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Editorial

Bernard Ramm has argued that Evangelicals must devise a new paradigm for doing theology in the Post-Enlightenment world. The issue is one of method. Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest have attempted this in their 3 volume *Integrative Theology*. Their method is to identify the problem, test alternative solutions that have been suggested in the history of Christian thought and, using a responsible hermeneutic, search the Scriptures in their progress of revelation. From this foundation, a coherent and systematic Theology is developed in order to defend the truth against every alien theology, philosophy, religion and ideology and to demonstrate its relevance for the church's life, minister and mission in the world. This is a method of contextualizing theology at its best.

The WEF Theological Commission consultation in London last April focused on the need for a vital and coherent evangelical theology for the 21st century. The plenary papers were published in the October 1996 issue of ERT. This issue includes the summary findings of the 12 working groups, articles (including some by participants) and relevant book reviews. All this is a part of the on-going process of working towards an evangelical, integrative theology which is, in the words of Lewis and Demarest, 'biblically grounded, historically related, culturally sensitive, person-centred and profoundly related to life'. p.

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Faith and Hope for the Future

*Towards A Vital And Coherent Evangelical Theology For The
21st Century Summary Reports of the Working Groups*

I

THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE AS THE WORD OF GOD IN THE PLURALITY OF CULTURES AND CHURCH

**MEMBERS: WARD GASQUE, CARL ARMERDING, W. CHEDZAMBUYO,
JOSE NAFATE, PAUL NEGRUT, E. ECKHARD SCHRABEL, BEN MANICKAM**

Report

1. As evangelicals in WEF we believe that the Holy Scriptures as originally given by God, are divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy, and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

We affirm that

1. the authority of Scripture for faith and conduct is inseparably linked with the interpretation of Scripture
2. the interpretation of Scripture as the Word of God needs to pay attention to both the divine and the human aspects of the Bible

3. the Word of God in and through Scripture is directed, in space and time, universally to all of mankind and must therefore be interpreted in such a way that the Word of God becomes 'very near' so that we may obey it ([Deut. 30:11, 14](#))
4. the foremost task in the interpretation of the Bible is to find the true meaning of the text
5. the historical dimension of God's revelation recorded in the biblical texts makes it necessary to continually actualize the biblical message to contemporary mentalities in their diverse cultural and social contexts
6. the cultural (Israelite, Jewish and Greek) dimension of Scripture presents us with the p. 6 task of dynamic contextualization (or inculturation) of the message of the Bible
7. the translation of the Word of God in Scripture must not be adapted to particular interests but has to remain faithful to the Holy Scripture as originally given by God.

2. We recognize the need to evaluate and study the following issues:

A. Methods of interpretation

1. Older and newer methods of historical (critical) interpretation with regard to their secular heritage.
2. The relevance of older (Jewish and patristic) methods of interpretation with regard to their practical theological orientation (*sensus literalis* and *sensus spiritualis*).
3. The influence of the diverse Christian traditions on interpretation.
4. The areas where evangelicals have to repent of faulty, one-sided and arrogant approaches to Scripture.

B. Challenges of interpretation

1. Ways in which the Holy Spirit helps us in the task of understanding and applying Scripture.
2. Similarities in interpretation, in different cultural context, i.e. the unity of evangelical biblical interpretation amidst the diversity of cultures.
3. The relationship of myth and historicity regarding God's revelation in Jesus Christ and in Scripture.
4. The hermeneutical process by which we may distinguish between what is culturally relevant and what is eternally valid.

C. Interpretation and society

1. The import of cultural and social realities on the process of interpretation, especially vis-a-vis ethnic diversity, political situations, poverty and prosperity, gender identity etc.
2. The question whether diverse social situations may justify a diversity of approaches to interpretation, e.g. systematic exegetical analysis, meditation, inspirational approaches.
3. The implications of interpretation for ethics, particularly in terms of issues which are discussed today, such as human rights, homosexuality, global and social justice.

D. Realities of interpretation

1. Methods and practical steps which will ensure that ordinary church members understand God's word, whether in the context of oral societies, of urban neo-pagan audiences and any other context.

2. Ways and means which will help poorer churches to evaluate the theology of the richer churches of the West in an independent spirit.
3. The type of theological education needed for proper theological interpretation and for relevant application, including an evaluation of the place of the Bible in ever-expanding curriculae.
4. Arguments and practical ways in [p. 7](#) which we can help equip to respond to the misuse and misinterpretation of Scripture, e.g. in the traditions of Islam.
5. The task of the exegete and theologian in the midst of diverse and numerous responsibilities in theological institutions, local and national churches, in society and in the family.
6. Evangelical publishing, in view of the task of helping God's people to understand God's truth afresh in each generation.

3. We recommend that WEF undertake an intensive study to study carefully the methods and results of biblical interpretation

1. in the religious contexts of non-Christian religions
2. in the secular contexts of neopagan societies
3. in the political contexts of the East, the West and the South
4. in the ethical contexts of local traditions and global changes
5. The unity of evangelical biblical interpretation in the context of the plurality of cultures and churches.

II

‘CONFESSING GOD’S TRINITARIAN SAVING REVELATION THROUGH SCRIPTURE AND CREATION’

MEMBERS: GORDON LEWIS, DORIS LEWIS, PAUL MURDOCH, SERGEI SANNIKOV

Report

1. Hope for the Future of Society—Divine Revelation to All people of all Cultures

People with sin-blinded minds, misdirected loves and perverse wills do not of themselves wholeheartedly know, worship and serve their Creator. So God discloses his transcendent existence and power in nature ([Ps. 19:1–6](#); [Rom. 1:20](#)) and his moral requirements (the ten commandments) in all human ‘hearts’ ([Rom. 2:14](#)). This *general revelation* through creation is made ‘plain to them’ ([1:19](#)) by a *general illumination*. The eternal Logos, the ‘light of men’ illuminates all that he created ([Jn. 1:4–5](#)) and the Holy Spirit also convicts people of their moral accountability to the Creator ([Gen. 6:3](#)). Thus the elements of a theistic world view: (1) that the powerful, personal and righteous Creator’s being is distinct from creation (transcendent), (2) but (immanently) active in it, ‘have been clearly seen’ ([Rom. 1:20](#)).

The message made plain to all sinners is nevertheless suppressed by both individuals and their cultures (v. [19](#)). So we should not expect the empirical descriptions of any culture to highlight love of their transcendent Creator above all, or for their neighbours as themselves. The result of the universality of the divine revelation and illumination is that all cultures and individuals who do not value their personal creator and his moral demands above creation are ‘without excuse’ (v. [20](#)). Even those [p. 8](#) brought up in

monistic or pantheistic world views ought not to believe that God is anything like the art and imagination of idolaters or mythmakers ([Ac. 17:29](#)).

Since the Creation and the Fall, all people need to engage in three forms of dualism. Firstly, from the time of creation, temporal creatures must distinguish their own being from that of their eternal Creator (*ontological dualism*). This is not an eternal dualism (as in Zoroastrianism, but one which follows temporal creation. (Just as there are different varieties of monism, so there are different varieties of dualism). Since the Fall, all are accountable also for a radical distinction between truth and falsehood (an *epistemological dualism*) and right and wrong, (an *ethical dualism*).

Young people, in spite of being brought up in the pantheistic philosophies of Hinduism and Buddhism, know better than to imagine that they are Brahman or the Void. Those taught by Nazi indoctrination to persecute and exterminate millions of Jewish people knew that murder is morally evil. Those guilty of ‘ethnic cleansing’ are inexcusable in any culture. Murders of God’s image-bearers are objectively guilty before the Creator and, when caught publicly, feel subjective shame. General revelation and illumination convince all of us that we are far from holy and our only hope is to cast ourselves on the mercy of the divine Court. God’s moral law, whether written on tablets of stone or our hearts, drives sinners to the one Saviour who gave his life for the lost. The problem is not with the law which is ‘holy, just and good’ ([Rom. 7:12](#)), but with the weakness of human flesh ([8:3](#)).

The most extensive passage on the subject of universal revelation ([Rom. 1:18–3:20](#)) concludes that all Gentiles, as well as all Jews, have not lived up to the moral principles they knew. Because of idolatrous worship and service, God calls the unjust what they are—guilty ([3:10–20](#)). They have chosen, not the way of the Giver of life, but the way of its destroyer, the way of death. Even though general revelation in itself does not provide the hope of an atonement for sin, it *provides hope in several ways important to all human relationships*.

(1) We can have hope for cultures, which like their Creator and Sustainer, will be *pro-life* in the most general sense. The giving of rain, food and joy are ‘testimonies’ to God’s ‘kindness’ ([Ac. 14:17](#)). Although everything is made by God, only humans are made *like* God. The command not to murder God’s image-bearers, however culturally qualified, remains a basic defence of everyone’s right to life. The value placed on one human life created in God’s likeness is not simply the product of legislation or social custom, but forms an independent criterion for appraising the laws and customs of any nation and the United Nations. Inherent rights are the foundation, not the consequence of freedom.¹

(2) The universal prohibitions of bearing false witness, stealing or [p. 9](#) covetousness provide the grounds for hoping for greater *justice for all*. Although the concept of justice is difficult to define, when we are treated unfairly we know what injustice is. All of us know that might does not make right. However much that knowledge is suppressed, all know that the ultimate Administrator of justice requires that they treat others as they would be treated themselves. Hope for the future finally rests on the defeat of total relativism and utilizing God’s universal disclosure of moral principles to correct injustices in homes, workplaces and governments.

(3) There is hope for coming generations who realize that *love* for others fulfils the moral law. We know that deserved justice is not enough; we all need unmerited mercy and grace. Caring more than fulfils the demands of justice. It seeks the well-being of others. Hopes for peace in the future rest ultimately on the fact that all non-Christians as well as Christians know that God’s image-bearers ought to care for each other.

¹ Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 177, 205, 269.

(4) In order that humans could be good stewards of creation, God made the eye to see and the ear to hear ([Prov. 20:12](#)). So hope for truth depends on the intellectual honesty to accept physical hypotheses that *fit verifiable data*. Total relativists in East and West imagine that our different standpoints prevent us from knowing any objective truth about reality. But because witnesses' reports of a traffic accident differ, it does not follow that there was no collision. We will not live long in any culture if we ignore data related to creation's laws, nuclear power, aids and cancer. When intellectual honesty is compromised, research will not be trusted, not even reports about the injustice of tyrants. If scientists have been arrogant, do not blame the scientific method, challenge the arrogance of naturalistic presuppositions. Given the necessity of testing hypotheses in a pluralistic world, one does not therefore assent to a first, isolated impression of data (as in naive realism), but to tested, converging lines of evidence (as in critical realism). All portrayals of events are not of equal worth; some are better informed than others.

(5) Since God's thought and communication is faithful and true (not self-contradictory—[Rev. 19:2, 9, 11](#)), all his image bearers should exhibit faithfulness in thought and consistency in the expression of that thought. It is impossible for our Creator to lie ([Heb. 6:18](#)). According to the law of *non-contradiction*, one ought not to affirm and deny the same thing at the same time and in the same respect. Although Aristotle classically formulated this law, it was not an invention of western philosophy. Its source is the Lord of all. It is assumed by the prophets, and Jesus Christ and his apostles. Logic, like science, is an instrument that can be used for good as well as evil. If logic has been used to deceive or oppress, do not throw out logic but deliver God's summons to deceivers to repent ([Ac. 17:30](#)). If they wish to be understood, teachers of world religions must not affirm and deny the same thing at the same time and in the same respect. If postmodern promises can mean that which contradicts them, trusting [p.10](#) relationships, essential to the stability of all society's institutions, become impossible. Hope for the 21st century world depends on coherent thought by which we can live without hypocrisy.

These five commonalities: rights, justice, love, honest appraisal of facts and logical consistency integrate our values. They are here supported, not by induction or deduction, but by an analysis of universal revelation. These transcultural norms must be accounted for by any philosophy or religion. They are most coherently and viably explained by belief in God the Father who devised principles conducive to life, God the Logos who inscribes them on every human heart and God the Holy Spirit who convicts their violators of sin and error. They are not the product of the middle class, the West or the Enlightenment, but derive from the Lord of all. They serve as criteria of truth here and now and in the final judgement of all weak or powerful individuals, communities, religions and cultures. If we deny the universality and necessity of these foundational principles in favour of a particular confessionalism, we lose points of contact with our non-Christian neighbours and hope for good relations with our neighbours.

When we try to live in a manner which is consistent with general revelation and its five commonalities, barriers are broken down. Christians can cooperate with all other men and women for purposes of moral decency, physical necessities, legal justice and intellectual honesty. We remain part of the one human race, whose members derive from one person ([Ac. 17:26](#)). We may work together with atheists, animists, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, humanists or New Agers for improvements in the life support system (cleaner air and water), freedom from threats to life and moral integrity (abuse of women, men and children), or property (theft and bribery), etc.

2. Hope for the Future of the Church—God's Special, Redemptive Revelation

God has a great plan by which he can remain true to himself and save people whose lives are marred by moral failure. Although creation does not disclose the Father's inner redemptive purpose, he makes it known in another, very special way. The supreme redemptive revelation comes through the life and teaching of the eternal Logos in human flesh ([Heb. 1:1](#)). Christ's teaching endures, though heaven and earth pass away ([Lk. 21:33](#)) and his life exhibited the principles he taught. He is the way, both teaching the truth and living by it. Prior to the incarnation of the eternal Logos the Old Testament prophets predicted the Messiah's coming. After he ascended into heaven, the New Testament apostles reported his work and applied it to the church and world. The supernaturally inspired and inerrant original writings of prophets and apostles, inerrant explain that, taking the place of sinners, the incarnate Christ satisfied justice and provided for us the gift of his perfect righteousness ([Rom. 3:21-26](#)).

Jesus is not the only way to God. All religions and philosophies lead to [p. 11](#) God—as Judge! Before the divine tribunal every knee shall bow ([Ac. 17:31](#)). The most crucial question is not how people can get to God. It is rather: 'How can unjust sinners ever be accepted by God when they stand in his immediate presence?' Or, 'How can God remain just and justify the ungodly?' Special revelation explains that the death of the Messiah in place of sinners satisfies the demands of divine justice in response to our sin. The wage of our sin is death. The Saviour's death not only pardons believers from all sin, but imputes to them the gift of perfect righteousness. Those united to Christ by faith do not need to strive for more good *karma* to be acceptable to God. They have been accepted and given the perfectly righteous status of the risen Christ himself. By the work of the Holy Spirit believers are regenerated and progressively delivered from the power of temptation and sin (sanctified). Hope for the church rests on the special revelation of the gracious plan of redemption the Father designed, the Son provided, and the Holy Spirit administers.

Regarding interpretation of its revelation in Scripture, the Bible's assertions of the good news are context-related without being context-determined. In contrast, H. Richard Niebuhr said, 'The Bible can be read in many different contexts and will mean different things accordingly'.² Although the specific *applications* of a passage may be numerous, there is only one intended meaning (except in the case of a double entendre, symbol or figure of speech). Differences among interpreters on the meaning of the biblical writers can be resolved by appeal to criteria rooted in the five commonalities shared by people of different cultures. Twentieth century biblical scholars should accept the interpretive hypothesis (1) that is without contradiction, (2) that most coherently fits the relevant grammatical, contextual and historical evidence, and (3) that one can live by authentically, respecting rights justly and lovingly without hypocrisy. On these bases serious students of theology can break out of liberal and conservative hermeneutical circles to make some progress toward truth.³

What boundaries of co-operation with others does the doctrine of special revelation set? For purposes of evangelism and missions, Christians will work only with those who affirm God's redemptive disclosure in the sinless Christ and inerrancy of Scripture. The doctrines of the gospel of the incarnate, crucified and risen Messiah, determine the boundaries of cooperation for the redemption and reconciliation of sinners. Leaders in

² H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (NY: Macmillan, 1942), p. 38.

³ These criteria test interpretive hypotheses in the three volumes of *Integrative Theology* by Lewis and Demarest (Zondervan) and in my *Decide for Yourself: A Theological Workbook* (InterVarsity). The criteria and verificational method of testing hypotheses are developed philosophically by comparing six methods of reasoning in my *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* (University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland).

any religion who seek to offer eternal life to the unjust and [p. 12](#) immoral on other grounds deceive their followers and waste their time, money and effort.

3. *The Ultimate Hope for the Future—the Trinity*

In the 21st century the doctrine of the Trinity will continue to be the most coherent and viable account of the biblical data about God. The elements of the doctrine include: ‘The Oneness of God’s Being’, ‘Three Personal Subsistences (Consciousnesses) in the Divine Being’, the ‘Interpersonal Fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit’, an ‘Administrative Order among the Three Persons’ and their ‘Distinctive but Harmonious Ministries in History’.⁴

The oneness of the divine being involves a multiplicity in unity. The text most often cited by Jews, Muslims and others to deny a possibility of the Trinity teaches a unity that does not exclude diversity. The word for ‘one’ Lord ([Deut. 6:4](#)) is used for two persons becoming ‘one’ flesh and ‘one’ nation. In the New Testament ‘one’ church or the ‘one’ body of Christ has many personal members. Biblical uses of ‘one’ (in both Hebrew and Greek) preclude polytheism, but regularly convey a multiplicity in unity. And in everything but a mathematical abstraction extra-biblical uses incorporate a multiplicity in unity. Since the simplest things involve several dimensions, parts, chemicals, organs or members, why should we imagine that the oneness of God bans diversity?

The threeness of the divine being will continue to be most like three persons. Father, Son and Spirit each thinks, feels, wills, relates and communicates. They intercede with one another and enjoy unbroken communion. So the Father is personal, the Son is personal and the Holy Spirit is personal. Each has the same divine attributes and engages in activities that only God can do. The hypothesis that the three are separate entities (a committee of Gods) does not fit the evidence of oneness. The hypothesis that imagines an undifferentiated monotheistic oneness does not fit the evidence of their diversity. The trinitarian doctrine is complex but not contradictory; it does not affirm oneness and threeness in the same respect. With respect to being, God is one; with respect to personal subsistences, God is three. The affirmation of one divine being denies three or more divine beings. The affirmation of three persons denies that there is but one personal consciousness.

The most coherent account of *the unity and diversity of creation* will continue to be found in the Trinity. Sooner or later every philosophy and religion must account for the world’s observed diversity and unity. Those who affirm One undifferentiated ultimate Being like Brahman tend to explain away as maya the reality or endurance of the many (Hinduism, Buddhism). Those whose ultimate starting point is with many spirits, gods or material elements like fire air, earth and water or atoms, do not coherently account for the world’s unchanging unity (animists, polytheists, materialists, [p. 13](#) idealists). Those whose ultimate reality is trinitarian have a coherent account of the fact that the entire universe (micro and macro) exhibits both multiplicity and unity. Although the divine Trinity cannot be fully comprehended, (what can be?), special revelation of the super-personal God is not contradictory.

The future worth of one human person is ultimately derived from trinitarianism. Alternative philosophies or religions like secular humanism, Hinduism and Buddhism with impersonal ultimates tend to be dehumanizing. Buddhist, New Age and other mystics for whom personhood is not an ultimate value, render meaningless the word ‘God’. The inestimable worth of a single person is finally rooted in the image of the God who is eternally personal! We are not mere vibrations lost in the totality of Energy. We are

⁴ Each point is explained and developed in Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology* Vol. 1: pp. 270–280.

personal spirits, though finite, image bearers of the infinite God who is spirit. Human spirits will never lose their identity at death. God created and recreated us, not to dissolve us in an impersonal ocean of Nothingness, but to renew us and give us an eternal life of personal communion.

Faith in the Trinity provides the ultimate base for hope for *personal fellowship in the 21st century*. The Trinity is ‘the archetype of all community, all fellowship, all love’.⁵ The unity of the Godhead is not only essential but also relational. Believers will never be absorbed in the Trinity, but will be brought into an eternal relational unity similar to theirs. Jesus prayed, ‘that they may be one as we are one’ ([Jn. 17:21–22](#), not essentially in this context, but one relationally). Distinct persons will enjoy an eternally unbroken communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The ultimate foundation for all community is found, not in social or political structures, but in the ultimate nature of the triune God. The final reason for families staying together is not legal agreements enforced by the state, but demonstrations of trinitarian love and grace. Unjustified schisms in the church are scripturally sinful, not only because of breaking relationships with members, but also with Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Hope for authentic Christian *worship* in the future calls for the practice of the presence of the Trinity. It must avoid a practical unitarianism. It should not encourage movements committed to the Father only, Jesus only and Holy Spirit only. Such reductionist tendencies have characterized some temporary trends in history, but are not coherent with all the relevant biblical data about God. Hence they are not classically Christian. Rather, worship should relate to all three in communion and prayer as distinguishable and yet one. Meditate on the unity of the distinctive roles of the divine Planner, the divine Provider and the divine Enabler.

Hope for the future requires a trinitarian *theology of missions*. The sending of persons as ambassadors to others, is at the heart of trinitarianism. In outgoing love, the Father sent the Son. After his death, resurrection and ascension, the Son, [p. 14](#) in harmony with the Father’s will, sent the Spirit. Jesus said, ‘As the Father has sent me, so send I you.’ The challenge of Gerald Anderson remains significant:

A major cause for confusion in missions today comes from the inadequacy of the various attempts to formulate the theology of missions in recent years ... from the culture-centered, man-centered, revelation-centered, eschatology-centered, kingdom centered, Bible centered, church-centered, and Christ-centered points of view.

After recognizing the importance of each of these concerns, none is regarded as an adequate focus. Anderson adds,

It remains now for a major attempt to be made at formulating the theology of mission from the view of a *radical trinitarian theocentrism*. When it comes, this approach may plant the seed—but only God gives the growth—for a new flowering of missionary endeavor in our time.⁶

To be fruitful, missions in the future must *keep in step with the Holy Spirit*. The Spirit convicts of sin and calls sinners out of the world to become God’s people. He convinces them of the truth of the gopher’s assertions. He enables them to turn away from their idols and put their trust in the living Christ alone. The Holy Spirit regenerates, giving believers life from above. He baptizes believers into the body of Christ, indwells them personally

⁵ C. W. Lowry, *The Trinity and Christian Devotion* (NY: Harper, 1946), 157.

⁶ Gerald H. Anderson, ‘The Theology of Mission Among Protestants in the Twentieth Century’ in *The Theology of Christian Mission*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1961), 15.

and collectively, bestows gifts, teaches, illumines, guides, fills, working in them to will and to do what pleases God. Theologians can plant the seeds of truth, cultivate and water them, but only the Spirit of truth can give sinners spiritual life and the grace to work together in the church. Only fruit born of the Holy Spirit perseveres. The Word must continue to test the spirits; the Spirit must continue to attest the Word.

What boundaries of cooperation are set by trinitarianism? For purposes of permanent church membership, evangelicals can join only with trinitarians. For unity of spirit in worship and the exercise of our gifts, we must fellowship with those who place their highest value upon the one God who eternally exists in three equally divine persons.

In conclusion, what are the boundaries of cooperation indicated in the three major doctrines of this chapter? Summing up the concluding paragraph of each section:

- (1) For purposes of the survival of the poor, personal morality and social justice, evangelical Christians will work together with all persons, regardless of religious or philosophical affiliation.
- (2) For purposes of evangelism and missions, evangelicals will work only with those who believe and teach the one gospel of Jesus Christ.
- (3) For purposes of permanent church membership, unite only with those who accept special revelation in the sinless Christ and inerrant Scripture, and orthodox trinitarianism. For building lasting church relationships [p. 15](#) it is also important to share similar convictions on matters like church government, the sacred ordinances and the day of worship.

With clarity of purpose and faith in each of the three doctrinal foundations, we have good reason to have hope for the future.

Ronald Dworkin

III

PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST AS THE ONE UNIVERSAL SAVIOUR AND LORD IN A WORLD OF RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR PLURALISM

MEMBERS: TERRANCE TIESSEN (CHAIR), GUILLERMO COOK, RICHARD HOWELL, IFRAHAIM MATHEW, ALAN PALLISTER, SAMUEL SIDJABAT

Pluralism: Both Friend and Foe

At the end of the 20th century pluralism is a fact of life which has both positive and negative implications for the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the unique Saviour and Lord of all. Evangelicals support and benefit from situations where there is respect for a plurality of perspectives. We are committed to the rights of others to believe and worship freely and we ask for that right for ourselves. This sort of tolerance and respect is a healthy form of pluralism. In some situations, however, the tolerance of differences is based on a relativistic approach to truth and knowledge, which either denies the existence of absolute and exclusive truth or insists that knowledge of such truth is impossible.

As we move toward the 21st century, evangelicals increasingly find themselves in one of two situations that have adverse effects on the proclamation of Jesus. There are still many places where religious freedom is granted in principle but not in practice, either because of the dominance of an oppressive religious majority, or because of an anti-religious secular philosophy. On the other hand, in parts of the world which are most tolerant of religious differences, there is a growing resistance to groups which make

exclusive claims to truth, as evangelicals do. The proclamation of Jesus as *unique* Saviour and Lord is perceived as an unacceptable intolerance of the convictions of others.

The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord

Although evangelicals defend the right of others to practise their own religious convictions, we are committed to truths which necessarily exclude the validity of other beliefs and practices. God has made himself known to us through his action in history, the meaning of which he has revealed in the Bible. The Bible is thus our sole authority for faith and practice and is the arbiter of all **p. 16** claims to truth and morality. It is on the basis of this biblical revelation that we assert that there is only one true and living God, who exists eternally as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In his uniqueness, God, who revealed himself supremely in Jesus Christ, is Lord of all other beings, who depend upon him for their very existence.

Humankind was created by God and for fellowship with him, but now lives in fallenness and alienation from God because of sin. To reconcile sinners to himself, the Word of God became a man in Jesus of Nazareth, who lived a perfect human life and died an innocent death. Through his resurrection, he overcame the power of death and sin and opened the way for the reconciliation of sinners to God, so that God might be just and yet justify sinners. All those who truly believe in Jesus as Saviour and who bow to his Lordship are accepted by God as his children. Those who hear and understand the proclamation of Jesus, but who refuse to believe and submit to him, remain under condemnation by their own choice, though God continues to be patient and gracious toward them until the end of their lives when their final response is irrevocable.

There is not a consensus among evangelicals regarding the possibility of salvation by grace, through faith, of those who are incapable of explicit faith in Christ, whether because of a physical incapacity or because of a lack of knowledge. This is an aspect of evangelical theology which is currently the subject of intense discussion. From all perspectives in the discussion, however, there is a strong commitment to the importance of the universal proclamation of Jesus Christ as the normal means by which God brings people to salvation. This is one of the essential ministries which God has given to the church.

The Proclamation of Jesus Christ

The proclamation of Jesus Christ is done both verbally and in deeds which require interpretation for their meaning to be evident. In its verbal proclamation, the church calls all people to repent of their sin (against God, against other human beings, and against God's creation), to cast themselves upon God's mercy, to trust in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and to submit themselves to him as their Lord. Christians also proclaim Jesus Christ by the symbols of Christian worship, by their lives of Christian faithfulness, and by their deeds of compassion and acts in pursuit of justice for others. As the grace of God is at work in the community of his people, the church becomes a sign of the kingdom and manifests the nature of life in that kingdom, in imperfect but attractive ways.

Having experienced the saving power of God, Christians are called to proclaim his Lordship in private and public worship. Every aspect of their lives, personal and social, must be submitted to Christ. Within the context of the plurality of religions, the identity of Jesus as Lord must be clearly proclaimed. (For example, within Islamic contexts, it must be stressed that Jesus is God and not merely a prophet. Within Hindu contexts, his uniqueness as God is **p. 17** the point needing emphasis.) In every situation, the forms of idolatry, religious and secular must be exposed. In this way, the implications of the Lordship of Jesus will be made clear in the face of other entities that compete for the allegiance of human lives.

Given the plurality of religious and cultural contexts in the world, proclaiming Jesus, in a manner that genuinely brings people into a meeting with him, is a complex and difficult task. The situation of hearers of this proclamation must be carefully assessed and those who proclaim Jesus must discover how to communicate effectively the truth of God within the context of the hearers. In this difficult task, we find hope in the promise of Christ to be present with those who carry his name to the ends of the earth, and in the presence of the Holy Spirit who illumines both those who proclaim and those who hear.

In seeking to contextualize the proclamation of Jesus, we must be careful that the Christ we proclaim is the one whom the apostle proclaimed in their preaching and in their writings, as uniquely Saviour and Lord. People must be called to be disciples of Jesus Christ with lives of personal holiness and social righteousness. In every situation, there are risks that the identity of Jesus and the claims of his Lordship will be subtly modified to make the message more acceptable and the life of discipleship more easy. Here evangelicals outside the context may play a role that is helpfully critical, but this requires much sensitivity when their understanding of the context is minimal. The task requires constant attention to both the voice of God in Scripture and the dynamics of the situation in which God is calling people to himself.

Evangelical Proclamation and Relationship to Other Denominations and Religions

The proclamation of Jesus is a duty accepted by all Christians churches. What this means is not always understood in the same way. Christians should seek to cooperate wherever possible with others who share their commitment to Jesus as unique Saviour and Lord of all. In such cooperative mission efforts, evangelicals must ensure that the gospel which is proclaimed is uncompromisingly the biblical good news.

It is essential that we understand the position of those among whom we proclaim Jesus Christ. Dialogue with representatives of other Christian groups or with other religions may be a helpful process to further mutual understanding. Such dialogue is always conducted, however, within the context of the church's evangelistic mission. Listening must precede but may both substitute for proclamation.

Sadly, serious, and often violent, religious conflict is a feature of our times. Evangelicals, while holding fast to the uniqueness of Jesus as Saviour and the universality of his claim as Lord, must do so in evident humility. It is Jesus Christ who is supreme and we are simply his followers. We, of all people, should be most conscious of God's grace towards us and must shun all expressions [p. 18](#) of pride or superiority. In relationship to other Christian groups, this should lead to a non-sectarian attitude. When persecuted for their faith, Christians should follow their Lord in the way of the cross, in a spirit of forgiveness and love. This too is a way of proclaiming Jesus, the one who suffered and called us to suffer with him in order that we might also share the joy of his final victory.

IV

THE HOLY SPIRIT CHALLENGES EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

**MEMBERS: THOMAS ODEN, RAL BUAI, DAVID SAMUEL, THOMAS
MACKEY, DAVID SUAZO**

We who proclaim Jesus Christ as the one universal Saviour and Lord in a world of religious and secular pluralism, and who interpret Scripture as the Word of God amid the plurality of culture and church traditions, attest our experience of the convicting and transforming ministry of the Holy Spirit in a sinful and oppressed world.

The forgotten person of the Trinity has been powerfully reintroduced in our time partly due to two distinctive movements.

1) The pervasive presence and effects of *charismatic* and Pentecostal movements on all continents and in all Christian communions, and
2) in the search for *ecumenical* embodiment of the oneness of Christ in the church, which has sometimes softened into syncretistic universalism. These two factors have brought the Holy Spirit once again into the centre of theological discussion. The modern ecumenical movement must come again under the tutelage, guidance and judgement of the ancient ecumenical movement. The modern charismatic movement must come to recognition of the history of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is leading the faithful today into all truth by:-

1. creating and preserving the world even when fallen (through creative grace)
2. drawing the fallen towards repentance (through common and preventive grace)
3. convicting of sin (by the grace of repentance)
4. enabling faithful response (through justifying grace and grace of baptism)
5. encouraging faith to become active in love (by cooperating grace)
6. engendering spiritual formation towards maturity in faith active in love (by sanctifying grace)
7. uniting the body of Christ (through eucharistic grace)
8. empowering the church to fulfil her mission (through marturial grace)
9. working to enable our hearing of scripture (through the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit)
10. fulfilling the promise of the [p. 19](#) Father in the consummation of the work of redemption (by the completing work of the Spirit)

We respectfully request that an ongoing study of the work of the Holy Spirit be undertaken by WEE We ask that this study commission proceed first by making inquiry into those key texts that have emerged repeatedly in our own conversation—among them: [Rom. 8](#) (incl. the work of the Spirit in renewing creation), [Acts 2](#) and [10](#), [Genesis 1](#), [John 14](#), [Gal. 5](#), [Eph. 4](#), [1 Cor. 12](#), [1 Cor. 2](#).

The work of the Spirit embraces not only issues of redemption (repentance, justifying grace, faith active in love, obedience, *klesis* and *ekklisia*) but also of consummation and creation.

The Holy Spirit is challenging evangelical theology to correct widespread excesses that have occurred in the name of the Holy Spirit. These excesses appear in the varied forms of willing, feeling, and knowing by abuses of or deficiencies in volition, emotion, or intellect.

- 1) The excess of pragmatic hyper-activism limits the range of the work of the Spirit to being primarily a human activity, and in doing so neglects both the renewal of the mind in Christ and the power of God to transform the inner emotive life.
- 2) The excess of intuitive hyper-emotionalism limits the range of the Spirit's work to having its locus in our hearts only, to the neglect of deeds of mercy, critical reflection, and social accountability.
- 3) The excess of rationalistic hyper-intellectualism has limited the range of the Spirit's work to having its primary locus in the mind, in thought processes, in correct ideas, often to the neglect of inner spiritual formation, the works of love, and care for the poor.

The relational unity of the one God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the model for integrating and bringing a Christ-centred cohesion. The Spirit-filled self encompasses intellect, will and feeling. The unity of the person as one who knows, does and feels, is a

work of the Holy Spirit. The new formed self is then sent into the world to manifest this unitive work of God the Spirit in social, economic, domestic and political life.

God the Spirit acts to reveal God's word through Scripture, to elicit repentance and faith through preaching and to awaken and sustain communities of faith who become salt, light and leaven within the fallen world.

While political liberation models of Christian community were opting for the poor, heavily influenced by a theory of class warfare alien to Christian faith, the poor themselves were opting for Spirit-filled communities that gave them a new self-respecting identity and accountability within the social order.

The Spirit of God who created the whole creation in the beginning is the same Spirit of God who dwells among the evangelical Christians today. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of grace who convicts the sinner's heart so that he realizes that he is a sinner needing to be saved. The [p. 20](#) conversion of three thousand by one proclamation of Peter on the Day of Pentecost occurred because of the power of the Holy Ghost who convinced them that they should ask what they must do to receive the salvation of Jesus Christ, which was provided by God's grace for every soul.

The work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is continued throughout church history beginning from the Day of Pentecost to this very moment. The Spirit of God moves upon the face of the earth as he moved upon the face of the water in the chaotic creation in Genesis.

The power of the Holy Spirit was great in the persecuted church. The church of God survived despite severe persecution only because of the Holy Spirit's sustaining power which gave them boldness to endure all persecutions. Persecution often caused many to renounce their faith yet probably also served to purify the church.

The convicting and transforming ministry of the Spirit in a sinful and oppressed world is seen throughout the history of the church.

The Spirit of the Lord is the mightiest force to convict sinners and transform their lives to become new creations of God. Modern technology, education etc may help people in various ways, but these things of themselves, cannot change a person to become a regenerated soul. ([In. 1:1-10](#)).

Without the convicting and transforming power of the Holy Ghost, true conversion is not possible. Establishing schools, dispensaries, hospitals, orphanages etc may have some influence within a society but true conversion is possible only by the convicting and transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

The revivals of 1900-1910 began a significant worldwide awakening in our century. Healing and Latter Rain movements took place in North American Pentecostalism, as did the Charismatic Renewal movement which began in the USA in the early 1960s and subsequently spread throughout the world.

Whenever these awakenings have occurred the primary factor has been the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. There are some features which constantly appear in revivals—1) persistent prayer, 2) preaching and testimony, and 3) a deep awareness of the holiness of God leading to a strong sense of conviction of sin and repentance, followed by extreme joy when peace with God is received.

In the nation of India, the tiny state of Mizoram is now the only state in India which is almost one hundred percent Christian. The Church in Mizoram celebrated last year a centennial since the first western missionaries landed in that region. The first 20 years of missionary endeavours produced very few converts. But when revival swept across the state, from 1906 till today virtually the whole population of nearly one million have been converted to Christ.

The convicting and transforming power of the Holy Spirit is the essential force bringing souls to Christ. In the absence of this power the evangelical church will not survive [p.21](#) or will become a powerless lifeless shell of a movement.

Proposals

1. WEF Study Group Theme: 'Discerning the Spirit: Toward an Evangelical Theology of the Holy Spirit for the 21st Century' A book to be produced by 1999. To include: The Work of the Spirit: Understood Exegetically, Historically and Theologically and How the Holy spirit is at Work in the World today.

V

REPORT OF GROUP 5

TOWARD A VITAL AND COHERENT EVANGELICAL ECCLESIOLOGY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY MEMBERS: PAUL SCHROTENBOER, GRAHAM CHEESEMAN, TONY LANE, M. PRETORIUS, HELGE STEDELMANN.

Having considered the biblical teaching concerning the church and the classic description of the church universal (one, holy, catholic, apostolic), and in the awareness of the current confusing situation (in which even though the church is often not popular there is a spiritual hunger) we move in faith and hope.

We affirm

1 That the church is the body of Christ, the community of the redeemed, brought into being by the Word and Spirit and that on the basis of Christ's acceptance of us we are called to accept one another ([Rom. 15:7](#)). The Holy Spirit is at work in and through the church.

2 That God's gift of the church, which Christ built and the forces of hell cannot destroy, entails our task to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and to strive to attain to the full stature of our unity in Christ ([Eph. 4:3, 13](#)).

3 That this body becomes visible as Christians assemble in fellowship (*koinonia*) in local congregations and in larger groupings, as these manifestations of the church fulfil their calling and mission in proclamation (*kerygma*), witness (*martyria*), worship (*leitourgia*), celebration of the sacraments and service (*diakonia*).

4 That all true believers, whatever their racial, cultural and denominational backgrounds, should rejoice in their common membership of the one family of God and that together they may with confidence experience the joy of a closer and more visible fellowship.

5 That there is urgency that the church contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints ([Jude 4](#)) in this age of religious pluralism and relativism, and clearly display its nature as the pillar and ground of the truth ([1 Tim. 3:15](#)).

6 That in the post-Christian and neo-pagan age which has seen scandalous moral lapses by Christian leaders and church members uncritically adopting the life style of their society, we must diligently maintain [p. 22](#) our Christian moral standards, striving for holiness in the fear of God.

We recognize

1 That there is an inevitable tension between the universality and unity of the church and the specificity of the church in its contextual forms. This diversity has been due in part to

historical and doctrinal differences between denominations as well as geographical and (less justifiably) ethnic, class and cultural differences. It is imperative to distinguish between the fundamentals of the faith, on which there should be unity, and secondary issues, on which there may be legitimate diversity.

2 That there exists a current tendency to emphasize the kingdom *to the detriment* of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, though in some parts of the world the church may have been emphasized to the neglect of the kingdom.

3 That the church is far from perfect and that we need to repent of our past failures. We look to God to renew his church, as he has so often done in the past.

We recommend

1 That in view of the biblical teaching and the great proliferation of church denominations, WEF undertake an intensive study, based solidly on Scripture and building on previous studies by evangelicals, including those done under the auspices of the WEF:

- to investigate what implications the soteriological aspects of the WEF Basis of Faith have for an evangelical understanding of the church;
- to consider revising the WEF Basis of Faith to produce a clearer statement on the church;
- to study the biblical teaching with a view to distinguishing the central core of fundamental doctrines from those secondary issues on which there may be legitimate diversity;
- to describe carefully the biblical teaching on the relation between church and kingdom;
- to prepare suggested guidelines for evangelicals in their relations between different churches and other church groupings.

2 That the WEF institute a commission on evangelical ecclesiology to implement these recommendations.

VI

OUR COMMITMENT TO CHRIST'S MISSION OF WORLD EVANGELIZATION, COMPASSIONATE SERVICE AND PROPHETIC JUSTICE

***MEMBERS: RENE DAIDANSO, ANNE-MARIE KOOL, BEN MANICKAM,
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(PAPER ONLY)***

1. Affirmation

(1) We affirm our commitment to Christ's mission of world evangelization. God showed his mercy to the human beings, created in his own image and yet lost in their sin, **p. 23** through sending his own Son, Jesus Christ to be their Saviour. Jesus entrusted the church with the task of proclaiming this gospel message. The disciples were commissioned to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the triune God and teaching them to obey everything he taught ([Matt. 28:19-20](#)). Evangelism is properly defined in the Lausanne Covenant as 'the proclamation of the historical and Biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to Him personally and so be reconciled to God'.

It is sad to notice in some circles of the Christian church that this commission of global evangelization is neglected or even opposed. One of the reasons for this negligence or opposition is the denial of the uniqueness of Christ and his salvation and the adoption of a pluralistic viewpoint. Theological compromises with pluralism and syncretistic trends have damaged the evangelism of many churches.

However, we evangelical Christians still take the great commission seriously. At the same time we realize the apologetical task of confronting the challenges of religious syncretism and pluralism, not ignoring other religions.

(2) We also affirm our commitment to Christ's mission of compassionate service. The Christian believers are expected by Christ to meet not only the spiritual but also the physical needs of others, whether Christians or not, out of love and compassion.

Although there has been a debate among evangelicals as to whether our compassionate ministry is to be included in 'mission' per se, it is universally admitted that ministry to the needy is to be done by Christians. In fact, evangelical believers have done a lot by starting orphanages, homes, for the elderly, schools, hospitals and other charitable institutions. Such a service has helped to demonstrate God's love and concern for people.

However, this important ministry is not immune to decay. In some areas of the world such services have become a mere routine and lost their original fervour. Some of the institutions are regarded as employment opportunities for Christians, ignoring the original vision of the founders and the biblical demands. Others have bad records of corruption and mismanagement. We should recognize that important questions confronting compassionate services involve recapturing the vision, improving management and accountability, and being solidly based on the biblical mandate.

(3) We further affirm our commitment to Christ's mission of prophetic justice. Again, believers are to be deeply concerned with justice in human society and with the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression, just as the OT prophets were.

Although Lausanne meetings and other consultations of evangelicals have reiterated this task, many churches have still not taken it into serious consideration. The church's prophetic role is much more than merely preaching judgement. An analysis of socio-political situations will lead to exposing violations of human rights, defending the weak, p. 24 such as the poor, refugees, women and children, and establishing social justice. The social responsibilities of Christians involve more than compassionate service and being involved in relief and development projects.

Despite recognized difficulties in integrating world evangelization with social concerns, we evangelicals should go one step further in the 21st century to address the question of human rights, justice and peace, and take the micro and macro level problems as our own tasks without neglecting the urgent need of evangelism. This involvement in the holistic mission will bring hope for the needy and strengthen the witness to the credibility of evangelical Christianity.

2. Foundation

To formulate an evangelical theology of mission, we should consider not only Christ's mission but also the whole redemptive work of God from the trinitarian perspective.

(1) 'Christ's mission' did not begin with his coming, but originated in the purpose of God the Father manifested in his creation and continuing rule.

a. God created the whole universe including humans. The created world was originally very good, but it was spoilt because of the fall of the first humans. Yet the whole world remains under the care of the Lord. He announced the plan to redeem fallen humanity and continued to entrust humans with the task of taking charge of the world. Significantly, in the centre of the creation stand human beings created in God's own image. Biblical

anthropology, particularly the idea of the dignity of individual humans, provides a foundation for our holistic mission.

b. God the creator is also the Lord of history. His lordship is manifested in the history of the world, particularly of Israel. He chose Abraham, delivered the Hebrews from the slavery, made the covenant with them, giving them his law, and continued to communicate his counsel through the prophets. Not only God's plan of salvation, but also his concern with justice and love has been revealed throughout history.

(2) In order to understand fully Christ's mission, we also need to reflect on his incarnation and the teaching of the kingdom of God.

a. Incarnation indicates how deeply God loves the world. God related himself to us, sending his Son to the world. Christ has come to save us from our sins. Because of his sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection, we are reconciled to God. We sinners are forgiven and given eternal life. Christ, the incarnate Son, also showed us the true meaning of humanity through his total obedience to the Father. His whole life made visible the righteous and merciful God.

b. Christ preached the gospel of the kingdom which was actualized in his person and ministry. The kingdom is given as a gift to those who humbly accept him. His teaching clarifies how the saved can live sharing the realities of God's rule, whose loci are justice and love. Mercy is especially exemplified by Christ in his healing, feeding and associating with the outcast. [p. 25](#)

Thus the kingdom of God has arrived with his coming, but we still wait for its consummation at the time of his second coming. In between, we are to live the new life of the kingdom.

c. The whole ministry of Christ is termed 'mission' since he is the Sent One. Our mission is modelled on his mission ([Jn. 20:21](#)). As, through the ministry of his Son, God intended to give eternal life to sinners, so, through the ministry of his disciples, the Son intends to make people share his life.

(3) Christ' mission cannot be fulfilled without the work of the Holy Spirit.

a. The mission to save sinners is actualized by 'another Counsellor' who regenerates them. The soul-winning, however, is not the final goal. He continues to help the saved to bear the fruit of new humanity, transforming them into the likeness of Christ. And his whole plan will be completed when they are made to participate in the life of the world to come.

b. This new creation by the Spirit is found not only in the life of individuals, but also in the community of the regenerated. In the early church evangelism did not stand by itself, but went forward hand in hand with the ministry to the needy. Thus Paul's missionary journey involved fund-raising for the poor believers in Palestine. The Spirit of God grants his gifts to the believers to build up the church and to reach out to the people in the world, showing love and justice to them.

It is thus obvious that the triune God is so concerned not only about the redemption of the sinners but also about the development of the community of the redeemed and the recreation of the whole world. God's mission is not simply to allow fallen individual humans to be reconciled with himself but to reshape whole societies. The holistic mission is founded upon the whole plan and action of the triune God manifested in the whole scripture.

3. Theological Tasks

To affirm our commitment to Christ's mission, the following theological issues are to be dealt with.

1. Integration of Mission

We need to integrate our mission of world evangelization and social responsibility. Whether the mission, in its definition, includes social activities or not, we should embrace the view that Christ entrusted the church with the task of world evangelization and also of ministering to people with compassionate service and prophetic justice.

In most, if not all, of the important segments of biblical teaching, evangelization and practising love and justice go hand in hand. The two tasks may be diagrammed as making a concentric circle, which shows a core-fruit relationship, the core being evangelism while the fruit is doing acts of love and justice. The evangelistic task is to be followed by the task of producing the fruit of love and justice which reshapes the sinful world. Compassionately helping the needy and prophetically acting in the cause of peace and justice, which foreshadow the eternal kingdom to come, also build a bridge for sharing the gospel. A vital and [p. 26](#) coherent evangelical theology cannot be established without paying due attention to the tragic realities of the contemporary world crying for compassionate service and social justice.

2. World Evangelization

We should rethink the task of world evangelization in the light of the shift of the centre of gravity of missions and the increasingly pluralistic society we live in. The mission field starts on our doorstep and missionary movement ought to start in our own local situation. World evangelization has been discussed mostly in its macroscopic/global perspective, but we should now pay more attention to microscopic/local steps. Grass-roots level efforts are a key to our commissioned task.

In order to accomplish the great commission, the multiracial character of church and mission is also to be theologically reflected in the light of the ethnic crises in various regions of the world. We should develop an ecclesiology of multiracial churches hinted by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians (especially chap. [2](#)), lest the church, the body of Christ, should be ethnically fragmented. The church is, in the divine plan, to be a reconciling community.

Evangelism in a dominantly non-Christian area, in particular, is often confronted by a serious question: 'What about my dear parents (or grandparents/ancestors) who have not heard the gospel?' Thus one of the current issues, whether the unevangelized will somehow have a chance to be saved by God's grace or not, is to be tackled.

3. Compassionate Service

A practical question is how to define compassionate service. The early church extended their ministry to the poor, geographically crossing national boundaries and yet mostly within the circle of faith. To whom are we to be neighbours today? Living in the time of globalization, our horizons are certainly to be expanded to the global needs. The best biblical advice would be that of Paul who says, 'as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers'. However, as the 'opportunity' increases almost infinitely today, we have to raise a question afresh: how is this principle to be applied to the ministry of individual believers/churches in the face of enormous needs.

Another question is how to develop this ministry in some sensitive context where the church is misunderstood or accused of proselytizing or unethically inducing people to conversion, taking advantage of the giver-position. We have to take into account the fact that compassionate service does not necessarily pave a way to an effective evangelization.

Again we have to tackle the question of how we can keep the integrity and vitality of Christian compassionate service, preventing it from losing its original vision and falling into a pit of corruption.

4. *Prophetic Justice*

We are facing enormous numbers of problems in our contemporary world, which surpass our relief activities. For instance, in addition to setting up emergency centres for the [p. 27](#) ever increasing number of refugees in Africa, we have to intervene somehow at the root of the problem. There is also the question of how the church in the first world raises its voice if there is a strategy in their own countries to hold Africa in a state of economic dependence, withholding technologies from the developing countries there, or if the economic growth of African countries is swallowed up by a cycle of foreign debts just because of the current world economic system? Again, a more universal question is how the church should address itself to social injustice like bribery.

Hence we need to establish an evangelical theology of prophetic justice. Compared with compassionate service, this topic is not so conspicuous in the NT, though social concern is testified by, i.e., Jesus' cleansing of the temple ([Jn. 2:13-22](#), [Matt. 21:12-17](#)) and the apostolic demands to pay wages ([Jam. 5:1-6](#)). Christ and his disciples were not zealots, taking more moderate attitudes to society. The church was able to avoid becoming an ideological movement probably because Christianity is not primarily political. Nevertheless its regenerating force can affect politics. Though Paul did not press Philemon to abandon slavery, his teaching as a whole has led to its abolition. Jesus and his disciples challenge the *Pax Romana* and its gods and laws in a deeper sense.

VII

PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERNITY AND POST-MODERNITY

MEMBERS: ROLF HILLE, BRIAN EDGAR, JAN HENZEL, EVERETT HUNT, DONALD TINDER, JOSEPH TSON

Report

The Gospel of Jesus Christ needs to be lovingly and boldly proclaimed with recognition of the large and growing context often called Post-Modernity. While maintaining confidence in reason and verifiable experimentation for scientific and technological progress, post-modernity (in contrast to both the Christian and the Enlightenment traditions) denies that there are universal truths in religious or ethical matters.

Our challenge is to show that, while the methods of verification differ, a variety of apologetic, moral, experiential and logical approaches demonstrate that the gospel is true not only for us who believe but for everyone.

Unlike some who react to modernity and post-modernity, we recognize the value of many achievements—technological, political, economical, social, and in media communications—of our secular age. While regretting and opposing unhealthy developments, we explicitly disavow the use of force or the law to impose the gospel or its implications upon people. Instead, Christians need to participate as fully as possible in the various aspects of the lives of our societies (including politics, academics [p. 28](#) and the media), guided by Christian faith, along-side of those who participate while guided by other belief systems.

Those who have received the gospel in a post-modern context need to reflect and act theologically and ethically upon the various effects, negative and positive, which these developments have had upon individuals and societies. Bio-medical technological developments are especially in need of Christian voices.

VIII

SERVING CHRIST'S KINGDOM OF LOVE, PEACE AND JUSTICE IN THE MIDST OF ESCALATING VIOLENCE, POVERTY AND POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION

**MEMBERS: PEDRO ARANA, EMILY CHOGE, GEOFFREY GLE, BRYAN
EVANS, EMILIEN RAZAFIARISON, SAMUEL YAMEOGO**

We live in a world created by God in which he has inaugurated his kingdom through Christ. In some aspects of preparing for the kingdom and alleviating disadvantage, work by God's people towards peace and justice has made huge progress in the last 200 years—concern for slaves, orphans, physically disabled, people with psychiatric and mental disabilities, women, ethnic minorities, the poor, those in exploitative working conditions, the hungry, refugees.

In other areas this world does not reflect the character of God's love, peace and justice. Instead there is violence, poverty, casteism, class conflict, political and religious oppression. Specific examples could include police brutality in Asia; war and ethnic clashes in Rwanda, Bosnia, Russia and Liberia; rape, wife battery, female infanticide. The flow of refugees increased ninefold between 1970 and 1994. Mass poverty and unemployment continue in the Two Thirds World.

This does not glorify our Maker who showed his love for the world through his creative and redemptive work. He sent to us the Prince of Peace whose rule should have no end. This shalom does not mean merely absence of war but wholeness in all dimensions—social, spiritual, physical, economic and political—a kingdom built on justice and righteousness. Justice is the foundation on which the throne of God rests and Jesus commands us to seek first his kingdom and justice ([Mat. 6:33](#)).

We recognize that transformation of society can come only through transformed people, so we desire to win men and women to faith in Christ. And yet we believe that an evangel which narrows itself to an individual relationship with God without affecting the society around will be incomplete. Consequently we strive for an evangel that is soteriological, prophetic, and compassionate. This will work against both personal and structural evils. Aware [p.29](#) of the enormity of the task, we affirm our dependence on the Holy Spirit who can enable us.

Recommendations

1. WEF should set up a unit to develop a stronger theology on peace and justice issues, with encouragement to publish books. This group should also network with other Christians and people of other faiths or no faith working in this area.
2. We encourage each national alliance of evangelicals to set up a unit which can, using the resources from #1 where appropriate, develop guidelines and seek cooperation with their government to promote peace and justice. This will require full participation of churches.

IX STRIVING FOR RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP OF GOD'S SUSTAINING AND REVIEWING WORK IN CREATION

**MEMBERS: KEN GNANAKAN, DAVE BOOKLESS, MANI CHACKO, G DALE,
CRAIG MILLWARD, BRUCE NICHOLLS, P NULLENS, JOSEPH SHAO**

The foundation of all our environmental discussion is a God who is a personal Creator, who manifests himself in his creation. This trinitarian God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the basis of all personhood and relationships. By his own free act God brought into being a creation radically distinct from himself, yet which exists and is sustained by him. The worth of all creation is not intrinsic but instrumental, deriving from its relationship with a holy God. All matter was made good in its original state, and perfect in its relationship to God. The world was made to God's glory.

The fall of humanity has radically disrupted the relationships between God, humanity, and the rest of the created order. Therefore ecological imbalance owes its origin to the entry and persistence of sin within God's perfect created order. However, nature still retains a positive value, declaring God's glory, and awaiting the restoration of its relationships with God and humanity. Since the fall, a hierarchy of responsibility and accountability has been perverted into one of exploitation, seen in human relationships and in attitudes to the environment.

Human beings are both created, and therefore physical beings related to and dependent on the rest of creation, and yet also in the image of God, with an independent relationship to the Creator and a responsibility towards the creation. This responsibility of stewarding and protecting creation continues despite the disruptive effects of the fall upon the task.

The incarnation of Christ reaffirms the physical creation. The resurrection of Christ lays the foundation of a material eschatology—a new heaven and a new earth. There will be both continuity [p.30](#) and discontinuity, as with the body of the risen Christ. In the light of despair over the ecological crisis, there is therefore hope for the whole of creation in Christ, and a basis for our continuing involvement. The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God ([Rom. 8:21](#)).

The theological framework outlined above, combined with the worldwide ecological crisis, has enormous implications for our priorities in theological education and in practical action, for our ethics and lifestyle, and indeed for our worship, and our mission and evangelism.

Ethics: Our ultimate vision of creation restored in Christ must inspire us now in the penultimate. Our ethics are interim, those of a kingdom that is now, but still not yet. The roots of the ecological and environmental crises in the present era lie in individual and corporate human sin. Instead of dealing only with the symptoms (such as pollution, poverty, overpopulation), we need also to deal with the causes. At the ethical level these lie in greed (materialism, the love of money and unrestrained pursuit of profit), the abuse of power (exploitation of the poor, of women, of animals), individualism (selfishness). There is a need for repentance where evangelical Christians have merely followed the spirit of the age in these areas. At a positive level our ethical motivation for environmental involvement is primarily that of love, for God and our neighbours—including future generations.

Education: Some priorities for action:

- WEF TC to encourage the networking of evangelical theologians and environmentalists, with the encouragement of national and regional groups.
- sharing of resources, bibliographies and key people in this field.
- need for monographs on specific aspects of the ecological crisis.

Ministerial Training: WEF TC to produce short course on theology and ethics of creation, covering all major doctrines, and integrated into major disciplines.

- WEF TC to produce monographs on theological basis for creation care.

Local Church: encourage idea of a conservation/ecology/creation Sunday, such as that pioneered by A Rocha and the UK EA, with teaching materials and suggestions for practical action.

- encourage incremental steps towards environmental awareness, and simpler lifestyles amongst evangelical churches.
- encourage involvement beyond the churches, in, eg, conservation groups, both as a Christian responsibility, and as an evangelistic opportunity.

Youth: a key area, not only as they are tomorrow's leaders, but because they are often more aware of (and less anaesthetised against) environmental issues, yet unaware of a Christian basis of involvement.

- importance of focus on animal welfare, arts and music in reaching youth.
- WEF TC to produce study guide, taking c. 10 aspects of the ecological [p. 31](#) crisis (eg deforestation, pollution) and developing a biblical perspective.

Beyond the Churches: potential for practical involvement with and evangelistic witness towards non-Christians, as we explain motivation for involvement, and hope in Christ for all creation (NB experience of A Rocha in this area).

Much further thinking and discussion are needed. We need to speak biblically, incisively and prophetically on many issues, and need further research to do so. Areas for research include: nuclear power and its abuses, bio-ethics, creation spirituality, the history of Christian attitudes to the environment, and many others. We must do this out of love for Christ, in union with whom all things have their proper place, and through whom God has decided to bring the whole universe back to himself ([Col. 1:17](#) & [20](#)).

X

AFFIRMING OUR ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE IN CHRIST'S KINGLY RETURN TO REIGN, THE FINAL JUDGEMENT, AND THE CREATION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS OF A NEW EARTH AND A NEW HEAVEN

MEMBERS: JOCHEN EDER, RODRIGO TANO, J MCINTOSH, DAVID SAMUEL, HANS SINNING

1. Our hope in the context of doctrine and church.

While working on eschatology, evangelicals have to affirm the validity of their subject not only on the level of doctrinal statements and symbolic books. To formulate the doctrine of the coming Lord Christ in seminary classes and in textbooks is but one part of the task.

Treating eschatology as a vital part of evangelical theology at the threshold of a new millennium means however to proclaim the significance of this subject *in the preaching of our churches*. There, in public worship, our hope of Christ's return must be expressed. In the pulpit, the eschatological horizon of justification has to be made known: Christ saving men, who believe in him, from eternal condemnation. In worship, the righteousness of God's new creation has to be proclaimed, for the sake of creating righteousness in the hearts of the congregation through the proclamation of the Word of God and so to stimulate analogies of righteousness in an unjust society, Christ's kingly return is part of our theology, not just as a written statement of our dogmatics, but as the truth proclaimed to the congregation, challenging secularized Christianity all over the world. [p. 32](#)

2. The structure of the topic.

While discussing Christ's return to reign, we have to acknowledge doctrinal differences between Christians concerning the literal understanding of the millennium, the rapture of the believers and other related issues. We affirm the necessity of in-depth bible-based research on these themes, which hinder the common witness of individual Christians and churches. Certainly the protestant distinction of fundamental and nonfundamental articles in eschatology could be helpful to avoid unproductive discussions. The distinction could also be expressed by the concept of *a hierarchy of truths*, which arose in the Roman Catholic context at the Second Vatican Council. In that way theological condemnations of diverging opinions on the subjects of minor importance can be avoided. The affirmation of Christ's personal, visible return to this earth has to be emphasized over against the negation of the churches' classical faith by a liberal theology and a secularized world. Affirming Christ's visible return to this earth, we reject that type of docetic eschatology, which interprets Christ's coming only as the coming of an impersonal reign of Christ.

3. Church unity and social action in eschatological context.

The coming Christ and the coming unity of the church under his reign are a strong impulse for evangelicals to seek now for a visible unity in witness and social action, by crossing the boundaries of our denominations to have fellowship with other Christians. Furthermore, the coming Christ is a strong impulse for our involvement in society with acts of mercy, because Christ will look for the fruit of faith ([Mat. 25:34-40](#)).

4. Christ's reign and political reign.

The coming of Christ to establish his reign on earth reminds us of the limitations of every type of human government and dominion. Human government is ordained by God to produce justice and peace through the means of political and administrative power, to create a more righteous and human world. We affirm that task with the reminder that political engagement in doing so can neither substitute nor prepare the way for the coming reign of Christ. In political context, only analogies of Christ's reign can be realized. The coming of Christ doesn't depend on our efforts, but is related only to God's plan for the salvation of mankind.

5. Faith and the final Judgement.

The preaching of final judgement is related to the key issues of theology: the call to conversion, the distinction between 'formerly' and 'now' in Christian life, the significance of baptism and the Lord's Supper and the delimitation of the church from the world. According to the Book of Revelation, the coming of Christ to judge the world and to set up

divine justice on earth, is for the consolation of the believers. But it is an object of dread to the world which doesn't really want Christ to reign over them. **p. 33**

The coming of Christ to liberate Christians from suffering and persecution has been the subject of expectation and fervent prayer in Christianity throughout the centuries. Without the expectation of the imminent *parousia* of the Lord, Christian hope for the future will vanish into a mere *utopia* of the kind the philosopher Ernst Bloch vainly taught people to trust in.

6. The creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

Ever since the book was written, God's promise of a new heaven and a new earth in [Revelation 21](#) has provoked imitations on the level of a (Christian or) human creation of a just society. At this point, the vital link between Christian doctrine and the struggle for an improvement of human living conditions was never questioned, not even by secular atheists. Evangelical theology will stress that social engagement cannot create the heaven on earth nor can it merit us our salvation, which is by grace alone. The final righteousness is an act of the God who speaks, who by his word creates conditions unobtainable by human efforts. The creation of a new earth and a new heaven is already now the object of Christian praise and worship.

XI

'RECOGNIZING GOD'S PURPOSE FOR GENDER DISTINCTIVES IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE, CHURCH AND SOCIETY'

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Report

This working group dealt with the theme of faith and hope for the future as it relates to the issue of gender distinctives.

1. We identified the following key challenges to the church and the evangelical movement moving into a new millennium:

1.1. With grief and empathy we recognize the tragic fact that gender distinctives are often expressed in the marginalization and oppression of women and girls in various and often shocking ways, and that such treatment, in the worst cases, is specifically because of their sex. Examples include female foeticide and infanticide, prostitution, rape, wife battery, incest, dispossession of widows, and severe psychological oppression. These injustices must be condemned and alleviated in the light of the biblical witness to the full human dignity of women and to their equality with men. There is both evidence and information relating to these issues of abuse, but by and large Christians are ignoring it. Evidence needs to be collated, and information disseminated, in a deliberate **p. 34** consciousness-raising strategy and in a campaign as thorough as Wilberforce's to address the evils of slavery.

1.2. Women's and men's roles in societies the world over are changing rapidly in the face of global socio-cultural, economic and political changes, and issues of gender identity and roles are being rethought in cultural debate. Fresh biblical and theological reflection on gender and gender distinctives is imperative in the light of this situation in order for

the church not to lose capable, gifted and motivated women (or men) and so that it can best fulfil its task as the light of the world today rather than come to be judged as irrelevant or outmoded. The church should not merely reflect secular culture, or the cultural patterns of other religions, but neither should it lag behind where a society is pushing forward in right directions even if from secular convictions. We recognize that Christian understanding should not be driven by western patterns, not by those of radical feminists, for example, but by glad exploration of biblical teaching and illuminated application of it. We also recognize that gender roles may need to be expressed differently in different contexts; for example, what kind of models are possible and appropriate for Christian women in an Islamic society? Further, we recognize the need for fresh and incisive thinking about gender identity and roles for Christian men today, in a variety of cultural settings.

1.3. Women are already, and have long been, making significant contributions in the Christian church, and in the family. These contributions and the gifts from which they spring must be recognized and valued, given proper legitimation, encouraged and actively promoted for the sake of the body of Christ and the mission of the church to the world. Where there has been a conspiracy of silence, or a denial of the contribution and gifts of women, as, for example, in traditional church history texts, explicit corrections must be made. In the light of these it will be easier for Christian men and women to identify God-given possibilities for women in the present and the future.

1.4. Evangelical Christians are not in full agreement on questions of gender distinctives and on a Christian theology of gender. While recognizing the key role of scripture for this issue, they disagree on the interpretation of the relevant biblical texts and their hermeneutical implications. Cultural differences can play a part in these disagreements. This impasse points to the need for more work on the problems of exegesis, hermeneutics, and the role of the reader's context in interpretation. Further, in addition to close study of specific texts, in the context of the testimony of the whole sweep of biblical material, we also wish to see a more thorough response to the charge that the Scriptures are themselves sexist, or that they are used to justify the oppression of women.

1.5. We also note the urgent need for careful and honest critical analysis of and response to the contributions p. 35 of many feminist writers, especially those who raise legitimate questions but address them in an unbiblical manner. We grieve that in some cases the church has contributed to and exacerbated radical feminism by its failure to respond to justified criticism or to repent of sinful practices. At the same time, we have reservations about the goals of many feminists, and reaffirm that our goals must be defined in terms of the gospel. We confess that in some countries, evangelicals either dismiss more than they should or embrace more than they ought. We believe there is a special need to collate and analyze carefully feminist writings, and information about feminist agenda, in countries outside Europe and North America, and to make available to the world church the contextualised responses of male and female evangelical theologians working in the Two Thirds World.

1.6. We condemn sexism, misogyny and homophobia, and the toleration of such, wherever they occur: in attitudes and assumptions, views and trading, structures and actions, inside and outside the church. We believe that Christians are called to demonstrate 'a better way' of mutually respectful, affirming relationships, where man and women gladly serve each other and seek to do each other good. This living out of God's perfect design of harmonious and appreciative complementarity is to transform relationships in the family, in the church, and in society, and will in itself be a powerful testimony to the world of the gospel.

2. *The following approaches and theological perspectives serve as grounds for faith and hope in addressing these challenges.*

2.1. When all the relevant biblical texts are taken into account, and we resist the impulse toward harmonization, we discover a diversity of perspectives on gender distinctives within the Bible, from subordinationist to nonhierarchical models for gender roles. These perspectives are not necessarily contradictory; rather they point to the multiplicity of cultural expressions of Christian faith and the context-oriented character of the biblical teaching on gender.

2.2. God created man and woman distinct (male and female), yet without differentiation as concerns being created in the image of God, being given responsibility for creation, and having individual accountability to God. Woman and man were created as complementary to each other.

2.3. Christ redeemed woman and man from sin and its consequences experienced in gender roles in the fallen creation. In Christ, man and woman remain sexually distinct, yet now they also have a *common* identity: 'you are all one in Christ'. This new identity based on being in Christ affects the whole of Christian existence (not only the relationship to God but also to fellow human beings). Thus in the body of Christ there is a new equality and a new reciprocity of woman and man ([Gal. 3:28](#); [1 Cor. 11:11-12](#)). The outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh and the distribution of spiritual gifts without regard to gender at Pentecost and in the early church gives evidence [p.36](#) of this new equality and reciprocity. The Spirit can and does empower men and women to new roles not based on gender but on spiritual gifts. Equality of status thus expresses itself in equality of function.

2.4. Jesus' relationship to women in the gospels provides a Christian model for a new understanding of gender. Jesus resisted gender discrimination. He made women full members of God's family, treated them as persons and not as objects of potential male lust, did not hinder women from learning at his feet over against traditional role expectations, but welcomed them in the roles of disciples, and sent women as his witnesses to proclaim the good news of his resurrection.

2.5. The New Testament teaching on gender roles is characterized both by sensitivity and adaptation to the culture as well as by critique and transformation of the culture in the light of the new creation and in the power of the Spirit of Christ (for example, by affirming celibacy for those who have the gift and not making gender role necessarily dependent on biological sexual identity).

2.6. A redeemed version of male headship not characterized by oppressive domination but by the sacrificial love of Christ is one biblical model of gender roles and relationships. Examples of nonhierarchical models of gender roles and relationships are also found in Scripture (for example, the early Christian teacher couple Priscilla and Aquila, or Paul's description of equal and mutual marriage relationships in [1 Corinthians 7](#)). Experience has taught us the immense danger of the abuse of male power, inherent in hierarchical models, due to human fallenness, a danger which is not inherent in nonhierarchical models of gender relationships. At the same time, we acknowledge that women, equally with men, are fallen, and that neither women nor men are exempt from the sinful desire to dominate others.

2.7. The apostle Paul appeals to the created order in support of *non*-hierarchical models of gender relationships ([1 Cor. 11:11-12](#)) as well as a Christologically-defined gender hierarchy. This invites us to look for models which incorporate the strengths of both.

2.8. In contrast with much current debate (which is often acrimonious and destructive) and much common practice (which may be deeply marred by sin), God's design for men and women in all their relationships, in marriage and family, church and

society, is born of perfect grace and love. We are therefore entirely confident that humble, careful, prayerful biblical and theological study, mindful of our limitations but seeking together to hear and obey God, can be only for our good and his glory. Therefore, while we are soberly aware of the difficulties of our task, we nonetheless approach it in hope and faith, believing that to seek to confront sin and to foster righteousness is entirely in line with God's will.

3. Recommendations

3.1. We urge each national evangelical fellowship to study and address gender issues, in the light of *p. 37* these theological perspectives, in ways appropriate to their context. This should embrace general gender roles and distinctives in marriage and family life, church and society, and may also include issues such as ordination, inclusive language, sexual orientation/homosexuality and lesbianism, representation and voice. In addition, national fellowships should address those issues of abuse specific to their context, for example from among those listed under 1.1. above.

3.2. We recommend further theological and biblical reflection on gender issues by evangelical men and women. The lack of adequate theological resources has limited those working against abuses and exploitation of females. The theological and biblical task should be undertaken jointly by men and women, rather than only by men, or only by women.

3.3. We recommend that WEF facilitate and finance exchange of research and publications on gender issues in various countries.

3.4. We recommend that WEF offer scholarships for women to engage in theological study and to participate in conference so that women's contributions are integrated in to the mainstream of theological work.

3.5. We recommend the formation of a task force on women and gender by the WEF Theological Commission to work on issues raised here and others related to them.

XII REFLECTING ON THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN COMMUNICATION IN THE MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH

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THATCHER***

Report

1. Definition of media as used in this task force

Media includes all possible forms of communication, such as: dance, drama, visual arts, puppets, pantomime, storytelling, music, ballads, textiles, books, tracts, poetry, scripture portions, cartoons, audio-cassettes, videos, the Internet, radio, CD Rom, film and TV.

Statement

As Christians in this life, what is our purpose? To borrow the motto from Columbia International University, our purpose in this life is 'To know Him (Jesus) and to make Him known'. This is important because it is only through Jesus that we can know God. [John 14:6, 7](#). Therefore, in the aforementioned motto, the phrase 'To know Him' is our

responsibility to ourselves, ([Col. 1:9-10](#), [2 Pet. 1:3-4](#)) and the phrase 'to make Him known' is our responsibility to others, primarily the lost ([2 Cor. 5:20-21](#), [Lk. 24:46-48](#), [Col. 1:27-28](#)). Every individual Christian has this twofold duty: "To know Him and to make *p. 38* Him known'. We must apply our whole soul, our talents, our intellects, our gifts our hearts, our bodies, and our creativity to these tasks. And we must remember that our primary means for doing so, and the source of all truth, is the inspired Word of God himself, given to us through the Holy Scriptures, and illuminated for us by the Holy Spirit. Theology transforms our understanding of media at many points. For example, when we use electronic or print media, we run the danger of thinking we can communicate without personal involvement. Yet God's personhood calls us to personal involvement. Media studies also show that one medium alone does not necessarily persuade, although it can. A follow up may be needed for reinforcement, and often that second medium is a live human person. For example, an evangelistic dance and narrative was put on in a village in India, and at the same time, a brochure with the names of local Christians living in that village was handed out, so that if anyone had questions or wanted further information they would know who to contact. Also, many Christian videos come with a study guide as a back-up to the video itself, which is often intended for use in a small group Bible study. An awareness of God as Person therefore affects our use of media. Secondly, there is a danger of separating communication from community. God is Triune, and as such he values relationships. Witness his desire that we be restored to relationship with him. Such relationality is central in Christ's teaching and in the doctrine of the church. Thus, when our involvement in media becomes an excuse or hindrance to our involvement with people and the needs of society and the church, we must be careful to avoid this. An example of such a danger can be found in the scholar who spends all his time with books to the exclusion of human relationships, or the computer fanatic who spends [10-12](#) hours a day at his computer, and never interacts with other people. Such idolatry of any media must be avoided. We must use media to encourage people to know and love God, through Jesus the son, in real communities in a real world. Thirdly, there is a danger of separating communication from an understanding of culture. God is Creator. God also gave us the gift of creativity, and therefore we have a diversity/variety of cultures. However, against the backdrop of a fallen world, the cultures we have developed demonstrate patterns of idolatry, exploitation, and other sinfulness. Nevertheless, as humanity also bears God's image, so also our cultures show patterns of beauty and wisdom. Respecting local cultures includes the development of culturally appropriate theologies which speak to local priorities and values through local thought patterns and symbols. Some people would define this as the using of 'Cultural Keys' to help a people group understand God. An example of this is the use of the 'peace-child' in Dani culture as an illumination to the Dani people that the Son of God became the peace-offering between God and man, enabling man to be reconciled to God. Another example of using *p. 39* cultural forms to express truth, is that of the Tonka Wheel from Tibet. There is a painting of a Christian Tonka Wheel which teaches theology from the Bible. By contrast, when we continue a policy of using only western forms of communication instead of investing in local communication styles and in the training and support of local methods, we devalue local cultures. Just as in the words of Dr. Noelliste: 'no theology created elsewhere will engage the context vigorously enough', so some communication methods evolved elsewhere will not necessarily communicate vigorously enough. Conversely, however, we must continually be on guard against syncretism, which may creep in unawares if we become too enamoured of local culture. For this reason we must always be extremely careful to base every media-message on Scripture, and be sure that we do not use a cultural form of expression that is not redeemable, such as a trance dance, where the dancer becomes possessed by evil

spirits. Fourthly, there is a danger inherent in abstract communication which lacks clarity. We need to communicate in a way to which people can relate, just as people could relate to Jesus Christ. His self-revelation was specific and sensory. Jesus taught through symbols and stories emerging from the local context. When we teach theology mostly through theological propositions and rarely as he taught, we run the risk of cheapening his incarnationai message. When we plan for print communications only, and never for systematic teaching through indigenous art forms or electronic media, we err similarly. Clearly, theology affects our use of media at every point. We must take into account our understanding of God as Person, as Triune, as Creator, and as Incarnate Redeemer. Other implications arise from a developing understanding of God: his holiness, his lovingkindness, his sustaining power in nature and society, and so on. In the end, in spite of the dangers, we are compelled to communicate in whatever way is appropriate and necessary, for God is a communicator, and his love compels us to communicate through all appropriate means. We must become like Paul, who said 'I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it' ([1 Cor. 9:22-23](#))

3. Goals for the next 3-4 years

- 1.a. Encourage some groups in many countries/regions to make a plan for balanced theological teaching materials, e.g. 30 book titles. Some detailed plans for achieving this have been formulated, including the production of a brochure which may be made available to 1996 conference participants.
- b. Assist in procuring grants to achieve this.
- 2.a. Network media-training consultants and local resource people, ie local theologians and lay Christians, as well as other experts in local cultures, with the purpose of developing culturally [p. 40](#) contextualized media which proclaims the truth of the Scriptures.
- b. Train the consultants to nurture theological and cultural richness.
- 3.a. Encourage extensive local rewriting, or new-writing of Christian books as the primary option in book publishing; and the importing of book translations as a second option.
- b. Allocate funds accordingly.
- c. Apply the same principles to other forms of media as appropriate.
4. Develop a curriculum for teaching one doctrine, possibly in a specific culture, using a carefully designed teaching package combining several media, to model an alternative to the primary use of books alone.
5. Develop a plan for encouraging selected widely-distributed western authors to provide a grant to a local non-western author instead of using the money to translate their own books.
6. Develop a plan to encourage experts in various fields of communication to act as mentors/facilitators in local contexts.
7. Consider producing a book on Communicating Theology Through Media. [p. 41](#)

Gender Distinctives, Discrimination, and the Gospel

Judith M. Gundry-Volf

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This paper is intended to serve as a basis for discussion and strategizing of the working group, 'Recognizing God's Purpose for Gender Distinctive in Marriage and Family Life, Church and Society', at the 1996 Theological Consultation of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship. I would like to take as my starting point the problem of gender distinctives in the form of gender-based discrimination, and look at the material in the New Testament for help in developing approaches to this problem. How was the difference of women perceived then, and how did this perceived difference affect the treatment of women and the roles of women in Jesus' circle and the early church? How can this biblical material inform our thinking and practice in relation to the matter of gender distinctives today?

When we take stock of the differences between men and women in both the private and the public spheres today it appears that women suffer because of their sex. In many cultures and social or religious groups women are denied the same human dignity and rights as men. They are marginalized and do not play major roles in political, economic, cultural and religious life in the proportion that men do. They do not have the same access as men to education and other means of personal and professional development. They are objects of physical, sexual and psychological abuse. These phenomena can be observed in many Christian contexts as well as non-Christian and secular contexts. Women are frequently excluded from full participation in the ministries of the church. There are other, less overt forms of exclusion such as the use of exclusive language in liturgical contexts. Women do not have representation in church structures in proportion to their numbers in the church. They do not always have the same access as men to theological p. 42 education and other forms of training for ministry. Women are subject to subtle or overt pressures in the Christian church and family which inhibit their freedom of choice in vocation and ministry and in the private domain on the basis of their sex. They often lack positive encouragement to pursue their callings and exercise their gifts and suffer from a comparative deficiency of female models to inspire them. Other disadvantages could be named. I do not mean to overlook the progress which has been made in recognizing women's human dignity and securing women's rights, nor the differences between various social and religious groups in their treatment of women, but simply to note what are common experiences of women.

What is a Christian response to this phenomenon of gender-based discrimination? Should women be treated differently from men, assigned different roles from men in society, the family, the church? What would be a *Christian* understanding of gender difference?

I now turn to the New Testament itself for light on these questions. What difference did it make to be a woman rather than a man in the fellowship of Jesus' disciples? In the early church?

WOMEN IN THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

When Jesus began his public ministry he called twelve male disciples representing the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel to be his closest associates. But he also issued a general call to discipleship to all, regardless of gender. Women as well as men responded and followed him. They ranged from women of means, who contributed financially to the support of Jesus and his disciples, to women of the most tragic circumstances whom he forgave and healed and liberated from demonic forces ([Lk. 8:1-13](#); [Mk. 16:9](#)). Jesus called his women followers his own 'sisters' and 'mother' in his new family of disciples—they were all bound intimately together around Jesus as doers of God's will ([Mk. 3:31-35](#)). He also called them 'daughters' ([Mk. 5:34](#)), expressing their intimate relation to God their Father ('Abba').

Jesus' treatment of women differed from that of many of his contemporaries, and was not according to the stereotypes that brought social and religious disadvantages for women. Instead of avoiding contact with women as Jewish men were supposed to do to avoid sexual temptation and the possibility of cultic defilement through a menstruant, Jesus talked with the woman at the well, asked for a drink of water from her drinking vessel, and engaged in a theological conversation with her ([Jn. 4:7-42](#)). The singularity of his conduct is indicated by the disciples' reaction: they 'marvelled that he was talking with a woman'. Jesus acted similarly toward a so-called 'woman of the city' ([Lk. 7:36-50](#)). Instead of keeping her at bay to protect himself, he let her wash and kiss and anoint his feet, and received these actions as her worship of him. A Pharisee concludes that Jesus could not be a prophet, otherwise he would know 'what sort of woman this is who is [p. 43](#) touching him, for she is a sinner'. But Jesus did know, and he exemplifies a liberating way of treating women, namely, as persons, even when their behaviour fits a certain stereotype of women's nature as morally lax.

Jesus also broke with patriarchal expectations for women's roles that were typical throughout the Greco-Roman world. When Mary sat down at his feet to listen to his teaching and Martha did all the domestic work, Jesus did not criticize Mary for taking up a typically male occupation ([Lk. 10:38-42](#)). He did not even accept Martha's criticism of Mary for neglecting 'women's work' and leaving her alone with all the serving. He praised Mary for doing the 'one thing [that] is needful', for choosing 'the good portion'. And he defended Mary's right to it: it 'shall not be taken away from her'. Thus Jesus makes learning or study the sphere of both sexes. He does not regard women as unsuited to intellectual or spiritual pursuits.

In the gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, women play prime roles as witnesses, in contrast to the very circumscribed roles as legal witnesses that they could play in Judaism. Women are the first witnesses of the empty tomb and of the resurrected Jesus, and they are sent by the angels of the tomb and Jesus himself to report to the disciples what they had seen and heard ([Matt. 28:1-10](#); [Mk. 16:1-8](#); [Lk. 24:1-11](#); [Jn. 20:1-18](#)). Their being assigned these roles is significant also in the light of the fact that a woman's word was commonly considered unreliable, as the reaction of the disciples to their report on the first Easter illustrates: 'these words [i.e. the women's report] seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them' ([Lk. 24:11](#)). Later the women's words are authenticated, and thus their role as witnesses is legitimated, overturning contrary culturally-conditioned opinions and practices (cf. also [Jn. 4:39-42](#)). The fact that the women are witnesses of the risen Lord means that they fulfil the prerequisite for apostleship, which corresponds to Jesus' 'sending' them to announce his resurrection to the other disciples. In the gospels, therefore, women act as witnesses and apostles, just as men do.

In summary, the gospels give many indications that Jesus treated women no differently because of their sex. He resisted the gender discrimination around him. He

made women full members of his new family—his ‘sisters’ or ‘mother’—and of God’s family—‘daughters’. He treated women as persons and not as sex objects responsible for male lust and hindering men’s spiritual welfare. He welcomed women who wanted to devote themselves to learning and study at his feet and did not stop them from doing so because of traditional role expectations. He sent women as his witnesses, despite cultural barriers to this calling.

WOMEN IN THE EARLY CHURCH

This overcoming of gender discrimination in Jesus’ ministry is manifest also in the early church, most dramatically, at its very beginning. When the Holy Spirit came upon [P. 44](#) the disciples at Pentecost and the church was born, there was no discrimination between men and women: ‘All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability’ ([Acts 2:4](#)). This event was, according to Peter, the fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy: ‘Your sons *and your daughters* shall prophesy ... Even upon my slaves, both men *and women*, in those days I will pour out my Spirit and they shall prophesy’ ([Acts 2:17–18](#)). The empowering of women and men in the same way through the Spirit is thus a fulfilment of God’s end-time promises and a result of the eschatological gift of God’s Spirit. It marks a new day.

In the epistles of Paul and Acts there is evidence that difference of gender did not necessarily lead to difference of roles in the early church, but women and men could take up the same roles. Not only were there women prophets such as the four daughters of Philip ([Acts 21:9](#)) and others in Corinth ([1 Cor. 11:5](#)). There were also women teachers such as Priscilla (or Prisca), and other women apostles such as Junia. Priscilla and her husband, also an early Christian teacher, were coworkers of Paul and taught—‘expounded ... the way of God more accurately’—the eloquent and well-educated Jewish Christian preacher Apollos ([Acts 18:24–26](#)). Priscilla appears to have had a more prominent role than her husband rather than a subordinate one, since her name is most often mentioned before Aquila’s when they appear together ([Acts 18:26](#); [2 Tim. 4:19](#)). Junia, together with Andronicus, who is presumably her husband, are called ‘prominent among the apostles’ ([Rom. 16:7](#)). (The view that Junia is a male name goes against the unanimous evidence in antiquity for Junia as a female name, and is likely to have arisen from the presupposition that only men could be apostles). This evidence for women’s exercise of the same gifts as men in the early church suggests that gender is not a restriction in the Spirit’s distribution of gifts but that the Spirit has freedom in this respect and, as Paul states in [1 Cor. 12:11](#), ‘allots [gifts] to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses’.

Women in Paul’s circle are also called ministers of the gospel and perform the task of ministers. Phoebe is called a ‘minister’ (*diakonos*, a person entrusted with preaching and teaching in the churches, cf. [1 Cor. 3:5](#)) of the church at Cenchreae ([Rom. 16:1](#)). She had the responsibility of delivering Paul’s letter to the Romans, and he commends her for her other services as a ‘helper’ (*prostatis*) of him and many others (cf. also Lydia in [Acts 16:14–15](#)). Euodia and Syntyche were two women leaders in the Philippian church. Paul addresses them in [Phil. 4:2–3](#), describes them as those who ‘have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers’, and exhorts the others to ‘help these women’. Paul mentions other women by name who have ‘worked hard in the Lord’, an expression denoting the work of ministers of the gospel: they are Mary, Tryphena and Tryphosa, and Persis ([Rom. 16:6, 12](#)). [p. 45](#)

How did these women come to take up the same roles as men in the early church? As I have already implied, the outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh is clearly one of the main ways to account for this phenomenon. Only very powerful forces could have led to the

breaking down of traditional role models such as we see happening at Pentecost and in its wake. Socio-economic factors also help to account for the involvement of women at the highest levels in the early church. The church was born at a time when women in the Hellenistic world were gaining new freedoms as a result of socio-economic changes, and these changes were felt in the early church as well. Women with financial resources and a high social status and the privileges that came with it (such as education), like Phoebe, or Nympha, who had a church in her house ([Col. 4:15](#)) and possibly also Chloe, who may have been a woman of means ([1 Cor. 1:11](#)), were more easily able to attain leading roles in the church and perhaps even thrust into positions of leadership by virtue of their position, acquired skills and resources. Further, the simple willingness and hard work of women certainly helps to account for their roles. Paul notes these qualities in a number of women ministers and obviously values them highly.

In summary, the New Testament evidence suggests that there were quite a few women in the early church who took up the same roles as men: they prophesied, taught other Christians, including men, performed the tasks of apostles by going on missions that involved preaching and teaching, worked hard as ministers of the gospel, were entrusted with important responsibilities such as bearing apostolic letters to churches, and shouldered financial responsibility for missionaries and churches, They came into these roles through being empowered by the Holy Spirit, enabled through their personal circumstances based on socio-economic factors, and by their own choice and determination. And so these women made a very valuable contribution to the growth and vitality of the early church. The fact that their names and activities are recorded in the New Testament is a witness to the importance of their contribution and others' appreciation of it.

THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON GENDER

In [Gal 3:28](#) Paul proclaims 'in Christ ... there is no male and female'. This statement, of course, does not mean that the bodily differences between men and women are erased. Rather, 'in Christ' the implications of those bodily differences are in some sense nullified. But in what sense? Many scholars take the words in [Gal. 3:28](#) to be part of an early Christian baptismal liturgy and to express what took place in baptism: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.' Through baptism the differences which served as a basis for privilege and disadvantage are nullified, and those who were once excluded are included. But if [Gal. 3:28](#) as a description of what takes place in [P. 46](#) baptism implies equality *before God*, it also has implications for relationships between women and men in the body of Christ. For it describes what it means to be 'in Christ', which encompasses the whole of Christian existence. It is likely, therefore, that [Gal. 3:28](#) served as a theological basis for the egalitarian practice in the early church described above.

On the other hand, some New Testament texts explicitly affirm the difference between men and women ([1 Cor. 11:3-9](#), [13-14](#)) and reinforce distinct gender roles ([1 Cor. 14:34-35](#); [1 Tim. 2:11-15](#); [Col. 3:18-19](#); [Eph. 5:22-33](#); [1 Pet. 3:1-6](#)). These texts are struggling to take seriously the social and cultural contexts of Christian women and men in patriarchal settings. For example, Paul presupposes that demonstrating one's freedom and equality in Christ should not result in shame throughout the violation of cultural taboos against blurring the distinctions between the sexes, even when these distinctions are expressed in ways that support patriarchal definitions of gender roles (women's 'head-covering' and men's not 'covering' the head). The prohibition of women's teaching in Timothy's church takes into account the fact that women often lacked proper

theological training and could therefore be easily seduced by false teaching. When 1 Peter urges a Christian wife to exhibit conventional female virtues so as to win her unbelieving husband to faith in Christ, this is accommodation to the ethical and social norms of the wider culture out of an evangelistic concern. In other words, the New Testament writers take Christian views and practice on gender to be informed by culture as well as by the gospel, for Christians cannot live their lives as if they were not woven into the fabric of the world around them which partly defines who they are. Nevertheless, the New Testament also subjects patriarchal cultures to criticism and considers them to be in need of transformation through Christ. For example, in contrast to widespread attitudes about marriage in the Greco-Roman world, in [Eph. 5:25–33](#) husbands are urged to love their wives as their own bodies in imitation of Christ’s self-sacrificial love for the church, and in [1 Cor. 7:2–5](#) wives and husbands are given equal rights and responsibilities in the sexual relationship. Other examples of counter-cultural applications of the gospel in gender matters have already been given.

A further explanation of the apparent discrepancy between [Gal. 3:28](#) and other New Testament texts on gender is that these other texts may stress difference in an attempt to counteract the explosive social force of the declaration in [Gal. 3:28](#) and disputable interpretations of it. In 1 Corinthians, for example, Paul may be trying to counteract unforeseen results or wayward interpretations of the declaration of ‘no male and female’ which he saw in Corinth. Some scholars explain [1 Cor. 14:34–35](#), which takes a very subordinationist stance, as an extreme reaction to gender innovations in the Corinthian church that is not a part of the original letter but was inserted later by a conservative copyist. In support of an interpolation [p. 47](#) these scholars point to the disagreement in early manuscripts on the placement of these verses.

Many Christians today, however, see the affirmation of different roles for men and women to be a matter not of taking seriously the cultural and social locations of Christians but of fulfilling God’s intention for creation, which entails a hierarchy between man and woman, whatever their social or cultural locations. This view rests especially on [1 Cor. 11:2–16](#), where Paul draws on the creation stories in Genesis to describe man and woman. But this view can be called into question on two counts. First Paul appeals to creation in this text in support of a *specific, culturally-conditioned practice with a certain social significance*—gender-specific, head-dress which preserves social acceptability and averts shame. Second, he also appeals to creation and the created order in support of the *egalitarian ethos in Christian worship*. I will now elaborate.

Paul appeals to creation in [1 Cor. 11:2–16](#) because it supports his argument for displaying the difference between man and woman—through contrasting headdress—in order to avoid shame: ‘man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man, for man is not from woman but woman from man, and man was not created for woman but woman for man’ ([11:7–9](#)). It follows that the Corinthian women and men should avoid headdress customs that cause shame. The accompanying implication of the argument that woman is created to bring glory to man, and man to God, however, is that woman has a lesser significance and lower status than man on the basis of her coming after a man, deriving her existence from man, finding her purpose in being man’s enabler, and having no immediate relation to God. This lower status and value is expressed concretely by the woman’s covered head. Paul therefore uses arguments and supports a practice that imply woman’s secondary status and even inferiority both in relation to man and before God (though his statements fall short of the outright misogyny found in many other ancient authors). That is, he operates with a patriarchal worldview here, and in such a way to make his statements hardly suitable as a basis for a Christian theology of gender. But his statements are not intended to have this function. To give Paul’s arguments from creation

in [1 Cor. 11:7-9](#) independent theological weight apart from their specific parenetic goal is to go far beyond their intended use. What is true, however, is that in order to achieve his goal of preventing the Corinthians from incurring shame by transgressing wider cultural norms Paul uses arguments that share the patriarchal perspectives of that wider culture rather than depart from it. He reads creation through the lens of patriarchal culture to support certain cultural practices which will allow Christians to be integrated into their cultural setting and thus maintain social acceptability. Paul is working with a model of developing a Christian understanding of gender which is informed by culture, yet, as I will show below, his model also lets the new creation inform his understanding [p. 48](#) of gender over against a particular culture.

What interpreters have not pointed out is the significance of Paul's making a further appeal to creation in [1 Cor. 11:2-16](#) when portraying the relationship between man and woman 'in the Lord' in a nonhierarchical way: 'Now neither is there woman without man, nor is there man without woman in the Lord. For just as the woman is from the man, so also the man is through the woman. And all things are from God' ([11:11-12](#)). Paul repeats his previous argument from creation implying the man's priority (woman is dependent on man for her existence), but he then makes two statements that deny the man's priority and instead give the woman priority or make them both equal with respect to creation. In the created order the woman has priority, for every man is born from a woman. And since God is the source of all things created, neither woman nor man has priority over the other. The upshot of all this is that man does not have *exclusive* priority based on creation. Creation also puts woman before man, makes woman the source of the man's existence, and makes them equally 'from God'. This way of viewing creation also supports a specific practice in the Corinthian church: the new roles which women are taking up in the Spirit and thereby assuming positions of priority and exercising spiritual leadership over men. Women pray and prophesy and minister to men in the public assembly as well as vice versa. Thus in [11:11-12](#) Paul shows that one can also read creation through the lens of the new creation in Christ which is unfolding before his very eyes in the Corinthian church. The unmistakable work of the Spirit among the Corinthian women and men which was most visible in their communal worship led Paul to acknowledge a new equality and reciprocity in gender relationships 'in the Lord' and to argue for it on the basis of creation.

In conclusion, the New Testament teaching that relates to gender distinctives is complex. The biological difference between men and women is never negated or considered something to be overcome (e.g. through an androgynous ideal). God's creation of humanity as male and female is still regarded as 'good'. Yet 'in Christ there is no male and female', that is, there is a fundamental freedom of women and men in Christ from pre-determined roles and thus also gender-based discrimination. [Gal. 3:28](#) proclaims the exact opposite of the oft-quoted prayer of the man in antiquity who expresses his gratefulness 'that I was born a man and not a woman'—the gender discrimination here reverberates loudly. Nevertheless, Christian freedom comes to expression within the particular socio-cultural contexts where Christians live, and thus it manifests itself to different degrees and in different ways, depending on how 'hospitable' those contexts are for such freedom. Further, when the gospel intersects with a culture it also transforms that culture and introduces new ways of thinking and practising gender difference. Creation acts as a guide but does not provide a blueprint, for it can support different construals of gender [p. 49](#) identity and difference, both patriarchal and egalitarian.

CHALLENGES FOR CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN VIEWS AND PRACTICE

The answers to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper should be clear by now. To be a woman should not mean to be excluded, marginalized or debased. As Christians we must stand against all gender discrimination, as Jesus did and as his Spirit inspired and empowered the early Christians to do. How close do we come to fulfilling such goals? I would now like to put forward some questions which issue from the above biblical reflections as a kind of self-test and to stimulate us further in our thinking and strategizing.

1. Attitudes toward and Treatment of Women. Are *stereotypes* of women prevalent in our midst and how do they influence behaviour toward women and women's own self-perception? In our churches are women treated as *persons*, or as sex objects by being made responsible for male lust and by being feared for their sexual attractiveness to men and thus shut out? Is *abuse* of women tolerated under the guise of a theology of subordination? Are there 'safe' places for women to talk about and report abuse and to receive help?

2. Roles of Women. What roles do women play in our churches? Do they take up only traditional female roles, or are they also students of theology, teachers, proclaimers, missionaries, Spirit-filled speakers of the word of God? Is the way made hard for these women to pursue callings not traditionally open to women, or is their willingness and determination met with *appreciation and encouragement*? Are there attempts to *remove the obstacles* that stand in the way of women's full participation in the ministries of the church, such as lack of theological education, or do we stand by and let these obstacles continue to serve as justifications for women's exclusion?

3. Accommodation to or Transformation of Culture. Do attitudes and treatment of women in our churches simply mimic the general culture? Is pseudo-theological legitimation given to sub-Christian ideas and practices? Do our churches even lag behind the general culture in willingness to recognize gender discrimination and effort to oppose it? Or are we *withstanding the pressure of culture and tradition* and being transformed by the renewing of our minds, following the example of Jesus and in the power of his Spirit? Are Christians showing others the way to a new, humane and redeemed way of living as women and men? How can we be *sensitive to the culture* without compromising the heart of the gospel when it comes to gender distinctives?

4. Not Quenching the Spirit. Is there a place in our understanding of gender roles for the *freedom of the Holy Spirit*? Do we recognize the gifts that the Spirit is giving to women, or deny them out of prior 'theological convictions'? Do we *welcome the new creation* or do we [p. 50](#) suppress its power by appealing to faithfulness to the 'created order'? Are we open to be persuaded that God is at work in ways that we formerly thought impossible?

5. Models for Women. Do our churches teach about Priscilla, Junia, Phoebe, Euodia and Syntyche and other *women leaders in the history of Christianity*, or have these women been forgotten? Is Scripture read as a source of liberation and healing for women, or used as an instrument to keep them in place? How can the examples of women's contributions in the history of the church and Christian missions be taught so as to inspire and strengthen women to pursue their callings today?

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Sheep and Goats: Current Evangelical Thought On The Nature of Hell and The Scope of Salvation

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I. INTRODUCTION

It is not too fanciful to suggest that if Christians who believe in the reality of hell were wild animals, they would long ago have been declared an endangered species. The scornful dismissal of hell as a medieval anachronism has for many years ceased to be characteristic only of those outside the church. Liberal theology has rejected it, along with other miraculous and supernatural elements of the Bible felt to be inconsistent with a 'scientific' worldview. There is no shortage of theologians who, having cast off the moorings of the inspiration of Scripture, are happy to sail across a pluralistic 'sea of faith' in the belief that over the horizon lies a New World promising universal salvation.

Evangelicals, maintaining a high view of Scripture, continue to take seriously what the Bible says about hell and the ultimate fate of the impenitent. But the united front they have always demonstrated on this topic has recently taken on a rather more fragmented appearance. At issue is not the ultimate reality of hell, but the way in which it should be understood. Traditionally, evangelicals have usually interpreted the fate of the unsaved as consisting of unending torment. Lately however, a number of prominent evangelicals have 'come out' and declared their belief in conditional immortality, which sees the final punishment of sinners as complete extinction. This trend gained prominence when John Stott, for many the doyen of British evangelicals, wrote in his dialogue with the liberal Anglican David Edwards of his 'tentative' belief in conditional immortality.¹ Similarly, p. 52 some surprise was evident when David Jenkins, the erstwhile Bishop of Durham, made similar views public which on that occasion did not attract the anticipated chorus of protest from conservatives.

At the same time we are seeing a radical rethink starting to take place among evangelicals on another issue on which opinion has traditionally been rock-solid, namely the eschatological scope of salvation itself. Partly in response to the criticisms of traditional Christian exclusivism voiced by radical religious pluralists, a number of evangelicals are arguing that final salvation can be possible without the need for explicit acceptance or knowledge of the Christian revelation.

This article does not claim to add anything new to either of these debates, but rather to provide an outline of the current 'state of the art' on both topics, in the hope that it will provide an introduction for those wanting to be better informed on them.

II. HELL: TORTURE CHAMBER OR FIRING SQUAD?

¹ D. L. Edwards and J. Stott, *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988), 312-29.

Although the belief that hell entails final extinction has recently become a topic of debate among evangelicals, it is not the first time it has done so, and the idea that they have consistently believed in the traditional unending torment view to the exclusion of other views is illusory. Conditional immortality was widely debated among evangelicals in the 19th Century.² Nor is the belief itself new. LeRoy Froom's historical study of its development occupies two volumes,³ and notes its occurrence among a number of early church theologians, Arnobius being its most explicit supporter.⁴

The unending torment view gained its apparently universal acceptance partly as a result of the theological clout of Augustine, its most well known champion in the early church. As a result of his influence it became generally accepted in later centuries, was reaffirmed by Aquinas, and taken into Protestantism by Calvin, who drew on Augustine on many points of doctrine. The re-emergence of conditionalism in the 19th century ran out of steam, possibly because its adherents fell silent in order to avoid splitting evangelicals over the issue at a time when more fundamental issues were being challenged by liberals. As a result, the unending torment view gained the status of evangelical orthodoxy almost by default. Any departure from it has usually been viewed as heretical. Consequently, it has been difficult for evangelical conditionalists to get their views [p. 53](#) heard or published, and it is only in the last twenty years or so that this situation has changed.

The issue hinges on two problems—theological and exegetical—one of which affects the other. The first is that of the immortality of the human soul.⁵ Put broadly, the traditional view holds that the soul is by its very nature immortal, being created in the image of God, and is therefore incapable of 'ultimate' death. Conditionalists argue that this view is more Greek than biblical, and hold that immortality is a blessing bestowed on the redeemed as a result of the work of Christ. The view taken on this question, therefore, acts as a control belief for the second problem, that of the exegesis of the various texts concerned with the ultimate fate of the wicked. If it is held that the soul is innately immortal, clearly these texts must be interpreted in a way which reflects this, and 'eternal punishment' has to be understood as 'unending punishment'. If, on the other hand, immortality is made conditional on the acceptance of God's forgiveness, it begs the question as to how the biblical imagery of 'destruction', 'burning', 'the second death', etc., should be interpreted. Conditionalists argue that the plain meaning of all such texts is that God's judgement on the impenitent results in their final extinction or annihilation. 'Eternal punishment' in this context is held to imply 'of everlasting effect' rather than 'everlastingly in progress'. These two issues, then, lie at the heart of the current debate.

² For a fuller treatment of the history of conditionalism in this period see D. J. Powys, 'The Nineteenth and Twentieth Century debates about Hell and Universalism', in N. M. de S. Cameron (ed.), *Universalism and the Dogmatics of Hell: Papers Presented at the Fourth Edinburgh Conference Dogmatics, 1991* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), 93–138.

³ L. E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers*, 2 Vols. (Washington: Review and Herald, 1965).

⁴ E.g. in *Adv. Gentes* 2:14 (Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol xix, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871).

⁵ For a full discussion of this subject see M. J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1983).

Apart from privately-published works by Basil Atkinson⁶ and Harold Guillebaud,⁷ and the appearance of Froom's historical study from an Adventist publishing house, it was the publication of John Wenham's *The Goodness of God* in 1974 that marked the re-emergence of conditionalism in evangelical circles.⁸ But the most substantial evangelical treatment of conditionalism has come from the pen of the American scholar Edward Fudge, whose book *The Fire that Consumes* first appeared in the USA in 1982. A revised British edition was published in 1994.⁹ Between the publication of these two editions controversy over the issue intensified, seeing Wenham and Fudge joined in the conditionalist ranks by such names as Clark Pinnock, Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, Stephen Travis Michael Green and, as already noted, John Stott.

In the latest edition of his book, Fudge takes the opportunity of making some responses to works whose publication was prompted by the first edition and which seek to p. 54 uphold the traditional view. His frank opinion of these is that they continue to rely on tradition as the main foundation of their arguments, and do nothing to advance the exegetical understanding of the actual texts.

The main body of Fudge's book commences with an introductory chapter which sets out the importance of the doctrine of hell, and various ways in which it has been understood by Christian thinkers through past centuries. He also charts the progress of conditionalist theories amongst evangelicals. His second chapter is an examination of *aionios*, 'eternal', concluding that it has both quantitative and qualitative aspects. Quantitatively, Fudge points out that while 'eternal' certainly can mean 'forever', it is also used adjectivally of some things which clearly do not last forever, such as the Aaronic Priesthood, Caleb's inheritance, Solomon's Temple, 'and practically every other ordinance ... of the Old Testament system'.¹⁰ Thus 'eternal' in this sense means 'forever', but 'within the limits of the possibility inherent in the person or thing itself ... it speaks of unlimited time within the limits of the things it modifies'. Qualitatively, the New Testament employs *aionios* to contrast the supreme characteristic of the age to come over against the present. On this basis, 'eternal' can refer to the *quality* of being rather than its duration, and Fudge argues that it is in this context that phrases such as 'eternal punishment' should be understood. It is 'eternal' in the sense that it belongs to the aeon of which eternity is a characteristic. Thus in these contexts it is virtually synonymous with 'transcendent'. 'Eternal life', on the other hand, certainly is endless, but this is guaranteed not so much by it being described by *aionios*, but by other dimensions to it indicated by different phraseology.

Fudge then devotes two chapters to the question of the immortality of the soul and the way this has been construed historically. He shows that 'immortality' is frequently used by traditionalists to describe the ability of the soul to survive physical death; they then tend to assume from this that immortality has to be a universal human characteristic. Fudge argues that such assumptions do not accurately reflect the writings of the Fathers

⁶ B. F. C. Atkinson *Life and Immortality: An Examination of the Nature and Meaning of Life and Death as they are Revealed in the Scriptures* (n.d.).

⁷ H. Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge* (1964).

⁸ J. Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (Leicester: IVP, 1974). 2nd edn. issued as *The Enigma of Evil* in 1985, 3rd edn. issued in 1994 (Guildford: Eagle).

⁹ E. W. Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes: the Biblical Case for Conditional Immortality* revising editor, P. Cousins (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1994 2nd edn.).

¹⁰ Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, 13.

and other major theologians (including Calvin) who assert that in the fullest sense immortality belongs only to God, and that any human immortality' must therefore be derivative from him, and dependent upon him for its continuation.

Most of the remainder of the book is taken up with exegesis of the biblical texts relating to final punishment (which includes perspectives from the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha), but there is one especially noteworthy chapter which draws out the eschatological implications of the death of Christ. Fudge argues that this holds important clues for a proper understanding of the final state of the unsaved. The death of Christ is seen against the background of the Levitical sin-offerings which entailed the utter destruction of the sacrificial victim. This was [p. 55](#) designed to show the fate which sinful humanity deserves and which had instead been transferred onto the victim. Since the Levitical sacrifices were pointers to the sacrifice *par excellence* which was offered by Christ, Fudge concludes that his death also entailed complete destruction, and is therefore a pattern of the judgement awaiting sinners. Fudge's book concludes with a rebuttal of universalism, and a critique of some of the theological objections made against the conditionalist case. His conclusion is that none of these can be sustained.

Probably the doughtiest advocate of the conditionalist cause on this side of the Atlantic is John Wenham (who contributes a foreword to the new edition of Fudge's book). In a paper given at the Fourth Edinburgh Conference on Christian Dogmatics in 1991 entitled 'The Case for Conditional Immortality',¹¹ he gives an analysis of all the New Testament passages dealing with eschatological punishment. His conclusion is that in all but 1 of 264 references to the final state of the wicked there is nothing to suggest that unending torment is the final fate of the lost, but rather that the plain sense of most of these references implies destruction. Wenham argues that the traditional interpretation of these verses as teaching endless punishment derives from the control belief of the innate immortality of the soul. Like Fudge, he concludes this to be an unbiblical concept, arguing that the picture given by Scripture emphasises human mortality rather than immortality. Again, like Fudge, Wenham points out that the ability of the soul to survive physical death is not the same thing as immortality, and that while Scripture clearly asserts the former it says nothing about its nature and endurance. To interpret it as immortality is therefore an assumption which goes beyond what Scripture actually reveals.

The one reference which Wenham concedes as apparently implying unending torment is [Revelation 14:11](#). In facing up to this, Wenham firstly expresses reservations about basing doctrine on the symbolism in this most enigmatic of books. He suggests that the 'smoke of their torment [going up] for ever and ever' in this verse does not refer to the eternal state as such, but alludes to an eternal symbol denoting that final judgement has been executed. He argues that John derives his imagery from the archetypal judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah. The final result of that judgement was 'total irreversible desolation and dense smoke rising from the land'.¹² Thus it is not the actual torment that goes on for ever and ever. The smoke of the judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah remains symbolically as an eternal reminder of God's justice; what John is therefore attempting to express is the fact that the final execution of judgement on sinners entails the same order of destruction as was inflicted on [p. 56](#) Sodom and Gomorrah, and will result in a similar eternal symbolic reminder, even though the actual judgement process and its physical consequences are of finite duration.

¹¹ J. Wenham: 'The Case for Conditional Immortality', in N. M. de S. Cameron (ed.), *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, 161–91.

¹² Wenham, 'The Case for Conditional Immortality', 179.

Wenham also addresses some objections usually made against conditionalism. These include the claim that, since we were made for eternity, conditionalism negates the dignity which this entails. Wenham counters this by asking how such dignity can be enhanced by unending torment: nothing is served by ceaseless pain and a learning process about the awfulness of one's sin when there is no hope of release or reformation.

Conditionalism is also said to detract from the glow of God's justice and judgements. Wenham argues that, on the contrary, the traditional idea of eternal punishment is neither loving nor just, and speaks of sadism rather than justice. Neither is it reconcilable with the final supremacy of Christ, since it leaves part of creation eternally unredeemed. He also deals with a common misinterpretation which sees destruction as not constituting a real punishment: 'this assumes that the first death is the end and that there is no Day of Judgement and that we are not judged according to our works. This is plainly unscriptural and not the view of any conditionalist that I know.'¹³ All unrepentant sinners will receive what they deserve, and the degrees of punishment will vary accordingly, though ultimately destruction will be entailed for all of them.

It is clear that the issue of conditional immortality will continue to be a subject of debate for some time. In putting the matter firmly on the agenda probably the main contribution that scholars such as Fudge and Wenham have made is to free the concept from the smear of heresy which has usually been associated with it. It now has the status of a legitimate interpretation of Scripture, even if it remains a controversial one with which not all will agree. Part of the problem is the tendency for confusion over terminology and the exact way it should be understood; and evangelical conditionalists would certainly want to distance themselves from some ways in which the belief has been formulated. Clarifying matters and establishing a conditionalist eschatology which seeks seriously to take into account all the biblical evidence is therefore no mean achievement; for this credit must be given. We turn now to a related issue—if hell (however we understand it) is a reality, who is able to escape it, and on what basis?

III. MUST THE PIOUS PAGAN WHO HAS NEVER HEARD OF CHRIST SUFFER IN HELL?

This question has been a bone of contention for Christians ever since Porphyry raised it with Augustine in the 3rd Century AD.¹⁴ Augustine's **P.57** answer has been the foundation of the traditional response: that Jesus is the only saviour, and an explicit act of faith in him is essential for salvation. Therefore, only Christians can be saved, since it is impossible to have saving faith apart from Christ. Those without knowledge of Christ are thus without hope because they fall outside the scope of salvation, constituting a *massa damnata* which includes the greater part of humanity. Faced with the moral difficulty of condemning those who never had the chance to hear the gospel, the usual response is to appeal to general revelation. This is held to communicate enough knowledge of God's nature for the individual to respond to. Those who have never heard of Christ will not therefore be judged for rejecting him, but (since no-one ever lives up to the moral standards revealed through general revelation) for 'rejecting the light they had'.

Liberal theologians have generally recoiled from this position, and have sought to avoid its conclusion in a number of ways. These frequently entail some form of

¹³ Wenham, 'The Case for Conditional Immortality', 189.

¹⁴ As quoted by Augustine in his Letter to Deogratias, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1 vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

universalism, often associated with a religious relativism which denies Christianity its unique revelatory and salvific significance. John Hick has come to be particularly associated with this school of thought,¹⁵ and more recently the American Catholic scholar Paul Knitter.¹⁶ Both have condemned the traditional argument as unjust and unreasonable, but until recently there has been no evangelical response other than to reassert the traditional view. Now the question is being tackled by a number of evangelical scholars, notably John Sanders¹⁷ and Clark Pinnock;¹⁸ their conclusions seem set to cause perhaps more controversy in evangelical ranks than the conditional immortality issue. Rejecting traditional restrictivism, they argue that God is concerned with saving as much of humanity as possible. Their conclusion is that the final number of the redeemed will not be a tiny remnant composed only of Christians, and that general revelation and non-Christian religions both have salvific potential. Sanders terms this approach 'inclusivism'.

Inclusivists such as Sanders and Pinnock make three main criticisms of the traditional restrictivist view. First, they argue that it does not do sufficient justice to 'universalist' texts (e.g. [John 1:9](#), [3:16-17](#); [1 Tim. 1:15](#); [2:4](#); [4:10](#); [2 Pet. 3:9](#)) which assert God's desire to save all. To interpret these as saying that Jesus [p. 58](#) died for all, but that only some have the chance to respond, is simply not good enough. If salvation is available only where the gospel is preached, this means that the shortcomings of the church's evangelistic efforts are frustrating God's desire to save all humanity, and that therefore he is unable to save all those he would like to. Sanders also points out the 'double-think' which is evident when considering the final destiny of children who die in infancy. Evangelicals are quick to affirm that they will be saved by God's love; but when it comes to the question of the unevangelized, sin is made to prevail, even though the doctrine of original sin teaches that *both* groups are equally sinful and deserving of condemnation. Why is salvation possible for the first group but not the second? Sanders urges us to recognize that God has ways of making himself known to all people so that they can receive the redemption he offers.

A second criticism of the restrictivist view is that it confuses the ontological necessity of Christ for salvation with the epistemological necessity of knowing about it. The restrictive proof texts such as [Acts 4:12](#) and [John 14:6](#) certainly say that Christ is the only source of salvation, but they need not imply that explicit knowledge of this is necessary for it. In other words, although salvation is only possible only through Christ, it does not necessarily follow that only Christians are able to find it.

Third, inclusivists attack the traditional understanding of general revelation as being without salvific significance, on the grounds that it entails God providing sufficient revelation for condemnation, but insufficient for salvation; he gives men and women enough rope to hang themselves with, but no lifeline by which they can escape. The only kind of God who would do that would be one who, contrary to what Scripture says, apparently does **not** truly desire all to be saved. They argue that the traditional appeal to [Romans 1-3](#) as proving the salvific inadequacy of general revelation is exegetically flawed, pointing out that Paul is concerned to show that those with either kind of revelation are equally guilty in failing to live up to the light shown to them. If the rejection

¹⁵ J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1973).

¹⁶ P. Knitter, *No other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (London: SCM, 1985). Not to be confused with the following!

¹⁷ J. Sanders, *No other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

¹⁸ C. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: the Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

of general revelation is regarded as an implicit rejection of Christ, there seems no reason why an acceptance of it (however theologically defective) cannot be counted as an implicit acceptance of him. Restrictivists may protest that this means there can be salvation outside the light of the gospel, but Sanders reminds us (again) that they do not have any difficulties with this concept when it comes to the question of the salvation of children who die in infancy.

Sanders and Pinnock both argue that salvation should be seen as universally accessible, outside the Christian revelation as well as in. They seek to do justice both to the particularity and finality of Christ and the universal salvific will of God, maintaining that grace sufficient for salvation is available to all through general revelation. The salvation extended to those that respond to this is no less Christocentric, though they are not explicitly aware of it in those terms. They argue that God [p. 59](#) has been at work in all ages and in all cultures to make salvation accessible to all. If God genuinely wants all to be saved he must have ways of making this possible. Scriptural support for this is sought in texts which speak of God's universal love, and from Old Testament evidence which shows that God's gracious acts were not confined to the Hebrews (e.g. [Deut. 2:5, 9, 19, 22-23; Amos 9:7](#)). God did not cease from gracious dealings with other nations simply because of the special covenant with Israel by which they received special revelation. The universal covenants, ([Gen. 1:26-30; 9:8-19](#)) imply this. The covenants with Israel were complementary to the universal ones; they were not intended to supersede them, but to ensure their fulfilment by creating the historical framework in which Christ would eventually appear. The universal Noahic covenant is as much one of redemption as of physical preservation—it is preparing the way for the subsequent covenant with Abram, which effectively implements the earlier promise made to Noah. The special call of Abram makes sense only in the context of God's concern for all nations. Christian theology has mistaken Abram's election by regarding it as God somehow turning his back on other nations. Rather, in choosing Abram God was working out his plan of salvation for many. Abram was not given a special rederuptive privilege when he was chosen, but a unique vocation. Augustine and Calvin transformed the concept of election into a soteriological category; Western theology has proceeded to accept this to such a degree that it is now assumed *ex hypothesi*. Election does not refer to grace and salvation in this way, Sander argues, but to the choice of the specific to ensure the blessing of the many.

The inclusivist view cites the many Old Testament references to favoured Gentiles (e.g. Melchizedek, Enoch and Jethro) as evidence that God was still active in salvation outside of the covenant with Israel. When God judged the pagan nations it was because of moral failures rather than religious ones. The very fact that they were held accountable indicated that a genuine knowledge of God was possible. Their religion may not have harmonized with that of Israel, but the direction of the heart, not the content of theology, was what mattered to God. The righteous Gentile theme is also echoed in the New Testament with the Magi, the Canaanite woman, the Roman Centurion, and, supremely, by Cornelius. Sanders also notes with approval the inclusivist aspects of the *Westminster Confession* (8.6): 'Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after his incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy and benefits thereof were communicated unto the elect in all ages successively from the beginning of the world.' Western theology has therefore erred in losing sight of the universal scope and availability of saving grace. It has restricted God's saving purposes to synagogue and church, thus narrowing it to a tiny thread of history rather than expressing the worldwide scope of salvation history as portrayed in the early chapters of Genesis.

Pinnock argues that it is helpful to make a distinction between Christians and 'Believers'. Believers are those who have responded to general [p. 60](#) revelation and

exercised the faith principle of responding to God; however deficient their theology they are made acceptable to God on the basis of faith. The Old Testament saints were ‘believers’ in this sense. Christians are those who have come into the fullness of God’s saving revelation and who know about the work of Christ explicitly, with the blessings of sonship which ‘believers’ do not yet have, such as the assurance of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The source of salvation is the same for both groups—Christ. In considering the significance of general revelation it is necessary to remember its source—God. God is the God who saves, so it follows that all revelation—general as well as special—must have a salvific potential. Salvation or condemnation depends on the response to it. Those who turn their backs on the truths in general revelation are heading for condemnation. Scripture speaks of general revelation as a ‘witness’ to God (e.g. [Acts 14:7](#); [Rom. 1:20](#); [Ps. 19:1](#)) which seems to indicate that saving faith can be arrived at through it. This is not arrived at through human reasoning but by the prompting and instruction of God ([Rom. 1:19](#)). Those saved in this way will be those who in spiritual anguish in the face of sin have cried out to whatever representation of God they knew. [Romans 1–3](#) implies that those with a proper response to general revelation can commit themselves to God’s mercy. We must also remember the promise of Scripture that those who truly seek God will find him.

On the basis of these arguments, inclusivists widen the role of the Holy Spirit in salvation history rather more than has been customary in the Western theological tradition. Rather than linking his activity to the Christian dispensation and within the church, they see the Holy Spirit as having been active in all people in all ages convicting them of sin, opening the door for them to respond to whatever revelation God has given them. So if the capacity to respond to this does not come about through reason but by God’s initiative, then it is a gift of grace which is capable of being manifested outside of the church. The church’s privilege has been to receive the knowledge of the Holy Spirit and salvation, rather than the exclusive title to it. While it remains true that there is no salvation outside Christ, there can be salvation outside the church.

Inclusivists also believe that a proper understanding of the cosmic nature of the work of Christ supports their position. This results in a contemporary recasting of the Alexandrian Logos theology. [John 1:14–18](#) reminds us that the Word existed prior to the Incarnation and was active in enlightening humanity. The revelation of the Word was thus not confined to the period of the Incarnation; that was indeed the supreme revelation, but not the only one. Many of the early Fathers such as Clement, Justin and Ireneaus, viewed what was best in paganism as having been revealed by God. They believed that the Word was active in revealing himself outside the covenant with Israel, that those who responded would be saved; and they did not hesitate to claim that the god of the pagan was the same god the Christian worshipped. (That did not [p.61](#) mean that they did not criticize the way they worshipped.) Inclusivists claim that the unevangelized who worship God in spirit and in truth are genuinely saved, even though some of their worship, practices, and perceptions of God may need correction. It is the communication of these correctives that lies at the heart of the great commission, so that the good news of what has been accomplished by God in Christ may be enjoyed in all its fullness.

Pinnock is specially concerned to establish an evangelical theology of religions. He agrees that there is much in non-Christian religions which is negative, but feels that evangelicals have given insufficient credit to other aspects which are noble and good, something which the Bible itself recognizes in what Pinnock terms the ‘holy pagan tradition’, already noted above. He argues that it was these aspects of their respective faiths which made Melchizedek, Abimelech, Jethro, and those like them acceptable to God, and that it is therefore possible for believing men and women of other faiths to enjoy a right relationship with him, under the terms of the Noahic covenant. In this sense, he is

happy to accept the term 'pagan saints', though he is uncomfortable with Rahner's 'anonymous Christians'. The acid tests are whether someone truly fears God (under whatever name he is worshipped), and whether that person seeks righteousness in their behaviour. 'Faith is what pleases God. The fact that different kinds of believers are accepted by God proves that the issue for God is not the content of theology but the reality of faith.'¹⁹ This asserts the principle of justification by faith which has always been the cornerstone of evangelical theology. The exact knowledge an individual needs to be able to exercise such saving faith we cannot tell, nor can we know with certainty who such people are. 'All we know for sure is that people are free to respond to God anywhere in the world, thanks to his grace. This encourage us to be open to the work of God in the wider world as we proclaim the gospel and encounter outsiders.'²⁰ Evangelicals, therefore, need to be more positive in their attitudes to those of other religions. What is needed is a middle way which avoids the extremes of, on the one hand, rejecting all non-Christian religions as worthless, and, on the other, of naively regarding them as having equal validity. '[I]t is possible to appreciate positive elements in other faiths, recognising that God has been at work among them. On the other hand, it is not necessary to be blind to oppression and bondage in religion, Christ being our norm and criterion for measuring. Spiritual discernment ... is what is critical.'²¹

Pinnock believes it is helpful to distinguish between 'objective religion' (the beliefs and practices of a given religious system) and 'subjective religion' (the piety, faith, worship and fear of God as it is expressed in the life of [p. 62](#) someone within that system). We should ask not which religion a person belongs to, but rather, what religion belongs to that person. That is not to say that the theology of a religion is unimportant. It can help or hinder the exercise of saving faith. But Pinnock argues that 'there is enough truth in most religions for people to take hold of and put their trust in God's mercy'.²²

Pinnock also urges us to recognize that religions (including Christianity) are not static. Their traditions are evolving dynamically. They form an important element in the totality of the historical and cultural continuum which will find its ultimate purposive resolution in the final triumph of Christ. Pinnock speculates that God is at work in all religions, guiding this evolution in such a way as to make the apprehension of the saving-faith principle clearer for those within them, and in the process, more open to the message of the gospel. He cites recent interactions of Christianity with some traditions of both Buddhism and Islam as examples of this process. This knowledge should encourage us to approach other religions in an open and positive way, rather than with the uneasy suspicion and distrust which is usually characteristic of the evangelical attitude.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is obvious that both the subjects dealt with in this article will continue to give rise to controversy and debate for some time, and that much ink remains to be split before the last word is written. Many will see them as perhaps threatening, challenging as they do some long-cherished and sincerely held beliefs which have been close to the very heart of evangelicalism. In dealing with them we would do well to heed the words of Fudge.

¹⁹ Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 105.

²⁰ Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 106.

²¹ Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 109.

²² Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 111.

Writing of conditionalism, he states that the debate ‘may test the depth of the evangelical church’s practical commitment to the authority of Scripture. It is very easy to profess that the Bible is our final standard and measure of doctrine. It is quite another matter to actually scrutinize a cherished doctrine, long held by a majority of Christians, in the bright pure light of God’s Word ... Indeed our evangelical will ... is now on the line. May God make us faithful in deed as in word’.²³

These wise words should guide us as we approach both these issues.²⁴

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Divine Justice and Universal Grace: A Calvinistic Proposal

by Terrance Tiessen

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THE PROPOSAL

Since Augustine’s time, Christian theologians have not achieved consensus on the role or operation of divine grace in salvation. By the Second Council of Orange (A.D. 529) Augustinianism had been absolved of the charge from Faustus of Riez that it was fatalist, and the church had affirmed the absolute necessity of prevenient grace and the inability of the human will to initiate faith¹ That did not, however, establish a consensus concerning who is *determinative* in the personal appropriation of salvation, the gracious God or the responsive human individual. After centuries of discussion there now seems to be an unresolvable disagreement, within the evangelical community, between Lutheran and Wesleyan theologians, on the one hand, and Calvinists on the other.

Calvinists (within the tradition of Augustine) stand convinced that the grace of God must be the determinative factor in salvation so that boasting of the human contribution

²³ Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, xii.

²⁴ All the works cited above contain a wealth of references to other material, and the following will also be of interest to those who wish to pursue these subjects at greater depth. The evangelical debate on conditionalism is mentioned in D. Tidball, *Who are the Evangelicals?* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994), ch. 8. His notes on that chapter also contain helpful references. Suggestions for further reading include: J. Blanchard, *Whatever happened to Hell?* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1993); O. Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* (London: Epworth, 1958) and *Immortality and Resurrection* (London: Macmillan, 1958); P. Cotterell, *Mission and Meaninglessness* (London: SPCK, 1990), esp. chs. 4–6; L. Dixon, *The Other side of the Good News* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1992); A. Fernando, *Crucial Questions about Hell* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1991); D. Pawson, *The Road to Hell* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992); H. Thielicke, *Death and Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970).

¹ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Distiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 192.

is made impossible ([Eph. 2:8–10](#)). Those whom God has chosen to salvation, he brings to faith by means of an efficacious grace which applies to the elect the saving benefits objectively accomplished by Christ's death for his own people. Synergism is viewed as a constant threat to divine grace.²

This Augustinian-Calvinist statement of sovereign grace characteristically encounters three objections: [p. 64](#) 1) some biblical texts speak of Christ's saving work in terms that are universal; 2) the Calvinist approach is deterministic and negates the significance of the human decision; 3) the Calvinist scheme makes God unjust in two ways, a) by the particularity of the divine choice which denies saving grace to many people; and b) by the condemnation of those who have no ability to repent and believe.

These objections have been addressed by Calvin and many others after him but the objectors remain unsatisfied. I will not address the scandal of divine particularity in 'unconditional election'.³ On that point, the answer appears to me to lie in a proper appreciation for the undeservedness of grace. That anyone receives saving grace is a cause for praise greater than our surprise that God should have chosen (for good reasons which have not yet been revealed to us), not to save everyone. I will not attempt to modify that basic tenet of Calvinism. This is, therefore, a 'Calvinistic proposal'. I accept that God has chosen his people from 'before the foundation of the world', that he provided for their justification by the sacrificial, penalty bearing death of Christ for his people (the righteous for the guilty), and that it is these people whom the Father effectively draws to faith in Christ, by an inner working of the Spirit. I hope, however, that the following proposal will alleviate to some extent the offensiveness of the particularity of divine grace, specifically with regard to the question of the justice of divine judgement (objection 3 b above). It may make Calvinism slightly more plausible even to Calvinists.

I will consider three subjects: 1) the accessibility of saving revelation; 2) the extent of an inner enablement to faith by the Holy Spirit; and 3) the divine intent in Christ's work. Calvinist evangelicals have widely asserted that only those who know about Christ's saving work, and who trust in him for salvation, can be saved, and that the Holy Spirit enables only the elect to respond in faith. This teaching often elicits a response that, if it were true, God would be unjust to condemn those who have not received the gospel and those who do receive it but who are unable to believe. It is my proposal, however, 1) that God makes himself known to everyone in a manner that is adequate to elicit a faith which would be justifying; and 2) that this revelation is accompanied at some point by an inner work of grace which remedies the ill effects of the fall so that everyone is able to respond in faith to the self-revelation of God. The position taken on these two points then calls for a brief reexamination of the divine intent in the atonement.

UNIVERSALLY ACCESSIBLE SALVIFIC REVELATION

John Sanders has helpfully described the manner in which Calvinist theologians have argued for a restrictivist understanding of salvation, that is, that 'all the unevangelized are damned'. As representative of this position, he presents the [P. 65](#) arguments of Augustine,

² Hughes, *op. cit.*, 203. Thus George Whitefield described his main concern to John Wesley: 'You plainly make salvation depend not on God's *free grace*, but on man's *free will* ...' (*Whitefield's Journals* [London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960]. 587; cited by Alan P. F. Sell. *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism and Salvation*, Studies in Christian Thought and History [Warthing: H. E. Walter Ltd., 1982], 74).

³ Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, tr. Hugo Bekker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 8.

Calvin and R. C. Sproul.⁴ Sanders himself argues for a more inclusivist understanding and presents as representatives of such a hope, John Wesley, C. S. Lewis and Clark Pinnock.⁵ What immediately strikes one is that all of these people are non-Calvinistic in their theology. It gives the impression that Calvinism is naturally restrictivist while Wesleyanism is more likely to be inclusivist.

In fact, a variety of approaches taken by Reformed theologians have provided ground for optimism concerning the salvation of the unevangelized. Among the first generation of Reformers we find a view that allows for the salvation of the unevangelized, in Ulrich Zwingli's strong emphasis on divine sovereignty.⁶ All the elect will be saved, whether or not they hear the gospel, in accordance with their response to the revelation which they do receive. Those who do not learn of Christ respond to God with a virtuous life, since election is to good works.

Moïse Amyraut (whose 'hypothetical universalism' is discussed below) also asserted the possibility of salvation for an individual who does not hear the gospel 'provided that he profit from the testimonies of mercy that God gives him'.⁷ As Roger Nicole sums up Amyraut's approach, 'In nature there is a sufficient presentation of the truth so that men may exercise faith if they only will do so.'⁸ In our own century, Karl Barth has been noted for his more hopeful view of the final destiny of humankind, all of whom are elect in Christ. Somewhat reminiscent of that approach is the proposal by Neal Punt that we should assume everyone to be elect in Christ except those whom Scripture specifically excludes. Thus, only those who explicitly reject God are reprobate.⁹

My own thesis may share elements of these proposals but it differs from all of them in significant ways. I affirm Christ's unique position as Saviour of the world, in the sense that no one is (has been or will be) saved on any ground other than the obedient life and death of Jesus. ([Jn. 14:26](#); [Acts 4:12](#); [1 Tim. 2:5-6](#); [Rom. 5:12-19](#)). I further affirm that this salvation, which was objectively achieved for all time, by [p. 66](#) Jesus Christ, is subjectively appropriated by faith. Salvation is now, and always has been, only by God's grace, through faith and not by our own good deeds ([Rom. 3:24-28](#); [5:9, 19](#); [8:1](#); [10:4](#); [1 Cor. 1:30](#); [6:11](#); [2 Cor. 5:21](#); [Gal. 2:16](#); [3:11](#); [Eph. 2:8-9](#); [Phil. 3:9](#)).

It is in regard to the necessary content of saving faith that restrictivist positions are unsatisfactory. Scripture teaches clearly that, in God's justice, he holds people accountable only for the revelation concerning God and his will which has been available to them. People are not condemned for not responding properly to revelation which they did not receive. Only God knows for certain when an acceptable faith exists in a person's life, but

⁴ John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 51-59.

⁵ Sanders, *op. cit.*, 249-64. Cf. Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

⁶ See Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought* vol. 3: *From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Abingdon, 1975), 69, citing G. W. Locher, "Die Prädestinations-lehre Huldrych Zwingli's," TZ 12 (1956): 526-48.

⁷ *Brief Traitté de la predestination et de ses principales dependances*. 1634 ed., 81; 1658 ed., 68. Cited by Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 211.

⁸ Roger Nicole, 'Amyraldianism', in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Edwin H. Palmer (Wilmington, Delaware: The National Foundation for Christian Education, 1964), 1:186.

⁹ Neal Punt, *Unconditional Good News: Toward an Understanding of Biblical Universalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

its presence is generally evident in the honour and thankfulness that is expressed toward God, and in a will to obey God's commands. The necessary focus or object of that faith varies according to the content of the revelation which God has made available to each individual.

These theses could be expanded and demonstrated biblically, but it is an area that has been given much attention in recent years. I have written regarding it elsewhere¹⁰ and will simply outline the main biblical rationale for my position here.

Divine Judgement According to Knowledge

On the question of the salvation of the unevangelized, whether they be infant mortalities or adult pagans, evangelicals often plead ignorance about the eternal destiny of others and cite the rhetorical question of Abraham, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?' ([Gen. 18:25](#)). We all know that he will. We also recognize that there is a fundamental injustice at work when people who are inculpably ignorant of some fact are condemned for not having acted according to a truth they did not know.

Paul states this principle in [Romans 2:12](#), 'all who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.' By 'the law' he means the law as given by special revelation to Moses. He is not suggesting that anyone is actually without some knowledge of God's law. That would leave all the unevangelized sinless. On the contrary, he asserts that the Gentiles also have a knowledge of God's moral will through their consciences, the law of God 'written on their hearts'. The witness of the conscience is not reliable and it must be reeducated on the basis of Scripture, but we must treat it formally as God's voice to us.¹¹ p. 67

God has thus left no one without a moral witness and we are judged according to the knowledge we have, not according to a knowledge that we do not have. On this basis, we acknowledge that people who lived before the Word became flesh were saved by grace through faith, though not through faith in Jesus. They did not know about Jesus and so they were not obligated to believe in him. When that knowledge came to them, of course, their obligation changed. [John 3](#) is very explicit about the fate of those who see the light in Jesus and reject it because they prefer darkness. It says nothing, however, about those upon whom that light has not shone. The principle Paul stated concerning the Old Testament scripture is true also of the New Testament. 'All who have sinned apart from the law [the Scriptures] will also perish apart from the law [the Scriptures]' ([Rom. 2:12](#)). Judgement will be according to knowledge.

In both of Paul's sermons to Gentile audiences, in Acts, he assumed this principle that judgement is proportionate to revelation. To the audience of idolaters in Lystra, Paul said that 'in past generations he [God] allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good—giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy' ([Acts 14:16, 17](#)). It is highly implausible that Paul is suggesting that God accepted all the various forms of worship and conduct which the nations chose in their ignorance of God through lack of revelation. His point is that: 1) God had given them some revelation, in the form of his

¹⁰ Cf. 'Can the Unevangelized Be Saved?: A Review Article', *Didaskalia* 4/2 (Nov 1993); 'Salvation of the Unevangelized: A Position Paper Prepared for Delegates of the SEND International Council, 1996', an unpublished paper; and *Irenaeus on the Salvation of the Unevangelized*. ATLA Monograph Series, No. 31 (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1993).

¹¹ Paul spells this out specifically with regard to believers. Those who violate the voice of conscience sin against God, even if they do not break God's moral law. 'Those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they do not act from faith' ([Rom. 14:23](#)).

providential care for them. As indicated in [Rom 1:21](#), this left them culpable if they did not respond by honouring God as God and giving him thanks. 2) In Paul's generation, they were receiving a clearer revelation of God's truth and of his will and their obligation was increasing accordingly.

To the philosophers of Athens, Paul is even more explicit about this principle. 'God has overlooked the times of human ignorance' but 'now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead' ([Acts 17:30–31](#)). Clearly, there is an ignorance that is not culpable. When the gospel concerning the resurrected Jesus is preached, the ignorance is dispelled and God's 'overlooking' is therefore no longer appropriate.

Some assume that the end of the 'times of ignorance' is the point at which Christ's earthly work is done.¹² It seems more likely that Paul locates it at the point of knowledge of that event. For the Athenians, it did not happen until Paul proclaimed this truth to them. The same would then be true for all p. 68 people prior to the proclamation of the gospel to them.¹³

Jesus speaks very specifically to this matter, on another occasion, when he says: 'If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin' ([Jn. 15:22](#)). It is those who receive the light and prefer the darkness that are here described, not those who have no knowledge of the light that came into the world in Jesus. This does not mean that it is better not to remove people's ignorance by preaching the gospel even though it increases their culpability. They were culpable of sin with regard to the revelation they had received before the gospel arrived. Their ignorance was not so complete as to vindicate them entirely.¹⁴ The gospel will, indeed, increase the guilt of those who reject it. But, to those who believe, it is the power of God to salvation, and those who have been 'destined for eternal life' will become believers through the proclamation of the gospel ([Ac. 13:48](#)).

The content of Saving Faith

Old Testament Revelation and Faith

Old Testament believers were saved by grace through faith although they did not know of Jesus' death and did not, therefore, put their trust in him. The writer of Hebrews identifies the minimum content of saving faith: 'without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him' ([Heb. 11:6](#)).

¹² E.g. John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, c1993), 115, cf. 131.

¹³ I. Howard Marshall also understands the text in this way. He writes, 'Until the coming of the revelation of God's true nature in Christianity men lived in *ignorance* of him. But now the proclamation of the Christian message brings this time to an end *so far as those who hear the gospel are concerned* [emphasis mine]; they no longer have an excuse for their ignorance. God was prepared to overlook their ignorance, but now he will do so no longer....' *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*. The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 289–90.

¹⁴ As Don Carson rightly asserts: 'The idea is not that if Jesus had not come the people would have continued in sinless perfection—as if the coming of Jesus introduced for the first time sin and its attendant guilt before God.... Rather, by coming and speaking to them Jesus incited the most central and controlling of sins: rejection of God's gracious revelation, rebellion against God, decisive preference for darkness rather than light.' *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 526.

The particular faith which was exercised by individuals under the old covenant is very instructive. Noah 'built an ark ... and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith' (v. 7). Abraham 'obeyed ... and he set out, not knowing where he was going' (v. 8); he 'considered him faithful who had promised' (v. 11); and so he 'offered up Isaac', believing 'that God is able even to raise someone from the dead'. Isaac invoked blessings for the future on Jacob and Esau' (v. 20), and Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph (v. 21). Joseph, in turn 'made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his burial' (v. 22). p. 69 Moses' parents hid him for three months. Moses left Egypt unafraid 'for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover, (vv. 27-28). Rahab 'received the spies in peace' (v. 31), and many others underwent unspeakable forms of persecution for their faith but refused to give up their firm trust in God and the future that he had prepared for them (vv 32-38).

The people of Israel demonstrated their faith in God by obedience, by trust in his faithfulness and by an expectation of the fulfilment of his promises. It was not the mere practice of the prescribed rituals of sacrifice that brought them forgiveness of sin, but sincere faith in God, which was demonstrated in acts of obedience and mercy, which elicited God's approval. The animal sacrifices were instituted by God as types of Christ's perfect sacrifice and those who brought such sacrifices for sin were explicitly acknowledging their guilt, repenting of it, and casting themselves upon the mercy of God for forgiveness. They were not saved by the animal sacrifices but by the sacrifice of Christ which was typified in them ([Heb. 9](#)).

This is not an assertion of two covenant theology, namely, that God has established two ways of approach to himself and that the old covenant continues to be his way for Jews, so that evangelism among them is not necessary. But, it is quite artificial to make the historical occurrence of Christ's death and resurrection the critical dividing line epistemologically, so that no Jew could be saved after Christ without explicit faith in Christ, though it was possible before Christ came.¹⁵ The problem created by making this chronological divide is particularly evident in the case of those whom Paul describes as the true circumcision ([Rom 2:29](#)). They were inwardly, spiritually of the faith of Abraham. Such people were 'saved' without explicitly having placed their faith in Jesus, just as Abraham had been. We can not suggest that, on the day that Jesus rose from the dead, they suddenly lost their salvation.

General Revelation and Faith The problem is greater with reference to those who do not have the special revelation that God gave to Israel. Clearly everyone has enough knowledge to be justly condemned. Apart from original guilt in Adam, all who live to moral consciousness violate their own consciences. All fall short of God's glory ([Rom. 3:23](#)). Is it possible that God has given many people sufficient revelation to constitute them justly condemned but insufficient revelation to permit them to be saved? [Romans 1:18-23](#) is frequently cited as evidence that general revelation is sufficient p. 70 grounds to condemn people but insufficient to lead them to salvation.¹⁶ This is because people have the law

¹⁵ It is interesting to find this distinction between the chronological and the epistemological in the writing of an unknown preacher of the fourth or fifth century, Pseudo-Chrysostom, *Homily on Easter 1,7* (*Sources Chrétiennes* 36, 61), cited in Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology in the Light of Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 3. He wrote: 'As far as we are concerned, Christ's immolation on our behalf takes place when we become aware of this grace and we understand the life conferred on us by this sacrifice.'

¹⁶ Cf. Bruce Demarest's review of the positions of Luther, Calvin and the Puritans on general revelation and its value for salvation. *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1982), 43-73.

written on their hearts and they break it. They are culpable sinners. But the revelation of God in conscience, creation and providence purportedly offers no knowledge which could elicit a faith which would be instrumental in justification. Special revelation is necessary for salvation to occur.

J. Herbert Kane finds a thread of hope in [Romans 2:6, 7](#). There Paul asserts that God will 'repay according to each one's deeds: to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life'. Kane suggests that 'in the light of [Rom 2:6-7](#) we must not completely rule out the possibility, however remote, that here and there throughout history there may have been the singular person who got to heaven without the full light of the gospel'.¹⁷ We need to be wary, however, of anything that attributes a saving effect to human works. Paul has been very clear that salvation is always by grace through faith and never by works ([Eph. 2:8, 9](#); cf. [Rom. 3:20](#); [Ac. 13:39](#); [Gal. 2:16](#); [Psa. 143:2](#)). [Romans 2:6-7](#) cannot be suggesting that there are some who might be saved by 'patiently doing good', if that implies that deeds of personal righteousness can ever be the ground of final justification. On the other hand, we should not rule out the possibility that the Spirit of God might do a work in the heart of those who have only general revelation which would elicit a response of trust in the Creator and Judge and of thankfulness. In such cases, the patient doing of good is evidence of a seeking after 'glory and honour and immortality' which is effected by the work of the Spirit, and this would account for God's giving such people eternal life ([2:7](#)).

Frequently, Paul's statement in [Romans 1:18](#) has been pushed further than Paul's own argument takes it. Paul teaches that 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of *those who* by their wickedness suppress the truth' (italics mine) and it is often assumed that Paul is indicating that everyone, ultimately and finally, does this,¹⁸ but he does not say so. By God's grace, people stop doing this or none would be saved. What Paul does clearly state is that those who do suppress the truth of creational revelation and do not honour God as God or give him thanks ([1:21](#)) are without excuse and that this sinful response to general revelation, when it persists, leads to increasingly more serious forms of sin.

David Clark has suggested that [Romans 1:18-23](#) is 'consistent with the claim that natural revelation fails to bring salvation to those who are p. 71 rebellious and wicked, but potentially leads to salvation for those who respond to it'.¹⁹ Clark Pinnock suggests that salvation is available on the basis of three covenants, the covenants, with Noah, Abraham and the one ratified by Jesus. It is faith that pleases God. The content of theology is less essential. Prevenient grace makes faith possible for all. Like Paul, we should build upon the truth that people already possess. We need to be modest both epistemologically and ecclesiastically while maintaining a firm confidence in the uniqueness and decisiveness of Jesus for salvation.²⁰

The major problem, at this point, is the lack of biblical examples of people whom God accepted on the basis of their proper response to general revelation. In the Old Testament, people who evidence a proper relationship to God, outside of Israel, all had special revelation in some form. Cornelius, in the New Testament, was certainly blessed with special revelation through his synagogue worship. On the other hand, evangelicals may

¹⁷ J. Herbert Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 164.

¹⁸ This is for instance, the reading given by John Piper, *op. cit.*, n. 23, 164; n. 39, 166.

¹⁹ William V. Crockett and James G. Sigountos, *Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 41.

²⁰ Pinnock, *op. cit.*, 97.

have a common tendency to underestimate the extent to which special revelation is experienced.

A more realistic assessment of the situation of the peoples of the world in regard to divine revelation must take into account the following factors: 1) the remnants of the pre-Babel knowledge of God which have been passed on (however distortedly) in their cultural and religious traditions; 2) the contact of the peoples and of the religions of the world with the inspired Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; 3) the fact that God still encounters people directly (in dreams, visions and theophanies), as he did in the Old Testament, and that a host of angels also serve him as messengers;²¹ 4) the fact that the Word operates throughout the world, just as he did before the Incarnation, in ways not limited by his embodiment; 5) the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who works in a special way in and through those whom he indwells in new covenant blessing but whose work is not restricted to the church; 6) the possibility of universal encounters with Christ, at the time of death. In short, it is doubtful that people come to God in acceptable faith through general revelation alone but we must not underestimate the extent to which special revelation reaches the peoples of the world, and the extent to which the Holy Spirit's convicting and enlightening work utilizes that revelation to draw them to God.

The Necessity of Preaching

[Romans 10](#) is widely cited, within the evangelical tradition of missionary motivation, to argue for the [p. 72](#) necessity of the preaching of the gospel for people to be saved. The conclusion is often drawn that no one can be saved unless this gospel is heard from missionaries and is believed. But this use of the text has distorted it from its context in Paul's letter.

C. E. B. Cranfield aptly states the point that is being made in the much cited verses [14-15a](#).

At this point Paul is concerned to show that the Jews have really had full opportunity to call upon the name of the Lord in the sense of vv. [12](#) and [13](#), and are therefore without excuse. That all along the law which was constantly on their lips was pointing to Christ, that all along He had been its innermost meaning, did not by itself constitute this full opportunity. The fullness of opportunity was not present for them until the message that the promises have indeed now been fulfilled had actually been declared to them by messengers truly commissioned for the purpose by God Himself. Paul makes his point by asking the question whether this fullness of opportunity has really been present for the Jews by means of this chain of related questions, and then answering in the affirmative in v. [15b](#).²²

Paul's argument is that, in the case of the Jewish people, by and large, three of the necessary conditions for salvation had been met, 1) God had commissioned messengers; 2) the messengers had preached; and 3) their 'report' (cf [Isa 52:7](#)) had been heard. But, in spite of this, Israel had not believed, and so the final necessary condition had not been fulfilled. A possible explanation for Israel's unbelief in the Christ might have been that

²¹ It has been estimated that 'fully half of Muslim converts in some countries experienced a dream or vision that convinced them to accept Christ'. Related to me in an E-mail message from Ken Guenther, Philippines, Jan 4, 1996. As a missionary in India, my father met many people whose first meeting with Christ was in a dream or vision.

²² C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Vol. II. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 533.

they had not heard, but Paul states strongly that this is not the case: 'Did they not hear? Of course they did' ([10:18](#)).

In verses [19–20](#), Paul then goes on to demonstrate that his people have 'ignored so many of its own scriptures which are now being fulfilled in Israel's rejection and the nations' acceptance of the word of faith'.²³ If the Gentiles, who are a 'no-people' have believed, it can certainly not be argued that Israel has not heard. As Cranfield sadly notes, 'the ignorance which is blameworthy has been characteristic of them; but *the ignorance which would have constituted an excuse* they cannot claim [emphasis supplied].'²⁴ For, as Cranfield correctly notes concerning verse [18](#), 'had the Jews not heard, they would have had an excuse for their not having believed.'²⁵ (Cf. [In. 15:22](#).)

Paul declares that Israel is without excuse for their failure to experience the 'righteousness that is by faith' in Jesus because the gospel was taken to them by divinely commissioned preachers, and they refused to believe. Paul is not making a statement about whether they would have been guilty of unbelief if they had not heard the gospel. The point is that they did hear it and so they [p. 73](#) were guilty. The basic principle of salvation by faith, which comes by hearing the 'word' applies to *all forms* of revelation. As indicated above, however, there is no one without some form of divine self-revelation. To imply from Romans chapter ten that only through hearing the gospel concerning Jesus can people be saved, is to beg the question at issue, namely the salvific value of other forms of revelation. In the case of the Jewish people of whom Paul is thinking, that revelation had included the gospel concerning Jesus.

At Death Encounter with Christ

Will there be people who have not known the Son but whom the Father will receive? This seems highly implausible, given Jesus' insistence that no one comes to the Father except through the Son and that no one knows the Father except the Son and 'anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' ([Mt. 11:27](#)). One legitimate approach would be to stress the revelatory activity of the Son in all forms of divine self-revelation so that whatever revelation of God one responds to is one that has been mediated by the Son. In fact, then, no one does come (or ever has come) to the Father except through the Son's mediatory and revelatory work. There is a logic about the economy of the Trinity, however, that makes the hypothesis of an at-death-encounter with Jesus an attractive position. It allows one to confess that faith in Jesus Christ is necessary, while not placing an overemphasis on the need to know information about Christ before death. It is a particularly useful hypothesis with regard to the salvation of those who die in infancy or who are mentally incompetent.²⁶

Paul expected to be with Christ at the point of his departure from the body, and I take this to be descriptive of the situation of all believers in Christ ([2 Cor. 5:6–8](#); [Phil. 1:23, 24](#)). There is nothing in Scripture which would exclude the possibility that a meeting with Christ is the experience of all people, not only believers, though it is obviously not a joy for those who have lived in disbelief and rebellion against God. This is a view that has been

²³ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*. Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1988), 631.

²⁴ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, 538.

²⁵ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, 537.

²⁶ It is interesting to recall that, for Irenaeus, in the second century, a major purpose of the millennium is so that Old Testament believers might meet Christ and thus be prepared for the vision of the Father. I have noted the interesting prospects of this view also for the unevangelized who respond properly to general revelation. Terrance Tiessen, *Irenaeus on the Salvation of the Unevangelized*, 168–70.

more commonly found among Catholic than among Protestant theologians.²⁷ (I do not consider [1 Peter 3:19–21](#) to be helpful on this point, though many do who accept the basic proposal of [p. 74](#) a universal encounter with Christ.²⁸) It is very important that we do not confuse this at-death-encounter with a ‘second chance’. This is not a chance for those who rejected Christ during their life time to accept him afterward. It is an opportunity, rather, for those who have had faith that God is and that he rewards those who diligently seek him ([Heb 11:6](#)), who had honoured God as God and given him thanks ([Rom 1:21](#)) but who had never met Jesus. Having responded, by God’s grace, to the form in which God revealed himself to them during their lives, they will then respond with faith and joy to the Son who had been at work in their lives, though they were ignorant of much about him.²⁹

UNIVERSALLY SUFFICIENT GRACE

Traditional Calvinism on Human Depravity

I have attempted to show that God has made himself known to all people in a manner that enables them to respond to him with a faith that is justifying. This removes any ground for the charge that God is unjust in condemning people for not believing in Christ when they have not heard of him. The traditional Calvinistic understanding of human depravity and of efficacious grace, however, leaves the charge of unjust condemnation still unanswered. Calvinists have asserted that the fall was totally spiritually debilitating. It left all of Adam’s descendants guilty before God by virtue of their solidarity with Adam in his original disobedience ([Rom. 5:12–21](#)). It also made them subject to death and placed them in bondage to sin and Satan. Their natures have been so seriously depraved that they can do nothing which pleases God. Being in a state of rebellion, their wills are bound. They sin willingly but they are unable not to sin, and specifically are not able to repent of their sin and trust in God for salvation.

Unless the Spirit of God intervenes and frees sinful human wills, people will not (and in a sense, cannot) believe.³⁰ They are, nevertheless, culpable for this unbelief because their inability is self-incurred, in their union with Adam.³¹ God graciously frees the wills

²⁷ A luminous presentation of this view is found, for instance, in the work of Ladislaus Boros, an Hungarian Jesuit, now teaching in Austria, *Pain and Providence*, tr. Edward Quinn (Mainz: Matthias-Grüne-wald-Verlag, 1965; reprint, London: Burns and Oates Ltd., 1966). It is also the position favoured by Clark Pinnock (op. cit.), and it is beautifully portrayed in allegorical form in the final work of C. S. Lewis’s delightful Narnia series, *The Last Battle*, when the Calormene soldier who had sincerely served Tash all his life is met by Aslan at the moment of his death and is greeted as a ‘son’.

²⁸ Cf. the material in Sanders, op. cit., 181–88.

²⁹ John Sanders cites Donald Bloesch as arguing the benefits of this proposal if one assumes that people can be ‘condemned to hell only for explicit rejection of Jesus as Lord’ (op. cit., 70–71), and he gives an extended treatment of the hypothesis of ‘eschatological evangelization’ (177–214).

³⁰ A representative statement of this position is found, for instance, in Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1949), 246–50.

³¹ E.g., Louis Berkhof, op. cit., 250: ‘We should not forget that the inability under consideration is self-imposed, has a moral origin, and is not due to any limitation which God has put upon man’s being. Man is unable as a result of the perverted choice made in Adam.’ The concept of ‘self-incurred inability in Adam’ is a difficult one for individualistic westerners to comprehend, and even more difficult to accept. The legitimacy of such an arrangement should be more evident, however, if we consider that it is on a similarly constituted ground of union with Christ, the righteous one, that God is able to be just while justifying sinners ([Rom 3:25](#)).

of those whom he intends to save (often spoken of as regeneration), so that they entrust themselves to [p. 75](#) God's mercy, willingly and joyfully, and are saved.

Even if we grant the propriety of a self-incurred inability in Adam, through a divinely established solidarity of the race with Adam, it is striking that 'Scripture universally relates man's ultimate judgement to his own moral "works", which fall short of God's standards, and not in the first instance to his union with Adam (e.g. [Mt 7:21-27](#); [13:41](#); [25:31-46](#); [Lk 3:9](#); [Rom 2:5-10](#); [Rev 20:11-14](#)).'³² If human responsibility is consistently attributed to actual or personal rather than original sin, it is peculiar that the inability which made that sin unavoidable should remain located in the Adamic fall. Likewise, the biblical expressions of God's hatred ([Hos. 9:15](#); [Jer. 12:8](#); [Psa. 5:5](#); [11:5](#)) and anger ([Ex. 32:10-11](#); [Jdgs. 2:14](#); [Jer. 10:24](#); [Psa. 30:5](#); [106:40](#); [Rom. 2:5](#); [9:22](#)) toward his people because of their sin are focused on the wicked and rebellious deeds which they were doing at the time. The strength of this divine disapproval is difficult to understand if these people were absolutely incapable of repentance and faith.

The grace given to the elect is efficacious. This is not to deny that the non-elect experience the grace of God. There is a 'common grace' which all people experience. It is seen in a variety of ways: 1) the good gifts of rain and harvest that God gives to both righteous and unrighteous, regardless of their undeservingness of these gifts; 2) the institutions which God has established for the restraint of sin in society, the state and the family; 3) the humanly praiseworthy deeds of the unregenerate who often show a large measure of unselfishness, courage, kindness and other virtues; and 4) the patience of God toward sinners who deserve death, and to whose consciences and hearts God speaks in ways that pull people toward himself. What only the elect experience, however, is the special grace that enables them to repent of their sin and to believe. When this grace is given to them it is effective in securing their salvation.

The Lutheran Proposal of Enabling Grace

Lutheran theologians have generally been unwilling to affirm the particularity of efficacious grace and the priority of divine unconditional election of those who are saved. It is posited, instead, that the proclamation of the gospel is accompanied by an enabling grace which empowers the hearer not to resist the Word of God and hence to respond in faith. Paul Althaus indicates that, in the theology of Martin Luther, God's word 'is never merely an external word, spoken by human lips and heard with human ears. On the contrary, at the same time that this word is spoken, God speaks his truth in our hearts so that men receive it not only externally but also internally and believe it. This is the work of the Spirit.'³³ [p. 76](#)

As the Formula of Concord stated the situation, 'With this Word is present the Holy Spirit, who opens the hearts of men, in order that, as Lydia did ([Acts 16:14](#)), they may diligently attend, and thus may be converted by the sole grace and power of the Holy Spirit, whose work, and whose work alone, the conversion of man is.'³⁴ Helmut Thielicke points out that, in the Lutheran understanding, 'the work of the Spirit is not an element

³² Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), 106.

³³ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. by Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 36.

³⁴ Article II, Affirmative III. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1877), 108-9.

that is added to God's words and deeds'.³⁵ It is 'a Word that contains the Spirit, i.e., a Word in which God himself is present. To refuse this Word is ... hardening, *non* salvation.'³⁶ It is in this way that the baptism of infants is understood to be justifying in its effect although justification is by faith. Infants, given this enablement, are assumed not to resist the Word of God and hence to respond with infant faith and thereby to be justified.³⁷

The Formula of Concord speaks of a universal mercy of God ([Rom. 11:32](#); [Ezek. 18:23](#); [33:11](#); [2 Pet. 3:9](#); [1 Jn. 2:2](#))³⁸ and states that [Matthew 22:14](#) 'is not to be so understood as if God were unwilling that all should be saved, but the cause of damnation of the ungodly is that they either do not hear the Word of God at all, but contumaciously contemn it, stop their ears, and harden their hearts, and in this way foreclose to the Spirit of God his ordinary way, so that he cannot accomplish his work in them, or at least when they have heard the Word, make it of no account, and cast it away. Neither God nor his election, but their own wickedness, is to blame if they perish' ([2 Pet. 2:1f](#); [Lk. 2:49, 52](#); [Heb. 12:25f](#)).³⁹ The Saxon Visitation Articles (1592) taught that God 'wills that all men should be saved', and that everyone is commanded 'to hear Christ', and promised 'by his hearing, the virtue and operation of the Holy Ghost for conversion and salvation'.⁴⁰

The Wesleyan Proposal of Universal Preventive Grace

The influence of Wesleyan theology is far wider than the Methodist Church and extends to many (numerous Baptists for instance) who are quite unaware of the manner in which John Wesley enunciated the soteriology that they affirm. Unlike the later Arminians, [p. 77](#) Wesley stressed the fact that original sin is not merely a disease (corruption without guilt), but is really and truly sin and makes a person guilty before God. This guilt is imputed to all Adam's descendants, so that even a child born of two perfect Christians would be a sinner.⁴¹ But the original guilt is cancelled by the justification of all people in Christ. This is one of the universal benefits of the atonement. Wesley, therefore, denied that humans, as they are by nature, have any ability whatever to cooperate with the grace of God. They are morally depraved and totally dependent on God's grace for salvation.

In Wesley's view, no one actually exists in that state of inability. In view of the universal character of redemption, God endows everyone with sufficient enabling grace so that they can turn to God in faith and repentance. The earliest Arminians held that it was only just that God should enable people to believe, since they could not be held accountable without spiritual ability. (This was also Charles Finney's position.)

³⁵ Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith. Vol. III*, tr. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3:9.

³⁷ Larger Catechism IV., 494; cited by Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma. Vol. VII* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1899), 251, n. 2. Cf. Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 151–54. Althaus notes that, as late as 1521, Luther declared that 'children are baptized on the basis of the faith and the confession of the sponsors', *op. cit.*, 364. In 1522, 'in order to preserve the insight that we are saved not through someone else's faith but through our own', Luther began to teach infant faith, *Ibid.*, 364–65.

³⁸ Art XI, Affirmative IX. Schaff, *op. cit.*, 168.

³⁹ Article XI, Affirmative XI. Schaff, *op. cit.*, 168–69.

⁴⁰ Article IV. Schaff, *op. cit.*, 185.

⁴¹ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1777 ed. reprinted, Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1966), 50.

Wesleyans, however, believed that this was of the free grace of God, through preventing or prevenient grace. Everyone has grace in some measure and they sin only because that grace is not used.⁴² People are thus responsible, free agents.

In his essay 'Predestination Calmly Considered', in 1773, Wesley argued for a universal call which assumes an ability on the part of hearers to respond in faith. This is the only way that a person could be justly acquitted or condemned.⁴³

And shall this man, for not doing what he never could do, and for doing what he never could avoid, be sentenced to depart into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels? [cf [Matt. 25:42](#)]. 'Yes, because it is the sovereign will of God.' Then you have either found a new God, or made one! This is not the God of the Christians. Our God is just in all his ways; he reapeth not where he hath not sowed. He requireth only according to what he hath given; and where he hath given little, little is required.⁴⁴

Wesley's concern regarding the justice of God is clear. If people are unable to believe, yet judged responsible to do so, then God is reaping where he has not sown. He is demanding more from people than he has made it possible for them to give. Both the Lutheran approach and the Wesleyan approach put sinners in the position of being graciously enabled to respond with faith to God's offer of salvation. In both cases, this faith is the fruit of grace. To the Calvinist, however, the effect of this approach is problematic because it means that the decisive factor in a person's salvation is that [p. 78](#) person's own decision. It is hard to see how this avoids a synergism between God and the person saved. Since the difference between those who are saved and those who are not lies within the action of the believer, it seems that these believers have cause for self-congratulation and that God's glory in salvation has been compromised ([Eph. 2:8-9](#)).⁴⁵

Universal Sufficient Grace: a Calvinistic Proposal

As a Calvinist, I do not question God's right to show grace and to have mercy on whomever he wishes and to judicially harden whomever he wishes ([Rom. 9:18](#)). On the other hand, I do feel the force of the sense of injustice that those who are unable to believe should be condemned for not doing so. Even though I accept the divine prerogative to establish humanity in solidarity with Adam, I do not find in Scripture the teaching that the inability incurred in Adam is the cause or ground of eternal condemnation for unbelief. I affirm the sovereign right of God to choose those whom he will save but I am uncomfortable with the grounds for the condemnation of those who are left in their sin, as these have been stated traditionally by Calvinist theology. I have also found it rather difficult to understand some passages of Scripture which describe God's distress at the unbelief of those who reject him. A case in point is the pain of Jesus at the rejection by most of the

⁴² *The Works of John Wesley*, 6:512; cited by Justo L. Gonzalez, op. cit., 313.

⁴³ William C. Placher, *Readings in the History of Christian Theology. Volume 2. From the Reformation to the Present* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 98.

⁴⁴ *Works of Jn Wesley*, 11:234M; in Placher, op. cit., 98.

⁴⁵ From numerous conversations with Wesleyans, I know that this perception is difficult for them to understand. It is argued that believers cannot boast since they simply accepted a free gift. Even granting that no one is saved without grace, where the difference between those who believe and those who do not is found in the believers, rather than in God's gracious work, surely believers are to be commended for having responded to grace. If two of my sons are offered something by a hostess and one of them accepts with thanks while the other turns up his nose and spurns the gift, I commend the grateful one and am disturbed by the behaviour of the other one. Is this not an expected response to such a situation?

inhabitants of Jerusalem: ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you *were not willing*’ ([Mt. 23:37](#), emphasis supplied). Why, I have wondered, is Jesus so disturbed, when he knows that only those whom the Father draws will come to him ([Jn. 6:44](#)) and that all of them will do so? ([Jn. 6:37](#)).

Thomas Flint has argued the benefits of a Molinist (middle knowledge) explanation of the inter-relation of the human and divine agency for our understanding of predestination.⁴⁶ In the Molinist scheme, ‘efficacious grace is not intrinsically different from sufficient grace: it is merely sufficient grace that “works”.’⁴⁷ The grace is ‘only contingently efficacious, and its being efficacious is determined by us, not by God’.⁴⁸ I propose a different p. 79 approach to the issue which conforms to the Calvinist understanding of efficacious grace. It may be that God gives everyone sufficient grace to enable them to believe in him but only draws and persuades effectively the elect. The contingency would then lie with God, rather than the human agent, preserving the sovereignty of saving grace. If this were so, it would solve some of the problems we have identified.

The Benefits of this Construct

God’s Justice

Jonathan Edwards granted the legitimacy of the Arminian concern about ‘the justice of damning men for those things that are necessary’.⁴⁹ Alan Clifford considers John Owen’s concept of a single intent for the atonement (namely, the salvation of the elect) to be problematic because it ‘cannot make sense of the sin of unbelief. If unbelievers are guilty of rejecting Christ, whence their guilt, if Christ was not given for them?’⁵⁰ Clifford’s own answer to the problem is to affirm the hypothetical or conditional universalism of Amyraut or of Richard Baxter. The matter of the intent of the atonement will be addressed later, but at this point we need only note that the problem which Clifford identifies with a limited intent of the atonement (for the elect) is more clearly a problem at the subjective level of human ability, as Edwards rightly discerned.

Against Owen, Richard Baxter asserted that Christ’s sacrifice for sin was ‘satisfactory and meritorious for all’ people and that no one ‘shall be damned for want of a Saviour to die for him, and fulfil all righteousness, but only for abusing or refusing his mercy’.⁵¹ Two things are necessary, if Baxter’s concern is to be properly addressed, namely, 1) the death of Christ must be sufficient for all sin, as Dort affirmed, and 2) sinners must be in a position

⁴⁶ Thomas P. Flint, ‘Two Accounts of Providence’. In *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 161.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will, Which is Supposed to Be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame’. in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2 vols. (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust), 1:65. To deal with this concern he proposed a distinction between natural and moral inability or necessity.

⁵⁰ Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640–1790: An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 100.

⁵¹ *Richard Baxter’s Catholick Theologie* (1675), I, ii.51, cited by Clifford, op. cit., 101.

to accept or reject that salvation. To accept the first condition, we need not assert a hypothetical universalism, but the second truth does require a universal enabling grace. Describing the inability as moral (per Edwards) does not evade the difficulty that Arminians have identified, so long as that moral inability is traced back to original sin, which makes the weight of final condemnation rest ultimately on sin in Adam. In a recent Wesleyan soteriology, Thomas Oden speaks well when he asserts that ‘no human being has been condemned for Adam’s sin alone, but in so far as anyone is subject to condemnation and judgment, it is due to p.80 one’s own freely collusive cooperation with the conditions of sin resulting from the history of sin following Adam. The principle of free moral agency is preserved in and through the doctrine of sufficient grace.’⁵²

The justice of divine judgement is no longer an issue if all people receive a grace that remediates the effects of sin sufficiently to enable them to believe, if they will. There is thus no question about their not having been able to do so. People who do not believe *could*, if they *would*. The problem is that, given the rebelliousness which characterizes us, we are still prone not to submit to God and receive his provision for our salvation. Without coercing us, however, God is able to draw us ([Jn. 6:44](#)), to open our hearts ([Acts 13:14](#)), to illumine our minds, so that we will to come. As with the Lutheran accompanying grace and the Wesleyan prevenient grace, this work of God is sufficient but not efficacious. But, as in traditional Calvinism, the explanation of the faith of those who do believe is not found in themselves but in the effective working of God which woos them to exercise an ability which all have graciously been given, but which only these people use to respond to God’s call. The act of saving faith is explained on the basis of efficacious grace, not on the basis of human choice, although that choice is freely willed by the human agent (not coerced by God).

The demand of justice does not require that people be continuously enabled, with each experience of divine revelation. Scripture speaks of a hardening of the heart that occurs as one resists God’s gracious drawing. Paul speaks of people storing up wrath for the day of God’s righteous judgement by their ‘stubbornness and unrepentant hearts’ ([Rom. 2:5](#)). He tells the Thessalonians about people who ‘perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved’ ([2 Thess. 2:10](#)). God sends such people a powerful delusion so that they believe the lie ([2:11](#)). Here we have indication of the judicial hardening that results when people resist and refuse grace.⁵³ They become ‘darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their p.81 hearts’, and the consequent loss of all sensitivity ([Eph. 4:18](#)).

Paul describes this process of judicial abandonment in [Romans 1:24–27](#). Those who spurn God’s grace may put themselves beyond the point where it will be offered again ([Heb. 6:4–6](#); [10:26–31](#)). There comes a time when God no longer accompanies the objective revelations of himself with a gracious enabling. The personal responsibility for

⁵² Thomas C. Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 45.

⁵³ Roger Forster and Paul Marston note that, in the case of Pharaoh, it was only after five warnings and penalties had been ineffective that God did the hardening. ‘Submission now would have meant prudence, not penitence; and it was against prudence, not penitence, that he was hardened’ ([Ex. 9:12](#)). For Pharaoh, ‘the last five plagues were not disciplinary, but wholly penal’, *God’s Strategy in Human History: God’s Sovereignty and Man’s Responsibility* (First British ed. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1973; reprint, Crowborough, East Sussex: Highland Books, 1989), 172. They further comment that ‘it appears, then, that the Lord is never said to debauch Pharaoh’s heart, but only to strengthen it against prudence and to make it dull; that the words used do not express the infusion of evil passion, but the animation of a resolute courage, and the overclouding of a natural discernment; and, above all, that every one of the three words, to make hard, to make strong, and to make heavy, is employed to express Pharaoh’s own treatment of himself, before it is applied to any work of God, as actually taking place already’.¹⁷⁵

this self-incurred inability can surely be denied by no one. It is in this vein that we may understand the biblical truth concerning the slavery that grows as one continues to sin ([Jn. 3:34](#); [2 Pet. 2:19](#); [Rom. 6:17](#)). When people choose to believe the lies of Satan rather than the truth of God, in spite of God's gracious enabling, Satan blinds them ([2 Cor. 4:4](#)) and enslaves them ([2 Tim. 2:26](#)). Having surrendered themselves into his power by these acts of their own will, they are responsible for this. The reality of death in sin becomes ever more obvious ([Eph. 2:1-2](#)).⁵⁴ It is in this light that I understand the warnings to the Hebrews that they not harden their hearts when the Spirit gives a desire to repent ([Heb. 3:7-8](#); [12:17](#)), because the opportunity will not last forever ([Heb. 3:15](#)).

There is much cause for praise when we hear testimony of lives in which this hardening and blinding process had gone on for years in a descending spiral, yet God graciously moves in and frees them from the bondage that they have chosen and gloriously saves them. God owes no one grace, but his grace shines brightest where sin reigns most evidently ([Rom. 5:20-21](#)).

God's Distress at Human Rejection The distress of Jesus as he looked down over Jerusalem now becomes more comprehensible. They *could* have come at his call. Nothing kept them from doing so except their own stubbornness. That resistance gave him great pain. We are left, of course, with mysteries: why did God not effectively woo them all? why did the Father not reveal to all of them, as he had to Peter, that Jesus was the Christ ([Mt. 16:17](#))? Paul provides some insight into God's work of grace, hardening part of the nation in pursuit of his wider plan of grace for the Gentiles ([Rom. 11:25-32](#)), and that only temporarily ([Rom. 11:25-26](#)). Nevertheless, we echo Paul's sense that God's judgement is 'unsearchable' and 'his paths beyond tracing out' ([Rom. 11:33](#)) and we give him glory ([Rom. 11:36](#)). As I indicated at the outset, I have not avoided the scandal of particularity, but I have hopefully ameliorated the sense of injustice. We can agree with Thomas Oden that 'grace is effective as p. 82 it elicits willing cooperation and sufficient in so far as it does what is necessary to lead the will to cooperate, even when the deficient will is resistant.'⁵⁵ I differ from him, however, in the conviction that when the grace is effective, its efficacy lies in the peculiar working of the Spirit not in (*though not apart from*) the response of the human will.

God's 'Desire' for People to Be Saved It may be that this proposal of God's universal grace offers us additional help in understanding some of the New Testament texts which speak in a language that has a universal ring to it. Roman Catholic theologians often speak of God's 'universal salvific will'.⁵⁶ This is a manner of speaking which is open to Wesleyans and Lutherans but is problematic to Calvinists, if 'will' is identified with God's eternal purpose. On the understanding being proposed here, however, Calvinists can speak of 'universal salvific grace', indicating that God has indeed enabled all to believe, although he has not been uniformly persuasive in his gracious calling. There is universal grace which is salvific in its enabling though it does not achieve universal salvation because it is

⁵⁴ On the basis of [Titus 2:11](#) ('For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all'). Thomas Oden asserts that 'to no one, not even the recalcitrant unfaithful, does God deny grace sufficient for salvation. Prevenient grace precedes each discrete human act' (op. cit., 48). Oden doubts that God ever ceases to give sufficient grace, even to the obdurate (81). Given the Scriptures we have cited, however, this is too optimistic a statement.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Cf. Flint, op. cit., 169, fn. 44: 'It is not quite *de fide* that God wills all to be saved; see Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, pp. 188-189. Nevertheless, I am aware of no Thomist who would deny God's universal salvific will.'

resisted by many. Thus, when Peter asserts that God is ‘not wanting anyone to perish’ ([2 Pet. 3:9](#), NIV), his ‘wanting’ (NRSV: ‘wishing’) is easier to understand if he has given everyone grace sufficient to make salvation possible. One of the universal benefits of Christ’s death is this grace.

With [1 Timothy 2:4](#) (cf. [2 Pet. 3:9](#)) in mind, Philip Hughes has asked ‘How can it be said that God desires all men to be saved, if by a fixed decree many are destined never to be saved and cannot therefore be helped by our prayers?’⁵⁷ Traditionally, Calvinists have responded by 1) describing God’s will in this instance as preceptive, that is, in the sense of God’s command that everyone repent and believe; and 2) pointing out that, in the context (cf. verses [1–2](#)), Paul is making reference to ‘all kinds’ of people.⁵⁸ Arminian theologians frequently protest the ‘paradoxical notion of two divine wills regarding salvation.’⁵⁹ Wayne Grudem has very aptly demonstrated that Arminians ‘*also* must say that God *wills* something more strongly than he [p. 83](#) wills the salvation of all people, *for in fact all are not saved*.’⁶⁰ In the case this is because God chooses to preserve human free will, whereas Reformed theologians attribute it to God’s purpose to glorify himself. We may go further, in addressing this passage, however, if we posit that God actually enables everyone to repent and believe.

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Book Reviews

GOD’S EMPOWERING PRESENCE

by Gordon D Fee

(Peabody, Mass., Hendrickson, 1994 pp967)

(Reviewed by Francis Foulkes)

It takes some conviction to recommend the purchase of a book of nearly 1000 pages at a price commensurate, but I do so in relation to this book without hesitation. Subtitled, ‘The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul’, the book deals in turn with all the passages in the Pauline epistles in which the Holy Spirit is mentioned, and a number of others where the work of the Spirit is implied. Gordon Fee gives detailed exegesis in a scholarly but highly readable

⁵⁷ Hughes, op. cit., 173.

⁵⁸ Cf. Robert C. Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 242–43. Jaroslav Pelikan observes that [1 Tim 2:4](#) ‘had always been a conundrum to Augustinian doctrines of predestination and the will of God’, *Reformation of Church and Dogma* (1300–1700), Vol. 4 of *The Christian Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 237. Bucer, Calvin and Ursinus all followed Augustine in understanding the text as a reference to ‘all classes’ of people.

⁵⁹ Clark Pinnock, ed., *Grace Unlimited* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975), 13; cited by Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 684.

⁶⁰ Grudem, op. cit., 684.

way. Where different interpretations of a passage have been proposed, he weighs up alternatives and comes to his conclusions. I found that often his exegesis brought fresh insights, sometimes in a way highly relevant to life today. Fee's book is a work of scholarship, but he makes clear in the beginning that his aim is not just to inform the mind, but to show the great value of going back to 'our biblical roots' to find direction and strength and inspiration for 'the contemporary church'.

Three-quarters of the book is given to direct exegesis, though Fee also has some insightful comments on the purpose of writing of each of Paul's Letters and the place teaching about the Holy Spirit has in each one. Then in the concluding part of the book he asks how one can bring coherence to all the different things that St. Paul says of the Spirit, and—the more important existential question—how to 'reflect on this material so that it has something to say to us' (p.799). He does this in the compressed writing of four chapters.

The first is titled, 'The Spirit as Eschatological Fulfillment', and in it he asserts that 'it was the resurrection of Christ and the gift of the promised (eschatological) Spirit that completely altered the primitive church's perspective, both about Jesus and about themselves.' In this chapter, as elsewhere in the book, Fee emphasizes that for St. Paul understanding and experience went together. His own 'changed eschatological perspective' derived from p.85 'two experienced realities ... his encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus Road ... and the subsequent gift of the eschatological Spirit' (p.805). The Holy Spirit is both the 'promised Spirit', and the promise (the 'firstfruits' or 'pledge' or 'earnest') of future life in its fullness.

The next chapter is 'The Spirit as God's personal presence'. The stress here is on the Spirit as Person rather than force or influence, and the Trinitarian implications of Pauline teaching are brought out, as are also the implications of what it means for Christians 'individually and corporately to be the people of God' (p.845). This leads to the chapter entitled 'The Soteriological Spirit' where Fee links together what the apostle says about the proclamation of the gospel of salvation, human response, the imagery of new life in Christ, baptism, and the relation of the operation of the Spirit to each of these.

In a further chapter entitled 'The Spirit and the People of God', he moves on to deal with the Pauline images of the church, the Spirit and ethical life, the fruit of the Spirit, and the Spirit and worship. In this chapter he deals with the charismata, but often also in exegetical comments in the earlier sections of the book, there are reflections on what are reckoned as movements of the Spirit, reflections that are often sympathetic but discerning. How should we understand the phenomena of 'tongues', of 'praying in the Spirit', 'prophecy'? Was Corinth a church essentially different from other Pauline churches?

Let me go back to my justification of recommending the purchase of such a magnum opus. Many books are read once, possibly lent to another person, and then destined to stay on one's bookshelves scarcely noticed in years. Here is a book to turn to when preparing to preach on Pauline passages which deal with the Holy Spirit, a book in which to find help in dealing with phenomena linked in many people's minds with St Paul's writing about the Spirit. Here is a book worth dipping into often to remind oneself of what the life of the Spirit meant in the first century church with the realization that the divine Spirit does not cease to be the 'Spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind', seeking to indwell and inspire the church.

GOD THE ALMIGHTY: POWER, WISDOM, HOLINESS, LOVE (CHRISTIAN FOUNDATIONS VOL 3)

by Donald G. Bloesch

(Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1995 ISBN 0-8308-1413-2 Hb 329pp Indexes)

(Reviewed by David Parker)

This is the third in Donald Bloesch's new theological series, *Christian Foundations*. The earlier volumes were devoted to theological method and the doctrine of Scripture. He now tackles classic and contemporary issues relating to the theology of God in an 'expositional theology', with twin emphases. First, there is a clear presentation of what he calls p. 86 the 'biblical-prophetic' understanding of God which contrasts in many ways with other historic and modern treatments. But then above all it reveals a God who is personal and one who calls for the worship and service of his creatures. As Bloesch puts it in the conclusion, 'We can worship this God because of the majesty of his glory. We can love this God because he has chosen to meet us on our level and enter into personal relations with us.'

The general line taken by the author is clear from the title and subtitle, indicating that he has little sympathy with much contemporary thinking which speaks of God's vulnerability or speaks of God in impersonal terms. Thus a considerable proportion of the volume is devoted to an exposition of the classic attributes.

In accordance with his customary rigour, Dr Bloesch, Emeritus Profess of Theology at Dubuque Theological Seminary, Iowa, commences with an investigation of philosophical questions, such as act and being; essence, existence and attributes; God and necessity, and rationalism and mysticism. While not conceding that philosophy can be a source of divine knowledge or a 'preamble to theology,' he does not hesitate to employ philosophy and reason to clarify our understanding of God as revealed in Scripture. He argues that 'We should indeed strive for as much coherence as possible but at the same time recognize that no human mind can grasp the mystery' of God's merciful ways with his people.

This clears the way for a discussion of the 'self-revealing God' which includes treatment of mysticism, natural theology and Scripture, and is followed by further chapters on transcendence and immanence. Rejecting deistic interpretations as well as the popular contemporary pantheistic and panentheistic approaches, Bloesch opts for the 'dynamic transcendence' of the biblical God who is known as unbounded love in the Christ, the one who 'reaches out to us even in our sin and depravity in order to draw us toward himself'.

From here, the author goes on in a series of chapters to discuss the other major divine attributes—power, wisdom, holiness and love, clarifying the biblical data with copious historical and philosophical references and insightful explanations, including extended treatments of classic topics such as creation and evil.

The last substantive chapter covers the Trinity with a competent outline of the biblical and historical material, a subject which Bloesch regards as 'the culmination of biblical and apostolic reflection on the nature and activity of the living God'. His treatment, which includes a discussion of contemporary issues such as the nature of 'person' in a section devoted to 'restating the Trinity', is supplemented by a thoughtful exposition of trinitarian spirituality (especially, relating to prayer) and appendices on unitarianism and the question of subordination and equality in the Godhead.

In the remaining chapters, he restates much of the earlier material in a different arrangement (and often goes beyond it to other related p. 87 areas of theology) as he contrasts the biblical position with the biblical-classical synthesis, in which 'the ontological categories of Greco-Roman philosophy have been united with the personal-dramatic categories of biblical faith'—often with detrimental results. Covering such topics as providence, truth, love, grace, prayer, justification and resurrection, a vintage Bloesch presents a dynamic kaleidoscope of the history of theology and the dangers for the faith

of the church of substituting belief in the living God with belief in an impassible Absolute Being and the subsequent impact of metaphysical speculation in place of personal encounter with the Word become flesh.

Another shorter chapter is dedicated to the danger of the biblical-modern synthesis, which since the Renaissance has sought 'to accommodate the faith to modernity' (and post-modernity). Here Bloesch focuses on issues such as the authority of the autonomous self, the contemporary stress on radical divine immanence, a God of temporality and futurity who is 'dynamic becoming' and a post-Christian naturalistic mysticism. He thus draws attention to a radically new worldview which stands in contrast to the biblical and classical approaches.

While, at first sight, these two chapters may seem somewhat extraneous, it is in them that the author reveals the main burden of his case, viz., that both the classic synthesis and the views of modern scholars who rightfully react against the weaknesses of this synthesis fail to represent the full truth of the 'biblical-prophetic' view of the holy, almighty personal God. His own exposition is a highly stimulating example of the way in which it is possible to hold together 'the polarities that are reflected in God's nature and activity' as revealed in Scripture.

This is the reason why he includes a detailed discussion of the 'open view theism,' as proposed by certain recent evangelical scholars; he sympathizes with their rejection of non-biblical views of God such as that presented by the biblical-classical synthesis, but remains uneasy about their conclusions, claiming that they need to be 'more thoroughly biblical and also more solidly evangelical'.

The early chapter on philosophic understanding reinforces Bloesch's contention that understanding God as revealed in Scripture requires the utmost intellectual effort as well as the deepest devotion.

Thus Bloesch's most recent work is as welcome for its sound judgement about the crucial issues facing the doctrine of God as it is for its theological content and spiritual sensitivity.

CREATED FOR COMMUNITY CONNECTING CHRISTIAN BELIEF WITH CHRISTIAN LIVING

by Stanley J Grenz

(Wheaton: Bridgepoint Victor Books, 1996 ISBN 1-56476-550-4 Pb 335pp Indexes,
Bibliog.)

(Reviewed by David Parker)

In this book, Stanley Grenz of p. 88 Regent College and Carey Theological College, Vancouver, has presented a popular version of his earlier, more technical *Theology for the Community of God* (Broadman and Holman, 1994). With its simple, readable (almost conversational) style and clear explanations of doctrinal concepts, it is suitable for new Christians and lay people generally. An appealing feature is the frequent use of cartoon dialogues from the popular Peanuts series and others to introduce a point, although there would have been more impact if the drawing had been used as well; each chapter also concludes with a verse of an appropriate song or hymn. There are no diagrams, charts or tables except occasional boxes with captions or thematic statements. In keeping with the needs of the intended readership, there are few quotes from other theologians and only in the most obvious cases are a range of views or historical developments presented; however, there are adequate references in the endnotes for the enquiring reader to gain more details, including information about some of the author's other books.

The material is presented in traditional systematic fashion beginning with the doctrine of God and ending with Eschatology. It is mostly conventional in its treatment from an orthodox evangelical and baptistic viewpoint, although Grenz does not hesitate to introduce his own insights. For example, he treats Scripture under the person and work of the Spirit rather than in the preliminary chapter on the nature of theology and revelation; this allows for a positively nuanced explanation of topics such as inerrancy and infallibility, but surprisingly there is little on the complicated question of hermeneutics. Again, his own particular views are presented in a helpful treatment of the image of God and he goes to some length when discussing the incarnation to avoid a 'Superman' type Christology which he believes is commonly held. Angels and other spiritual beings get fuller treatment than is often the case in introductory theology texts.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of this book, like its larger predecessor, is the systematic focus on the theme of community, whether it be in reference to the nature of God, heaven or salvation. This theme is of particular importance to the theology of the church and Grenz's chapters on the church and church membership under the title 'the Pioneer Community' are perhaps the most useful of all, especially in the present climate. His balanced and sensitive approach to these questions should help to provide much needed clarity of thought and direction for church members and leaders.

The rigorous use of an integrating theme harmonizes well with the author's stated aim of 'connecting Christian belief with Christian living'. As he stresses in the Preface, 'Theology is by its very nature connected with life.' Therefore one of his main purposes in writing is 'to make theology accessible to people who are reticent to read a theology text' and to assist the reader 'to live as a Christian in the society in which God has placed us'. Accordingly, much of the introductory and concluding sections of the book is [p.89](#) devoted to explaining the connection between theology and life. Here and elsewhere throughout the book, Grenz exhorts his readers to make the link, but this important task could be strengthened further by pointing to the spiritual dynamic which facilitates this process and so makes it more than a moral obligation on the part of the Christian. However, the conceptual basis of the book, that as Christians within the church we are a vital part of God's community-making activity, is powerful enough in itself to contribute significantly to this process.

THE OPENNESS OF GOD

by Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker and David Basinger
(I.V.P., Downers Grove, USA and Paternoster, Carlisle, UK 1994, pp.202)

(Reviewed by Francis Foulkes)

The sub-title of the book is 'A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God', and that traditional understanding is taken to involve the emphasis on God's changlessness, impassibility, and his sovereign irresistible will. Rice describes this view as holding that 'though he fully knows and cares for the created world, he remains essentially unaffected by creaturely events and experiences. He is untouched by the disappointment, sorrow or suffering of his creatures. Just as his sovereign will brooks no opposition, his serene tranquillity knows no interruption' (p.12). Over against that, Scripture often, as in the book of Hosea, indicates that there is feeling and pathos in the being of God that can be described in terms that compare with Hosea's experience of loving one unfaithful to him. The New Testament, it is argued, 'extends and intensifies the dynamic portrait of God ... found in the Old' (p.39). God's feelings are expressed in parables like those of [Luke 15](#), and a suffering God is involved in the understanding of the cross.

Emphasis is placed on the fact that in the Bible the promises and warnings of God and prophecies of the future are often conditional, with the implication that God's actions in human history are not predetermined. It is stressed that there is an 'openness' in God that means that he is not 'immutable', but he is 'a God who is active within human history, patiently pursuing his objectives for his creatures, while taking into account their decisions and actions'. It is argued that Scripture shows that 'God adjusts and alters his plans to accommodate changes in human behavior' (p.58). In that it can be said that God 'repents' of a purpose previously stated, we cannot think of that purpose in terms of 'iron-clad decrees'. The purposes of God are not to be thought of as indicating a plan to which 'the course of history passively and perfectly conforms. They are goals that God pursues over time and in different ways' (p.37). Because God is love, and sensitive and responsive to human situations, we must have a dynamic rather than a static concept of God. Although the writers make clear that they do not agree with p. 90 what has come to be known as 'Process Theology', they do not want simply to speak of God as unchanging.

It may be said that 'change and changelessness' are both to be seen in God. 'God's nature and God's character are just as changeless as he could possibly be'. 'When it comes to God's concrete relation to the world, however, ... God is dynamic in ... his response to what happens in the world, his decisions about what to do in the world and his actions within the world. He is deeply affected by what happens to his creatures' (p.48). This means that both predestination and foreknowledge must be excluded from our understanding of God (p.57). The openness of God means that God is 'endlessly resourceful in achieving his ultimate purposes' (p.154).

Sanders argues that traditional theology in its sense of the perfection of God, and thus God's immutability, has been influenced more by Greek philosophy than the Bible. Most significantly Augustine, with his neo-Platonic philosophical background, influenced the theology of the Middle Ages, and to a great extent the Reformers also followed the same path. The influence continues, Sanders argues, into contemporary conservative evangelical attitudes.

Pinnock in his contribution to the book says of omnipotence that it is not to be defined 'as the power to determine everything but rather as the power that enables God to deal with any situation that arises' (p.114). In fact 'The Lord of the universe has chosen to limit his power by delegating some to the creature' (p.115). God has created a world which is not fully determined, but which includes human beings able to enter voluntarily into personal relationships with him—or to refuse to do so. God has willed the existence of creatures with the power of self-determination.

There is much that is challenging and helpful in this book. Sometimes, however, it is less than fair to the traditional understanding of God, at least as often presented in evangelical teaching. Most have such a sense of the love and grace of God that they would not see him as 'untouched by the disappointment, sorrow or suffering of his creatures'. The 'immutability' of God is seen as meaning that God is in nature and character unchanging and unchanged—in truth and love, in justice and mercy. It must be granted, however, that Greek philosophy has often influenced Christian theology, and led us away from the emphasis of the Scriptures. The writers are true to the Bible when they stress the conditionality of the warnings and promises of God. They are right also in emphasizing that prayer involves 'the openness of God'. When we pray we do rely on the fact that God is unchanging in character and nature. At the same time the Bible gives us reason to believe that 'prayer changes things', and we fail to obtain for ourselves or to help others to obtain all the resources of God's grace if we fail to pray or if we pray selfishly ([Jam. 4:2-3](#)).

Yet we must still recognize that there is mystery involved in holding to both human freedom and responsibility and also to the ultimate sovereignty p. 91 of God. In some of the contributions in the book there is an irritating optimism that suggests that any right-thinking person must appreciate the force of the arguments being presented. And, at a deeper level, we may need a greater humility in all the ways in which we speak of the nature and being of God. Human logic may not always be able to guide us to see what is right or wrong in statements about the being of God. We may well say that absolute predestination is not compatible with genuine human freedom. We perhaps need greater hesitation in ruling out foreknowledge in God.

MORE THAN ONE WAY?: FOUR VIEWS ON SALVATION IN A PLURALISTIC WORLD, ED.

Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips.

(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995. 283 pages with indexes. ISBN 0-310-20116-0)

(Reviewed by Terrance Tiessen, Professor of Theology and Ethics, Providence Theological Seminary, Manitoba, Canada.)

The four views are those of John Hick, Clark H. Pinnock, Alister E. McGrath, R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips.

Two significant conversations are carried on in this book: one between the evangelical view of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the non-evangelical position that allows for salvation in more than one way; and one between three evangelical positions concerning the salvation of those who do not explicitly trust in Jesus as Saviour. Each position has a major presentation, with opportunity for response from the other three positions, and a concluding counter-response. This allows for a very clear exposition of the four alternatives.

On the first issue (pluralism), John Hick stands alone against the united protest of the other four writers. Following a brief description of his own religious journey, Hick sets forth his understanding of religion. God is always and everywhere present to us and 'when a human being is exceptionally open to the divine presence, he or she has a vivid awareness of God, which is then called revelation' (34). Hick denies that Jesus considered himself to be God, though the church later deified him and developed a doctrine of incarnation which is paradoxical. In fact, he believes that the different religions represent different manifestations of God, the Ultimate Reality and that, from careful observation of the lives of religious people, we cannot establish the unique moral superiority of any one of the great world religions. Defining salvation as 'a gradual transformation from natural self-centeredness ... to a radically new orientation centered in God and manifested in the "fruit of the Spirit" ', it seems clear to Hick that salvation is taking place within all of the world religions (43).

On the second issue, the fate of the unevangelized, three evangelical proposals are made. The editors identify Clark Pinnock's position as p. 92 inclusivist, while Alister McGrath's is viewed as an optimistic particularism and Douglas Geivett and Gary Phillips are described as pessimistic particularists. This nomenclature is misleading, since it becomes apparent from the interaction between Pinnock and Geivett/Phillips that they all consider McGrath's position to be inclusive, and thus in a class with Pinnock's. Two evangelical options thus emerge, one of which is optimistic regarding the salvation of those who do not hear the gospel and one which is sure that explicit faith in Christ is necessary for salvation.

Pinnock is the most optimistic of the evangelicals. Although insisting that Jesus is uniquely the Saviour of the world, he emphasizes the universal work of the grace of God,

drawing people to faith in God in forms that are appropriate to the ways in which God has revealed himself to them. Individuals like Melchizedek and Cornelius indicate that saving grace is working among those who have not yet encountered God in the special covenantal forms of revelation. Pinnock denies that religions as such are salvific and describes the Christian message as 'the fulfillment, not only of Old Testament religion, but in some way of all religious aspiration of the human quest itself' (115).

McGrath obviously considers the first issue to be the most critical and devotes most of his space to emphasizing the differences between religions and the exclusive claims of Jesus to be the Saviour of the world, in regard to the kind of salvation that the Christian scriptures uniquely describe. On the second matter, however, McGrath asserts that 'where the word is not or cannot be preached by human agents, God is not inhibited from bringing people to faith in him, even if that act of hope and trust may lack the fully orbited character of an informed faith' (179).

With pluralism in view, Geivett and Phillips argue at length that a case can be made for particularism from natural theology. In spite of their conviction that nature leads us to expect 'that a particular revelation, answering to the specific needs of the human condition, might be provided by God' (225), they consider special revelation concerning Jesus to be essential for salvation. A case for the necessity of explicit faith is made from an analysis of [Acts 4:12](#), [John 3:16](#), [18](#), [Romans 19:9-15](#) and [John 14:6](#) and [17:20](#). Biblical passages cited in favour of greater optimism concerning the salvation of the unevangelized are also considered and explained in a manner consistent with the restrictive position.

Other books present evangelical alternatives regarding the salvation of the unevangelized, but the particular contribution of this one is that it addresses both the intra-evangelical discussion and the wider issue with non-evangelical pluralists. Given that there are three against one on the second issue, a clear evangelical position emerges. On the discussion between the evangelicals, however, the presentations are too brief to satisfy and readers will wish to proceed to lengthier treatments identified in the footnotes. [p. 93](#)

JESUS THE JEWISH THEOLOGIAN

by Brad H. Young

(Peabody, Massachusetts; Hendrickson, 1995, Pb., 305 pages, ISBN 1-56563-060-2)

(Reviewed by Dr. Eckhard J. Schnabel, Head of New Testament Department, Freie Theologische Akademie Giessen, Germany)

This volume seeks to establish Jesus within the context of early Judaism, giving evidence of Jesus' Jewishness and of the Jewish roots of his self-understanding and of his message. Brad Young is a student of the Jewish scholar David Flusser (who is the most frequently cited author) and founder-president of the Gospel Research Foundation which is committed to exploring the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. He is currently teaching in the School of Theology at Oral Roberts University.

If one approaches Young's book with the expectation of being presented with a contribution to the rapidly growing number of studies on the historical Jesus, one will be disappointed: there is no discussion of sources and their reliability, of methodology or of the interrelationship between history, tradition and interpretation, and there is no critical interaction with the quest for the historical Jesus. Rather, his book belongs to what another Jewish scholar, Geza Vermes, has once termed the trendy effort of yesterday, the 'repatriation of Jesus into the Jewish people'. Brad Young has provided a popular presentation of cultural, ethical and theological aspects of Jewish tradition which help us

to understand the ministry of Jesus. The book consists of 23 brief chapters organized in five parts and an epilogue. Each chapter has concise endnotes; the literature quoted is sometimes dated and often rather selective.

The first part deals with 'The Messianic Drama of Jesus', discussing Jesus' birth, baptism, temptation as well as his miracles, his proclamation and the question of faith. The second part considers 'The Jewish Roots of Jesus' Kingdom Theology', the teaching of the kingdom of God 'breaking forth' ([Mt. 11:12](#); [Lk. 16:16](#)), the depiction of the kingdom in parables, the blessing of peace ([Mt. 5:9](#)), Jesus' sayings about children, about the Sabbath and the Law, about divorce and adultery and about giving thanks as a way of life.

In the next section, Young discusses 'The Jewish Theology in Jesus' Parables', highlighting the themes of grace, compassion, spiritual renewal, unconditional love, faith and genuine heart-controlled relationship with God. Following this he examines 'The Jewish Messiah and the Politics of Rome', discussing Jesus' messianic self-awareness, the redemptive nature of his suffering as expressed in the story of the transfiguration and in the parable of the wicked husbandmen ([Mt. 21, 33-46](#) par), and finally the responsibility for Jesus' death which, according to Young, lies exclusively with Sadducean priests who felt that the Jesus movement threatened the nation.

The final part focuses on 'The Future Messiah', raising the question whether the Son of Man in the teaching of Jesus is human or [p. 94](#) divine. The expression 'son of man', the highest term used in Jewish thought for the Messiah' (p. 251), is explained as combining both aspects: as Jesus uses the expression, it shows that he is a human being, but he is so much more: he would rise on the third day and he would return in the future and complete the messianic task during the last judgement.

The epilogue considers 'Jesus in the Company of Scholars and Theologians', emphasizing that Jesus and his message must be understood not primarily in a (hellenized, western) 'church-context' but in context of the original 'Hebrew Gospel' where Jewish values are prominent, especially the preoccupation with action rather than with belief or creed.

Young creates the impression that the insights into the Jewish beginnings of Christianity are new and due to the fact that they come from scholars in Israel (cf. p. xxiv, 35). He fails to inform the reader that many of the 'fresh insights' which he adduces are neither new nor the unique product of Israeli scholars: the older work of P. Billerbeck, J. Jeremias or W. D. Davies and the newer research of M. Hengel, J. Charlesworth and others give evidence of a long and distinguished tradition of exploring the Jewish context and identity of the ministry of Jesus.

Critics will demur at the many points where Young simply presupposes the authenticity of sayings attributed to Jesus. They will not be convinced by the Jewish parallels which Young presents as they often belong to later rabbinic sources. It would help if Young provided reasons for accepting the historicity of individual sayings which are disputed in historical-critical scholarship.

Evangelical readers will have difficulties with the seeming ambiguity of Young's treatment of Jesus' messianic self-awareness and its relationship with his death on the cross. The messianic task is not just linked with the witnessing disciples (p. 203) but with the very person of Jesus and particularly with his death and resurrection. Unfortunately Young does not discuss Jesus' predictions of his death and resurrection ([Mk. 8:31](#); [10, 32-34](#) par), the ransom saying ([Mk. 10:45](#)) nor the meaning of Jesus' sayings during the Last Supper (cf. [Mk. 14:24](#)!). The statement that Jesus' death 'possesses enduring significance in the process of redemption' (p. 207) remains obscure. Apart from the one sided view that the Sadducean priests alone are responsible for the death of Jesus and the down-playing of the opposition of the Pharisees to Jesus' teaching, the gospel tradition (not

merely the early church, p. 238) contains clear evidence that Jesus regarded his coming death as being at the heart of his divine mission which consists in the messianic task of carrying out God's redemptive plan.

Young asserts that Jesus was preoccupied with action rather than with belief or creed, as were other Jewish theologians such as Hillel or Shammai (p. 273). If this statement is taken seriously, it is difficult not to sense a contradiction to the general approach and emphasis of Young's book. The background material which he presents often contributes p. 95 to a better understanding of many sayings of Jesus, tying in with his conviction that 'every word spoken by Jesus is of paramount importance' (p. 264). But at least as important as the words of Jesus are his actions which provoked opposition from Sadducees as well as from scribes and Pharisees. This is particularly the case with his final action: his conscious move to Jerusalem with the expectation of meeting his death, in accordance with God's plan for the world. Jesus was not only a theologian, albeit with a messianic self-awareness: he was convinced that in his person God's presence has appeared in such a way as to make the traditional locus of God's presence—the Temple—obsolete. Thus he established in the fulfilment of God's promises a new experience of God's forgiving and healing love. p. 96

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