
Book Review

Only One Way

Hywel R. Jones

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The former Principal of London Theological Seminary, has written a useful book to argue that those who are not evangelised have no hope of salvation. It is one of the series being produced by the FIEC Theological Committee. The occasion for his book is primarily the publication of books by Peter Cotterell, the former Principal of London Bible College and Clark Pinnock, a lecturer at McMaster Divinity School, Ontario. They argue that there may be salvation for those who have never heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the response to recent writings by professing evangelicals, that makes this a useful addition to older books on the subject such as those by Oswald Sanders and Dick Dowsett.

In a short first chapter, Hywel Jones, sets out his pattern for the book. He first tackles the interpretation of Acts 4:12, where he counters the suggestion that the verse does not mean that no one can be saved without conscious faith in Christ. In chapter 3 he looks at the *Ten Theses* which Cotterell presents in his book *Mission and Meaninglessness* arguing in particular against the view that God would be unjust to condemn those who have not had the opportunity to reject the Gospel message. Two further chapters deal with the so-called "Pagan Saints" in Old and New Testaments, who are advanced by Pinnock as arguments for the possibility of salvation assured to people who did not know the Christ or even the revelation of Yahweh. Moving on from the arguments of these particular scholars, Dr Jones then addresses other arguments that have been put forward by evangelicals as optimistic for the salvation of some

unevangelised people. A final chapter entitled *Finding Our Bearings* is a restatement of the classic evangelical position enshrined in the Reformed Confessions that there is salvation only for those who have faith in Christ. The only exception recognised by the confessions is "elect infants dying in infancy" and "other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word."

It might seem that there is little for readers of *Foundations* to criticise in this book. That would be a right conclusion. In general Dr Jones is fair to his opponents, but there are a few points which might be addressed.

In the search for the origin of evangelical equivocation on the implications of Acts 4:12, Jones suggests (p.13) that FF Bruce in his 1951 commentary "possibly opened a door to a weakened interpretation of this verse". The 1951 commentary was a very technical work on the Greek text. When in 1988 his fuller NICNT was published, Bruce was as clear on salvation being only through Christ as any one could hope. The criticism on the same page of Stott and Marshall for a failure to emphasise particular words in the verse, would seem to be an unnecessary multiplication of opponents rather than the identification of real error in respected commentators. The writings of Don Richardson (e.g. *Peace Child* and *Eternity in their Hearts*) are not noticed as seminal in developing evangelical acceptance of the possibility of salvation without hearing the Gospel. These are well criticised by Bruce Demarest in his contribution to *One God, One Lord in a world of Religious pluralism* (The Tyndale Study Groups lectures of 1991 to which strangely Dr Jones does not refer).

Dr Jones is generous to historical figures

when they express views which are in direct contradiction to his own. John Wesley is a man “whose evangelical zeal cannot be doubted”, but he also “regarded it as possible that some heathen might have been taught the essentials of true religion” (p. 7). This is dismissed as “human inconsistency”. Might not some of his living opponents be similarly affected? Calvin’s comments on Acts 10 are quoted in the Forward (why could not this have been in the more intelligible Torrance translation?), but it is only later that the continuation of his quote is noted where it becomes clear that Calvin viewed Cornelius as a regenerated man *before* he sent messengers to call Peter. He does not quote the part of Calvin’s comment that argues Cornelius must have been regenerate to have prayed an acceptable prayer. One wonders whether there was in past centuries quite such total agreement on this subject as Dr Jones would like us to think. Might it not be the case that the subject was never completely tackled in the context with which we are currently interacting. As David Wright says in his article on Vatican II (as part of the 1991 Tyndale Study Groups papers to which we have already referred p. 170) “The sixteenth-century Reformers had a very limited awareness of the world beyond the bounds of Christendom. It was sufficiently circumscribed to be capable of being managed, theologically, by notions such as common grace. Protestantism’s apprehension of that territory *extra Christum* has steadily expanded without, it seems, any corresponding expansion of theological horizons”. Whilst one wants to maintain the position that seems to be enshrined in the Reformation Confessions, a fuller apologia is necessary in the light of our modern interactions with the followers of other faiths. It is clear from Dr Jones book that some of the developed thinking of evangelical Christians has gone astray. However allowance should be made for some loose comments being intended to indicate a

sympathetic understanding of how difficult it is culturally for modern Christians to assert that there is “No other name...”.

Dr Jones’ argument is best when he is expounding scripture. His opponents have been guilty of taking verses out of their contexts in order to make them say what they want. It is very clear that no-one who understands the flow of Paul’s argument in Romans is going to assert that 2:14-15 means that those who haven’t heard the Gospel might be saved. The tendency to quote isolated verses as proof texts is not limited to those who hold erroneous positions. All must continually check that the use that is made of any verse of Scripture is completely justified within its whole context.

Dr Jones rightly asserts that a belief about the fate of the unevangelised will influence attitudes to the task of taking the Gospel to those who have never heard. Fortunately it is not always true that people with wrong ideas about the fate of the unevangelised have no interest in world mission. A number of modern young Christians, as a result of poor teaching, would place themselves in an “optimistic agnostic” position and yet they have a desire to take the Gospel to those who have never heard. Conversely it is sad to note that there are people within the FIEC and similar constituencies, who would faithfully affirm all that Hywel is arguing, and yet have no concern either to go to preach to those who have never heard nor to properly support those who are going. This praxis needs to be addressed by the FIEC as well as the theological thinking at which this book is aimed.

The book is attractively produced and the only point at which the printer seems have failed the writer is in leaving out the underlining he promises us in *italicised text*!

Ray Porter
