Nungalinya College has developed an excellent, well-contextualized programme for Australian Aborigines.)

10. Is this programme basically liberating—or domesticating?

11. Is there an emphasis on lifelong learning and on learning how to p. 91 continue learning? Does the programme provide ongoing assistance for its graduates?

12. Are all three elements of TEE presented and well integrated—home study, classes and real-life ministry in church and community?

13. Are spiritual, practical and academic aspects all stressed and integrated, without any suggestions that to stress one means neglecting the others? Most TEE programmes I visit are weak in the practical area which should be their strength, and/or very weak in integrating practical ministry with home and class learnings.

14. Is a problem-posing approach used in preference to 'banking education' models (cf. Paulo Freire)?

15. Is the extension programme (and, if applicable, its sponsoring college) genuinely a part of and engaged in the communities where it operates? Are students working and serving in ministries which move beyond the church itself? (China's 'open-door' policy in education calls for two-way learning and interaction between schools and community).

16. Does the programme explicitly work for transfer: from what is learned in study and discussion to life; from life to doing theology, from generalizations to specific applications; from specific cases to analogous cases; from the trade language of the TEE course to vernacular (where applicable)? Relatively few programmes work for transfer as much as they need to. Most just assume it will happen—research indicates this is unlikely to any great degree. In part the problem lies in approaches which always begin with theory and then try vaguely to 'apply it', or to semi-magical views of what 'Bible knowledge' will achieve.

Home Study Materials: Technical Aspects

1. Has the sponsoring body realised that TEE does not equal programmed instruction materials (PIM)? That is, that PIM are no longer considered an essential component of TEE and are in fact seriously questioned in certain kinds of training? Well-written PIM still have a place, but after teaching scores of TEE personnel to write it, this trainer is convinced that only a few will do it well enough to make it worthwhile. She now teaches other methods most of the time. Some TEE is still back in the early seventies where PIM was considered obligatory.

2. Has a variety of potential home study materials been considered—e.g. workbooks, cassettes, and study guides, or in cities where high technology is readily available, videos, computer-assisted instruction p. 92 (CAI) and the like? Has a choice been made which best fits needs and budget?

3. If cassettes are used, is there an adequate back-up system for repairs, battery provision, and so on, if necessary?

4. If books are used, are they adequately bound, especially if intended for village or inner-urban usage? Do they open flat for writing?

5. Are print style and size in workbooks appropriate to the educational level of the students? Do these factors allow for areas where a majority of people over 40 have poor eyesight?

6. Is the paper used obtainable at an affordable price, yet strong enough to last?

7. Do printed materials contain a good amount of visual variety, achieved through appropriate and educative use of illustrations, diagrams, maps, charts, different type styles and the like? The more basic the educational level, the more essential it becomes to break up pages of unrelieved print. Are my pictures culturally understandable? NE-TEE has made fair use of illustrations, but needs to be careful to avoid figures which some see as reminiscent of children's Sunday School books. CLTC-TEE has some excellent photographs in the small booklets which students can use to re-teach the courses in local New Guinean churches, but the courses themselves have too few 'print breaks' for their intended level.

8. Are home study lessons set out in the most 'user-friendly' way possible?

9. Do the home study materials carry the weight of the teaching? They should not simply consist of 'homework'.

10. Do they actually teach?

11. Do lessons have objectives, and are they developed in logical and interesting ways?

12. Has a readability test been applied? This is standard procedure in some programmes. Readability involves a good matching of readers and materials, and includes gearing material to the appropriate reading grade level and to cultural and language background.

13. Does the material maintain human interest? A human interest formula may be used as a rough guide.

14. Do assignments require thought and application, not just repetition of the facts of 'right' answers? Do they often take students into the community as well as 'into the library'? (Many programmes confine most assignments to book work, and often to the use of the Bible and—for practical reasons—one textbook. Ways need to be found around this). p. 93

THE T.E.E. SEMINARS

1. Are these held weekly or fortnightly so far as possible? Experience in NE-TEE indicated that seminars each month are about as infrequent as one can schedule them without losing group cohesion. Less frequent seminars required more time per session. We generally held monthly 'major seminars' in distant centres and encouraged students to meet together themselves more often for 'minor seminars' with materials we had prepared for them. This worked well.

2. Does a visiting tutor take time to get to know her students in their own environment—visiting or staying in homes, taking extra time to build relationships etc.? This proved a valuable part of my work in NE-TEE in rural Australia. I am also convinced that in societies where primary relationships are crucial, the success of TEE will depend much more on the relationships developed than on the content of the materials.

3. Are seminars real times of interaction, not lectures? Tutors must be well trained for this—I have observed many tutors around the world who either lecture, or woodenly go through workbooks giving the 'right' answers during seminars.

4. Do the seminars include more than just discussion, yet always retain it as a component? Do they utilize varied and appropriate methods of learning such as drama, excursions, case studies, simulation games, audio-visuals and study groups?

Pastoral and Ministerial Factors (In addition to those already covered in previous sections)

1. Does the student participate in a well-organized and integrative Field Education programme which consciously utilizes the best modern insights in this area, as part of the TEE programme? This is particularly vital for ordination candidates, but is important for effective lay ministry as well. In TEE, artificially contrived 'field work' should not often be required: training can be built around real ministry situations. However, many students will benefit from new kinds of ministry experience, within and outside the church. Most South Pacific TEE programmes—and many others I know—lack this dimension almost entirely, although many students are involved in ministry and discuss this in seminary, there is no conscious integration, and a great opportunity is lost.

2. Is there an adequate system of advising (sometimes called supervision) available for pastoral and other field ministry? p. 94

3. What proportion of student ministries are inward-looking (serving church members) and outward-looking (evangelism, community work, etc.) respectively? Few programmes I have seen maintain a good balance. Most concentrate on serving the Church as such.

4. Has someone surveyed actual church and community needs and examined what people need to be able to do and be in various ministries, so that practical work and class study can be built around these needs?

Contextual/Global Factors

1. Are these two dimensions well balanced in the programme?

2. Is there a strong, continuing concern to relate the whole programme to:

- the cultural milieu;
- the religious milieu;
- the socio-economic environment;
- the political-economic environment;
- the political history and present situation;
- geographic and historical realities?

3. Is contextualization related to:

- structure of programme;
- content of curriculum;
- methods of learning?

4. Are the limits of contextualization defined so that:

- a. parochialism may not result and a broad world view develop: and
- b. the integrity of the gospel message may be maintained? (Some cultures are racist, sexist, elitist or authoritarian.)

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(Subject to change)

The Holy Spirit, Creation and the New Creation—April 1991

Symbols and Realities: Towards a Theology of Communication—July 1991

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