

---

# No Other Name

---

## Hywel Jones

---

*The theme of the BEC Conference at Leicester in 1989 was 'ONLY ONE WAY'. This article is a revision of the address which examined the exegetical basis for evangelical exclusivism and universality by considering Acts 4:12, 'Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved'.*

---

I have come to believe that this is a most important verse of Holy Scripture at this time not only in relation to the church and her task in the world but also for the preservation of Christianity itself.

Acts 4:12 is a statement of the gospel and of course it is part of the Bible. We have here an example of the close connection which exists between the Bible and the gospel. Let me say a word or two about that inter-relationship. The gospel is found in the Bible and it is presented there, infallibly, in all sorts of ways. The Bible, therefore, supports the gospel which in turn leads those who receive it, to the Bible. The one therefore subserves the interests of the other. May that be increasingly so in the closing years of this century — all over the world! There is, however, another side to this connection — a dark one. It is that when either the Bible or the gospel is undermined, the other is bound to be adversely affected. One cannot play down the Bible and play up the gospel.

In this century an attempt has been made to do just that, to play up the gospel while playing down the Bible. I draw your attention to this fact so that we may **locate our subject historically**. It is important to realise that the threat posed to the gospel in the late eighties is the direct consequence of the threat posed to the Bible in the early decades of this century and even before that. The BEC has been involved in this struggle. In the sixties and early seventies the inerrancy of the Bible was on the programme of our annual conferences. This was before the International Council for Biblical Inerrancy came into being (the BEC is not always behind the times!). As an inevitable consequence of the departure from an orthodox doctrine of Holy Scripture, we now find that the gospel is at stake. If we cannot say 'No other book', we will soon be unable to say 'No other name'. May those evangelicals who did not see Christianity threatened in the conflict over Scripture, see that it is now threatened in the conflict over the gospel!

But let us also note *where* our text is found in the Bible. It is in a book which is given over to an account of the expansion of Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome — a growth from 120 Jews to thousands of Jews and non-Jews, from something in an upper room to something which turned the world upside down. Acts 4:12 relates to a particular occasion when the gospel was made known. It is therefore an example of how this transformation which affected the then known world took

place. It was primarily and supremely through the preaching of the gospel. In Acts 4:12, therefore, we find something to instruct and inspire us in our multi-racial, multi-religious and pagan world. The truth and spirit of Acts 4:12 are intimately related to our being more effective and relevant in today's world. Acts 4:12 is what the church of today ought to say and how it ought to say it.

It is precisely at this point that a major difficulty has to be encountered and this is the reason why our subject has been chosen. The church today is, by and large, no longer able to say what Peter said, let alone how he said it. This is most serious because Acts 4:12 is an utterance of the apostles, Peter and John, authorised plenipotentiaries of Jesus Christ as far as the making known of truth is concerned. As such, Acts 4:12 — and we may just note in passing that there is no variation in the extant manuscripts of this verse — is of massive significance for the church in every time and culture. It supplies a standard to which all Christian proclamation should conform. Unless Acts 4:12 is acceptable to the church, its proclamation of the Christian message will neither be in truth nor in power.

A study of how Acts 4:12 has been commented on over the last century provides an interesting piece of history. What emerges from such a study is an indication of what has happened in the churches over that period. Taking 1878 as a rough departure point we see in the commentaries of J A Alexander and H A W Meyer that Acts 4:12 presented them with no problems at all. They stated its plain meaning, supported by exegetical comment. In the first decades of this century, Acts 4:12 was passed over without comment by Furneaux, Foakes-Jackson, Rackham and others. I have difficulty in understanding this silence as a case of letting the text speak for itself. In the years following the Second World War, the verse is either argued with or explained away (cf Interpreter's Bible).

From this it can be seen that Acts 4:12 serves as a litmus test of the church's condition, its relative health and vigour, or its decline and weakness. We need to test ourselves by it, or allow it to test us, as well as insisting on testing others by it. Sad to say, it is not only ecumenically aligned commentators who are exposed by it, but even evangelical commentaries leave something to be desired in their treatment of it. In those, too, the scope of reference of Acts 4:12 and the strength of the statement is not brought out as fully as it ought to be.

So the statement in Acts 4:12 which originally was intended to exert pressure on the 'world' seems today to put pressure on the church. Face to face with Acts 4:12 the church can be as uncomfortable as the world is — perhaps even more so. Whenever what was intended to be a means of life, as Acts 4:12 surely was, becomes a means of 'death', sin is the cause. When that applies to the gospel as well as to the law and to the church as well as to the world we are indeed faced with a serious state of affairs and need the intervention of God not only to rehabilitate his truth but also to clothe it with power.

The method which I am going to follow in an attempt to expose this condition will be to analyse Acts 4:12, using its light to reveal the darkness in today's church, the world and perhaps in our own hearts. This will not mean doing violence to the text because, in ever so many ways, its plain teaching cuts across what passes

**today for Christianity.** Almost everything about Acts 4:12 is objectionable in the modern church. It is as if the Lord God moved Peter to say it with the twentieth century in view and not the first. Of course he did not. But what God did was to move him to say it with the twentieth century in view *as well as* the first century. In Acts 4:12 God censures and vetoes many of the most cherished notions of churches today. He also recalls the church to his truth and encourages her to proclaim it.

## **The Form**

By this we mean the text's literary character. Even on this relatively superficial level, Acts 4:12 has something important to say which amounts to a criticism of modern Christianity. Attention has already been drawn to the fact that it is a statement. It is therefore an assertion, not a question. Peter is not asking for information; he is conveying it.

But more needs to be said. Though Acts 4:12 is an assertion; **its form is negative.** There are not only negative particles in the verse; the whole verse is a negation. Even the clause at the end carries a strong negative inference indicating that salvation is no optional matter. There can be no reasonable doubt that Peter, the apostle, was intending to deny certain things when he said what he did. No one listening to him could have thought otherwise.

Negations are not that plentiful in contemporary theology, whether academically or popularly expressed, nor in ecumenical pronouncements — unless someone who does make negations is being responded to. The only thing which seems to be clearly denied in today's church is that denials can be properly and graciously expressed, that is, that one can speak as Peter did. All kinds of evasions are practised to avoid having to reject anything or say that something is wrong. This is neither a case of being polite nor of being politic. It is a matter of presupposition and prejudice which regards denials and exclusions as being at best unthinking and blinkered, at worst, bigoted, intolerant and obscurantist.

What then is to be said about Peter's negation? I have heard it said that he was carried away by the heat of the moment and spoke with vehemence but not much thought, a thing which he was prone to do. It was assumed in a rather superior manner that on reflection he would have wished to revise his statement. Such psychologising by non-professionals is hazardous enough when the patient is on the couch. But to do so at a distance of 2,000 years takes some doing — and, surely, some believing.

When one looks at the verse in its context, a very different picture emerges. Peter was moved — who wouldn't be? But for once, and not for the first time, he was thinking as well as feeling and was feeling what he was thinking. Indeed his thinking was clear and elevated because he was 'filled with the Spirit'. But look at verse 12. It is in two parts. Following the negation is an explanation introduced by 'for'. That means Peter was thinking; he was reasoning. He could explain himself. But that is not all. Look at the connection between verse 12a, the negation, and verse 11. It is in the nature of a deduction. This allegedly thoughtless and sub-Christian negation is not an explosion of mindless passion. It is a deduction from

what preceded it. And what is that? It is a passage in the Old Testament Scriptures, Psalm 118, a word from God himself. The negation is therefore in the nature of a conclusion drawn from divine revelation which can itself be reasonably explained and supported.

Peter was thinking theologically and here is the nub of the issue. Theologians today do not follow the theological method of the apostle. For Peter, there were firm statements made in Scripture from which equally firm conclusions could be drawn 'theo-logically'. The one yielded the other. God's affirmation yield negations of their logical opposites. That is an element in apostolic theology.

But today theology is adrift. It has cut itself loose from the two anchors of revealed, inscripturated truth and biblical theological method and therefore the ship can be driven by any wind, up and down in Adria. Its soundings never reach the bed of truth. Theology is governed by existentialist philosophy, ie Truth is what has become true for you, for me, for the liberal, the radical; the ecumenical as well as the evangelical; the Roman Catholic as well as the Protestant; for the Muslim, the Jew, the Hindu as well as the Christian. Revelation, its interpretation and expression is personalist and not propositional. It is also pluralist. John Hick declared 'Truth is two eyed'. By that he meant a statement and its opposite. Archbishop Runcie has said that truth has a thousand eyes. This means that somehow everything is part of the Truth.

If one cannot make Peter's negation, one is not only disagreeing with apostolic Christianity, but also with the nature of truth. Truth is one and consistent. It is incarnate in Christ and inscripturated in the Bible. While it is rich and many-sided, it is harmonious. Contradictions of it are wrong — unreal and soul destroying notions. **Truth has an opposite.** Not everything is true. Its antithesis is error. Such thinking is scientific; its opposite is non-sense. Divine revelation is not irrational.

During the summer of 1989, the INDEPENDENT newspaper carried comments from a number of invited contributors on the subject of how the major world religions relate to each other. Dr Paul Helm was among those invited. Our brother pointed out that in all the pieces which had been published there was a 'notable absentee'. It was 'any concern for truth'. He wrote:

Pilate's question 'What is truth?' when it was originally asked, was no doubt the question of a cynic who would not wait for an answer. But modern enquiries into the relations between the faiths are in a different case. They do not even ask the question.

He then went on to point out that while an obsessive pursuit of truth marks the natural sciences and the humanities, that is not the case among theologians. We have already stated the reason or the explanation for this. It lies in the nature of current theological method which is linked with an unbiblical theology of revelation.

We must not hesitate about making negations. Pressure is building up among evangelicals to try to avoid doing so. Of course, we are not to become negativistic and hyper-critical. But if we are not prepared to negate as clearly and loudly as we affirm then we are less than biblical. Moreover, our affirmations will become

vulnerable to (re)interpretation by those without and some within the church. Negations have a positive function. They defend truth and demarcate it from error.

## The Focus

We now look at the content of this statement and concentrate on its main theme. **That theme is salvation.** It is referred to twice in the verse, first as a noun and then as a verb. Whatever is said in this verse is related in some way or other to salvation which is its focal point. But what is salvation?

Not all that long ago, when the old 'social gospel' reigned, the use of the term 'salvation' was inevitably associated with fundamentalists. It expressed their shared belief in sin, guilt, death, hell and Satan on the dark side and acceptance with God through the atonement, forgiveness and new life on the bright side. It was evangelical and an evangelical's term. No longer is that the case. Others use the term and do so with a variety of meanings. We shall consider two.

First of all, it is pointed out in several commentaries and by David Edwards in the book *ESSENTIALS*, that Acts 4:12 is set in a healing context and the word 'saved' is a translation of the same Greek word as the word 'healed'. At the end of verse 10 the word plainly means 'well' or 'in good health'. Why then may not the word 'healed' be substituted for the word 'saved' in verse 12? After all, Peter and John are responding to the question of the Sanhedrin stated in verse 7, 'By what name did you do this?' Peter's answer begins in verse 8 and goes on to verse 12. It is claimed that he is talking about healing throughout, physical and by extension psychological.

The Inter-Faith Consultative Group of the Board for Mission and Unity of the Church of England was requested by General Synod in 1981 to produce a report on 'the theological aspects of dialogue'. In that report Acts 4:12 is described as being part of a 'story (which) is about healing and the authority by which this takes place'. The report goes on,

Peter's reply is not intended to deny the existence of other healings but to claim that all healing, all making whole, belong to Jesus. It is going beyond the text to make it a statement about other faiths.

Secondly, this statement about salvation is not only understood by some as referring to healing or wholeness. There is also the concept of social justice/liberty from oppression which has come to the fore since the late sixties. This amounts to freedom from every kind of socio-economic tyranny with all the deprivation which such oppression and concentration of wealth and power inevitably creates. The Third Assembly of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, a department of the World Council of Churches, which was held in Bangkok in 1973 was immediately preceded by a world conference called to discuss the subject of 'Salvation Today'. In this conference, salvation was regarded as having four dimensions, economic, social, political and personal. All the time was taken up in discussing the first three. The heavy influence of liberation theologies and anti-western third world theologies is obvious at this point. Is that what Peter meant by salvation?

In reply to this it must be acknowledged that the salvation word group does include

the aspect of healing and wholeness within its range of meaning. But that does not mean that there is nothing to prevent 'salvation' being replaced by 'healing' in our text because the *noun* translated 'salvation' is never used for healing in the New Testament. In addition, Peter's answer to the question of verse 9 is completed in verse 10. Verses 11 and 12 are in the nature of an addition, expounding the significance of the name, seizing an opportunity for evangelistic preaching. Further, verse 11 is talking about something much larger than temporary healing of the body.

The meaning of the figurative expression in verse 11 is stated doctrinally and practically in verse 12. This means that the salvation referred to in verse 12 is what a cornerstone or capstone does for a building. Physical healing is a detail in and an illustration of that larger salvation.

The words in verse 11 are taken from Psalm 118, which is a messianic Psalm. Jesus quotes it with reference to himself. It was one of the psalms sung at Passover time. The building referred to by implication in the statements is a temple — a place where God dwells with his people. The cornerstone begins the building and marks out its character, just as a stone at a corner determines the lines for the walls it joins by its own shape, or, as a copestone, it completes the edifice. The divine messiah brings the 'new' temple into being and brings it to its completion. This stone is divinely chosen and placed. It is given. 'Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, Jesus Christ.'

J A Alexander wrote as follows concerning the term translated 'salvation' and his words are well worth heeding: it is 'the standing, not to say, the technical expression for the whole remedial work which the Messiah was to accomplish, and of which his personal name (Jesus) was significant'. That is why the definite article is used in the text ie *the* salvation. As such it is not to be identified totally with the renovation of the spirit. This would be to narrow it down to unacceptable limits. 'The' salvation includes the body. Equally, it would be an unjustifiable restriction to limit it to the church, for this salvation will make a new world ie new heavens and a new earth. But the Scriptures teach that this provided salvation is worked out or bestowed in stages through time, culminating only in eternity. That must be remembered. The Bible teaches that salvation *will* make completely whole but not all at once or all on earth, nor for all beyond death.

**To make salvation include physical healing and psychological wholeness for all and universal social justice in the here and now is therefore a serious and unbiblical distortion.** Healings may and do occur: social harmony in justice may be found, primarily and increasingly in the church and, in measure, in the world during times of revival, but fully only in heaven. It is only when sin is forever banished and people are forever glorified that 'there will be no more...and all the former things will have passed away.' Even so, the entire salvation is secured and promised in association with and in consequence of the bestowal of the initial blessings of the gospel, namely repentance and the remission of sins (Acts 5:31). That can be termed 'the gospel'. Therefore, salvation, smaller and larger; begun and continued here but consummated only in heaven not on earth is what is held out in Acts 4:12. It is found only in Jesus Christ.

## The Features

I have in mind here the description of salvation provided in this verse. We have already seen that it is divine and immense. Verse 11 shows that. It is 'so great salvation'. In addition, this statement presents two further aspects which need to be emphasised today, separately and together. They are exclusiveness and universality.

### Exclusiveness

Acts 4:12 not only makes it clear that this salvation is found in Jesus Christ but that it is found in him *alone*. There is no other saviour beside him and no salvation except in him. This amounts to a declaration of exclusiveness in the matter of salvation. The notion of exclusiveness is not generally acceptable today. It is regarded as the mark of the rabid and bigoted fundamentalist — Shi'ite Muslim and evangelical, as if there were no difference between them. As a result many prefer to use the word 'unique' instead of the term 'exclusive'. We need to understand what this substitution is aimed to achieve. It speaks of a distinctiveness which does not amount to an exclusiveness in any respect though, strictly speaking, the two words are synonymous. Consequently, its use with reference to Jesus Christ becomes coloured by the way in which he is regarded. It becomes possible to speak of a special distinctiveness with regard to him as a special revelation of God which does not put him in a category of his own necessitating the use of the term 'exclusive'. What I mean is that if Jesus of Nazareth is not the Christ of God, then his uniqueness does not amount to that. If one is unable to affirm the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ it is because one's christology is at best weak.

The New Testament as a whole makes clear what Peter does in Acts 4:12, that it is because Jesus bears the name he does, ie is of the kind he is, that **his uniqueness must amount to exclusiveness**. It is because Jesus is the Christ that there is no other saviour and consequently no salvation in any other. The word 'other' in Acts 4:12 means 'of a different kind'. While numerous 'saviours' are acknowledged in the world there are basically only two *kinds*, viz Jesus and all the rest. Because Jesus is the Christ of God, the salvation of God is found in him alone.

Peter was aware of the existence of other religions as was Paul, who referred to the fact that there were many gods and lords who were recognised and worshipped. In saying what he did, Peter therefore knew that Jew and Gentile, with all their sub-groups, with their differing beliefs and rituals were being excluded. But that is exactly what he meant to do. Here again, a contradiction must be noted between apostolic Christianity and much of what passes for Christianity at the present time. Peter was at pains to exclude 'other saviours' and 'other ways of salvation'. Today, strenuous efforts are being made to include them.

There are three main ways which I notice in which this broadening is being attempted. Any one of them by itself would be destructive of Christianity. But they combine to make a three-pronged attack. They are:

- 1 A concentration on **God and not Jesus Christ**.
- 2 A concentration on **the Spirit and not Jesus Christ**.
- 3 A concentration on **Christ and not Jesus**.

It is not my intention to expound these views which are not only anti-Christian but anti-trinitarian. However, I must say a little about each to make clear what is being referred to.

### ***1 A Concentration on God and not Jesus Christ***

What this approach does is to make use of the fact that God or a concept of deity is common to all religions. This is to be maximised. J A T Robinson of HONEST TO GOD notoriety took this view. Probably its leading exponents are Karl Rahner on the Roman Catholic side and John Hick on the Protestant side. In adopting this perspective, the person and work of Jesus Christ are at best diminished and even dispensed with.

For example, David Edwards commenting on John 14:6 says that while it is only Christians who know God as Father, others know the same God by other names. But is this the same God? Can God be personally known if he is not known as Father? Hick rejects that Jesus is divine and focuses instead on the 'God (who) has many names'. God can be Adonai or Allah, Rama or Krishna. For the issue of salvation it does not really matter. Peter Cotterell, an evangelical teacher of missiology, writing on John 14:6 says that 'what this (verse) does say is that insofar as anyone approaches God that approach is made possible by Christ. There is no other way. What it does not do is to define the prerequisites of that approach.' That means that it is possible to approach God without ever coming personally to Jesus Christ. Is that evangelical truth?

### ***2 A Concentration on the Spirit and not Jesus Christ***

This is part and parcel of the position which has just been referred to, but as the Spirit is separately mentioned we should isolate this view. Archbishop Runcie has made several statements about God being 'the irreducible mystery' present in all forms of worship; 'a higher and stronger power than that of human beings'. But in his lecture on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the World Congress of Faiths he referred to his belief that 'other faiths than our own are genuine mansions of the Spirit'. (Capital 'S' original.)

The Inter-Faith dialogue speaks of the Spirit uncovering to Christians 'in other faiths and cultures the deepest truths of their own Christian and human being', ie as they engage in dialogue. Salvation is by the Spirit at work in the world apart from Jesus Christ. But is that what Scripture teaches? Will not the Spirit of Truth always lead to Christ?

### ***3 A Concentration on Christ and not Jesus***

In this approach to other religions, use is made of the statement at the beginning of the Gospel of John that the Logos or Christ is the light of men. This is taken to mean that he informs and is present in non-christian religions. As a result people have written about the Unknown Christ, eg in Hinduism. Devout adherents to these other faiths are recognised as 'anonymous Christians' because implicit faith is present in their hearts. In addition to a book entitled GOD HAS MANY NAMES Hick has another volume called WHATEVER PATH MEN CHOOSE IS MINE.

**What can be said by way of response to all this?** What would Peter have said if he had been faced with it? Well, what did he say? Perhaps it is relevant to us today. From Acts 4:12 we see that he referred to one name in which salvation is found. Which name is that? Is it God, or the divine Spirit or the Christ? What is the name of this saviour? Acts 4:10 gives us the answer. It is not 'God'. Nor 'the Spirit'. Nor is it even 'Christ'. It is Jesus Christ of Nazareth — the designation of offensive particularity.

It is the Messiah who was Jesus. And not any Jesus, for that was a common name, but a particular Jesus from Nazareth. Salvation is found in history not philosophy; in fact not mysticism; in a particular individual not a cosmic being, an ineffable deity nor even a High Creator God. Just as there is no Christ apart from Jesus the Christ so there is no God apart from the one revealed in Jesus the Christ. God is only personally and savingly knowable through Jesus Christ.

### **Universality**

To reject the kind of universalism which is favoured by those who adopt a pluralistic view of truth and the saving validity of non-Christian religions and to assert the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ as the only saviour does not carry with it any suggestion that Christianity is for some kind of elite. Nor must it ever be thought of as a minority faith. Such conclusions are as forbidden by Scripture as the heresy which we are opposing. No — it is for the world and the world needs it. Peter was affirming this when he used the expressions 'under heaven' and 'among men'. The gospel has a worldwide bearing and scope of reference.

By the expression 'under heaven' Peter was referring to the whole earth. No part of the universe is excluded at this point. 'Among men' is a reference to the inhabitants of the earth, women and children included, considered in their common humanity (*men* lacks the definite article) but also in their number and variety (the noun is plural). David Edwards' restriction of Peter's statement to the Jews who were present fails to treat these universalising expressions at all. Associating 'under heaven' and 'men' and relating them to the matter of salvation means that there is no other saviour in the whole wide world and the people of the whole wide world need that saviour.

What is it that undergirds this universality? We have seen and stated the reasons which support and necessitate the exclusiveness of the Saviour. What are those which support and necessitate the universality of his salvation? They are two in number and are found in the words '*given*' and '*must*'. The first relates to **the single divine provision** and the second to **the common human need**.

The basic fatal weakness of all 'saviours' other than Jesus Christ is that they are only human and therefore sinful. They are therefore unable to deal with the sin which creates the need for salvation. Salvation cannot come therefore from within the human race. Where then can it come from? It cannot come from the devil — he has neither the love nor the righteousness nor the power to provide it. Only God has. But he is the one so grievously sinned against and justly angered. Yet he provides it and by gift! It is given but only in one person, Jesus Christ. That salvation is divine and so it must be sufficient for the whole world. And all the

world needs it. God loves all sinners. God so loved the world. No one can say there is no love for him or her in God and no salvation. Anyone, anywhere, who believes in Jesus Christ, God's son, will not perish but will have everlasting life.

But will everyone, everywhere, who does not believe in him perish? **What about those who cannot believe because they have never, ever heard?** This is a problem for us to reflect on. We have already excluded the notion of salvation outside of Christ for good pagans on the basis of pluralism. That selfsame possibility raises its head from within evangelicalism — albeit on another basis.

Is it true that every human being needs the Saviour God provides, even though he or she is made in God's image and lives in the world which God has made and in which he is active? God does reveal himself in creation and providence, and man, though fallen is still incurably religious. May someone, then, be received by God even though he or she does not believe in Jesus?

There is disagreement among evangelicals on this matter. Some declare that no one can be saved who does not come to believe in Jesus Christ, eg Carl Henry, Dick Dowsett. The unevangelised, ie those who do not hear the gospel must therefore be eternally lost. Others, for example, Sir Norman Anderson, Peter Cotterell, Martin Goldsmith, Jim Packer and John Stott do not make that categorical denial. In some way or other they reckon with the possibility that some who have never heard the gospel *may* be saved. We need to note discriminatingly the differing grounds on which they do this and the language they use. There are three basic reasons to consider.

- 1 Some 'good pagans' may live up the light which they have been given in creation and providence.
- 2 Some 'good pagans' may cry to God for mercy because of their conscious need through sin and guilt.
- 3 God may quicken some directly by his Spirit.

There is an obvious difference between the first of these reasons and the other two. The first reason is based on an incorrect exegesis of Romans 1 & 2 in two respects. First, it assumes that what God reveals of himself and his will in creation and providence is enough to save and that someone or many could respond to it acceptably. Neither is true. **The gospel is not revealed by general revelation** and whatever light people have. Jews or not, no one lives up to it, no not one. All in Adam are therefore subject to God's just wrath on account of ungodliness and unrighteousness. To teach otherwise is to teach another way of salvation. Peter Cotterell does this and argues that general revelation must be potentially salvific. He says that: 'although there is clear Bible testimony that salvation comes to us exclusively through Christ, that testimony does not also require an overt knowledge of Christ'. Such thinking is anti-evangelical as well as unbiblical and is to be rejected.

Anderson, Goldsmith, Stott and Packer do not regard general revelation as salvific. Their view is that God may well act savingly apart from gospel proclamation but if, or when he does it is by his Spirit, in his grace and on the basis of the death of Christ. Anderson is by far the most optimistic on this point, arguing and

affirming that God will save sinners who cry to him for mercy, even though they have never heard of Jesus Christ. He uses the case of Old Testament believers who were saved apart from the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ as examples of what God will do for such 'good pagans'. But is this a fair parallel? Old Testament saints were not entirely without gospel information. By means of the Old Testament's predictions and types they were in receipt of a kind of gospel proclamation though they could not in the nature of things hear the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But that apart, Anderson's view is not anti-evangelical in content as Cotterill's is. It may, however, be or become anti-evangelical *in practice*.

Packer and Stott proceed on general theological grounds, allowing for the immediate work of the Spirit on the human conscience. Both refer to Cornelius as an example that the Spirit can work in this direct way but rightly point out that the Lord brought the message of the gospel to him so that he might be saved. That fact should weaken any enthusiasm about the possibility of someone's being saved without the word. (Goldsmith does not refer to Cornelius.) But, all four declare that if anyone is saved in this way, it is only because of Christ's death. There is no other saviour and no other basis of salvation.

In my view, this position does not militate against the gospel in terms of its content because it does not teach an alternative way of salvation. Salvation is only in Christ, by grace and to all who look to God for mercy. Yet I believe it is not in keeping with what the New Testament teaches about the way of salvation because it does not include the distinct object of saving faith. This object is not just the mercy of God but the person of Jesus Christ and while it is not essential to understand the doctrine of the atonement in order to believe in Jesus Christ, it is necessary to perceive that Jesus Christ is the saviour from sin. I take therefore the view that **everyone needs to believe in Jesus Christ in order to be saved** and would argue that as being the New Testament position.

If, however, we were to accept that the view presented by Anderson, Goldsmith, Packer and Stott is not anti-evangelical in content, would we be admitting something which had the effect of being anti-evangelical and anti-evangelistic in practice? Here I think we have to distinguish between Anderson, Goldsmith and Stott on the one hand and Packer on the other. The views of the former could well be anti-evangelistic in practice because they are *optimistic* that God may save apart from faith in Christ. Anderson is positive about this while Goldsmith and Stott are agnostic. The fact that all stately countenance the possibility can send a signal to their camp followers which can weaken evangelism. Packer, by contrast, makes objective statements in a definitive way. He expresses no hope and that, I think, is important. He writes: 'What we cannot safely say is that God ever does save anyone in this way. We simply do not know.'

But this is only a debate about a possibility. Acts 4:12 deals with certainty. It uses the word 'must' not 'may' about this salvation. The fact that God has given a saviour is the proof that he is needed. Just as every sinner has no real option about whether he or she needs to be saved or not, so **the church has no real option about whether it needs to preach the gospel or not to every sinner**. God was not

interested, nor was the Lord Jesus Christ, in a possibility of salvation, not even a theological possibility! Should the church be? God gave Jesus Christ to make salvation sure for any, for all who believe. The church must therefore proclaim that certain and immense salvation to any and to all. To the whole wide world, we must say 'Come, for all things are now ready'. And if they were all to come there would still be enough and to spare — in room and provision.

## Select Bibliography

ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY, The Elusiveness of Doctrine, P Avis, SPCK, 1986  
ESSENTIALS, David L Edwards with a response from John Stott, Hodder & Stoughton, 1988

THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS, Karl Rahner, Seabury Press, 1972-5

GOD HAS MANY NAMES, John Hick, Macmillan, 1980

THE MYTH OF CHRISTIAN UNIQUENESS, J Hick & P Knitter, SCM Press, 1988

CHRISTIANITY & WORLD RELIGIONS, Archbishop R Runcie, World Congress of Faiths, 50th Anniversary Lecture, 1986

THE UNKNOWN CHRIST OF HINDUISM, R Panikkar, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1986

THE UNEVANGELIZED; An olive branch from the Opposition, P Cotterell, International Review of Mission, 1988, Vol 77

MISSION AND MEANINGLESSNESS, The Good News in a World of Suffering and Disorder, P Cotterell, SPCK, June 1990

In the catalogue of New Titles the publishers write: 'Written with penetrating honesty and insight, this is the first book by a leading British evangelical to recognise God's saving activity among those who live without the Church and without an overt knowledge of the gospel. As such, it holds out a special challenge to traditional Evangelicalism, while also having much to say which Christians of all persuasions will find stimulating and refreshing.'

WHAT ABOUT OTHER FAITHS?, M Goldsmith, Hodder & Stoughton, 1989

Rev Hywel R Jones MA is Principal of the London Theological Seminary

---

*It is fundamental to biblical revelation to preserve the distinction between general and special revelation. Where general revelation is seen to be special, common grace is seen to be saving, creation is seen to have within it the seeds of redemption, and the law is thought to be the gospel, there Christian faith will be destroyed. By contrast, where that which is general is obscured, where common grace is denied in order to enhance that which is saving, where the Spirit's work of regeneration is so stressed that his work of creation is forgotten, there what is prerequisite to saving faith will be lost, and much that God is doing in our world will be obscured.*

David F Wells, GOD THE EVANGELIST, p 24

---