
The Gospel and the World

Keith Walker

This article summarises the papers written for discussion at the BEC Study Conference, 'The Gospel and the World', held in March 1989. Written before the Conference, the article makes no attempt to reflect discussion of the contributions.

In numerous places phrases and sentences are lifted from the papers without the intruding of quotation marks. It is hoped that the authors will not take this amiss in what attempts to be a summary of their work. And where this reader has failed to convey their intention, all he can do is plead their forgiveness. No attempt has been made to hide the inevitable overlaps between the papers.

The five papers written for this Conference address issues such as the relationship of the Judeo-Christian religion to other religions; the theology of the Kingdom of God; 20th century universalism, with especial reference to Pannikar and Hick; the idea that adherents of other religions may be saved in Christ without knowing him; biblical universalism and particularism as it effects the composition and task of the church.

Observers of the BEC may wonder why we have been so slow to take up these matters. Other evangelicals have already written very fully. Perhaps we are slow, but the boat has not been missed. These issues remain very current. On the other hand this is not a case of belatedly jumping on a band-wagon. Readers of these papers will find something new and distinctively 'BEC'. Their great strength lies in the place they afford to the discipline of Biblical exegesis. Writers of Study Conference papers are asked to pay especial attention to exegesis, and are pointed in the direction of certain passages. Arising from this is the robust case which is made for the uniqueness of the God of the Bible and of faith in him. Yet this is achieved with biblical sensitivity, reflecting the divine unwillingness that any should perish.

Jehovah and the Gods of the Nations

Prof John L Mackay

Paper 1 addresses some major OT questions. Scholars agree that the faith of Israel in the time of the major prophets was monotheistic, but was it always so? Our answer to this question is inextricably bound up with our view of the nature and content of the OT, and the relationship between the Judeo-Christian religion and other faiths. Is polytheism an ancestor of biblical religion? Is Jehovah a relative of the gods of the nations or an opponent?

The evolutionary paradigm or model of religious history dates back to Hume in the 18th century and his contention that religion had developed upwards from the

primitive beginnings of polytheism. Modern theorising with regard to Israel traces a progression from animism, through polytheism and monolatry to monotheism. Monolatry (virtually synonymous with henotheism) is the exclusive worship of one god without denying the existence of others.

In this scheme Moses appears before the emergence of montheism, which in view of texts like Deut 10:14 and 4:39 demands the denial of Mosaic authorship and dating of the Pentateuch. The evolutionary model is thus inextricably bound up with critical dissections of the Pentateuch.

A biblical history of religions may be drawn from Pauline material. Rom 1:18-32 describes the degeneration of the Gentile world including its religion. An original revelation was deliberately ignored and man fell into idolatry and polytheism. From texts in Gal 4, Col 2, 1 Cor 8 & 10, Paul's view of the connection between idolatry and the demonic can be assessed. The contention that Gal 4 posits the existence of pagan deities, not as gods but as demons is rejected. For Paul pagan deities have no objective reality, but 'heathen religions emanate from malignant spirits' (according to Godet on 1 Cor 10:20).

Exodus 6:2,3 is the crux text for critical reconstructions of the early faith of Israel. Its apparent assertion that the name Yahweh was unknown to the patriarchs is at variance with what precedes it in the Pentateuch. J A Motyer identifies at least 45 instances where Yahweh is used, either in divine speech to the patriarchs or in human conversation, between Gen 12:1 and Exodus 3:12. These have been felt by liberal critics to be in fundamental conflict with Exodus 6:3, resolvable only by positing at least 2 tradition sources behind the Genesis narratives one attributing the introduction of the name Yahweh to Moses' day, the other tracing its use back to the beginnings of the human race.

In avoiding this conflict some exegetes have favoured understanding Exodus 6:3 as a question, despite the absence of any interrogative particle. The case rests upon the implications of the Hebrew word *V'GAM* 'and also' in v 4, but is not strong.

The traditional Jewish and Christian interpretation has been most ably defended by Motyer who argues for 'name' to be understood as indicating something of the character of Yahweh. So the new departure in Moses' day is not the use of the name Yahweh but the revelation of its significance. Recent attacks on this view by G J Wenham are found wanting.

Patriarchal knowledge of Yahweh is denied by Wenham who sees references to Yahweh in Genesis as later interpretations of the writer, additions identifying the older names, El, Adonai, with the new Yahweh or otherwise suited to the editor's theological purpose.

All this begs general questions with regard to a redaction critical approach. Were inspired authors at liberty to insert words into reported speech? How may we be so sure of the theological purpose of an author as to warrant such conclusions? Why did not such a perceptive editor remove the inherent problems in Exodus 3 & 6? Why resort to redaction criticism when other adequate explanations of textual phenomena exist?

Mackay concludes that the patriarchs religion revolved around the worship of **the** one God, El, especially in the character of El Shaddai. El was also known to be called Yahweh, but the redemptive nature upon which that name was based was all but unknown.

Mosaic revelation is set against a background of Israelite idolatry. Its monotheism is thus seen to be of the nature of normative revelation rather than the expression of maturing religious consciousness. Yahweh's status is expressed both in the denial of the existence of other gods and in the assertion of his incomparable superiority over other deities (Deut 4:39, Exod 15:11). But does such language concede the reality of other gods so as to make Israel's faith monolatrous?

A consideration of the first commandment, and especially the expression 'before me', leads to the conclusion that such language does not grant the existence of other gods apart from the subjective projections of their devotees. Liberal arguments that 'the first word' implies at least a dynamic monolatry which had the seeds of monotheism within are weak in that they ignore the divine dimension of revelation and view OT faith as a purely human phenomenon.

The OT's terms for other gods, 'ELIL (meaning perhaps 'weak/worthless' or 'godlet') and HEBEL (vapour), emphasise their unreality. The biblical identification of the idol and the god reflects the fact that the idolatrous mind actually does conceive of the idol and the god as one.

When we come to consider **the relationship between the gods and the demonic** some passages may be thought to suggest a link, but Mackay concludes that they do not establish such a link in the Pauline sense (see above).

The paper concludes with a lengthy section discussing the presence and more importantly the significance of references to **Ancient Near Eastern myths in the OT**. It is not necessary to deny that passages exist containing such allusions. Such passages need not be seen as reflecting Israel's polytheistic past. In many cases they appropriate the language of myth in order to assert Yahweh's superiority over the Canaanite pantheon. Some references are no different from the Puritans' classical allusions.

Two areas are more difficult. **The Sons of God and the Divine Council** mentioned in passages like Gen 6:2, Ps 82, and Job 1 & 2 is the first. The expression 'sons of God' permits of varying interpretations in varying contexts. In Job the reference is to the angelic host, in Ps 82 it is to human judges. Gen 6:2 is more difficult and 4 solutions seem possible, angelic/demonic beings, demoniacs, Sethites, antediluvian kings.

The second area is **the dragon myth** and its relation to passages in Job, Psalms, Isaiah and Ezekiel. It needs to be noted that distinctly different emphases from the pagan parallels emerge. So in Is 51:9f the slaying of Rahab is not set in the context of creation but of redemption, as if to say to a world subject to evil and chaos, 'this is the answer, not creation, but redemption in Yahweh.'

The Kingdom of God and its Universality

Rev Tom Holland

This paper tackles the theme of the Kingdom of God which, it reminds us, is shared by almost all the biblical authors. It begins by asserting that the Bible concept is not of the kingdom as a thing, but that 'kingdom' speaks of God's 'reign' or 'sovereignty'.

The kingdom of God in the OT speaks of man's relationship with his Maker. The history of man has been dominated by the question as to what kingdom he will seek out of the two opposing kingdoms, Satan's and God's. First Abraham and then Israel the nation were called to submit to God as their king.

The demand for a human king represented a rejection of God and led to confusion as to the nature of the kingdom. The political entity became synonymous with the spiritual reality and began to supplant it.

The Servant of the Lord in the OT (known to Jeremiah and Zechariah as the Branch, and to Jeremiah as the Son of David also) is to be related to the kingdom via the promised New Covenant. This covenant promised blessings to Israel, but would also bring about the universal display of the glory of God.

Morna Hooker's argument that the Servant is to be understood only as a corporate personality, even in Is 53, is inconsistent with her contention that the exilic and post-exilic prophets shared a common tradition. Ezekiel and Jeremiah both anticipate the coming of an individual through whom God will bring about his purposes. The Servant combines facets of both the corporate body, the remnant, and the individual through whose sufferings God would establish the ideal kingdom. In that kingdom the character of God will be realised in the life of his people.

Liberal theology has focussed its interest in the kingdom upon those passages in which God's people are delivered from tyranny, slavery or oppression. It has thus justified Christian involvement in revolution. This is to fly in the face of the exilic prophets whose criticism of the Mosaic covenant was that it was external and thus would be replaced by a covenant which would deal not with man's *conditions* but his *condition* (Jer 31:32-34 is here cited, but without reference to Hebrews). The new covenant was not primarily about political power, but about spiritual mercies. The prophets and the Messiah himself demote man's political aspirations to a very much second place.

That said, we may share the concerns of the liberals, even if not their theology, for the plight of millions of sufferers under evil governments and systems is appalling.

OT eschatology focusses on the universality of Yahweh's government, and Israel's prime agency in his rule. Is 2, the kingship Psalms (96-100), Dan 2 and Mal 1 all declare the universality of God as creator, the one true object of worship, judge and Saviour.

The kingdom of God in the NT. The NT material is much more complicated than the OT, but again 'kingdom' refers not to the realm of God, rather to his

authority and power. It is progressively revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, and in the work of the Apostles. The church, the community of those submitted to their Redeemer, is the kingdom of Christ as distinct from the kingdom of God, of which it is but a part.

Examination of the Matthew 13 parables of the kingdom, which explain its mystery, emphasises the total contrast between popular expectations of the Messiah and the reality of what he had come to do. The parables tell of submission, obedience, death, the apparently unchecked work of a hidden enemy, the obscurity of God's kingdom, the need to labour on in the face of the lack of visible success. Membership was conditional upon repentance, the plea for God's mercy and submission to his rule.

The use of the Servant Songs in Mt 3 & Luke 4 demands that we consider the nature of Christ's mission in relation to the bringing of 'justice'. In particular, does 'justice' imply social justice? Against the back-cloth of the coming New Covenant, justice should be understood as God's setting right of whatever has harmed the relationship between God and his people, and therefore whatever harms their communal welfare. Whilst in his ministry Christ did perform acts of healing and deliverance which literally fulfilled some of these prophecies, we must be careful to understand the Songs as bearing spiritual rather than literal significance. Neither Christ nor the Early Church set about a programme for social justice. Kingdom Theology is in danger of compromising the exclusiveness of the kingdom.

The scope and the means of entry into the kingdom of God is discussed in relation to Pauline statements which bear upon the matter of baptism — 1 Cor 6:9, Eph 5:5, Rom 6:3-4, 1 Cor 12:13, Gal 3:23-29. It is contended after lengthy discussion that these references are not to water baptism but to the moment of the death of Christ when the Holy Spirit united all believers of every generation into unity with their head. By means of this baptism we are in the kingdom of Christ and destined for the kingdom of God. This secured position is appropriated through faith and repentance.

The 'Unknown Christ' ?

Dr D Eryl Davies

Our third paper interacts with those contemporary theologians who derive from the NT's *Logos* teaching the idea that Christ is to be found hidden, incognito or unknown in world religions. Raymond Pannikar is foremost amongst these, whilst John Hick, rejecting Pannikar's Christocentric universalism, urges a theocentric universalism based on the idea of a transcendent God common to all religions.

Twentieth century universalism, the belief that all will be saved, has roots deep in Christian history. It was current in the second century, was defeated at Constantinople in 553 AD, but re-emerged in early Protestantism. It was at the end of the eighteenth century, however, that the floodgates of universalism opened and a hundred years later a tentative universalism had become acceptable in the churches.

Universalism in the twentieth century was for sixty years more an under current than a main stream. Wilfred Cantwell Smith espoused a cautious universalism.

Ernst Troeltsch and others, whilst expressing sympathy with other faiths, insisted on the superiority of Christianity. Influential in these decades were Kraemer, Barth (who seems to have held to a kind of latent universalism) and Tillich. Tillich paved the way for the development of the concept of a single 'God' common to all religions and for the relativising of claims to particular revelations of that Being.

From the 1960s onwards the pace quickened. In Roman Catholicism Vatican II opened the door wide to universalism through its statements on the sincere untaught. In Protestantism universalism flowered in the context of the World Council of Churches against the background of an increasing consciousness of the vast numbers of people of other faiths worldwide and in our plural Western society. Will over two-thirds of the world's population be damned?

Two main approaches are current amongst inclusive universalists.

The Christological Approach. The influence of Barth's christology, evident in William Barclay, Visser't Hooft, T Torrance, Newbigin, etc led them to maintain the uniqueness of Christ even when deeply sympathetic towards other faiths. This influence may account for a slow uptake in Western European churches. By 1975 the christological approach was losing favour in ecumenical circles. It is by Roman Catholic authors (eg Pannikar, Rahner and Küng) that it has been pursued most vigorously.

Pannikar, born of a Hindu father, has proposed that Hinduism and Christianity meet at the existential level of union with the Absolute. This 'ontic intentionality' is ultimately inexpressible. The differing terms employed by the religions reflect just one 'ontic' goal. Christians and Hindus are aiming at the same thing. Both religions meet in Christ. He is present *incognito* in Hinduism, which is not so much a false religion as 'a vestibule of Christianity'.

Rahner propounds three theses. 1 — Christianity is the absolute religion for mankind. 2 — Other faiths contain elements emanating from divine grace on account of Christ. 3 — Members of other religions must be regarded as *anonymous Christians*. This last thesis demands an unbiblical doctrine of revelation, and both Pannikar and Rahner compromise and relativise biblical truth.

Küng, whose christology is based upon a critically reconstructed 'historical' Jesus, distinguishes between the 'ordinary' way of salvation in world religions and the 'extraordinary' way in the church, the former being an interim path until the implicit faith of other religions becomes explicit in Christ. But for Küng, Christ is not the 'true God' of Chalcedon, the Bible is not unerring and of supreme authority and the NT contains conflicting christologies.

The God-centred approach is yet more radical. It has been expounded by J T Robinson whose base point is the omnipotence of God's love, and by John Hick. Hick wished to see a shift from the Christo-centric model of the universe of faiths to a theocentric one. Crucial in the achieving of this was the non-literal understanding of the incarnation expressed in 'The Myth of God Incarnate' (1977) which he edited. By 1980 his attack upon the uniqueness of Christianity was well-developed. He has two main arguments.

1. 'GOD' alone is at the centre of all religions, including Christianity. The

world's religions exhibit a common core of practice and theology, albeit that they employ different languages and names for the same Ultimate One, whose infinitude renders impossible any authoritative or unique description of him. Hick adds to this the thought of mankind's unity, the equality of God's love for all, and the impossibility of a universal revelation prior to this century. This one world, one God view has been espoused by Dr Runcie.

Hick may be faulted at a number of points. His reading of the history of religions is suspect. His presuppositions about the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the authority of Scripture, the impossibility of verbal revelation, the reality of a holy God's wrath, are unacceptable. Moreover, it may be doubted that the world faiths do exhibit a common core of belief about the nature of God.

2. Most significantly, Hick's theology requires the denial of the unique Person of Christ, whom he sees (as a result of NT critical studies) as a largely unknown man of Nazareth. The NT has no single christology, that of the Early Church is the conception of Christians and not to be viewed as normative. Denial of Jesus' deity rests also on Hick's view of religious language. He argues that to assert that Jesus is literally God is meaningless, like saying a circle is a square. But we may doubt that Hick has really understood what Nicaea and Chalcedon were saying.

A concluding discussion of **Contemporary views of Scripture passages** deals with *logos* in John 1:1; Acts 17:23; the 'Cosmic Christ' in Eph 1:10 & Col 1:15; and the significance of 1 Cor 15:24-28.

John 1:1 does not support universalists' uses of the *Logos* motif. John's use of *logos* is not an attempt to syncretise with Greek thought. Certainly there is a Greek background to the concept of *logos*. However, there has been a shift of emphasis from Greek to Hebrew sources in recent interpretation of the Gospel. It is Jewish OT background which dominates John's use of *logos*. The context points to Jesus' three-fold relationship, with the Father, the world and people, all of which universalists misunderstand. These relationships identify Christ as pre-existent; personal; divine; the universal creator; the cause and preserver of all spiritual and physical life; and, as such, the source of general (ie not salvific) revelation. Christ, as *logos*, is both God and God's revealing and accomplishing utterance.

Acts 17:23 speaks of an UNKNOWN GOD. Universalists infer that all sincere worshippers are worshipping the one, transcendent God. Howard Marshall claims that 'Paul hardly meant that his audience were unconscious worshippers of the true god', rather he tells them about the only God (v24).

Eph 1:10 & Col 1:15 speak of the cosmic significance of Christ and some have argued from them for universalism, but to do so is to fly in the face of their immediate contexts and the context of the Bible as a whole. Ephesians makes much of being 'in Christ' and the doctrine of election, while in Colossians the Person and Work of Christ are inseparably related to his universal pre-eminence.

1 Cor 15:24-28 does not teach universalism. In the immediate context, a parallel is drawn between Adam and Christ assuming the solidarity of all humans in Adam and of the church 'in Christ'. The 'alls' of v22 fail to support universalism when seen against the background of other Pauline uses of 'all', the technical nature of the phrase 'in Christ', and Paul's explicit particularism elsewhere (eg 6:9-11).

The 'Anonymous Christian'

Rev Mark G Johnston

How will God judge those who have never heard the Gospel and so have never had opportunity to respond to Christ? That is the central question of this paper. Is there such an animal as the 'Anonymous Christian'?

Traditional Roman Catholicism grappling with this question against the background of its avowal that outside the Church there is no salvation, has appealed to the doctrine of **Baptism by Desire**. Charity is an act of the love of God. In the adult sinner such an act always contains at least an implicit desire for baptism, even where there is no knowledge of God beyond that minimum defined in Heb 11:6. Such Baptism of Desire is deemed equivalent to the sacrament in its essential effects.

Some early liberal contributions are found in the debate between Kraemer and Hogg. The former's position on the fate of the unevangelised is hardly different from the above Roman view. 'Hunger and thirst for righteousness is the sign of the active presence of him who is the Source of the world's life.' For Hogg faith can never be judged right or wrong: it is entirely subjective. The missionary task needs to be drastically redefined.

Karl Rahner's concept of 'Anonymous Christianity' arose in the context of 4 theses propounded in 1966.

1. 'Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion, intended for all men, which cannot recognise any other religion besides itself as of equal right.' This robust statement is, however, severely weakened by Rahner's qualifying riders.
2. Non-Christian religion contains elements of a natural knowledge of God, but also supernatural, grace-filled elements.
3. Christianity should confront the member of an extra-Christian religion as one to be regarded as an Anonymous Christian. Yet missionary endeavour is valid in order that Christian grace may be incarnated, and to afford the 'Anonymous Christian' greater chance of salvation.
4. The church must see herself no longer in exclusive terms, but as the explicit vanguard of grace.

Rahner's weakness is presuppositional. His definition of a Christian is existential/philosophic not biblical. He assumes that our position as Christians entitles us to know and declare what is God's final judgement upon other people. The objectivity of revelation is undermined in that saving faith demands no knowledge of the historical, biblical Jesus; faith in some ephemeral, shadowy 'incognito Christ' will do. All this leads to a moralistic gospel. Empirically, when these so-called 'Anonymous Christians' eventually do hear of Christ, they do not seem to rush to embrace Him (cf Jn 1:11).

Vatican II and the current stance of Roman Catholicism. Rome has made several pronouncements bearing on the fate of the unevangelised. Whilst regarding highly what is 'true and holy in other religions', she maintains that it is only in Christ that men find the fullness of their religious life. God's means of salvation include the religious efforts of men as they seek to touch and find him. However, these efforts need to be enlightened and corrected.

Recent developments in Liberal Protestantism have been encouraged by this Roman shift. Hick, who may act as spokesman for the constituency, is open in calling for a revolutionary change in the church's presuppositions not least in the area of revelation. On the one hand he relegates the authority of the Bible, on the other he grants the Bhagavad Gita revelatory status.

The Evangelical dimensions of this debate are complex. At least five positions are adopted.

1. The unevangelised are lost ('exclusivist' position). This view preserves the logic of mission (Mt 28:18), denies any salvific value in general revelation (Rom 1:18) and takes seriously 'exclusive' gospel statements (Jn 14:6, etc). Its weakness is that it endeavours to put a very definite interpretation on the Bible's silences on the fate of those who do not hear.
2. The unevangelised are saved or lost depending on their response to the light God has given them ('inclusivist' position). This position argues that 'to call upon the name of the Lord' (Rom 10:13) does not necessarily imply knowledge of Christ: to what extent did OT believers know Christ? But it is wrong to draw direct parallels between God's self-revelation in OT times and His dealings with those who have had no contact with the completed canon.
3. God will give the unevangelised a future chance after death. This view rests much upon the highly controverted passage, 1 Pet 3:18-4:6 and upon more general theological extrapolation.
4. The 'typological' approach, asserting that God uses individuals in pagan culture as He did, for example, Cyrus in the OT, rests on unwarranted assumptions about such OT Gentiles.
5. The fate of the unevangelised is a matter best left to the wise mercy of God. This is by far the least complex of these alternatives and seems to pose the least number of exegetical and theological difficulties.

Biblical considerations make up the last third of this paper, discussing some individuals who are candidate 'Anonymous Christians' and passages which are controverted in this debate.

Melchizedek seems a strong OT candidate for an 'Anonymous Christian', but that is to forget his context within revelation history. God had not yet established the covenant community in the organised sense of the people of God, and as we are not told how he came to be a servant of God we too must be silent on that point. Advocates of the Documentary Hypothesis suggest that **Jethro** was priest in a pre-Mosaic Yahweh cult, but his exclamation in Ex 18:11 is best understood as indicating a quantum leap forward in his knowledge of God. Moses played missionary to him rather than *vice versa*. **Balaam**, upon whom it can hardly be said God's favour ever rested, also fails the test as an 'Anonymous Christian'. **Naaman**, on the other hand, despite his fulfilling of his duties when his king worshipped Rimmon, is no 'Anonymous Christian'. He is a man converted through a personal encounter with God when confronted with His powerful Word. Likewise the **Ninevites** responded to the Word of God proclaimed through Jonah. **Cyrus**, though used by God for His eternal purposes, was not necessarily a saved man. 'It is amazing how the dramatic story of **Cornelius** in Acts 10 is sometimes 'thrown in' to support the idea that sincere pagans can be in a right and acceptable relationship

with God without knowledge of Christ, when the whole point of the story is to show the opposite.' (Christopher Wright).

Each example falls into one category or other, saved or lost, without the introduction of some kind of *tertium quid*. Save for Melchizedek, we know how the message of salvation came to those who did respond positively.

John 1:9 is the first key text for consideration. Its translation is not easy, but the NIV rendering is satisfactory, 'The true light that gives light to every man, was coming into the world.' But then how does Christ give light to every man? Those favouring 'Anonymous Christianity' understand 'gives light' salvifically and apply it universally. But this results in a moralistic gospel and a diluted mission. Avoiding this, others understand the verse in terms of Christ's role in general revelation. But better still is the Augustinian view which takes 'every man' in the sense of every man who believes. This approach retains the grandeur of the coming of Christ as the bringer of salvation for people of every nation and takes nothing away from the normal means of propagating the Good News of that event.

The interpretation of **Romans 2:6-11** hinges upon *kata ta 'erga 'autou* in v6. For some it justifies works salvation (but see Rom 3:3, Eph 2:8,9). Some take 'erga as a reference to faith, but Paul does not use it in this way elsewhere. It is best to take the good works (vv 7,10) as the evidence of saving faith and therefore to see those who perform them as the redeemed.

In **Acts 10:34,35** the problem is the statement that God accepts 'the man who fears him and works righteousness'. Yet evidently, for Cornelius salvation came through believing in the name of Christ whom Peter preached to him.

Concluding, how will God judge the unevangelised? We do best to leave the matter to the wise mercy of God, a position supported by the Westminster Confession (10 (iii)). To adopt this position means that we are committed unequivocally to the task of bringing the gospel to those who have not heard of Jesus, but we also realise that the limitations imposed by history and geography and by the Church's shortcomings and failure will not limit the gracious saving purposes of God.

Evangelical Universalism

Rev Derek Thomas

'God loves the world' proclaims the best known text of Scripture. For universalists it means all will be saved. For various hues of Arminian it means that Christ has died for everyone, and that their salvation will depend upon their freely-willed response. But the emphasis of the Scriptures, whilst they affirm a universal love of God, falls upon the electing, covenant love of God.

There are two doctrinal constraints leading us to reject the idea that all will be saved and constituting the cornerstones of evangelical particularism. Firstly, **the constraint of Christ's uniqueness** demands a gigantic 'NO' to universalism. He is unique, the one and only Son of God, the only Mediator and Saviour. The title, 'only-begotten' (Jn 1:14,18; 3:16,18; 1 Jn 4:9), whatever the import of 'begotten', implies that Jesus is God's *only* Son. The principle thought of the John 14:6 is of Jesus as '*the way*' by which men come to God. Christ travelled the way back to Eden along the path of expiation, propitiation and redemption. The way of

reconciliation is by coming to Him, 'the way'. The early disciples were often referred to as followers of 'The Way'. He is also 'the truth', the true representation of God, the one whose word is true. Whether He is speaking of himself, the Bible, salvation, the division of mankind into the saved and the lost, or the reality of Hell, He is trustworthy. He is 'the life', the life given for the sheep, the giver of life full and overflowing. There is no other mediator (1 Tim 2:5,6) no other name (Acts 4:12) by which we must be saved.

Secondly, **the constraint of faith** demands the rejection of universalism, because the Bible proclaims the absolute necessity of faith in Christ in order to be saved. Faith, itself a gift, is an instrument of reception, not a means of merit. Most commonly 'faith' is construed with 'eis + accusative, implying motion into. So faith in Christ is an absolute transference of trust from ourselves to Him.

In universalism, all men are redeemed and justified, so justification is before faith and apart from it.

Calvin proposes seven essentials for an understanding of justification by faith alone:

1. All men face the judgement-seat of God.
2. All are sinners, deserving God's wrath.
3. Justification is God's judicial act of pardoning the sinner.
4. The sole ground of justification is Christ's vicarious righteousness and blood-shedding.
5. The means of justification is faith (*fiducia* rather than *fides*) in Christ.
6. This faith is evidenced in a life of good works.
7. The sole source of justification is God's grace.

(A lengthy footnote deals with the problem of those who have not heard against the background of discussion about deceased infants. Rom 2:14ff; 10:12-18; and Acts 10:34f are relevant. The note quotes W G T Shedd to the effect that the Divine Spirit exerts his regenerating grace, to some extent, within adult heathendom without the Redeemer having been presented historically and personally as the object of faith.)

Next, **evangelical universalism** is considered. God's love is universal. It is not limited temporally, racially, religiously, economically, socially or culturally. Firstly this universalism is seen in the **will of God** as expressed in 2 Pet 3:9. But what will is this? If it is His decretive will, then the verse implies that everyone is saved; if His preceptive will, then God does not allow people to perish; if it is the will of His disposition, then God is not pleased when men perish. Given that hell is not empty, only the third of these options is open to us. Further consideration of the text and interpretation of this verse demands the conclusion that God does not wish that any man should perish.

Universalism is seen in **common grace**. God is longsuffering to all sinners (2 Pet 3:9). He is good to all sinners (Rom 2:4; Mt 5:45). There are the natural blessings of food, health, etc (Ps 145); the laudable qualities of human existence; the achievements of the natural man, be they artistic, scientific, etc. There is the restraint of sin in society; the external call of the gospel. 'God is good to all men in some ways and to some men in all ways.' He longs for everyone to be saved.

In this context, however, 1 Tim 2:4 needs consideration. In view of the expression of 'all men' here we must face up to **the constraints of particular redemption**. This doctrine is defended in another lengthy footnote, arguing from Jn 10. It needs to be understood properly. It does not undermine the free offer of the Gospel. It is not saying that Christ is unable to save all, but that the prerogative to save is the Lord's. Nor is it saying that Christ's death is insufficient to save the whole world. Moreover, there are benefits which do issue from the death of Christ to all.

For many John 3:16 collapses particular redemption. Two points need to be made. First, *kosmos* is best understood as denoting something ethical, the world as containing nothing to attract God's love. Second, in relation to the design of v17, John Murray says, 'The only way whereby universalism can be posited in vv 16 & 17 is to assume that all men will believe in Christ and be saved, a position contrary to the teaching of our Lord.' Christ came to secure and purchase the salvation of all those who had already been ordained to eternal life.

The use of 'world' in 1 John 2:2 presents another category, **eschatological universalism**. The verse presents two problems. The first is the understanding of *hilasmos*. 'Expiation' is preferred by those for whom wrath demanding appeasing is unthinkable when predicated of God, but OT uses of *KIPPER* and NT uses of *hilaskomai* indicate a personal, Godward and thus propitiatory aspect. The second problem concerns the extent of the propitiation. J P Lange argues that the verse 'renders any and every limitation (of the atonement) inadmissible'. But if propitiation has been made for all sinners, for what will unbelievers be punished? For unbelief? But is not unbelief a sin? And has it not therefore been atoned for?

The solution is to view John as an 'eschatological universalist'. He teaches the salvation of the whole world, not just of Christians in Asia Minor. Christ's purpose in his death is to save a whole world — not every individual in it, but a world.

These papers close, fittingly, with a section on **evangelical universalism and the church's task**. Our Lord's final words to the church, prior to his ascension (Mt 28), are intended to impress her with the largeness of her task. 'All authority' reflects the extension of the authority of Christ resultant upon His resurrection. So the disciples are now impelled on a universal mission, to all people (including Israel), *panta ta 'ethne*. The church owes the gospel to the whole world. She has a fourfold message:

1. We are to say to all, 'there is good news for you'.
2. The LORD is God. Jesus is God. Jesus is Jehovah, the only God there is.
3. The blood of Christ cleanses from all sin, and finally — though not everyone will be saved. The Gospel is a fragrance of life to some, and of death to others —
4. Whoever believes will not perish but have everlasting life.

May God help us to proclaim that Gospel to this needy world. May He grant us a new outpouring of His Spirit. May many from all nations be brought into His kingdom. And may it be to His eternal praise and glory.

Rev Keith R Walker is Minister of Borrass Park Evangelical Church, Wrexham
