



A MONTHLY LETTER ON EVANGELISM

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LETTRE MENSUELLE SUR L'ÉVANGÉLISATION

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Dear Friends,

Once again, it is the season of Advent, and the end of my first year in the WCC. I would like to share with you a few thoughts on evangelism and the ecumenical movement.

Let me start with Korea. The country has been featured high on the ecumenical agenda largely because of the human rights situation there, and the churches' responses to it. The Korean experience calls for international Christian solidarity and opens up new ways of understanding mission. It is right that the human rights struggle of Korean Christians become a matter of deep ecumenical concern. But too often this focus is seen and understood by some of us as a Korean commitment over against that of another set of Korean Christian realities. In this case, the phenomenal growth in the number of Christians and of congregations there. Many of us in the ecumenical movement tend to see the commitment to human rights as somehow inconsistent with the commitment to engage in evangelism. I call this "pseudo dialectical" thinking: contradictions are looked for and suggested and unresolved. A latest example, from a report of a church-to-church visit to Korea:

"We attended the second of two services Wednesday night at the Young-Nak Presbyterian Church. When we got to the church, the parking lot was already filled with cars. The English material indicated that they have a membership of 50,000 with 19 ministers, seven Sunday worship services, and several educational programmes. The congregation seemed to enjoy the hymn singing and the sermon. The main role of the church seemed to be to provide a refuge for troubled people. What impressed me was that there were many well dressed young people who were proud to be members of the church. Contrasted to this* was the attendance at the Thursday Prayer Service for the political detainee's families and their supporters in the chapel at the Christian Centre. The WCC team were introduced to the 130 people in that ecumenical fellowship. The Rev KIM Dong Won, of Inchon, UIM General Secretary, preached. Through hymn singing and prayer all

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participants shared experiences and received mutual encouragement for life together as they carried this common burden of concern for oppressed people." (*my italics)

A fair-minded description, gently prodding the mind. But is there any reason to put the two pictures of Christians worshipping and praying in a relationship of "contrast"? Is there any reason to suggest that they are incompatible with each other? From the description as it stands, none that I can see. If there are reasons, they would have to come from assumptions that well-dressed young people attending church are somehow a contradiction to political detainee's families and supporters praying and singing together.

With this type of thinking, I doubt if we could ever understand the Korean pastor who said, in utter frustration with some of us in the ecumenical movement, "But the big churches pray for the detainees and their families too!"

Of course, there are differing degrees of commitment to human rights among the Christians in Korea, as in elsewhere. And how the commitment should be expressed must have been a subject of fierce debate within the churches. But to cast the question as an issue between commitment to human rights and social justice over against commitment to evangelism and church growth would be a serious distortion of reality as Korean Christians see it. With this perspective, no one is served. Neither the cause of human rights there, nor the sharing of the evangelism concerns and insights of Korean churches with the rest of the world. We need to affirm the oneness of the churches and the need for mutual challenge and support as Christians try to be faithful to their calling.

I can't help feeling how many more allies the ecumenical movement could have had, and how much richer and stronger we could have become, if only we would have more clarity in our theological convictions and allow them to guide us as we seek the unity that is promised us. I look for insights as to how the ministry of evangelism can contribute to the ecumenical movement. Do you have something for me here?

The other thought I like to share, it may only be some sort of a thinking outloud instead of a well thought-out thought ☺ has to do with evangelism and dialogue with people of other living faiths. Two events in this regard happened in the year which render me both grateful and alert. You remember the July issue of the Monthly Letter about bearing witness to Hindu neighbours? A colleague from the Dialogue office (DFI) wrote it. For me, it is probably the most lucid dialogue statement on witness. The clarity is such that, in my opinion, the issue is cut, the problem defined. Which is: In front of a Hindu, or others of another living faith, do we or do we not, as Christians, proclaim "Christ is the Only Way: there is no salvation except through him"?

To quote from the same letter, the answer is clearly "No" - "If you ask me to single out one single factor that has been the greatest hindrance to genuine witness, I would say that it is these absolute claims that some Christians make for Christ. The decisiveness of Christ must be a matter of experience and should never be a matter of preaching." Thus the field is open for debate. For this I am grateful. The other event which makes me become alert is the passage of the WCC statement on Mission and Evangelism - An Ecumenical Affirmation. As I expressed my unhappiness in my last letter over a section on Witness Among People of Living Faiths, the wording "in him is our salvation",

instead of "in him is salvation", let alone "in him only is salvation" denotes no more than the lowest common denominator of the thinkings of the ecumenical movement. There is need, to use Archbishop Edward Scott's expression, for "a common quest into a deeper and fuller understanding". My hope is that the ecumenical movement will engage itself on this vital issue, and the Vancouver Assembly with its explosive theme may well be a proper arena.

As an Asian, I believe I have long been aware of the minority status of the Christian churches among neighbours who possess different faiths. We need the ministry of dialogue for mutual understanding, for cooperation, yes, for our own survival, and yes, for the enrichment of our own faith. I have also put much hope in dialogue because it challenges much of the missionary practices of the churches. As far as I am concerned, in terms of world evangelization, the modern missionary movement and the evangelistic endeavour of the subsequent national churches have not made a dent on countries and peoples which have long-established cultures and religions. India, Burma, Thailand, China, Japan spring to mind. Our way of doing the job obviously has not worked. So I eagerly look for another way. Although fully aware of the fact that Dialogue does not speak the language of evangelism, I was, and still am, prepared to see in it an ally or even a teacher, indirectly, in the church's evangelism task. Now, I've been put on alert. Do we or do we not proclaim that Christ is the Only Way?

Arrogance, let me assure you, has nothing to do with it. There's absolutely nothing in Christianity today that we can be arrogant about. Similarly, for that matter, for Islam and Hinduism. Massacre, totalitarianism, Casteism. They provide the most compelling reasons in the world for people not to believe. That's why, for us Christians, there's all the more reason not to point to ourselves but to Christ. And the only asset Christians have in pointing others towards Christ lies with the recognition and confession 1) of our failure to follow him and 2) of his love which compels us to continue on this journey. This, in all fairness, is somewhat of a negative asset, but herein lies our credibility with all those who are on a journey too.

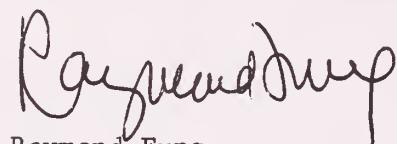
Back to the question of the finality of Christ. Probably, there is no one ecumenical answer to it, perhaps because of the nature of the ecumenical movement, or perhaps because of the nature of the question. But I am glad the problem has been defined. How shall we approach the issue? I believe we would debate it head-on on a practitioner's level, i.e., let practitioners of evangelism share their experiences and conceptualization of evangelism among people of other faiths, to see if proclaiming Christ as the Only Way works or not. That would give us a good start.

We could, of course, take a more theological approach. But I don't know if we can break new ground. Or we would have to go a long way back, and say, "The question is all wrong. Let's bring in a new formulation." I am aware for instance that a few theologians in Asia have been attempting to understand Christianity afresh with a creation focus rather than the salvation focus. Potentially, this has the promise of easier sailing for Christology in the Asian context. We may be able to steer away from having to deal with the question of the finality of Christ with regard to other offers of salvation. But, I am not sure. It is a monumental task. I am suspicious of academics making structures of words and call it theology. And I suspect "What do you think of Christ?" will always remain a question and a challenge with us, seeing as it did in the Gospels.

My preferred approach to the whole concern of world mission and evangelism among people of other living faiths is, and I must be careful now and I ask of you not to misunderstand me, the approach of solidarity, of participation in people's struggle for justice and dignity, in short, of the Good News to the Poor variety. During my 14 years of industrial mission in Asia, my every encounter with the poor was an encounter with people of another living faith, except when they happen to be Marxist-inclined. In most cases, we got through to each other. This is not to suggest that all non-Christian religious believers are poor. On a world scale, the overwhelming majority of them are. Neither do I suggest that the faith elements of the poor are not important to them. They are, and extremely so. As a matter of fact, I wish those of us who work with the poor for justice would have a much better appreciation of the religious in people. My experience has been simply that credibility, trust, openness and respect can be more naturally achieved if we, Christians and others, work together on our felt needs, struggle together against forces which sin against us.

I have a lot more to share with you on the common concern of Good News to the Poor and where a handle can be found, having been exposed to the abundance which is the World Council of Churches family in the course of the year. So I look forward to a new year of sharing. With this may I wish you and your family a happy Christmas,

Yours in Christ,



Raymond Fung

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Once again, an appeal to you to share your evangelism hopes for the Assembly in Vancouver next July and August. This gathering will be decisive in influencing the WCC agenda for the next ten years. I hope to devote one or two issues of the Monthly Letter to reader's views. Please play your part.

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Jesus Christ and Mission: The Cruciality of Christology

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Introduction

The theme of this annual meeting of the American Society of Missiology is "Mission and Joint Witness: Basis and Models of Cooperation." We are seeking together those points where we, as Christians in different denominations and communions, can find the common ground upon which we might stand to witness to Christ. We do this not just out of some sense of a greater efficiency or effectiveness in our evangelizing efforts, so as to streamline our processes or utilize better our resources, but for profoundly theological reasons. There is but one Head of the Body, and that is Christ. We acknowledge but a single Lord, and that acknowledgement, if it is to be true to its Lord, should be of a single voice. That deeper desire to praise God in unity wells up from that great prayer of Jesus himself: "That all may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, and that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." (John 17:21 NAB)

We realize, too, that the divisions brought into the body of Christ are a stumbling block for many who would hear the Gospel. We preach union with Christ, but manifest among ourselves division. How does our human failing strain the credibility of our

evangelization to our hearers? We obscure the power of the cross by our own, all-too-human power struggles and rivalries. And we do not live together in peace and harmony that is portrayed for us as a sign of the resurrection in the Book of Acts (Acts 4: 32-35).

But recent decades have witnessed to significant progress. It has long been noted that the ecumenical movement itself grew out of the missionary movement -- as though the experience of evangelists prompted a reflection on the scandal of divided witness to the One Lord. And documents of these last few decades from all across the spectrum of the Christian church have acknowledged the need for a greater sense of collaboration and cooperation, as in the Lausanne Covenant (1974) and its followup in the Manila Conference (1989); to the World Council of Churches' ecumenical affirmation on mission and evangelism (1982), reaffirmed by participants in the 1989 meeting in San Antonio; and in parallel Roman Catholic documents.

A call for greater unity is one thing; finding suitable ways to work toward and achieve it is another. Evangelism, as Philip Potter remarked a number of years ago, provides a challenging ground for that struggle (World Council of Churches 1982: 428). For it touches on our most personal encounters with the Risen Lord in the experience of grace and forgiveness, prompting us to ponder again the meaning of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. It urges a definition of the role of the church in this

process. It requires that we think about those who struggle to live upright and just lives beyond the pale of the Gospel, trying to discern their motives and inner directions. And it demands thinking about integrity on all fronts -- our preaching of Christ, our witness, the world to which we witness. This is captured beautifully in one of the themes of the 1989 Manila Congress of the Lausanne Covenant, "Calling the Whole Church to Take the Whole gospel to the Whole World."

If we ever hope to develop the grounds for common witness, it will require this kind of holism. Even to treat any one of these themes of christ, church, world with the comprehensiveness it deserves goes beyond what could be done here adequately. Yet despite this awareness of the inadequacy of our efforts, we know that we must continue to move forward, in the hope that the Holy Spirit is guiding us.

In view of that, I want to focus on the topic of Jesus Christ and mission, and within that topic on three points for reflection and discussion. These three points are ones that divide Christians from each other in different patterns and configurations of disunity. They are all, I believe, central to our affirmations about who Jesus Christ is and what he has done for us in saving us. My hope in each of these is to sketch directions that might aid us, first of all, in examining the quality of our preaching and witness in mission, and secondly, in laying out what might be the bases for developing the frameworks and

models we will need to achieve a greater sense of both fidelity to the Gospel and commitment to the unity of witness that befits our one Lord, Jesus Christ.

Thus what follows here is by no means complete. It is offered rather as a series of suggestions to stimulate discussion and common exploration. Some of these questions loom, I believe, as the most important ones theologians will have to face in the coming decades as Christianity becomes a genuinely world church.

There are three areas to explore together here: (1) What measure of salvation beyond Christ; (2) the role of the Trinity in Christian mission; and (3) preaching the whole Christ.

What Measure of Salvation outside Christ?

For a long time, most of the Christian church answered the question about salvation outside Christ and his church in a simple, straightforward manner: there was, quite simply, no hope of such salvation outside of accepting Christ as savior and being incorporated into his Body, the church. But all throughout that same history, there have been dissenting voices, usually coming from those intimately acquainted with non-Christian realities. The names of Justin Martyr and those connected with the catechetical school at Alexandria are some of those who come to mind.

It is only in the most recent period, however, that the question has taken on a new urgency. When Christians faced only one opponent, it seemed simple enough to reaffirm the sovereignty of Christ. But within the missionary experience of this century, especially in Asia, attitudes began to shift. There Christianity is a tiny minority and seems destined to remain so, despite our most fervent evangelistic efforts. Encounter and dialogue with Asians reveal persons of deep faith in their own traditions, committed to living upright and just lives. One becomes aware of how much Christian preaching was cloaked, even muffled, by Western cultural attitudes. But even when one moves beyond ethnocentrism and colonialism, even as one continues to believe that Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life, one cannot help but wonder about how God might be working in and through those other great religious traditions.

Different parts of the Christian church have responded to it differently. To take but a few examples: already in 1964 the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic church affirmed that "[t]hose who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience -- those too may achieve eternal salvation." (Lumen gentium, 16). Thus, there was an affirmation that God's grace could be active in people's lives outside Christ and the church. While

But it is also true that no EC texts in ad. 1964
Vatican II affirm that God's grace is to the non-christians.

hesitant about expressing what the exact nature of the salvation might be, that same Council, in other documents (notably the Constitution on Divine Revelation, the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church and the Decree on the Relation to Non-Christian Religions), does affirm that God and God's salvation does move -- however mysteriously -- outside the realm of the Church and the preaching of Christ.

Protestant churches have largely been more hesitant in their approach to all of this. To allow for such divine activity without the explicit mediation of Christ goes beyond the strong Christocentrism that marked the Reformation and formed their understanding of the meaning of the Scriptures. Different measures of goodness are to be found in non-Christian cultures and peoples, but this does not prescind from their need for Christ. To take but one recent example from the Manila Manifesto: at one point the document affirms that "[b]ecause men and women are made in God's image and see in the creation traces of its creator, the religions which have arisen do sometimes contain elements of truth and beauty." (Manila Manifesto 1989:29) But its seventh affirmation reads also: "We affirm that other religions and ideologies are not alternative paths to God, and that human spirituality, if unredeemed by Christ, leads not to God but to judgment, for Christ is the only way (*ibid.*:26).

The possible calibrations between different positions of a christocentric approach regarding what we mean about the "truth" and the "salvation" found outside Christianity present a complex bundle of proposals, none of which has met universal acceptance. From Rahner's "anonymous Christian" through Schlette's "ordinary and extraordinary" means of salvation, these different approaches are wrapped up with how we understand creation, the extent of God's revelation, the relative strength of uncreated reason, the precise meaning of human sinfulness, and the role of other religions in God's overall plan for human salvation.

But even before this complex of issues could be unravelled, there has come in the last two decades an even more dramatic challenge by the rise of theocentric approaches that shift the parameters of the discussion entirely. To most Christians such an approach cannot escape relativizing the person and work of Christ in the world, and in so doing, questioning the uniqueness of Christ and the fullness of God's revelation through him. This was evident in, for example, Carl Braaten's presentation on the Trinity last evening, and many would find themselves in sympathy with him on this matter.

My own feeling is that we should not be too hasty to set aside a christocentric approach for a theocentric one, no matter how well it seems to meet some of our problems in facing other religious traditions in their integrity. I believe that two important tasks still remain before the grounding of a chris-

tocentric approach -- tasks that have already been undertaken, but not completed. These have to do with our understanding of the relationships surrounding uniqueness, and a closer study of the New Testament itself as it witnesses to the uniqueness of Jesus. Let us look at these two tasks and see if they might reveal something to us about the meaning of Jesus.

The Language of Uniqueness

Part of the problem clouding this discussion is finding the adequate language to capture Jesus' role in God's salvific plan. Basically, it involves finding a faithful and contemporarily relevant equivalent to some of the language of the New Testament such as is found in Acts 4:12 ("There is no salvation in anyone else, for there is no other name in the whole world given to men by which we are to be saved"), and elsewhere in the New Testament. What is needed is to find ways to sort out the meanings of concepts that are used as equivalents, but do not actually have quite the same definition. To that extent, gradated schemata or spectra can be of help. Let me suggest two such instruments here.

The first was offered some years ago by J. Peter Schineller in his classification of the different approaches to the question of Christ and salvation (Schineller 1976). He distinguishes four points on a spectrum: an ecclesiocentric approach, a constitutive approach, a normative approach, and a theocentric approach. Of

importance here are the second and third points. "Constitutive" he defines as "not only normative but indispensable" (*Ibid.*:553). "Normative," on the other hand, "corrects and fulfills all other mediations." (*Ibid.*:556) Thus some see Christ as constitutive, while others may posit Christ as being normative but not constitutive.

A second classification, now widely used (although not always in the same way), would make a distinction between exclusivistic and inclusivistic approaches, i.e., those saying that Christ is the only way, and those holding that Christ is the superior (but not only) way. (cf. most recently, Hillman 1989)

In all these instances, there is a matter of precision of language. What do we mean by "absolute," "unique," "normative," "constitutive," and so on? Some of this language finds its semantic field by setting itself off from the more clearly definable. Other kinds see themselves as foundational. In every instance, however, the language presumes a relationship, a relationship to something it is not. Without being aware of that, we can be engaging in superlatives that are really simply oppositional. Freytag showed that already thirty-five years ago in terms of some of the biblical language of "ta ethne": that it was less descriptive than a foil for talking about the Chosen People. (Freytag 1956)

Thus one thing that we might try to do together is to check out the precision of the language we are using when we try to speak of the uniqueness of Jesus.

The New Testament Witness to Jesus' Uniqueness

In one manner of speaking, we can say that there would have been no New Testament if the followers of Jesus had not thought him to be unique. One can read the New Testament as a coming to terms with what God had revealed in Jesus. We know also that this coming to terms with the event of Jesus did not happen all at once. Recently, Adelbert Denaux has retraced that development. He sees it as growing out of the historical Jesus' claim to a unique filial relationship to God and his claim of an eschatological mission and authority from the Father. The experience of the resurrection and the Spirit led Jesus' disciples into the confession of a high christology, developed in a dialectical relationship with their equally held tenet of monotheism (Denaux 1988).

We know, too, that the development of the understanding of Jesus' did not end with the New Testament period; indeed it would take the ensuing three hundred fifty years to come to its completion in the affirmation of the Council of Chalcedon.

This long development poses for us a question today, a question again that we might explore together. Just as the development of the understanding of Jesus' divinity stretched beyond the

New Testament period -- but did not negate what the biblical witness proposed -- might we be in a situation, because of the changed circumstances prompted by living in a genuinely world church, that requires a continued reflection? Again, such a reflection would not negate the past so much as extend it. That past must be viewed cumulatively rather than in terms of isolated words and events. If we do not do that, we would have difficulty explaining, for example, the apparent reluctance of Jesus to appear as though he were usurping God's place (Logister 1988:254-257). But back to the point: dramatic new developments such as those we experience in the encounter with the great religious traditions of the East may prompt such reflections. Are we in a position, then, to reflect together again on the growing sense of Jesus' uniqueness and his divinity in the early church in such a way as to carry that reflection into the circumstances of our own time?

The Trinity and Mission

Carl Braaten has already addressed this topic in some detail; what I would like to do is to highlight two things that he said and make two proposals for reflection on the Trinity that have implications for Jesus Christ and mission.

Braaten makes the point that a neglect of the Trinity opened the way for theocentric understandings that minimize the importance of Jesus in the Christian confession. He traces this

development from the nineteenth century down into our own time. That is a fruitful point for our reflection. He notes also the western tendency to begin with the unity of God and from there to move to the Trinity, whereas Orthodoxy has preferred to move in the opposite direction, from the three Persons to the one God. This is suggestive of a second point for our reflection and for our common witness. The two points I would like to present, then, have to do with the divided witness between East and West about the relationships in the Trinity (the filioque problem), and what our point of departure (unity or Trinity) might tell us about God and mission.

The Filioque and Mission

The witness of the New Testament regarding the relationship of the Son and the Spirit is complex, and cannot be completely harmonized. Paul at one point exclaims that the Lord and the Spirit are one (2 Cor 3:17). Paul seems to want to link the Spirit closely with the Risen Lord so as to hold some of the more charismatic developments in Corinth from getting out of hand (1 Cor 12-14). On the other hand, the synoptics make the Spirit of God to seem more separate from Jesus.

A painful point that divides East and West is the understanding of this relation -- whether the Spirit proceeds from the Father only (East) or from the Father and the Son (West). The western affirmation is admittedly late, although it clearly has

its roots in Augustine's reflections on the Trinity and can claim precedent in Paul's theology. One of the consequences of the western affirmation, however, is a strong christocentrism that at times can threaten to become a christomonism. The East has long noted this, that tying the Spirit so closely to the Son reduces, as it were, all of the Father's activity to that which is manifested through the Son.

The experience of the corruption of the medieval church and the need to reassert that it is Christ who saves us, not the church, only reinforced christocentrism in the West. Is it perhaps time now to reconsider that approach to God's revelation in Jesus? Would not the Eastern approach be more useful in explaining how God is manifest through the Spirit throughout the world, and how that Spirit goes before us to prepare the hearts and minds of those to whom we preach the Gospel? This is not to create a tritheism or to suggest that God works at cross-purposes in the world, but to overcome our tendency to undervalue the work of the Spirit as proceeding from the Father. Certainly one consequence of the addition of the filioque in the Nicene Creed has been to keep the theology of the Holy Spirit underdeveloped. The Spirit is not separate from the Son, but cannot it be distinct from the Son?

This, I believe, is something that a more soundly trinitarian approach to mission urges upon us for reflection. It can serve as a safeguard to refraining from making our solus

Christus simply a replacement for a sola ecclesia. And it might provide us with a way of dealing with the reality of many religious traditions and the place of Christ and Christianity within them.

Where to Begin: Unity or Trinity?

As was noted above, East and West have had different points of departure for reflecting on the relations within the Trinity. The West's concern with the unity of the Godhead has led to a wonderful cohesion in our faith, but has made it difficult at times for us to come to terms with new realities.

A number of years ago, the French Roman Catholic theologian Christian Duquoc wrote a book entitled Dieu Différent (Duquoc 1978). He looked at the doctrine of the Trinity from the Capadocian point of view, and suggested that such an approach to God could serve as the grounding of difference as an essential component of unity rather than its antithesis. He does not extend the argument to the question of christology and other religious traditions we are addressing here, but I think such an extrapolation might be made. Would the presence of different religious traditions in the world be a manifestation of a difference that is part of the unity of God? This is not to claim that all religions are of equal value, but it would help overcome that gap that arises out of affirming the possibility of truth in

other religions, but not wanting to grant them any salvific value. Does difference offer a categorical possibility that will help us mediate our problem here?

Duquoc's interpretation of trinitarian theology is not without precedent. We find similar ideas being discussed and critiqued elsewhere in the West (cf. Baillie 1948; Plantinga 1986; Schillebeeckx 1989). But again, as we think together, might we not find a path here worth exploring?

Preaching the Whole Christ

As was noted above, the theme of the 1989 LCWE Conference of "Calling the Whole Church to Take the Whole Gospel to the Whole World" is helpful for reflecting on the theme of Jesus Christ and mission. It prompts us to ask: do we preach the whole Christ? Or do we preach only the Christ who suits us? Every missionary needs to ask this question from time to time.

I do not intend to point fingers here, but only wish to note a phenomenon that could well have an effect on how our christologies get shaped, and in turn how they interact with our sense of mission. I refer to the shift taking place, in many different sectors around the world, away from a heavy reliance on the christologies of the Pauline and Johannine literature of the New Testament toward the christologies of the synoptic writers. To be sure, the christologies of the synoptics have never been absent from Christian faith, but under the influence from two un-

likely quarters -- liberation theologies on the one hand, and secularized cultures on the other -- synoptic christologies seem to be more and more in evidence. These christologies are generally not as "high" as are those of Paul and John, although they are not incompatible with our confession of the divinity of Jesus. They emphasize much more the earthly life and ministry of Jesus than do those of Paul and John. They make for a challenging approach to discipleship and imitation of Christ, and point us much more toward this world than so exclusively to the world to come.

This is not the place to argue the relative merit or lack thereof of this shift; I am only try to identify what seems to be a growing phenomenon. But if it is indeed the work of God's Spirit for our time, what will it mean for our christologies for mission? Are we being asked to expand our christological horizons, to include more than the traditional high christologies of John and Paul? Certainly parts of the synoptic christologies have always informed missiology, notably Matthew's great commission. But will they have an effect on more profound aspects of christology -- e.g., if we adopt the suffering messiah christology of Mark to guide us rather than the more exalted christology of John? Again, in a time when we are faced with new and daunting challenges, might this not be something that we can explore together?

Conclusion: The Cruciality of Christology

This presentation has tried to raise questions in three areas of our christology -- regarding salvation outside of Christ, our understanding of the trinity, and preaching the whole Christ -- that confront all of us in mission today, whatever our particular backgrounds, and are areas that we can work on together as we search for the proper and faithful forms of mission for the twenty-first century. They are meant at this point as questions to explore and suggestions to pursue. It will take our working together to discern whether or not these are potential resolutions to the challenges we face.

A final word about the subtitle of this presentation. This was the title assigned for this presentation, and the play on words is not lost on any of us. I accepted the title gladly, because it highlights two important things we need to keep in mind in any discussion of Jesus Christ and mission.

First of all, we cannot talk Christian mission if we do not speak of Jesus Christ. He is simply crucial to the message, the crossroads where we meet God in our world. To diminish that fact is to engage in something other than Christian mission.

And secondly, to speak of Jesus Christ is to speak of his cross. The cross (and here I remain Pauline) is central to the story of Jesus and our proclamation of the Good News today. The cross reminds us how little we know of the ways of God in the world, how easily we mistake our own power and ways of doing

things for the ways of God. I think that such a modesty should underscore not only our evangelizing, but also our reflection in missiology -- that whether the absolutes we proclaim reflect the mind of God or our own; and that whether we like -- Jesus on the way to the cross -- may be asked to remain faithful even if we do not understand entirely where God is leading us.

In this time where the question of universal salvation seems more complex than it may have been for us in the past, that modesty -- and that fidelity -- should be two characteristics of every disciple of Jesus Christ.

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Abstract

Questions today about the relationship between the salvation given in Jesus Christ and the salvific value of non-Christian religions looms larger than ever before. Robert Schreiter suggests in this article that, even though the Christian churches are divided in their responses to this challenge, there may be some areas where they can work together to meet this issue in the twenty-first century. He proposes three areas for such common exploration: what measure of salvation might be found in non-Christian religions; the meaning of the Trinity for understanding non-Christian religions; and the importance of preaching the whole Christ.

Vita

Robert J. Schreiter, C.PP.S., is professor of doctrinal theology and coordinator of World Mission Studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. He is president of the American Society of Missiology for the 1990-91 year.

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Van Engen's summary

Mission from unity. Agreement on Christ incarnate, resurrected, God. The metaphor for mission.

Mission in unity. The means of mission.

Mission toward unity. The goal of mission.

Sch. Points away from a missiology too Christocentrist

" " too church encapsulated.

" " too ideological (the "Christ-idea").

" " too theocentric (loses incarnation connection, cross).

It implies again that the - Engen's - idea is that
mission is not the goal

and what is an adequate overall theology of religions. Most of this overview will be taken from Contemporary Missiology, by J. Verkuyl. In light of the first two sections, the final section will be an attempt to draw some conclusions about my understanding, about my theology of Christian witness among those of other faith traditions.

Section I.

Learning of Gandhi's faith experience and reading his books caused me to question my own faith experience and beliefs. His views about how people of different religions are to relate to one another were particularly thought provoking. A closer look at some of these major ideas will provide an assortment of issues we will later compare to a Christian perspective. The Message of Jesus Christ is a concise account of Gandhi's personal opinions about Jesus Christ and Christianity, and it will be the major source of the following material.

One of the things that must have influenced Gandhi's feelings about Christianity and its missionary practices was early contact with Christians, themselves. Gandhi could appreciate most religions by the time he was a young adult, but he had a problem with Christianity. An early negative impression was gained by observing Christian missionaries standing on street corners and abusing Hindus and their beliefs. Almost simultaneously, he became angry at the news that a Hindu convert to Christianity had been compelled to disregard his previous customs and religious standards. Supposedly, grace allowed one to eat beef, drink liquor and wear European clothes. These and other experiences lessened Gandhi's opinion of Christians. Christian missionaries were seen as hypocrites and unworthy messengers.¹

When Gandhi moved to England for further education, his contacts with Christianity became somewhat more positive. He was introduced to and studied the Bible. He was affected by it, especially the Sermon on the Mount. This particular passage truly emblazed itself upon Gandhi. It gave definite form to his conviction that Truth and morality were the basis and substance of all things.²

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Gandhi was not convinced that Christianity offered him something unique and superior to that which he believed as a Hindu. God's existence and creative acts of mercy offered nothing new, and Gandhi could not accept the idea that Jesus was the only incarnation of God or the idea that Jesus was the true Mediator between God and humanity. If God had one son, than all human beings were children of God; as Jesus was like God, so could all people be like God. In terms of salvation, Gandhi could not accept that it was attainable only by becoming a Christian. Jesus was a divine teacher, who's message was best conveyed in his Sermon on the Mount; Jesus was a martyr for the world to emulate, who's actions were totally servantlike loving. On the other hand, Christian principles and lives did not convince Gandhi that Christianity was the truest of all religions. Hinduism satisfied the heart, and soul and mind of Gandhi.³

The supposition held by Gandhi was that all religions are linked to Truth, God, and that they were all imperfect. The true factor they had in common was their stress on the Law of Love, while their imperfection was the result of inadequate human interpretation and discipleship. Gandhi wrote, "Religions are different roads converging to the same point," and he asks, "What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal?"⁴ Love is the law that is seen to govern all major religions. All would be well if members of the various faiths would just follow this rule. Mutual tolerance is the only possible alternative for people who have similar but slightly differing interpretations of the one true and perfect Religion. Thus, all religions were equal according to Gandhi. In conjunction with his framework surrounding the equality of religions, Gandhi's primary objection with missionaries was that they thought no religion other than their own offered truth and salvation.⁵

What did Gandhi intend in his request for mutual toleration? It was his invitation for the religions of the world to learn and grow from one another. Gandhi had a broad faith that was not restricted to one orthodox interpretation of Hinduism. Toleration meant working along side of other traditions. It meant loving all people, everywhere, and becoming better people through religious interaction. Each religion should, like a rose, transmit its own special scent not by action of speech but by the natural effect of being a Hindu, or a

Christian or a Jew in the midst of others. Toleration was to be synonymous with humility that does not hold up one's faith as superior. All faiths were seen to be equally valid, salvific and errant.⁶

Conversion was possible within Gandhi's understanding of things, but it was to have nothing to do with acquiring Western beliefs or practices as a matter of fact. It entailed giving up the evil of the old and acquiring the good of the new. Practically, it meant greater self-purification. One was not to convert from one faith to another. Gandhi was even troubled by the thought of secretly praying for one to be converted to one's own religion. Instead, efforts and prayers should be made that aid people of faith in becoming more obedient to their own faith tradition. In the end, conversion is an individual matter caused and known only by God. Conversely, Gandhi, accepted those who did change from one religion to another as long as the conversion was not induced by fear, hunger or material gain. Obviously, these were some of the factors Gandhi saw as forces affecting Christian conversion.⁷

In the final analysis, Gandhi strongly maintained that the validity of one's faith depends upon the degree to which one lives out the main tenets of that tradition of faith. Gandhi wrote he could not be content until he was purified from even the thought of sin. Of course, for Gandhi, being obedient involved non-violence, or, in other words, turning one's cheek and loving one's enemies. Living the faith related directly to moral progress and not at all to material gain. Obedience to truth and the quest for it has everything to do with purification of the soul and nothing to do with bodily pleasures. Regarding this point, Gandhi believed that Christianity lost contact with Christ's message. The teachings of Jesus are antithetical to Western society's materialism, technology and, so-called, modern civilization. The point is that adherents of Christianity should live their faith and let their lives witness of all people and religions. In other words, let the works of believers be their appeal and service to the world.⁸

Section II.

Gandhi's thoughts on the subject of religions relating to one

another was unsystematic; Verkuyl's material will be more systematic. Let us now consider a Christian perspective of how people from different religions are to relate to one another. Three questions will order the format. The questions are: 1) Why do Christians view mission as indispensable? 2) How should missionaries witness to the Gospel? 3) What is an adequate theology of religions? These same questions will shape the course my conclusions will take in Section Three.

To be sure, there are both sound and unsound motives for Christian mission. Likewise, there have been valid and invalid appraisals of missionary motives. Verkuyl makes a concerted effort to be fair. He lists pure and impure motives that have been used over the years.

First, there is the Motive of Obedience. God's written word mandates the proclamation of reconciliation in Jesus Christ. Second, the motive of compassion (love, mercy, pity). Recipients of God's great love should, in turn, be instruments of God's love to others. Compassion is a motive derived from God's creative and recreative compassion. Doxology is a third motive. God's divine glory is that which leads men and women to praise God through their witness in word and deed. An Eschatological motive believes that the body of Christ is incomplete until all people become a part of it. There is a Motive of Haste, which considers the Good News of Jesus Christ as an urgent message. Finally, the Personal Motive involves the dynamic nature of one's own journey of faith. It leads a person to share it with others and to grow in the process of sharing.⁹

Verkuyl also gives four impure motives. The Imperialistic Motive involves both political and economic forces that attempt to extend their respective domains of influence over other nations of the world. Next is the Cultural Motive. Simply put, this motive results in the transfer of the missionary's culture rather than the proclamation of God's incarnation, which is not the possession of any one culture. Third, there is a Commercial Motive. The Church's progress in a country was sometimes valued as an opportunity to further commercial interests. Finally, we consider the Motive of Ecclesiastical Colonialism, which entails the goal of modeling the native church after the mother church.¹⁰

Summarizing pure and impure motives gives a parital answer to why missionaries seek to share their faith. Verkuyl offers a second

ENDNOTES

¹M.K. Gandhi, The Message of Jesus Christ (Bombay: Anand T. Hingorani, 1964) p. 1.

²Ibid., pp.2-3.

³Ibid., pp. 4-9.

⁴Ibid., p. 13.

⁵Ibid., pp. 9, 50-52.

⁶Ibid., pp. 27, 31.

⁷Ibid., pp. 15, 28, 33, 56.

⁸Ibid., pp. 5, 17, 23.

⁹J. Verkuyl, Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978) pp. 164-168.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 168-174.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 176-180.

¹²Ibid., pp. 181-185.

¹³Ibid., pp. 194-196.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 196-198.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 199.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 199-200.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 201-202.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 224.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 206-211.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 211-221.

²¹Ibid., pp. 221-222.

²²Ibid., pp. 355-357.

²³Ibid., pp. 357-359.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 359-361.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 361-366.

CHRISTIANITY AND PLURALISM:

Perspectives on the Problem in the Indian Context

Paper presented to

*Dr. Samuel H. Moffett
EC41
Contemporary Asian
Christianity*

by Richard Kusterbeck

Introduction

It is impossible to underestimate the importance of Asia. It is home to over sixty percent of the world's population and contains one third of the land mass. It contains an amazing variety of peoples, languages and cultures, and a great variety of religions, of which Christianity is only a small percentage. The fact that the overwhelming majority of Asians have remained faithful to their traditional faiths is one of the key factors in evaluating Asian Christianity, as Christians in Asia must cope with religious ^lpluralism ^Aas the dominate feature of their environment.

For centuries Christianity developed in a narrowly western context. It became the dominant religion of Europe, but was hemmed in by muslim "infidels" to the east and south. The discovery of a new world, and the development of an economic and industrial revolution led to a great expansion of European influence throughout the world. This led to the nineteenth century, which witnessed the greatest period of missionary expansion in Christian history. Christian missionaries carried the gospel to every nation on earth, winning converts, forming churches and passing on what was considered the best of Christian civilization. The underlying assumption of these

missionaries was that "vast hordes of unsaved heathen" of these lands were lost, and faced a Christian eternity without the gospel.

The twentieth century has brought new information and questions before the church. The former caricatures of Asia's great religions are being replaced by a genuine appreciation of their ethical nature and answers to the ultimate questions of existence. Furthermore, a new estimation of their strength has been called for, as most asians have shown stiff resistance to conversion to Christianity. These questions are now being dealt with by theologians from Asia, who view the plurality of religions in Asia from an inside perspective, and often arrive at different estimations than western theologians.

Why are there so many religions? How do these relate to each other? Is there only one true religion? If so, what is the fate of everyone else? Are there many paths to one god? These questions are critical concerns to the Christians of Asia, and the solutions they offer will shape the missiology of Asian Christianity for a long time.

In this paper I want to examine the problem of religious pluralism in Asia. First, I shall examine some of the traditional Christian solutions offered to explain how Christianity relates to other religions, and how those answers are viewed today. I shall then turn to briefly examine some of the great religions of Asia, paying particular attention to the Indian subcontinent. Finally, I would like to analyze how several Indian theologians are addressing the questions and examine the startlingly different answers they advocate.

Before we examine the traditional Christian positions in depth it will be helpful to sketch out a simple range of opinions that are held by Christians concerning other religions. Lesslie Newbigin lists a sample of these as:

1. Christianity is the only truth revealed by God and the Christian has nothing to learn from these other religions which are wholly false.

2. Non-Christian religions are the work of devils and their similarities are the results of demonic cunning.

3. Other religions are a preparation for Christ and the reception of the gospel fulfills them.

4. Other religions have true value. Their religious claims contain elements of genuine truth; but only in Christianity are all true values found in their proper balance, relationship and perspective.

5. A ~~difficult~~^{different} perspective was offered by Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964). In it the world religions are viewed as concentric circles having the Roman Catholic Church at the center, then other Christian, Jews, Muslims, other (Theists) etc., radiating from the center.

6. Recent Roman Catholic ^{theological} thought which affirms that non-Christian religions are the means which god uses to save those who have not yet been reached by the gospel.

The Problem of Exclusiveness

This scope of Christian opinion covers the very traditional to the modern, yet does not yield on any critical point of the Christian faith. For example, the uniqueness or universality of Christ. However, quite a different theory of religious pluralism is increasingly heard and accepted in many quarters. In this view, there is no one and only way to religious truth. It understands that there are many roads to one center, each co-existing and satisfactory for different individuals. This view, and variations of it are perceived as serious threats to the Christian faith, as Karl Rahner states:

"Because of Jesus Christ, Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion, intended for all men, which cannot recognize any other religion beside itself as of equal right...this pluralism is a greater threat and a reason for greater unrest for Christianity than for any other religion. For no other religion - not even Islam - maintains so absolutely that it is the religion, the one and only valid revelation of the one living god... The fact of the pluralism of religions, which endures...even after a history of two thousand years, must therefore be the greatest scandal and the greatest vexation for Christianity". 2

? Doesnt #6
contain a critical
point - What's salvation
in Jesus Christ about.

Rahner has correctly diagnosed the problem; Christianity which claims to be the ultimate and clearest revelation of God in Christ must admit that after twenty centuries, the most generous estimate attributes only thirty two percent of the world as being Christian. 3

Essentially only ~~that~~ a small minority of the world claims it is right while the rest of the world is wrong. If Christians were to make any concession, their faith would be seriously undermined; the universal claims that have energized it until now would be threatened. Is Christ the "one among many" the "first among many" or the "only" way to god and salvation?

Thus a pressing need in Christian theology is to develop an apologetic for world religions. Simple missionary claims such as "Christ is the answer" must respond to the challenge "what do these others mean?" Yet before we list some of the possible solutions it will be helpful to examine more closely some of the modern notions of religious pluralism.

Roman Catholic Views

Much

Modern Catholic thought since Vatican II has made a radical break with both the traditional Christian view and the Protestant positions. They readily acknowledge God's saving activity in the world, even to the extent of accepting the salvific value of other faiths while retaining a measure of uniqueness for Christ by conceiving of Christianity as the norm.

Roman Catholic thought has several theological differences from the Protestants. It has always stood for the universal aspects of Christ's salvation. It has not been troubled with the decrees of elections since the middle ages, and has never advocated as severe a doctrine of total depravity as the reformers. Yet Vatican II marks a significant change, as its "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" praises the beliefs and practices of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. It states that these religions contain truths that have enlightened every human being and encourages dialogue and common life with other faiths. Much of the impetus for the Vatican II change has come from the two leading theologians that shaped its view of relating to non-Christian faiths, Karl Rahner and Hans Kung. Although Rahner wrote earlier, Kung has had greater impact on the average person as his works are available in popular form suitable for ingestion by the average mind. Kung notes that the great religions have to be acknowledged, at least provisionally, as a

Official RC pronouncements, as in Nostra Aetate (1965) are less radical than Rahner - more liberal than Vatican II (1965). Nostra Aetate implies, but does not explicitly affirm, "means of salvation in other religions". Nostra Aetate is not universalist, and affirms Christ as the only mediator & savior. This is more like Kung than Rahner.

Kung is more conservative than Rahner

permanent fact. The sad record of Christian neglect of the great Asian lands where they have flourished is no reason to presuppose they have been neglected by God. The "cosmic covenant" with Adam and Noah are ample evidence to support God's interest. Thus, God plainly wills the salvation of those who are outside the church, and the means he uses to accomplish this are the "legitimate" religions which have a "relative validity", and a "relative providential right to exist". Kung adroitly points out that all religions are a mixture of faith, doubt, and superstition. He suggests that the Old Testament pattern of faith which had no explicit revelation of Christ was often corrupted with Baal-worship and cultic practices and was probably misunderstood by its followers. Yet it cannot be denied, by evangelicals or catholics, that it was effective for salvation. So from this Old Testament example he states that people can be saved without an explicit revelation of Christ by "extraordinary" means. Yet these people are not united to the visible church, and, presumably are unaware that they are Christians. Rahner termed them, "anonymous Christians", as recognizing their acceptance by God, but still through Christ. Rahner held that the time limit for this possibility exists only until the religion and culture is confronted with the Gospel, i.e.-the gospel is indigenized and embodied in the culture.¹⁷ When that happens, Christianity then becomes the normative revelation. Kung notes the problem with the term, how would we appreciate being called, "anonymous Buddhists" for example? Nevertheless, the concept requires a vast reorganization of presuppositions about the nature of the church. The Church is no longer an ark floating on a sea of Perdition, but the sign and sacrament of salvation; the explicit

representation of what is hidden reality outside the Church.

He does not suggest that all religions are equally true. If people are saved outside the church it is inspite of the errors of their faith, not because of them. Christ is the unique element of Christianity, only, as Kung argues, we have been bound by western interpretations of his message, his meaning and his person. Kung would have us open ourselves to truly Indian, African, and Asian Christian understandings of Christ and how He is active both in the universe and in the life of our Asian religions.

Thus recent Catholic theologians have acknowledged the possibility of permanent value and place for non-Christian religions. As one writer states; "There is a good deal of evidence that the actual religious pluralism is the will of God for humanity." 18 This is held in tension with the understanding that Christ is the critical catalyst for all world religions, as He is the final touchstone of divine revelation. Thus the Catholic view is just an extension of the Liberal Protestant view, for it still understands Christianity as a superior faith and the highest revelation, although it does not make salvation dependent upon a personal relationship with Christ.

What is then the result of this new development in mission theology? First, it must be acknowledged that there is an underlying desire on the part of many Christians to be more pluralistic. The "Scandal of Exclusivity" is not a point of pride but a object of dismay. No one enjoys looking at a world which is 70% non-Christian and consigning the greater portion of these people to hell. Yet few Christians want to reduce Christ to a transcendental influence which is divorced from the actual preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

thought forms and philosophical tenets of that culture in order to be understood. As Hinduism seems strange, even bizarre, to the Western mind, so Christianity often appears strange to the Asian mind. A two way relationship pluralism is the result, one which re-evaluates the nature of Asian religions, and at the same time seeks to translate Christianity into Asian thought forms and which respond to Asian questions. To illustrate how this might be done, let us examine the dominant faith of the sub-continent.

Hinduism

The great, diverse religion of Hinduism began over five thousand years ago and has shown itself to be remarkably pluralistic and adaptable. It can be divided into hundreds of sects which claim a total of over 3 million distinct deities. The unifying forces within the faith are esteem for the Vedas, the belief in Karma, reincarnation, and non-violence, respect for holy man, and acceptance of caste as the framework of society. 20

Hinduism can be divided into three main branches:

1. A small percentage who are mono-theistic, reject idol worship and the incarnation of the Gods. Those include: Arya Samaj-assembly of noblemen, formed in 1875; Shankar Archarya-Vendantic Hinduism; the RamaKrishna Mission (1886); and Sikhism which all can be considered reform movements, although Sikhism is usually classified as a separate faith.

2. The vast majority, 98%, are called Sanatanists, or idol worshipper. These believe in incarnations of the Gods, the chief among them being Siva, Kali, Vishnu, Ram, Krishna, and

Sakti.

3. New Sects- These are missionary oriented, proselytizing sects. They tend to draw on Christianity and Islam, and unite them to traditional Hindu philosophy, among them being: The Divine Light Mission (Guru Maharaj Ji), Sri Chinmoy, Ragneesh Bagwan.

Hinduism has passed through many phases or periods which demonstrated distinctive emphasis as; Vedic, Brahmanic, Philosophical, Reformed, and Devotional. The name for Hinduism derives from the word "Sindhu" which means "river", from this is derived the Persian "hindu" and the Greek "indos". Hinduism has no creed or doctrine. There is no such thing as heresy. There is no great founder as Moses, Jesus, Mohammed or the Gutama. Everything runs according to cosmic law or "dharma", which rules all of life. Hinduism believes in the self, which continues to pass from generation to generation, on an endless cycle of evolution and dissolution. Life is ruled by Karma, the principle of cause and effect. Every action has its consequence, and effects us in this life and perhaps the next. Karma determines who and what a person is. People are born unequal; caste dictates position, but Karma indicates an opportunity and not only fate. The actions we perform can raise or lower us through the chain of being.

Life is accepted with resignation but also involves action. One accepts, for injustice is the reward of your Karma. Yet the desire to transcend- moksha - to "eat up" Karma and get off the wheel of birth and rebirth is present. Moksha is release, emancipation, escape, deliverance, and liberation.

There are three chief paths to moksha called margas. They are the three disciplines of liberation or yogas: Karma Marga- the way of

Indian Christian Theology

The first question which faces us is not only one of indigenization. In some respects the Hindu tradition intersects with Christian philosophy as in the Bhakti tradition, but in many ways Hinduism is in opposition to Christianity. Can a Hindu-Christian who accepts Christ also accept a cyclical view of history? Syncretism is always a danger in indigenization, and even more so in the Indian context because the fundamental notions of sin, time, and after-life are radically different than the Western ideas. To the Western mind what appears to be heretical dilution of the faith may be to the Indian mind, an expression of Christ.

For the most part adaptation has taken place primarily in forms or rituals, not in theology. So the wedding necklace or mangalsutra can be used instead of a Western ring, and a Christian adaptation of the seven steps (*saptapadi*) will be used in a Hindu Christian weddings. However, these are adaptations of form not substance, similar to many worship traditions found in Western churches.

Walbert Buhlmam, who has been an eloquent advocate for

readjustment of our philosophy in encountering the religions of Asia, reports how firmly the Catholic Church rejected any theological adaptation with Hinduism. The Bangalore Center is a large Christian center which has held large study sessions on important topics of interest to the Christian church. In December, 1974, a group met to consider the place of non-Christian Scriptures in Indian Catholic worship sevices. Included was Mgr. Pietro Rossano, Vatican Secretary for Non-Christians. They concluded that the decisive point was not the text itself, but what was received and experienced as the "Word of God". They explained that what can be rightly understood as "seeds of the Word" can be found in Hindu scriptures, and so might be heard as the "Word of God". This continues the development from rejection of Hinduism as paganism, to a position of a positive recognition of its value in God's plan of salvation. It follows that the Hindu scriptures might also provide help in understanding the mystery of the Divine, as well as the Christian Scriptures do. The study group pointed out the limitations of other scriptures but advanced the position that through the anointing of the Holy Spirit we can discern the special way in which the Spirit speaks in those scriptures.

The Vatican responded quickly and decisively. In June, 1975, it issued a protocol which abruptly called a halt to the whole experimental pattern that was being tried. 22 Thus, they continued the historical pattern of adaptation in form but not in the substance of theology.

Another example of this type of adaptation is the Christian ashrams or religious communities. These have been popular since the middle of the last century, and, however ludicrous it may appear, many

of these have been formed where Indian Christians gather to study the thought of Calvin or Wesley. The adaptation of form is also seen in Christian hymns set to Indian tunes or in the ascetic sadhus, religious holy men. Yet the question remains: Is there a truly Indian theology? The tentative answer is , "yes", it is in the process of being born. It will be a Christian theology which will be as related to the philosophical systems of Hinduism as Paul, Augustine, and Origen were to theirs. The problem is how does Christianity relate to this adaptable system, without being swallowed up by the amorphous, changable boundaries of Hinduism? Christianity has always resisted syncretism because it is a dogmatic religion. Is this a product of the Greco-Roman culture- an accretion to the gospel? Can Indian Christians adapt Hinduism without slipping into syncretism? I don't know. I do know that ultimately they must do their own theology and be judged by their peers. Indian thought is rich, and its contributors are plentiful. Let us now examine some of their contributions.

The "Father of Modern India" as he is often called is Rammohan Roy, who was a contemporary of the Serampore trio of Carey, Marshman, and Ward. Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833) became fascinated with the person of Christ. Inspired also by Islam, he converted to monotheism and devoted his life to the overthrow of idol worship. He published many works and engaged in a published dialogue with Joshua Marshman over the nature of true religion. Roy held that moral principle was the essence of Christianity while Marshman tended to be more evangelic,^{al} Yet Rammahan Roy revered Christ and in a certain sense adopted Him into the Hindu world. This was not acceptable to Protestants who understood that the very nature of the gospel was at

stake. Although Raja Rammohan Roy is not counted in the Christian camp, and is not representative of orthodox theology, he began the dialogue and debate.

The next significant step was developed by Keshab Chandra Sen in 1872. He also became attached to the person of Christ, but instead of pursuing Christ along rationalistic lines as the Raja had done, Sen adapted the concept of bhakti -personal devotion- to his quest for Christ. Although unorthodox by creed, Sen moves towards trinitarianism but explains it in relation to Hindu definitions as Sat, Cit, and Anada. Yet perhaps his greatest contribution was his insight of a "hidden Christ" who is already present in the Hindu faith. This is the Christ who is present in all the good of philosophy and religion.²³ This concept ~~will~~^{has been} be picked up in our own day by Raymond Panikkar and contributes greatly to the discussion within Catholic circles. Keshub Chunder Sen, then, for his thoughts on the trinity, his description of Christ as divine humanity, and even expressing thought on the atonement, represents an authentic attempt to interpret Christ from an Indian perspective while not straying too far afield from the locus of orthodox Christianity.

Although Sen emphasized the continuity of Christianity with Hinduism he had no system of doctrine, which has led some to doubt his orthodoxy. A more rational approach but much less sympathetic to Hinduism was that pursued by Father Nehemiah Goreh (1828-95). He was a noted Sanskrit scholar and exponent of traditional Hinduism prior to his conversion, and later, ordination in the Anglican church. His greatest work was A Rational Refutation of the Hindu Philosophical Systems which was published in 1862. In it, with detailed logic he

examines the main Hindu systems and exposes the deficiencies in each. This becomes a vehicle to preach the gospel, which he does clearly and with much power. Although his apologetics were developed in a largely negative fashion, he recognized the value of Hinduism as a preparation Evangelico. He writes:

1. *What is the further
question in J.A.
subject to the OF? As
below.*

But a genuine Hindu is rather prepared to receive the teaching of Christianity. Providence has certainly prepared us, the Hindus, to receive Christianity, in a way which, it seems to me, no other nation - excepting the Jews, of course - have been prepared. Most erroneous as is the teaching of such books as the Bhagvadgita, the Bhagvata, etc., yet they have taught us something of ananyabhakti (undivided devotedness to God), of vairagya (giving up the world), of namrata (humility), of ksama (forbearance), etc., which enables us to appreciate the precepts of Christianity. 24

Thus Goreh recognized the value in the Hindu culture as preparation for the gospel. He was surpassed by a younger contemporary Brahmobandhav (sanskrit for Theophilus) Upadhyaya in his appreciation for the nature and value of Hinduism. Upadhyaya's thought followed the path blazed by Keshuh Chundu Sen in trying to discover an indigenous expression for the Christian faith. He was baptized and became a member of the Roman Catholic Church. The main points of his works as summed up by M.M.Thomas are:

1. Integration of the social structure of India into the Christian way of life.
2. Establishment of an Indian Christian monastic order.
3. Employment of Vedanta for the expression of Christian theology.
4. The recognition of the Vedas as the Indian Old Testament.

Upadhyaya felt that Vedantic thought could be integrated into the Christian faith much the way Greco-Roman philosophy had been in the West. He felt that Hinduism as a culture could be separated from the religion, much the same way the Greek and Roman religions were separated. First, culture was closely tied to religion; then, slowly,

the ties were weakened. Philosophy became a separate discipline, mythology became a part of literature rather than religion, and Greek and Latin religions died, while cultural, philosophical, scientific, literary, and artistic traditions merged with Christianity and are very much alive today. 26

His activities integrated some aspects of Hindu culture to such an extent that he was suspected of syncretism. In the school he ran for Hindu children, he encouraged the veneration of Sarasvati, the Hindu goddess of learning. He defended the worshipping of Krishna as a avatara and also took part in a ceremony of prayascitta or ritual atonement, in repentance for unclean acts. Yet Upadhyaya defended his acts as merely cultural expressions of his life and as being compatible with his Christian faith. In Europe he had seen pictures of the Moses and depictions of the graces in art and literature. The Roman and Greek Gods are mentioned in Shakespeare and other great literary works; Thus he reasoned that Sarasvati was merely a cultural expression of learning, as Venus for Love, Mercury for Speed. Upadhyaya understood Krishna as an historical figure who has revealed the sublime teachings of the Gita, which, he felt had a true message for the people of India. Finally, Hindu ceremonies carried no implication of his being Hindu, rather, it emphasized his continuity and connectedness to the society from which he came and in which he still lived. Upadhyaya felt that Hinduism had drifted from its pure base in the original Vedas even as ancient Isreal drifted from the Pentateuch. Though Hinduism had drifted from an original monotheism present in the Vedas, there was no reason to dispense with the entire system. Instead he would baptize much of cultural Hinduism into the

Church.

Thus Brahmobandhau Upadhyaya's thought is truly significant in the development of an indigenous theology for he wanted to re-open the canon to include Indian Scripture. He didn't claim that the Gitas were without error; yet who would claim that the Old Testament contains the highest developed theology? Indeed, the Old Testament often depicts a God who is vengeful, warlike, jealous and unforgiving—are we justified to say that other writings, revered as highly as our Scripture, are not preparations for the Gospel? In many ways his thought reflects the early Church fathers who saw similar patterns in the Greek and Roman worlds, and attempted to utilize the philosophic systems of Athens and Rome as platforms to explain the meaning of the Christian faith.

In his zeal to integrate Christianity with the Hindu tradition Upadhyaya fulfills many of the hopes and ideas of Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656), the first missionary to India to advance the policy of separation of Hindu religion and culture. This Italian Jesuit firmly believed that religion and culture were distinct and separate spheres and he desired to have a broad and tolerant view of social customs, including those which had religious overtones.

Upadhyaya represents a further development over de Nobili, as he wanted to substitute the Gitas for the Old Testament. This is a movement toward pluralism from simple contextualization, although Upadhyaya never accepted Hinduism as having equal validity with Christianity. The distinction between contextualization and pluralism must be noted. Contextualization attempts to translate Christianity into the thought forms and symbols of a culture. This can be done without acceptance of the validity of those concepts. The validity is

the essence of pluralism which may be understood as a continuum that stretches from acceptance of religious concepts as containing elements of truth, to granting equality of status to another religion. Indian theology has spanned the entire spectrum, from tentative use of Hindu terminology to understanding Hinduism as God's avenue of salvation. Our purpose here is not to recount the entire history of Indian theology, Yet I would like to present several more important examples before we move into our concluding discussion of the future of Indian theology as related to pluralism.

Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889-1929) is perhaps the most well-known and influential of the Indian theologians. Although he had little formal training in theology he was raised in the bhakti tradition of Hinduism and also in the Sikh faith. He converted to Christianity while a teenager and donned the ochre robe of a sadhu. His ministry consisted chiefly of itinerant preaching in India and especially Tibet. His theology was derived chiefly from the New Testament and Singh's personal experience of Christ. Singh's theology was personal and entirely Christ centered. He derives his influence from the depth of his spiritual experience and evident saintliness. His attitude toward Hinduism is positive. He accepted the validity of Hindu religious experience, and believed that where true experience of God had occurred it was the result of the Holy Spirit. "Just as every soul that lives breathes in the air, so every soul, whether Christian or non-Christian breathes in the Holy Spirit, even when he knows it not".²⁷ Singh understood Christ as the fulfillment of Hinduism, and consequently made it a point not to criticize that faith. His message was simple yet profound. He embodied deep religious experience with

technical simplicity and in doing so, penetrated the heart of Indian mysticism.

Sundar Singh had a deep effect on his biographer, Bishop A.J.Appasamy, (b.1891) who followed the ideas of Keshab Chancha Sen in developing the tradition of Christian bhakti. Appasamy was raised in a Christian home and was greatly influence by the bhakti poetry of Tamilnad. He completed a doctorate at Oxford and returned to publish several works, Christianity as Bhakti Marga (1928) and What is Moksa? (1931). These are expositions of John's gospel as understood by a Christian from the bhakti tradition. He utilizes a wealth of illustrations from Tamil poets who interpret the Christian life as one of loving devotion to God in Christ. Appasamy's emphasis was on religious experience. He understood bhakti as the way prepared by God as a path to ^Himself. He also maintained that the Scriptures of India should be read as devotional material. He felt that the Bible was not the only authoritarive guide for our religious life. 28 He continues the distinguished line of Indians who have interpreted Christianity from a point of view deeply influenced by Hindu thought.

The two other famous South Indian theologians who greatly contributed to the development of Indian Theology were P.Chenchiah (1886-1959) and V. Chakkrai (1880-1958). P.Chenchiah regarded Hinduism as the spiritual mother of all Indians which need not be surrendered in order to be a faithful Christian. He also emphasized the centrality of Christ to all Christian experience and directly attacked the dogmatic theology of Chalcedon as being foreign to the true nature of the gospel. He felt that the deep religious experiences of the Hindu faith were not being reproduced in Indian Christianity

because the Church had become the central focus of the believer, replacing the Spirit of Christ. His view of the faith is one where the new life from above is constantly drawing the believer into union with Christ and service. He also has a negative opinion of the Old Testament and would substitute the Hindu Scriptures for it. Like other Indians he sees little value in the organized church. Hinduism has little organization and our Western development of large complicated denominational structures hold little appeal to the Indian mind, which is more metaphysical than practical. Chenchiah felt that Christianity could spread from within Hinduism, rather than outside of it, yet this thinking runs the risk of simply assimilating Christianity with Hinduism. However, his view also indicates his respect for the strength of the Christian faith.

Chahkarai attempted to further develop a Christology by utilizing the concept of avatara, and continued the struggle to form a new vocabulary of Hindu-Christian terminology that would be relevant to both Hindu and Christian. He felt the religious experiences of Hinduism had prepared the Indian heart for the gospel and that God inspired Hindu Scriptures.

This South Indian trio of Christian writers contributed greatly to the development of a distinctive Indian theology, which tried to contextualize the Christian message for the Indian world, but also acknowledged the spiritual validity of the religious experiences of the Hindu tradition. Other theologians have also contributed; Paul Devanandan articulated the terms of dialogue with Hinduism and set an agenda for action. M.M. Thomas, who succeeded him as Director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, has

followed in his footsteps by continuing dialogue with both classical Hinduism and secular society. Thomas' book, The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance is a sustained effort to place Christ in the center of neo-Hindu thought that has developed since 1800, and parallels Raymond Panikkar's effort in The Unknown Christ of Hinduism to uncover Christ in traditional Hinduism. Panikkar believes that Christ is present in Hinduism, albeit hidden, but because of that hidden presence, Hinduism has been for many people an effective means of salvation. Father Panikkar then understands Christian mission as unveiling the Hidden Christ of Hinduism and so transforming it rather than destroying it.

This has been a brief sampling of Indian thought: it is rich, mysterious, baffling, surprising, and intriguing. I have extended this survey to demonstrate its complexity, and to show how the overwhelming Hinduism of India has forced Christians to wrestle with religious pluralism. the relationship of Christianity to non-Christian faiths is the central theological issue on the subcontinent. Let us now make some concluding remarks on the subject of pluralism in India.

WVU
11/20/2023

Conclusion

The decisive turn taken by recent Roman Catholic theologians has deeply effected the relationship between the Church and the world. In Roman Catholic circles this has meant that the world is no longer viewed as a hostile environment but the proper place of life, witness, and service for a consecrated community. The church is no longer a place to escape from the contaminations of the world, but a community that is determined to transform the world. This change is remarkable, and has led to renewed theological energy in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

This view poses new questions for evangelicals. The traditional Protestant understanding of missions has been that the world was lost and that God wants to send us to help save it. It is quite startling to propose that perhaps the "heathen" were never lost in the first place, or, "lost to us but known to God". Protestants must do some deep rethinking of the traditional answers proposed by them about the relationship of God to the world and the extent of God's revelation. Is natural revelation sufficient to condemn? If so, has there been special revelation given to others in the form of Scripture, insights or oral tradition? Up until the twentieth century Westerners were smug in their belief in the superiority of their culture and faith. They never stopped to ask these questions. This

does not undermine the belief that the revelation in Christ is the highest and clearest revelation of God; Yet it acknowledges the activity of God in the world through other mediums.

This proposition understands the will of God as positively directed towards the salvation of all humans. It also asserts that where there is a will, there is a way. God is able to reach out to the searching heart by grace through faith to minister salvation through Christ through the concepts and forms of other religions. This requires a loosening of the dogmatic Western approach to salvation, which postulates salvation as dependent on orthodoxy in faith as well as praxis yet It meets the Old Testament requirements of "faith". Although the notion of a "hidden Christ" of Hinduism is novel to this writer, it is dangerous to underestimate God or to limit his grace according to our own theological formulations. Our rational, orthodox understanding of Christianity as a doctrinal or dogmatic system must shift to an existential experience of Christ; even if this experience does not fit our accepted patterns of orthodoxy.

The question this study of pluralism raises is "what is theology?" Traditionally, it has been the study of God and doctrine as understood by examining the authoritative sources for this knowledge, i.e., the Scriptures. However, it raises the question of whether the world itself can be understood as a revelation of God's activity. This takes seriously the dynamic quality of all religions and tries to interpret them in light of their authentic religious experience. The fact that several Indian theologians have questioned the value of the Old Testament for India must lead each of us to re-evaluate their Scriptures as authentic vehicles of Divine revelation. If so, they may

be of value for us. Since we have Christ as our revelation of God, He is the center of our theology. There is no way any Christian can yield on the uniqueness or the universality of Christ and still be faithful to the New Testament. Nor can we endorse synthesis of Hinduism and Christianity into a new religion. Yet the New Testament claim that salvation is "only in Jesus Christ" need not be understood to mean that God is only revealed in Christ and nowhere else. Rather, the God who is revealed everywhere is the one and only God who is revealed in and through Jesus.

We must be cautious in lowering the levees on the stream of salvation. I do not deny what I perceive to be the reality of damnation. Yet I find it difficult to render so many people to damnation because of what seems to be a failure on the part of Christians to spread the news. Although I recognize a remnant theme in Scripture, I fail to see how Christ's coming into the world could be such a failure that barely a third responded. Surely the great victory of God's incarnation and redemption was more successful.

The analogy which is advanced in support of this is the Old Testament example. Certainly the Old Testament views of God as vengeful, jealous, and at times blood thirsty, are not sustained in the New Testament. It is questionable whether the average Isrealite under Moses, Joshua or David had a very clear understanding of the way of salvation, the who of salvation or what salvation meant. Yet a community of faith continued. Although mixed with falsehood ^{and} superstition, people came to know an "unknown" Christ of the Old Testament.

The model for religious pluralism in Hinduism can also follow

The focus is on the
importance of the only true God
Christ to bring a God
that goes with the religions.

Was the cross
what justifies it?

one which has received greater acceptance in Protestant circles-

Messianic Judaism. These are Jews who have converted to Christianity and acknowledge Christ as the fulfillment of their religion. Because they have evolved out of the Old Testament, they have been accepted as an authentic expression of contextualized Christianity. Perhaps in the future we will be able to accept on a similar level with the Hindu Christians and Muslim Christians.

What this challenge has to offer to Christianity is a stretching of its theological vistas. Each culture has a distinguishing characteristic and approach to life. If the Western approach is rationalistic, scientific, and dogmatic, then the Indian approach is metaphysical and poetic. The Chinese approach is humanistic and relational while the African is communal. The Latin American experience grows out of poverty and domination. Each can add to our total understanding of God's revelation in the world instead of the one (the Western) serving as the criterion to evaluate all the others. Consider Michaelangelo's famous statue of David in the Vatican as an example. Viewed from the front, the young King appears boyish, almost feminine with smooth features and delicate frame; yet if one views this same statue from the rear, the rippling muscles of a powerful man emerge. One man, two views. Or consider the famous Hindu parable about the blind men who are asked to describe an elephant: the one who grasps the tail declares the elephant to be like a snake. The one who touches the leg perceives the elephant to be as a tree. The one who feels the belly declares the elephant to be as a great boulder. Each is right, yet each is tragically wrong for they all failed to perceive the whole picture. The comparison to the Western,

This tentative solution does not answer the problem of exclusiveness. The question of whether a Hindu is saved "in spite of", "in", or "through" his or her religion can still be posed. These suggestions in no way yield to the exclusiveness of Christianity. Other faiths are seen containing the seeds of the faith, but the uniqueness, universality, and fulfilling revelation of God remains in Christ.

To the three types of pluralism: substantial, distributive, and unitive (pg.7) I would add one more - hierachal pluralism. This pictures Christianity at the apex and other faiths in descending planes ordered in relationship to it. This type acknowledges certain truth claims in other faiths and even the possibility of salvation being present in them but reserves the primary place for Christ. I find this the most attractive alternative, for I am not able to essentially yield on the uniqueness or universality of Christ but I am willing to be open to what God may be doing in other cultures. Thus I reject the Evangelical Fundamentalist position which understands Christianity as the only truth revealed by God. I affirm the liberal protestant position that Christ is the true light which enlightens every person who comes into the world. I rejoice in the notion that all humans are saved by grace, and that faith is itself a gift of God. I find the propositions advanced by Rahner both thoughtful and attractive. It combines sensitivity to other faiths with acknowledgement of God's universal activity, and unites this to a high view of Christ. I believe that this offers a real basis for dialogue, acceptance, and mutual learning which can explore these possibilities.

I admit that my conclusions in this paper startle me. I am not

a fulfillment pluralism

The keyword in all this is "salvation". Do the other religions have "saving truth, saving good news etc.?"

Rahner is a bit too far on the relative front? His argument for me. Very Kemp, or Newbigin, in smoother terms.

sure whether I have been swept away by a new idea or have made a permanent shift. The danger in this is an all too apparent syncretism. Yet, it is a syncretism which is measured by an attempt to find the most liberal view of God's grace to all humans. How can we limit God's grace to the individual? Few Christians claim to be infallible in all points of doctrine or practice - Yet we believe God's grace is active in our lives. The question remains, where do we draw the line? The general concensus of recent thought is toward a widening of the circle. We can draw the line of orthodox Christianity at Nicene orthodoxy , but we cannot maintain this as the limits of God's saving grace.

The development of Indian theology provides a concrete example of a non-western church struggling to relate to its faith to other religions. We clearly see two facts; first, the attempt to translate the kerygma of Christ into the philosophies of a different culture; and secondly, the gradual realization by some that Hinduism had definite value, truth, and perspective which illuminated their search for God. The proposal that Indian Scriptures are the Old Testament for India cannot be lightly dismissed, even if they were rejected for liturgical use by the Vatican. The current argument by major theologians that they contain seeds of truth must be evaluated and answered. This is perhaps the finest example of contextualization of substance. Sadhu Singh's belief that Christ was the fulfillment of Hinduism leads us to recall our Lord's own statement, "I came not to destroy, but to fulfill". To what was Christ referring? Sundar Singh believed it was Hinduism.

Is there an unknown Christ of Hinduism? This question can

The basic question is not whether a "new idea" exists, but whether it is faithful to God's revelation in the living Word and the written Word, perhaps.

END NOTES

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2. Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions", in Theological Investigations, Vol. 5, Baltimore: Helicon 1969, pg. 116-118.
3. David Barrett, World Christian Encyclopedia, Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982, Pg. 796.
4. For this section I relied on Paul Knitter, No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Towards the World Religions. MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis, 1985, pg. 21-70.
5. Arnold Toynbee, An Historian's Approach to Religion, New York: Oxford Univesity Press, 1956, pg. 262. See also Paul Knitter, above citation, pg. 38-39 for his analysis of the central themes in Toynbee's philosophy.
6. Knitter, op. cit., pg.44.
7. Ibid. pg. 59.
8. St. Cyprian, Epistle 51:24. Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol.5, Grand Rapids: EErdmans, 1951, pg. 333.
9. St. Cryprian, "treatise on the Unity of the Church", 1:6 in above citation, pg. 421.
10. Barrett, WCE, op. cit., pg. 71.
11. Lausanne Covenant, Chapter 3, "The Uniqueness and Universality of Christ", in Let the Earth Hear His Voice, Minneapolis: Worldwide Publications, 1975, pg. 3
12. Student Volunteer Movement Slogan.
13. Theological Students for Frontier Missions.
14. See John Stott, "Dialogue, Encounter, Even Confrontation", in Mission Trends #5, op. cit., pg. 156-172.
15. Newbigin, op. cit. pg. 10.
16. Hans Kung, On Being A Christian, Garden City: Image, 1984, pg. 89-ff.
17. Rahner, op. cit., pg. 119-121.

18. Gregory Baum, "Christianity and Other Religions: A Catholic Problem", Cross Currents # 16, 1966, pg. 461.
19. Barrett, NCE, op. cit., pg. 370.
20. Ibid. pg. 372
21. Herbert Wolf, "The Hindu Tradition", in Great Asian Religions, C. Fry, J. King, E. Swanger, H. Wof. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984, pg. 33-64.
22. Walther Buhlman, The Search for God, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1980, pg. 98-113.
23. R.H.S. Boyd, An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology, Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1969, pg. 38.
24. Ibid., pg. 55.
25. M.M. Thomas, The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance, Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1970. Pg. 104.
26. Boyd, op. cit., pg. 69.
27. Ibid, pg. 107.
28. G.C. Oosthuizen, Theological Battlegrounds in Asia and Africa, London: Hurst, 1972, pg. 18-21.
Oosthuizen is overly critical of Appasamy's work, chiefly because it does not conform to the rigid Calvinism which he prefers. Oosthuizen is a dogmatic theologian who cannot tolerate vagueness in theological works. He seems to find fault with every theologian who steps outside of traditional Western formulations.

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March 28, 1987

Dear Respondent:

First of all I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to you for participating in my survey of opinions among "missiologically minded persons" regarding the spiritual state of the unevangelized. Many respondents showed incisive insight, made quite pertinent comments, and suggested relevant references. To these I owe special thanks.

The questionnaire was sent to the persons in the United States and Canada whose names and addresses were published in the April, 1986 issue of Missiology. It was feared that if it were sent to foreign countries that problems of communication would be greater than desired. This decision produced a preponderance of respondents from these countries.

454 questionnaires were sent out. Four were returned marked "undeliverable." 244, or 54.2%, responses were received. 155 persons (63.5% of the respondents) modified their answers or gave an alternative answer to at least one question in written comments. These written comments are quite possibly more significant than the answers without comment. 216 persons requested information on the results.

The accompanying pages indicate the total of answers for each question. A detailed analysis will appear in my dissertation, which should be finished later on this year.

Thank you for the privilege of corresponding with you and sharing with you the results of the questionnaire.

Most sincerely,

E. Earl Carver

E. Earl Carver



QUESTIONNAIRE
TO DETERMINE OPINIONS OF MISSIONARILY-MINDED PERSONS
CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL STATE OF THE UNEVANGELIZED

ANSWERS GIVEN BY THE 244 RESPONDENTS:

I. I consider myself to be

- 100 a. very highly motivated to win converts to Jesus Christ.
1 between 'a' and 'b'.
116 b. motivated to win converts to Jesus Christ.
11 c. not very motivated to win converts to Jesus Christ.
3 not at all motivated to win converts to Jesus Christ.
10 e. Other. (Please explain on answer card.)
3 No answer.

II. I consider the Christian denomination (or movement or organization) to which I belong to be

- 99 a. highly interested in winning converts to Jesus Christ.
- 108 b. interested in winning converts to Jesus Christ.
2 between 'b' and 'c'.
25 c. not very interested in winning converts to Jesus Christ.
1 not at all interested in winning converts to Jesus Christ.
6 e. Other. (Please explain on answer card.)
3 No answer.

III. In regard to communicating the Christian message, I believe that

- 199 a. as far as it is possible, Christians should reach every human being in world with the message of Christ's salvation.
15 b. Christians should make reasonable, but not necessarily heroic, efforts to reach the unevangelized with the Christian message.
3 combination of 'a' and 'c'.
12 c. it is not imperative to reach every human being with the message of Christ's salvation. In his own good way God will take care of those who do not hear.
1 combination of 'c' and 'd'.
4 d. one should not try at all to induce people of other religions to accept Jesus Christ.
8 e. Other. (Please explain on answer card.)
2 No answer.

IV. In regard to non-Christian religions I believe that

- 21 a. Christianity is the only true religion and that all other religions should be considered as false.
2 combination of 'a' and 'b'.
- 114 b. there may be some truth in other religions, but there is no other way of salvation other than accepting the Christian gospel message.
8 combination of 'b' and 'c'.
73 c. there is some truth in most religions and, in the absence of the Christian revelation, God may use such religions and/or "natural revelation" to bring persons to a knowledge of himself.
1 combination of 'c' and 'd'.
1 combination of 'a', 'b', and 'c'.
7 d. all religions lead to the salvation of the people who practice them sincerely.
15 e. Other. (Please explain on answer card.)
2 No answer.

- V. I believe that Christians should
- 170 a. persuade as many people as possible, worldwide, to accept Christ as their personal Savior.
- 4 combination of 'a' and 'b'.
- 43 b. preach the gospel message as widely as possible, but leave it entirely to the individuals whether to accept or not, i.e., not make any special effort to persuade them to accept the message.
- 14 c. preach the gospel message to practicing and non-practicing Christians, and to those of other religions who show some initiative and desire to know about and possibly accept Christianity
- 0 d. not attempt at all to disseminate the Christian message among those of other religions.
- 10 e. Other. (Please explain on answer card.)
- 3 No answer.

- VI. Regarding the eternal destiny of a person who has never heard the gospel, I believe that
- 66 a. the person who has never accepted Jesus Christ has no opportunity of being saved, even though the choice has never been presented to him.
- 4 combination of 'a' and 'b'.
- 64 b. since such a person is responsible neither to the Law nor to the Christian gospel, he will be judged by his conscience, and may be eternally saved or lost, accordingly.
- 1 combination of 'b' and 'c'.
- 2 c. since such a person never had the opportunity to accept Christ while on earth, an opportunity will be provided in the life hereafter to accept or reject Christ.
- 0 d. those who do not hear and believe on Jesus Christ will simply cease to exist.
- 1 combination of 'b' and 'e'.
- 1 combination of 'c' and 'e'.
- 4 e. since God wills the salvation of all persons, none will be lost, including those who have never heard the Christian message.
- 1 combination of 'a' and 'f'.
- 5 combination of 'b' and 'f'.
- 46 f. it is not possible to know the eternal destiny of those who have not heard the Gospel. God has not revealed this to us. I have no opinion.
- 42 g. None of the above descriptions fits my belief exactly. (Please explain on the answer card.)
- 1 "Those who have not heard are not responsible."
- 4 "They must cast themselves upon God's mercy."
- 2 No answer.

- VII. I believe that in order to be accepted of God and enter heaven
- 100 a. the only way is for one to accept the historical Christ as one's personal and exclusive Savior.
- 6 combination of 'a' and 'b'.
- 67 b. those who have heard the gospel explained must accept it to be saved; for those who have been deprived of the gospel other provisions have been made.
- 10 c. it is only necessary for people to practice their religion faithfully.
- 5 d. no one will be damned, whether or not the person has followed his religion faithfully.
- 54 e. Other. (Please explain on answer card.)
- 2 No answer.

- VIII. Of the following statements by well-known theologians and missiologists, the one that best expresses my belief is:
- 49 a. Because of their "spiritual sinfulness and estrangement from God . . . the heathen are lost and are doomed, unless saved [by hearing about Jesus Christ and accepting him as Savior], unto eternal death." combination of 'a' and 'b'.
- 4 59 b. "In the light of Romans 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." combination of 'a' and 'c'.
- 11 1 c. "If a pagan surrenders himself in faith, in some obscure but real way, to the one true God in Jesus Christ, of whom he is perhaps only dimly aware under a hundred concealing veils, and if he then shows forth this faith in works of love, then he can be saved." combination of 'c' and 'd'.
- 10 d. "We ought at least to admit the equal rights of the milder view, namely, that through the power of redemption there will one day be a universal restoration of all souls."
- 42 e. None of the above fits my belief.
- 4 No answer.

Socio-demographic information:

Nationalities:

USA-225; Canadian-8; British-2; Italian-1; Swiss-1; No answer-7.

Ethnic group:

White (Ethnic groups which are easily assimilable were assumed to be assimilated and included in this group. Not all were WASPS, however, for there were a significant number who were not Protestant, and many who were not Anglo-Saxon.)-222.

Hispanics-2; Black-1; Chinese-1; Korean-1; No answer-17.

Capacities in which respondents have served (3 allowed per person):

Missionary-173; Instructor-153; Administrator (usually of a missions organization or of a missions school)-120; Pastor-35; Para-Missionary Activity-10; Researcher-5; Evangelist-5; Consultant-4; Translator-3; Author-2; 1 each: Minister, Lay Person, Nun, Strategist, Missiologist, Musician.

Denominations:

Roman Catholic-27; Southern Baptist-22; Presbyterian USA-20; Baptist (non-specific)-15; Mennonite-12; United Methodist-11; Episcopal-10; Non-denominational or independent-9; Christian and Missionary Alliance-8; Evangelical Free Church of America-7; United Church of Christ-7; Lutheran (non-specific)-7; Conservative Baptist-6; Presbyterian (Non-specific)-6; Reformed Church-6; Brethren in Christ-4; Christian Reformed Church in North America-4; Church of the Nazarene-4; 3 each: Seventh Day Adventist, Church of God (Anderson), Lutheran (Missouri Synod), Missionary Church.

2 each: North American Baptist Conference; Presbyterian Church in America, Evangelical Covenant Church, Assemblies of God, Conservative Congregational Christian Conference.

1 each: Pentecostal (non-specific), Friends, Pilgrim Holiness, Grace Gospel Fellowship, Baptist Central Conference, Evangelical Congregational, Moravian, American Baptist Church in the U.S.A., Fellowship of Christian Assemblies, Free Will Baptist, Church of God (non-specific), Free Methodist, Methodist (non-specific), Orthodox Presbyterian, Evangelical Presbyterian, Associated Reformed Presbyterian, Wesleyan Methodist, General Association of Separate Baptists, Salvation Army, Bible Church.

Some reported the missions organization rather than a denomination:
Wycliff Translators-2; and 1 each: Africa Inland Mission, Siloam International, TEAM, Oriental Missionary Society.

No answer-7.

Fields of labor (Two allowed for each person. Too many countries to be meaningful):

Western nations-100; Africa (except Egypt)-56; Eastern Asia-52; Latin America-46, Oceania-26, Near East-12, Non-Latin Caribbean-9; More than two areas-20.

World Council of Churches
Central Committee
August, 1962

THE FINALITY OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE AGE OF UNIVERSAL HISTORY

by Principal John Marsh

Fathers and Brethren:

You have prescribed for me a large theme, and I must quickly proceed to it. But you will, I hope, pardon this brief preparatory glance at something at the opposite pole to universal history, namely, my own personal and private history. It was on 21st June, 1962 that Dr. Bilheimer brought to me in Oxford the request of the General Secretary that I should read a paper to this august and learned Central Committee. I knew, even without an impending visit from Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother to Mansfield that this request from Dr. Visser 't Hooft was really a command; so as an obedient Chairman of a Division, I agreed to obey. But what hindrances Providence has put in the way of my obedience! An international Congregational Council at Rotterdam where my appearance without any major commitments was the signal for my incarceration into one sub-committee after another, and my hope of having the paper finished by the end of the Council vanished. There were domestic difficulties with an injured son, and I ask your indulgence therefore if I no longer set out with any pretence to read you a paper, but at this late date simply raise a few problems that seem to confront us as we set ourselves the task of planning some successful study on this large theme.

"The Finality of Jesus Christ in the age of Universal History." It would take a longish essay even to expound this title; I can only raise a few questions that it poses to my mind. And first: "the age of Universal History." The definite article is noteworthy and, I suppose, deliberate. It is intended to remind us that in a way quite unknown before, human history has become recognized as one, in a sense that was unknown and indeed impossible, in previous ages. Hitherto, it is implied, peoples, nations, continents could live within their particular histories, unaware of, and not needing to be aware of, the particular histories of other people, nations, continents. But today, not even Tibet, not even the lordly islands of the ocean are able to survive as isolated entities, but are obliged to realize, in varying ways, that each unit is bound up with a whole of which it is but a part.

And yet the title says not only "the age of Universal History," but "the age of Universal History." If History be truly universal, it surely cannot be so for one age, or start to be so for one age. Either history is universal in all its ages, or it is not truly universal at all. Our title, that is to say, wants to remind us not only that in this particular era of a history that is universal we have become, many of us for the first time, aware of the fact that it is universal, but that, whether we have known it or not, history has all the time been universal. And this as I understand it, is the implication of the whole biblical tradition. When, in the years, as I suppose, of the Babylonian Exile, the Priestly writers of Israel seized upon the myths of Babylonia about the creation of the world, and made them serve the high monotheism of their belief in Yahweh, they were in effect saying, as they prefaced the great sagas of Israel's history with this demythologized Babylonian material, "our Israelite history, particular and local as it is, is in the end but part of a general, indeed universal history, so that it can be taken as part of what Yahweh began when he first, in the beginning, created heaven and earth."

Similarly in the New Testament, the "story of Jesus" is never seen as something that is contained within itself. (Nor, for that matter is any historical story ever so seen). Mark sees it beginning with the story of John the Baptist, and even his mission, clouded with mystery as it is, he recognizes to have been that precipitation into the present of some recognizable elements from Israel's past in the prophecies of Isaiah and Malachi, much as today many Britishers would see any yielding to Moscow as an intrusion into the present day of Chamberlain and his journey to Munich with its tragic appeasement. Matthew traces the story back, with the aid of a genealogy, to the very beginning of an historical "Israel," to Abraham, Luke traces it even farther back, to the very beginning of humanity, to Adam, while John, with an insight matching the deepest in the scriptures, begins it, as the priests of old, "in the beginning," with God.

It would be idle to pretend that throughout its history the Christian Church has always been conscious of these things. But it would not be too much to claim, I think, that in her attempt to evangelize the world, the Church has been staking a claim that all history really belongs to her. She has wanted to see "one Lord" throned in proper dominion over his "one world" - and if that consummation is ever to be seen by men in this terrestrial history, then it will be plain that all the many streams of human life that eventually join in Christ's one kingdom will in fact have become part of one history, and that His story.

Meanwhile, we live in an age where the effects of the Church's evangelism, with its implicit claim to be the only true bearer or subject of history, has had widespread effects throughout the world. In particular, the other great religions of the world are living in a time after Christ. Their present resurgence, their strenuous attempts to modernize themselves and their doctrines, may be seen in depth as an attempt to claim a part in the universal history which, we are all coming to feel, we all share. In some sense I would think this the depth of their claim; and there is a real sense in which I think their claim should not be resisted. For from the standpoint of Christian faith it has to be asserted both that they have been part of the Christian story, and that Christ has been part of theirs. Again, this kind of thinking, difficult though it is, is not strange to the biblical tradition. In various ways and with different emphasis it appears in the assertion that God hardened Pharaoh's heart; that he raised up the Assyrian as the rod of his anger; that he had a "strange" work to do in the history of men; that the Word was in the world, and the world received him not, that he came to his own, and his own would not accept him; that Jesus was, by God's deliberate will given up to wicked men to be crucified - and so I could go on. Positively and negatively both the non-Christian and the Christian religions are related to the one central story of all history, the story of God's creation of the world, and of its redemption, by the same Word, creative, incarnate, crucified, risen, ascended, triumphant.

But it is not only the great religions of the world that are coming to be aware of the inescapable unity of the history that men share in every part of their life. The great nations and power blocks have come to see the same thing. But though it is seen that history is one, or, in other words, that what any one nation does is bound to affect what all the other nations do, or suffer, this fact is seen from a world more divided, and more tragically divided, than ever before. Never before has it been so plain to so many people that the histories of the peoples are really one and indivisible; and never before have men lived in such isolation, for our present estrangements are not, as they once were, geographical, easily to be conquered by a ship or an aeroplane; but our isolations now are ideological and political, strengthened by fears, suspicions, ignorance and an insatiable lust for power.

It is in such an age of universal history that we are asked to speak of the finality of Jesus Christ. Our title rightly asks us to speak of his finality in history, not simply his finality for history. The meaning of this distinction is plain, and very important. It might well be held that what was final for history was not something that was, or is, or ever could be, in history. Indeed some interpretations of the Christian, mistaken as I should hold, have come perilously near maintaining that even the Christian faith does not conceive of what is final for history as having been, in any strict sense of the term, in history. There are some forms of the eschatological hope, those that are entirely futuristic, that would come under this condemnation; whatever may be the defects of Professor Dodd's conception of "realized eschatology" he has at least seen the importance of being able to say that what is final for history is also something that has been in history. Further, I should hold any sort of Christian Platonism of the kind that saw certain values, such as beauty, truth and goodness as final for history as equally in error. The really distinctive thing, as it seems to me, about our Christian faith, is that it is bound to assert that what, or rather He, who is final for history is also He who is final in history. I must therefore take some slight exception to the way that the generally excellent paper that has been circulated to us has been expressing the way in which the New Testament understands the finality of Jesus Christ. This cannot really be stated in terms of a contrast between present reality and future expectation. Indeed, as the paper rightly says, "the present study raises the issue from inquiring in the first instance concerning the finality of Jesus Christ within history." What kind of conclusions does such a procedure entail?

I want to say that the answer to this question cannot be given in a general universal proposition; it cannot be formulated in any general philosophical or metaphysical statement; it can only be stated in sentences couched in finite verbs of the historic tenses, in such forms as are found in the historic creeds of Christendom: "who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven." But in what way may we understand such apparently normal historical statements as "final" for history? The answer must be given in two parts:

First, it must be said that this set of statements in historic tenses is final in the sense that they in some way describe all the events of history, even of universal history. They are, as Dorothy Sayers said in the preface to her remarkable play, "The Man Born to be King," "the only thing that has ever really happened." That is to say, they sum up, in their reality, all that preceded them, and expose the depth of the reality of all that has succeeded them. It is as if a Britisher were to take the unusual experience of this country at Dunkerque during the last war, and were to see in it the disclosure of many a hair's breadth escape that his country had had in the past, and were to keep it, as it were ready-made against any such escape in the future, per chance at some time when again a British army were to be swept ruthlessly towards the Channel ports, and again to be saved as by a miracle in what doubtless others as well as Britishers were to call "another Dunkirk." So, for the Christian, the Cross and Resurrection sum up in themselves all the great story of God's dealing with his people Israel (Exodus, Exile and Return, etc.) and provides a disclosure of the depth of the meaning of all subsequent events, from disasters like the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD to the historic tragedies of modern times, and the more personal histories of individual men, in their virtues and vices, their failures and successes, their life and their death.

But the second thing that has to be said about such historic statements as we find in the creeds is that they represent not only a set of assertions of different

events in history, but even more they tell of one unique act of God in history, by which, at a given place and at a given time, he redeemed his world. In other words, whatever men may learn about the eternal nature of God from the Gospel, and I assume that they may learn much, the Gospel as such is literally "good news," a story of something God has done. It is not just the successive statements of what Jesus did and suffered during his "lifetime"; it is one statement, composed of several parts, of one act that God has done, and by which he has reconciled the world to himself.

The finality of Jesus Christ then, is the finality of an act by which God has, once and for all, irrevocably and ineluctably saved the world. The finality of Jesus Christ consists in the fact that this action has been taken, in him and through him, by God; and that nothing can undo it, or add to it, or detract from it. Like the act of the first creation, this act of the new creation has been done, and it is final. I have no easy answers to all the questions that these considerations arouse, but we shall have to wrestle with the problems posed by the facts that while history, as we may put it, began with the first creation, the new creation began, in a very real sense within history. Quite clearly, it seems to me, the time relationships of the old and the new creations differ from one another considerably. And these differences are, I suspect, well worth exploring.

But above and beyond all the fascinating metaphysical questions that such an enquiry would impose, there seems to me a great need for a renewed emphasis upon the redemptive nature of the finality of Jesus Christ. If our document is weak, it seems to me weak here. He is final because he is Saviour; he is Saviour because he has been and is yet "in history"; and he is relevant to all human thought in the age of universal history because he is such an historic Saviour. But to place this emphasis upon or within our studies will not be to seek a simple reiteration of older views about the Work of Christ, or of doctrines of the Atonement. It will be to see the whole historic character of our salvation in a new perspective, in which the whole of human history, sacred and secular, Christian and non-Christian, comes to be seen as essentially part of his one story. And seen in this way, not because we have projected our stories into his, but because he has written his story into ours. As an English poet wrote of him: "I'll put into your story what I did."

But if the story of Jesus, so understood, is to be presented as the real substance of all history, what are we to understand by the word "Universal" in our title? We must acknowledge that, at any rate in English, the word is highly ambiguous. I do not think that in this area of the usage of our term we shall want to limit it to mean "all the inhabited earth," meaning by earth just this planet on which we chance to live. I take it that we are more concerned to pick up those authentic trends of biblical tradition and affirm that Jesus Christ is final not only for the history of our planet, but for even the vast universe of the modern physicist. There will be many outside the Christian Church, and I suspect a few not unfriendly ones inside it, who will say that the claim passes the limits of human imagination. But that will be nothing new in the biblical tradition. What does the language of Genesis 1, of Second Isaiah and Job and the Psalmist about creation mean save that they have linked the world of nature and the history of man on this planet with a life of God that is unimaginably greater than the, to them, vast earth of their mortal pilgrimage? What does it mean that within forty years or so of the death of Jesus Paul, or some other Christian apostle, is claiming for him that he was "far above all rule and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this world, but in that which is to come." Paul stretches his imagination, and ours, beyond its limit, in order that language might begin to convey to men that transcendent act of salvation that God had wrought for his whole

universe in Jesus Christ. Today we are doubtless boggled in our attempts to imagine what it is like to live in a universe where stars may be millions of light years away from us; but, if we are to retain the insights of the biblical writers, we shall still want to make the effort of imagination, or of some faculty perhaps transcending it, and claim that even the story of so vast a universe is still, by the exercise of God's power, the theatre of a salvation of the universe in Jesus Christ.

But from the vastness of an Einsteinian universe we must come to look at the other meaning of universal - that of the inhabited world we know as our planetary home, however much we may be at the starting point of making holidays, planetarily speaking, abroad. On this earth, at any rate, we have had to learn in this century of the solidarity of man. There can no longer be a British history, a French history, a Russian history, an African, an American, an Australian history; while we shall go on writing such histories for, I suppose, a long time, we know them to be false, and false because they are partial, in both senses of that word. Humanity is one, and its destiny is one, and in many ways is now acknowledged to be one. But the world, as we noticed before, is nevertheless divided, more deeply divided than ever before. What does it mean to speak of the finality of Jesus Christ in such a world as this? What has the Christian Church to say to the world? What, in the properly realistic question of our paper, does the Church expect to accomplish, or to be able to accomplish, in this divided world?

To answer this question we must look at the problem, raised in the paper, of what the Church may expect to secure in this world if she is ever able to establish a "Christian Society." I would myself accept the valuable distinction drawn some years ago by T.S. Eliot between "a Christian Society" and "a Society of Christians." That is to say, it is quite possible to have a society whose life is based upon insights into life deriving from Christian faith, without by any means every member of the society being a committed Christian. On the other hand I should hold it important to observe that even if there were to be established in this world a society that was composed entirely of Christians, and even if they were all of one kind, there would be no guarantee that the social and political order they established would be wholly Christian, and certainly no guarantee that all their political, social, legal, and moral judgements were either Christian or free from error or folly. What the Church must expect to accomplish then is an ordering of society in which is incorporated those insights into the nature of man and of human society that derive from or are consonant with the Gospel. In the end this means, I venture to think, that the Church is made for man, not man for the Church. We become Christians in order to become men; we are not made men in order that we may become Christians. Christianity is but the rehabilitation of manhood on this earth, even at the same time that it is man's deification in the life of the world to come.

I want to say a brief word about the form of the Church in a world that is dividely aware of its unity. It is idle to point out how very much involved in contemporary society the Church is elsewhere, or has been in past ages, unless we are prepared to learn that we are ourselves immersed in our own cultural forms and social traditions. There is, as I believe, a constant tension between the given form of the Church (whatever that may rightly turn out to be) and the actual form it assumes in any given cultural or historical environment. It may, for example, be permitted for a Congregationalist to hold that episcopacy is a given form of the Church's life; but will it be equally happily permitted for him to observe that the form that episcopacy has taken has varied a great deal from time to time, and from place to place? And that whereas some forms of episcopacy were consonant with a feudal social order, those same forms of episcopacy, if persisting into twentieth

century societies, are irrelevant and contrary to the forms of political and social life today? But there is a further test of the form of the Church's life that I want to mention. Paul writes of him who "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped at" as having "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant." If the profoundest and yet the simplest truth about the Church's true life is that it is not her own life, but a life that Christ is pleased to live in her, then it seems to me that the Church must needs be found with her life in a servant's form. What does this mean? That the Church is with man in his likeness and in his unlikeness to God, as the coming in the flesh of the Son of God was God's decision to be with man his child in both his likeness and unlikeness to Himself. The form of the Church's life, that is to say, must enable the Church to associate with man at his best and at his worst, in his creativity and in his rebellion, in his vice and in his virtue, and in both as the compassionate society that knows that man's true destiny does not lie in seeking a terrestrial solution to the moral tensions and dilemmas of human life, but only in accepting a heavenly gift of forgiveness and renewal, where man's virtues and vices, where his creativity and destructiveness are both alike redeemed from their power to estrange man from God, and God is once more found and known to be man's chief end. If you ask me what sort of practical questions these considerations raise, I would answer that they seem to me to ask questions about, for example, the universally popular "parochial" form of the Church's life, to which even the "gathered" churches to which I belong have for centuries subscribed. I believe that whether or not the parochial system is to be replaced by some other, or supported by some extra-parochial forms of ecclesiastical life, there needs to be some quite new forms of experience of the Church open to modern, industrialised, technological man; and that we shall not find a way of evangelism until we have been much more radical in thought and experiment than we have so far managed to be.

But if these are to be some of the thoughts that are to guide us for the Church today, in what way are we to think of Jesus Christ as being "final" in the sense we have described, i.e. in being the real subject of the history of this and all ages, of our own and other people's religion, culture, politics and society? I can only begin to sketch in an answer to these questions, which will surely have to receive consideration if our work is to have integrity in our own eyes, let alone in the eyes of others. I would suggest that perhaps the best way of expressing the reality that is disclosed to us in our religion of an incarnation of the Son of God, is to say that God is "complicit" in all our human activity, not indeed as one who is just "alongside us" as an equal, but over us as Lord; yet not over us as one who has destroyed our significance and integrity by taking away our freedom, but as one who through the bestowal of freedom has sought a world where his creatures shall in the end be freely bound to him in love and thanksgiving.

If we think of this complicity of God in a world that is divided, yet knows its unity of destiny, we are surely able to see the relevance of the whole drama of the incarnation, cross, resurrection, ascension and heavenly reign, as well as the significance of the hope of a final consummation. For the cross was the bridging of the unbridgeable gulf between man and God, between man and man, between man and woman, between slave and free, between Jew and Gentile, between cultured and barbarian. The good news of the gospel is that the really unbridgeable gulfs have been bridged already, and that the secret of human, as well as distinctively Christian living, is to live in the knowledge that the divisive powers in human life have been proved finally impotent. What Christ has already done, the story that he has already written into our human story, has already given the final ending to the tragic divisions of our own time. Whatever tragedies our present divisions may bring to us, or whatever darkness we may avoid, we shall know that what takes place will be what has already

taken place at the cross, where the whole universal history was affirmed and reaffirmed as the story of God's reconciliation of an alienated universe to himself.

Yet the final unity that God has been pleased already to make known proleptically in our human history is not a mere undifferentiated monism, but a rich and harmonious plurality in unity. There are, in our Christian thinking, two modes of expression which help us to see the rightful balance between plurality and unity. The first concerns the Christian attempt, on the basis of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, to say something about the nature of God himself. This finds expression in a doctrine of the Trinity, of three 'persons' in one 'God.' It is as if, for the life of the blessed God it is necessary to have a unity that is not a mathematical unit, but in itself a rich union of function and of being. The Godhead remains the Godhead both because it is triune, and because the triunity never dissolves into a triadic relation between three deities. This is the ideal, the proper unity in diversity, from which all true unities flow. The second mode of expression of the rightful balance of unity and diversity is found in the Christian conception of the "creature." The creature is not, like a person of the Trinity, part of the Godhead; he is, by divine intention in creation, separate from the deity: and yet, though so separate, he is also by divine intention, purposed and destined to live only in obedient and loving relationship to his creator. Man is, as it were, a satellite in orbit, separate from the planet from which he has been launched, yet fulfilling his function only as he remains in proper orbital relation to his launching base. It is such reflections as these that must underlie what our paper has appropriately called "the integrity of the secular." The world of creatures has been "set in orbit" by the creator, given a life of its own, which it must live as its own, and yet must live always as an "orbital" life, related at depth to God. The duties of the Christian community then, are to respect the integrity of the secular, and so to accept responsibility for it and within it, knowing that whatever the course of history proves to be, God is complicit in it, and that its outcome is already assured. In this sense at least the Christian must be a "man of the world."

I wish I had more time and space to take up further points. For example, what does "conversion" to Christianity mean in the context of these thoughts? It cannot mean forsaking one history that has no meaning, or only negative meaning, leaving one religion that has no truth for one that has nothing but truth. It is rather to be made aware of the one history that lies in and beyond all histories, the one universal history that underlies all particular and partial histories, even the history of the Christian Church, the one history that is the history of one person, God and man, one person, yet all persons as they come to live in him, Jesus Christ.

So finally it is worth saying a word about "fact" and the "consciousness of fact." History has always been "universal," for us who are Christian because God has always purposed his one purpose for the world. In varying ways men have discerned that universal purpose, sometimes, as in Israel and the Church of Jesus Christ through what we have come to call revelation; sometimes, as in this present age, as secular men and as secular societies, by the pressure of events forcing man to realize his interdependence upon other men. To live in a given factual situation is one thing; it may not make any difference to live in the same situation and know what it is and how it works. But this cannot be true of the fact of history if what Christians say is true, that the real substance of history is the story of Jesus Christ. For that makes of history a realm of personal relationships, not only in its inter-mundane events, but also in that area where the events of this world are related to the life of God who is Lord. To know him as the centre and the substance of all

our human story is to have a new dynamic and a new hope, indeed a hope that is, as the New Testament assures us, "certain and sure." To speak of the finality of Jesus Christ in this age of Universal History, then, is to use the language of faith about matters of fact, which is but to confess that "facts" are not always what they seem, and that we who have put our trust in Christ look not only at the things which are seen, which are temporal, but also at the things which are unseen, which are eternal. And it is because in Him, Jesus Christ, that time and eternity, history and what lies beyond history, God and man have been made inextricably one, and that our eyes have seen him, and still hope to see him, that we can speak of him as the finality of our history.

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THE FINALITY OF CHRIST IN THE AGE OF UNIVERSAL HISTORY

by Father Paul Verghese

What a vague, clumsy, and uninspiring title. But then, friends, that is the way some of us theologians speak, and you have in sheer charity to put up with us. Perhaps, some of you who are closer to reality would suggest for us an adequate phrase which more inspiringly expresses the main point of our common quest.

It seems we have tried to load off too many of our urgent concerns into that title. First, we are all honestly worried about the loss of assurance about anything absolute in our secular culture. We want once again to affirm Him, our Lord and Master, as the Alpha and Omega of all things. The phrases in which we expressed the uniqueness or absoluteness of Jesus Christ are all worn thin; we need a set of fresh concepts, which have some relevance to the life of the world, in which to express our Christian Faith.

Secondly, our major intellectual rivals in Asia are also challenging the Christian message precisely at this point of the Finality of Christ. Both Hinduism and the varieties of Buddhism have now come of age and refuse to be bullied by the Christian missionary condemnation of their religions. In fact they have taken the battle into our camp, and the number of Buddhists and Hindus is steadily on the increase in the West. New forms of syncretism are rising up all over Europe and America, and we have to speak clearly the message of Jesus Christ in this context.

Some of my colleagues are also worried about "Religion in general," which seems to become increasingly a concern of many good men everywhere. These good men see the need for religion and are prepared to support any kind of religion. Religion is good for morality. Religion makes good loyal citizens. Religion may be able to deal with the juvenile delinquency problem, the divorce problem, and the many other social problems. Religion gives a good emotional glow to our culture and makes us feel a bit more secure. Prosperous nations and governments also seem to be deeply interested in religion, because it helps to preserve order and loyalty, both absolutely necessary for the efficient running of the economy.

Religion is thus in danger of being prostituted to serve our human ends, and my friends are anxious to liberate the Christian message from the category of religion altogether. There may be detected in this effort, especially by a cynic like me, the attempt to rescue the old concern for "the uniqueness of Christ" from the inroads of the phenomenological and descriptive schools of comparative religion. However that may be, I feel quite sure that we cannot keep the Gospel in a vacuum. It has to be embodied in the life of a divine-human organism, the Body of Christ, and it is by no means fair or honest to make the contrast between the Gospel and Religions. We must speak about the Church and other religious societies, and it will be useful to create a special category called the "Christian religion" as distinct and separable from the Gospel. Our comparisons must not be between the reality of other religious societies and an abstract concept called the Gospel, which we are always tempted to equivocate with the whole of Christian teaching when it so suits us.

The need to find genuine meaning and significance in the other religions, and to extend the horizons of our ecumenism beyond the confines of the Church and the "secular world" which is after all only a part of the world, has suddenly become imperative and in our understanding of the Finality of Christ in the age of universal history, we must learn to assume a more positive attitude towards these rena-scent religions, in order to achieve a truly oikumenical ecumenism.

Another of our concerns is the new shaking of the foundations in New Testament scholarship. Of course this affects only those churches for whom the University Professor is the main locus of authority in Hermeneutics, and a large part of the Christian Church may not even detect the post-Bultmannist tremors even in a sensitive theological seismograph. But some who are closer to the quake feel that something is happening to their foundations and are asking us for help. We have therefore along with our Finality study also to launch a Hermeneutics study.

But the fourth is our major concern. History is no longer a national affair. Humanity is caught up in a common destiny, so obviously. We have to find the meaning of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ in a manner that relates to the whole of humanum and not merely to those who acknowledge the Lord and are incorporated into the Body of Christ. We may even have to include the non-human elements of the world in our doctrine of the Incarnation, since science and technology have revolutionized our relationship to the physical world.

As our General Secretary says: "Post-Reformation Christianity has lacked the universal dimension. It has not developed a theology de humanitate and left it to the philosophers to think in terms of mankind. We need to work out a Christo-centric universalism."

To put it rather bluntly, the question we need to ask is: "Is the rest of mankind merely the object of evangelism and service, or does God have a greater purpose for the whole of mankind, including the Church?" If we answer yes, we have to go further, and indicate some ways in which to state this purpose of God for the whole of humanity.

These four major concerns of ours have all been loaded into our theme, and it is obvious that we would not expect to explore all these areas here in Paris. What I would seek to attempt with your permission and cooperation is simply this: to sharpen the theme to one of its many foci and suggest a partial answer to the question I have raised above.

A word then about the definition of our theme itself. Some of us think "finality" is a rich enough word. Others among us are not so sure, particularly those who have no parallel word in their own languages which has the same richness. I myself have only a vague awareness of what is meant by the word. And so there is little I can do to clarify the theological meaning of the expression except to say that when I use the word, I am thinking of the Sanskrit "Paramata" or Paramya of Christ. In case you do not have the time to look up an English dictionary, here are a few dictionary meanings for the word finality and final.

Finality = the state of being final. In philosophy, the doctrine that nothing exists or was made except for a determinate end.

Final = Pertaining to the end or conclusion; last; ultimate; conclusive; decisive; respecting a purpose or ultimate end in view.

You see the word is rich and every meaning of the adjective is applicable to Christ. So we will have to keep all that in mind when we use the phrase.

Perhaps the word has a haughty ring to it, and non-Christians especially in our little parochial Asian world will call us arrogant and conceited for using such a phrase. Then perhaps that is what we are - arrogant and conceited - and we shouldn't resent being called by our name.

Let us not bother too much about defining "universal history" except to pass on a rather illuminating remark of our General Secretary:

In a sense history has always been universal. Is our age then the first in which there is a consciousness of the universality of history? No, for that consciousness began to develop in the 18th century. Our age is an age of universal history in that the consciousness of participating in universal history has itself become universal.

That may be a slight exaggeration when it comes to the masses of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and even some supposedly educated people in Europe and America. But the point is clear enough.

Now the question that I propose to ask and suggest a partial answer is this:

God is at work in history. We all accept that. But what is God doing?

The partial answer:

He is doing many things which we do not as yet understand. But one thing is clear. God the Holy Trinity in our time is working in all things together (Romans 8:28), gradually but at a definitely stepped-up tempo, to bring about an enhancement of the scope of human freedom, human community and human tragedy, in order that man may grow into the fullness of the mature manhood (Ephesians 4:13) of Christ the God-Man.

There is a further question: In what way does the Incarnate life of Jesus Christ affect the life and destiny of the whole of mankind, even those who are outside the community of faith?

To me the latter is the more interesting question. But I do not have the courage to attempt even a partial answer to it in 20 minutes. I shall seek to do so in a paper on some other occasion. In this present paper, I would like, with your permission, to limit myself to the first question.

God the Holy Trinity. We ought to be careful not to separate too sharply the Three Persons of the Triune God. We must resist the temptation to Christo-monism and to the assertion that the Holy Spirit alone is working outside the Church. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are working together.

working in all things together. History is in a large measure the work of man. But man often works for his own personal, group or national interests, and not always for good. God who controls history takes the raw material of our decisions and actions and puts them together to work towards His over-all purposes for mankind.

gradually, but at a definitely stepped-up tempo: History is outrunning our time-tables. The independence of the African nations, the sudden advances in space research, and the breaking down of confessional and national barriers in the Church and in Western Europe have all caught us by surprise. We should be on the alert with eager expectation and yet with great patience, to watch for His clandestine coming into the life of mankind.

Human Freedom

The question of freedom has often been posed in Western theology in the categories of Free-will and Predestination. Augustine started the debate in his De Civitate Dei, but nearer to the end of his life retracted his main position against free-will, a fact almost ignored by medieval and post-Reformation Theology. (See Retractations I: xxiii).

But the issue is hardly one of predestination and free-will. The nature of freedom itself has to be explored. Freedom has been sub-divided in many ways by many thinkers. But most of them make two assumptions which seem to me to be untenable when we speak of Christian freedom. First, most of the writers on freedom are speaking primarily of a freedom of choice; and secondly, they usually speak of freedom as individual freedom.

We need to see freedom as essential to the nature of God Himself, and reflected in humanity as Image of God in the form of a seminal potentiality. When we speak of God's omnipotence, we are actually speaking of God's absolute freedom. Freedom is more than merely the possibility of choice, but truly the possibility of realization, of achievement.

Let me try to speak simple everyday language here. Am I free to be in India physically in the next five minutes? That of course is not a question of choice, but of power, of forces that prevent me from fulfilling what I desire, of agencies that I lack. God is free in that by the sheer act of willing He realizes His purposes. His freedom is commensurate with His power. And when we speak of human freedom from a Christian standpoint we are not speaking of free-will as over against predestination, nor are we thinking of the freedom of choice of the individual.

The Reformation set men free from the shackles of traditional authority in the medieval European world. But this was basically an individual freedom, a freedom which later paved the way for free enterprise capitalism and the missionary and sectarian revolts against the organized Protestant Churches. The Reformation and its individualist Gospel of freedom released forces whose mushrooming and fall-out have begun to envelop the whole world.

As Jacob Burkhard puts it admirably:

In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness - that which was turned ~~with~~ ^{as that} which was turned ~~without~~ ^{lay} dreaming of half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion, and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation - only through some general category.¹

But in this very process of discovering himself as an individual as over against other individuals, there is alienation both from the neighbour, and from nature. And the uncomfortableness of this alienation has filled western man with doubt and anxiety, and has ever since his liberation been driving him once again to new submissions to authority, new identifications with mass movements, new urges to compulsive and often irrational activism.

While the Reformation brought freedom, it has not been able to train man for the burden of freedom - that which we too lightly call responsibility. This training of man is the crying need of the day which God is imposing on us. We cannot afford merely to develop a few super-men who are able to handle their freedom with responsibility, while the others meekly accept their authority and surrender both their freedom and their responsibility. We need to develop the freedom of the totality of the human race.

So while we need to continue our fight for "the rights of man," for the freedoms of speech, of worship, of minorities, of association, of conscience, and of government, we have to expand the scope of our quest to reach for two different realms of freedom as well.

The first realm still deals with the freedom of the individual - namely freedom from internal constraints. But at the very point where the internal bondage breaks, the kingdom breaks in and community begins to emerge. This is not simply a question of believing in Jesus Christ for it was precisely to the believing Jews that Jesus spoke His momentous words on Truth and Freedom:

Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue to abide in my logos, you shall be truly my disciples, thus know the truth and the truth shall liberate you." St. John 8:31-32.

The inner constraints are manifold and we only catalogue a select list: anxiety, guilt, fear of death, fear of being different, fear of losing approval and love, fear to upset established patterns in which we find our security, the compulsive drives of passion and hatred, envy and slander, bitterness and gossip, fear of exposure, fear of loss of power and so on. Here is the tremendous need of the world - western or eastern, Christian or non-Christian, educated or uneducated. And the break-through in this area of freedom must come from the community of love, the Church, where "for freedom Christ has set us free." This is a question of a genuine Christian community of faith and forgiveness, of mutual acceptance and common worship and service. From the Church this freedom must spread to the world, just as the concept of service has broken loose from the Church and is spreading into the unbelieving world. There is so much to say here, but one can only find time to indicate the area.

The second realm is one which is already receiving world-wide attention. This is not freedom from, but freedom for. This is a question of considerable urgency especially in those nations which have recently become free from the colonial bondage. There remains the whole question of economic colonialism and I think, also intellectual and spiritual colonialism, which are highly loaded phrases likely to alienate the sympathy of many among you. But the positive aspect of the freedom of the new nations to be themselves can hardly be separated from these aspects of western domination. To find their own identity - it is for this that the nations are striving. Emancipation is the first stage - from external domination of any kind; also from the uncritical enslavement to the past. But the second stage is the

slower and more laborious process of growing into full nationhood in a community of nations, where no one dominates and all are free to be members in a relationship of mutuality to other nations, in an atmosphere of acceptance, forgiveness and cooperation. The point is to be discussed under the heading of community, but the need to be free to be oneself as a nation belongs to the realm of freedom. It raises a whole series of questions: economic and technological development, the development of a pluralistic but harmonious culture within each national unit which determines the fundamental aspect of the nation's personality, the changes and adaptations that this calls for in the areas of education, pattern of government, and social systems.

To summarize the answer in the area of freedom, God has enhanced the scope of freedom for individual and social entities within the world-wide human society. He is working to face us with new freedoms to be won, and the Church should be there to work with men outside in the common quest of freedom - which is the power to be one's own self in relation to other selves, and to grow by the mastery of power and by its utilization for good ends.

Human Community

God has broken down many fences in our time, to throw us together. The communications media, economic interdependence of nations, the spread of education to the masses and the levelling influence of a contagious urban-technological culture have brought us together across many national, racial and class barriers.

The United Nations Organization and its allied agencies, in spite of their many set-backs and failures, have created the nucleus of a total human organization on a world-wide basis, something completely new in the known history of the world.

Just as God has been and is increasing the scope of human freedom in its internal and external aspects, so also He is now working to increase the scope of human community. The spontaneous communities of the middle ages in Europe as well as in other parts of the world were after all parochial communities. They have broken down. The urban-technological culture has demolished the old securities and has thrown us together into the Lonely Crowd. It is there that we have to rediscover community, and that not by going back to an agrarian-rural economy. God has placed us in front of a problem which frustrates us by its very magnitude. Here again God works in history to place a challenge before man which he cannot solve even in part without truly developing and growing together in the very process of finding and executing that solution.

It may be possible for us at this point to seek many easy solutions - (1) to retreat into oneself and find a purely personal adjustment to the loneliness and meaninglessness of life - what some delight to call "acceptance of absurdity and living with it" or (2) to escape into pietism and find a solution in pure "inner spiritual development" or (3) to escape into the mass and drown the groan of inner loneliness by joining the whirl of social or political activity, or again (4) to seek a meaningful active vocation of service in which one almost uses other people as a means of giving significance to one's own life.

But none of these can create community - not even the fourth alternative which is most attractive to us as Christians. Some way has to be found at the foundation levels of human association - in the family, in the school, in the local community, in the local church, in the factory and so on - to break down the walls that divide man from fellow-man. The forgiving, accepting, sustaining, secure love of

God must become so richly and deeply a matter of personal and direct experience to each individual that he is enabled to face himself as he is and open himself to others. This is the grass-roots level of community - also the grass-roots level of genuine ecumenism. Ecumenism does not simply require that the local Methodist and Lutheran congregations merge into one congregation, or are in a relationship of mutuality to each other. The unity of the Church does not become a full reality until at the inter-personal level there is forgiveness and openness and mutual acceptance. This is something which has more meaning for the ordinary Christian than the merger of the denominations.

I am not suggesting that we should not do anything to bring the Churches together until we have dealt with the inter-personal problems at the level of "where two or three are gathered together." My suggestion rather is that the small group community of openness in love and concern, in common worship and common service is a neglected area of our ecumenical work. The neglect of this level is sure to leave an enormous gap in the full manifestation of the reality of Christ's unity, even when the problem has been solved at other levels. This is the sort of thing which cannot be tackled by the Welfare State, and at present the Church is in a better position to start a contagion of openness than any other agency that God has in the world.

But we must at the same time keep in mind the genuinely ecumenical dimensions of the problem. If the whole oikoumene has to be involved in the new human community towards which God is beckoning us, we cannot be satisfied with merely working at the small inter-personal level. The power structures have to be reconciled to each other too. And here God does place before us several concerns.

(a) The West and the East. I need not elaborate this area of concern, except to say that our faith must be equal to the risks involved in taking bold action at this point. Disarmament takes courage and faith and openness. Fear of the other still hiding his true intentions and his murderous weapons is inducing both sides to hide their hearts from each other. A break-through is necessary here. The charge of "Fellow-travelling" or in more modern lingo, of being a "Com-symp" (Communist sympathizer) is a frightening and tyrannical force in many parts of the world today, disrupting community both at a world-wide and at national and domestic levels. The Christian faith should be able to deliver us from our bondage to this tyranny. Christ was and is the Master Fellow-traveller and we cannot afford to be less. He was and is the "all-symp" and we have to share in his universal sympathy. The World Council of Churches itself is hamstrung in its approach to Christians in the socialist countries by the fear of being tarred and lampooned as "com-symps," even though the smear campaign has already started anyway. Neither can we afford to neglect one fourth of humanity in our human community by keeping People's China out of the United Nations.

(b) The West and the Rest. I am not always sure that we can blame God for taking the West into the rest of the world. Imagine the year 1450. Europe is a pretty isolated place, ignorant of the rest of the world. And then suddenly it explodes. Discovery of America, discovery of route around the Cape of Good Hope, the division of the world between Portugal and Spain as areas of colonization, the wars in Europe which expand into European world colonialism lasting until about 15 years ago. I know some of my friends see God's hand in all this; but I see only the wrath of men praising God.

But can we think that we have come to the end of Western dominance in the world today now that political colonialism is practically liquidated? The true answer is no. And we cannot have a world-wide human community so long as that dominance lasts. Western man has slowly acquired the spirit of domination through the last 400 years. It will take him many generations to get rid of it. So he has a special responsibility to be careful; for even when he thinks he is serving, he may actually be dominating. I will say no more, for it is a very sore subject.

We have a need to think of how the European Economic Community, the African regional federations, the Commonwealth and other regional or selective human communities can contribute to the final emergence of a genuinely world-wide community.

Human Tragedy

Suffering is the constant companion of human existence. Obviously it is hard to measure. My own general impression, however, is that its scope has increased in our time. The up-rootedness of human life is becoming more universal today than it ever was. Wars are more global in scope today. The catastrophic possibility of the dissolution of the whole planet with all life in it also has become frighteningly real in our time. In spite of our greatly increased humanitarian activities, the impressive progress in medicine and our more comprehensive care for the disabled and aged, we still have such vast proportions of human suffering to conquer yet.

It takes more optimism than facts allow to hope that the world without war and without want which we hope to achieve in a foreseeable future, would also deal with all the other aspects of suffering and that we would thus come into a golden age of no suffering at all.

What then is God doing in our world by increasing the scope of suffering and tragedy in our world? The agony of the burden of freedom itself is a major cause of suffering. Our very efforts to relieve suffering does entail voluntarily accepted suffering. Our alienation from neighbour and nature also causes intense suffering. What is God calling us to do in the midst of this suffering? Of course there is the imperative that springs directly out of the love of God, not only to relieve suffering, but also to share the suffering of men. But I wish here to speak of another aspect of suffering to which God is calling us. I will call this the "tragic mode of learning."

Learning is of the essence of human growth. And God's purpose is that the whole of mankind may grow into the mature manhood of Christ. That is why education is such an important concern to us. But how do we learn? I suppose all experience is learning in a sense. But it may be fruitful to distinguish between the comic mode of learning and the tragic mode of learning.

Eric Bently in his discussion of George Bernard Shaw's Comedies² makes the interesting point that the method of comedy is clarification of truth through the ironic exposure of pretentious, false or hollow ideas. Comedy as distinct from farce uses words to analyse truth. The inspired verbal commentary and dialectic which dissects and exposes falsehood, however, asks for no identification of the onlooker of the drama with the agents in it. We can watch it in detachment and learn without pain.

Tragedy on the other hand has its power in the learning that comes to the actors through suffering, and to the onlooker through participation in the suffering of the actors. The essence of tragedy, I am told, is to affirm the dignity and significance of man in a world of suffering.³ This dignity is reflected in man's choice and his responsibility for the consequences of the choice. But it is not the individual man who chooses, in isolation from others. His choice and action are affected by other men and other forces, which have power over him. There are limitations on the agent's ^{within himself} power, ^{in his "boundness"} to others and in the forces of nature. And the function of tragedy is not to offer a solution to the problem of human limitation and suffering but to provide a clarification of the situation.

The tragedy, when it is authentic drama, does not pose the issues of good and evil in black and white terms. The hero and the villain have both good and evil mixed in them in varying proportions. Of course there are the demonic forces, like Mephistopheles, the witches, Iago, etc. Their demand is for the soul of man, for the surrender of basic humanity. But the triumph of the tragedy is not in the destruction of evil, but in the dignified refusal to surrender one's basic identity.

As Hegel so brilliantly pointed out, the tragic struggle is not between good and evil but between differing principles of right. It is unfair to oversimplify this as choosing the lesser evil. The tragic probe is always to clarify the conflict in real human life between rival principles of right, and to unveil the hard and by no means clear nature of the decisions we have to make in life.

Our scientific and academic approach to knowledge, discursive and analytical, detached in general, belongs to the comic pattern of learning and is an essential component of learning for maturity.

But the tragic mode of learning is the key to Christian Education. One is frightfully worried about the great desire to educate the Church through an unending stream of books, periodicals and mimeographed sheets, by the virtuoso or amateurish performances of preachers for 20 minutes a week, taking advantage of the time when the congregation puts on its most civil manner, and by those who think that including or excluding a "subject" called religious instruction in the school curriculum and the shape of that curriculum are the important keys to Christian education.

If we are to serve the Church and the world which in some ways is more mature, we have to cut through the moralistic over-simplification of issues and teach our people to learn by the tragic method, by the method of identification and involvement, of suffering with and for the world, in order that we may learn wisdom. The moral uprootedness of our time is again God working to destroy our over-simplified concepts of good and evil. As Michael Polanyi so convincingly asserts, our age is not an amoral age. It is rather an over-moralistic age. We are very much concerned about moral issues, the burning questions of value, but we have found no acceptable system. Youth is deeply interested in morality even when it rejects the conventional form of it.

To evolve an ethic of suffering love, to embody it and thereby manifest God to the world - this is the great goal of Christian education. For this it must use the tragic mode of learning, not merely the comic. By enhancing the scope of tragedy in our time, God is forcing us to restructure our ethical vision. Our work of service must grow into a labour of suffering love. In our time we have returned to a stoic conception of suffering: suffering is to be relieved, but without ourselves sharing in it, our own suffering is to be heroically borne alone, without showing any of it

to others.¹ But suffering is the raw material out of which true faith and love can be built, and there needs to be discovered a more Christian attitude towards suffering. In this we shall ourselves grow closer to the mature manhood of Christ, but we will have to grow with the whole of mankind.

* * *

I have intentionally refrained from discussing the theological aspect of the question: "How does the Incarnate life of Jesus Christ affect the life of unbaptized man in the world?" Limitations of time prevent me from doing it here. But we must get an image of humanity past, present and future as a single unit, the Great Adam, flowing through time, and of the presence of the Incarnate Christ in this Adam as a continuing phenomenon affecting the life of humanum in perceptible and imperceptible ways.

The Lordship of Christ should not be misunderstood in this connection as an arbitrary authority over the world. Our Lord's words to Pilate, the representative of the Roman Empire, are significant: "My Kingship is not of this world, if my Kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews." (John 18:36). It is neither the law-and-order Kingship nor the welfare state kingship. It is the kingship of suffering love. It is the kingship that lays down its life for the world. And we are kings too, but my participation in his kingship of suffering love.

The Finality of Christ in the age of Universal History is a strange finality - the finality of the Cross and Resurrection - of life through death.

* * *

Will the unbaptized man be saved? God wills that all men be saved. Christ wills that all men be saved. And He wills as He ought to will. And His will is: "When the hour of destiny strikes, to gather together into one the whole Universe in Him." (Eph. 1:10) Can that will be thwarted? No, for His will is commensurate with His power. But how is His will to be fulfilled? That is a comic question. Our task is to learn the answer slowly by the tragic method, by laying down our lives for the life of the world.

¹The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, 1921, p. 129,
quoted by Erich Fromm, The Fear of Freedom, Routledge, 1960, p. 36.

²The Playwright as Thinker, New York, 1946

³The Complete Greek Drama, Oates & Neill (ed.), New York,
1938, Vol. I Intro. passim.

Timothy M. Solomon
EC-41 Dr. Moffett
7 March 1983

Lesslie Newbigin's The Finality of Christ

The Finality of Christ (John Knox Press, 1969) has met a need for me. As EC-41 progresses, I am growingly aware that I have been lacking something basic in my knowledge of modern missions and ecumenics. That lack is an introductory sense of the development of modern missions. While aware of the church's repudiation of much of the 19th century's mission efforts, I fail to see what the issues are which define the current concerns in the world of missions. Newbigin's book not only fills that gap but gives the reader cause for excitement and not embarrassment about Christian missions.

As Newbigin casts it, this century's missionaries wrestled with the relation of Christianity to the world's other religions. Many Christians, he says, have operated on a principle of continuity here: Christianity's distinction is in being the fulness of what the other religions are in part. The difference is a quantitative one, with Christianity being more and better than the rest -- the ultimate end to which the others point. Newbigin, however, argues for a principle of discontinuity which recasts the question as the relation of Christ to secular history. In this light the focus is on Christ (thus, Christianity itself receives the critique of the Cross), and other religions do not begin to compare. "They face in different directions, ask fundamentally different questions and look for other kinds of fulfilment than that which is given in the Gospel." (p. 44) Yet Newbigin goes beyond this to affirm that this radical discontinuity is not a total one, for those who are converted later see that the God they now know in Christ had been working in their lives before they ever heard the name of Jesus. Thus, by affirming both continuity and discontinuity, Newbigin is able to present conversion as the essential response to the Gospel, though not necessarily into a fellowship modelled after that of Western Christians.

Newbigin's book is a valuable one. It explains and structures the issues of

20th-century Missiology with the kind of thorough clarity achieved by John Baillie, whose The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought (Columbia University Press, 1956) fulfills a similar function in Theology. Drawing on the work of Hendrik Kraemer and others, Newbigin presents a masterful twist when he refutes the continuity-minded, with their high value of the devout and religious in other faiths, by presenting the example of the Pharisees who, according to their logic, should have readily embraced Christianity. Thus, the Jews become the stumbling-block to this argument! But in emphasizing the point that the religious are the last to accept the Gospel, Newbigin plays up the compatibility between Christianity and the secular realm. He even states "modern secularism has its roots in the Bible": (p. 46) From my perspective this is an extreme statement, unnecessarily made to show that the Gospel is at home with the everyday world whereas other religions withdraw from it (p. 63). I believe that Asian secularization stems less from the spread of the Christian Gospel than from the effect of modern materialism. It is encouraging, however, to know through Newbigin that even in a secular Asia the finality of Christ challenges men and changes lives.

Very good -



The Mission Society for United Methodists

February, 1988

Dear Praying Friend,

This may well be the single most important letter I've ever written to you! I ask you to read it very carefully. I am going to share with you some things that are of utmost importance!

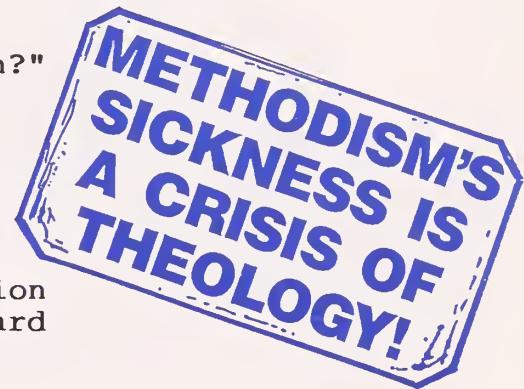
This month marks the fourth anniversary of The Mission Society for United Methodists. Thinking back to those early days in 1984, I remember several questions we were frequently asked:

"What is the reason for the tremendous problems within the United Methodist Church?"

"Why was the Mission Society formed?"

"What's the real problem with United Methodist missions?"

"What are the real issues which the Mission Society is raising as it challenges the Board of Global Ministries?"



Those questions are still being asked today, because the crisis in our Church's missions program has not been solved. I want to share my answers with you, because I know that you, too, are being asked these same things!

My response to these inquiries is very simple:

The root of the problems within Methodism is theological.

The Mission Society for United Methodists came into being because a dramatic theological shift had taken place within our United Methodist missions movement over the past several decades.

The primary issues which we have raised with the General Board of Global Ministries in 10 formal dialogue sessions since 1984 have centered around the Board's theology.

The signs of our missions crisis are increasingly evident. You can't look at the astonishing reduction of missionaries from 1,500 to 500 in the last twenty years, or the monumental shift toward social and political programs instead of proclaiming Jesus Christ, without knowing that something is wrong. What is it?

At the root of these "symptoms" lies a theological cancer!

I am absolutely convinced that it matters what you believe!
In spite of the indifference to doctrine and theology which is so prevalent within our denomination, I am persuaded that there are matters of Biblical teaching which are so important that we simply cannot remain silent when they are either ignored or attacked.

The Mission Society's concerns about what United Methodist mission leaders believe were stated very clearly in a letter which was written to two directors of the General Board of Global Ministries several years ago. After stating a conviction that the struggle over missions really centered in theological issues, the letter went on to clarify those issues by raising several crucial questions:

Who is Jesus, the One whom we call the Christ?

Is He the only Son of the living God?

Was His death on the cross an atonement for sin, or merely an example of loving sacrifice?

Is He or is He not the only One through whom persons might be saved, as the Scriptures assert?

Do persons need to repent of their sins and turn in faith to Christ to be forgiven by God, to be adopted into His family, and to become heirs of eternal life?

Is salvation possible outside of faith in Jesus Christ?

I think you will agree that those were honest and straightforward questions that focused on vital issues. But though the letter requested unequivocal answers to these very plain inquiries, the replies that finally came were full of disclaimers as well as excuses for their inability to give a clear response. The "inclusiveness" and "diversity" of our Church were used as reasons for avoiding the questions entirely!

In an age when theological pluralism has reigned supreme over our denomination, the Mission Society has not always been popular for declaring that there are certain unchanging truths which are not subject to revision by either a Board of our Church or the latest theological fad.

Nevertheless, God has called us to declare with boldness and clarity those Biblical teachings which lie at the heart of the Church's faith and mission.

What, then, are the Biblical foundations upon which we stand? What does the Mission Society believe?



*We believe that Jesus Christ is the only Son of God. THE BIBLE SAYS that Jesus is God's only Son, and that He alone is "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." He has no peers or equals. Jesus was not just a great teacher. Nor was He simply one among many religious leaders. Jesus, the "Word made flesh," is God.

*We believe that the central problem of humanity is sin, and that the primary need of the human family is to be forgiven and restored to fellowship with God. THE BIBLE SAYS that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." While the tragic catalogue of social, political and economic ills in the world is almost endless, people's deepest need is not a better environment but a new heart!

*We believe that Jesus' death on the cross was an atonement for sin, and that on the cross He voluntarily took upon Himself the sins of the whole world. THE BIBLE SAYS that "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." While His death certainly modeled self-sacrificing love, it was much more than an example for us to emulate. It was God's atoning act, providing the basis upon which He offers forgiveness to all who trust in His Son.

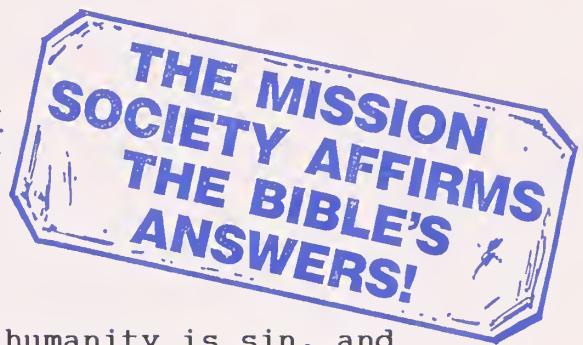
*We believe that salvation is only to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ. JESUS HIMSELF DECLARED: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me." Jesus is not a savior of the world. He is the Savior of the world.

*We believe that in order to be saved, people must repent of their sins and turn to Christ in faith, trusting in Him alone for salvation. THE BIBLE SAYS: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Neither religion nor human effort can save, no matter how sincere. It is only by trusting in Christ that salvation is experienced.

*We believe that the primary task of the church is the evangelization of the world. JESUS SAID: "Go ye therefore into all the world and make disciples of every nation." The central task of Christian missions, then, is to offer the world Christ.

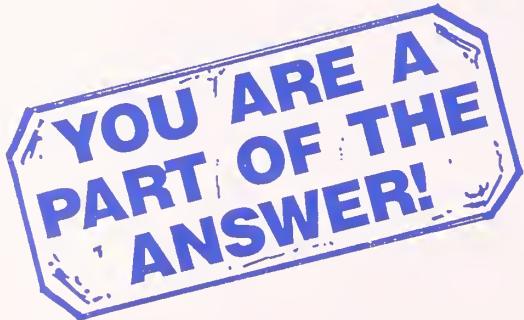
I invite you to be the judge of whether our positions are faithful to the Bible. And only you can determine whether the Mission Society's positions represent your own understanding of the Christian faith and your own convictions about missions.

Perhaps you are wondering how the Mission Society's theology differs from that of the General Board of Global Ministries. While I will not attempt to speak for the GBGM, I hope you will read their new Theology of Mission Statement (1987). Then you can make your own judgment concerning the differences between us, and evaluate whether Biblical truths are being faithfully upheld by the GBGM.



I am convinced that the mission program of the United Methodist Church is no longer founded upon these teachings that have for years been the hallmarks of the evangelical faith. Historic Wesleyan theology is out and radical new ideas are in.

As a consequence, Methodism's missions thrust, which once was the flagship of North America's missionary movement, has foundered on the shoals of a bankrupt theology.



I hope you agree with me that this must be changed, and that United Methodists must once again rise up in obedience to Jesus Christ and make the evangelization of the world our highest priority. Your partnership in the effort to restore to United Methodism its true mission heritage is vital!

The problems in our Church are so great, my friend, and the needs of a lost world are so urgent, that words alone are not enough. Dialogue regarding missions has been going on for nearly two decades in our denomination. But all the while, millions are plunging into eternity without hope of salvation.

It is time for action! Evangelical convictions alone will not win the lost to Jesus. Orthodox theology in itself will not save anyone. Only our obedient response to the Great Commission will reach the nations for Christ. We must pray, we must give, we must go. That is His command. And that is our commitment.

Thank you for joining the Mission Society in the marvelous task of taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Yours for the nations,

H. T. Maclin
President

P.S. Your support matters! The needs on our fields around the world, coupled with the special demands upon our resources during this General Conference year, make your gift this month very important. I know I can count on you! Thank you, in advance, for your gift.

THE MISSION SOCIETY FOR UNITED METHODISTS
PO. BOX 1103/DECATUR, GEORGIA 30031-1103/PH. (404) 378-8746





A MONTHLY LETTER ON EVANGELISM

MONATLICHER INFORMATIONSBRIEF ÜBER EVANGELISATION

LETTRE MENSUELLE SUR L'ÉVANGÉLISATION

每月宣教音信

No. 8, August 1982

Dear Friends,

The July Letter featured my colleague Wesley Ariarajah writing a pastoral note to a Sri Lankan Christian on witness to Hindu neighbours. It was very quickly responded to. The Ecumenical Press Service picked it up immediately. Twelve written statements arrived from Asia, Europe and Africa. So, for this month I propose to take life easy and simply publish selections from these responses. The issue, as I see it, is deadly serious - Do we or do we not proclaim "Christ is the Only Way; there is no salvation except through him."? Wesley clearly advised "no" in front of a Hindu. What do you think? I'm half-tempted to wade into the discussion. But let's hear our readers first.

Whatever the theology and whatever the missiology (what a big word), I am happy to find that the format of a pastoral letter on evangelism communicates. Pastor H. Barth in France had his attention caught "by Wesley's letter to Ranjith". He suggested if we could "from time to time, do this kind of letter addressed to other 'sorts' of evangelists: vis-à-vis secularized persons in Europe, for instance, or vis-à-vis persons who are victims of sects, or vis-à-vis socio-professional categories (workers' milieu, small bourgeoisie...)". Good idea. I'll work on it. And if you feel like trying your hand, or know somebody who would, please let me know.

Before you turn the page for readers' responses to Wesley, I would like to report to you some recent "evangelism" highlights in the life of the WCC.

In July, we had our Central Committee meeting. It is the highest policy-making body in the WCC, and apart from the assemblies probably the world's most formally representative church body. Let me share several things which happened there.

The concern for the theology of cultures received a lot of attention. It is not simply a "dialogue" issue. It is something like my walking through the Geneva Museum of Art and History for the first time. Beautiful religious paintings. Jesus speaking to his disciples by a Swiss lake. Christianity has

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES · COMMISSION ON WORLD MISSION AND EVANGELISM
OEKUMENISCHER RAT DER KIRCHEN · KOMMISSION FÜR WELTMISSION UND EVANGELISATION
CONSEIL ŒCUMÉNIQUE DES ÉGLISES · COMMISSION DE MISSION ET D'ÉVANGÉLISATION

been totally contextualized into European culture. And then I found myself saying to myself, "How much richer the Gospel will be to all of us if it can ever be seen through the cultures of Asia and Africa, etc?" I think this is what the Central Committee was concerned about.

On a number of occasions, a woman delegate from the Netherlands said something to this effect, "I am a mother. Many of our children have dropped out of church." In fact, probably she used these same simple words. It was powerful. I think it will be heard in Vancouver.

During a plenary session, Max Rafransoa, General Secretary of the All African Council of Churches, told the Central Committee, "In Africa, evangelism is our first priority, but we can't separate this from the whole problem of liberation, not only the question of political liberation as in Southern Africa but all types of alienation which exist on our continent. It is because of the Gospel that we speak for liberation." It was well said. I hope he would say some more.

The Central Committee approved an important document called "Mission and Evangelism - an Ecumenical Affirmation" which had been drafted and submitted by CWME. The statement is now a WCC statement on the subject. It contains many ecumenical insights on evangelism, one of the most important, it seems to me, is this in paragraph number 34:

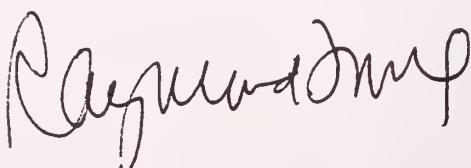
"There is no evangelism without solidarity; there is no Christian solidarity that does not involve sharing the knowledge of the Kingdom which is God's promise to the poor of the earth. There is here a double credibility: A proclamation that does not hold forth the promises of the justice of the Kingdom to the poor of the earth is a caricature of the Gospel; but Christian participation in the struggles for justice which does not point towards the promises of the Kingdom also makes a caricature of a Christian understanding of justice."

I shall be sending you a copy of the full text later in the year, and would ask for your help in circulating it to local churches and getting their response.

Now, back to readers' responses to Wesley's letter on witness to Hindus. Welcome to the debate,

With warm greetings,

Yours in Christ,



Raymond Fung

SELECTED READERS' RESPONSES TO

WESLEY ARIARAJAH'S LETTER ON WITNESS TO HINDU NEIGHBOURS

From Parmananda R. Divarkar, S.J., India

I found myself very much in sympathy with Wesley's line of thought. Of course, he does not say all that there is to be said on the subject; nor does he claim to. But he does open up a lot of questions that need to be examined; and which moreover are relevant not just when addressing Hindus.

One of my own reflections on this matter, as you know from our previous discussion, is that we need not only new "models" of evangelization but a new type of model. The traditional models envisaged communication in one direction: the point of departure remained firm and stable; and a change, indeed a conversion, was expected at the receiving end. Could we not think of "dialogal models" for accomplishing the evangelical task?

Do keep up the initiative of encouraging an exchange of ideas on this topic, which is both interesting and very important.

From L. Suohie Mhasi, Nagaland, India

The statement of Wesley in the form of a letter is very educative. Once a Gandhian leader came to Kohima and we had fellowship with him. As I was sitting by him, he started conversing with me about religious matter. He said, "My mother is a wonderful religious woman in the world. But she did not like to practise kneeling in prayer because it is what the Christians practise. Some Christians also do not like 'tika'. There are some extreme Christians who say that man can be saved through Christ only and there is no other way. What is your view?" I replied, "It is what I believe." "Then there are millions and millions of people in other major religions in the world. What will be their fate then?" he harshly asked. "According to the Bible, the unbelievers of Christ will perish." I replied. He angrily departed. My conviction is that whether one likes it or not, we cannot compromise the truth.

Once I share the words of God with a Hindu young man in a hotel. For several times when I said some thing, he replied, "Yes, it is in our religious book too." At last I posed a question to him, "Do you have the joy of salvation in your heart?" He replied, "No." "We Christians have the real joy of salvation in our hearts." I told him. However deep their search for the truth, their devotion, their philosophy; however old their religion is, they do not have the peace and joy of forgiveness of their sins and of having communion with the living God; and therefore, seeking for peace they practise self-immolation. We must love them and must present Christ the only living bread from God to them.

From Israel M. Kabalimu, Bukoba, Tanzania

"Christ Only is the Way" is a common conviction among many Christians in Africa. Since, the witness of the preacher is based on his/her own reflection and experience, no one outside the preacher could deny it. Some of the revisionists I had talked to in our diocese, stress that when a person testifies to the power of Christ, he does so in ecstasy. At such a moment a person becomes so full of the Holy Spirit that he may feel to have been "born again"

with Christ. However, this is not done to force the hearers to do the same but rather it is an open encouragement to share Christ's Love, and Salvation among themselves.

If the Hindus do not find any reality in such a Christian witness, e.g., "Christ is the Only Way", we cannot force them to accept it. The Holy Spirit, after a Christian witness, functions among the hearers and a few would become genuinely converted. It is my opinion that after a person has recognized the truth of the Gospel, he or she gradually would accept it at his/her own volition.

From W. Morgenstern, Dresden, German Democratic Republic

1. The basis of all Christian witness and all missionary and evangelistic activity is the fact that God acted decisively and comprehensively for all human beings in Jesus Christ: God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor 5:19) and "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that all who believe in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).
2. The real motive of Christian speech and action is rooted in personal experience of the Love of God. Paul writes: "Having received mercy, we weary not..." (2 Cor 4:1) And Peter tells those who would forbid him from witnessing to Christ: "We cannot keep silent about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:20)
3. Because it is God's will that all human beings should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4), the mission of the Church can have no limits. The dialogue with people of other faiths and ideologies is a specific form of mission calling for a special measure of sensitivity, humility and receptivity.
4. Christian witness can only be accepted when it is accompanied by the witness of life. In the encounter with people of other faiths, therefore, it is essential to respect both their integrity and their freedom.
5. Dialogue is possible only if the partners to it are ready to listen to each other and to take the other partner's conviction seriously. The absence of this readiness to listen on the part of the witness to Christ, however imbued with a sense of mission, will always prove a fatal handicap preventing him or her from successfully commanding the Good News to others.
6. In the dialogue with people of other faiths, the witness of Christ always also finds him or herself in a tense situation, particularly so even. However friendly, humble, receptive and patient his or her approach to the dialogue partner may be, the point will inevitably be reached when he or she must testify to the Lord Jesus Christ, and indeed to "the crucified Christ, a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23).
7. The Gospel is a message which necessarily requires a decision. This being so, the dialogue, too, will reach the decisive - i.e. the "critical" point, earlier or later. The Christian who seeks to witness to his or her Lord will have to allow seriously for the possibility that his or her witness may also meet with resistance, rejection or even violence (Acts 9:20-23; 13:44-46; 17: 22-23, etc).
8. In dialogue, too, love and truth are inseparable. The ruthless fanatic for truth is just as incapable of dialogue with people of other faiths as the

Christian who, out of a spurious love, keeps silent about the consequence of rejecting the truth. Christian mission is constantly exposed to both these dangers. But the special temptation to which dialogical mission seems to be most exposed is that of telling only half the truth, out of a mistaken tolerance or fear of the reactions of the partner in dialogue. But the whole truth is: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever refuses to believe in the Son will never see life; the anger of God rests on him or her." (John 3:36)

From Moti Lal Pandit, New Delhi, India

Dear Wesley,

Your letter to Ranjith is thought-provoking. While going through the letter, certain important questions arose in my mind. Let me share them with you.

1. There are lot of ambiguous expressions and terms in your letter. It is very difficult to understand what you really mean by spiritual experience. Spiritual experience of what? There must be some truth, a belief, a way of life to be experienced. An experience, whatever its nature and content, is always cognitive, and therefore operates within a particular frame of beliefs or ideas, predispositions, and so on. It is, therefore, fallacious to speak of experience without any reference to the truth which I am to share or experience.
2. It has become a fashion to say that Hinduism values experience rather than doctrine. This is not, historically speaking, true. The study of classical Hinduism, even of contemporary neo-Hinduism, makes it quite clear that teachings and doctrines and beliefs of every Hindu denomination or sect are based on the ideas of a particular prophet or saint. Each denomination has its own belief-system. Hinduism may not have homogeneous doctrines, yet certain beliefs are universal among all Hindu denominations: the concept of samsara, karma, dualism between mind and body, eternity of soul, etc. It is, therefore, wrong to say that Hinduism is basically oriented towards experience and not towards a belief-system.
3. No religion exists without the dimension of experience. The same is the case Hinduism. The experience of one person, whether he be called a saint or prophet, are concretised into what one may call doctrines and beliefs. Take the case of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara. Whatever Sankara wrote or said have been transformed into a particular school of beliefs and doctrines by his followers. These beliefs and doctrines are not accepted by those who follow Ramanuja or the Trika system of Kashmir. Take the contemporary examples of Ramakrishna or Ramana. Ramakrishna has been raised to the pedestal of a deity by his followers, and his teachings have become the doctrinal basis for his followers. The same is the case with Ramana. To say that Hindu denominations have no founders or prophets is, from a historical viewpoint, not correct.
4. You maintain that God can be experienced through different ways, such as bhakti yoga, karma yoga, jnana yoga, etc. This unfortunate classification is not found at all in traditional Hinduism. It is the creation of Vivekananda. If we, for example, study the classical texts on Yoga dispassionately, it becomes clear that the aim of Yoga as such is not to experience God; rather it is to reach the state of isolation (kaivalyam). I shall not here go into a textual exegesis. However, we must remind ourselves that when making use

of such terms, we must be aware of their meaning, and how they have been applied in the contexts in which they sprang. Carelessness can lead to confusion and chaos of thought.

5. In this context to say that Hinduism is tolerant is to misread history. This fallacious argument started with Vivekananda, and has now become a slogan with contemporary neo-Hindu writers and leaders. What is maintained to be tolerance turns out, when perceived carefully, to be intolerance. We just have to study the contemporary Hindu missionary literature, particularly of Hindu Vishwa Parishad, Arya Smaj, etc.

6. The question is not whether we should preach Christ to Hindus or not. The question is: how to preach him. I agree with you that we cannot separate the message from the one who carries the message. But this does not mean that the truth-claim of Christ depends on the person who carries it. Truth must subsist in itself. If truth is dependent on something else other than itself for its validity, it is no more truth. If Christ is God, he must validate himself as God. This assertion - that Christ is God, and therefore redeemer of mankind - must vindicate itself. If human techniques can lead to the experience of God, then God is nothing but fiction, an illusion created by imagination. What is needed is not the negation of this truth (that Christ is God) by entering into a false pluralism (all roads lead to Rome), but a re-interpretation in the context of historically-conditioned human experiences. The need of preaching Christ as redeemer exists as much now as it did when the event of Incarnation took place. If this point is missed in our Christian life, we have missed the central meaning of Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

7. We cannot separate the witnessing of Christ to Hindus from the message of Christ. We cannot witness Christ outside of his message. To bring a dichotomy between Christ and his message is to deprive Incarnation of its significance and meaning in the plan of God. I agree with you on the problem of methodology. There is no doubt that the Church in the Third World countries suffers from the sins of all historical aberrations which took place in the West. We have various denominations, we have different modes of worship and confessions, we have different structures in the church - all of them imported from the West. In this sense we can say that we do not have the authentic Gospel, and therefore not authentic Christ. Our Christ is a Christ of the Western denomination, of Western confessions, of Western cultures, etc. We have to rectify this situation. The Western garb of Christianity has put us in a defensive position. It has isolated us from the mainstream of our culture and history. But we have to be careful on this point, that is, this aberration of the past does not absolve us from our task, which is to preach Christ authentically in the contexts in which we live.

8. Let us keep this in mind always: If we really believe in the uniqueness of Christ, we will have to make this belief a reality through our witness. Christ's uniqueness is not hindrance only to Hindus, but to everyone. It is proving a hindrance even to the church.

From Johannes Aagaard, Denmark

Dear Wesley,

I appreciate your letter to Ranjith and I shall express my gratitude for the letter by offering some critical questions and statements:

1. During my many excursions to India I have been impressed by the pluriformity of Hinduism. But at the same time this fact has put a full-stop to most of my generalizations about "Hinduism" and thus made life more difficult! I should like to make your life more difficult too, for I am not sure that your generalization "Hinduism" holds water. In fact it is my impression that you by "Hinduism" simply means that limited part of neo-Hinduism, which took off from Ramakrishna/Vivekananda and similar synthesizers.

2. I am somewhat worried because of the tendency in your letter to emphasize knowledge and not faith. Does this represent a terminological trend only? Or does it reveal a certain one-sidedness? You speak about knowledge as a counterpart to experience, while the counterpart to faith is obedience? I would not exclude your dimension, but I do think that it is only a biblical trend if and in so far as knowledge is part of faith and experience is part of obedience. I know well that this terminology is not at all as easy as yours in relation to my Hindu-friends, but it may still be necessary.

3. You underline that "God" cannot be taken anywhere. But this fact does not exclude - I hope - that the good news and its affirmation of life and of God's love to mankind can and must be taken everywhere. It has to be taken to all mankind, not as a package deal, that is right, but still as something which has to be sent off and received.

Neither Nordic people nor Indian people have been able to find the truth by themselves. Nor has the Jewish people been able to. No one can experience or see Truth. It has to be revealed "from outside". We cannot escape that hard fact. Faith can only be shared when it has been accepted as a gift which is and remains in a way foreign to all of us.

4. The reason for this foreignness is not imperialism or colonialism or otherisms. The reason is our sin and our alienation from God. Not the concepts matter, but the fact matters. The human condition is fundamentally determined from the fact that we do not know who we are ourselves and definitely not who God is.

We not only do not understand our human condition, but we are most probably even in principle not able to understand it. Our knowledge more than anything is ruined. We do not even put the right questions, not to speak about the answers to our dilemma. I see no fundamental difference between people and people in this respect. Danes hate to acknowledge this hard fact and so do all other people. We prefer our own religious projections - and although they differ from people to people, they are fundamentally the same: we see in a mirror and thereby we see ourselves. We are our own horizon and constitute our own limitations.

Jesus and his communication to mankind is different from all that. He is the road in a very specific way, specific because of his specific mission. This specificity is not part of the church's reality. The road of the church is inclusive: Those who are not against the church are for it, but those who are not with Christ are against Him (Luke 9:50 and 11:23). This exclusive claim is part of his love and in fact is the most inclusive mission one can imagine.

God's name is Christ, for Christ reveals the face of God, creates the love of God, gives the faith in God. God always spoke to mankind in Christ, and there is no other road from God to us than this revelation. But from that revelation there are many roads to mankind in all its religious diversity. All these roads can be used by the Holy Spirit who, however, always speaks out of the wisdom of the Truth which Christ manifested.

I know well that this double dimension is not easy to express in a factual dialogue, but it is necessary, I hope, that we never forget this dialectic and attempt to communicate it. The church is itself more of mankind than of God, as are all religions in the world. The church is not the presence of God or Christ. It is when it is at its best a pointer to God beyond all gods and divinities. It is fundamentally very necessary never to forget this distance between us and God. This unites us with all of mankind. We are all in the same dilemma.

I fear that some of my friends may sneer: European theology. If so, what then? I am a European theologian, and I speak or write as such. If not I would cheat. We have a lot of escapism in modern theology, which makes people behave as if they were someone else. Let us not join this farce, which threatens to empty the theological task of its seriousness.

From Vinay Samuel, Bangalore, India

I appreciate the concern of this letter to be sensitive and to be aware of a number of pitfalls in Christian witness among Hindus. Most Christians whom I know would affirm the necessity of an integral relationship and proper congruity between the messenger and the message. But there is an important distinction between the Hindu and Christian world views in the emphasis given to this relationship. The Hindu perspective is that the messenger must reach the status of a guru before he can instruct others about matters of faith. There is no dominant concept of bearing witness in Hinduism because the fundamental relationship within which religious communication takes place is that between a guru and a disciple. On the contrary, the Christian perspective is that an ordinary disciple can share matters of faith with others. A person does not have to reach a state of enlightenment that identifies him as a guru or master before he can share with others, nor in so doing does he make any claim to be a master.

Consequently, when Christians share with Hindus, they appear to be making an implicit claim to a status as a guru, which they do not demonstrate. So it is important that Christians do not bear their witness in a didactical manner, using categorical or absolutist terms. Rather they must humbly share their convictions in a fashion that shows that they are disciples of the guru who enables his disciples to share. The issue is whether we can speak with conviction without being categorical. For our categorical statements give the impression of a claim to have reached perfection.

I fully agree that in dialogueing with Hindus, we are dialogueing with members of a religious tradition which includes great spiritual giants. Only ignorance mixed with arrogance would dismiss all such as not of God, merely human or even evil. But the very openendedness and plurality of Hinduism which makes it easy for the Christian to begin a discussion with a Hindu at any point, makes it impossible for him to reach a conclusion anywhere. In the popular understanding of religious pluralism, all expressions of religion have equal validity. Thus an atheist and a devout Bhakti follower have equally valid stances. The ethical and social implications of such a view are obvious to any observer of Hinduism. The oppressive dimensions of casteism are not merely rooted in economic or social realities, but are reinforced by the religious world view. Any witness to the religious world view of Hinduism must not neglect the religious sanctioning of casteism.

Therefore while Hinduism has a concept that truth has many dimensions and takes a variety of religious forms, the only basis of truth is religious experience.

The content of that experience can only be known and authenticated by the individual who experiences it. It cannot be evaluated by anyone else. This renders it almost impossible to formulate criteria for evaluating truth within any religious experience.

But people do form judgements within Hinduism. The religious experiences of the vast majority of Hindus who may be committed to the worldview of karma and reincarnation are set in the context of being victims of oppression. Within that situation they are forced to ask questions and make judgements for which their own religious system provides no objective validity. Christian witness and dialogue must therefore not be restricted to only one type of religious experience among literate and sophisticated Hindus. It must begin with the questions and judgements of these marginalised groups, especially the women and the poor. For it was with the questions of these groups that Jesus began to explain the good news, even to the rich. Not all human questions point to the realities and answers of the Gospel. The questions of the untroubled rich did not lead them to appreciate the answers of Jesus. It was those rich who experienced for themselves the questions of the marginalised, Zaccheus the outcast and the prodigal son who experienced degradation, who found in Jesus the answer to their quest. When they found themselves victims of oppression, they asked the right questions and came to Jesus for the answers. That is part of what is meant by repentance.

A crucial area therefore for Christian witness to Hindus is to begin with the questions of the marginalised within Hinduism, the women and the poor, and to share the answers of Jesus which affirm the validity of their questions and of their judgements. The aim of Christian witness is not to enable the literate sophisticated Hindu to have a religious encounter with a mystical figure from another religious tradition. The Gospel comes with questions. It enables the questions of the marginalised Hindus to be affirmed, and addressed by the Gospel, and addresses those questions to the socially elite Hindu.

Again, because the Christian Gospel is about breaking down barriers between God and man and between man and man and so addresses issues such as the barriers between rich and poor, caste and outcaste. So the Christian witness cannot be the witness of an individual alone testifying to his own personal religious experience. It must be the witness of the life of a Christian community in which the new life of reconciliation is being expressed. A person's Christian witness must not be confined to claiming a privileged status for his own Christian religious experience as superior to other religious experiences. It must be to witness to his participation in the reality of the reconciliation which his Christian community is experiencing which he is convinced is mediated to them and offered to all through Jesus Christ.

From Raymond Fung, again, but on a different subject.

Since there is a blank page left, let me advertise a book I have put together and recently published by the WCC. It tells true stories of the "house churches" in the People's Republic of China. This is how the promotion material describes it:

HOUSEHOLDS OF GOD ON CHINA'S SOIL

A book of stories, but the stories are from real life. They are stories about the church in China, told by Chinese Christians. They are about the "house churches" of which we have heard so much and know so little. They describe "how small Christian communities, through one of the most radical upheavals in human history, kept their faith in Jesus Christ - and how their faith kept them". And they do so with a simplicity which is both refreshing and challenging.

Emilio Castro wrote in the Foreword, "Personally, I found these stories deeply moving. They meant a lot to me in my own commitment to Jesus Christ and his church."

He also suggests a distinctive type of contextual theology. Rather than adapting theology to context in a way that places the gospel in cultural captivity, he believes that the gospel has a normative priority and context an experiential priority. Brands of North American adjectival theology, which view one's context as normative for doing theology, could benefit from his way of doing theology in context, rather than subjecting theology to context.

This book will also help those who want to think theologically about social issues. The tendency to moralize may relieve a guilty conscience or two but fails to respond evangelically to one's context. Confessing Christ in a particular situation binds us as well as the situation to Christ. To confess Christ as Lord in a context that denies people the humanity that Christ assumed and reconciled is a response that arises from the gospel.

A critical question is whether inser-

tion in a crisis situation is a legitimate starting point for a theology of ministry. We must guard against the tendency to respond merely to one's context instead of the gospel. This, however, is what de Gruchy successfully avoids. By using Tracy's concept of the three publics, he minimizes the danger of playing one public off against the other (such as the church or society against the academy). By beginning with Bonhoeffer and Barth's christological emphasis, he lessens the propensity merely to moralize about social issues. By incorporating insights from liberation theology, he reminds us of the critical role of society in one's theological and pastoral activity. Although these various influences may not fit neatly together, they do complement one another

in developing a theology of ministry that serves Christ in response to social crises.

This book, in short, is theological without being abstract, pastoral without being privatistic, contextual without being acculturated, and timely without being trendy. *Theology and Ministry in Context and Crisis* would make a distinctive contribution to courses in theology, ethics, missions, and ministry. It would also help people in a church context become theologically formed and prepared for ministry. This book, originally given as lectures to a British audience, reflects on the South African context and would be profitably read as a case study of doing theology. It would then prompt us to consider crises in our context in light of the gospel of judgment and transformation. □

Soteriological Christology

by Richard A. Muller

Lee E. Snook, *The Anonymous Christ: Jesus as Savior in Modern Theology*. Augsburg, 1986, 191 pp.

If nothing else, 20th-century Christology is diverse and varied. We have seen Christology "from above" and Christology "from below," Christology that is ontologically oriented to the tradition of German idealism and Christology that is experientially constructed, reminiscent of Schleiermacher. There have been existential Christologies and Christologies grounded on a consideration of the place of Jesus of Nazareth in salvation history or, indeed, in universal history. This diversity is both amazing and daunting. There are few trustworthy guides to its highways and byways. Although far from complete in its survey of authors and models, Lee Snook's *The Anonymous Christ* provides a significant typology of and introduction to a fairly broad selection of contemporary Christologies.

Snook's point of departure is the necessity of grounding any successful

Christology in the saving "event which centers on Jesus of Nazareth and which is inseparable from the community of believers who wrote the New Testament" (p. 7). This basic assumption leads him to analyze the various Christologies and to present his own prospectus for a "constructive" and "post-modern" Christology from a soteriological perspective, specifically, in terms of the way in which the human predicament of "lostness" or "disrelation" is addressed by modern theological meditation on the saving event of Jesus Christ. Snook further defines the problem of lostness or disrelation in terms of the categories of God, world, and self, and uses this definition as the basis of his typology. Thus, some Christologies address primarily the disrelation of God and the human self, others primarily the disrelation of God and world, still others the disrelation of self and world.

This typology manifests several significant relationships and parallels that might otherwise go unnoticed. Barth's virtually a-historical Christology "from

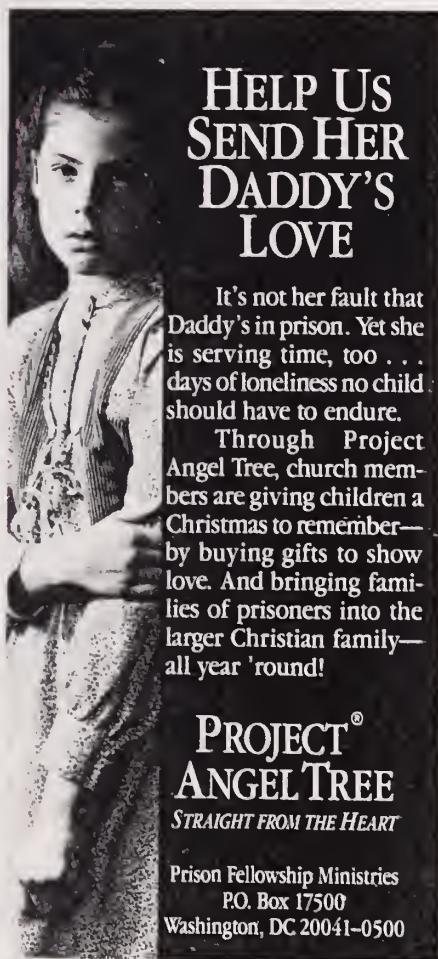
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Richard A. Muller is Associate Professor of Historical Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary.

above" and Pannenberg's historicized Christology "from below" for all of their methodological and attitudinal differences both lay stress on the lostness of the individual and the reestablishment of the relationship between God and the human self in and through Christ. Snook can also point to the fact that both Barth and Pannenberg place christological understanding prior to soteriological understanding and, in a sense, oppose the kind of soteriological paradigm proposed by Snook's essay. Thus also, despite their profound ontological disagreement, Tillich and Cobb agree in their construction of Christology along soteriological and apologetic lines, with an emphasis on the estrangement or disrelation of God and world. The liberation theologians and Schillebeeckx, with their emphasis on human experience and the liberating presence of Jesus, stress the soteriological problem of the disrelation of self and world. As a final group, Snook discusses a rather diverse set of thinkers including John Hick, Paul Knitter, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and Karl Rahner, all of whom point toward the need for a view of Christ that recognizes or at least allows for salvation outside of Christianity in the other great religions of the world. These views of Christ all stand outside of Snook's paradigm.

In lieu of a detailed discussion of Snook's various presentations, suffice it to say that *The Anonymous Christ* is both a substantial and a substantially accurate work. Its paradigms of lostness or disrelation, though obviously not the only paradigms for analyzing 20th-century Christology and probably not sufficient by themselves to explain the christological discussions of recent times, are quite instructive and provide a significant vantage point from which to address Christology. It is worth questioning why the author omitted certain theologians—notably Jürgen Moltmann, Walter Kasper, Hans Küng, and Emil Brunner. While Snook is perfectly justified in illustrating his paradigm rather than attempting to discuss every important theologian of the century, the omission of Brunner seems curious inasmuch as Brunner struggled so mightily with the problem of order in

Christology, even to the point of setting aside the early pattern of *The Mediator* in favor of a soteriologically-governed movement from Work to Person in the *Dogmatics*. This is very much the approach that Snook advocates.

A word needs to be said, finally, about Snook's own christological proposal: it is a Christology that grows out of the analyses of the problem of salvation present throughout the book and that gravitates toward the issue of the disrelation of God and world. Snook sees the need for Christology to address such issues as "global interdependence," ecology, and oppression together with the problem of the encounter of Christianity and of Western culture with other religions and with the cultures of the Third World, but he also recognizes the necessity of maintaining the "finality of Christ" in God's redemptive plan. In order to argue the breadth of God's saving work and

to acknowledge the incompleteness of all particular Christologies, Snook proposes a language of the "Anonymous Christ"—recognizing both the finality and the ultimacy of God's work in Christ and the presence of Christ, beyond the localization of historical Christianity, in all of God's redemptive working with the human race. This formulation does draw together many of the themes of the book, but it is not developed to the point that a reader is able to understand concretely what the author means by the anonymous presence of Christ, say, in Hinduism or Buddhism. One is left, at the end of the book, with some sense of incompleteness and perhaps with a desire to hear more of what the author has to say. In any case, the book does provide a significant paradigm for examining contemporary Christology and, by extension, a useful overview of problems confronting Christianity and Christian teaching in the 20th century. □

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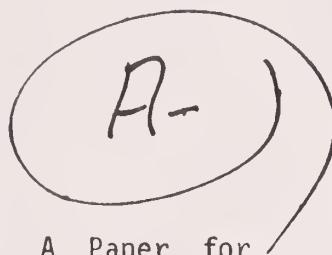
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THE CONTEXTUALIZATION-SYNCRETISM DEBATE

AND CONTEMPORARY ASIAN THEOLOGIES



A Paper for

Christianity in
a Pluralistic World

Dr. M.M. Thomas

by

Garry O. Parker

December 8, 1982

INTRODUCTION

The debate on contextualization and syncretism is an important one. It focuses on some of the most important issues of missiology today. It relates to the need to make the message of Christ come alive in the culture of the peoples of the world. It addresses the question of God's revelation to the world, the problem of communication, and the need for thoughtful reflection on the theological task.

This paper will deal with the issue by examining the discussion regarding contextualization; then Syncretism and the problems connected with it; and finally examples of contextualization and conclusions to be drawn from them.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

During the last decade one of the major foci of missiological discussion has been the issue of contextualization-contextuality and its implications for theological reflection. The roots of the dialog can be traced to the classical discussions of protestant missiology regarding indigenization by Venn, Nevius, and Hodges^{1.} but the current discussion goes far beyond the problems of structure and administrative control and evangelization. The issue is well defined in Ministry in Context. When... in discussing the third mandate of the Theological Education Fund the staff writers state,

(It) appears to focus on a central concept, contextuality, the capacity to respond meaningfully to the Gospel within the framework of one's own situation. Contextualization is not simply a fad or catch word but a theological necessity demand by the incarnational nature of the Word. What does the term imply ?

It means all that is implied in the familiar term 'indigenization' and yet seeks to press beyond. Contextualization has to do with how we assess the peculiarity of third world contexts. Indigenization tends to be used in the sense of responding to the Gospel in terms of traditional culture. Contextualization, while not ignoring this, takes into account the process of secularity, technology, and the struggle for human justice, which characterize the historical moment of nations in the Third World.

2.

They go on to urge that a careful distinction be made between authentic and false forms of contextualization. False contextualization is that which produces uncritical accomodation. Authentic contextualization is prophetic, arising out of real encounter between God's Word and the world and seeks to challenge and change situations through

grounding in and commitment to the historical moment. Contextualization is a dynamic, future oriented view. The context of third world situations will produce its own priorities but there is an interdependence of contexts. Renewal thus grows out of the local situation and relates itself to the past, present, and future with ties to all contexts. Ultimately, contextualization draws its basic power from the Gospel, which is for all people and thereby contributes to "the solidarity of all people in obedience to a common Lord." The section concludes by suggesting that contextualization relates to mission, theological approach, educational method, and structure.

How did the use of this new word, "contextualization" begin? It appears to have begun in a letter from Dr. Nikos A. Nissiotis, who was then Director of the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey. He wrote inviting participation in a meeting on "Dogmatic or Contextual Theology" to be held in 1971. He urged the consideration of the issue because of, "...the crisis which has arisen through the continued use of abstract principles and metaphysical presuppositions by some theoretical disciplines."⁴ He goes on to cite technological changes in the world which have given rise to experiential or "contextual" theology which .." gives preference, as the point of departure for systematic theological thinking to the contemporary historical scene over against the biblical tradition and confessional statements."⁵ The discussion obviously arose not out of a sterile

academic environment, but in "context", because there was a movement toward doing theology contextually and that movement needed evaluation and encouragement in the minds of Nissiotis and others.

Dr. Nissiotis concludes his call for discussion by asking,
". . . whether Systematic Theology can continue to take biblical texts as its point of departure, and on the basis of Biblical Theology
6.
systematize the Christian Faith."

After the conference had reached its conclusions, Dr. Nissiotis introduced the report by restating the issues and pointing out that one main issue was whether theology is self sufficient , built on its own premises alone or whether experimental thought and
7.
environmental action might not be sources of theology. The thrust of the report was to recognize the contextuality which is present in all theology and to focus on the need to contextualize theological premises. Dogmatic theology was seen as rooted in the past and while methods such as the historico-critical were seen as helpful, their methodology was regarded as partial. Stress was placed on event centered theology and the common motifs of struggle and redemption seen in the histories of all people. There was an emphasis on the universal action of God among the nations and the need to recognize God's hand in the histories of the nations. A conscious effort was made to join the older dogmatic approach to the newer contextualized one and to balance all the parts. The shift in emphasis was away from a priori use of Bible and tradition

and toward a method of doing theology which gave equal weight to the context of the historic moment. Contextualized theology can be contrasted with the older styles of doing theology in its approach (inductive); its philosophy (functional); and in its expression (praxic).^{8.}

By 1972 Dr. Shoki Coe had begun to use the word contextualization in his writing and speaking and the discussion about its significance had widened beyond the TEF documents.^{9.} In the Salvation Today Conference of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, in the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, and in numerous regional meetings in the USA and other countries the issues have been discussed. Dr. F. Ross Kinsler, one of the developers of Theological Education by Extension, a contextual approach to pastoral training suggests that there are four crucial issues to be dealt with in relation to contextualization. First, that the current debate is concerned with the nature of the Gospel itself. All missiological scholars agree that it is necessary to understand the literary and historical context of the Scriptures. Similarly the modern context must play a role in interpretation. At issue is how that modern context should be related to the text. Secondly, there is a need to understand and define syncretism and perhaps a danger in it of distorting the Gospel. Yet this trend has always been present in the life of the church and should not keep us from exploring the issue and rethinking our views on it. The line between authentic contextualization and syncretism (if the latter word is to be used

in a negative sense, as is most often the case) is very thin, and may involve gray areas (or at least areas where different cultural filters may result in differing opinions). (For an expanded discussion of syncretism, see the following section of this paper.) Thirdly, contextualization is concerned about both tradition and renewal in the church. It seeks to evaluate and renew structures as well as ideas. This renewal can be positive, but it is sometimes radical and revolutionary . Finally, there are apparent conflicts between contextualizing theology and relying on Biblical theology as a starting point in reflective thinking. Does one use Biblical theology as a filter for contextualizing, or does one use it as only one part of the admixture of reflective thinking that produces 10. a "theology"?

Dr. Shoki Coe holds that we must see that there are many contexts and not all are equally important for the Missio Dei . He sees danger in academic theology becoming fossilized and equally of contextual theology becoming "chameleon" in nature. He sees the salvation of contextualization in the principle of critical discernment of the signs of the times. He speaks of the conscientization of the contexts through involvement and participation in the historic moment. This ~~inter~~^station with history is the contextuality of contextualization. He seems to stress a process of theologizing which is ever changing in relation to the context. He suggests that theologica in loco, must become theologica viatorum as the

11.

"pilgrim people" make their way toward God.

Most of the attempts at contextualizing theology to date have proceeded from an existential framework. This involves the essentially relative nature of text and context. It depends on a dialectical methodology in its doing of theology. It assumes that all theology is conditioned

12.

by culture and not absolute. This methodology has produced

13.

the various "peoples' theologies" of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Its presuppositions raise the question of syncretism and how we may best avoid it in the pejorative sense.

SYNCRETISM

What is syncretism? W.A. Visser 'tHooft defines it as the view which,

" holds that there is no unique revelation in history, that there are many ways to reach the divine reality, that all formulations of religious truth or experience are by their very nature inadequate expressions of that truth and that it is necessary to harmonize as much as possible all religious ideas and experiences so as to create one universal religion for mankind.

14.

Is the tendency to relativise the Gospel into a way among ways a real problem or a straw man based on inadequate understandings of the Gospel? Looking at the general world situation Visser 'tHooft sees it as a major problem. He distinguishes between translation of ceremonies and forms from one religion to another, absorption of practices from one religion to another, and true syncretism which

15.

relevatizes all in universality. He demonstrates that the

Bible is not a syncretistic book, and that its message is a particular one calling for salvation through a narrow point, Jesus Christ, but thereby opening up to a universal salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.^{16.} In taking this position he argues against Bultmann, von Harnack, Hocking, and most of the scholars of comparative religions. He is supported by Cullman, Kraemer, Newbigin,^{17.} Beyerhaus and many others. He points out that if the message of a historic God acting in historic ways through saving events and especially through Jesus Christ is not a true one, no real humanization can take place. He traces the waves of syncretism which have swept the world and points to the need for the Gospel message to remain above the efforts to distort its uniqueness. He calls for dialogue but not for a blending of religions. For Visser 'tHooft, Jesus^{18.} Christ is always Lord above all.

In what ways might contextualization lead to syncretism ? In precisely the point of relevatizing the historical Jesus Christ into a cosmic Christ figure who would assume mythic proportions as he was interpreted and reinterpreted in the local context. Has this happened in western society across the centuries of the Christian era ? Yes, it has, and the many cults (Theosophy, Spiritism, etc) which have grown out of the attempt need to be judged in the light of solid exegesis. The hermeneutical problem is central in evaluating contextualization and in avoiding syncretism. One obvious conclusion is that what is "syncretistic" by one yardstick may not be considered

*what about
the N.T itself?
has not
the historical
Jesus become
the living
Christ & faith?
present in all history
to the believers. Has not
NT used mythic v the
cosmic Christ?*

syncretistic by a different yardstick. Some scholars continue to use the word syncretistic in a positive sense. M.M. Thomas called for

19.

a "Christ-centered syncretism" at Nairobi. But by Visser'tHooft's definition or Newbigin's that is probably not syncretism, but rather

adsorptional as historical Jesus as we see him paragraphs?

In discussing syncretism and contextuality, Saphir Athyal suggests that when the Gospel is relativized, all certainty of understanding of God is lost, the Incarnation loses its significance, and God's person is obscured. He suggests an apt analogy of true contextuality is the picture of a grain of rice buried in the ground, dying, and bringing forth transformed life, the rice plant- true in genus and species, unique in form, rooted in the soil, interacting with its environment, and reproducing.

20.

Hendrick Kraemer has written at length on the problem of syncretism and has had great influence on missiology of past years through his books. He sees a primitive kind of spontaneous syncretism and a more conscious philosophical effort to construct syncretistic systems. Kraemer recognizes that there is a constant effort on the part of popular religion in Israel to syncretize their faith, but recognizes also the rejection of this tendency by the prophets. Kraemer believes that most religions are naturally syncretistic because they see themselves as partial apprehensions of the great universal truth. Christianity, functioning in the light of "Biblical Realism

21.

reacts against syncretism. There are many evidences of the tendency of the first century world to seek accommodation with the Gospel and bend the Gospel to its own ways, but these were rejected by the church as witnessed it in the New Testament, especially in the Acts and the Epistles.

needs contextualization

In struggling with contextualization and avoiding syncretism there is a need to avoid a "Christo-paganism" on one hand and a foreign

to what

is real
a native-culture model
dominated alien-culture model on the other. Bruce Nichols of the World Evangelical Fellowship warns of cultural syncretism which *is a excess from religious syncretism*.
uses inappropriate animistic symbols or nationalistic symbols and thereby creates a distorted witness to Christ or which rejects all cultural forms except its own. The former is dangerous because it lacks critical judgement; the later because it is a form of Judaizing.

Nichols suggests a second form of syncretism which distorts the Gospel is theological in nature. He suggests that such syncretism, because it assumes that all truth is culturally conditioned relativizes the nature of truth and reduces the Gospel to a competing philosophical

22.

claim, idealizing Jesus as a cosmic Christ figure. He suggests that syncretism results in a slow death for the church.

...

We can summarize by noting that generally contextualization is seen as a positive method of doing theology, but it must be done carefully so that the uniqueness of Jesus Christ is maintained. The tension between uniqueness and universality must be maintained and the

particularity and universality are in tension - uniqueness - do you it not under universality?

importance of the text must not be obscured by the context, nor should the uniqueness of the context be ignored in understanding text.

Having examined in an introductory way the issues of contextuality and syncretism, I shall evaluate how these issues are dealt with in the writings of several Asian theologians before considering analytically the factors involved in contextualization and syncretism.

CONTEXTUALIZED THEOLOGIES

In the last decade a number of Asian scholars have been developing theologies which could be called contextualized. Earlier attempts though few in number, were an excellent foundation for their efforts. D.T. Niles and M.M. Thomas were two who pioneered in this effort among the protestent community. Most of these protestant theologies have grown out of the Asian Christian Conference.^{23.}

The most well developed of these theologies is that of Dr. Choan-Seng Song, formerly Principal of Tianan Theological College in Tiawan, and now associate director of the commission on Faith and Order of the W.C.C. in Geneva. His major work to date is found in the books Third-Eye Theology, The Compassionate God, and The Tears of Lady Meng.^{24.} He is attempting a synthesis of insights from the Asian experience with Scripture events and stories which he sees as paradigmatic for all peoples and therefore justify taking a theological leap from Israel to Asia.^{25.}

One of Dr. Songs' starting points is the view that it is not Salvation-history which is important, but salvation in history. A view centered on Israel and the church is not an Asian view because most of the church's history is western history. We must therefore take a leap from the Bible to modern history in Asia. We must learn to see God's hand at work in the nations.^{26.} He sees God's redemptive acts as revolutionary acts and always in a context of violence, because history resists change. He stresses the discontinuity of these acts which make history readable and enable us to leap into the future. He sees the church as attempting to institutionalize the revolution and strongly criticizes the western church for coming to Asia with the view that salvation and truth are in the church's hands alone. He sees the missionary effort of the church as an attempt to incorporate Asia within the static structure of Salvation-History instead of seeking to understand history in context.^{27.}

Western theologies are criticized for reflecting on other cultures from the vantage point of messianic hope lodged outside Asia (in the western church history) so that redemption loses its meaning for these "outside" cultures.^{28.} Song maintains that every nation has analogical experiences to calling, slavery, exodus, and other redemptive acts and therefore all nations experience God's saving grace directly in their history, not only Israel and the nations touched by Christian history. He cites the passages in the Old Testament dealing with God's covenant with all people, and

with aliens who were used by God in Israel's history. This makes the leap from Israel to Asia justified and even an existential necessity.

All histories are like paintings which need to be scrutinized in the light of the dialectic of salvation seen in the Bible. ^{29.}

He recommends that Asian theology should not seek relevance beyond Asia

but that reflection should be concrete in the Asian setting. A

liberation from the claim to universal validity is necessary so that an ecumenical theological community may be built on the basis of ^{30.}

situational authenticity. Therefore a conceptual and propositional

theology must give way to the situational and contextual. For

Song this implies that while the Cross plays an important role in

showing God at work in history, the Resurrection has only a symbolological ^{31.}

value. The material of Scripture is only important in as far as

it deals with events of history which show God at work and analogical

stories which teach something of the peoples' struggle. Reflective

insights of Scripture may equally be drawn from other wisdom literature

of the Asian setting. Song finally calls his theology a Transpositional ^{32.}

Theology, because it stresses the transaction of God in history.

Charles West sees in Song's theology four main points. First, a Christology which is almost universal and which sees a sacramental presence of Christ in all cultures. Second, a transformational theology which breaks history and changes it and secularizes it. Third, a theology judging the bad missiology of the past. Fourth, a theology of hope for change based on God's redemptive acts. ^{33.}

D.Preman Niles challenges Song's analogical method and asks whether it is a form of spiritual imperialism to insist that all nations' histories can be seen in Israel. He agrees with the concept that a break needs to be made with the older missiological views of Salvation History and he agrees that attempts need to be made to seek values in other religions and cultures.^{34.}

Song's theology stresses the love of God working in human history and working for the people. His transpositional hermeneutic is

a liberating one which sees God freeing people through redemptive acts.^{35.}

Though his earlier work (Third Eye Theology) does not stress the Resurrection, his newer book (The Compassionate God) does^{36.}

although it is not clear in what sense he takes its significance.

His theological hope is based on an eschatological view that affirms God's control over human history and sees the whole of history as the arena of God's saving work. God's salvation is a universal one^{37.} which is mediated through Christ in all religions.

A second theologian writing contextualized theology in Asia is Dr. Kosuke Koyama, formerly a missionary to Thailand, Dean and a professor at Southeast Asia Graduate School of Theology, and now teaching in the U.S.A.. He is a Japanese. Dr. Kosuke uses a keen wit and popular style to raise specific questions about specific points of encounter between theology and culture. His three major books are Waterbuffalo Theology, No Handle on the Cross, and

*can this
be done
without
abusing
the universal
meaning of
the resurrection*

Three Mile an Hour God. He has also written a number of articles for various journals.

Dr. Koyama speaks of contextualization as "critical accomodational-
38. prophetism and prophetic accomodation". He points out that this is likely to be done in an often hidden manner. It is a life centered action focused on Jesus Christ. He challenges the traditional view that Christianity takes history seriously while Buddhism or Hinduism do not. He defines taking history seriously as experiencing
39. history and influencing history through suffering. This kind of reinterpretation of old assumptions is characteristic of Koyama. He continually refers to various Bible passages and in both exegesis and exposition forms a background of them in doing theology. He does not limit himself to a few themes, but tries to let the Bible speak to each problem he encounters. In this sense he is existential in his methodology. He seeks to accomodate the linear view of history and
40. the cyclical view of Buddhism through a spiral pattern. He stresses the importance of the Asian context and its sacredness in history. He deals with questions of technology, relational theology, western dominance, relations between Buddhists and Christians, the problem of suffering, the pilgrimage of faith, the outcast ministry of Jesus, and the identification with the crucified one through
41. participation in the world's sufferings. One of the interesting themes which Dr. Koyama treats is that of the "Three Mile an Hour God". He points out that God meets us in the wilderness and deals with us at a walking pace. The implication is that the wilderness is a place

of both danger and promise. The Biblical patterns are of God working with us over a long period and slowly.

Koyama is not tied to any one major theme, nor is he a slave to a particular hermeneutic. He uses alegory, linguistics, tradition, and the historico-critical method as needed. He comments that those who are tied to one method are like those who spend " too much time with chopsticks and not enough with eating". Dr. Koyama's position can be said to be Christ centered. He states, " The historical context is ruled by God. To it the Son came (incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection) to challenge it profoundly. Contextualization is, then, an outcome of reflecting on the career of Jesus Christ."^{42.}

Two different approaches come out of Korea. Dr. Jung Young Lee is a North Korean, educated in the USA, who teaches in the USA. He has taken a philosophical approach to contextualization in going back to the Chinese tradition of I Ching, a philosophy of change which is monistic in nature, and using it in the light of process theology to set up a rather systematized theology which leans heavily on Bultmann, Whitehead, and other western theologians. Lee applies the yin-yang- both/and principle to resolve paradox and to establish a framework for a universalized religion able to cope with the realities of quantum physics and the traditions of Asian religions. His approach, while innovative is rather philosophical and not directly tied to the struggle of the mass of people as most contextualized theologies are. His Americanized framework of supporting evidence seems to make his theology more suitable to Asians in the USA rather

than in Asia itself.

A second type of Korean theology comes from the minjung movement. Minjung is a word for the "people" (in the class sense) and is used by the Christian theologians who are constructing a people's theology in South Korea. Dr. Steven Tonghwan Moon was at Princeton Theological Seminary recently and delivered a lecture from which the material for this discussion is drawn. There are some writings in English available on minjung theology but it is primarily being done ^{45.} in the Korean context as a liberation theology.

Minjung theology came into being as the work of professors and students expelled from their schools for their political views. They ^{46.} were not of the minjung background in their upbringing. They sought to work for the exploited and downtrodden people of the minjung. They took as their background materials the stories and traditions of the minjung, and the Biblical stories of Exodus and other liberation passages. The minjung are seen as possessing a spirituality which has grown out of the long struggle against the overlords. They are still struggling but they are the sinned against, more than sinners. Their spirituality is seen as a gift of the God of love and justice. They are seen as a chosen people; chosen to lead the way to justice and freedom. Their social history is the history of the struggle of all the people. Their history is filled with the struggle with greed, fellowship of the people, and the messianic hope

of the people. In the idealism, the sufferings, and the hope of the minjung, a redemptive process goes on. God is there. The same God who appears in the Bible. The analogical method is used to find identity between the people of Israel and the minjung.

The Minjung theologians have used a common contextualization method in rooting their process of theology in the oppressed people of their land. They use case study, social history, Biblical criticism, and analogy to make their points. Their theology is a form of liberation theology since it has as its eschatology the victory of the people in God's liberating movement through history. It is Christian since they see Jesus Christ as the witness to God's redemption. It is universalist since it sees God in the folk religion of Korea and would use their social history as an Old Testament analogue for 47. their preparation for the coming of Christ.

A large number of other [^]Asians are presently writing and most are approaching their doing of theology from the contextualization framework. In Indonesia, Albert Widjaya is suggesting a theme of "beggarly theology" based on identifying with the poor and seeking meaning in the context of daily life. He suggests that begging is taking from the west, but beggarliness is taking from the 48. garbage can of daily life. Ms. H. Marianne Katoppo presents a woman's view of doing theology and suggests that in Asia women are not given their rightful status before God. She suggests doing theo-

logy through reinterpretation of Biblical models and correct linguistic studies of Bible words to remove the male bias. She suggests that the model of Mary the work weary peasant woman is the best one
49.
for Asian women to identify with.

Emerito P. Nacpil, now Methodist Bishop, from the Philippines has written of the "critical Asian Principle" which should underlay all of Asian contextual theology. That principle is that it should be thoroughly Asian. (By which is meant that it must take into account the tradition, social history, religions, historic struggle, and contempot scene all in the light of Scriptural witness). That critical principle is to be used in a situational, hermeneutical,
50.
missiological, and educational dynamic.

M.M. Thomas surveys the development of indigenous theology (by which contextualized seems to be meant) and points out three sources of Indian theological development. First, theological education has sought to maintain high standards of training for the ministry and the whole church. Second, the ecumenical struggle of the various confessions has sought an indigenous expression in its creeds, though with limited success. Third, theological creativity has been increased through the interaction of Christian thinkers with the religions of India. Dr. Thomas cites a long list of men who have sought to gain insight from the Indian religious context. These insights seek to relate basic Hindu concepts to the Christian understanding and find ways to communicate the Gospel more clearly in Hindu thought forms.

Dr. Thomas goes on to present an analysis of the fourth stream of influence through the interrelationships with other religions and those who claim Christ without baptism or Christianization of culture. Finally he cites the early political theologies, and the rise of nationalism. He sees the major Indian contribution to contextualized theology as probably coming from Chenchiah's concept of the new creation. Jesus Christ is the manifestation of a new creative effort of God. The Christology of this view is based on the Pauline idea of Jesus as the New Man. The Incarnation then is a permanent state and the basis for the humanization of history.

51.

It can be seen from the preceding survey of contextualized theologies that most of them center on the people. Most of them are attempts to find meaning in the context of history and interpret history in the light of eschatology which focuses on the person of Jesus Christ and God's redemptive acts in history. They all have a deep respect for the traditions of the religions which surround them and they find values in those religions which are analogous to the Old Testament protohistory of Christianity. James A. Veitch has suggested that an Asian Theology should be oriented to the "living factors of self disclosure and liberation and the witness of Christ to the Resurrection. He speaks of its response as a Christian interpretation of the world, a Christian understanding of man, a Christian concept of freedom, and a Christian concept of God's self disclosure in human history. He quotes Barth that Asians should feel free to

*center - people
of Christ?*

52.

be Asians and work at constructing their own theology. Dr. Saphir Athyal suggests that there are four factors to remember when shaping an Asian theology. First it must have a Biblical base and character. He maintains that the Written Word and the Living Word have no contradiction or contradistinction and that there is a core of Biblical theology which is supracultural. Second, he calls for a systematization of theology around the Asian context. He points out the need for carefully relating to the context, both social and religious, as his third point. Interreligious dialogue is called for on the basis of a need to understand one another. He urges careful maintaining of the "revelation-fact" in any dialogue. Fourth, he shows that Asian theology should be directed toward life and mission

53.

and not be abstract. Although stressing the "revelation-fact" less than Dr. Athyal, Bishop Lakshman Wickremesinghe suggests a similar idea in stressing a need for adaptation, in forms, naturalization in communication, and dialogue in interaction.

54.

In a thoughtful paper delivered to the American Society of Missiology, Dr. Charles Taber suggested several criteria for contextualizing (or indigenizing) theology. He cites several Asian and American theologians in making the first criterion Biblical. There must be a grappling with the text itself. The Transcendence of God is a second criterior. In whatever way this is expressed it is necessary. Christology is the third criterion. It must be explicitly stated in ways which communicate. Contextualized theology must be prophetic

in nature, the fourth criterion. It must not only affirm the values of its context; it must challenge them where necessary. A fifth criterion of theology is that it must be dialogical. It must learn from the struggles of others within and without the Christian faith , both in the east and in the west. The sixth criterion is that its methodology must be open ended. It must wrestle with modernization, power and all the complexities of the age with all tools available. Finally, it must be subject to the Holy Spirit. He must be its dynamic principle as He has been for the church through the ages.

55.

D. Preman Niles points out that Asians see a great need to join theology and mission in contextualization. There is a need to make the periphery (the poor of Asia) the center of theologizing. A conversational theology needs to arise stressing not personal conversion in isolation, but in relation to belonging to the people. For Asians , Niles holds creation history is the proper starting place for doing theology, not salvation history (he defines salvation history as book bound and related to the western church and western history). Niles is not rejecting the history of salvation in God's redemptive acts, but in identifying that history with the west and neglecting the work of God among the peoples of Asia. He suggests three approaches to contextualization. First, forming a theology or philosophy of pluralism. Second, shape a method and analysis of dialogue which is dynamic. Third, seek to discover the significance of other religions in God's plan.

56.

57.

58.

dynamic is the opposite 2 static

Niles affirms a Christ centered approach rather than a static doctrinal approach. There are two salvation stories in Niles' view. One which is based on the Bible, mediated through western missionaries and the church, and the other which is mediated through Asian religions, cultures, and social histories. The Asian task is to relate these 59. two into one coherent whole. *without change?*

There are two motifs which seem to form the center of the contextual theological framework in Niles' opinion. First, a liberation motif which is drawn from the Bible and from other stories of Asian religions and social histories. Second, a view of the mystic, Cosmic Christ who figures in all of history. Niles' view in this regard is 60. widely held in Asia. The prevalence of this view can be seen in the following quotes from the East Asia Christian Conference Sri Lanka Conference of 1965,

" For Asian Churches to be confessing Churches in the contemporary World of Asia means they must ... extend their worship to the secular world... their theology... to the world of Asian Thought, philosophy, and religion... (Such confession is essential and).... This enrichment happens as Christians share in what it means for a Buddhist, a Hindu, a Muslim, to know Christ....(We have inherited a great tradition from the missionaries) but we have been too inhibited by our fear of syncretism... forgetting that even as peoples of other times and cultures made their confessions, we must do the same in our own time and culture."

61.

*where are the
new motifs
in Niles?*

Again the tension between contextualization and syncretism arises. It is inescapable in the effort to relate Gospel and culture.

DETERMINING FACTORS

In the discussion of valid criteria for contextualization and the problem of syncretic tensions there is a need to clarify issues and define terms. Communication is a difficult process at best and misunderstandings lead to misapprehensions.

The First factor to consider is proto-world views. Proto-world views are those views which act as a grid through which we view our environment.^{62.} In communicating the Gospel, there are at least three proto-world views operational. The first is that of the Biblical writers themselves. To communicate, we must first effectively analyze the linguistic, historical, and social and religious elements of the textual materials. Exegesis is basic to the task. Secondly, the protoworld view of the communicator is important. He must express his ideas through a filter of his own pre-understandings. The Third factor is the receptor's proto-world view. The receptor must understand a radically new way through the old context of his usual environment.

The Second Factor is the role of the Bible in revelation. In contextualizing, one must ask what part Biblical material will play in the ultimate theology produced. If Scripture is interpreted as event and interpretation, completely culturally conditioned, one will use Biblical materials more casually than if one sees an element of the transcultural or "cosmic" in the form of propositional principles in Scripture. There is little question that Scripture is

*the cultural - full
scriptural needs
further elaboration*

Is the 'propositional principles' essential to transcultural truths?

*is + a term coined by you? or
it is any
question!*

enculturated in its own time and culture, but the question remains whether God intends Scripture to speak supraculturally in such a way that the Biblical Theology of all systematic theologies remains the same, though emphases will differ. All systematized theologies are culturally conditioned and contextualized. Are the Scriptures a special case in speaking normatively to all cultures or are they the same as all other theologies ?

63.

*is systematized
emphasized
for Biblical
Theology.
The Bible
itself is not
systematic.
please say so again*

The Third Factor is the need for a valid Hermeneutical principle in evaluating the contextualization process. Situational principles, historical principles, cosmic principles and others have been suggested to resolve the dilemma. Four concepts lend themselves to the shaping of a hermeneutic. First, the Living Faith Principle. The Scriptures witness that understanding is not possible without faithful living in obedience to God. One must be in spiritual relation to God in Christ in order to understand the Scripture. Second, Interactive encounter with the text. One must objectively wrestle with the material of the text, before subjectively submitting to the text. Third, one must be in community with the body of Christians, the Church, in order to gain all the insight God offers His people through collective wisdom. Fourth, One must relate all to the Eschatological Hope of God's action in history and His control over history which moves toward climax in Christ.

64.

*is loyalty to
church tradition
united here?*

The Fourth Factor is the issue of pluralism and dialogue with other

religions. At the heart of this discussion is the question of the ways the peoples of the O.T. and the N.T. interacted with the surrounding cultures and whether they were syncretistic in their accommodation to those cultures. They provide us with a model for our interaction today. Secondly, there is the question of the kind of revelation we have in the Scriptures and the kind of revelation other religions have from God. Thirdly, there is the question of the grace of God as it relates to other religions. Is it saving grace, or
only informing and calling grace ?
65.

The Fifth factor is the role of the Holy Spirit in informing Scripture, informing other religions, informing the church, and informing individual Christians. Certainly His work is mysterious and unseem, but He is God's dynamic at work in the world. We must develop an adequate understanding of His work if we are to adequately
66.
contextualize theology.

CONCLUSIONS

I perceive contextualization to be a valid process which holds real possibilities for enriching the church of Christ in every setting. I see also, grave problems with the process because it is often done without adequate critical reflection taking into account the Biblical materials. There is a considerable latitude of viewpoints regarding the proper hermeneutic for contextualization. Those differences often arise out of the preunderstandings of the interpreters. There needs

to be more dialogue at the level of hermeneutical understandings, and Biblical approaches. Contextualization has sharpened the awareness of theologians toward other religions and cultures. This is for the good. We need to struggle more with the question of God's providential care and His witness to the world. The Scriptural material is ample and has been cited frequently. Finally, as I analyse the various views as an evangelical, I see one major problem which deserve more discussion between those of my viewpoint and other positions. That is the nature of revelation and the role of Scripture in shaping our views. There is too much of caritaturing of positions by all concerned. We need to seek to understand, even while disagreeing. Our

cerned. We need to seek to understand, even while disagreeing. Our call should be to be Christ centered in life as well as in theology. A good start for discussion and further study.

A good start for discussion and further study. In theological issues we need pursuing more thoroughly. There has been great debate over the last few years. Let's pursue it with clarity in the paper.

A-)

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ENDNOTES

1. See Rolland Allen's Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours, Eerdmans' Publishers, Grand Rapids, 1962 and Melvin Hodges, The Indigenous Church, Gospel Publishing House, Springfield, MO, 1953. Also John Nevius, Methods of Mission Work, Foreign Mission Library, New York, 1895. In the view of its proponents, contextualization goes beyond the limits of indigenization; however see also James Buswell III in Theology and Mission, "Contextualization, Theory, Tradition, and Method", Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1978 for a contrasting view.
2. Ministry in Context, The Theological Education Fund, London, 1972, p. 19-20. The first mandate was to raise the level of scholarship in ministerial training in the 3rd world. The second mandate was for relevance to context. This mandate is for reform and renewal.
3. Ibid., p. 18ff.
4. A quote taken from an unpublished letter by Nissiotis found in Contextualization of Theology, Wm. Carey Library Pasadena, Ca., Bruce Fleming, Author, p. 5.
5. Ibid., p. 6.
6. Ibid. p. 6.
7. Ibid., p. 7.
8. See Allman, Daniel von, "The Birth of Theology," International Review of Mission, Vol. 64, No. 253, June 1975. Also see Bautista, Lorenzo, et. al., "The Asian Way of Thinking in Theology", The Evangelical Review of Theology,
9. Beginning in 1972 with the third mandate and the Bangkok conference on Salvation Today, and in the various mission journals of every theological persuasion there has been extensive debate on the issues.
10. Kinsler, F. Ross, "Mission and Context", The Evangelical Missions Quarterly, April 1978, Vol 14, No. 2. pp.23-36. Dr. Kinsler is a United Presbyterian missionary representing a mediating view in the discussion.

11. Coe, Shoki, "Contextualizing Theology", Mission Trends No. 3., Gerald Anderson, Ed., Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1976.
12. A keen analysis of this aspect of contextualization is discussed by Bruce Nichols in his Contextualization: a Theology of Gospel and Culture, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL., 1979.
13. See Guttieriz, Mbiti, Song, et al. These Theologies begin with engagement between the historic moment, Biblical themes of liberation, and pre understandings of history and the class struggle.
14. Visser t'Hooft, W.M., No Other Name, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1963, p.11.
15. Ibid., p. 11-12.
16. Ibid., p. 90-97.
17. This is not to suggest that the Biblical writers do not struggle with the issue of syncretism. Both the O.T. and the N.T. deal with the issue squarely, but they remain in tension with it rather than absorbing syncretic elements. As Visser t'Hooft says, "There is a great gulf between the N.T. (and the O.T. as well) and syncretism." p. 77.
18. Ibid. p. 124-5.
19. Nichols, Contextualization, p. 34 as cited.
20. Ibid., p. 36.
21. Kraemer, Hendrick, The Christian Message in a Non Christian World, Harper and Bros., New York, 1947, especially chapters 6 and 8. Kraemer sees a radical discontinuity between the Christian faith and others, but he calls for adaptation in relation to the other faiths.
22. Nichols; See especially chapters one and two. He states a position which approves of contextualization but sees limits in the nature of Biblical core material which must be respected. He adopts the view that there is but one Biblical theology and that authentic contextualization will seek to relate its task to that core.
23. The various periodicals, papers, and books of the Asian Christian Conference and the, as yet scarce publications of the Asian Theological Association (of the World Evangelical Fellowship) have published most of the Asian material available.

24. His books have been published by Orbis and the W.C.C. and represent a truly Asian theological discussion.
25. Song, Choan-Seng, "From Israel to Asia, a Theological Leap", Mission Trends, No.3, p. 217. See also his Third Eye Theology.
26. Ibid., p. 217; see also his Tears of Lady Meng in which he discusses political theology through a folk story.
27. Ibid., p. 213.
28. Ibid. p.216
29. Ibid., p. 212.
30. Song, Third Eye Theology, Chapters one and two.
31. Ibid., p. 189.
32. Ibid., p. 16.
33. West, Charles, "Responding to the Thought of Choan- Seng Song, " Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research, Vol. I, No.3 ,July 1977, pp. 11-12.
34. Niles, D. Preman, Ibid.,pp.9-10.
35. Song, The Compassionate God , section one.
36. Ibid., p.98.
37. Ibid. , see also his reaction to West and Niles in the Occasional Bulletin article cited.
38. Koyama, Kosuke, Water Buffalo Theology S.C.M. Press, London, p. 21.
39. Ibid., P. 23.
40. Ibid ., p.28ff.
41. Ibid., see parts II and III of Waterbuffalo Theology and the Three Mile an Hour God
42. Koyama, " Reflections on Association of Theological Schools in South East Asia", S.E.A. Journal of Theology, Vol 15, Spring 1974,p.13.

- 43 . Ibid. , p.19.
44. Lee, Jung Young, The Theology of Change , Orbis, Maryknoll, 1979,p 53ff.
45. See Living Theology in Asia , also Minjung Theology .
46. Based on a statement of former missionary to Korea, Dr. Samuel Mofett.
47. Stated in a lecture given by Dr. Steven Tonghwan Moon at Princeton in the fall of 1982.
48. Widjaya, Albert,"Beggerly Theology", in Living Theology in Asia Orbis, Maryknoll, 1981, p. 139.
49. Katoppo, H. Marianne, "A Liberated Asian Woman", Ibid., p.163.
50. Nacpil, Emerito P., Emerging Themes in Asian Christian Theology "The Critical Asian Principle" , p.56ff.
51. Thomas , M.M., "Towards an Indigenous Indian Theology", in Asian Voices in Christian Theology , Anderson, Ed.,p 11 ff.
53. Athyal, Saphir, "Toward an Asian Christian Theology", in Elwood, p.66.
52. Veith, James A., "Is an Asian Theology Possible", S.E.A.Journal of Theology, 17, Spring 1976, p. 13-14.
54. Wickremesinghe, L.A., "Christianity in the Contexts of Other Faiths", p. 30 in Asia's Struggle .
55. Taber, Charles, "The Limits of Indigenization in Theology", Missiology, Vol. 6, No.1,Jan.1968.p.69ff.
56. Niles, D.Premar, "Christian Mission and the Peoples of Asia", Missiology, Vol 10, No.3, July, 1982.p.281.
57. Ibid. , p. 286
58. Ibid., 287.
59. Ibid., 291.
60. Ibid ., p. 292-5.
61. Elwood, p.44-5.

62. This represents a change from the time when it was accepted that one could view issues purely objectively as in the case of the scientists of religion of the last century.
63. This is a basic dividing point in the views of missiologists of the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Fellowship in their thinking on contextualization. At the Willowbank conference the W.E.F. defined their position as affirming one Biblical theology and one core of Biblical truth for all cultures.
64. Often preunderstandings shape hermeneutics. Bultmann seems to be bound in a world which allows no supranatural intervention and which is based on the postulates of a materialistic- scientism in denying the possibility of miraculous events. Barth's Christiological filter of hermeneutic caused him to strain in some exegesis. Others could also be cited on any side of an issue. We need to be careful of our preunderstandings in our hermeneutic.
65. The spread of opinion on this issue is wide. Evangelical scholars such as Hesselgrave and Nichols join Visser t'Hooft, Kraemer, and others against Van Lewen , von Harnack, et. al. Part of the problem is the definition of words as Visser t'Hooft wisely points out.
66. Perhaps the Pentacostal Christians have something to teach us in their insistence on the immediacy of the Spirit's work in the church today.

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Evangelism: The leading

There is nothing quite so crippling to both evangelism and social action as to confuse them in definition or to separate them in practice.

The New Testament uses the word evangelize in what seems to be a shockingly narrow sense. A whole cluster of verbs, actually, is used to describe evangelism: "preaching the word" (Acts 8:4), "heralding the kingdom" (Luke 9:2), "proclaiming the good news" (Luke 4:18, 8:1). But in essence, what all these words describe is simply the telling of the good news (the Gospel) that Jesus the Messiah is the saving King. Evangelism was the announcement of Christ's kingdom. It was more than an announcement. It was also an invitation to enter that kingdom, by faith and with repentance.

Evangelism, therefore, is not the whole of the Christian mission. It is only a part of the mission. Jesus and the disciples did many other things besides announce the kingdom and invite response. Evangelism is not worship or sacraments. "Christ did not send me to baptize but to evangelize," said Paul (I Cor. 1:17).

And it is not church growth or church planting. The planting and growth of the church are surely goals of evangelism and its hoped-for results. But evangelism does not always produce a church or more members for it.

Neither is evangelism confined to apologetics. Paul says, "We try to persuade" (2 Cor. 5:11), but insists that he was sent to tell the good news "without using the language of human wisdom" (I Cor. 1:17, 20).

Finally, evangelism in the New Testament was not confused with Christian service, or Christian action and protest against the world's injustices. A revealing and disturbing incident in the Book of Acts tells how Greek-speaking Jews among the early Christians rose as a minority group to complain of discrimination in the distribution of funds. The reply of the apostles seems almost callously narrow: "We cannot neglect the

preaching of God's word to handle finances" (Acts 6:1, 2 HEV). Of course, they did immediately proceed to do something about the injustice. But they did not call it evangelism.

In the context of the kingdom, however, the evangelistic proclamation was never so narrow that it became isolated from the immediate pressing needs of the poor, the imprisoned, the blind and the oppressed.

Here I am reminded of Korean evangelism. I asked a pastor in the Philadelphia area why his church was growing so fast. "When Koreans come in," he replied, "first I get them jobs; I teach them some English; I help them when they get in trouble with their supervisors. I invite them to church. And then I preach to them the Gospel." That is putting evangelism into context.

But if there is anything worse than taking the text out of context, it is taking the context without the text. Just as Christ's salvation is never to be isolated from the immediate, real needs of the people, neither is it to be identified with those present needs. When Jesus quoted the Old Testament about "good news to the poor" and "freedom for the oppressed," he did so on his own terms. His salvation is not Old Testament *shalom*, and his kingdom is not Israel.

There is nothing quite so crippling to both evangelism and social action as to confuse them in definition or to separate them in practice. Our evangelists sometimes seem to be calling us to accept the King without his kingdom; while our prophets, just as narrow in their own way, seem to be trying to build the kingdom without the saving King.

Restoring the balance

There was a time when most Christians believed that evangelism was

partner in missions

by Samuel Moffett

the only priority. They were wrong. Then the Church swung too far the other way. The only Christian priority for some has been social justice through reconstruction. That, too, is an important priority. But it is not the only one. And when they made it the only clear mission of the Church, the result was a disaster. In trying to speak to the world, they almost lost the Church.

Others tried to restore the balance by pointing out that "Christ mediates God's new covenant through both salvation and service. . . Christians are called to engage in both evangelism and social action." But even that is not enough. What the Church needs for the future in mission is more than balance. It needs momentum. Not an uneasy truce between faith and works, but a partnership.

Now in most practical, working partnerships, there must be a leading partner, a "first among equals," or nothing gets done. Which should be the leading partner in mission? Evangelism or social action?

I submit that what makes the Christian mission different from other commendable and sincere attempts to improve the human condition is this. In the Christian mission our vertical relationship to God comes first. Our horizontal relationship to our neighbor is "like unto it," and is just as indispensable, but it is still second. The leading partner is evangelism.

This is not to exalt the proclamation at the expense of Christian action. They belong together. But it does insist that, while without the accompanying deeds the good news is scarcely credible, without the word the news is not even comprehensible! Besides, the real good news is not what we in our benevolence do for others, but what God has done for us all in Christ. Evangelism, as has been said, is one beggar telling another

where to find bread.

The supreme task of the Church, then, now and for the future, is evangelism. It was the supreme task for the Church of the New Testament. It is also the supreme challenge facing the Church today.

Half the world unreached

The determining factor in developing evangelistic strategies, I believe, is that evangelism moves always in the direction of the unreached. "It must focus on those without the Gospel." More than one-half of the world's people are still without the simplest knowledge of the good news of God's saving love in Jesus Christ. There is no greater challenge to evangelism in mission than that.

In this connection it may be useful to note that for general strategic evangelistic planning, some missiologists suggest as a rule of thumb that "a group of people are classified as unreached if less than 20 percent claim or are considered to be Christian." Christians are rightly concerned about the grievous imbalances of wealth and food and freedom in the world. What about the most devastating imbalance of all: the unequal distribution of the light of the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ?

I am not overly addicted to statistics. But what does it say about a "six continent approach to evangelism," for example, to find that most of our church mission funds still go to ourselves on the sixth continent, which is between 70 percent and 80 percent at least nominally Christian? Africa, however, is perhaps 40 percent Christian by the same rough and imprecise standards. And Asia, which holds more than one-half of all the people in the world, is only three percent to four percent even nominally Christian.

In the next ten years, the number

of non-Christians which will be added to the population of Asia will be greater than the entire present population of the United States multiplied almost three times (650 million, compared to 220 million). Treating all six continents as equals for strategical purposes is a selfish distortion of the evangelistic realities of the world.

One last thought. There is an unexpected bonus to keeping the definition of evangelism simple. It means that anyone can get into the act. One of the happiest lessons I ever learned about evangelism came not from a professional evangelist, but from a watermelon vendor.

It was in a Korean village, and my wife came up to ask him how much a watermelon cost. He was so surprised at finding a long-nosed foreigner who spoke Korean that at first he was struck dumb. He even forgot to tell her the price. There was something more important he wanted to say. He asked, "Are you a Christian?" And when she replied, "Yes," he smiled all over. "Oh, I'm so glad," he said, "because if you weren't I was going to tell you how much you are missing."

If more of us were so happy about what we have found in the Lord Jesus Christ that we couldn't wait to tell those who have not found him how much they are missing, we would need to worry no longer about the future of evangelism.

Dr. Samuel Moffett was born and raised by missionary parents in Korea. After obtaining degrees at Wheaton College, Moody Bible Institute, Princeton Theological Seminary and Yale University, he returned as a missionary to serve first in China and then in Korea, where he just retired as the dean of the graduate school of the Presbyterian Seminary in Seoul. This article is reprinted with permission from the author and *Latin America Evangelist*, magazine of the Latin America Mission.

ON THE DEITY OF JESUS CHRIST

In our American Presbyterian tradition, one of our illustrious 20th Century church fathers is Robert E. Speer. Those who have "ears to hear" him realize that the historic, orthodox view of the divinity of Christ Jesus proved a problem at the beginning of the 20th Century, as it is in the United Presbyterian Church today.

Closing his address* at Northfield Massachusetts, Dr. Speer presents four reasons why "so many men and women do not believe that Christ is the Son of God."

Briefly, these reasons are:

First, they have never given real, conscientious, consecutive thought to the problem of Christ at all. Second, they have never studied the four gospels. Fourth, they have never tried Him. ("The deity of Christ is not a mere doctrine or proposition. It is a living theory of being . . .")

Speer's third reason -- "A great many do not believe in His deity simply because they do not know how absolutely the world needs God incarnate in the flesh" -- appeals to me as a missionary. Robert E. Speer's illustration supporting this third reason seems a bit removed from Presbyterianism today -- but need not be. I quote:

"I have a dear friend who says that he never realized how it must be that Christ was the Son of God until, during his university course, he went down to work in the county jail. Sunday after Sunday as he sat down among the prisoners in that jail, among men of darkened souls, men of rotted-out characters, men who were hopeless about this world and the world to come, men who were as dead as any man could ever be when his body was laid down in his grave, he realized as he had never realized before that, if there never had been an incarnation, by the very character of God there must be one; because it was necessary that there should come into the world somewhere and some time that great release of divine and transforming power without which the world in its death could never live. We believe it came nineteen hundred years ago once for all in Jesus of Nazareth."

Before graduating from Princeton Theological Seminary, my son told some classmates that the Speer Memorial Library was named after himself. Not exactly, but he is not ashamed of his name -- Robert Speer Rice. Would that all Presbyterian clergy would read Speer the layman's "The Deity of Christ"!

*The Deity of Christ, Robert E. Speer, Revell, 1909

Rev. Robert F. Rice, Pastor at large,
Presbytery of Eastern Oklahoma

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IS SALVATION THROUGH JESUS CHRIST RELATIVE, NORMATIVE, OR EXCLUSIVE ? A CRITIQUE OF THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE AND ITS MISSIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Prepared for
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EC 33

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Ph.D. Program

Relative

John Hick

~~John Macquarrie~~

Paul Knitter : "applies intrinsically conditioned"
"common experience" theology
but less sure than Hick about question of progress.

David Tracy

Normative

a) Tillich

Schubert Ogden

John Macquarrie

Karl Rahner - "Open Catholicism"

- in one sense absolute, but not exclusive.

- multi-cultural & "growing knowl. Xis."

- sin is not a ultimate significance

Raimundo Panikkar

s. Wilfrid Sheldene - common experience

- all scriptures are revelatory

- deep devotional faith in Xt.

b) Hans Küng - connection with historicity but excludes global universalism

Wolfhard Pehl

Carl Beder - historicity of Xt, and resurrection.
- great religious analogies in OT

Exclusive (unique, sole, not shared)

Knott

Narratives
(1) Common beliefs esp.
- plot related Confession of Jesus
- as basis condition for salvation
- monotheism & Christ
(2) hope for final salvation apart
from explicit faith?

John Stott -

N.T. Wright - spiritual incarnation
refers only to possibility &
sense of in. train.

G. Wilfley - } "eschatological"
Clarke Flannick - } "Rahner -
C. S. Lewis } "God with us
abandon a half
those who do not
know him"; but
we don't know how.

INTRODUCTION

What is the soteriological role of Jesus Christ in the salvation of the world ? That key question is the dialogical point of the contemporary debate on the relationship of Christianity to the other religions of the world. Historically, from the writing of the New Testament, Christians have affirmed with Peter, and the other Apostles, " Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12).^{1.} In today's climate of inter-religious dialogue, however, such claims of exclusivity are being challenged both by the proponents of other religions, and by Christians such as John Hick, who call for a "Copernican revolution", which will move us away from exclusivist positions toward a theocentric universe in which all the religions have ultimate salvic significance, and are legitimate ways of pleasing God.^{2.} The issues are very significant. There seems little question that the Christian heritage is one of exclusivity, but it is unclear to many whether the Christian claims to Jesus Christ's singular role in salvation should be regarded as accidental (that is, growing out of the particular, prescientific, limited world view of the past); or whether they should be considered an essential part of the gospel message. Though few would go as far as John Hick's call for a "Copernican revolution", there is a wide spread call for a re-assessment of traditional views by protestants such as Carl Braaten and Roman Catholics such as Karl Rahner.^{3.} These men and others argue for a proleptic universality of Jesus Christ's role in salvation not only through explicit faith via Christianity, but also through other religions,

because God is at work in all religions through Jesus Christ and is leading all to a final unity of salvation. There is also a resurgence of more traditional views among evangelicals through the focal point of the Lausanne Covenant, and the writings of such men as John R.W. Stott,
^{4.} Michael Green, et. al. These renewed affirmations of traditional views of Jesus Christ's soteriological significance recognize the necessity, along with the more heterodox views, of the need to develop an adequate apologetic which can cope with the broad horizon of inter-religious dialogue and the eclecticizing tendencies of modernity which characterize the contemporary era.

The focus of this paper is an examination of the question of the soteriological role of Jesus Christ in world salvation as that role is understood in the context of the contemporary debate. I shall argue that the major positions in the debate can be delineated along an axis which can be viewed as beginning from the position which states, "Christ has a relative soteriological role", through the position which states, "Christ has a normative soteriological role", to the position which states, "Christ has an exclusive soteriological role". It is my thesis that this wide spectrum of positions is shaped by three root causes: wide hermeneutical diversity, the impact of contemporary inter-religious dialogue, and the pressure of the modern model of cooperative unity.

This paper has the character of an exploratory study on the debate regarding the role of Jesus Christ in world salvation. It is not a study of how His redemptive acts are carried out, nor of the problem of His divinity vs. His humanity (except tangentially), but rather of the debate on whether He is to be considered a way of salvation or the Way of salvation for all peoples.

A RELATIVE SOTERIOLOGICAL ROLE

The most radical position in the spectrum of views on Christ's soteriological role in world salvation is expressed by John Hick. In numerous articles, he has argued for a universe of faiths, theocentricly related, complementary, and all partial understandings of the Eternal Spirit. He characterizes the Christian way as, "authentic, adequate, and sufficient" (but not exclusive, for)... "God saves men and women within the Christian way, within the Muslim way, within the Jewish way, within the Buddhist way." Calling the Christian claims to exclusivity a rejection of, "God leading us through new experiences into a wider conception of human brotherhood and a larger understanding of divine Fatherhood", he urges us to leave exclusive superiority in the past and move beyond them.^{5.} Hick characterizes the "God- Incarnate" language of the New Testament as mythic and suggests that the scholarship of New Testament theology

has left us unable to secure access to the Jesus of history and therefore the Christ of faith should not be viewed in exclusivist terms, for our view of Him is based on the developing theology of the church and subject to our more insightful correction. He summarizes his position by affirming,

" We no longer have to draw the negative conclusion that He is man's one and only effective point of contact with God...We can say that there is salvation in Christ without having to say that there is no salvation other than in Christ."

6.

The implications of Hick's views for all of theology are far reaching. He places us with a universe where all truth claims are valid, inadequate expressions of the greater whole. Contradiction is swallowed as easily as congruence. He seems to place us in a universe of total cognitive subjectivity with regard to religious truth, except as it relates to his axiom, "All religions are different responses to variously overlapping aspects of the same ultimate reality."⁷ From what fulcrum point Hick achieves his assessment he does not tell us. His axiom seems to presuppose a complete knowledge of all systems, and of ultimate reality which one suspects is really somewhat beyond him. Yet Hick goes on his way, seemingly unaware that in calling for a universal access to God through any religion, he has adopted a specific religious position which is not new, but as old as Hinduism. Ironically, he closes one of his articles by quoting from, "one of the great revelatory scriptures of the world" (the Bhagavad Gita) to support his hermeneutical position,

" Howsoever man may approach me, even so do I accept them; for on all sides whatever path they may chbse is mine."

8.

In a similar vein, from within the radical wing of the Roman Catholic tradition, Paul Knitter speaks of a need to question the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. He asks, " Is it not consistent, as John Macquarrie claims, to be fully committed to Christ and at the same time fully open to the salvific significance of other religions ?" He answers his question with a clear affirmative. Drawing on the work of Tracy and Ricoeur, he argues that claims to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ are part of the Apostles' historically conditioned world view, and therefore simply, ' mode of being in the world', that is, accidental accretions rather than essential core.^{10.} His thesis rests on his reliance on the conclusions of contemporary hermeneutical thought, following Tracy, Ricoeur, Wiles, Baum, and Loneagan, among others. Using the arguments of John Hick's (Ed.), The Myth of God Incarnate, he demythologizes and re-mythologizes the language of Incarnation in order to affirm his central thesis. One suspects a predisposition to find all traditional views of Jesus Christ's soteriological role inadequate and outmoded, precisely because they do not support the findings which he is looking for. It appears that Knitter's reluctance to accept a unique role for Jesus Christ in world salvation grows out of the 'common experience' side of the theological model he espouses (along with David Tracy) which includes also 'Christian fact' (that is Scripture and tradition).^{11.}^{12.} The model takes on a rather top sided shape when Knitter makes 'common experience' the filter for 'Christian fact', and fails completely to allow for the problem of sin and its distortion of 'common experience'. In arguing for the importance of 'common experience', Knitter is arguing for a kind of secular theology which relies epistemologically on the

sense experiences for verification and seems to enthrone sociology and history of religions in the place previously occupied by dogmatics. It is a position which he comes to out of a desire to bring all the resources of modern research to bear on the fundamental question of Jesus Christ's role in the salvation of the world. He poses questions which deserve better answers than have been given, but his tentative conclusions are in need of critical revision. His position can be summarized as follows,

" In the present state of knowledge of and dialogue with world religions, the revisionist theologian", (he refers to Hans Küng), "simply does not have enough data from 'human experience', to verify the claim that Christianity is based on a revelation which surpasses and can 'catalyze' all others. Better to follow the more scientifically reputable path of David Tracy who claims that for Christians Jesus is clearly the revealer of a decisive truth about God and human existence and that this truth has universal significance but he (sic) cautions against concluding to the finality of this truth for other religions."

13.

Knitter seems less sure of himself than does Hick in questioning the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. He maintains a qualified agnosticism as to whether Jesus Christ has soteriological significance uniquely or in common with other salvific figures. He points out with Tracy that no one has yet taken on the immense task of writing a systematic theology for, nor explored a theology of religions on this important issue, with sufficient breadth and depth to make a 'final' statement. " Whether it (the task) would yield a verification of Christ's finality is uncertain. In the light of the processive, ever incomplete character of reality and of the continued vitality of other religions, it would seem unlikely."

14.

A NORMATIVE SOTERIOLOGICAL ROLE

This position is more difficult to define than either the preceding relative one, or the following exclusive one. It is amorphous and its edges tend to shade into the positions on either side. The core of the affirmations of this position are variations of the view that while Jesus Christ is the decisive and normative final way in which we find salvation, our understanding of the words "Jesus Christ" must be very broad and while historically conditioned, must go beyond history into a cosmic dimension. Further, advocates of this position would assert that belief in Christ need not be explicitly necessarily, but could be the seeking after truth of those in other religions or philosophies, or ultimate salvation because of God's eschatological purpose to save all peoples.

At one extreme of this viewpoint are those who would affirm with Paul Tillich that while there is salvation apart from Christ, "He is the ultimate criterion of every healing and saving process."^{15.} Schubert Ogden and other process theologians take up Tillich's arguments stating, "One may affirm the necessity of Jesus' sacrificial life and death without in the least supposing that his sacrifice accomplishes some other end than perfectly manifesting God's everlasting purpose to embrace even our sin within his love."^{16.} John Macquarrie opts for a similar understanding of Christ's work, calling for finding "truth and love" in other religions as representative of Christ's work through them, and rejecting exclusivity for a tonus of openness and commitment in the Christian faith.^{17.}

A kindred view of the role of Jesus Christ in world salvation is found in Karl Rahner and Raimondo Panikkar's writings. Speaking from a posture of "open Catholicism", Rahner calls for a shift from traditional Roman Catholic views, beyond Vatican II, to a new understanding of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ which can see God at work normatively in other religions ^{18.} in salvific ways. For Rahner Christianity is in one sense the absolute religion, but at the same time, "...every human being is truly and really exposed to the influence of divine, supernatural grace which offers an ^{19.} interior union with God." Rahner regards nonchristians as "anonymous ^{20.} Christians" and seems to affirm an almost irresistible grace at work in their lives. Raimondo Panikkar takes a similar tack when he suggests,

"The good and bonafide Hindu is saved by Christ and not by Hinduism, but it is through the sacraments of Hinduism....through the Mysterion that comes down to him through Hinduism, that Christ saves the Hindu normally. This amounts to saying that Hinduism has ^{21.} also a place in the universal saving providence of God."

For these preceding advocates of a normative soteriological role for Jesus Christ, he is savior because God is in all things, reconciling them to himself. Though Rahner qualifies his understanding by speaking of sinful distortion of God's grace, he still leans toward a theology which, with others of this persuasion, views sin as something which has no more ultimate significance because of their universalist eschatology. The cosmic function of Jesus Christ as the light of all the world is upheld. Emphasis is placed on the "Christ of faith" and the "Cosmic Christ" or the "spirit of Christ" as the means by which God brings salvation to those who have no explicit knowledge of him or who follow other religions. All soteriological actions are viewed as having

an underlying unity of cause. Any "yes" to God's grace is seen as leading to salvation if pursued, and is affirmed as originating ⁱⁿ and enabling because of Christ.

Protestants have also affirmed a similar viewpoint. Particularly the theologians related to the Asian Christian Conference have often spoken from this perspective. M.M. Thomas, S.J. Samartha, and S. Wesley Ariarajah are three whose writings have reflected this viewpoint. In recent articles Ariarajah has called for a dialogical Christianity which abandons all absolutist claims for Christ. ^{22.} He is arguing for more than simply humility in listening however, for earlier he has written that we must see Christ in each religion, since all have their experiences of salvation and their stories which grow out of valid human experiences. Ariarajah roots his theology in the 'common experience' of humanity and sees all scriptures as revelatory and equal. Christ is a cosmic organizing principle which symbolizes God's work in the world. ^{23.} All these men have a deep devotional faith in Christ, but have chosen to read his salvific action in broad terms.

It is interesting to note that all of the preceding views are products of the struggle to wrench Christianity from its moorings as a 'historical religion' and give it more 'cosmic significance' by emphasizing the timeless present of God's working and a smooth continuity between nature and grace rather than a sharp discontinuity because of sin.

Moving closer to the exclusivist position, one finds a large grouping major figures such as Hans Küng, Wolfhard Pannenberg, Carl Braaten, /of and others. Concerned to preserve the historicity and careful "linguistic access" to the Christological traditions ; they affirm the finality **and** ultimate value of Jesus Christ. At the same time they rely on a critical tradition of scholarship which produces a universalist eschatological outlook, and a view of Christ's work in the other religions which is quite close to the preceding thinkers' views. The difference between the two groups seems to lie in the insistence of this latter group on maintaining ^{historicity ?} historicity in its views of the way Christ works in other religions.

Carl Braaten is an excellent example of this latter group. In a recent article he surveys the spectrum of positions regarding Christ's soteriological role. He challenges the more radical views to prove what identity Christ has apart from his historical nature, other than identity we give him subjectively. He challenges the more conservative position to present a convincing exegesis of all the universalist passages in the New Testament (such as Colossians 1:19-20). At the same time, Braaten affirms the uniqueness of Christ, " nothing is more clear in the New Testament and the Christian tradition than the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in whose name alone there is salvation." Braaten characterizes his own position as one which guards both the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ through emphasis on historical study, Christological tradition, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and re-interpretation of the 'texts' in a modern context.

Braaten seems to find great hope in the contemporary inter-religious dialogue. He asserts that, "The true identity of Jesus Christ is still being disclosed in the encounter of the gospel with the world religions."²⁶ He envisions the dialogue as a two way street with the religions of the world occupying an analogous position to the Old Testament and complementing the New Testament with their insights. His emphasis on a living Christology is a counter to the deadness of orthodoxy. While Braaten's critique is very insightful, he seems somewhat inconsistent in his own position. While affirming the historical character of the uniqueness of Christ, he nonetheless seek to lift christological theology from its historical relationships and subject it to a revisionist critique based on the insights of other religions. This creates a kind of relativity which seems to belie his affirmation of Christ's uniqueness. He couples his weakness in this area with an eschatological universalism which sees God's work in other religions converging ultimately in universal salvation. Why we should involve ourselves in a mission to the world in Jesus' Name is questionable in the light of his conclusions. Braaten wishes us to move forward in hope, which he sees as an antidote to gnosis, that is being too sure of what God is going to do (apparently being too sure means being more confident than Carl Braaten in what is going to happen). Our hope is, ".that the Lord of the Church will also finally rule as the Lord of the world,²⁷ inclusive of all its religions." Certainly Braaten has charted a course which many will follow. His combination of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ, coupled with openness to God's work among the non-Christian religions, and hope for universal salvation is an attractive, if problematic package.

EXCLUSIVE SOTERIOLOGICAL ROLE

This position has often been described using words like absolute, unique, ultimate, and final. I have chosen to use the word exclusive because it seems to delineate the position best. Unique could also be used satisfactorily. Absolute has many Hegelian overtones. Ultimate and Final seem to imply a process of saviors leading up to a last savior (and that is certainly not accepted by proponents of this position).^{28.}

Exclusive is a word which may have negative connotations as in placing some outside and accepting others, but it has another common meaning, and it is this second meaning which I use to define this soteriological position, " given or belonging to no other; not shared or divided; sole".^{29.}

Exclusive is a word which clearly carries the core meaning of this position's affirmation that Jesus Christ is the unique Savior of humanity and no one else has a role like his in offering salvation to the world.

This affirmation is clearly spelled out in the Lausanne Covenant, a document which represents the thinking of the evangelicals who make up a large segment of those who hold this position.^{30.}

Those who hold this viewpoint usually couple it with an eschatology which acknowledges the possibility of some being lost because they have rejected Christ.

Adherents of this position range from "fundamentalists" to "evangelicals" of varying degrees. If Carl Braaten could be said to lean slightly to this position, then Leslie Newbigin could be said to lean slightly from this position toward Braaten. Affirming the universality of God's love, the need for ^arepentence and faith, and the freedom of God in an exposition of Romans 10:9-12, Newbigin says, " It is those who

'call upon the Name of the Lord' who will be saved. Conscious belief and explicit verbal confession of Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9) are 31. the conditions for salvation." Newbigin prefers the term finality in describing Jesus Christ's soteriological role (but it is clear that he means 'unique') He rejects an unqualified universalism, but does not clearly affirm an eschatology which strictly limits salvation to explicit belief, choosing rather to use Jesus exhortation to seek to enter into the narrow gate, " To claim finality for Jesus Christ is not to assent either that the majority of men will someday be Christians or to assent 32. that all others will be damned." Newbigin has a clear view of an historical Christ who offers salvation to all people. He recognizes the powerful evil of sin and understands a need for explicit belief in Christ. His arguments are strong where they represent an analysis of the human situation, but weak where he hopes for salvation beyond the realm of those who have explicit faith in Christ. What the basis of that hope is he does not clearly say, other than to affirm an openness of action on God's part, " ..the Bible offers us always an open world ... We cannot and must not try to know in advance what the final judgement 33. is going to be." His contention is that the Bible does not tell us in Christ's words about the final judgement. It seems that Newbigin is overly cautious here and fails to read Matthew, chapters 24 and 25.

An exemplar of the broad middle of this position is found in John R.W. Stott. In his exposition of the Lausanne Covenant he states,

"It is because Jesus Christ is the only savior, that he must be universally proclaimed.." (By calling Him the only savior).. we mean neither that all men are automatically

saved .. nor that all men are ultimately saved.. for alas some will reject Christ and perish. Still less do we mean that all religions offer salvation in Christ, because plainly they do not.

34.

Stott also affirms the possibility of the lostness of some, 'saying
35.
that it is " almost too dreadful to contemplate". The strength of Stott's argument is his reliance on the Biblical record. Yet that same strength is a weakness also, for he makes no reference to any critical analysis of situation or context in his exegesis. Stott rests his case on Scripture without demonstrating the kind of critical awareness that would give us confidence that he understands the difficulties with some of the passages he cites.

Another evangelical, N.T. Wright of Cambridge, writing in Themelios makes up for Stott's weakness in an article which analyzes the texts relating to universalism in the New Testament. He demonstrates that these texts primarily relate to a universalism of inclusiveness of both Jews and Gentiles in God's salvific plan, and do not affirm unconditional universalism, because they are linked to passages calling for explicit belief in Jesus Christ.
36.

In regard to the question of what happens to those who have never heard the good news of the gospel, an interesting view is developing among some evangelicals. (It is not a new view, having been held by John Wesley inter alia.) It suggests, according to Clark Pinnock, " ..God will not abandon in hell those who have not known and therefore have not declined His offer of grace. Though He has not told us the nature of His arrangements

37.

we cannot doubt the existence and goodness of them." Pinnock points out that such a view is based on the exegetical possibilities of God's Word. C.S. Lewis, Wesley, and others are cited as holding a similar viewpoint. This concept grows out of an understanding of God's activity among people who do not have explicit knowledge of Christ in such a way that their implicit faith is counted as explicit. It is really quite close to the view of those who see with Rahner, "anonymous Christians" among the world's religions . What makes the concept interesting is that those who are suggesting it come from a background most antagonistic to the implications of universalism it carries with it.

The exclusivist position can be summarized as one which rests more on Scripture and tradition than 'human experience'. It affirms the traditions of the historic Christian community. Its strengths lie in its fidelity to a Biblical tradition which has proven convincing to many, and its systematic theology which can deal with the texts adequately. Its weakness is its inadequate grappling with the problem of religious pluralism and the modern spirit of eclecticism.

INFLUENCES WHICH SHAPE THE DEBATE

It is affirmed by as diverse a group as John Hick, Carl Braaten, and John R.W. Stott that the traditional views of Christ's soteriological role have largely been exclusive ones. Why then, the clear shift by a majority of theologians to a normative or relative view of that role ? One reason the shift has come about is the impact of the historical-critical method on modern Biblical scholarship. It has assumed the role of a given in the methodology of most scholars. "Modern historical method questions all traditional views about the sources of the New Testament... and it excludes in principle dogmatic presuppositions such as the notion of revelation..^{38.}" This kind of methodological assertion clearly predisposes its users to a limited set of conclusions. It is often said that the historical critical method not only critiques structure, but content as well. Rigorous application of the method has tended to make an a-priori assumption of eliminating divine agency in Scripture transmission as one of its bases. This in turn has produced Biblical theologies which both relativize any insights from Scripture, and remove any possibility of a unifying principle from their message. Thus Hick can quote Pannenberg approvingly since, "certainly one can no longer regard it as a fact proved out of the New Testament that Jesus thought of himself as God incarnate."^{39.} This frees Hick to construct his 'Copernian revolution' of religions since Christ can no longer be shown to be unique from the Scriptures.

In the same manner all Christological titles can be reduced to the expressions of the faith of the maturing church and not directly be

attributable to Jesus Christ's self awareness. Therefore witness to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the early church can be held to be outside the essential core of the gospel, that is outside Jesus personal teachings. Thus the argument is built and it stands and falls on the question of the strength of the methodology. Carl Braaten seeks a mediating view, while agreeing with the use of the critical-historical method he points out that all we know of Jesus' identity is through the witness of the apostolic community and therefore we must accept their assessment as a valid reflection of faith on who Jesus was. For him, this means that all Christological titles are subject to revision and should be contextualized in contemporary language.^{40.} A further implication of the rejection of any special quality adhering to Scripture, is the willingness to use the scriptures of other religions in an analogous role with the Old Testament. Braaten, Rahner, Panikkar, and others affirm the need for us to incorporate insights from these other religions into our understanding of who Jesus Christ was and is.^{41.}

The net result of this methodological change is the production of Christologies of an extremely relative nature. Jesus Christ's soteriological role becomes whatever the considered weight of interpretative evidence leads one to. An axiomatic corollary to this position is that the Biblical truth statements are only blik (personal and unverifiable insights). Therefore, our contemporary insight takes methodological and existential precedence over the Biblical blik, as long as our statements are based on a scientific methodology.

While hermeneutical diversity is primarily a by product of the rejection of traditional views for modern ones, it has not entirely left even the exclusivist viewpoint undisturbed. It is undeniable that the quest for more reliable insights into Scripture has benefited all theologians, whether they fully accept its critical historical methodology or not. It is equally clear that it follows that if we cannot agree on what constitutes the basis for determining Christ's soteriological role in world salvation, we can never expect to agree on the correct understanding of what that role is.

A second factor shaping the current debate is the impact of inter-religious dialogue. There is a great deal of agreement on all sides that dialogue is important. There is less agreement by some on what truly constitutes dialogue. A W.C.C. Theological Consultation held at Chiang Mai, Thailand in 1977 ended up confessing an inability to define the word in its religious context. Instead they spoke of openness and communities and love, etc. (Dialogue has the characteristics of) "...an opening up in more than intellectual terms each to the concerns of the other... a fundamental part of our service within the community, ... an expression of love... affirmation...participation with all who are allies of life in seeking the provisional goals of a better humanity."^{42.} Urging the use of the Bible as a basis for our Christian reflection in dialogue, the report speaks of a need for repentence,^{43.} humility, joy, and integrity in approaching people of other faiths.

In guidelines issued by the W.C.C. central committee, meeting in

Jamaica in 1979 dialogue is called, "witnessing to our deepest conviction^{44.} and listening to those of our neighbors." There is a cautious tone to these official W.C.C. statements. While some individuals have pushed for less restrictive views of dialogue, the W.C.C., increasingly occupied with the idea of dialogue has also maintained some affirmation of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Whether that affirmation will grow weaker or stronger is open to question. Certainly there are those who wish to carry the commonly held W.C.C. view of Christ's working in other religions to the extreme of affirming his salvific action in other religions, at least in terms similar to Vatican II's statements, if not further.

Those of the exclusivist position affirm dialogue also. John R.W. Stott cites an Anglican definition as particularly helpful,

Dialogue is a conversation in which each party is serious in his approach both to the subject and to the other person and desires to listen and learn as well as to speak and instruct.

45.

Stott also traces the use of the word dialogue to the Greek word, dialogomai as it is used by Luke in Acts 20:7-9 to describe Paul's teaching method. Both in the passage cited and in other places the word appears and Stott affirms its modern use on that basis.

On all sides of the debate, inter-religious dialogue has had a significant impact. Dialogue enables encounter, understanding, clarification, humility, sensitivity, and integrity to be part of the communication process whatever the content.

We live in a world where interdependence is an important fact of life. In other eras, empires have forced cooperation on smaller nations and provided little or no opportunity for them to seek redress for grievance. Today that model has changed somewhat. Certainly large nations still exercise their influence and at times use force to impose their will, but a new emphasis on cooperative unity has produced at least the beginnings of a different style of international cooperation. The United Nations provides a structured forum for the world community to discuss political problems and to work together to solve common agricultural, health, scientific, educational, and disaster related problems. It has proven ineffective many times, but it is a start. Its existence has engendered a drive for increasing cooperative efforts. These efforts have been most evident in the way the economies of the world have meshed into an interdependent network. Multinational corporations, for all the problems they have created, have also been instruments in promoting international interdependence. Tourism has been another factor in creating international cooperation, as people from differing cultures have become acquainted with each other.

This spirit of cooperative unity has affected inter-religious relations and the Christian view of Christ's soteriological role in world salvation as well. With the growing awareness of how interdependent the world has become, and how much we all need to cooperate in insuring its survival in the face of world tensions, has come a call to reexamine our claims to exclusivity for Christ's salvific work. Sometimes the

calls for cooperation have been based on convictions that there is an underlying religious unity among religions in that all are manifestations of God's grace such as in the case of John Hick, or Raimondo Panikkar. At other times, the calls for cooperation have been based on the common humanity which we share with others and the need to work together to preserve it, as with Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who states,

" My own view is that the task of constructing even that minimum degree of world fellowship that will be necessary for man to survive at all is far too great to be accomplished on any other than a religious basis... cooperation among men of diverse religion is a moral imperative, even at the lowest level of social and political life.

46.

This call for cooperation based on common humanity is a common one in the World Council of Churches documents. S.J. Samatha is a representative spokesperson.^{47.} It is interesting to note that these calls for cooperation among religions seem to originate from the area of the world where the plurality of religions is most evident, Asia. The consciousness of the need for cooperation is sharpest there both because the natural tendency of other religions in the region is toward cooperation, and because population pressures make the need for cooperation imperative.

The question remains however, whether cooperation is a good or bad thing ? Our basis for answering that question will need to be related to the root purpose of cooperation. If cooperation is for the purpose of seeking mutual solution to common human problems, it would seem to

be a good thing. If, on the other hand, cooperation among religions is sought for the purpose of creating a common world religion or in affirmation of God's salvific action through all religions in a similar way, then cooperation will create as many barriers as it tears down.

It appears that in the modern debate on the soteriological role of Jesus Christ in world salvation there are two points of tension. One point centers on the use of Scripture,(particularly, the Bible) and Christian tradition as a hermeneutical filter in determining Christ's role, with human experience helping the process. The other point centers on using human experience and the modern scientific method as a hermeneutical filter, with Scripture from many religions informing the process. These two points of tension seem to me to be ultimately polarized points of view. One point begins with an affirmation of revelation which is specific and exclusive, i.e. Jesus Christ is the only Savior of mankind. The other begins with human insight, i.e., the universe is too vast to conceive of only one Savior or at least to conceive of only one way to God. One can only hope that those participating in the contemporary debate will at least listen to each other and seek to understand what is being said. It seems to this writer that if in past decades our problem was arrogance in claiming too much in our soteriological affirmations (that is being too culturally conditioned and misinformed about the world religions to really understand what they affirm and to see how God has led them to whatever insight they have); then today the common problem is that we are too humble, not recognizing that there is a uniqueness in Jesus Christ.

The missiological implications of this debate are significant. It seems ultimately, that the way one perceives the role of Jesus Christ in world salvation conditions the type of mission one carries out. The Christian community has historically perceived its mission as being one of service and witness. The focus of the mission has been loving witness by word and deed to Jesus Christ's saving power. That witness has resulted in Christian churches planted in every continent. The Biblical tradition is clear and forthright- there is no other Name given for salvation than Jesus Christ. If we are now to move away from that position because of the impact of other religions salvation claims and our own growing humility, we must answer some thoughtful questions. In what way do the religions of the world today differ from the religions of the New Testament world ? Certainly they have been impacted by modern life, but their variety of mystical and ceremonial insights are essentially the same. Why was it valid for the Apostles to witness to "No other Name" then, if it is not valid for us to do so today ? They confronted the same variety of religious truth claims as we do. Secondly, if it can be argued that the Apostles, because of their limited world view did not know any better than to preach as they did, how do we know that we have arrived at a wise enough position to say we know so much that there is no possibility that we may be wrong in our assessment of the "many ways to God"? Thirdly, If we would argue that Christ is in all religions, saving men in them, how do we explain the New Testament's painstaking effort to encourage a clean break between believers' new faith in Christ, and their old religions, with the old religions being characterized as, "walking in darkness." ? Finally, what is

the nature and extent of salvation which some claim to find in Christ's presence in other religions ? The New Testament claims that salvation in Christ is deliverance from death and hope of eternal life through the grace of God. It equally claims ^arepentence as a necessary gateway to entering that new life. When the religions of the world, such as Hinduism insist that death is a part of the cycle which frees us for rebirth in yet another life and that it is our good works which enable us to go on from better life to better life, how can their affirmation be seen as congruent with Christian ones ? When Islam insists that only the al Koran contains God's true revelation and therefore Jesus cannot be God's Son, nor savior, how do we resolve the paradox ? It can only be resolved by reducing the New Testament to helpful, but often erroneous insight and by finding some organizing principle for harmonizing the conflicting truth claims. While such a principle has been suggested by many as residing in simply a theism without specific content, such an approach would reduce religion to philosophy and would pass too lightly over the problem of evil in the world. The Apostolic witness to Jesus Christ is that God broke in on history and put an end to speculation with his affirmation of hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We should not part with that affirmation for it is the essence of the uniqueness of the Gospel.

Finally analysis and synthesis

problem and a common conclusion .

The real problem for evangelicals, it seems

to be, is a more convincing hermeneutical

and practical application of the so-called dispensational

theology as we suggest on p. 14, 2^d a theology

that more ultimately destroys the God without making God

himself to be needed about the destroy in his revelation

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International Bulletin

The Truth of Christian Uniqueness

A few years ago our colleague Donald R. Jacobs, visiting the World Council of Churches headquarters in Geneva, looked across the dining room and recognized Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, the former general secretary of the WCC. Jacobs recounts how he approached Visser 't Hooft and, after introducing himself, ventured to ask, "What is the major issue in missiology today?"

Visser 't Hooft replied without hesitation, "The uniqueness of Christ." And with eyes alight he explained to Jacobs his concern that "if Jesus is not unique, there is no gospel."

The publication of *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, edited by John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Orbis Books, 1987) demonstrates the validity of Visser 't Hooft's concern. The magnitude of shift in Christian belief that is proposed by the authors of *The Myth* volume constitutes what has been described as crossing "a theological Rubicon." Langdon Gilkey, one of the co-authors of the book, allows that this effort "toward a pluralistic theology of religions" represents "a monstrous shift indeed," from an affirmation of the uniqueness of Christ and Christianity to some sort of parity of religions. Gilkey acknowledges that "this is real relativism" and it "involves all theological doctrines, not just some of them."

Voices of theological relativism have always been around the churches, usually at the fringes. What is new today is that some of these voices and views are found in the World Council of Churches' Program on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths. Concern about these developments and their meaning for the future of the World Council is widespread as the council prepares to hold a World Mission Conference in San Antonio, Texas, in May, and anticipates its next general assembly in Canberra, Australia, in February 1991.

In this issue of the BULLETIN two veteran missiologists and longtime supporters of the ecumenical movement express their deep disquiet. Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, a former director of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, says that if the council goes along with these trends, it will "become an irrelevance in the spiritual struggles that lie ahead of us." Dutch missiologist Johannes Verkuyl predicts that the drift toward religious universalism and theological relativism in the dialogue program "will pose more and more serious questions not only about the credibility of the WCC, but even about its survival."

The Christian world mission cannot afford to cross the theological Rubicon proposed by the authors of *The Myth*. Rather, we need to affirm again that unique "Rubicon-crossing" event of twenty centuries ago: the redemptive entering of the Creator into human history in the person of Jesus Christ (Heb: 1:1-3). Without the uniqueness of that person and that event, there is no gospel and no mission.

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of Missionary Research

Religious Pluralism and the Uniqueness of Jesus Christ

Lesslie Newbigin

In his 1987 Lambeth Lecture on "Religious Pluralism and Its Challenge to Christian Theology," the director of the World Council of Churches unit on interfaith dialogue, Wesley Ariarajah, speaks of "a current . . . about to become a flood," exercising an overwhelming pressure on people of all religions to "become aware of and to cope with a religiously plural world."¹ That pressure has already led a group of well-known Christians to announce—under the title *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*—their conclusion that the claim for uniqueness must be abandoned.² The July 1988 issue of the *International Review of Mission* (IRM), containing addresses and discussions centering on the celebration of the jubilee of the 1938 Tambaram Conference, gives further evidence of the power of this current.³ It is fed, of course, not only by arguments that are, properly speaking, theological and philosophical, but also by the pervading feeling of guilt in the world of Western Christendom, and by the overwhelming sense of need to find a basis for human unity in an age of nuclear weapons. As always, there is a strong temptation to go with the current, but even a small acquaintance with history is enough to remind us that what seem to be overwhelmingly powerful movements of thought can lead to disaster. Critical reflection is in order.

No persons in their senses deny the need for human unity. Our world is in fact torn apart by rival programs for human unity. Washington and Moscow are both convinced that we need one world. Many years ago André Dumas drew attention to the obvious fact that any proposal for human unity that does not specify the center around which unity is to be constructed has as its hidden center the interests of the proposer. *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* provides rich illustration of this. Gordon Kaufman in his essay starts from the need for human unity and takes it for granted, without argument, that the Christian gospel cannot provide the center. He goes on to say that "modern historical consciousness" requires us to abandon the claim to Christ's uniqueness and to recognize that the biblical view of things, like all other views, is the product of a particular culture (pp. 5–6). It is of course true that the biblical view of things is culturally conditioned: that does not require us to say that it is not true. "Modern historical consciousness" is also a culturally conditioned phenomenon and does not provide us with a standpoint from which we can dispose of the truth-claims of the Bible. Recognition of the culturally conditioned character of all truth-claims could lead to the abandonment of all belief in the possibility of knowing the truth; that is what is happening in contemporary Western culture. But this recognition provides no grounds upon which it is possible to deny that God might have acted decisively to reveal and effect the divine purpose for human history; and such a revelation would, of course, have to be culturally conditioned, since otherwise it would not be part of human history and could have no impact on human history. There are certainly no grounds whatever for supposing that "modern historical consciousness" provides us with an epistemological privilege denied to other culturally conditioned ways of seeing.

Lesslie Newbigin, a contributing editor, was for many years a missionary and bishop of the Church of South India in Madras. He is now retired in Birmingham, England, where he taught for several years on the faculty of Selly Oak Colleges.

As Alasdair MacIntyre so brilliantly documents in his book *Whose Justice, What Rationality?*,⁴ the idea that there can be a kind of reason that is supra-cultural and that would enable us to view all the culturally conditioned traditions of rationality from a standpoint above them all is one of the illusions of our contemporary culture. All rationality is socially embodied, developed in human tradition and using some human language. The fact that biblical thought shares this with all other forms of human thought in no way disqualifies it from providing the needed center.

The authors of *The Myth* would go some way to accept this. For Paul Knitter, "Pluralism seems to be of the very stuff of reality, the way things are, the way they function. . . . There can never be just one of anything."⁵ So there are no absolute values given to us; we must create them, but this must be a collective enterprise in which we all share. In similar vein Stanley Samartha calls upon Christians to contribute "to the pool of human values such as justice and compassion, truth and righteousness in the quest of different people for spiritual and moral values . . . to hold together different religions, cultures, languages and ethnic groups" (IRM, p. 323) and that "to claim that one religious tradition has the *only* answer to such a global problem [as the nuclear threat] sounds preposterous" (IRM, p. 315).

These and similar statements bring us, I think, to the heart of our matter, revealing as they do that loss of faith in the possibility of knowing objective truth, which is at the heart of the sickness of our culture. In the first place it is, of course, not true that the modern worldview of physics removes all absolutes. There are such absolutes as the speed of light and the value of Planck's constant. One might well say that it seems preposterous that these figures should be just so, no more and no less; but it is so. These are what we call in our culture "facts," about which we are not pluralists. It is in the realm of "values" that we are pluralists. Values are matters of personal choice; they are what people *want*. And human wants conflict. The idea of contributing to a shared pool of "values" conveys no coherent meaning. The question that has always to be addressed, surely, is the question about the facts, the question "What is the case?"—and on that question some answers will be true and others false. Rational people will see to it that their "values" are based upon what is the case, upon reality. "Values" that are not so based are merely personal wishes, and human wishes collide. It is precisely for "justice" that nations go to war.

The course of the present debate has illustrated the retreat from objectivity into subjectivity of which I speak. In his well-known use of the Copernican paradigm, John Hick advised us that we should learn to see God as the center of all reality, and abandon our culture-bound vision of Jesus as the center. Paul Knitter and others now suggest a further move, beyond a Christocentric and even a theocentric view to one that might be called soteriocentric—for why indeed should belief in God be the clue to reality? Thus Christopher Duraisingh writes: "It is not through our *a priori* doctrinal formulations on God or Christ, but rather through our collective human search for meaning and sacredness that the 'universe of faiths' could be adequately understood," and he goes on therefore to say, in agreement with Paul Knitter, that our approach to other faiths must be neither theocentric nor Christocentric, but must start from soteriology (IRM, p. 399). In Paul Knitter's words, interfaith dialogue "should not revolve

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around 'Christ' (or Buddha or Krishna), or around 'God' (or Brahman or Nirvana) but around 'salvation'—that is, a shared concern about and effort to remove the sufferings that rack the human family today" (IRM, p. 399).

The movement that Knitter and Duraisingh propose is indeed a natural extension of the movement initiated by Hick. He asked us to move from Jesus—the name of a man about whom there are historical records that can be read and probed and analyzed—to God, a name that has almost as many meanings as there are human beings. "God" as the center means not God as revealed in Jesus or in the Qur'an or in any other specific religious tradition but "God" as I understand God. It is a move from the objective to the subjective. The further move is natural—the move to my own search for wholeness, a search that is surely in some sense different for every human being. Hick in several places speaks of true religion as being turned from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness; but this is a move in the opposite direction, from objective reality to the self and its needs.

One might bring out the point by placing Copernicus in his historical context. Ptolemy's way of understanding the solar system had endured for 1,500 years. During that period it enabled astronomers to predict eclipses, cartographers to make accurate maps, and explorers to sail to far destinations. It satisfied human need for a very long time. When Copernicus proposed his alternative view, there was a debate (not then called "dialogue"), which lasted for many decades. It was not, of course, a debate between "science" and "religion"—an absurdly anachronistic portrayal of the matter. It was a debate within a society that had not yet relegated "facts" to a domain outside theology. It was a hotly argued discussion. In the end it was decided: Copernicus was right; Ptolemy—useful as he had been for so many centuries—was wrong. The suggestion that the argument might be ended by agreeing that there is a common search for truth or that the different views should be "pooled" would not have been accepted. And rightly so, because there was a concern for truth and a belief that it could be known.

I make this point (which I owe to Harold Turner) to illuminate what seems to me to be the central issue in this whole debate; it is the abandonment of the belief that it is possible to know the truth. There is indeed an ancient and venerable tradition that tells us that ultimate reality is unknowable. It is true that the human mind cannot comprehend God. But this true statement can be used, and is used, to disqualify any firm affirmation of truth. The true statement that we cannot know everything can be used to disqualify a valid claim to know something. The human mind cannot comprehend God, but we have no grounds for denying the possibility that God might make the divine known to human beings and that they might legitimately bear witness to what has been revealed to them.

And, of course, the writers whom I am criticizing would reply: "Yes indeed, but God has revealed God's self in many ways. Therefore, there are many gospels and many missions." I do indeed believe and am firmly convinced that there is no human being in whose mind and conscience there is not some whisper of God's word, and I have known many non-Christians who have a deep and often radiant sense of the presence of God. But I also know that many evil and horrible things are done in the name of religion and in the name of God. Does a claim to have a mission from God exempt the one who makes it from critical questioning? And if there are to be questions, where do we find the criteria? Diana Eck, moderator of the WCC's Dialogue Unit, is severely critical of Hendrik Kraemer because he presumed to discuss the question of whether and how God reveals the divine to a Muslim; for the answer to that question, she says, we must go to the

Muslim (IRM, p. 382). But does that apply to all those who claim to have a mission from God? Hitler, for one, was certain that he had a mission from God; do we take his word for it? If not, on what grounds do we deny his testimony? When Christians do evil things in the name of God, as they do, we can confront them with the figure of Christ in the Gospels and require them to measure their actions and motives against that given reality. But if it is denied that there is any such divinely given standard available to us as a part of our human history, what grounds are there for passing a judgment that is more than *ad hominem*?

This is not a merely rhetorical question. In *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* one writer faces up to it. Langdon Gilkey asks the question: How, in a pluralist world, do we respond to a phenomenon like Hitler? His answer is interesting. He says that for such

"We are in the midst of a dying culture."

situations we need an absolute; only something like the Barmen Declaration is an adequate response. But the necessity for this absolute is a relative one. Gilkey's key sentence is: "paradoxically, plurality, precisely by its own ambiguity, implies both relativity and absoluteness, a juxtaposition or synthesis of the relative and the absolute that is frustrating intellectually and yet necessary practically" (pp. 45–46). Gilkey endeavors to cope with the intellectual "frustration" by appealing to "the venerable, practical American tradition" of pragmatism, and I confess I am simply unable to follow him. He is, of course, profoundly right in drawing attention to what he calls the demonic possibilities of pluralism. But I remain totally unconvinced by the idea of an absolute that is available on call when it is relatively necessary.

The point is that we do not need to go back to Hitler to find evidence for the demonic possibilities of pluralism. We surely know that our contemporary Western culture is in the power of false gods, of idols; that people are seeking salvation through the invocation of all the old gods of power and sex and money—"star wars," the "nuclear shield," the free market, the consumer society. There will come a point, perhaps not far in the future, when Christians will realize that something like the Barmen Declaration is needed. What deeply troubles me about the contemporary output of the "interfaith industry" is that it is destroying the only basis on which such a declaration could be made. There is certainly a common search for salvation; it is that search that tears the world to pieces when it is directed to that which is not God.

But Wilfred Cantwell Smith says that there is no such thing as idolatry. In *The Myth* volume he restates his familiar view that all the religions have as their common core some experience of the transcendent; that whether we speak of images made of wood or stone, or images in the human mind, or even of Jesus himself, all are the means used by the transcendent to make himself or herself or itself present to us humans. To claim uniqueness for one particular form or vehicle of this contact with the transcendent is preposterous and blasphemous. Much rather accept the truth so beautifully stated in the Bhagavadgita and in the theology of Ramanuja, that God is so gracious that he (or she or it) accepts all worship whatever be the form through which the worship is offered. Here clearly "the transcendent" is a purely formal category into which one can put any content that the mind can devise. Once again it is clear that we are in the world of pure

subjectivity. There can be no such thing as false worship because no objective reality is involved. The question "True or false?" simply does not arise. We are witnessing the collapse of the whole glorious human enterprise of seeking to know the truth, to make contact with reality, to know God as God truly is. It is the mark of a culture that—in the words that Gilbert Murray used to describe the end of the glorious civilization of Greece—has lost its nerve. We are in the midst of a dying culture.

When the Greeks, worshiping "an unknown God," were confronted by a not very impressive man (see 2 Cor. 10:10) who told them, "What you worship as unknown, that I proclaim to you," they were naturally inclined to laugh. And of course God was not wholly unknown, otherwise there would have been no altar. And if God had been truly known, there would have been no need for many altars to many gods. God has indeed made the divine known in some way and in some measure to all human beings. Why, then, speak of one unique revelation? Eck tells us that her Hindu teacher was astonished to learn that Christians acknowledge only one *avatar*, and she goes on to say that while some Christians believe this, to many other Christians it is folly (IRM, p. 384). With Cantwell Smith, she deplores the idea that God's revelation is locked away in the past, and she quotes Smith as writing, "God is not revealed fully in Jesus Christ to me, nor indeed to anyone that I have met; or that my historical studies have uncovered" (*ibid*). Now surely every Christian must confess that he or she has not fully grasped the length and breadth and height and depth of God's revelation in Jesus, and is seeking to comprehend more. Truly God makes the divine known in the soul and conscience and reason of the human person, but not in a purely inward spirituality, which is separate from the public history that we share. The Hindu can speak of many *avatars*, because none of them is part of public history; they are all ideas in the mind. There is no event in public history that can or could replace those events that we confess to have taken place under Pontius Pilate. It is because of those events that we can recognize and rejoice in the intimations of God's presence in the experience of men and women of many religious traditions and (especially!) men and women who make no religious profession. What is here in question is not merely an inward experience of "the transcendent" but a series of events in public history by which the human situation is decisively changed. We enter into and grow into the inward experience of God's love and truth through participating in the rational discourse of the community that takes its rise from these events. This tradition of rational discourse enables us to find in these events not only the source of a growing inward experience of God, but also the clue by following which we are enabled to make sense of the world, to grasp its real nature with growing (though always very partial) sureness.

Of course, it is always possible to deny that these events have this significance. One might almost say that it is normal to deny it. There are no external proofs by which it could be shown to be indubitable. But every form of rationality or of spirituality is socially embodied in a particular tradition and language, and rests ultimately upon presuppositions that cannot be verified by reference to some reality external to it. The idea that the universe is so constructed that we can enjoy indubitable knowledge without the risks of personal commitment is an illusion, but this illusion is used to discredit the claims of a specific tradition of rationality such as is embodied in the Christian community. "True knowledge," says Paul Knitter (quoting Cantwell Smith), "is that knowledge that all intelligent men and women . . . can share, and can jointly verify, by observation and by participation" (*No Other Name?* p. 11). But truth is not the possession of majorities—even if the vote is unanimous. All knowing of real-

ity, and supremely when the reality in question is God, is the work of people nurtured in a tradition of rational discourse. The fact that the Christian affirmation is made from one such socially embodied tradition in no way discredits its claim to speak truth. To pretend to possess the truth in its fullness is arrogance. The claim to have been given the decisive clue for the human search after truth is not arrogant; it is the exercise of our responsibility as part of the human family.

There is, of course, one final objection. It was classically expressed in the saying attributed to Rousseau: "If God wanted to say something to Jean Jacques Rousseau, why did He have to go round by Moses to say it?" Why Moses and not Socrates or Confucius or Gautama? Why one people and not another? Should not "the transcendent" be equally and simultaneously available to every human being? Very clearly there lies behind the complaint that very ancient belief to which I have referred: the belief that in the last analysis I am a solitary soul with my own relationship with the Transcendent—whatever he, she, or it may be. And that belief is false. It rests upon an atomistic spirituality that contradicts what is most fundamental in human nature, namely, that our life is only fully human as we are bound up with one another in mutual caring and responsibility. When Stanley Samartha, in the Tambaram discussion, attacks the traditional work of missions because "conversion, instead of being a vertical movement towards God, a genuine renewal of life, has become a horizontal movement of groups of people from one community to another" (IRM, p. 321), he demonstrates his captivity to this illusion. We do not know God, in the sense of true personal knowledge, except as part of a community. The fact that the confession of Jesus as unique Lord and Savior is made by a particular human community among other communities provides no ground for denying its claim to speak truth. God's action for the salvation of the whole human family cannot be a series of private transactions within a multitude of individual souls; it is something wrought out in public history, and history is always concrete and specific. It is possible, as it has always been possible, to deny the truth of the Christian claim, as these writers do. But it is not possible to claim that the denial rests upon a kind of rationality superior to that which is embodied in the Christian tradition.

I think it is fair to say that the writers whom I am criticizing are not wholly to blame for this individualist perspective. I think that the whole debate about the uniqueness of Christ has for many decades been skewed by the notion that the only question at stake is the question of the fate of the individual soul in the next world. It is assumed that those who speak of the uniqueness of Jesus are saying that only Christians will be saved in the next world—which of course opens the way to destructive debates about who is a real Christian. It is enough to say that this way of thinking has lost contact with the Bible. This individualism, with its center in the selfish concern of the individual about personal salvation, is utterly remote from the biblical view, which has as its center God and divine rule. The central question is not "How shall I be saved?" but "How shall I glorify God by understanding, loving, and doing God's will—here and now in this earthly life?" To answer that question I must insistently ask: "How and where is God's purpose for the whole of creation and the human family made visible and credible?" That is the question about the truth—objective truth—which is true whether or not it coincides with my "values." And I know of no place in the public history of the world where the dark mystery of human life is illuminated, and the dark power of all that denies human well-being is met and measured and mastered, except in those events that have their focus in what happened "under Pontius Pilate."

There is indeed a powerful current in our time that would sweep away such a claim and insist that the story of those events is simply one among the vast variety of "religious experience" and that it can be safely incorporated into a syllabus for the comparative study of religions. The current is strong because it is part of the drift of contemporary Western culture (of what in every part of the world is called "modernity") away from belief in the possibility of knowing truth and toward subjectivity. The World Council of Churches has been asked, at two general assemblies, to accept statements that seemed to call in question the uniqueness, decisiveness, and centrality of Jesus Christ. It has resisted. If, in the pull of the strong current, it should agree to go with the present tide, it would become an irrelevance in the spiritual struggles that lie ahead of us. I pray and believe that it will not.

Notes

1. S. Wesley Ariarajah, "Religious Plurality and Its Challenge to Christian Theology," *World Faiths Insight* (London), June 1988, pp. 2-3. Ariarajah is quoting from Wilfred Cantwell Smith.
2. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987).
3. All quotations from the *International Review of Mission* (IRM) cited in the text of this article are from the July 1988 issue.
4. Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1988.
5. *No Other Name?* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), p. 6.



Group I-A

While we recognize that the theses stated below are "source-oriented" rather than "receptor-oriented", we offer them as a beginning point of our common witness.

1. The centrality of Christ is essential to the mission and unity of the church.
2. Christ must be understood from a trinitarian perspective. While we must not surrender the classical formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, we need to be prepared to go beyond this to new expressions which, while remaining faithful to the scriptures, would relate to our life and witness in terms understandable in other cultures.
3. Our witness to Christ must be informed by the full range of views of Christ in the scriptures.
4. The primary manifestation of Christ is in and through the community of faith expressed both in the local congregation and in the universal church.
5. Though we differ in our view as to the extent and nature of salvation beyond explicit commitment to Christ, we affirm the urgency of witness to Christ to people everywhere.

Group I-B

Thesis I: God's activity in Jesus the Christ is necessary for salvation.

Reflection: though there was agreement on this generic statement there was a diversity of interpretations, e.g.

- a) there is no salvation outside the specific relationship with Christ and the Christian church;
- b) salvation is possible for those who do not explicitly know Christ.

Thesis II: How we interpret the role and relation of Christ to salvation leads to diverse approaches to mission which may prove divisive/complementary for unity in mission.

- a) one interpretation would/could lead to intrusive colonial/imperial insertion of the Christian community in contrast to the host culture;
- b) the other would necessitate a respectful discovery of Christ's revelation already present in the culture.

Thesis III: God is manifest through the Spirit throughout the world. That Spirit goes before us to prepare the hearts and minds of those to whom we preach the gospel.

Thesis IV: The Body of Christ (church) must continue to preach and embody Jesus Christ and his message as evidenced by his life, ministry, death and resurrection. We must embody Jesus' call to right relationship (love and justice) between all creation, all members of the human community and God. We must address theologically and concretely issues which distort our mission...and unearth the treasures of cultural and racial identity.

THESES ON MISSION AND UNITY

Presented to Closing Plenary Session of 1990 ASM Annual Meeting
by Reporters from Six Working Groups

Techny Towers, Techny, IL, June 17, 1990

The theme of the 1990 Annual Meeting of the American Society of Missiology was "Mission and Joint Witness: Basis and Models of Cooperation." The keynote address was given by Carl E. Braaten on "The Trinity: New Source for Mission and Unity", and a response to the keynote was made by Steve Bevans, SVD. Other major addresses given on sub-themes of the conference were as follows:

(I) "Jesus Christ and Mission: the Cruciality of Christology", by Robert Schreiter, CPPS, with a response by Chuck Van Engen; (II) "What Mission Is: Our Understanding of Mission as a Factor for Unity or Division", by U Kyaw Than, with a response by Lois McKinney; and (III) "Church, Mission and Unity: Obstacles to and Practical Possibilities for Joint Witness", by Samuel Wilson, with a response by Mary Motte, FMM. The texts of the keynote address and of the major presentations on conference sub-themes will appear in the October 1990 issue of Missiology.

The Presidential Address, "Why Mission Theology Cannot Do Without Eschatological Urgency: The Significance of the End", given by ASM President James A. Scherer, will also appear in the October 1990 issue of Missiology.

Biblical presentations on themes relating to mission and unity, based on texts from St. Paul's letters to the Corinthians, were offered by Margaret Mitchell, Ken Gill and Lamin Sanneh.

At the closing plenary session, reports from six working groups were presented by reporters for the groups and received by the plenary. In view of the "working draft" character of the reports, it was agreed that they should be released to participants in the 1990 ASM Annual Meeting and to other interested persons as an unofficial record of what was discussed in the working groups, with no names of participants, group facilitators or recorders attached. The working group reports do not represent agreed statements of the ASM or of its members present at the 1990 Annual Meeting. They are made available solely for the private use of ASM members.

The texts of the working groups reports which follow have been slightly edited, and abbreviated. No attempt has been made to harmonize differences. The ASM Program Committee expresses its thanks to the working group members, approximately 75 in number, and to facilitators and scribes of the six working groups, for their helpfulness and cooperation in preparing these theses.

Persons desiring to reproduce these theses are requested to secure permission from the Secretary-Treasurer of the American Society of Missiology, George R. Hunsberger, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, MI 49423.

JAMES A. SCHERER
ASM President, 1989-90

June 25, 1990