

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A Fresh Inquiry into the Fate of the Un-evangelized: A Traditional Dispensational Perspective

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by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).¹ Several months later the Apostle Peter expanded on this thought by insisting “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

For many, the implications of these and similar texts are not open to serious dispute. Their meaning seems obvious; those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ are saved and those who have not are lost and will spend eternity in hell. However, many sincere Christians are troubled by the thought that the majority of the people who have lived on this planet are “condemned already” (John 3:18) because they have not believed in a Christ they have never heard of. Clark Pinnock speaks for them when he wrote, “Are we not all burdened by the apparent unfairness of a message that we say has universal saving significance, but which has not actually been available to a sizable percentage of the race hitherto?”²

In fairness, many have not been burdened by the apparent unfairness of the exclusivist message. Many able theologians have addressed Pinnock’s concerns and are completely comfortable with the answers they have offered. Nevertheless, the number of those who are no longer comfortable with traditional exclusivist answers is growing. Many of these dissenters have embraced some form of universalism, others have embraced Clark Pinnock’s inclusiveness, and still others have considered these alternates and rejected them as unbiblical and even sub-Christian. Yet, they wonder if there might be a better answer to their questions concerning the

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New American Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

²Clark Pinnock, “A Pluralistic View” in *Four Views of Salvation in a Pluralistic World*,” Ed. Denis Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, Kindle Edition, 1995), Location 1663.

fate of the un-evangelized than those which have been offered by conservative and liberal theologians, open apostates, or wavering evangelicals.

In an essay included in the Book, *Four Views of Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, Clark Pinnock writes:

Being part of conservative Christianity in North America, I was also aware of dispensational theology, which is influential in these circles. I noticed in this position a view of God's dealing with people in more than one way, depending on historical circumstances. Charles Ryrie spoke of a dispensation where God accepted pagans like Job on the basis of faith but without knowledge of either Moses or Christ. I felt this was Biblical and found it appealing. I remember thinking how helpful it would be if this arrangement were still true for today for people in the same situation. I keep hoping dispensational theology will progress in this direction too and that a dispensational inclusivist will come forward to help people burdened by this restrictivism in his or her camp. It hasn't happened yet, and I'm not holding my breath.³

The purpose of this paper is to fill the void Pinnock identifies, to present a traditional dispensational alternative that is both Biblical and appealing to "people today in the same situation."

Specifically, this paper will argue that salvific grace has always been available to the un-evangelized through the Eternal Gospel which is and always has been universally communicated through natural revelation.

Section 1: Methodology

The Inductive Method

This book is a theological inquiry. As such it will be based on the inductive method. Lewis Speery Chafer offers the following explanation of the inductive method:

Of the two methods of dealing with the truth of God's Word – deduction, by which a theme is expanded into its details of expression, a method belonging largely to the sermonic field, and induction, by which various declarations upon a subject are reduced to one harmonious and all-inclusive statement – induction is distinctly the theological method.⁴

³ Pinnock, Location 1540.

⁴ Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Kregal Publications, 1976), 8.

A Biblical Inquiry

This paper is a Biblical inquiry. Its aim will be to discover what the Bible teaches about the fate of the un-evangelized. The author will approach this task with certain presuppositions concerning the scriptures:

1. The Bible is the written word of God: “The Bible, consisting of both the Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety, is the only divinely inspired, inerrant, objectively true, and authoritative written Word of God, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice.”⁵
2. The Sufficiency of Scripture: “God’s Word is sufficient to meet every need of the human soulScripture is comprehensive, containing everything necessary for one’s spiritual life.”⁶
3. The Perspicuity of Scripture: “Scripture is lucid rather than mystifying so that it enlightens the eyes.”⁷

The Hermeneutical Approach

While proceeding on the basis of the assumptions listed above, and understanding the importance of comparing scripture to scripture so that more obscure passages become understandable in the light of clearer texts, the interpretation of scripture is still a human task. The scriptures are not self-interpreting, and even with conscious dependence on the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit the theologian’s hermeneutical approach will play a crucial role in his understanding of the word of God. The hermeneutical position taken by this paper is the dispensational position. This

⁵ The authors own definition which was adopted as part of the doctrinal statement of the Berean Fellowship of Churches.

⁶ John MacArthur Jr., “The Sufficiency of Scripture” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 15/2 (Fall 2004) 165.

⁷ MacArthur, *Ibid.*

position will be referred to as the *traditional* dispensational hermeneutic to distinguish it from the progressive dispensational hermeneutic.

Ryrie defines the traditional dispensational hermeneutic as literal hermeneutics, *normal* interpretation, or the grammatical-historical method. In this hermeneutical approach the interpreter “gives every word the same meaning it would have in normal usage, whether employed in writing, speaking, or thinking.” It assumes that “the meaning of each word is determined by grammatical and historical considerations,” and contrary to its critics’ assertions, this method takes symbolic language, figures of speech, and literary genre into account.⁸ Ryrie explains:

Symbols, figures of speech, and types are all interpreted plainly in this method, and they are in no way contrary to literal interpretation. After all, the very existence of any meaning for a figure of speech depends on the reality of the literal meaning of the terms involved. Figures often make the meaning plainer, but it is the literal, normal, or plain meaning that they convey to the reader.⁹

Ryrie goes on to identify the grammatical-historical method as an essential part of the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism.¹⁰

The Philosophical Methodology

The search for truth in the natural sciences and evangelical theology has much in common, more perhaps than either side is willing to recognize or acknowledge. This is especially true when it comes to methodology in that both have historically been committed to induction. This thesis, then, will be drawing on some of the insights of two prominent twentieth century philosophers of science, Thomas Kuhn and Carl Popper. In addition, the methodology employed in this paper

⁸ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago, Illinois, Moody Press, Kindle Edition, 1995), Location 939.

⁹ Ryrie, Location 943

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 434.

will be drawing on the insights of a distinguished twentieth century Christian philosopher, Mortimer Adler.

Scientific Paradigms, Normal Science, and Scientific Revolutions

In 1962, Thomas Kuhn, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, published a short monograph entitled, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. It caused a revolution of its own by challenging and eventually changing the way in which science saw itself. Robert Paul Wolfe neatly summarizes the challenge Kuhn presented to the scientific community:

Kuhn's book...revolutionized the philosophy of science and called into question the two proudest boasts of science: first, that science gives us the *truth* about what nature really is; and second, that science, unlike art, philosophy, religion, or politics, is *progressive*, securing an ever-greater store of truths about nature and building steadily on the work of past scientists...For Kuhn, science is done by real men (and women though he does not say so) – people who are born into a particular culture at a particular time, learn their science out of textbooks and in classrooms, and then practice what they have learned in laboratories. Kuhn [was] interested in the human process by which real scientists learn their craft and pass it on to others.

Kuhn's picture of real-world science...is this: in each branch or sub-branch of science...during times of "normal science," there are a few models ("Paradigms") of actual scientific work that are so striking, so successful in solving the problems that scientists in that field are working on, so persuasive as pictures of how to do science, that all of the ordinary scientist in the field imitate those models and try to solve the puzzles that remain by applying or adapting the methods the author of the paradigm introduced.¹¹

Three great ideas emerge from Kuhn's analysis: first, the idea of normal science, and second, the concept of paradigms, and finally, the idea of a scientific revolution. Kuhn explains that,

Normal science, the activity which most scientists inevitably spend almost all their time, is predicated on the assumption that the scientific community knows what the world is like, because they have accepted the assumption upon which a particular scientific paradigm rests, and that much of the success of the enterprise derives from the community's willingness to defend that assumption, if necessary at considerable cost.

¹¹ Robert Paul Wolff, *About Philosophy, 11th Edition* (Saddle River, New Jersey, USA, Pearson Education, Inc. 2012) 128-130.

Normal science, for example, often suppresses fundamental novelties because they are necessarily subversive of its basic commitments.”¹²

Kuhn went on to argue that scientific revolutions occur in response to crisis, when new discoveries raise questions that the old paradigm does not seem to answer.

Interpretive Paradigms, Normal Theology, and Theological Revolutions

As in the natural sciences, theological work is carried out within paradigms, or theological systems which will be referred to in this paper as “interpretive paradigms.” While not using the term “paradigm,” Charles C. Ryrie does understand the concept and does a good job of explaining it:

Attention has been given recently to the role of preunderstanding in one’s approach to interpretation. This means that we bring our interpretation of Scripture not only to a set of interpretive principles (hermeneutics) but also theological presuppositions, as well as personal and cultural presuppositions. The process of engaging these three aspects has been called the hermeneutical spiral – we spiral from our predispositions and hermeneutics to the exegesis of Scripture and developing our theology, then cycle through again, expecting that each cycle will help us grow in a better understanding of God’s word.¹³

Ryrie goes on to identify three interpretive paradigms (again, not using the term):

“Historically among evangelicals there have been two basic and distinctive hermeneutical positions – dispensationalism and covenantalism. Recently a third position has appeared, that of progressive dispensationalism, which is somewhat of a mediating position and which does not fully share the hermeneutics of normative dispensationalism.”¹⁴

As in the natural sciences, theological paradigms are useful in that they provide a basis for doing actual theological work, normal theology, and this work has resulted in the discovery of truth. Interpretative communities, then, have and continue to play a vital role in theological inquiry.

¹² Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 50th Anniversary Edition* (Chicago, Illinois, USA, Chicago University Press, 2012), 5.

¹³ Ryrie. Kindle Location 936

¹⁴ Ibid. Kindle Location 930, 939.

This being said, interpretative communities can actually inhibit the pursuit of truth in the same way in which those operating within scientific communities “suppress fundamental novelties because they are necessarily subversive of its basic commitments.”¹⁵ The Anglican blogger, Mark Thomson, a Calvinist, has described this situation within his own theological paradigm:

I remember listening to a series of addresses on baptism in which the constant refrain was “the Reformed faith teaches...” Now I’m happy to identify myself as standing within the Reformed tradition of theology, but after about the fifth address (there were twelve!) you couldn’t help but wonder whether this system was so set in stone that it would be impossible to question it on the basis of the Bible. I had the impression that to do so would be considered a betrayal of Calvin, or Turretin, or Hodge or Warfield and what they have bequeathed to us. And yet each one of those men would have rushed to protest that their own teaching needed to be tested by the one true standard of doctrine, the teaching of the Scriptures.¹⁶

What Thomson describes is not exclusive to the Reformed Anglican circles in which he practices *Normal Theology*, and in and of itself the resistance to new approaches serves an important function. Theological systems have provided theologians with a framework for conducting *Normal Theology*, and operating within these structures theologians have discovered important truths. There is a need, then, to protect these systems from heretical ideas which might undermine or even destroy them.

Unfortunately, the desire to protect the integrity of the system carries the risk of closing the door to fresh perspectives that might lead to a more complete understanding of the truth of God’s Word. More seriously, a slavish devotion to a system can cause the interpreter to miss the point of the scripture entirely. This can happen when any given interpretive community begins to embrace the idea that their system must surely be correct in all that it affirms. When this

¹⁵ Kuhn. Ibid.

¹⁶ Mark Thomson, “Knox/Robinson for Toda,” The Briefing, <http://matthiasmedia.com/briefing/2011/12/knoxrobinson-for-today-extended/> (accessed May/19/2016).

happens, any text of scripture which would seem to call any part of the system into question will be forced to mean what it *must* mean given the assumed correctness of the system. The result is that any questionable text which would call any assumption of the interpretative community into question is pre-interpreted by the system before the theologian actually begins his or her theological work. Thus the system becomes self-confirming and circular, and conformity to the system in all it affirms becomes the test of orthodoxy. What is clearly needed is a more objective test.

The Insights of Karl Popper: Falsifiability

In recent times, the objectivity of the inductive method has been called into question as it has come to be recognized that both science and theology are human projects being carried forth by human beings who bring their cultural, philosophical, or theological biases with them when they enter the door of the laboratory or the seminary library. This skepticism has become even more intense with the emergence of postmodernism. The eminent philosopher of science, Karl Popper, was one of the first to question the value of the inductive method. In fact, he rejected it.

As a young man, Popper noted the contrast between the theories of Albert Einstein and the “allegedly scientific theories of [Sigmund] Freud and [Alfred] Adler that seemingly were immune from falsification, since no matter what objections were raised to the theories, there always seemed to be some way to accommodate the theory.”¹⁷

Philosopher, Robert Paul Wolff explains that

This apparent immunity to falsification had been considered the strength of these theories and in some circles it still is considering a strength of a theory or position. (How often have you heard someone say, in the context of a religious or political debate, “You can say anything you want to about my position by you cannot *prove me wrong!*”?) But Popper saw that this apparent ability to accommodate any and all challenges was not a strength of a scientific theory but a critical weakness, since a theory that is compatible

¹⁷ Wolff, 125.

with any and all possible situations cannot distinguish in its predictions between which possible situation will actually occur and which will not.¹⁸

The parenthetical connection Wolf makes between political and religious theories is important because the interpretation of Biblical texts, like the interpretation of scientific evidence, has often given birth to theological systems, and as noted above, these systems often become circular and able to accommodate any and all challenges. Popper saw this circularity as the mark of pseudo-science. It is probably too harsh to refer to the circularity that exists in many theological systems as a mark of pseudo-theology, but it is certainly annoying when it is encountered.

In Einstein, Popper found what he saw as a better model because the theory offered predictions, which could be verified, or more importantly, falsified. In other words, the interpretation of the evidence, the theory, could be proven wrong. Wolfe explains that “For Popper . . . falsifiability became the line of demarcation between genuine science and pseudo-science, between those theories with genuine predictive power and those that only pretend to predict.”¹⁹

Not all theological interpretations lend themselves to falsification, but some do because some Biblical interpretations, like scientific theories, make predictions which can be tested, verified, or falsified. Importantly for this study, many of these testable interpretations concern the spiritual condition of the un-evangelized, and these predictions lend themselves to falsification.

The Insights of Mortimer Adler: The Unity of Truth

The aim in exegesis is the discovery of truth. The rationale for testing one’s exegesis has

¹⁸ Wolf. 125.

¹⁹ Ibid.

to do with what Philosopher Mortimer Adler referred to as the Unity of Truth. Adler argued that “the unity of truth [requires] any religion that claimed truth – factual, not poetic truth – for its beliefs had to be consistent and compatible with whatever truths were known at the time, with certitude or probability, in history, science and philosophy.”²⁰ In other words, truth is self-consistent; two things that are true cannot be in conflict with each other. Truth has often been in conflict with what was erroneously believed to be true or with a popular theory, but it is never in conflict with those things which are actually true.

While not citing the principle of the Unity of Truth, a principle he had probably never heard of -- Karl Popper’s principle of falsifiability assumes it. It will be shown in this thesis that many popular theories concerning the fate of the un-evangelized are not consistent with the truth. As such, they can be falsified through the inductive method of interpretation and through comparison with other things we know to be true from extra-Biblical sources.

Summary of the Philosophical Methodology

When possible, this paper will examine its own interpretations and the interpretations of other by: 1. Identifying the interpretive paradigm in which the interpretation was produced, 2. Identifying the testable predictions and, 3. Testing these interpretations by comparing their predictions to scriptural, sociological, psychological, historical, and missiological data.

Section 2: Review and Critique of the Literature

The Apostolic Paradigm

The Evidence of an Apostolic Paradigm in Scripture²¹

²⁰ Mortimer Adler, *Philosophers Who Believe* Ed. Kelley James Clark (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 211.

²¹ Mark L. Carlton, “The Future of Global Theology will further the Splintering of the Body of Christ until copious localized Christianities render the term ‘Christianity’ Meaningless,” (Term Paper: Contextualization and Global Theology – THEO 675, February 6, 2014).

In the beginning, there was an apostolic paradigm. Specifically, the Apostles intentionally proclaimed an authoritative body of teaching, “the faith.”²² They unapologetically asserted that these doctrines were *the* truth.²³ Faithful men with the ability to teach were especially instructed in the Faith (II Timothy 2:2),” and exhorted to “retain” that which had been delivered to them (II Timothy 4:7), to “guard and keep” it (I Timothy 6:20; II Tim 4:7), and to “earnestly contend for it” (Jude 3). Finally, at the end of the apostolic era, John, the last of the Apostles, went so far as to declare the adherence to this Apostolic tradition the ultimate test of orthodoxy: “We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (I John 4:6).

This Apostolic teaching has been preserved in the New Testament. Proclaiming, teaching, retaining, guarding, keeping, contending for, and adhering to these Apostolic doctrines is the theological task which the Apostles assigned to the church. The Apostolic paradigm has an advantage over all of the systems which followed it in that the men who created it were divinely inspired. The defending of other paradigms has often resulted in the closing of the defender’s mind. The defending of the faith “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude), had it been faithfully done, would have preserved the truth which had been passed down from the one group of men who under the supervision of the Holy Spirit got it right. The ever increasing diversity of theological opinions throughout the history of the Church is testimony to the fact that the post-Apostolic church largely failed to carry out the theological task assigned to it by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles.

²² Acts 6:7; 13:8; 14:22; 16:5; I Corinthians 16:13; II Corinthians 13:5; Galatians 1:23; 6:10; Ephesians 4:13; Philippians 1:25, 27; Colossians 1:23; I Timothy 3:9, 13, 4:1, 6, 5:8, 6:10, 21; II Timothy 3:8, 4:7; Titus 1:3, 3:15; Jude 3.

²³ II Corinthians 11:10, 13:8; Galatians 2:5, 14, 5:7; Ephesians 1:3, :4:15, 21, 6:14; Colossians 1:5; II Thessalonians 2:10, 12, 13; I Timothy 2:4, 4:3; II Timothy 2:18, 25, 3:7, 8, 4:4; Titus 1:1, 4; Hebrews 10:26; James 2:14, 5:19; I Peter 1:22; II Peter 1:12, 2:2; I John 2:4, 21, 3:19, 4:6*; II John 1,2; III John 1, 3, 8, 12.

The Apostolic Response to Religious Pluralism

The Apostles lived in a religiously diverse world. The Roman Empire in which the Christian movement was incubated was a multicultural world and this was reflected in the religious diversity within the empire. The Apostles, then, were not strangers to either cultural or religious pluralism. Their response to religious Pluralism was well stated by Paul in his first letter to the church in Corinth: “[W]e preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Gentiles foolishness” (I Corinthians 1:23). In chapter nine Paul makes it clear that he did everything possible to contextualize himself as a missionary so that he would not offend, but the purpose for this was “for the sake of the gospel” (v. 23a), so that he might proclaim a message he refused to contextualize even though he knew it to be offensive to the cultural sensitivities of both the Jews and the Gentiles. In fact, he went so far as to anathematize anyone who would dare to preach any other gospel (Galatians 1:8-9).

The Apostles called upon their listeners to turn from and even repent of their involvement in pagan religions. For example, when the citizens of Lystra responded to a miracle by trying to worship Paul and Barnabas, he rebuked them: “Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you so that you should turn from these vain things to a living God” (Acts 14:14b-15a). In his message on Mars Hill, Paul noted and referenced all of the gods being worshiped on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22), he went on to explain that the desire to worship idols is something that ought not to be indulged (Acts 17:29). Then he informed his listeners that God had “overlooked the times of ignorance” (Acts 17:30a), but that he was “now declaring to *all* that *all people everywhere* should repent” (Acts 17:30b, emphasis added). In the first chapter of Romans, he denounced idolatry as a rejection of natural revelation and the Creator who has revealed himself through it. Most importantly, Paul went so far as to

renounce pagan religion as fundamentally demonic (I Corinthians 10:19-20). Peter, in the company of his Apostolic colleague, John, boldly declared that “there is salvation in no one else [other than Jesus], because there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The author of the book of Hebrews warned his readers against even turning back to a religious system revealed by God himself, Judaism (Hebrews 6:1-6), and at the end of the Apostolic age, the last of the Apostles was still warning believers against idolatry: “Little children, guard yourselves from idols” (I John 5:21).

The Second Generation (70 – 100 A.D.)

Almost no information concerning the second generation of the Christian movement has survived to modern times, but from the little information available it is possible to gain some of their perspectives on such matters as the nature of other faith traditions, those outside the faith, and the second generation’s understanding of its mission.

Other than a reference to Timothy in the book of Hebrews (Hebrews 13:23), and a non-canonical epistle by Clement (possibly the Clement mentioned in Philippians 4:3), there is no reliable record of what became of the lives and ministries of those who should have been the backbone of the post-apostolic church, the associates of the apostles referenced throughout the New Testament. However, there are some important things that can be learned about this period in church history from the handful of documents produced during this time. For example, significant portions of the New Testament were produced during this period, including the general epistles of Hebrews, The Gospel and letters of John, Jude, and the Book of Revelation.²⁴

²⁴ Bruce M. Metzger, *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content, 2nd Edition* (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Abingdon Press, 1983), 98, 249, 261, 265.

Johannine Corpus

One of the most important witnesses from this period is the Book of Revelation, particularly the seven letters to the seven churches in Asia. These letters present us with a snapshot of the church at the end of first century. If these churches are representative, then the future of the fledgling Christian movement looked bleak at the end of the first 70 years of its existence. Zeal was abating among those who were still faithful to the Apostolic tradition (Ephesus). Some churches were facing intense persecution (Smyrna). Heresy was rapidly entering the churches (Pergamum, Thyatira); some churches were spiritually dead (Sardis), and others were lethargic (Laodicea). There were two faithful churches. The church at Smyrna was standing firm in the midst of persecution, and from Christ's perspective, the weak church in Philadelphia was perhaps the best of the seven.

The epistles of John, written at the end of the century, deals with a problem touched on in the letters to the churches in Revelation, heresy.²⁵ The Apostolic tradition was under assault. Some were abandoning it to follow after the "antichrists," which were spreading these false teachings. These heretics had once been part of the orthodox community (I John 2:18-19), but they had gone "too far" and were not abiding "in the teachings of Christ" (II John 9).

In response, John exhorted the church not to "believe every spirit," but to "test the spirits...to see whether they [were] from God." It was in this context that John made abiding in Apostolic tradition the definitive test of faith (I John 1:1-3; 4:6). Simply stated, those who rejected the Apostolic tradition did "not have God" (II John 9). John instructed believers not even to allow these false teachers into their house churches (II John 10).

²⁵ Metzger, 261.

As young men John and Peter had stood before the leaders of Israel and boldly declared, “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). As he reached the end of his life, John put an exclamation point in this assertion when he recorded these previously unrecorded words of the Lord Jesus Christ: “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me” (John 14:6). From the beginning to the end, the Apostles’ message never changed; salvation was available to all, but it was only available through the Lord Jesus Christ.

John’s Gospel contained a commission: “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21). Unlike the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, or Jesus’ final charge to the Apostles at his ascension (Acts 1:8), John’s commission did not define the mission. However, as he reached the end of his journey John clearly defined the mission: “We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the Savior of the world” (I John 4:14).

Jude

From Jude we learn yet again that false doctrine was flooding into the church during the second generation of the Christian movement. Jude spoke of “the faith,” an authoritative body of truth which had been proclaimed by the Apostles and faithfully handed down to the next generation (c.f. Jude 3, 17). That body of truth, the Apostolic paradigm, was under assault and Jude issued a call to arms. It was time to stand up and defend the faith which had once for all been handed down to the saints” (Jude 3). Jude concluded his epistle with a short but powerful appeal for aggressive evangelism (Jude 22-23). Even as they combated heresy the faithful never lost sight of the mission. Jude understood that those apart from Christ were in mortal danger. The mission of the church was a rescue mission.

I Clement

Towards the end of the first century, Clement, the bishop of Rome, wrote a short epistle to the church in Corinth to address a schism in the church. Of course, this epistle was not divinely inspired, but it provides the researcher with a second-generation artifact, another snapshot of the state of the church at the end of the first century. Given the context of his epistle, the fate of the evangelized was the furthest things from Clement's mind. However, his letter touched on a subject central to this investigation, the salvation of Gentiles during Old Testament times:

Let us fix our eyes on the blood of Christ and understand how precious it is unto His Father, because being shed for our salvation it won for the whole world the grace of repentance. Let us review all the generations in turn, and learn how from generation to generation the Master hath given a place for repentance unto them that desire to turn to Him. Noah preached repentance, and they that obeyed were saved. Jonah preached destruction unto the men of Nineveh; but they, repenting of their sins, obtained pardon of God by their supplications and received salvation, albeit they were aliens from God. The ministers of the grace of God through the Holy Spirit spake concerning repentance. Yea and the Master of the universe Himself spake concerning repentance with an oath: for, as I live saith the Lord, I desire not the death of the sinner, so much as his repentance”
26

Speaking of the present age, Clement believed the blood of Christ, which was shed for “our” salvation, had also “won” the grace of repentance “for the whole world,” but he believed the grace of repentance had been made available before Christ through such means as are recorded in the Biblical accounts of Noah and Jonah.

With respect to the revival in Nineveh, Clement specifically states that their repentance had resulted in a divine pardon and salvation. Importantly, he adds the phrase, “albeit they were aliens from God.” In other words, they were saved, but they were not parties to the covenants God had made with Israel. It is obvious that the Ninevites did not become Jews as a result of

²⁶ J.B. Lightfoot, trans., “I Clement,” in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. J.R. Hunter (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Book House, 9th printing, 1976), 16.

Jonah's teaching, thus they were not parties to the Covenants God made with Israel. This raises an interesting question. Clearly, Gentiles were saved during Old Testament times. Sometimes, as in the case of Ruth, they became part of the Covenant people. Most generally, they did not. Were they then a people without a covenant, or were they parties to some other covenant? If so, what covenant was that?

A Critical Evaluation of the Second Generation

There is little to fault in the second generation's understanding of its mission. Their mission, as expressed in an epilogue to the Gospel of Mark which was possibly produced during this time makes it clear that they believed they had a responsibility to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15b). Clement noted that the "grace of repentance" had been given to certain Gentiles before the advent of Christ, but these believing Gentiles were not part of the House of Israel. Therefore, they were not parties to the Covenants God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. What then was their status? It might be argued their faith made them "Abraham's descendants, [and] heirs according to promise" (Galatians 3:29b), but what of those who believed before the time of Abraham? Was the Abrahamic Covenant retroactive?

The Fathers

By the middle of the second century Christian literature, both orthodox and heretical, began to be produced at an enormous rate. Of necessity, then, this review will be selective, focusing on certain authors and documents which are especially relevant to the issues being explored in the inquiry.

Ignatius (108 - 110 A.D.)

As Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch in Syria, made his journey to “fight with beasts at Rome,” he certainly had things on his mind other than the fate of the un-evangelized.²⁷ Not surprisingly, then, there was very little in the epistles he wrote upon his way to Rome that pertain directly to the subject of this thesis. However, he made a statement or two that will be relevant to this discussion.

In his Epistle of to the Magnesians, and again in his Epistle to the Philadelphians,²⁸ Ignatius makes it abundantly clear that he did not believe there was salvation within Judaism, and he exhorted his readers to beware of lapsing, or straying into Judaism: Ignatius had even less respect for deviant forms of Christianity than he did for Judaism, and he warned against these other Christianities in almost all of his epistles.²⁹ The significance of this emphasis was that Ignatius clearly sought to maintain a distinction between the true and the false, or, to use modern missiological nomenclature; he took a hardline stand against any movement toward synchronization.³⁰

In an era in which independent theologizing produced all sorts of “Christianities,” Ignatius saw himself as a defender of the tradition (paradigm) which had been passed down to the church by the apostles. He had no patience for other paradigms and he minced no words in condemning them. He did not entertain the notion that these deviant Christianities might contain a measure of salvific truth. Instead, he attributed them to Satan; he declared the ministers of these rivals Christianities “children of the evil one,” the spiritual path they pointed to as the way of death, and he had no problem with calling the worst offenders out by name.³¹ Like John before

²⁷ Ignatius, “Letter to the Ephesians, 1:7b; Letter to the Romans V:37” *EarlyChristianDocuments.com*....

²⁸ Letter to the Magnesians, Chapters VIII-X; Letter to the Philadelphians VI.

²⁹ The exception being his letter to the Church of Rome.

³⁰ Epistle to the Philadelphians III:14b-20a.

³¹ *Ibid.* XI:78b-84.

him, Ignatius insisted that, we, the successors of the Apostles, “are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us.” (I John 4:6a). Convinced of the purity of the Apostolic paradigm, Ignatius spent the last months of his life heeding the admonition of Jude by earnestly contending for “the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3).

II Clement (120-140 A.D.)³²

A short, early Christian homily has survived the test of time. It has been attributed to Clement of Rome, but was actually proclaimed by an unknown believer in the first half of the second century. It offered an example of the sorts of sermons, which were being preached in the orthodox assemblies of the time, and it preserved the perspective of a former pagan’s opinion of the emptiness of his former “church”:

We who were maimed in our understanding, and worshipped stocks and stones and gold and silver and bronze, the works of men; and our whole life was nothing else but death. While then we were thus wrapped in darkness and oppressed with this thick mist in our vision, we recovered our sight, putting off by His will the cloud wherein we were wrapped. For He had mercy on us, and in His compassion saved us, having beheld in us much error and perdition, even when we had no hope of salvation, save that which came from Him. For He called us, when we were not, and from not being He willed us to be. Rejoice, thou barren that barest not. Break out and cry, thou that travailest not; for more are the children of the desolate than of her that hath the husband. In that He said Rejoice, thou barren that barest not, He spake of us: for our Church was barren, before that children were given unto her (II Clement 1:6-2:1)³³

Clement’s analysis of the barrenness of his former church went directly to the question of whether there was salvific truth in other religious traditions. Clement’s answer was, no, there was nothing of profit in my old church. Rather than preparing his mind for Christ, Clement said that paganism maimed his understanding. Rather than serving as a path to life, paganism led

³² Geisler, 203.

³³ II Clement, <https://carm.org/second-epistle-of-clement-to-the-corinthians>

Clement only to death, darkness, oppression, and a blindness which was only removed by the mercy and compassion of God.

Marcianus Aristides (Late first century – 134-135 AD)

The second half of the second century of the Christian era witnessed the ministries of several remarkable apologists. A full analysis of the writings of the men would be impossible in a paper of this length, but several of the apologists touched on issues relevant to this discussion and their thoughts are worth consideration.

Marcianus Aristides, was the first to produce a written apology, and he began his apology with a brief acknowledgement of the role natural revelation had in his own conversion:

I, O King, by the grace of God came into this world; and when I had considered the heaven and the earth and the seas, and had surveyed the sun and the rest of creation, I marveled at the beauty of the world. And I perceived that the world and all that is therein are moved by the power of another; and I understood that he who moves them is God, who is hidden in them, and veiled by them. And it is manifest that that which causes motion is more powerful than that which is moved. But that I should make search concerning this same mover of all, as to what is his nature (for it seems to me, he is indeed unsearchable in his nature), and that I should argue as to the constancy of his government, so as to grasp it fully,--this is a vain effort for me; for it is not possible that a man should fully comprehend it.³⁴

Marcianus divided the human race into four groups based on their religions: the Barbarians, the Greeks, the Jews, and Christians. Then, in an echo of the first chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans, in which he demonstrated that both the Barbarians and the Greeks had suppressed the truth of God in unrighteousness and turned to idolatry.³⁵

Marcianus was kinder in his treatment of the Jews. He acknowledged that they believed, "God is one, the Creator of all, and omnipotent; and that it is not right that any other should be

³⁴ Marcianus Aristides, "The Apology of Aristides," *Early Christian Writings*, www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/aristides-kay.html: (accessed 6/8/2016).

³⁵ Marcianus, *Ibid.*

worshipped except this God alone. And herein they appear to approach the truth more than all the nations, especially in that they worship God and not His works.”³⁶ This being said, Marcianus believed the Jews had suppressed the truth revealed to them in another way, and he insisted, “Their mode of observance it is to the angels and not to God,” thus, “they do not observe perfectly.”³⁷ Marcianus finished his apology by showing how the Christian got right what the Jews got wrong.

Justin Martyr (100-165 AD)

Several ancient sources have said that Marcianus inspired the great apologetic writings of Justin Martyr.³⁸ There was certainly an echo of Marcianus in apologetic, particularly in his approach to other religious traditions. In fact, Justin’s condemnation of idolatry was even stronger than Marcianus’. In addition to denying the existence of any salvific revelation in Pagan religion, Justin took on the Greek poets and philosophers from Thales to Aristotle.³⁹ In the case of the latter, he argued that they had rejected more than general revelation; they rejected special revelation too, because they were aware of Moses and even borrowed from him. As a result Greek philosophy – at least *some* Greek philosophy -- was an empty well dug by men who rejected the truth though it was known by them.

Justin was sensitive to the fate of those who had died before the advent of Christ. Certain unnamed critics of the faith accused Christians of teaching that “all men born before [Christ] were irresponsible.” Justin answered the detractors by insisting that the Word, the Logos, had always been manifest and universally known to all men through reason, and since the Logos was

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Marcianus , Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Philip Schaff, trans, and ed., “Justin’s Hortatory Address to the Greeks, Chapter II,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Kindle edition, 2001).

Christ (John 1:1, 14), those who lived reasonably in former ages had accepted Christ and were Christians. Thus, some philosophers, such as Socrates and Heraclitus, were Christians even though they had never heard the gospel:

We have been taught that Christ is the first born of God, and we have declared above, that He is the Word whom every race of men were partakers; and those who live reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them...⁴⁰

Justin believed everyone had “the spermatic word” within him or her.⁴¹ Therefore, all were responsible for accepting the Christ, the Logos. Since the knowledge of the Logos was universal, no one could say they did not know him. Justin believed that in former times, some from all classes had accepted Christ, showing the reality of their faith through reasonable living. This allowed him to include a great many Gentiles in the “general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven” (Hebrews 12:26). Justin found scriptural support for his teaching in the Gospel of John, particularly John 1:9: “There was the true Light [the Logos], which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.” His doctrine was also informed by Stoicism.⁴²

Irenaeus (130 AD – 202 AD)

Like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, believed reason had been placed in the minds of all, and he believed it was salvific, “even before the coming of our Lord:”

[A]lthough "no one knows the Father, except the Son, nor the Son except the Father, and those to whom the Son will reveal Him," yet all [beings] do know this one fact at least, because reason, implanted in their minds, moves them, and reveals to them [the truth] that there is one God, the Lord of all. And on this account all things have been [by general consent] placed under the sway of Him who is styled the Most High, and the Almighty. By calling upon Him, even before the coming of our Lord, men were saved

⁴⁰ Schaff, “The First Apology of Justin, Chapter 46,” Location 5874.

⁴¹ Ibid. 6384.

⁴² Andreas J. Kostenberger, *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Academic, 1999), 51-56.

both from most wicked spirits, and from all kinds of demons, and from every sort of apostate power.⁴³

Irenaeus developed this theme further in the fourth volume of *Against the Heresies*:

And for this purpose did the Father reveal the Son, that through His instrumentality He might be manifested to all, and might receive those righteous ones who believe in Him into incorruption and everlasting enjoyment (now, to believe in Him is to do His will); but He shall righteously shut out into the darkness which they have chosen for themselves, those who do not believe, and who do consequently avoid His light. The Father therefore has revealed Himself to all, by making His Word visible to all; and, conversely, the Word has declared to all the Father and the Son, since He has become visible to all. And therefore the righteous judgment of God [shall fall] upon all who, like others, have seen, but have not, like others, believed.⁴⁴

Irenaeus believed that salvation was received through faith in Christ, who was the Logos, and since the Logos was known to all, those who do not “do his will,” were justly condemned and they had no one to blame but themselves for their damnation:

For it was fitting that the truth should receive testimony from all, and should become [a means of] judgment for the salvation indeed of those who believe, but for the condemnation of those who believe not; that all should be fairly judged, and that the faith in the Father and Son should be approved by all, that is, that it should be established by all [as the one means of salvation], receiving testimony from all, both from those belonging to it. . . . and by those having no connection with it, though they are its enemies.⁴⁵

In this paragraph, Irenaeus broached the subject of the fairness. He believed that all should be fairly judged, and he was concerned that the judgment of God be “approved by all.” Some modern theologians lightly brush aside concerns about fairness and how the judgment of God is perceived by outsiders, but Irenaeus and his fellow apologists took these concerns seriously. As far as Irenaeus was concerned, if God is not fair then he cannot be good, and it would be unfair for God to judge men for not believing in one they had never known. Thus, he

⁴³ Irenaeus of Lyons, “Against Heresies, Book 2, Chapter 6,” *Early Christian Writings*: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/irenaeus-book2.html> (accessed 6/9/2016).

⁴⁴ Irenaeus, “Against the Heresies, Book 4, Chapter 6,” *Early Christian Writings*: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/irenaeus-book4.html> (accessed 6/9/2016).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

insisted that the Logos had always been known to all through his handiwork. Salvation was a work of the Logos which had been going on throughout the course of time. The Logos had always been known and available to the un-evangelized, so there really was no such thing as an un-evangelized person.

Clement of Alexandria (150 AD – 215 AD)

Clement of Alexandria believed many Gentiles were prepared for salvation through their pursuit of wisdom (which corresponds to Justin and Irenaeus' concept of the Logos), in Old Testament times. Clement taught that wisdom was a gift of God to all peoples, and for the Greeks in particular; as the Law had been a schoolmaster to bring the Jewish people to Christ, so philosophy was a schoolmaster to bring the Greeks to Christ:

Before the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness: And now it becomes conducive to piety; being a kind of preparatory training to those who attain to faith through demonstration. . . . For God is the cause of all good things; but of some primarily, as of the Old and the New Testament; and of others by consequence, as philosophy. Perchance, too, philosophy was given to the Greeks directly and primarily, till the Lord should call the Greeks. For this was a schoolmaster to bring "the Hellenic mind," as the law, the Hebrews, "to Christ." Philosophy, therefore, was a preparation, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ."⁴⁶

In the Book Five of his *Stromata*, Clement provided his readers with an illustration of the way the Greeks were prepared by the lesser light of philosophy for coming of the Light of the World:

Hellenic philosophy is like the torch of wick which men kindle, artificially stealing the light from the sun. But on the proclamation of the Word all that holy light shone forth. Then in houses by night the stolen light is useful; but by day the fire blazes, and all the night is illumined by such a sun of intellectual light.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Clement of Alexandria, "The *Stromata*, Book 1, Chapter 5," *EarlyChristianWritings.com*: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/clement-stromata-book1.html> (accessed June 21, 2016).

⁴⁷ Clement of Alexandria, "The *Stromata*, Book 5, Chapter 5," *EarlyChristianWritings.com*: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/clement-stromata-book5.html> (accessed June 21, 2016).

Clement went on to insist that those who truly sought wisdom (the Logos), would ultimately repent of their sins, particularly the sin of idolatry: “But to those that were righteous according to philosophy, not only faith in the Lord, but also the abandonment of idolatry, were necessary. Straightway, on the revelation of the truth, they also repented of their previous conduct.”⁴⁸

However, Clement realized that many he would have included in the ranks of the righteous had not repented of their idolatry during their lifetimes. He found his answer to this dilemma in Ephesians 4:9-20, I Peter 3:19, and the church’s teaching that that Jesus “descended into hell.” Clement was convinced Jesus had descended into Hades on an evangelistic message: “The Lord preached the Gospel to those in Hades,” and he did not believe this was the final opportunity for the un-evangelized dead to hear and respond to the Gospel:

The apostles, following the Lord, preached the Gospel to those in Hades. For it was requisite, in my opinion, that as here, so also there, the best of the disciples should be imitators of the Master; so that He should bring to repentance those belonging to the Hebrews, and they the Gentiles; that is, those who had lived in righteousness according to the Law and Philosophy, who had ended life not perfectly, but sinfully. For it was suitable to the divine administration, that those possessed of greater worth in righteousness, and whose life had been pre-eminent, on repenting of their transgressions, though found in another place, yet being confessedly of the number of the people of God Almighty, should be saved, each one according to his individual knowledge.⁴⁹

A few paragraphs later, Clement explained his rationale:

For it is not right that these should be condemned without trial, and that those alone who lived after the advent should have the advantage of the divine righteousness. . . . If. . . . He preached the Gospel to those in the flesh that they might not be condemned unjustly, how is it conceivable that He did not for the same cause preach the Gospel to those who had departed this life before His advent? ".⁵⁰

Origen (184 AD – 253 AD)

⁴⁸ Clement of Alexandria, “The Stromata, Book 6, chapter 6,” *EarlyChristianWritings.com*: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/clement-stromata-book6.html> (accessed June 21, 2016).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology's short biography of this influential theologian and apologist says that Origen "believed Christians are free to speculate on everything but the cardinal doctrines spelled out in Scripture. Among his speculations was a belief in reincarnation and the ultimate restoration of everything, even the devil and his angels."⁵¹

Origen set forth these views in detail in Book One of his *De Prinipiis* (First Principles). He prefaced his remarks with a disclaimer, pointing out that his thoughts on these matters were not on the same level as such vital doctrines as the Trinity, and he insisted that this subject was to be "treated by us with great solicitude and caution, in the manner rather of an investigation and discussion, than in that of fixed and certain decision," but there was little in his subsequent discussion of "the end or consumption" that would lead anyone to think he was not sincerely advocating the position he presented:⁵²

The end of the world, then, and the final consummation, will take place when everyone shall be subjected to punishment for his sins; a time which God alone knows, when He will bestow on each one what he deserves. We think, indeed, that the goodness of God, through His Christ, may recall all His creatures to one end, even His enemies being conquered and subdued.⁵³

The foundation of Origen's argument was Psalm 110:1 and I Corinthians 15:25. Based on his interpretation of these texts, Origen argued that the end of all things will be like it was in the beginning. On that day, everything will be subdued under the Kingdom reign of Christ, and every knee "in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord to the Glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11). Then, Christ having ruled until

⁵¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker House Books, 1986), 120-121.

⁵² Origen, *De Principiis, Book , Chapter 6* Early Christian Writings, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/origen122.html> (accessed 6/13/2016)

⁵³ Ibid.

everything is once again in submission to him, will deliver up kingdom to the Father. And so history will have gone full circle, because,

“the end is always like the beginning: and, therefore, as there is one end to all things, so ought we to understand that there was one beginning; and as there is one end to many things, so there spring from one beginning many differences and varieties, which again, through the goodness of God, and by subjection to Christ, and through the unity of the Holy Spirit, are recalled to one end, which is like unto the beginning.”⁵⁴

Origen believed this would happen “when everyone shall be subjected to punishment for his sins; a time which God alone knows.”⁵⁵ According to Origen, hell was temporary and the just punishments of the sins of the wicked were a refining process to prepare them for the day when even they would submit to Christ:

Both in those temporal worlds which are seen, as well as in those eternal worlds which are invisible, all those beings are arranged, according to a regular plan, in the order and degree of their merits; so that some of them in the first, others in the second, some even in the last times, after having undergone heavier and severer punishments, endured for a lengthened period, and for many ages, so to speak, improved by this stern method of training, and restored at first by the instruction of the angels, and subsequently by the powers of a higher grade, and thus advancing through each stage to a better condition, reach even to that which is invisible and eternal, having travelled through, by a kind of training, every single office of the heavenly powers.⁵⁶

Zachary Hayes provided a concise summary of Origen’s universalism, including his view of reincarnation:

[Origen] argued that at the end of history, the unity of creation would be restored under the rule of God. To him this seemed to be the simple requirement of the goodness of God. In the end, all the enemies of Christ would be overcome, not by being annihilated but by being won over by divine love. This meant that those who had not made the grade during their first life would return until they had succeeded. Thus the purgative process postulated by Origen is oriented to a theology of universal salvation. In the end, Origen says, there is only “heaven.” Even what Christians have called “hell” is seen as a temporary situation that is superseded by a total restoration of all reality to its God-intended form.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Origen, *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Zachary J. Hayes “*The Purgatorial View*,” in *Four Views of Hell*, ed. Stanley W. Gundry (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan, 1996), 100.

A Critical Evaluation of the Fathers

It is ironic that those who set out to “earnestly contend for the faith” often damaged it in their efforts to defend it. The gospel has impacted every culture in which it has been proclaimed, but like one car that collided with another, every culture has impacted the gospel too. The voices considered here, and others that could have been considered, were defenders of the truth, but they were also men of their times, shaped by their cultures and the spirit of their ages.

The ablest defenders of the faith were men with extensive philosophical knowledge. They were facing challenges from unbelievers with similar backgrounds. As they set out to “exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9), they drew on their philosophical knowledge as well as the word of God. In doing this, they noticed many things in the philosophical systems they were familiar with which were compatible with scripture. They brought these things into their apologies. Unfortunately, they also brought things into their arguments that were questionable, and in some cases completely heretical, and in time many of these foreign ideas seeped into the official and unofficial teaching of the church. Most seriously, in their desire to make room in the kingdom for their favorite philosophers they began to suggest that there were two paths to God, the path of reason and the path of faith.

In spite of their failings, the Fathers’ did not get it all wrong. In fact, they emphasized and expounded many important truths. They were uncompromising in their insistence that salvation was now available to all men, but only through Jesus Christ. They were in agreement that there was no salvific revelation in other religious systems (though they did believe there was salvific value in true philosophy). All were in agreement that there were Gentiles saved during Old Testament times, though the path to salvation they pointed to, philosophy, is highly questionable to say the least. The Fathers’ were insightful in recognizing that fairness is an aspect of justice,

that if God is not fair, then God is not good; but they can be faulted for imputing their own standard of fairness to God (i.e. “If God does not see things the way I see it he cannot be fair,”).

The Fathers’ Logos theology is fascinating but ultimately flawed. The primary flaw is it baptizes Stoicism by making the living of reasonable life an alternative path to God. In fairness, they viewed Stoicism and other Greek ideas as lesser lights, but they believed they contained sufficient light to insure the ultimate salvation of those who submitted to the Logos (reason). In the final analysis, their Logos theology made justification a gift the virtuous receive for living a reasonably responsible life. In doing so they introduced the idea that good works are a precondition for receiving justifying grace.

Though the Fathers’ doctrine of the Logos was defective, the idea that Christ (the Logos) speaks through natural revelation is an idea worth considering. The Psalmist declared that “Day to day,” natural revelation “pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge... Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world” (Psalm 19:2-4a). Could the voice speaking through nature be the voice of Christ himself? If so, the Fathers were correct in believing that there is no such thing as an un-evangelized person, because everyone has heard the word of Christ.

Overall, the Fathers were interested in the fate of the un-evangelized, particularly those who lived in the ages before Christ, and particularly their most beloved philosophers. There was a widespread belief that the un-evangelized, particularly those who had lived lives of virtue, were given an opportunity to hear the gospel and accept Christ after their deaths. Origen went so far as to suggest that everyone will eventually be saved. While one can disagree with their conclusions, and sometimes be appalled by the exegesis, there was a time when virtually the entire church viewed the scripture from a different set of paradigms, paradigms often shaped by the *a priori*

philosophical assumptions of the creators and defenders of the paradigms. As a result they were much more open to the possibility that the un-evangelized could be saved through natural revelation, though their view of natural revelation included much more than is generally meant by the term. All of this changed quickly with the arrival of Augustine of Hippo.

Augustine of Hippo (354 AD – 430)

A Short Review of the Life and Certain Key Teachings of Augustine

In the history of Christianity there have been few thinkers more influential than Augustine of Hippo. According to James O’Donnell, the Provost at Georgetown University, Augustine’s “distinctive theological style shaped Latin Christianity in a way surpassed only by scripture itself.”⁵⁸

Bruce Demarest concurred:

In his view of the sacraments and church authority, Augustine may be regarded as the founder of Roman Catholicism, but in his evangelical doctrines of man, sin and grace, he was the forerunner of the Protestant Reformation... The genius of his thought can be seen in the fact that both the Pope and Reformation Christians acknowledge him among their theologians⁵⁹

Augustine was a trained rhetorician with a deep interest in philosophy, particularly “certain books of the Platonists,” which were instrumental in his conversion.⁶⁰

His appreciation of Plato also played a significant role in the development of his theology. In the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Dr. Michael Mendelson, noted that,

One of the decisive developments in the western philosophical tradition was the eventually widespread merging of the Greek philosophical tradition and the Judeo-

⁵⁸ James O’Donnell, “St. Augustine,” in *The Encyclopedia Britannica, Online*, <http://www.britannica.com/contributor/James-ODonnell/4506> (accessed June 15, 2016).

⁵⁹ Bruce A. Demarest, *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan, 1982), 26.

⁶⁰ Augustine, “The Confessions of Saint Augustine,” trans. Philip Schaff, in *The Complete Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene Church Fathers, Kindle Edition*, (Catholic Way Publishing, location186393).

Christian religious and scriptural traditions. Augustine is one of the main figures through whom this merging was accomplished.⁶¹

However, as he matured he began a slow drift away from his philosophic moorings.

Mendelson explained that as a young Christian Augustine had been struck with “the compatibility of the two traditions,” but by the time he wrote his *Confessions* he had come to see “significant points of divergence.” This drift continued, and by the time Augustine wrote *The City of God* (416 A.D.), these “points of divergence [had] become more important to him.”⁶²

Mendelson attributed this gradual movement to two things:

The first is his increasing familiarity with scripture and the resulting modification of his earlier, Neoplatonizing views in light of what he finds in those texts... The second set of events center on his involvement in the Pelagian controversy. . . . Under the pressures of this controversy and in conjunction with his interpretation of scriptural and especially Pauline views on original sin and grace, the intellectualistic optimism of his earlier work was gradually transformed into an exceedingly grim view of the human moral landscape.⁶³

When Mendelson spoke of “an exceedingly grim view of the human moral landscape,” he was referring to Augustine’s “evangelical doctrines of man, sin, and grace.”⁶⁴

By. . . . 426 C.E., in the midst of the Pelagian controversy, we find a vastly different picture. . . . gone is the earlier optimism. The post-Adamic will is no longer in a position to initiate any choice of lives; the fact that we have any choice at all is entirely a product of unmerited grace a grace that will be given to only a small number whom God has predestined to be saved out of the vast number who are eternally lost.⁶⁵

Augustine’s grim pessimistic view of the human landscape changed the discussion of the fate of the un-evangelized. Earlier writers – including the young Augustine-- had widened the

⁶¹ Michael Mendelson, “Saint Augustine”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/augustine/> (accessed June 15, 2016).

⁶² Mendelson, *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Demerest, *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Mendelson, *Ibid.*

road that leads to life, but the mature Augustine narrowed it again.⁶⁶ In his book, *No Other Name*, John Sanders described Augustine's general rejection of the views of those who had written before him:

Augustine was well aware that several prominent Christian writers before him, such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen, had espoused wider-hope views, but he pointedly rejected them. . . . he believed that general revelation brings knowledge of God's nature and ethical demands to all humanity, but he maintained that this knowledge is not sufficient for salvation because sin clouds the natural mind and perverts the truth. To be saved, a human being must have explicit knowledge of the Messiah⁶⁷

Augustine did not use the term, natural revelation, but he believed in it. As Sanders noted, he believed certain truths were discernable to all, but he believed the Platonists had been particularly prescient: "It is evident that none came nearer to us than the Platonists," he wrote, "their gold and silver [were] dug out of mines of God's providence which are everywhere scattered abroad."⁶⁸ Nevertheless, even the Platonists had no knowledge of God's saving purposes. As Demarest explained, "they acknowledged the validity of John 1:1, but they were ignorant of the truth of John 1:14."⁶⁹

Augustine's exclusivism was not unique. In spite of the openness of apologists such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen, Christians were known and sometimes reviled for their exclusiveness. One of those who reviled them was the Neo-Platonist, Porphyry:

If Christ...Himself to be the Way of salvation, Grace and the Truth, and affirms that in Him alone, and only to souls believing in Him, is the way of return to God...what has become of men who lived in the many centuries before Christ came?... What, then, has become of such an innumerable multitude of souls. . . . who were in no wise blameworthy, seeing that He in whom alone saving faith can be exercised had not yet favoured [sic] men with His advent?... Why. . . . did He who is called the Saviour [sic]

⁶⁶ Mandelson: "In the long and difficult controversy with the Pelagians, Augustine found his own earlier writings on the will cited by his opponents as evidence that he himself once advocated the view he came so vehemently to oppose [see *Retractationes* I.9.3–6]."

⁶⁷ John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992) 51.

⁶⁸ Demarest, 26.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

withhold Himself for so many centuries of the world? What, then, became of the souls of men. . . [who] were destitute of the grace of Christ, because He had not then come?⁷⁰

Augustine recognized the seriousness of this argument and he was not afraid to address it (Letter to Deogratias, 409 A.D.). First, he insisted there were many saved by faith in Christ in the ages prior to his advent of Christ: “Therefore from the beginning of the human race, whosoever *believed in Him*, and in any way knew Him, and lived in a pious and just manner according to His precepts, was undoubtedly saved by Him, in whatever time and place he may have lived”⁷¹ (emphasis added).

Anticipating that someone might question how those who had never heard of Christ could believe in him, Augustine encouraged the reader to,

... ascribe wisdom to God, and for our part exercise submission to His will. Wherefore the true religion, although formerly set forth and practiced [sic] under other names and with other than it now has, and formerly more obscurely revealed and known to fewer persons than now in the time of clearer light and wider diffusion, is one and the same in both periods.⁷²

Augustine’s response seemed to be that Christ made himself known to some in former times, but to fewer souls than have come to know him since the incarnation. To explain how this happened Augustine fell back on the mystery of the wisdom of God and the need of the believer to submit to His will in these matters.

Augustine was also consistent in his insistence that faith in Jesus Christ, the eternal Word, had always been essential to salvation. If, then, souls were saved in the time before Christ, which he acknowledged, then Christ must surely have been revealed to them through some special revelation. He provided some specificity in his letter to Evodius:

⁷⁰Augustine, “Letters of Augustine, Letter 102, v. 8,” NewAdvent.org, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102102.htm> (accessed June 20, 2016).

⁷¹ Augustine, Letters, Ibid., (accessed June 18, 2016).

⁷² Ibid.

[Although] he had not yet come in the flesh, as He came when afterwards He showed Himself upon earth...nevertheless he certainly came often to this earth, from the beginning of the human race, whether to rebuke the wicked...to comfort the good, or to admonish both, so that some should to their salvation believe, others should to their condemnation refuse to believe...speaking by suitable manifestations of Himself to such persons and in such manner as seemed good to Him.⁷³

The answer to one question often gave birth to another. Augustine said that the light was not defused as widely as in former times. A Porphyry might be expected to ask, “If Jesus is the Savior of the world, then why did God not defuse the light more widely?” To address this concern Augustine turned to the foreknowledge of God. “Christ knew the world was so full of unbelievers in former ages,” he declared, so “He righteously refused to manifest Himself or to be preached to those of whom He foreknew that they would not believe either His word or his miracles.”⁷⁴

It has been noted that this argument sounds very much like the Molinist doctrine of Middle Knowledge.⁷⁵ Reformed theologians, R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, are among those who have acknowledged strength of this argument:

The doctrine of middle knowledge may be applied to explain how God might justly withhold salvation from all those who do not believe in Jesus Christ, whether or not they have heard the gospel. For God might have arranged for all those who would believe if they had the opportunity to hear the gospel to actually hear. If that is the case, then anyone who dies without hearing the good news is a person who would not have believed had he heard.⁷⁶

More importantly from Augustine’s perspective, this argument completely turned the tables on Porphyry. Since the rejection of light results in condemnation (the greater the light

⁷³ Augustine, “The Letters of Augustine, Letter 164, 6:17,” NewAdvent.org, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102164.htm> (accessed June 18, 2016).

⁷⁴ Sanders, 53.

⁷⁵ Kenneth Keithley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: B & H Publishing Group, 2010, Kindle Edition) Location 349, 367, 388.

⁷⁶ R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, “Response to Allister McGrath,” in *Four Views of Salvation in a Pluralistic World*. Stanley N. Gundry W. Gary Phillips, ed., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, Kindle Edition, 1995), Location 2923.

rejected, the greater the condemnation, Luke 12:48), then God's withholding of salvific revelation from those he foreknew will reject it is a demonstration of His mercy, and therefore his goodness.

Once again, the answer to one question births another. Why do some believe while the majority, both before and after the advent refuse to believe? It was not a question Porphyry asked, but it is one that Augustine would be asked to give in response to the teachings of Pelagius. Pelagius was appalled by Augustine's teaching. He was particularly offended by Augustine's prayer, "Give what thou commandest and command what you want."⁷⁷

Instead of regarding the commandments of our illustrious King as a privilege. . . . we cry out at God, in the slothfulness of our hearts, and say, "Tis too hard and difficult. We cannot do it. We are only human, and hindered by the weakness of the flesh." Blind folly and presumptuous blasphemy!⁷⁸

A serious charge indeed. Most considered Augustine's prayer the petition of a humble man well acquainted with his weakness, because of this it is hard for many to understand Pelagius' vitriol. Michael Mendelson has provided a useful explanation:

[At] the heart of the Pelagian position seems to be an emphatic insistence upon the principle that "ought implies can," i.e. that it is unacceptable to require individuals to perform actions that they cannot in fact perform.⁷⁹

Pelagius, stated the same thing in far more colorful language:

[If Augustine's teaching is accepted] we ascribe to the Just One unrighteousness and cruelty to the Holy One; the first, by complaining that he has commanded the impossible, the second, by imagining that a man will be condemned by him for what he could not help; so that (the blasphemy of it!) God is thought of as seeking our punishment rather than our salvation. . . . He has not willed to command anything impossible, for he is righteous; and he will not condemn a man for what he would not help, for he is holy.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Early Church* (New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press, 2nd edition, 1971), 53.

⁷⁸ Bettenson, quoting Pelagius, *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Mendelson, *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Bettenson, *Ibid.*

Augustine's theology ultimately prevailed, but the issues Pelagius raised linger. Will God indeed condemn a man for not doing what a man could not do? God could enable such a man to do what he required, and for some he has done so, so why does he not provide this grace to all if he truly loves them? These questions go to the very heart debate over the fate of the un-evangelized. Augustine responded to these questions by amplifying his previous answers. He stood firm in his insistence that the, "post-Adamic will is no longer in a position to initiate any choice of lives; the fact that we have any choice at all is entirely a product of unmerited grace, a grace that will be given to only a small number whom God has predestined to be saved out of the vast number who are eternally lost."⁸¹

How then could men and women be held eternally accountable for not doing what they could not do? For Augustine the answer was found in natural revelation. He never wavered in his conviction that natural revelation was insufficient to bring a person to saving faith, but he was emphatic in insisting it was sufficient to make him accountable to God, and that the lost's could not have received it. Demarest explained:

From the springs of data displayed in nature, providence and history, common grace enables people to intuit cognitively eternal truths concerning God's existence, character and moral demands. . . . Sinful man, however, rebels against the knowledge of God mediated by general revelation. Rather than loving the elemental truth about God and cleaving to it, natural man volitionally opposes it. Consequently, general revelation fails to lead to the knowledge of God that saves.⁸²

A Critical Evaluation of Augustine

It is almost impossible for anyone outside the Augustinian paradigm to understand that his theology adequately addressed the fairness objection. Conversely, it is virtually impossible for any within the Paradigm to understand why his answer was not completely satisfactory.

⁸¹ Mendelson, *Ibid.*

⁸² Demarest, *Ibid.*

However, those who reject his theology deal with the fact that it flows from Augustine's theology flows from a formidable understanding of the teaching scriptures, particularly Paul's epistles.

The cornerstone of the Augustinian Paradigm was his interpretation of Romans 1:18-25. Augustine's understanding of the inefficiency of natural revelation rested on Paul's clear statement that natural revelation had gone out into all the world, thus all were without excuse and faced the wrath of God which was being poured out on all unrighteousness of the men who suppressed the truth in unrighteousness. This interpretation fit well into Paul's argument that there was a universal need for the gospel because "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Any argument that posits the notion that the Holy Spirit can and has used natural revelation to bring the lost to saving faith is going to have to address this strong scriptural argument.

There are portions of Augustine's argument that lend themselves to objective analysis in ways previous paradigms did not. For example, Clement of Alexandria's idea of post-mortem evangelism is clearly beyond any objective test. On the other hand, Augustine, and the Reformers who followed him, presented interpretations of scripture that lends themselves to objective validation or refutation.

One of these is Augustine's assertion that every man and woman without exception suppresses the truth in unrighteousness. This hypothesis is like a scientific theory in that it makes a testable prediction. If Augustine was correct then it follows that no person or group will ever be found responding to natural revelation in an affirmative manner, worshiping their creator rather than the creation. On the contrary, the data should show that men and women always suppress the truth of natural revelation in favor of some sort of idolatry inspired by their worship of

nature. More than this, a researcher would always find the sorts of immorality Paul describes running rabid among the un-evangelized.

This is not what we find. In fact, not all of Rome fit Paul's description. There were Pagans who were as appalled by the things Paul condemned in the first chapter of Romans as he was. Pagan moralists wrote against idolatry and the moral decadency they saw all around them, and just as righteous Lot was oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men of Sodom, so were many pagans. In response, many lived lives of remarkable virtue, so much so that early apologists could not help but commend them for it. In fact, that was one of the reasons they felt pressured to suggest that perhaps there was some salvific merit in systems such as Stoicism. There were also God-fearers such as Cornelius who had rejected their native religions to seek the God of Israel. Importantly, he placed his faith in the God of Israel before Peter arrived with the gospel. It will be argued on the basis of Romans 2:14-27, that Paul was aware of these "righteous Gentiles," and it will be argued that Paul did not mean Romans 1:18-25 to receive the universal application Augustine gave it. Instead, he described the way *some* responded to the light given to them.

The missionary literature also calls the Augustinian interpretation of Romans 1:18-25 into question because all of the predictions which can be reasonably drawn from Augustine's construct have been shown to be false. As missionaries took the gospel to other lands they encountered peoples who had rejected animism and idolatry, and who were worshiping their creator rather than the creation.

In his book, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, Missiologist Don Richardson documented some of these peoples. He began his book with a dramatic recreation of a revival in Athens in the 6th

century B.C. The Cretan philosopher, Epimenides, led the revival.⁸³ As a result of a remarkable series of events the entire city repented, turned away from the worship of idols, and began to worship “the unknown God” who revealed himself to them.

The story of Epimenides’ Athenian revival resembles the revival in Nineveh in the days of Jonah, minus the presence of a waterlogged Hebrew prophet. In the Epimenian Revival we see what could be called a semi-special revelation of God in which the people of Athens became aware of the existence of a God unknown to them who was greater than the gods they knew of. Athens would not receive a full revelation as to the identity of this God until Paul arrived with the gospel in the first century A.D. (Acts 17:16-34), but what of those who put their faith in the unknown God in the days of Epimenides? They certainly did not suppress the truth in unrighteousness as described in Romans 1:18-25. Instead they responded to the light they had and turned away from their idols, and for a generation a new God was honored in Athens.

In his letter to Titus, Paul showed his familiarity with Epimenides by quoting from his writings. Interestingly, he referred to him as a prophet (Titus 1:12-13). Noting this, Richardson opined that the Greek word Paul used was,

the same word Paul commonly used for both Old and New Testament for both Old and New Testament prophets. Surely Paul would not have honored Epimenides with the title of prophet apart from knowledge of Epimenides character and deeds! A man whom Paul could quote as rebuking others for certain evil traits was, by implication, judged by Paul as not noticeably guilty of those traits himself.⁸⁴

Richardson also saw an “oblique reference to Epimenides” in Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill when he spoke of pagans who “had ‘reached out and found’ a God who though unknown by name, was in reality not far away.”⁸⁵ Richardson has also document several examples of other

⁸³ Don Richardson, *Eternity in their Hearts* (Ventura, California, USA: Regal, 1981), 9-16.

⁸⁴ Richardson, 22.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

peoples in more modern times who were not suppressing the truth in unrighteousness when missionaries encountered them. His chapter, *Peoples of the Lost Book*, is particularly relevant to this discussion. In it, he recounted stories of entire people groups who refused to join others around them in suppressing the truth as described in Romans 1. Instead they worshiped their creator and waited patiently for the fulfillment of tribal prophecies concerning the arrival of men with a book which would lead them to a full knowledge of the God they worshiped.

What would Augustine say of these peoples if he had known of them? What do those who continue to hold to the basics of the Augustinian paradigm say of them, and what of those who died before the missionaries came? The presence of such peoples ought to cause those committed to the Augustinian paradigm to at least consider the possibility that he, and they, have erred in their understanding of Romans 1:18-25.

Medieval Voices -- Summary and Critical Analysis

Anselm (1033 AD – 1109 AD)

Anselm, the medieval Archbishop of Canterbury, believed “nothing should be urged upon the authority of scripture alone, but that whatever the conclusion of independent investigation should declare to be true, should...with common proofs and with simple argument be briefly enforced by the cogency of reason.”⁸⁶ Believing this, Anselm built his theology on an assumption apologists have always supposed, that the Christian faith is reasonable, and that a reasonable presentation of the faith will be persuasive to a reasonable man or woman. As attractive as this idea seems at first glance, it is a point of view that ultimately led the Church of Rome to conclude that there are two ways of knowing God, reason and revelation.

⁸⁶ Demarest, quoting Anselm, 33.

Unquestionably, human beings have the ability to reason. It is reason which makes everything from a baby's ability to acquire a language to a physicist's ability to explore the mysteries of particle physics possible. Western philosophy began when the Greeks began to believe they could use their reason to figure everything out. Reason led the wisest among them away from the gods and the best among them to the place remarkably close to truth. Many of the early apologists believed that they had camped close enough to the truth to gain salvation through reason, or at least to earn a post-mortem opportunity to receive it.

For a season, Augustine's theology brought the church back to the foundational truth that salvation is by grace, and received through faith alone. As Demarest explained,

Augustine. . . . held that. . . . the enablement of common grace all men effably intuit eternal changeless principles, including the existence and character of God. Moreover, the indicia of both the created order and the historical continuum constitute occasions by which further truth about God are mediated to the human mind. The religious a priori and general revelation together insure that preliminary wisdom. . . . defined as knowledge of God's existence, character and moral demands become an actual possession of man made in the image of God and enabled by common Grace. . . . but Augustine is adamant in his insistence that this partial and preliminary wisdom falls short of the knowledge of God and his purposes necessary for Salvation.⁸⁷

Augustine's theology on this point was firmly rooted in scripture, particularly Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 1:20-21: "Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."

It is significant that both Paul and Augustine were insistent on the point that, "the world did not come to know God through reason, that true knowledge of God comes only through Jesus Christ, and that this knowledge is gained only through faith. Anselm's work reflects the

⁸⁷ Demarest, 30.

beginning of a movement away from Augustine's "evangelical doctrines of man, sin and grace," which would ultimately result in the church's rejection of both sola gratia, sola fide and the realignment the Roman Catholic Church with the former apologists.⁸⁸

Anselm agreed with Augustine that "unaided human reason" was unable to attain to saving wisdom.⁸⁹ As Demarest explained, this was because there were two obstacles reason could not overcome, "Human finitude...and human sinfulness." Thus, unaided "by special revelation, natural man fails to comprehend the demands of God's justice and righteousness."⁹⁰

Anselm, then, affirmed the necessity of special revelation and "the primacy of faith for the saving knowledge of God,"⁹¹ but he was also convinced that "reasons must be adduced in support of the Christian faith." He believed that a reasonable presentation of Christianity would strengthen the faith of believers and persuade open-minded unbelievers. In Anselm's estimation, the latter was possible because he believed that even "though the Fall has crippled human nature, still 'the corrupting influence of sin is not such that it can prevent the natural man's reason from assenting to the 'necessities' of the Christian faith once these have been presented to him.'"⁹²

Convinced of the reasonableness of the Christian faith, Anselm then set out to demonstrate its reasonableness. Much of his apologetic (including even an argument for the Trinity) flowed from his idea -- an observation really -- of the universality of the concept of God in the human consciousness. Though he wrote many years before Kant, he would have accepted

⁸⁸ Demarest, Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 31.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Demarest, Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

the Kantian notion that universality and necessity were evidence of intuitive knowledge.⁹³ Given the ubiquitous nature of this God concept, Anselm argued that God must exist.

This argument, the Ontological Argument, though much maligned, is a powerful argument when it is understood and properly communicated. And many of Anselm's arguments have powerful apologetic value, and apologetics do have value, but they also have limitations. Apologetics can encourage the faith of those who already believe, particularly in an age in which the faith of most has been severely damaged by centuries of rationalism and now by post-modernism. Apologetics can demonstrate to a skeptic that Christians are not necessarily unreasonable in believing (some, of course, are unreasonable); and they may even provide an opening for the sharing of the gospel, but they are limited in that they are ultimately unable to bring an unbeliever to a true knowledge of God. G.C. Berkouwer (referencing Max Scheler) explained why this is so: "[The] proofs are sufficient and clear in themselves, but the sinful will of man, who does not want to acknowledge God, is also unwilling to accept the clear testimony of scripture."⁹⁴

Thomas Aquinas (1225 AD – 1274 AD)

The Roman Catholic Church still honors Augustine as one of the Doctors of the Church, and his writing on the sacraments and authority of the church laid the foundation for Roman Catholicism, but his theology has largely been supplanted by the man the Roman church saw as a greater light, the Angelic Doctor, Thomas Aquinas.

⁹³ Derk Pereboom, "Kant's Transcendental Arguments", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/kant-transcendental/>>. (accessed 6/22/2016).

⁹⁴ G.C. Berkouwer, *General Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955) 76.

Anselm may have started down the road to the idea that God can be known through both revelation and reason, but Aquinas completed the journey. Both Augustine and Anselm were heavily influenced by Neo-Platonic ideas. Aquinas was an Aristotelian and his theology was a blending of Christian Theology and Aristotelian philosophy, as the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy noted, “The [Roman] Catholic Church has over the centuries regularly and consistently reaffirmed the central importance of Thomas's work, both theological and philosophical, for understanding its teachings concerning the Christian revelation”⁹⁵

To appreciate Thomas’ understanding of natural revelation, which informs his natural theology, it is important to discuss epistemology, specifically, what can be known and how can it be known? If one begins with the assumption that the world is not an illusion and that the senses provide men and women with accurate information, then true knowledge is accessible to all who have sensibility and reason; but the scriptures insist that there are some things that can only be known through revelation. Augustine, following Paul, placed the knowledge of God in this latter category, since “the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God” (I Corinthians 1:21b). Aquinas agreed with this two-fold way of knowing, but he departed from Augustine (and Paul) in suggesting “that there are in fact elements of what God has revealed that are formally speaking philosophical and subject to philosophical discussion -- though revealed they can be known and investigated without the precondition of faith.”⁹⁶ In other words, Aquinas believed God can be most truly known through revelation, but also in some measure through reason (i.e. philosophy).

At first glance it may seem that Augustine and Aquinas were saying the same thing since both believed these things were apparent to all through natural revelation, but the apparent

⁹⁵ McInerny, Ralph and O’Callaghan, John, "Saint Thomas Aquinas", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/aquinas/>

⁹⁶ McInerny, Ibid.

similarity was just that. In fact, the two were at serious variance with each other. In order to understand the difference, it is important to notice an often overlooked phrase in Romans 1:19: “that which is known about God is evident within them; *for God made it evident to them*” (emphasis added). Natural revelation then is just that, a revelation, knowledge of God which the fallen human race would not know were it not for the fact that God graciously chosen to make it known. This was Augustine’s position. In contrast, Aquinas did not believe the fall had destroyed the ability of human reason to arrive at truth. On the basis of this assumption he developed a natural theology which made the truth of God in nature self-obvious to any thinking man or woman. Thus, by following the simple laws of cause and effect, human beings unaided by God could use their own reason to come to a true but incomplete knowledge of God. This doctrine set the Roman church on a path that led it to its present inclusivist theology.

The world was shocked when Pope Francis said,

"The Lord created us in His image and likeness, and we are the image of the Lord, and He does good and all of us have this commandment at heart, do good and do not do evil. All of us. 'But, Father, this is not Catholic! He cannot do good.' Yes, he can. . . . "The Lord has redeemed all of us, all of us, with the Blood of Christ, all of us, not just Catholics. Everyone! 'Father, the atheists?' Even the atheists. Everyone!" We must meet one another doing good. 'But I don't believe, Father, I am an atheist!' But do good: we will meet one another there."⁹⁷

This statement dumbfounded many, including many Roman Catholics, and it sent the church into damage control. A Vatican spokesman and Catholic website quickly pointed out the “The Holy Father was not teaching anything new. In fact, this hope that all who do not yet know God is not only capable of doing good - but will progress toward that knowledge of God by

⁹⁷ “Pope Francis says Atheists can do good and go to Heaven Too,” *Catholic Online*: www.catholic.org/news/faith/story.php?id=3d51077/RK=0/RS=UVIZe7MSg_Y6IbDGS0PIIz3Rwv0- (accessed June 23, 2016).

doing good - is ancient.” It can be argued that the medieval period was not exactly ancient, but it cannot be argued that the Pope was out of the mainstream of Roman Catholic teaching.

Aquinas was a prolific author until December 6, 1273, when he “experienced a heavenly vision. Urged to take up his pen again, he replied, “Such things have been revealed to me that all that I have written seems to me as so much straw. Now I await the end of my life.””⁹⁸ He never wrote again. With respect to Aquinas’ natural theology, one can only wish the vision had come sooner.

Peter Abelard (1079 AD – 1142 AD)

Among the medieval voices which spoke to the fate of the un-evangelized, the voice of the French theologian, Peter Abelard, should not be overlooked. Abelard studied for a season under Anselm, but he quickly came to despise his teaching, which he found “vacuous,” and separated himself from him.⁹⁹ This was a pattern of Abelard’s life, as he seemed to have trouble getting along with practically everyone, save his students (and the love of his life, Heloise). His first book, *Heologia*, “was formally condemned as heretical and burned by a council held at Soissons in 1121. Abelard’s dialectical analysis of the mystery of God and the Trinity was held to be erroneous, and he himself was placed for a while in the abbey of Saint-Médard under house arrest.”¹⁰⁰

At the end of his life he settled in “the Mont-Sainte-Genève outside Paris to teach, and he wrote in a blaze of energy and of celebrity. He produced further drafts of his *Theologia* in which he analyzed the sources of belief in the Trinity and praised the pagan philosophers of

⁹⁸ Dan Graves, “Thomas Aquinas had a Vision,” Christianity.com: <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1201-1500/thomas-aquinas-had-a-vision-11629843.html> (accessed June 22, 2016).

⁹⁹ *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Peter Abelard, French Theologian and Poet,” <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Peter-Abelard> (accessed June 23, 2016).

¹⁰⁰ Britannica, *Ibid.*

classical antiquity for their virtues and for their discovery by the use of reason of many fundamental aspects of Christian revelation.”¹⁰¹ John Sanders referred to this period of Abelard’s career and noted that he “believed the Trinity was revealed not only in the Old Testament, but also to pagan poets and philosophers – though indeed not in precise Christian terms... This was necessary since medieval theologians held that belief in the Trinity is necessary for salvation.”¹⁰²

Abelard was not completely orthodox in both his factious personality and writings, so it is not inaccurate to classify much of his teaching as heretical. The church certainly thought so: “At a council held at Sens in 1140, Abelard underwent a resounding condemnation, which was soon confirmed by Pope Innocent II.”¹⁰³ Rebuked and condemned, Abelard “withdrew to the great monastery of Cluny in Burgundy. There, under the skillful mediation of the abbot, Peter the Venerable, he made peace with [his most influential critic] Bernard of Clairvaux and retired from teaching.”¹⁰⁴

Like many pre-Augustinian apologists Abelard noted that many Gentiles in the ages before Christ had come very close to the truth, and it was an undeniable fact that many had turned from idolatry and lived lives of conspicuous virtue. “Shall we dismiss these men to the realms of infidelity and damnation?”¹⁰⁵ he asked. Abelard did not think this could be justly done:

Notable as they were in faith and life we cannot doubt that they obtained indulgence of God, or that their conduct and worship of the One God which they both held and made known by writing acquired for them of the divine favour [sic] in the present existence and in the word to come, along with the things necessary for their salvation.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Sanders, quoting Abelard, 269.

¹⁰³ *Britannica*, Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Sanders, 269.

¹⁰⁵ Sanders, Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Thus Abelard held out this hope for the un-evangelized in his day as well.

John Sander, an inclusivist, noted that few would agree with Abelard's assertion that the poets and philosophers he admired had come to understand the trinity. Nevertheless, Abelard's larger point was within the mainstream of pre-Augustinian thought, and it was a point worth pondering. For sure it was hard to refute Abelard's observation that a vast number of un-evangelized do not fit the profile of the pagans described in the first chapter of Romans. Romans 3:11b, says "there are none who seek for God;" yet Abelard noted the obvious, many do search for God. How can this phenomenon be accounted for?

Whether one considers the Poets and Philosophers who left their gods behind in search of the true God, the God-fearers of the first century such as Cornelius, or the "peoples of the book" Don Richardson documents in *Eternity in Their Hearts*, there are just too many people who do not fit the Romans 1:18-25 profile to conclude that the first chapter of Romans has been properly interpreted. In fact, many have sought God. How is this possible unless the Father is somehow drawing them (John 6:44)? By what means? And have those means sometimes resulted in the actual salvation of those who have never explicitly heard the gospel? Sadly, many of these seekers have died without ever hearing the name of Jesus. What of them? "Shall we dismiss these ... to the realms of infidelity and damnation?"¹⁰⁷ For many the answer has been, they are indeed damned.

Selected Reformers

By the time of the reformation Augustinian thought had been displaced by theology of Thomas Aquinas. The Reformation was a revival of Augustinianism. Turning back to

¹⁰⁷ Sanders, quoting Abelard, 269.

Augustine's doctrines of man, sin, and salvation, the Reformers uncovered a vast body of Biblical truth which had been buried beneath an ever growing pile of Roman Catholic tradition. Clearing away the debris, the Reformers proceeded to build their theological systems on the Augustinian foundation they unearthed.

Martin Luther (1453 – 1546)

Like Augustine before him, Luther recognized two kinds of knowledge of God, general and particular. Demarest explains the difference Luther saw between the two: "Luther explains that 'all men have a general knowledge, namely that God is, that He has created heaven and earth, that He is just, that He punishes the wicked, etc.' On the other hand, particular or saving knowledge comes only through faith in the gospel."¹⁰⁸ Luther also differentiated between these two knowledges by using the terms, Legal Knowledge, "which is a knowledge of God sought on the basis of human works and achievements," and Evangelical Knowledge, which is "the gift of God that leads to life."¹⁰⁹

Demarest wrote that "Luther placed all philosophical quests for God, so admired by the early apologists, in the category of legal knowledge." Evangelical knowledge, on the other hand, "is a knowledge that proceeds from the gospel and from grace. This knowledge is evangelical because it informs man of the saving work that God has freely accomplished on his behalf. Evangelical knowledge is a gift of God that leads to salvation."¹¹⁰

With respect to general knowledge, Luther, following Augustine, believed that "the general knowledge of God, which consists of conceptual notions of the divine Being, is immediately 'seen' by the minds of men. All people therefore 'have had the truth of God.'

¹⁰⁸ Demarest, 44.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Demarest, Ibid.

Moreover, this *a priori* conviction cannot be eradicated from the human heart.”¹¹¹ Further, “since a remnant of the *imago Dei* remains intact subsequent to the Fall, man is capable of intuiting the reality of God from the data of both the external world of nature and of his own internal world.”¹¹² Demarest went on to explain how Luther’s used a line of reasoning very similar to Anselm’s Ontological Argument to make his point. Specifically, Luther argued that the ubiquity of idolatry proves that,

all people possess an intuitive knowledge of God. The fact that pagan religions venerate various gods proves that people everywhere possess and intuitive knowledge of a Supreme Being – a knowledge that cannot be erased. “How,” Luther asks, “could they call an image or any other create things God, or how could they believe that it resembled Him if they did not know at all what...pertains to him.”¹¹³

Luther included the Law written in the heart (Romans 2:15), as part of humankind’s General Knowledge. Demarest thoughtfully applied this principle in a way that surely would have pleased Luther, “Notwithstanding the denial of atheists, all people actually know God in a general way. Those who explicitly reject the existence of God implicitly acknowledge His reality when they speak of moral obligation, duty, or right and wrong.”¹¹⁴

Interestingly, Luther believed that general knowledge is “sufficiently clear...that people would be saved if they responded to it with a positive heart,”¹¹⁵ but like Augustine before him and Calvin after him, Luther believed that this universal knowledge of God had been met with a universal rejection by the human race. So he concluded that “In the day of judgment no one can object that adequate opportunity had not been given to them to know the moral demands of God.”¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 46.

¹¹⁵ Demarest, Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

Luther agreed with the Fathers that there was no salvific knowledge in other religious systems. Demarest pointed out that Luther was a “keen student of world religions,” particularly Islam, but he concluded that all the religions of the nations are absolutely nothing,” and that “the papacy and all the religions of the heathen,” would eventually be destroyed by the “gunshot and artillery” of the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁷

Finally, Luther reaffirmed the words of Peter, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12b). Further, Luther insisted that only those who had received particular knowledge of God through the proclamation of the Gospel could be saved.

John Calvin (1509 – 1564)

If one composed a list of the ten most influential figures in the history of post-Apostolic Christianity, John Calvin would be near the top of that list. The Encyclopedia Britannica’s article on Calvin provides a concise summary of this impact:

He was the leading French Protestant Reformer and the most important figure in the second generation of the Reformation. His interpretation of Christianity, advanced above all in his *Institutio Christianae religionis* (1536 but elaborated in later editions), and the institutional and social patterns he worked out for Geneva deeply influenced Protestantism elsewhere in Europe and in North America. The Calvinist form of Protestantism is widely thought to have had a major impact on the formation of the modern world.¹¹⁸

If anything, Britannica understates his importance. More than anyone else Calvin codified Protestant Christianity’s understanding of the fate of the un-evangelized. In fact, he established an orthodoxy on this issue among Protestants which has only recently been challenged.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 50.on

¹¹⁸ *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “John Calvin,” <http://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Calvin> (accessed June 24, 2016).

Calvin believed in natural revelation, or as he defined it, “The invisible and incomprehensible essence of God, to a certain extent, made visible in his works.”¹¹⁹ He expanded upon this more eloquently at the beginning of the fifth chapter of the first volume of his *Institutes*:

Since the perfection of blessedness consists in the knowledge of God, he has been pleased, in order that none might be excluded from the means of obtaining felicity, not only to deposit it to our minds that seed of religion of which we have already spoken, but so to manifest his perfections in the whole structure of the universe, and daily place himself in our view, that we cannot open our eyes without being compelled to behold him. His essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought; but on each of his works his glory is engraven in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse.¹²⁰

In support of his elegant description of natural revelation, Calvin referenced Romans, 1:20a: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made.” In spite of God’s gracious self-revelation, revelation “too clear to escape the notice of any people, however obtuse,”¹²¹ and the kindness that God lavishes on all as evidences of his love, “the shameful ingratitude of men” appears, that “they inwardly suppress them.”¹²² Nevertheless, natural revelation “leaves the ingratitude of man without excuse, since God, in order to bring the whole human race under the same condemnation, holds for to all without exception, a mirror of his Deity in his works.”¹²³ However, there is hope -- at least for some -- because “another and better help [has been] given to guide us to God as a creator.”¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970 printing), 50.

¹²⁰ Calvin, 51.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹²² Calvin, *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

The “better help” Calvin spoke of is “the light of his Word” which had been added to natural revelation “in order that he might make himself known unto salvation, and [bestow] the privilege on those whom he was pleased to bring into nearer and more familiar relation to himself.”¹²⁵ When Calvin spoke of the Word, he meant scriptures as well as the ultimate revelation of God in his incarnate Son. God then, makes himself known unto salvation through his Word. Calvin, then, neatly defined the difference he saw between natural and special revelation. Natural revelation teaches us that some God must be worshipped, special revelation teaches us who that God is.¹²⁶

Calvin believed the Old Testament saints, such as Adam, Noah, and Abraham, were aided to the same intimate, saving knowledge of God through the same means. The thing which differentiated them from the unbelievers around them was that they knew God as more than just the creator (the result of natural revelation); through the Word they came to know him as the redeemer too.¹²⁷

The question then became, why has God not given this help to all men? Calvin’s answer was found in the doctrine most often associated with his name, election, the idea that God in his sovereignty had chosen some, the elect, to receive salvific grace and the ability to believe in Jesus Christ. For Calvin, faith in Christ was non-negotiable. To make this case Calvin quoted I John 2:23a, “Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father.”

Centuries later C.S. Lewis raised the question, is it necessary to know the actual name of the Son in order to be saved by him?¹²⁸ John Calvin would have answered him with a

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 64-65.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 65.

¹²⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity, Kindle Edition* (New York, NY, USA: Harper Collins Publishing, 1996), Location 931.

resounding, YES! In order for Jesus Christ to save a man a man must know the name of Christ. There is, after all, “salvation in no other, for there is no other *name* given among men whereby we must be saved. Those then who died without specific knowledge of Christ are damned to eternal torment. And so the issue was settled, but not to the satisfaction of everyone. In fact, there had been a reformer in Zurich who disagreed with the master of Geneva.

Huldrych Zwingli (1509 – 1564)

John Sanders wrote, “Zwingli held (to Calvin’s dismay!), that a great many un-evangelized will be in heaven.”¹²⁹ He wrote, “Nothing hinders but that God may choose among the Heathen those who shall observe His laws and cleave to Him, for election is free.”¹³⁰ Sanders offered a more complete explanation of Zwingli’s reasoning:

He reasoned that the luminaries of antiquity could not have lived a life of goodness apart from God’s influence, so it must have been the case that God elected them for salvation: ‘where there are works done worthy of God, there surely there has long since been a pious covenant with God.’¹³¹

Zwingli also believed God would not condemn those among the un-evangelized who rejected natural revelation the same way he would condemn those who had rejected greater light. Sanders summarized Zwingli’s position on the un-evangelized:

It is difficult to say for certain if Zwingli believed in universally accessible salvation, but he seems to have been more inclusive than restrictivist, if we are to judge by his statement, “in short there has not lived a single good man, there has not been a single pious heart or believing soul from the beginning of the world to the end, which you will not see there in the presence of God.”¹³²

Critical Evaluation of the Reformers Positions on the Fate of the Un-evangelized

¹²⁹ Sanders, 269.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., 270.

¹³² Sanders, Ibid.

It is virtually impossible for anyone outside the Augustinian/Lutheran/Reformed paradigms to accept their answer to the fairness objection. It seems intuitively immoral to them. Conversely, it is virtually impossible for those who have embraced these answers to understand why outsiders are not satisfied. It seems perfectly logical to them. In his book, *For Calvinism*, the eminent Calvinist theologian, Michael Horton, attempts to turn the tables on those who raise the fairness with a logical argument:

Is election fair? Hardly. But who wants fairness in this matter? After all, if God were to give everybody what is deserved, nobody would be saved. He could leave everyone in our spiritual death and the condemnation that we have chosen for ourselves. When we talk about what is fair, then, we need to start at the baseline that each and every one of us deserves: eternal death. The amazing thing is that God chooses to save anybody, especially when he know that the people he has chosen would not choose him apart from his grace.¹³³

With all due respect to Horton, he is confusing the concepts of justice and fairness. Justice, at least retributive justice (which Horton is addressing here), has to do with giving people what they deserve. Fairness has to do with treating everyone equitably. Horton is correct in stating that the human race would only be receiving what it deserves if God were to damn the entire race. Indeed, that would be both just and fair, since the fallen would receive what they deserve and God would be treating everyone exactly the same. However, when God chooses to save some who would not have believed had he not chosen them, then to many people's thinking God becomes unfair, and if God is not fair then God is not good.

The frustration of those who do not accept the logic of Horton's paradigm is well summarized by his nemesis, Roger Olsen, in his response to Horton, *Against Calvinism*:

For me. . . . nothing is more important to preserve, protect, and promote than the good name of God – God's reputation based on his good character. Insofar as Calvinism

¹³³ Michael Horton, *For Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan, Kindle Edition, 2011), Location 1021.

undermines that, I cannot live with its conundrums because they all ultimately injure God's reputation – making it difficult to tell the difference between God and the Devil.¹³⁴

Those in Horton's camp understandably bristle at these words, but they accurately reflect the perspective of many who sincerely raise the issue of the fairness of the exclusivist paradigm. Unable to find satisfactory answer, some have embraced more inclusive religions. Others have remained in the faith but slipped into dystheism, "the belief that there is a god, but that this god is not good, though not necessarily evil,"¹³⁵ which affects their ability to truly trust God. Still others have become open Misotheists, though they general self-identify as atheists.

While the hard determinist paradigm is offsetting to many, the Zwinglian paradigm is more appealing to the seeker because they can sense that he understood fairness to be as important in the giving of grace as it is in the distribution of justice. His observation that there were those throughout the ages who do not fit the description of the men Paul describes in the first chapter of Romans is an early example of a theologian attempting to test the predictions made by other paradigms. As he did this, he saw what many other reformers could not, that there were righteous gentiles like those Paul describes in the second chapter of Romans. Noting their presence he attempted to offer a reasonable explanation for their existence: "where there are works done worthy of God, there surely has long since been a pious covenant with God."¹³⁶ He did not explain what that covenant was, nor did he explain how they came to the life changing faith he saw evidence of, but he did have a view of things which is far more difficult to falsify than predications of Augustine and those Reformers who followed him.

A Sampling of Liberal Positons on the State of the Un-evangelized

¹³⁴ Roger E. Olson, *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan, Kindle Edition, 2001), Location 3534.

¹³⁵ "Dystheism," Omnilexica.com, <http://www.omnilexica.com/?q=Dystheism> (accessed June 17, 2016).

¹³⁶ Omnilexics Ibid., 270.

The Romance with Rationalism

Augustine believed the human race was blinded by sin; as a result the fallen race could only know God through revelation. Eight hundred years later Thomas Aquinas advanced the view that human reason had somehow not been destroyed by the Fall. This being the case human reason provided the fallen race with a second path to true knowledge of God. A little over five hundred years later, on the 10th of November, 1793, human wisdom came to be so admired that the French renamed Notre Dame Cathedral, the “Temple of Reason,” and seated a woman dressed in ancient Grecian robes on a throne of flowers placed over what had once been the altar. The goddess of Reason had been enthroned. A new secular religion had been inaugurated. Revelation was discarded as an outdated relic from a less rational era. The dark age of Christianity had ended, Enlightenment had fully come. Now humanity would follow the light of reason into a bright new age. This was also the year of the Terror.¹³⁷

The French Revolution was the culmination of a dream. The world had reached a new season; an age of Enlightenment had dawned. Optimism was in the air. The religious superstitions of the past would be discarded and a new religion based on reason would rise from the ashes.

The revolution in France was greeted with enormous optimism by intelligentsia of the day. They fully anticipated the arrival of the day when the great ideas they had bantered about for the better part of two centuries would finally be implemented. Freedom! Equality! Fraternity! Utopia would be created in France. Philosopher Robert Wolfe traced the beginnings of this movement back to the French philosopher, Rene Descartes, whom he credited with what he

¹³⁷ Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York, NY, USA: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1989), 778.

referred to as “the epistemological turn” in philosophy.¹³⁸ What he meant by this expression was that before Descartes the primary focus of philosophy had been metaphysics. Epistemology was discussed before Descartes, but it was a back burner issue. Descartes methods of inquiry and doubt moved metaphysic to the back burner (where later philosophers would eventually shove it off the stove), and epistemology was moved to the front burner. Demarest described this time:

The Enlightenment thinkers postulated that by the process of observation and reflection man could attain religious truth independently of any supernatural disclosure. Some within the Enlightenment tradition doubted the validity of a super-natural revelation whatsoever. Others argued that revelation involved merely a “republication” of elemental religious truths that had been obscured by the addition of superstitious accretions. . . . Hence the old Aristotelian-Thomistic natural theology gave way to a new theology of immanence ground in a mechanistic view of the universe.¹³⁹

Emerging from the Enlightenment was a new “priesthood,” destined to change the world: “With the decline of clerical power in the eighteenth century, a new kind of mentor emerged to fill the vacuum and capture the ear of society. The secular intellectual might be deist, sceptic or atheist. But he was just as ready as any pontiff or presbyter to tell mankind how to conduct his affairs.”¹⁴⁰ Among the things this emerging intellectual class could not help but notice was the accumulating data of the age of discovery. The world, it seemed, was far larger and filled with many more peoples, cultures, and religions than they had ever imagined. To their minds, this called Christianity’s claims of exclusivity into serious question:

[The] exploration of new regions of Asia, Africa, and Oceana disclosed masses of peoples untouched by Christianity, yet ostensibly living fulfilled lives. Suddenly the Christian tradition was recognized as a minority movement in the world. These and other factors led to the gradual supplanting of traditional Christian beliefs based on a purported supernatural revelation. In the new humanistic climate biblical statements about special revelation were reduced to affirmations of universal general revelation in nature. Enlightenment confidence in the competence of man’s natural faculties led to the rise of a purely natural religion shaped by the data of ordinary experience. In lieu of the

¹³⁸ Wolff, 48-49.

¹³⁹ Demarest, 76.

¹⁴⁰ Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals* (New York, NY, USA: Harper Collins, 1988, Kindle Edition, 2008), Location 46.

contradictory claims of the positive religions, natural religion embraced only those core convictions commonly held by all people through the honest exercise of reason.¹⁴¹

Bruce Demarest traced this intellectual fashion from Descartes, through English Deism, French Naturalism, and German Rationalism. There were, of course, differences between these intellectual movements, but in spite of their diversity they shared certain core beliefs. Most importantly for this inquiry, all accepted the basic Rationalistic assumption that human reason and natural revelation were sufficient for humankind to come to a true, accurate, adequate and fulfilling knowledge of ultimate reality. Thus the champions of all of these systems would have readily agreed with the inclusivist theologian, Clark Pinnock's, assertion that,

There has been too little openness to the salvific presence in the Spirit in other religions and too little recognition of his role in bringing God to people everywhere in the world. We have stressed too strongly the Spirit's role in bringing people to faith in Christ that we have neglected the salvific presence of the Spirit in humanity's search for meaning generally.¹⁴²

Meanwhile in the New World, these secular intellectual movements were being undermined by a divine counterattack. At the same time Descartes was the talk of the Salons of Europe, the Puritans in Great Britain were slowing the progress of these ideas among the common man in England, and their brethren on the other side of the Atlantic were pursuing their own vision of Utopia in New England. The Puritans, of course, were firm Calvinists, and they stood powerfully against the new trends in Europe and firmly for that which had been passed down to them from Geneva:

On the issue of general revelation and the knowability of God, the Puritans largely were of one mind . . . they highly esteemed general revelation as a clear witness to the reality of God. They gave careful attention to the rational explication of natural evidence in response to the objects of atheists and other opponents of biblical theism. Nevertheless, in the tradition of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin they asserted the spiritual blindness and moral incapacity of the unregenerate sinner. Hence the redemptive initiative must come from the God of grace. Saving knowledge is acquired not by adherence to religious

¹⁴¹ Demarest, *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Pinnock, *Four Views*, Location 1494.

traditions, nor by any philosophical quest, but by the faith reception of the Word made flesh as disclosed on the pages of Holy Scripture.¹⁴³

The Puritans were not alone in stemming the tide in England and the colonies. There were significant revivals on both sides of the Atlantic. Out of these revivals came an evangelistic zeal which gave birth to the modern missionary movement. Secular historians do not usually take note of these counter movements, and if they notice the modern mission movement at all it is generally linked to colonialism and presented in a most unfavorable light. Nevertheless, the chronology is fascinating. For example, on the day after the French revolutionaries enthroned the Goddess of Reason in Notre Dame, a far more important event was occurring on the other side of the world. William Carey arrived in India (November 11, 1793).¹⁴⁴ Ironically, then, at the same time as the secularism of the Enlightenment was spreading in the Old World the gospel was beginning to be proclaimed on the other side of the globe, and in its wake multitudes would come to saving faith through the proclamation of that special revelation that the wise men of the Enlightenment were trampling under their feet.

The Lurch toward Subjectivity

As time passed the church continued to expand and prosper, but the new religion of rationalism had not delivered on its lofty promises. In fact, it had led those who sought meaning through it to the dead end of existential despair. This led to what Francis A. Schaeffer referred to as the “escape from reason.” Echoing Schaeffer, Bruce Demarest wrote,

Enlightenment scholars affirmed that human resources were adequate to ferret out ultimate truth. Natural man possesses the strength of mind and will both to know and to actualize the good. In the eighteenth century. . . the prominent outlook. . . was rationalistic. In the following century, however, the sterility of a purely rationalist

¹⁴³ Demarest, 62.

¹⁴⁴ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Mission* (New York, NY, USA: Penguin Books, Second Printing, 1990), 223.

approach to religion gave birth to the subjective Romantic Movement centered in the school of Schleiermacher.”

The rationalistic spirit of the church led to atheism and irreligion, while in society to the chaos of the French Revolution (1789-94). The cul-de-sac in which eighteenth-century Enlightenment rationalism found itself mandate, a new tack that would avoid the sterility of a purely deductive approach to religious truth. . . . Whereas the eighteenth century involved a revolt against revelation in the name of autonomous reason, the nineteenth century involved a revolt against autonomous reason in the name of ineffable religious feeling.¹⁴⁵

This new school of thought retained its basic belief in the natural theology it had inherited, but instead of seeking God through a rational exploration of “the external world,” the romantics took an irrational turn and began to look for God in the subjective world of personal religious experience:¹⁴⁶

“To be sure, the romantic school of Herder, Fichte, Coleridge, Schleiermacher, and Maurice upheld the validity of natural theology; only. . . . the data. . . . was drawn. . . . solely from man’s inner religious awareness. “My experience is my proof” was the romantics’ slogan. They thought it foolish that God should be sought by syllogistic reasoning when He is richly present in man’s religious self-consciousness. Thus in romanticism we find liberal theology seeking to know God through the modality of religious experience.¹⁴⁷

The celebrated German theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher, led the jailbreak from the prison of rationalism. Schleiermacher “has been acclaimed as the greatest theologian between Calvin and Barth.”¹⁴⁸ Demarest noted that “Karl Barth himself declared that as the watershed of modern theology, ‘Schleiermacher. . . has no rival.’”¹⁴⁹ Demarest explained that Schleiermacher reacted against the rationalistic tradition by seeking to establish “religious belief on the foundation of pious subjectivity:”

Man, he argued, if first and foremost a feeling rather than a thinking being. Providentially excited by God, man possesses the intrinsic capacity to sense and taste the infinite higher truths are derived from religious feelings. More than mere human

¹⁴⁵ Neill, *Ibid.*, 75, 93.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Demarest, 94.

¹⁴⁹ Demarest, *Ibid.*

emotion, feeling is the intuition of immediate self-consciousness, or that inner sense of continuity with the Spirit of the Universe.¹⁵⁰

Salvation in Schleiermacher's scheme was replaced with the deep penetration into a person's consciousness which "overcomes the subject-object duality," so that the worshiper is united "with that which is set over against it. This will produce a feeling of absolute dependence which is "cognitive, mystical, and identical in all persons."¹⁵¹ Schleiermacher's "altar call" was for people everywhere to "attend to their inner religious feelings to establish contact with God, for consciousness of God involves 'the direct inward expression of the feeling of absolute dependence."¹⁵² Demarest observed that in Schleiermacher's model "man gains no knowledge of God as He himself is in Himself, but only knowledge of God's relationship to man."¹⁵³

Demarest noted that Schleiermacher's God "is not a personal, transcended Being distinct from the world but] the Spirit of the universe or as the source of our feelings of utter dependence beyond all the speculative conceptions of the philosopher or the theologian."¹⁵⁴ He even suggested dispensing with the term God altogether and substituting some other term "that adequately describes the universal factor encountered in human experience."¹⁵⁵ This sounded somewhat pantheistic. There is a reason for this; it was.

Schleiermacher believed this experience of dependence was available through Christ, but not exclusively through him. He believed that "'the deity is to be perceived and worshiped in many ways.' Hence it is immaterial with which historical religion one identifies. 'Each person

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 94-95.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

may seek out religion in the church in a form best suited to nurture and inculcate the seed of religion within him.”¹⁵⁶

There are other lesser lights within the Schleiermacher tradition that could be considered, but they add little to the overall discussion since the foundations of modern liberalism were laid by Schleiermacher and in a very real sense very little has changed within liberal theology since, except the ultimately reality that is still called God has become even more ambiguous and the existential experience less tightly defined. Hence from Schleiermacher forward liberalism would rest on three foundations: 1. the rejection of the revealed truth, special revelation, on rationalistic grounds, and, 2. the apprehension of personal truth through subjective religious experience, and finally, after Kierkegaard, 3. the idea that religious faith is inherently irrational, yielding truth of a different kind than can be learned through reason, a knowledge which can only be known through an irrational leap of faith.

There were those within liberal Christianity who pushed back against Schleiermacher. The three most notable were Albrecht Ritschl, Karl Barth, and Emil Brunner. All three recognized that Schleiermacher had gone too far and endeavored to re-center Christian theology on Jesus Christ.

Albrecht Ritschl

Demarest noted the difference between the Romantic and the Ritschlian theology:

The Ritschlian movement rejected the supposition that personal feelings constitute the heart of religion. Religion must not be viewed in terms of an individual’s mystical relationship to God. Rather, religion involves the complex web of moral relationship that exist between God, man and society. . . . loyal to the Kantian thesis that human knowing is limited to the phenomena of the space-time world, the Ritschlian school posited that spiritual truth is acquired by the process of empirical and historical interpretation. It adopted the functional viewpoint that what God does informs man of what God is.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Demarest, *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Demarest, 99.

God, then,

Can only be known in terms of His value for the individual. God is known not in a metaphysical sense through propositional revelation, but as a felt moral need. . . . Ritschl flatly affirmed that apart from this value-judgment of faith there exists no knowledge of God.¹⁵⁸

Confusing to say the least. For those unfamiliar with the ethos and vocabulary of theological liberalism, trying to understand it is comparable to a first time visitor trying to understand the culture of India.

For the purposes of this inquiry there are certain key points. First, he believed that “the Christian religion has its origin in special revelation.”¹⁵⁹ Demarest described Ritschl’s theology as “Christocentric.” However, Ritschl’s Christ was not the Christ of the New Testament or the Creeds:

He [Christ] was not the ontologically God, but an unusual man. Jesus’ uniqueness resided in the fact that he was the first man to actualize in his life the kingdom purposes of God. Indeed, the character of God is unveiled in the firmness of Jesus’ religious convictions, in the purity of his motives, and in the humility of His life. Faith as it reflects on the life and works of Jesus of Nazareth, judges that God is pure and total love. In Jesus, man discovers that God is both a loving Father and a merciful redeemer.¹⁶⁰

Ritschl rejected any special revelation in scripture, so it was not a difficult thing for him to reject what the scriptures declare to be true about Jesus. He also rejected natural revelation:

Ritschl allowed for no innate knowledge of God or a knowledge gained by rational reflection on Creation or providence. And secondarily, the knowledge of God postulated by Ritschl is entirely subjective. Man knows nothing of God only that which speaks to the problems of human existence in the world. God, in other words, is posited as a moral need. What God is in Himself cannot be known Ritschl was a staunch foe of all Roman Catholic and Protestant natural theologies that postulated a knowledge of God independent of historical revelation.¹⁶¹

Ritschl’s theology, then, was man centered, this world focused, only Christian in the most tangential sense of the term, so it is not surprising that Ritschl believed there were roads to

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 101.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Demarest, 101.

¹⁶¹ Demarest, 101.

salvation outside of Christ, even though he held that Christianity was the best and most well-lit highway to heaven. He believed “humankind is intrinsically religious as it reflects on matters of ultimate value.” Ritschl held Christianity as the “perfect embodiment of all that is noble in other religions the ideal to which all religions strive.” Nevertheless, one could reflect on matters of ultimate value without being a Christian.

Karl Barth

The most powerful voice raised in opposition to the theology of Schleiermacher belonged to Karl Barth. Barth correctly saw the trend of liberalism as a rejection of the historic Christian faith, more importantly he saw it as a rejection of Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. In sharp contrast to Schleiermacher, Barth insisted that “the church and our salvation are based exclusively upon the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.”¹⁶² In order to return the Church to revelation of God in Jesus Christ, Barth rejected natural revelation and the natural theology which had been built upon it. G.C. Berkouwer explained that he did this because of his firm conviction that,

God’s revelation in Christ was unique and exclusive, because “only Jesus Christ can be called revelation in the true and strict and original sense of the word. The word became flesh. Apart from the incarnation we cannot speak of revelation.”¹⁶³ Thus a person could not have some prior knowledge of God, because “one must know about Jesus Christ in order to know anything about revelation.”¹⁶⁴

Berkouwer went on to explain that Barth believed “Revelation concerns something new, which was not previously known *in any manner whatsoever* [emphasis in the original],” but apart from revelation there would be “signs and witnesses.” Scripture and the evidence of God in

¹⁶² Berkouwer, 22.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 23

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

nature fell into this latter category. In contrast to these signs and witnesses Christ was God's unique revelation.

Barth made a valuable distinction between religion and revelation. Barth saw non-Christian religion as part of the darkness in which men apart from the revelation of Christ walk,¹⁶⁵ Non-Christian religion, then, was actually veiled unbelief:

From the Barthian perspective . . . non-Christian faiths are expressions of paganism, [and the] word of God stands totally and irrevocably opposed to all pagan and idolatrous ideologies. "That that revelation has come and its light has fallen on heathendom, heathen religion is shown to be the very opposite of revelation: a false religion of unbelief."¹⁶⁶

It might seem from the above that Barth was exclusivist in his view of the fate of the unevangelized, this was not the case. In fact, Barth's understanding of election seemed to imply universalism:

With the earlier Reformed tradition, Barth retains the notion of double predestination, but he makes Jesus simultaneously the object and subject of both divine election and reprobation: Jesus embodies God's election of humanity and God's rejection of human sin. He is the electing God and the elect man. As the electing God, Jesus elects all of humanity in himself. And thus, as the elected man, all who are "in Christ" are elect in him. Non-believers, it is said, have simply not realized or recognized their election in Christ.¹⁶⁷

In response to the charge that he was a Universalist, Barth made a somewhat evasive claim of agnosticism:

Barth . . . noted that insistence on necessary universal salvation impinged on God's freedom and suggested it was beyond the church's duty to speculate on the subject. . . For Barth, the grace of God is characterized by freedom. On the one hand, this means that we can never impose limits on the scope of grace; and on the other hand, it means that we can never impose a Universalist 'system' on grace. In either case, we would be compromising the freedom of grace - we would be presuming that we can define the exact scope of God's liberality. So Barth's theology of grace includes a dialectical protest: Barth protests both against a system of universalism and against a denial of universalism! The crucial point is that God's grace is free grace: it is nothing other than God himself

¹⁶⁵Berkower, *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 126-127.

¹⁶⁷ "The Theology of Karl Barth," Theopedia.com: <http://www.theopedia.com/theology-of-karl-barth> (accessed 6/29/2016).

acting in freedom. And if God acts in freedom, then we can neither deny nor affirm the possibility of universal salvation.¹⁶⁸

During the course of his long career, Barth reclaimed many key doctrines of the church, which had been abandoned by the Liberal theology, and his neo-orthodoxy was certainly far removed from the Romanticism of the Schleiermacher school. This being said, there is an important similarity worth noting. In the final analysis, both systems make faith a subjective experience. The pantheistic Schleiermacher believed the experience could be found in practically anything; Barth believed it could only be found in Christ. Both, then, were ultimately existentialists in their understanding of faith.

The existential nature of Barth's concept of faith can be seen by contrasting it with Augustine. Augustine believed that "faith is not blind but rests on knowledge of the object to be believed in and on the reason it is to believe."¹⁶⁹ Barth believed God is so transcendent that he is "beyond the reach of human knowing."¹⁷⁰ Since objective knowledge of God was beyond human reach all that was left was some mystical, experiential, and ultimately incommunicable encounter with the Holy Other.

Emil Brunner

John Bailie wrote that when "Dr. Barth and Dr. Brunner were first heard of in the English speaking world they were regarded as representing an identical point of view – the point of view variously spoken of as the Barthian theology, the theology of crisis, and dialectical theology."¹⁷¹ Both theologians rejected classical liberalism and worked to bring the church back to the Biblically based theology of the reformation (though neither believed the scriptures were a

¹⁶⁸ Demarest, Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Demarest, 28.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 127.

¹⁷¹ Emil Brunner, Karl Barth, John Baillie, *Natural Theology*, Peter Fraenkel, trans. (Eugene, Oregon, USA: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 5.

divine revelation), and both “were united in their insistence that there is no true salvation [and] . . . no true knowledge of God, save in and through Jesus Christ.”

Their friendship was interrupted over one of the key issues of this inquiry, natural revelation. The trouble began with an essay by Brunner, “Nature and Grace.” In this essay Brunner proclaimed that it “is the task of our theological generation to find the way back to a true *theologia naturalis*.” As far as Barth was concerned these were fighting words. In his angry response to Brunner, he went so far as to say that if “this be Brunner’s opinion . . . then I fail to understand among many other things . . . how can he think that, in spite of his opinion, he has a right to be mentioned . . . to be my ‘ally,’ and [my] ‘good friend.’”¹⁷² What did Brunner believe that so angered his former ally and friend? He simply reasserted the historic

Augustinian/Reformed understanding of Romans 1:18-23, Acts 14:15-16, and Acts 17:24-31:

The godlessness of the natural man does not mean that God stands apart from him – for the Creator has truly not left himself without witness among his creatures – but consists in the fact man has *perverted* what he has and knows of God (Romans 1:23), that he turns himself away from the God who so mightily declares himself, and uses the revelation in creation in order to reverence the creature rather than the creator. Accordingly ‘the heathen’ do not stand outside the revelation of God, or out of relation to him; they stand rather in that *alienatio originis* which from the human side must be called sin and from the divine side the wrath of God (emphasis in the original).¹⁷³

Brunner also made it clear that he did not believe a person could come to saving faith apart from the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ:

The difficult question is . . . not whether there are two kinds of revelation. The reply to this question must just on the basis of Scripture once and for all be a positive one. The question is rather how the two revelations, that in creation and that in Jesus Christ, are related. The first answer – again one which is universally Christian and also obviously biblical – is that for us sinful men, the first, the revelation in creation, is not sufficient in order to know God in such a way that the knowledge brings salvation. . . . Even the most perfect theology will in the main be unable to get beyond the double statement that as

¹⁷² *Natural Theology*, 70.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

concerns the heathen, God did not leave himself without witness, but that nevertheless they did not know him in such a way that he became their salvation.¹⁷⁴

In a later revision of *Nature in Grace*, Brunner wrote that the missionary's task is to preach, "the God whom ye [heathen], perverted by your sinful blindness, unknowingly worship as the unknown, him do I proclaim to you as he who has 'made known the secret of his will' to us in Jesus Christ the Crucified and Risen."¹⁷⁵ Even though Barth and Brunner were in agreement as to the nature saving grace, Brunner's argument was not convincing to Barth. Instead he issued a strongly worded response entitled, simply, "NO!" At the end of this counter-essay Barth concluded that natural revelation "has to be rejected *a limin* – right at the outset," because, "Only the theology and the church of antichrist can profit from it."¹⁷⁶

Like Barth, Brunner can be credited for his efforts to move the church away from Liberalism and back *toward* historic orthodoxy and the theology of the Reformation. Barth spoke of his own journey as recovery from "the effects of [his] theological studies."¹⁷⁷ No doubt Brunner could say the same thing. Sadly their recovery was not complete.

Neither man separated himself from the mystical existentialism which dominated theological Liberalism. As a result, both believed a mystical, revelatory encounter with Christ was possible and necessary, and that such an encounter was salvific. With regard to natural revelation, Barth's theology had no room for it; but even if Brunner was correct natural revelation was still seen as so incomplete that no one could come possibly come to a salvation through it. Thus, in the final analysis both men reached the same conclusion, which seemed to

¹⁷⁴*Natural Theology*, Ibid., 26-27.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 11.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 128.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 71

have been Brunner's point, but it was a point completely lost on Barth. At the end of his essay, Brunner accused Barth of being, "one-sided."¹⁷⁸ He was surely correct in his analysis.

Critical Analysis of the Liberal Positions

This chapter has presented a representable sample of Liberal opinion on the questions being explored in this inquiry. These positions have not been referred to as "Christian" because many of them represent an apostasy that is unworthy of the name. In fact, when Liberal theology had run its course on the Continent, European faith had been all but gutted. Dave Breese wrote a dramatic description of the state of the church in the wake of Liberalism's enlightened pursuit of truth:

The change was so dramatic, so fundamental, so far-reaching that it can be said that because of it the Christian religion, though retaining its external form, became a fundamentally different thing on the inside. At the close of the [nineteenth] century, the churches were still there, the choirs still sang, the babies were still baptized, the candles continued to burn, but the substance, the core – yes the life – of Christianity was gone. The idea that God was in the midst of it all and that He had revealed himself in His inspired, infallible Word – that idea, the life, slipped through the fingers of an unsuspecting church.¹⁷⁹

Rationalism had destroyed the church's belief in special revelation and elevated natural revelation in its place. It replaced the Holy Spirit's enlightening work with humankind's ability to reason. Natural revelation and Reason were all that was needed, but in the end reason led only the existential despair and an emptiness that the Goddess of Reason could not satisfy.

Schleiermacher and the Romantics tried to fill the emptiness with experience. In introducing subjectivism, the Romantics introduced unfocused subjectivity into the salvific equation and liberalism has never been able to move away from. It also removed the necessity of Christ from

¹⁷⁸ *Natural Theology*, *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁷⁹ Dave Breese, *Seven Men who Rule the World from the Grave* (Chicago, Illinois, USA: Moody Press, 1990), 91.

the calculation which paved over the narrow way that leads to life with an ever-growing multilane highway with a seemingly endless number of entry ramps.

The counter movements of Ritschl, Barth, and Bruner moved Liberal theology back to a focus on Christ, at least to some degree, depending on how you define him. In doing this Neo-Orthodoxy reclaimed some of the ground that had been lost to the rationalists and romantics. Nevertheless, the counter-revolutionaries re-baptized and retained the subjectivity of Liberalism. With the arrival of a movement not discussed here, the Comparative Religion Movement, Liberalism would finally conclude that “Christianity’s claims to absoluteness as a supernaturally revealed religion can no longer be substantiated,” and Christianity would take its place as “one element in the complex web of religion.”¹⁸⁰ In doing this, Liberal theology prepared the stage for postmodernism. As Dennis McCallum explained, Postmodernists aren’t against religion; they are only against religious teaching that holds to objective truth and the usefulness of reason. Religion based on personal experience and “What’s true for me” is perfectly compatible with the postmodern world view.¹⁸¹

Finally, then, Schleiermacher and company hid the leaven of subjectivity in the unleavened dough of a Christianity which had already been soiled by the hands of the rationalists who had kneaded it before them. As a result, Liberal “Christianity” is now completely saturated with yeast of syncretism. Today Liberalism is embracing the proposition that there is no absolute truth, everyone’s truth is absolute, and all paths lead to the Beautiful Isle of Somewhere where everyone except for Hitler, Stalin, and perhaps Genghis Khan will someday experience heavenly

¹⁸⁰ Demarest, 106-107.

¹⁸¹ Denis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth: Responding the Multiculturalism, the Rejection of Reason, and the New Postmodern Diversity* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA: Bethany House Publishers, 1996), 203.

bliss after coming to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses, to enjoy a tryst with whatever or whomever the ultimate reality turns out to be.

The Modern Evangelical Landscape

When discussing the fate of the Un-evangelized there are three primary theological paradigms current with the twenty-first century evangelical church. John Sanders identifies them as the Restrictivism, Universalism, and The Wider Hope. Most would refer to Sanders' "Wider Hope" position as Inclusivism. In 1997, Zondervan published a useful book comparing and contrasting the various view on this issue, *Four Views of Salvation*. The four views are actually three views since one of the viewpoints, the Particularist position, is divided into two paths to the same conclusion. Sanders makes the same division by noting that his equivalent of the Particularist perspective (Restrictivism) includes some who are clearly uncomfortable in saying that all of the un-evangelized are lost. He refers to these as agnostics.

For the purpose of this inquiry, the three theological constructs being discussed as they are presented in *Four Views of Salvation*, will be Pluralism, Inclusivism, and Particularism. The two approaches to Particularism will be discussed together.

The Presentation of the Pluralistic Paradigm

Attention was brought to Pluralism in recent years when it was embraced by celebrity pastor, Rob Bell. Bell gave voice to the questions many post-modern Christians are asking:

Of all the billions of people who have ever live will only a select number "make it to a better place" and every single other person suffer in torment and punishment forever? Is this acceptable to God? Has God created millions of people over tens of thousands of years who are going to spend eternity in anguish? Can God do this or even allow this, and still claim to be a loving God? Does God punish people for thousands of years with infinite, eternal torment for what they did in their few finite years of life? . . . If there are only a select few who go to heaven, which is more terrifying to fathom: the billions who burn forever or the few who escape this fate? How does a person end up being one of the few? Chance? Luck? Random selection? Being born in the right place, family, or a

youth pastor who ‘relates better to the kids’? God choosing you instead of others? What kind of faith is that? Or, more important: What kind of God is that?¹⁸²

The immanent Philosopher of Religion and theologian, the late John Hick, made the same point:

For a traditionally orthodox theology, [the fate of the non-Christian] is a grave problem, for the eternal destiny of the large majority of the human race is at stake. The unacceptable aspect of the old exclusivist view that non-Christians are eternally lost, or eternally tormented in hell, is its dire implication concerning the nature of God. Is it compatible with the limitless divine love that God should have decreed that only a minority of human beings, those who have happened to be born in a Christian part of the world should have the opportunity of eternal life?¹⁸³

These are powerful questions, and it is no doubt true that countless Christians are troubled by them. Young evangelicals in particular are offended by the judgmental attitude in the note Bell references, and they are being drawn to Pluralism because they do not find the exclusivist answers satisfying. Given the post-modern consensus in the West, it is not unreasonable to predict that this trend will continue unabated unless more compelling answers can be found.

In the book, *Four Views of Salvation*, John Hick presented and defended the Pluralistic paradigm. Hick, like Rob Bell, was once an evangelical, and he devoted a great deal of space detailing the story of his journey away from evangelical Christianity to Pluralism. He said this,

. . . . to help conservative readers to appreciate that I have some understanding of their position because it was once my own. My departure from it was gradual and was partly the result of further reflection and prompted by a reading of the works of New Testament scholars, and partly of trying to preach the gospel in a way that made sense to ordinary twentieth-century men and women, both young and old.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Rob Bell, *Live Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York, NY, USA: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010). 2-3.

¹⁸³ *Four Views*, Location 622.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, Location 416.

As he came to embrace Pluralism, Hick rejected the scriptures as God's timeless, special revelation to humankind (Bell, and all other Pluralists are forced to do this); but in the tradition of Schleiermacher he continued to believe in divine revelation:

I ought at this point to make clear to a conservative readership how I differ from them on the questions of revelation and the authority of Scripture. I do not think it is possible to settle theological issues with "the Bible says" The Bible is a collection of documents written during a period of about a thousand years by different people in different historical and cultural situations. The writings are of a variety of kinds The human authorship and historical setting must always be taken into account in using the Scriptures. We do not . . . need to take over the prescientific beliefs and cultural assumptions of people living in the remote past in a much different human world It is their religious experience that is important. God is always and everywhere present to us And when a human being is exceptionally open to the divine presence, he or she has a vivid awareness of God, which is then called revelation.¹⁸⁵

Hick also rejected the Jesus revealed in scriptures. To him and other Pluralists, the "historic" Jesus of Nazareth was a "Spirit filled prophet and healer," who understood his role "as that of the final prophet, proclaiming the imminent coming of the Kingdom on earth." After his death (Hicks says nothing of Christ's resurrection), the early church "lived with the expectation of his return as God's agent to inaugurate the kingdom," but as "this expectation gradually faded Jesus was exalted in communal memory from the eschatological prophet to a divine status."¹⁸⁶

With respect to non-Christians who are not interested in trading in their old religion for a new one, Hicks argued for the presence of salvific knowledge is present in all of the world religions:

If there is indeed only one God, maker of heaven and earth, two obvious possibilities present themselves. One is that God as known within one particular religion, namely one's own, is the real God and that all the others are unreal. The other is that God as known to Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and others represent different manifestation in relation to humanity, that different "faces" or "mask" or *personae* of God, the Ultimate Reality. But there is also a third, intermediate position, adopted by the majority of mainline theologians [following Ritschl], that God as known within Judaism,

¹⁸⁵ *Four Views*, Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., Location 439.

Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism are partial or distorted glimpses of the real God, who is full know within Christianity. This range of options seems to cover the field.¹⁸⁷

Of these three doors, Hick selected door number two, “the Pluralistic view that the God figures of the great theistic religions are different awarenesses of the Ultimate rather than for the traditional Christian view that we alone have true knowledge of God.”¹⁸⁸

Regarding “salvation,” Hick posited the foundational Pluralist belief that the *phenomenon* of salvation is present in all world religions:

If we define salvation as being forgiven and accepted by God because of Jesus’ death on the cross, then it becomes a tautology that Christianity alone knows and is able to preach the source of salvation. But if we define salvation as an actual human change, a gradual transformation from natural self-centeredness (with all the human evils that flow from this) to a radically new orientation centered in God and manifested in the “fruit of the Spirit,” then it seems clear that salvation is taking place within all the world religions – and taking place so far as we can tell, to more or less the same extent. On this view, which is not based on theory but on the observable realities of human life, salvation is not a juridical transactions inscribed in heaven, nor is it a future hope beyond this life (although it is that too), but it is a spiritual, moral, and political change that can begin now and whose present possibility is granted in the structure of reality It therefore seems logical to me to conclude that not only Christianity, but also these other world faiths, are human responses to the Ultimate. . . . they seem to constitute more or less equally authentic human awareness’s of and response to the Ultimate, the Real, the final ground and source of everything.¹⁸⁹

Hick clearly makes salvation about morality, and on the basis of this assumption he argues that Christians are no better than those who hold other religious opinions. In an attempt to falsify the claims of the strawman he has set up, Hick argues that if Christianity was superior to other religions we should expect to discover that Christians are morally superior too, but this is not what the data shows. On the contrary, other faiths have their saints and they are not inferior to the saints of the Christian tradition.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., Location 501, 512.

¹⁸⁸ *Four Views*, Location 512.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., Location 585.

Rob Bell makes the same point in, *Love Wins*, by directing his readers' attention to a truly great and wise man, a saint, if you will, who just happened to have sought God and godliness in a non-Christian tradition, Mahatma Gandhi:

Several years ago we had an art show at our church. I had been giving a series of teachings on peacemaking, and we invited artists to display their paintings, poems, and sculptures that reflected their understanding of what it means to be a peacemaker. A woman included in her work a quote from Mahatma Gandhi, which a number of people found quite compelling. But not everyone. Someone attached a piece of paper to it. On the piece of paper was written: "Reality check: He's in hell." Really? Gandhi's in hell? He is? We have confirmation of this? Somebody knows this? Without a doubt? And that somebody decided to take on the responsibility of letting the rest of us know?¹⁹⁰

In summary, Bell, Hick and other Pluralists reject special revelation in either scripture or in Jesus Christ. However, they do believe in personal revelatory experiences which they believe to be universally available. Virtually all Pluralists reject the deity of Jesus Christ, his substitutionary death for sin, and presumably everything else the New Testament affirms to be true about him. They would acknowledge him as *a* great religious leader and teacher, *a* light, and *a* way, but they reject the notion that no one can come the Father but by him. Pluralists also redefine salvation as a spiritual enlightenment which results in a move from self-centeredness to other-consciousness. Ultimately, salvation is morality. This being assumed, conversion is any religious enlightenment or experience which results in a moral transformation. Finally and perhaps most importantly, Pluralist believe salvific knowledge is present in all of the world's religions.

A Critical Evaluation of the Pluralist Paradigm

In an insightful critique of Hick's essay in *Four Views of Salvation*, Cambridge Don Alister McGrath put his finger on the primary problem with pluralism:

In the end, approaches to religious pluralism are Christologically determined. Who Jesus Christ is has a controlling influence over one's approach to the issue of Christianity and

¹⁹⁰ Bell, 1-2.

other religions The crucial issue concerns the identity of Jesus Christ. If he is just someone like us, then he may fairly be placed in the category of “good religious teachers.” But I see no evidence of this categorization in the New Testament or the early Christian tradition. Jesus is different. . . .any discussion that pretends that Christians think otherwise about Jesus Christ can fairly be criticized as resting on a distorted and inauthentic understanding of Christianity.¹⁹¹

McGrath’s analysis is confirmed in Hick’s own account of his conversion to Pluralism.

Hick began his argument, as he and all Pluralists must, by rejecting the New Testament’s assertion that salvation can only be found in Jesus Christ. To do this they must reject those parts of the New Testament which would suggest that Jesus is indeed “different than us,” the *only* true light who is greater than everyone else who has ever claimed to be *a* light. Hick, then, rejects the authenticity and authority of the gospels:

We should not think of the four gospels as if they were eyewitness accounts by reporters on the spot. They were written between forty and seventy years after Jesus’ death [noticeably, he does not mention the resurrection], by people who were not personally present at the events they describe; for all are dependent on sources in a way in which an eyewitness would not be.¹⁹²

However, Hick overlooked the self-obvious fact that he and the scholarly voices he found persuasive were even further removed from the events than the writers he disparages. It is reasonable to assume that even if Hick is correct and the gospels were written in the second half of the first century, the authors were closer to and had more accurate knowledge of the historical Jesus than an assembly of twenty-first century sceptics with an agenda. Oddly, Hick even admitted that “the Christian documents from the first century A.D. take us as far back to the historical Jesus and the origins of Christianity as we can get.”¹⁹³ Nevertheless he insists they must be rejected. Why? Because Pluralism is inconsistent with a Biblically based Christianity.

¹⁹¹ *Four Views*, Location 967.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, Location 440.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, Location 429.

Thus a person can have either the Christ of the New Testament or the deconstructed Christ of speculative modern scholarship, but one cannot have both.

In addition to rejecting the Christ of scripture, Pluralists reject the scriptural concept of salvation. Hick explains that if salvation is defined as “being forgiven and accepted by God because of Jesus’ death on the cross, then it becomes a tautology that Christianity alone knows and is able to preach the source of salvation.” Understandably, such an understanding of salvation is incompatible with Pluralism.

Even though the Biblical idea of salvation is rejected, Pluralism retains the term “salvation,” though the term has obviously been redefined to fit their paradigm. As noted, Pluralism makes salvation about morality, and conversion a religious awakening of any sort that turns a person from self-consciousness to other-centeredness which is then worked out in morality. Once this new definition has been assumed it is possible to make a powerful argument that Christianity’s claims of superiority are logically unsustainable, falsified by reality. A Christian, then, who claims his religion is superior to other religious traditions, is clearly out of touch with reality.

This would be a good argument if it was not based on a logical fallacy. Specifically, this argument begs the question by assuming the very thing to be proved. In other words, this argument assumes salvation is morality. That is an assertion that needs to be argued on its own merit rather than being assumed. If one grants the premise that salvation is morality, then the Pluralist has an ironclad argument, but Biblical Christianity has never accepted the premise that salvation is mere moral reformation.

There is a historic Christian faith, and within that historical mainstream salvation, has always been as John Hick described it, “being forgiven and accepted by God because of Jesus’

death on the cross.”¹⁹⁴ More than this, within the New Testament, and within the Augustinian/Reformed, and other Paradigms, salvation has always been about the grace of God which is received through faith, and which is specifically *not of works* (Ephesians 2:8-10). Paul explains that “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).

As an apostate evangelical, Hick knew that he was changing the subject when he equated salvation with morality, but Alister McGrath picked up on the subterfuge: “The issue is *not* about morality,” (emphasis in the original), he declared, “As it happens I do not think Christians are morally superior to other people The issue concerns the identity of Jesus Christ.” So, to be a Pluralist one must deny not only the scriptures but the idea of Jesus as the Savior of the world.

It is important in the debate with Pluralism (and Inclusivism) to remember that “salvation” is unique to Christianity. All religions realize something is wrong with the world, that it is broken. This brokenness can be thought of as the human problem. Every religion offers itself as the solution to the problem. Although the specifics vary, they all teach that there is something a man or woman can do about the problem (they may need some assistance but to quote the children’s cartoon character, Builder Bob, they all declare, “Yes you can!” Only Biblical Christianity says, “No you can’t,” because the human problem cannot be solved through human effort. Only Christianity declares that the fallen race must have a Savior, and that apart from the Savior there is no hope for humankind. It is as true today as when Peter said it, “there is only one name given among men whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

¹⁹⁴ *Four Views*, Location 585.

In his book, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, Timothy Tennent disputes the uniqueness of the Christian soteriological message by pointing out that there are parallels between the Christian concept of salvation by grace in other religious traditions, particularly within certain Hindu sects and Japanese Shinran Shonin Buddhism.¹⁹⁵ But upon closer examination the answer being offered in these systems is not salvation by grace through faith, but enlightenment by grace through faith. The difference is significant.

At a glance one might easily look at the evidence Tennant includes in his *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, and arrive at the conclusion that there is salvific light in other religious traditions. This could lead to an acceptance of either Pluralism or Inclusivism. But when the distinction between enlightenment and salvation is maintained the “light” in these non-Christian traditions is seen to be a distortion of truth. As with Hick, it all comes down to the definition of the term, salvation. If salvation = morality, Hick is right. If salvation = enlightenment, then those eastern religions which teach enlightenment by grace through faith are correct. However, if salvation = being saved from eternal damnation through the sacrifice of the one and only Son of God, then Christ alone is the answer to the human problem.

In his argument for the moral equivalence of Christianity with other religions, Rob Bell referenced the universally admired “face” of Hinduism, Mahatma Gandhi. It seems only fair, then to allow this saint from another religious tradition, as Clark Pinnock refers to such individuals, to speak for himself.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Timothy C. Tennant, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan, 2007), 135-161.

¹⁹⁶ *Four Views*, 538.

In this autobiography Gandhi recounts the efforts various Christians made to convert him during his time in South Africa. A certain Mr. Coates made the most prolonged attempt.

Describing his interaction with Coates, Gandhi recalls that,

He was looking forward to delivering me from the abyss of ignorance. He wanted to convince me that, no matter whether there was some truth in other religions, salvation was impossible for me unless I accepted Christianity, which represented the truth; and that my sins would not be washed away except by the intercession of Jesus, and that all good works were useless.¹⁹⁷

Gandhi goes into great detail in explaining the arguments used by Coates and his circle of friends. In this account he shows that he gained a thorough understanding of the gospel through their efforts to convert him. One would-be evangelist seized upon the “restlessness” of Gandhi’s soul, caused by his unfulfilled quest for truth, but after a month of dialogue he told the young Plymouth Brethren missionary that his arguments had “utterly failed to convince me:”

I humbly replied that if this be the Christianity acknowledged by all Christians, I cannot accept it. I do not seek redemption from the consequences of my sin. I seek to be redeemed from sin itself, or rather from the very thought of sin. Until I have attained that end, I shall be content to be restless.¹⁹⁸

The young evangelist responded, “I assure you, your attempt is fruitless.” Gandhi added a sarcastic postscript, “And the brother proved to as good as his word. He knowingly committed transgressions and showed me that he was undisturbed by them.”¹⁹⁹

Gandhi did recognize that many Christians, such as his good friend Coates, were as sincere in their pursuit of godliness as he was, but he observed that none of them was his moral superior. In the end, and in spite of many valiant efforts to convert him, Gandhi rejected Christianity. His explanation could have been written by John Hick:

The pious lives of Christians did not give me anything that the lives of men of other faiths failed to give. I had seen in other lives just the same reformation that I had heard

¹⁹⁷ Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *My Experiments with Truth*, Trans. Mahadve Desai (Beaverton, Oregon, USA: Sublime Books, Kindle edition, 2014), Location 1946.

¹⁹⁸ Gandhi, *Ibid.*, Location 1238.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

among Christians. Philosophically there was nothing extraordinary in Christian principles. From the point of view of sacrifice, it seemed to me that the Hindus greatly surpassed the Christians. It was impossible for me to regard Christianity as a perfect religion or the greatest of all religions.²⁰⁰

When Gandhi finished his auto-biography, subtitled, *The Story of my Experiments with Truth* (1925), he wrote an introduction which is immensely relevant to this discussion:

What I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years – is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain Moksha. I live and have my being in the pursuit of this goal. . . . [There] are some things which are known only to oneself and one's Maker. These are clearly incommunicable. The experiments I am about to relate are not such. But they are spiritual or rather moral; for *the essence of religion is morality*" (emphasis added).²⁰¹

Clearly Hick and Gandhi are on the same page, religion is morality. However, it is fair to ask, "How did those experiments work out for you, Mr. Gandhi?" Gandhi answered this question with pathos in the final words of his introduction: "For it is an unbroken torture to me that I am still so far from him, who, as I fully know, governs every breath of my life, and whose offspring I am. I know that it is the evil passions within that keep me so far from Him, and yet I cannot get away from them."²⁰²

Gandhi had no respect for the Plymouth Brethren evangelist who tried to convert him because of the moral inconsistency he saw in his life. Nevertheless, the evangelist's words were prophetic. Gandhi's attempt to find God through the pursuit of moral excellence, though unquestionably sincere, was by his own admission, fruitless.

Though anecdotal, Gandhi's personal testimony is an illustration of the truth of Barth's insightful observation concerning the nature of non-Christian religions: "Heathen religion is...the very opposite of revelation: [it is] a false religion of unbelief."²⁰³ As such it is, as the

²⁰⁰ Ibid., Location 2110.

²⁰¹ Gandhi, Location 134.

²⁰² Ibid., Location 174.

²⁰³ Demarest, 127

Great evangelist, George Whitefield pointed out, a particularly pernicious variety of unbelief which must be repented of before a person “can speak peace to his heart.”

Our best [moral] duties are as so many splendid sins. Before you can speak peace to your heart, you must not only be sick of your original sin, but you must be made sick of your righteousness. There must be a deep conviction before you can be brought out of your self-righteousness; it is the last idol taken out of our heart If you are not thus brought out of self, you may speak peace to yourselves, but yet there is not peace.²⁰⁴

The Presentation of the Inclusivist Paradigm

Stripped to its essentials, Inclusivism is a theological model that posits the theory that “God as known within Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism [et al.] are partial or distorted glimpses of the real God, who is fully known within Christianity.”²⁰⁵ In other words, there is divine revelation in all of the world’s religions. Some argue that this revelation is salvific; others believe it is meant to prepare the way for the fuller revelation which is found only in Christianity. Clark Pinnock is perhaps the leading evangelical proponent of this latter variety of Inclusivism, which he refers to as Modal Inclusivism.

In an essay presenting the Modal Inclusivist paradigm, Pinnock asked a series of provocative *questions, which he believes demanded* an Inclusivist answer:

How can a particular historical person (Jesus of Nazareth) have universal saving significance? Does it not appear that those in close touch with Jesus would be privileged over others? Though the saving benefit of Christ is said to accrue to all humanity, does it not in reality have a more limited scope? The Bible claims. . . . that the nations will worship the Lord at the end of history. . . . But how intelligible is a plan to bring salvation to the nations at the end of history if most people get left out because they died too soon? If God cares for the whole world, is it not fair to ask what he is doing in advance of the mission among those who have not had the good news preached to them?²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ George Whitefield, “The Method of Grace,” in *Great Sermons by Great Preachers*, ed. Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA: The John C. Winston Company, 1927), 187.

²⁰⁵ *Four Views*, Location 501, 512.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, Location 1350, 1356.

These are certainly compelling questions. Pinnock has argued that any satisfactory answers must be “both faithful and *timely*: true to the divine revelation and discerning of the ways of the Spirit” (emphasis in original).²⁰⁷ Pinnock has asserted that timeliness is essential because an “awareness of religious pluralism is a characteristics of the present moment.” Given the pressures of the moment, Pinnock insisted that it “is not enough to get information of the past revelation right if, at the same time, we are not discerning as to what God is doing right now (Luke 12:56).”²⁰⁸ Pinnock explained what Inclusivists such as himself believe God is doing right now:

Inclusivism [is exploring] the possibility that the Spirit is operative in the sphere of human religion to prepare people for the gospel of Christ. . . . that God, who is gracious and omnipresent, is redemptively at work in the religious dimension of human culture, just as he is in all other spheres of creation.²⁰⁹

Inclusivism has done more than just expand the definition of general revelation to include non-Christian religions, it has rejected the distinction between natural and special revelation altogether: “We refuse to allow the distinction between nature and grace or between common and saving grace, on the supposition that, if the triune God is present, grace must be present too.”²¹⁰ Pinnock recognized the fact that Modal Inclusivism is “a new proposal in certain ways,” and that it is a “reinterpretation of historic theology,”²¹¹ but he is heartened to note that it has been the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church since Vatican II (1965),²¹² and he freely acknowledges inclusivism’s “debt to the Catholic Church for its leadership in this regard.”²¹³

²⁰⁷ Ibid., Location 1350.

²⁰⁸ *Four Views*, Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., Location 1364.

²¹⁰ Ibid., Location 1381, 1392.

²¹¹ Ibid., Location 1373.

²¹² Documents of the Second Vatican Council: “*Nostra Aetate: Declarations on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions: I*,” Vatican.va: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html (accessed July 1, 2016).

²¹³ *Four Views*, Location 1552.

In fairness to both the Vatican and Pinnock, the Inclusivist paradigm does recognize the dark side of Religion. In their critique of Pinnock's theology, Reformed authors Dennis Okholm and Timothy Phillips acknowledged that he has "insightfully [noted] that religions are a mixture of truth and error and are often pathways to damnation." Nevertheless, Inclusivists insist that,

God's Spirit can use positive aspects of other religions and a variety of other elements – specifically, the conscience, the human religious question, angels, and social interaction – as means of grace. The requirement for salvation is simply trust in God – under whatever from God is known – and obedience. Perhaps some believers will receive an explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ and the basis of their salvation only after death.²¹⁴

Pinnock has written that "Inclusivism offers...middle ground between exclusivism and pluralism," because it holds to "both the particularity of salvation through Christ and the universal scope of God's plan to save sinners."²¹⁵ He also offered a pragmatic reason for setting aside Christianity's historic exclusivism in favor of Inclusivism:

Western theology has been reluctant to acknowledge that grace operates outside the church, and there is the abhorrent notion of a secret election to salvation for a specific number of sinners, not of people at large. Such beliefs are deep in the Western tradition and place the genuineness of God's universal salvific will in considerable doubt. My sense is that Christians today are less willing than before to accept such a hard and pessimistic theology.²¹⁶

Some Inclusivists assert that non-Christian religions contain salvific revelation. Modal Inclusivism stops short of this. Referencing the declarations of Vatican II, Pinnock has affirmed a "cautious inclusivism [which] stops short of stating that the religions themselves as such are vehicles of Salvation."²¹⁷ However, a few paragraphs later he seemed to suggest that God may indeed use the revelatory light found in other religions to bring individuals to saving faith, and that such matters need to be decided on a case by case basis:

²¹⁴Vatican Document, Location 1378.

²¹⁵ Ibid., Location 1446.

²¹⁶ Ibid., Location 1368.

²¹⁷ Ibid., Location 1407.

We are not in a position. . . . to say what God has done before testing the given instance. Surely a given religion might be unusable, owing to the depth of the darkness of the severity of bondage in it. It seems wiser to say that God *may* use religion as a way of gracing people's lives and that it is *one* of God's options for evoking faith and communicating grace. This avoids a priori judgments concerning God's use or nonuse of religion. Whether God makes use of religion is a contingent matter to be explored case by case with discernment (emphasis in original).²¹⁸

What then does Pinnock believe about the un-evangelized? On the one hand, he emphatically claimed "the Spirit is present in advance of missions, *preparing the way of the Lord*" (emphasis added).²¹⁹ On the other hand, he argued that inclusivism is preferable to exclusivism because it "relieves us of those dark features of the tradition that suggest that (at worst) God plays favorites or (at best) inexplicably restricts his grace, so that whole groups are excluded from any possibility of salvation."²²⁰

A Critical Evaluation of the Inclusivist Paradigm

In recent days, the fields of Psychology and Neuroscience have confirmed something the Bible has said all along: every human being is born with an innate sense of right and wrong. In his best New York Times, bestselling book, *The Righteous Mind: What Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, Moral Philosopher and Evolutionary Psychologist, Jonathan Haidt, has identified six moral intuitions which seem to be present in every neurologically normal human being in every culture. Based on the accumulating evidence Haidt has concluded we "are born righteous, but we have to learn what, exactly, people like us should be righteous about."²²¹

When Haidt says, "We're born righteous," he is not using the term in a Christian sense. Rather, he is making Paul's point (he even acknowledges it), that we have a law written on our

²¹⁸ Ibid., Location 1427.

²¹⁹ Vatican Documents, Location 1433.

²²⁰ Ibid., Location 1442.

²²¹ Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided on Politics and Religion* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, Kindle Edition, 2012), 604.

hearts, an intuitive knowledge of right and wrong. As an evolutionary psychologist and an atheist, Haidt believes this law was written on our hearts by natural selection. Christians, realizing natural selection is not that clever, believe God engraved this law on the human heart. There is, then, a debate concerning the author of this intuitive moral sense, but based on the evidence there is a growing consensus that an innate moral compass is there.

Among the moral intuitions carved in the human heart is what Haidt refers to as the “fairness foundation.” Studies by Haidt and others have demonstrated that people living in Western cultures have learned to suppress all but two moral intuitions. The “fairness foundation” is one that has survived in spite of efforts to “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). Since fairness and concerns about kindness are the only intuitive moral virtues to have made the cut in the industrialized world, fairness has assumed a disproportionate importance. It is useful to keep this in mind when evaluating Pinnock’s arguments concerning the growing popularity of Inclusivism.

At its most basic level, Inclusivism is a direct appeal to the human heart’s intuitive preference for kindness (i.e. love) and fairness. In the West, these values are placed above all things; this is not an inconsequential matter. Pinnock, then, is probably not overstating his case when he notes that “Fewer and fewer are willing to tolerate a doctrine of salvation that favors a few over all the others.”²²² However, he does not address the possibility that the popularity of Inclusiveness might not be a good thing, an idea that ignores all other moral values in favor of the few that find a receptive audience in the uber-relativism of a post-modern culture. It might well be that truth is not determined by a popular vote.

²²² *Four Views*, Location 1442.

Pluralism is, by the admission of its proponents, a departure from the historic teaching of the church with respect to non-Christian religions. The Fathers of the early church did stretch natural revelation so that they could include the best exemplars of their favorite pagan philosophical systems, but they would never stretch it so far as to include Pagan religion. Until modern times, there are three adjectives the church would have used to describe non-Christian religion: soulless, dead, and demonic. Consider the words of Justin Martyr: “And neither do we honor with many sacrifices and garlands of flowers such deities as men have formed and set in shrines and called gods; since we see that these are soulless and dead and have not the form of God . . . but have the names and forms of those wicked demons which have appeared.”²²³

A consensus maintained by Catholics and Protestants for almost 2000 years is not something to be abandoned lightly. Not everything old is gold, but we can at least question an interpretation of scriptures that is such a radical departure from such a well-established exegetical tradition. It can be done, and perhaps it should be done, but one would need to build a substantial case for doing so. Such a departure needs to be especially examined when it is rooted, as Pinnock admits, by the fact that “awareness of religious pluralism is a characteristics of the present moment.”²²⁴

Pinnock has insisted that as an evangelical he is concerned that Modal Inclusivism “be shown to be congruent with the Scriptures.”²²⁵ Is it congruent with scripture, or is the lack of Biblical support the greatest weakness of Inclusivism? Consider the very heart of the Inclusivist Paradigm, the assertion that there is redemptive revelation in non-Christian faiths. How can a case for this be made from scripture?

²²³ Schaff, “The First Apology of Justin, 1:9,”

²²⁴ *Four Views*, 1360.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, Location 1552.

Pinnock tries to make the case by referring to Melchizedek:

The story of [Melchizedek's] encounter with Abram shows that God was at work in the religious sphere of Canaanite culture. . . . Abram accepts the blessing of this pagan priest. . . . God seems to be teaching Abram that his election does not mean he has exclusive possession of God, but rather that God is calling him to be a means of Grace to all nations among whom God is already at work.²²⁶

This incident does indeed show that others besides Abram were worshiping the true God. However, referring to Melchizedek a “pagan priest” is not only reading something into the text which is not there, but is also by definition an insult to Melchizedek. The Merriam-Webster Online dictionary defines a pagan as “a follower of a polytheistic religion.”²²⁷ This is the exact opposite of the way in which Melchizedek, the Priest of the Most High God, is presented in scripture. More than this, depending on your interpretation of Genesis 14, Psalm 104, and Hebrews 6 - 7, Melchizedek was either a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ himself or a type of Christ.²²⁸ It is inconceivable that Moses, David, or the author of Hebrews considered him a Pagan Canaanite priest.

It is also an enormous reach to make Melchizedek a representative of the religious norm of the Canaanite Culture. It is, to say the least, an argument from silence, but a closer look at the scriptures and the evidence of Archeology suggest that the Canaanite culture was certainly not a culture devoted to the worship of the Most High God represented by Melchizedek. Other than this one Biblical reference, Pinnock offers no other Old Testament argument for the premise that God is, or was at work in the pagan religions of the Old Testament era.

Pinnock's one New Testament example is the God-Fearing Centurion, Cornelius. According to Pinnock, “God used this godly Gentile to teach the apostle Peter that there is no

²²⁶ Ibid., Location 1543, 1565.

²²⁷ Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pagan> (accessed June 5, 2016).

²²⁸ Genesis 14:18; Hebrews 7:11

partiality in God’s dealings with humanity. Though a non-Christian and a Gentile, Cornelius was devout and God-fearing – evidently God was present in the religious sphere of his life,” but that is not the issue.²²⁹ The question is whether God was revealing redemptive truth to Cornelius through Greco/Roman Paganism. There is absolutely no evidence that this was the case. What we do see is that Cornelius was turning away from paganism, drawn to the light of God through his especially revealed word in the Jewish scriptures. Thus he was a devout worshiper of the one true God.

In his critique of Pinnock’s essay, Alister McGrath pointed to the obvious fact that,

Old Testament writers were clear that “salvation,” as they understood it, was not about a new relationship with any of the gods of Canaan, Philistia, or Assyria, but with the one and only covenant God of Israel, whom they knew by the distinguishing personal title of “the LORD” (Yahweh). For Christianity, the notion of salvation explicitly centers on a relationship, inaugurated in time and to be consummated beyond time, with none other than the “God and Father or our Lord Jesus Christ.” We are thus dealing with a highly particularized notion of salvation.²³⁰

Indeed. Imagine the scene. Moses has descended with the Ten Commandments. As he descends from Mt. Sinai, he is livid. All Israel heard God himself say, “You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them” (Exodus 20:3-5a). Now, in his absence the people have set up a golden calf, and Aaron in a wonderful display of Bronze Age syncretism has declared it to be “your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt” (Exodus 32:4b). In anger and disgust, Moses hurls the Ten Commandments to the Ground. The tablets of the Law shatter. Fire is in the prophet’s eyes and he is ready to act as God’s instrument of judgment. At this point, an ancient Inclusivist approaches and says, “Moses, I really don’t see why you are so upset. Sure, we’re worshiping an

²²⁹ *Four Views*, Location 1562

²³⁰ *Four Views.*, Location 2483

idol, but you need to recognize that that ‘there is testimony in human experience that God is redemptively at work in other religious communities.’”²³¹ It is likely that these would have been that unfortunate Inclusivist’s last words.

John Sanders, another Inclusivist, is better than Pinnock in setting out the scriptural case for Inclusivism. First, he sets out a series of texts which deal with God’s character and will to extend grace to all who believe in him.²³² Second, he presents a group of texts which focus on God’s attitude toward and relationship with those outside the Covenant with Israel. In this section of his defense, he makes specific mention of the Noahic Covenant, noting that it is the first covenant in the Bible and that it was made “to all flesh.” He also speaks of the universal aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant, God’s promise that all the world would be blessed through Abraham.²³³ After mentioning several examples of Gentile conversion he ends his scriptural argument, as Pinnock did, with Cornelius.²³⁴

Sanders arguments do prove something, namely that there were Gentiles in the dispensations before Christ who put their faith in the one true God. But his arguments, like Pinnock’s, fail to prove there is redemptive revelation in non-Christian religions. Consequently, they fall short of Pinnock’s stated goal of demonstrating Inclusivism to be congruent with scripture.

After attempting to demonstrate that Inclusivism is scriptural, both Pinnock and Sanders turn to theology. Theologically speaking, Pinnock and Sanders approach the question of the fate of non-Christians from an Arminian perspective. It is important to note that the majority of

²³¹ Ibid., Location 1601

²³² Sanders, 219.

²³³ *Four Views*, 220-221.

²³⁴ Ibid., 223.

evangelical Arminians are not inclusivists. This being said, it is undeniable that Sanders and Pinnock's Arminian perspectives inform their theology. For example, Pinnock has written that,

Western theology has been reluctant to acknowledge that grace operates outside the church, and there is the abhorrent notion of a secret election to salvation for a specific number of sinners, not of people at large. Such beliefs are deep in the Western tradition and place the genuineness of God's universal salvific will in considerable doubt.²³⁵

Pinnock's rejection of the doctrine of election stands out in this quotation, but so does his notion that God's will is universally salvific. There are indeed passages which speak of God's love for *all* men and his desire for the salvation of *all*, but there is also abundant scriptural support for the proposition that God's love will go largely unrequited and finally be rejected by the majority of those who have lived on this planet.

It is, as has been argued, difficult if not impossible to make a scripturally sound defense of the proposition that there is redemptive revelation in non-Christian religions. It is even harder to make a scriptural case for God's alleged "universal salvific will," especially since Jesus himself specifically addressed the issue. In the 13th chapter of Luke, Jesus was asked if only a few would be saved. His answer to this question must not be overlooked: "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able" (Luke 13:24). Jesus was even more emphatic in the Sermon on the Mount: "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

It is perhaps commendable for a person to wish the path to salvation were broader and gate wider. After all, Peter does inform us that God would prefer it if all were to come to repentance (I Peter 3:9), but there are other texts which make it clear that most will not. The

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, Location 1375.

scriptures and the Lord Jesus make it clear that humankind's rebellion against the will of God is such that only a relative few will find the narrow gate that leads to life. If the stark reality of this seems grievous to the post-modern relativists of the day, it should be noted that it also grieves the heart of the God who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11).

Pinnock refers to this sort of narrow gate theology as "hard and pessimistic."²³⁶ This may be true, but is the pessimism the result of God's unwillingness to save or the race's unwillingness to be saved? Inclusivists speak a great deal of God's love of humankind, but they are noticeably silent on the humankind's hatred of God. This makes their examination of this topic one-sided and a horribly incomplete analysis.

Inclusivists argue that Christianity needs to be relieved of the "the dark conclusion that that God restricts his grace . . . [and] that whole groups are excluded from any possibility of salvation."²³⁷ This is necessary, as Pinnock argues, because the "problem of evil is large enough without adding to it the idea that most of the race is beyond the possibility of salvation through no fault of their own." Pinnock's argument is a two-edged sword since he stops "short of stating that the religions themselves as such are vehicles of Salvation."²³⁸

Pinnock bewails the fate of the vast multitudes that the exclusivist paradigm condemns to eternal damnation merely because "they died too soon," This is, of course, an unfair statement of the exclusivist position, but even if it were fair, the inclusivist paradigm ends up at the same place.²³⁹ If the light in non-Christian religion merely prepares a person for the greater light of Christianity, as Modal Inclusivists say it does, then the same number of souls will ultimately experience damnation because they died too soon. God working in the sphere of their religious

²³⁶ Ibid., Location, 1368.

²³⁷ *Four Views*, Ibid., Location, 1442.

²³⁸ Ibid., Location, 1407.

²³⁹ Ibid., Location, 1355.

experience ended up doing nothing more than preparing them for a greater revelation, which never came.

The fact is, Inclusivism is somewhat disingenuous in its claim that non-Christian religions are not “as such are vehicles of salvation.”²⁴⁰ According to the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church:

Those 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. Although in ways known to himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please him, the church still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize all men. (CCC 847-848).²⁴¹

Vatican II document, *Gaudium Et Spes*, also declares that salvific grace is available,

[For] all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.²⁴²

Clark Pinnock believes the same thing, but he is a bit more evasive:

Through the Spirit, God offers every person the mystery of his grace, because in their hearts, as the [Second Vatican] Council says, he works in unseen ways Whether a religion serves as a means of grace remains an open question, needing more study and always careful discernment We are simply confident that the spirit is operating in every sphere to draw people to God, using religion when and where it is appropriate.²⁴³

Pinnock became more confident later in his essay:

The Spirit is the power of God unto salvation, not religion. God may use elements in them as a means of grace, even as God may use the moral dimension, the celestial bodies, or social interaction to lead people to himself If a non-Christian believes, it is faith

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 1409.

²⁴¹ *Catechism of Catholic Church: Revised in accordance with the official Latin text promulgated by Pope John Paul II, Second Edition, 26th Printing* (Washington, D.C., USA: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2016) 224-225.

²⁴² *Documents of the Second Vatican Council: “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium Et Spes, 22,”* Vatican.va: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (accessed July 4, 2016).

²⁴³ *Four Views*, Location 1511, 1524.

not membership . . . in a religious community that counts. By faith, one receives the prevenient grace of God on the basis of an honest search for God and obedience to God's word as heard in the heart and conscience . . . latently a member of Christ's body and destined to receive the grace of conversion and explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ at a later date, *whether in this life or after death* (Emphasis added).²⁴⁴

Notice Pinnock's subtle departure from the teaching of the Paul. Paul said *the gospel* is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16), Pinnock says it is the Spirit. How neatly the gospel is folded and set aside as superfluous, replaced by some mystical knowledge of God. Paul said, "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ;" Pinnock says faith may be the result of all sorts of things, and prevenient grace will be given on the basis of an honest search.

In fairness, Pinnock believes that God speaks his word in the hearts and consciences of non-Christians, and if they obey this word, they will receive a latent membership in the body of Christ. This will result in the grace of conversion before and after death. This latter statement seems to be a revival of the pre-Augustinian doctrine of an opportunity to receive salvation after death. Certain early church Fathers, most notably Clement of Alexandria, did make this argument, but Pinnock argument is that inclusivism is congruent with the Scriptures, and neither Pinnock nor Clement have made a compelling scriptural argument for the concept of post-mortem conversion.

There is one final argument that should be made against Inclusivism, and that is that it leads to a syncretism that calls into question the need for and undermines the motivation for fulfilling the Great Commission. W. Gary Phillips and R. Douglas Geivett have explained that,

The point is more than academic, for the Christians motivation for world evangelism is at stake. When it is suspected that God will arrange for the salvation of others without our cooperation, there will be an understandable tendency for believers to doubt the necessity of obeying the Great Commission . . . [Inclusivism] must inevitably generate confusion

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 1686.

about whether the evangelist or missionary should even insist on conversion to Jesus Christ if a sincere adherent of another faith might be persuaded to convert only upon hearing adequate reasons to do so.²⁴⁵

The movement towards inclusivism is indeed raising these concerns because once the principle of redemptive revelation within non-Christian religious traditions is accepted, and when the idea of latent or post-mordic conversion is added to the mix, the proclamation of the gospel does seem superfluous. More than this, these ideas open the door to syncretism. Why proclaim the message of the cross since a devout follower of practically any religion will have an opportunity to hear it about after they die anyway? Pinnock himself seems to be moving in the syncretistic direction:

I welcome the Saiva Siddhartha literature of Hinduism, which celebrates a personal God of love, and the emphasis on grace that I see in the Japanese Shin-Shu Amida sect. I also respect the Buddha as a righteous man (Matt. 10:41) and Mohammed as a prophet figure in the style of the Old Testament.²⁴⁶

Pinnock is not alone in this drift toward syncretism. The missiological literature is replete with examples of others moving in the same direction.

In the final analysis, Inclusivism posits a God with only one attribute, love. It opens the possibility of salvation without the Savior, since all those who demonstrate “saintly character” will somehow be saved, and it rejects the proposition that there are no righteous people (Romans 3:10-18, 23). Inclusivism requires more than just the reinterpretation of scripture; it requires the rewriting of scripture so that it will be more agreeable to the relativism of a post-modern culture. Pinnock sees inclusivism as a middle ground between exclusivism and pluralism, and, as noted above, he agrees with John Hick that Inclusivism is fast becoming a consensus among Christian thinkers today.²⁴⁷ This is no doubt true, but it is also becoming apparent that Inclusivism may be

²⁴⁵ Ibid., Location 1965

²⁴⁶ *Four Views.*, 1588.

²⁴⁷ Demarest, 1434

nothing more than a stepping-stone toward apostasy. Pluralism's outright rejection of God's special revelation is refreshingly honest in comparison.

The Presentation of the Particularist Paradigm

The parameters of the Particularist Paradigm were neatly summarized by Bruce Demarest:

Persuaded by the correctness of the a priori scheme of Augustine, we purpose the following hypothesis concerning the relationship of revelation, knowledge of God, and world religions. Man, made in the image of God and enabled by common grace, effably intuits (in the first moment of mental and moral self-consciousness) eternal changeless principles, including the existence, character and moral demands of God. Thus equipped with a rudimentary knowledge of God, man adduces further knowledge of God's character and purposes by rational reflection on the data of nature and history. For the light of general revelation, then, all people know God as Creator, Preserver, and Judge of the world. But controlled by a darkened heart and stubborn will, natural man refuses to cultivate the elemental knowledge of God afforded by general revelation. Instead, he tramples underfoot the knowledge of God as Creator and worships false gods of his own manufacture. Hence, the knowledge mediated by general revelation does not save; rather, it serves only to condemn. Nevertheless, God in his grace revealed to wayward sinners His saving purposes through mighty acts in history and supremely through the life, teaching, and deeds of His Son, Jesus Christ.²⁴⁸

Reformed and Arminian theologians are divided on many issues, but the basic outline of Demarest's statement would be generally accepted in both traditions, and this understanding has motivated Protestant missions since the dawn of the modern missions movement. This theology was even set to music in 1823:

*From Greenland's icy mountains,
From India's coral strand,
Where Afric's sunny fountains
Roll down their golden sand,
From many an ancient river,
From many a palmy plain,
They call us to deliver
Their land from error's chain.*

²⁴⁸ Demarest, 22-23.

*What though the spicy breezes
Blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle;
Though every prospect pleases
And only man is vile?
In vain with lavish kindness
The gifts of God are strewn;
The heathen in his blindness
Bows down to wood and stone.*

*Shall we, whose souls are lighted
With wisdom from on high,
Shall we to men benighted
The lamp of life deny?
Salvation! Oh, Salvation!
The joyful sound proclaim,
Till earth's remotest station
Has learned Messiah's name.²⁴⁹*

Demarest also has provided a more detailed outline of the Particularist Paradigm.

1. All of humankind “*may* possess, albeit dimly and vaguely, what could be called a reminiscent knowledge of God With senses, sight, and mind unclouded by sin, Adam and Even in Eden knew God Natural man thus may retain a dim and distorted memory of the progenitors’ Edenic concourse with the creator With the passing of time Adam’s descendants *may* not have completely unlearned this primal or Edenic knowledge of God” (Emphasis in the original).²⁵⁰
2. All of humankind has an intuitional knowledge of God: Humankind, “created in the image of God and universally illuminated by the Logos, effably intuits the reality of God as a first truth John, in the fourth Gospel, describes the Logos as ‘the true light that gives light to every man who comes into the world’ (John 1:9 NIV margin).²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Reginald Heber and Lowell Mason, “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” in *Living Hymns*, ed. Alfred B. Smith (Montrose, Pennsylvania, USA: Encore Publications, Inc. 1972), 648.

²⁵⁰ Demarest, 227-228.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

3. All of humankind can acquire additional knowledge of God through natural revelation: “Man by common grace not only intuitively perceives the reality of a supreme Being on whom he is dependent, but man, created in the image of God and illuminated by the Logos, also infers the existence and character of God by rational reflection on the data of the created universe.”²⁵²

Demarest also provides a list of the things human beings can infer about God through rational reflection:

God exists (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:19); God is uncreated (Acts 17:24); God is Creator (Acts 14:15); God is Sustainer (Acts 14:15); God is universal (Acts 17:24); God is self-sufficient (Acts 17:25); God is transcendent (Acts 17:24); God is immanent (Acts 17:26-27); God is eternal (Ps. 93:2); God is great (Ps. 8:3-4); God is majestic (Ps. 29:4); God is wise (Ps. 104:23); God is good (Acts 14:17); God is righteous (Rom. 1:32); God has a sovereign will (Acts 17:26); God has standards of right and wrong (Rom. 2:15); God should be worshiped (Rom. 2:15); man should perform good; God will judge evil (Rom. 2:15-16).²⁵³

4. All of humankind suppress the truth of natural revelation in unrighteousness:

“We recall from our study of Romans 1 that four times in the text the apostle expressly declares that mankind possesses certain knowledge of God’s existence and character (Rom. 1:19, 21, 28, 32). Indeed general revelation was given to mankind so that man might seek God and find him (Acts 17:27) . . . yet Paul plainly teaches in Romans 1:21-32 that, in spite of the universal availability of knowledge of God, sinful man chooses to respond in a consistently negative way. . . . First, mankind uniformly repudiates the knowledge of God afforded by natural revelation (Rom. 1:21-22) Second, man not only spurned the knowledge of God but he proceeds to fashion lifeless gods in the form of men, birds, animals and reptiles (v. 23, 25) third God, because of man’s willful rejection of the light, gave mankind up to their own inventions. . . . Since man deliberately abandoned God, God abandoned man the control of his natural impulses.”²⁵⁴

Particularists insist that salvific knowledge of God is only available through special revelation, most specifically during this dispensation, through the gospel. Natural revelation and God’s common grace may be instrumental in drawing the lost to the more complete revelation of God in Jesus Christ, but in and of themselves cannot save.

²⁵² Ibid., 233.

²⁵³ Demarest., 243.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 244-245.

There are two kinds of Particularists: those who hold steadfastly to the Augustinian/Reformed paradigm, and those who are open to the idea that God may save some who have no direct knowledge of Jesus Christ, though they are agnostic with respect to how it could happen. John Sanders notes that “this approach is popular in both Eastern Orthodoxy²⁵⁵ and Protestantism,” and that those “who advocate it are often very humble and responsible theologians who are not convinced that there is enough information to decide the issue.”²⁵⁶

Alister McGrath is one of those responsible theologians who take this position even after making a strong defense for Particularism:

We are assured that those who respond in faith to the explicit preaching of the gospel will be saved. We cannot draw the conclusion from this, however, that *only* those who thus respond will be saved. God’s revelation is not limited to the explicit human preaching of the good news, but extends beyond it. We must be prepared to be surprised at those whom we will meet in the kingdom of God.²⁵⁷

Pinnock’s response to McGrath is germane: “It is hard to be satisfied with exclusivist when they say that non-Christians can be saved but that it is a complete mystery how it occurs.”²⁵⁸ More than unsatisfying, this approach is downright frustrating. One wishes that the agnostics would take one position or the other rather than attempting to straddle the theological fence.

Pinnock’s response to dogmatic Particularism is also worth noting:

The odd thing here is that you have general revelation without grace. We are told to believe that special revelation is gracious, but general revelation itself is not. It is as if God reveals himself to all people in such a way that the revelation is incapable of helping them to be saved, even though they lack any other possibility. What a strange circumstance.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁵ The author has confirmed this personally in a recent conversation with a Greek Orthodox Priest.

²⁵⁶ Sanders, 17.

²⁵⁷ *Four Views*, Location 2613.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Location 2774.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Location 3662.

A Critical Evaluation of the Particularist Paradigm

This inquiry will be in substantial agreement with the Particularist approach to the question of the un-evangelized. In fact, it will attempt to go where McGrath and other agnostic Particularist are unwilling to go and offer an answer as to how those who have not explicitly heard the good news may be saved. This being said, there are a few items in the Particularist approach that will be challenged.

The primary area of disagreement with the Particularist Paradigm is the Augustinian/Reformed interpretation of Romans 1:18-32, which insists that everyone suppresses the light of natural revelation. In his commentary of Romans, Charles Hodge, explained the rationale: “Though the revelation of God in his works is sufficient to render men inexcusable, it does not follow that it is sufficient to lead men, blinded by sin, to a saving knowledge of himself.”²⁶⁰ What good does it then do? According to Hodge, it justifies God’s subsequent punishment of the unrighteous, “because He has made himself known to them.”²⁶¹ Douglass Moo concurs:

The current climate of pluralism and tolerance makes it especially important to listen carefully to Paul here for he makes it clear that natural revelation, by itself, cannot rescue people from their sinful state. People have enough information about God in the world around them to be justly condemned, but not enough to discover the good news that is the only path to salvation.²⁶²

There is a sense in which Moo’s point is irrefutable. Natural revelation “by itself” cannot save, but Moo goes beyond what the text actually says in arguing that the Holy Spirit has not nor could use natural revelation to bring an un-evangelized person to faith in Christ. This is not to

²⁶⁰ Hodge, 37.

²⁶¹ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Reprinted 1994), 36.

²⁶² Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans: A Theological Exposition*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, Baker Academic, 2002), 57-58.

say that there is not the universal rejection of which natural revelation speaks. There is, but it should be noted that humankind suppresses special revelation too. Paul provides an example of this in his description of the Jewish response to special revelation in the second chapter of Romans. It is apparent that the universal response to God's revealed truth is to suppress it in unrighteousness. Ultimately, then, neither natural nor special revelation are salvific "in and of" themselves. Only Christ can save. Revelation, the means to that end, is a salvific tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit, but never salvific in and of itself.

It goes beyond the text to argue that the only way in which men suppress the truth in unrighteousness is to turn to idolatry and the moral depravity Paul describes in Romans 1:18-32. In Paul's day there were many pagans who were as critical of the things Paul decried as he was, and both before and during the lifetimes of the great Apostle there were un-evangelized Gentiles who strove to live of virtue and integrity in the midst of the stich that was the Greco/Roman world. Consider, for example, the Roman Statesman Cicero (106-43 B.C.):

He believed in virtue, admired it, loved it. His aesthetic nature was pre-eminently true and pure. His private character indicates high-toned principle. In an age when all things were venal, no charge of corruption was ever urged against him, even by an enemy. He neither bought office, nor sold its functions. Associating familiarly with well-known convivialists, who regarded a wine-debauch as always a welcome episode in the pursuits whether of war or of peace, we have no vestige of a proof that he ever transgressed the bounds of temperance, and there is not a word in his writings that indicates any sympathy with excesses of the table. Living at a time when licentiousness in its foulest forms was professed without shame and practised [sic] without rebuke, we have reason to believe that he led a chaste life from his youth; and though as an advocate he was sometimes obliged to refer to subjects and transactions offensive to purity, and in his letters there are passages which might seem out of place in the correspondence of a Christian scholar of the nineteenth century, it may be doubted whether in all his extant writings there is a single sentence inconsistent with what a purist of his own age would have deemed a blameless moral character.²⁶³

²⁶³ Andrew P. Peabody, "The *Ethical Writings of Cicero: Introduction*." The Online Library of Liberty, Libertyfund.org, <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/cicero-on-moral-duties-de-officiis> (accessed July 6, 2016).

Given the existence of such non-Christians it would be difficult if not impossible to make the case that Paul's description of paganism was meant to be taken as a comprehensive treatment of natural revelation or pagan unbelief. However, Paul did describe a particular response to the revelation of God which Paul's readers could identify with because it was the cultural norm in Rome. Therefore, Paul was anxious to preach the gospel in Rome (Romans 1:15) because the wrath of God was being "revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." There were Gentiles in Rome who were suppressing the truth they had received through natural revelation through idolatry (Romans 1:18-23); but in the second chapter of Romans, we learn that there were Jews in Rome who were suppressing the truth they had received through special revelation through hypocrisy and self-righteousness; but there was another group mentioned, righteous Gentiles who by perseverance in doing good [were seeking] for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life" (Romans 2:7). Paul uses the existence of this group of righteous Gentiles to destroy the false security of Jews who were not truly the Israel of God because they did not understand that "a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter" (Romans 2:29b).

Who were these Gentiles? Unlike the Gentiles described in the first chapter of Romans, these Gentiles had responded to natural revelation:

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

Roman Catholic theologian, David M. Coffey, has offered some insightful analysis concerning this group of Gentiles. With respect to the Gentiles Paul describes in the first chapter

of Romans, Coffey opines that “Paul is speaking in general terms and does not intend to include every single man of the Gentiles. Otherwise he would be unable to say in Rom 2:13-15 that some of them are justified.”²⁶⁴ Coffey is referencing Romans 2:13-16, particularly verse 13: *it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified*” (Emphasis added).

The Augustinian/Reformed paradigm does not allow for such a group of Gentiles. What then do the defenders of the paradigm say of this group of godly Gentiles? Were they justified by their works rather than faith? James Stifler addressed this question by explaining that the “difficulty arises from a misconception of Paul’s view of faith. He is not speaking here of faith’s beginning, but of its completion; not of justification, but of judgment. The deeds that gain a reward clearly imply faith in him who does them.”²⁶⁵

Stifler has made a solid point. The good deeds referenced in the second chapter of Romans do seem to imply a prior faith, but that creates another problem. Given the context, Stifler’s answer seems to suggest the existence of a group of Gentiles very unlike those the reader is introduced to in the first chapter of Romans. These Gentiles are not guilty of suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, instead they have apparently responded in faith to natural revelation (i.e. the law written on their hearts). Stifler acknowledges this:

It must have been generally known that there were among the Gentiles at least some who ‘by nature’ did the things of the law, pure men who know the right and loved it, who looked upon God as one and a person. Noah and Melchizedek, Abraham and Job are examples How could this be unless some standard of right and wrong existed by nature among the heathen?²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ David M. Coffey, “Reflections on Romans 1:18-32,” *TheologicalStudies.net*, PDF, December 32: 674-691: <http://cdn.theologicalstudies.net/31/31.4/31.4.4.pdf>, 674 (accessed July 6, 2016).

²⁶⁵ Stifler, 40-41.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

Stifler identifies the righteous Gentiles Paul references as Old Testament believers, but he quickly adds that they have no New Testament counterparts:

“It must be noted that Paul does not say that the heathen have the law written on their hearts, for this is the characteristic blessing under the new covenant (Heb. 8:10). God in regenerating grace certainly gives something more than that which the heathen already have. . . . Again, while Paul asserts that Gentiles may have what is the equivalent to the law, he does not say that they are saved by that possession.”²⁶⁷

To summarize: Stifler believed that the un-evangelized do have some standard of right or wrong, but they do not have the law written on their hearts until they are saved since that is the characteristic of the New Covenant, which men like Melchizedek and Job were apparently parties to, even though, the New Covenant had not yet been inaugurated, because they are examples of men who had the law written on their hearts. That’s certainly clear. However, one is left to wonder where the men of Nineveh fit in to this whole picture. To which covenant were they parties? They were not required to be circumcised, so they were not parties to the Abrahamic or Mosaic Covenant, and the New Covenant was yet to be inaugurated.

Another possibility is that the law of God is indeed written on every person’s heart. Thus they are morally responsible for submitting to what J. Budziszewski refers to as that which they cannot not know, the natural law.²⁶⁸ However, Stifler is correct in saying that even if “Gentiles may have what is the equivalent to the law . . . they [not] are saved by that possession.” Just as natural revelation is not salvific in and of itself, just as special revelation is not salvific in and of itself, neither is an innate knowledge of the moral will of God not salvific in and of itself. If it were then all would be saved. Apart from the initiative, call, and the salvific ministry of the Holy Spirit, none are or will be saved no matter what revelation they have received.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 42-43.

²⁶⁸ J. Budziszewski, *What We Cannot not Know: A Guide* (San Francisco, California, USA: Ignatius Press, 2003).

Stifler's point that obedience to this law is evidence of prior faith is also well taken. Salvation has always and only been by grace through faith. However, this does not close the door to the possibility that natural revelation has, is, and will be a means the Holy Spirit uses to bring the un-evangelized to true faith in Jesus Christ even though they too have never heard the name of Jesus Christ in this lifetime.

Other Particularists address these righteous Gentiles of chapter 2 differently than Stifler. Douglas Moo, for example, makes them a hypothetical group who would be saved by the law if that were possible. He also mentions three other possible interpretations.²⁶⁹ He acknowledges the interpretation advocated in this paper, but he opines that "this interpretation is not required by the text and stands in considerable tension with Paul's claims in Romans 3:20."²⁷⁰ However, none of the interpretations of this text are required by the text, if one of them were required of the text there would be a consensus as to the identity of the righteous Gentiles.

The conflict Moo sees between Paul's statement in Romans 3:20 can be resolved if one accepts Stifler's point that the works being described in Romans 2 imply prior faith on the part of the person doing the good works. However, the presence of such a group would call into question the Augustinian/Reformed interpretation of Romans 1:13-32. For those who hold to this interpretation the proposal being made in this inquiry might be unacceptable because the traditional interpretation of this passage is foundational to other theological claims they believe to be essential.

An Unheard Voice – The Orthodox Jewish Paradigm

²⁶⁹ Moo, 59.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

In the discussion of the fate of the un-evangelized, there is one voice that has not been listened to, the Jewish voice. In the Christian literature on this subject there are a few mentions of Jewish opinion. However, very few of them reference the consensus the rabbis eventually reached with respect to the fate of the Gentiles. This is analogous to speaking about the sovereignty of God and leaving out Calvin.

This omission is understandable given the church's longstanding tradition of antisemitism. The scriptures say the hardening of Israel is "partial" (Romans 11:25). The church has assumed it is total. Paul bore testimony to his people's "zeal for God," while at the same time pointing out that Israel's zeal is "not according to knowledge." On the other hand, John Calvin went so far as to argue that the Jews do not worship the true God at all:

It ought to be observed that the Jews, when they had treacherously set aside the covenant of eternal life which God had made with their fathers, were deprived of the treasure which they had till that time enjoyed; for they had not yet been driven out of the Church of God. Now that they deny the Son, they have nothing in common with the Father; for whosoever denieth the Son hath not the Father (I John 2:23).²⁷¹

There is of course a difference between not having the Father and idolatry, but given the antisemitism of nearly every Christian during the reformation era it is not surprising that the literature produced by the reformers reflects this perspective. Given the ongoing influence of the Reformers it is not surprising that few evangelicals are interested in Jewish thought on this or any other subject. This is a mistake, because the rabbis have something to offer, and the Traditional Dispensational approach discussed in Section III will be informed by the Jewish perspective.

²⁷¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on John, Vol. II, Pdf* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Christian Classics Ethereal Library: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.pdf>), 122 (accessed July 8, 2016).

To briefly summarize the Jewish position, when God chose Israel, humanity was divided into two groups, “the Jews and everyone else.”²⁷² During Old Testament times the “goyim” were all viewed as pagan, idolatrous, and therefore a threat to Jewish monotheism. Boston College Professor of theology, Ruth Langer, explains:

While the Bible may grant these nations some element of distinct identities based on their historical, political and military interactions with Israel, theologically they are all total outsiders, uniform in their failure to recognize Israel’s God. The struggle to wean the Israelites from the attractions of idolatrous worship – whether a perversion of the worship of Israel’s God or direct participation in non-Israelite cults – fill large sections of the historical narrative of the Bible and provide fuel for prophetic ire.²⁷³

Spiritually speaking, the Gentiles represented a seductive presence and when it came to matters of religion the Jews were encouraged to distance themselves from them lest they be drawn into idolatry. Of course, Israel did not do this and as a result the nation was gradually drawn into syncretism and finally full idolatry. This ended with the Babylonian captivity.

During the time between the restoration and the advent of Christ, interaction with the Gentiles was forced upon the Jewish people as a result of the political domination of the Jewish people by a succession of Gentile powers. This created new challenges:

The rabbis . . . understood that, during the Second Temple period, [the] Jews had ceased to be tempted by idolatry. However, they were also very aware that much of their contemporary surrounding cultures’ ritual practices, many aspects of which were very attractive to many Jews, still met the Bible’s definition of idolatry. The Rabbis absolutely prohibited any interactions with the Gentiles that might involve a Jew in idolatry, even indirectly. They prohibited Jews not only from directly and deliberately practicing idolatry themselves, but also even from accidentally behaving in any way that might be interpreted as the practice of idolatry or from indirectly causing a non-Jew to perform an act of idolatry. They wanted to create a significant social barrier to social and economic interaction between Jews non-Jews, idealizing and intensifying their sense that Israel, for self-preservation needed to stand apart.²⁷⁴

²⁷² Ruth Langer, “Jewish Understanding of the Religious Other,” *Theological Studies* 64, 2 (June 2003): 263-264.

²⁷³ Langer, 264.

²⁷⁴ Langer, *Ibid.*

This caution can be seen in the New Testament in the Jewish church's attitude towards the influx of Gentile believers (c.f. Acts 11:1-2; Galatians 2:11-13; Acts 15:1-29), but this cautiousness did not mean that the Jews were completely closed to the idea that there were some "righteous Gentiles" who would be saved. This can be seen in Jewish elders of Nazareth's intercession on behalf of the centurion in Luke 7:4: "He is worthy for You to grant this to him; for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue."

John Sanders cites I Enoch 108:11-14, where Enoch speaks of Gentiles who were "born in darkness" who were nevertheless "faithful and so would receive eternal life," as an example of early Jewish inclusiveness.²⁷⁵ He also notes that the school of Hillel believed Gentiles could "find salvation outside the covenant with Israel." Sanders cites Rabbi Joshua who maintained that "there must be righteous men among the heathen who have a share in the world to come."²⁷⁶ In an echo of Romans 10:13, Sanders also references other rabbis who "believed the Messiah would save all the Gentiles who called upon God."²⁷⁷ This being said, Sanders acknowledges the salvation of Gentiles was not a subject the rabbis were terribly interested in.

Ruth Langer explained that Jewish attitudes toward the Gentiles began to be modified as new realities of the diaspora "demanded that Jews be able to function within the great societies in which they lived:"

The rabbis were cognizant that if their interpretations of the Torah became overly restrictive to the point that people could not possibly prosper, Torah would no longer be a source of life. . . . Thus, theoretical theological positions and reality exist in an acknowledged tension that generate creative application of (biblical) principles so as to ameliorate Torah's restrictions on dealings with idolaters.²⁷⁸

In the process of rethinking their relations with Gentiles, the rabbis began to develop

²⁷⁵ Sanders, 267.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 268.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Langer 266

what Langer refers to as a “potentially more positive understanding” of their non-Jewish neighbors:

[All] humanity is descended from Adam and Eve, but more specifically, from Noah and his sons. Therefore all humanity, Jews and non-Jews, are of common descent, biologically (and hence spiritually) distinguished from any other creation by their creation in the divine image. The rabbis understood that God had communicated a specific set of expectations to the pre-Israelite humanity, expectations that held for all its descendants. The nations (goyim) fulfill God’s will and are considered righteous when they accept what the rabbis term the seven Noahide laws.²⁷⁹

Evangelical Christians would normally speak of the Noahide Law as, *The Noahic Covenant*, or more accurately, *The Eternal Covenant*. (Genesis 6:16). The oldest known copy of the Noahide Law dates to the third century, which of course suggests that the actual theological theory was being discussed at an even earlier date.²⁸⁰ A case can even be made that the rabbi Saul of Tarsus may have been familiar with it and that this may be reflected in Paul’s reference to righteous Gentiles in Romans 2.

Today, Orthodox Jews look upon non-Jews as “Noahides,” or, to use more familiar nomenclature, people living under the terms of Noahic Covenant. Righteous Gentiles are those who submit to the Noahide Law, the unrighteous reject them. The Noahide Law consists of seven commandments:²⁸¹

1. Do Not Deny God (The prohibition of idolatry provides that the non-Jew does not have to "know God" but must disregard false gods.)
2. Do Not Blaspheme God
3. Do Not Murder
4. Do Not Engage in Incestuous, Adulterous or Homosexual Relationships.
5. Do Not Steal
6. Do Not Eat of a Live Animal [Eating the blood of an animal is considered eating a live animal in rabbinic tradition because the scripture says the life of all flesh is in the blood (Genesis 9:4).]

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ “Jewish Concepts: The Seven Noachide Laws” Jewish Virtual Library Online: https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Judaism/The_Seven_Noahide_Laws.html (accessed July 7, 2016).

7. Establish Courts/Legal System to Ensure Law Obedience ²⁸²

According to Rabbinic tradition, these commandments define the terms of the covenant God made with “every living creature” after the flood (Genesis 9:12). If this tradition is accepted, the Noahide Law is the basis for God’s judgment of the nations. This case is strengthened by the fact that Isaiah specifically stated that the abrogation of the eternal covenant would serve as the basis for his final judgment of the godless Gentiles at some time in the future (c.f. Isaiah 24:5b).

For the purposes of this inquiry there are several important points in the Jewish understanding worth considering. First, there is an important principle concerning human accountability: people are responsible for the light that they have been given. Or, to state the principle more broadly, humankind is responsible for what it knows, but is not responsible for what it does not know. There is a sense in which this principle has been partially embraced by the evangelical church. Most evangelicals believe in the concept of an age of accountability with respect to children. This widely accepted doctrine is not explicitly taught in scripture. At best it is implied, but there are very few who would be willing to consign infants to the flames of hell (there are, of course, some exceptions). On the contrary, even the strong Calvinist, John MacArthur Jr., has dogmatically defended this doctrine:

There is no "age of accountability" identified in Scripture, as such. There is nothing in the Bible that says, "Here is the *age* and from here on you are responsible!" I think the reason for that is because children mature at different paces. That would be true from culture to culture, and from age to age in history. . . . So the Lord in His wisdom didn't identify a specific moment. God knows when each soul is accountable. God knows when real rejection has taken place; when the love of sin exists in the heart. When enmity with God is conscious and willful God alone knows when that occurs.²⁸³

²⁸² For a more extensive treatment of the subject of the Noahide Law: <https://www.auburn.edu/~allenkc/noahide.html> (accessed July 7, 2016).

²⁸³ John MacArthur, “The Age of Accountability,” Grace To You, <http://www.gty.org/Resources/Articles/A264> (accessed July 11, 2016).

The Jewish model expands the concept of accountability to include the entire human race. Every human being is accountable, but every human being is *only* held accountable for what he or she knows. The rabbi, Paul, built a major theological argument on this principle in the fifth chapter of Romans when he stated the principle that “sin is not imputed when there is no law” (Romans 5:13b). The Augustinian/Reformed model recognizes this principle too, but makes it a moot point by insisting that everyone suppresses the light of natural revelation in unrighteousness. Thus, the knowledge humankind receives through natural revelation serves mainly to justify the condemnation of the un-evangelized, though God can use it to set an awakening person on the road towards the fuller revelation in Jesus Christ.

Second, the Eternal Covenant model makes room for the existence of two covenant peoples existing during the same moment in history. The Traditional Dispensationalist model is the only model since the early church to allow for such a possibility. We know that a two-covenant model existed in the early church because it is specifically referenced (and condemned) in the Epistle of Barnabas. Barnabas was a premillennialist, and his understanding of premillennialism would become the dominant understanding of premillennialism until it was supplanted by the Amillennialism of Origen/Augustine, but there was another brand of premillennialism being proclaimed in Barnabas’ time. This rival eschatology recognized the Jewish people as heirs of the New Covenant. The idea of two covenant peoples coexisting, especially since one of those covenant peoples had rejected Christ, annoyed Barnabas, and he wanted to protect those in his circle of influence from it:

I am asking you this as one who is from among you who loves each and every one of you more than my own soul: watch yourselves and do not become like some people by piling up your sins, saying that the covenant is both theirs and ours. For it is ours. But they

permanently lost it. . . . when they turned back to idols they lost it their covenant has been smashed Israel was abandoned²⁸⁴

Dispensationalists insist that covenants God made with the Jewish people have not been abrogated, so even in unbelief, the Jewish people are still God's chosen people (Romans 11:28). Traditional Dispensationalists reject the suggestion that the Jewish people have been replaced by a "new Israel." On the contrary, the Jewish people are still bound to God in a covenant relationship because "the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). The Traditional Dispensational Paradigm's ability to allow for the existence of more than one covenant people at the same time is unique, and it will be shown that this is a strength which allows it to uniquely address the question of the fate of the un-evangelized.

Third, the Noahide Law may shed light on the way in which Gentile believers in Old Testament times were saved and point us to the salvific covenant they had with God. The Noahide Law may also shed light on the way in which un-evangelized Gentiles may come to salvific knowledge of God during the present dispensation.

Section 3: A Traditional Dispensational Alternative

Points of Agreement and Disagreement with the Other Paradigms

Salvation through Christ Alone

Other than the Pluralistic Paradigm, all of the theological systems discussed in this inquiry agree; there is no path to salvation other than *the* way, Jesus Christ. Traditional Dispensationalism has always agreed with this essential foundation of the Christian faith. Historically Dispensationalists have maintained that Christianity is fundamentally exclusivistic because Jesus is "*the way, the truth and the light*. Thus, *no one can come to the Father except*

²⁸⁴ Bart Ehrman, ed. *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament*, (New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press, 2003) 222-223.

through him (John 14:6) Truly, then, “there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

The question being explored here is a different one. It is the issue C.S. Lewis raised when he wrote: “We know that no man can be saved except through Christ, we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him.”²⁸⁵ Of course, Lewis’ declaration is highly debatable, but the fact is everyone saved in Old Testament times was saved by Christ without knowing him.

A persuasive argument can be made that Abraham, David, and the Prophets foresaw Christ’s life and ministry in startling detail, but Peter expressly declared that holy men of the Old Testament era did not know “*what person the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow*” (I Peter 1:11b, emphasis added). Since this was true of the holiest men of Israel, how much more was it true of those Gentiles who were saved during Old Testament times? Presumably, Christ saved the men of Nineveh who repented in response to the preaching of Jonah (since there is salvation in no one else), but it is a monumental leap to assume that any of them knew the one who saved them.

Natural and Special Revelation

When speaking of revelation it is good to begin with a definition. Lewis Sperry Chafer writes that “revelation is restricted to the divine act of communicating to man what otherwise man would not know.”²⁸⁶ Chafer notes that Revelation “draws its material from both revelation and reason, though the portion supplied by reason is uncertain as to its authority and, at best, restricted to the point of being insignificant.”²⁸⁷ Chafer’s point is simply this: without human

²⁸⁵ Lewis, 936.

²⁸⁶ Chafer, Vol, 1, 48.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 48-49.

reason it would be impossible to process divine revelation, but unaided reason would not be able to come to an understanding of the things God has chosen to reveal about himself. Revelation, then, is simply God's gracious self-disclosure to humankind through a variety of means.

Historically, Dispensationalists have agreed that there is a distinction between natural and special revelation. This is not surprising given the fact that Dispensationalism was born within the Protestant mainstream. Later, as the Dispensational movement headquartered at Moody Bible Institute and then Dallas Seminary, it found a theological home within the Reformed Paradigm. This is not to say that Dispensational eschatology was confined to the Reformed Paradigm. Arminians also found it attractive, but the various Arminian denominations which embraced it also recognized the Augustinian distinction between natural and special revelation.

This inquiry rejects the distinction between natural and special revelation as artificial. The distinction *is* demanded by the assumptions of various interpretative paradigms, but it is not a distinction explicitly or even implicitly demanded by the scriptures themselves. However, the terminology is useful in discussing and teaching the various ways in which God has revealed himself, but the implication that there are two kinds of divine self-disclosure is misleading.

At the very beginning of God's self-revelation in scripture, the reader learns that the God who created the heavens and earth is a God who speaks: "Then God said, "Let there be...."" (Genesis 1:3). The 19th Psalm expands on the idea of a God who has spoken by explaining that he continues to speak to the human race by means of a great silent sermon which is constantly being proclaimed to "the ends of the earth." The sermon is communicated through the things God has made. Having made this point, the Psalmist then moves on to describe the verbal revelation of God in scripture. This latter revelation is a more complete, and in that sense

superior to the revelation of God in nature, but it is not a different species of revelation. On the contrary, both natural and special revelation is the word of God to humankind.

Paul underscores this point in the 10th chapter of Romans. In Romans 10:17, Paul famously declares that “faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” Immediately after saying this he responds to a very modern sounding question, “Surely, they have never heard, have they?” The pronoun “they” refers to those to whom the good news has not yet come (c.f. Romans 10:15-16). Paul’s responds with a bold assertion, “Indeed they have” (Romans 10:18b).

How so? How can those who have never heard the gospel be said to have heard the word of Christ? Paul answers this question by quoting Psalm 19:4: “Their voice has gone out into all the earth and their words to the ends of the earth.” Paul is referencing the “silent sermon” (i.e. Psalm 19:1-4), and in doing so, he reveals the identity of the Preacher. The one proclaiming the silent sermon is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, Paul can say there is no one who has not heard, because if they have heard the silent sermon, they have heard the word of Christ. There are certainly theological reasons for saying that the word of Christ through nature is never used by the Holy Spirit to bring a person to saving faith, but there is nothing in the text itself that requires this conclusion. Furthermore, it was almost certainly among the means God used to bring Gentiles to himself in previous dispensations. Moreover, there are suggestions in the New Testament that this was indeed the case.

Referencing the word of Christ in nature, Paul and Barnabas reminded the people of Lystra that God had “not left himself without witness” in earlier dispensations (Acts 14:15-17). To what end has God left this witness in nature? So that he would be justified in condemning those who do not believe? To set the un-evangelized on a quest for truth they will never be able

to find? Or did God have a salvific purpose in revealing himself through the silent sermon? In his message on Mars Hill, Paul suggests that the latter may indeed be the case. The silent sermon was proclaimed so that “they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him” (Acts 17:27b). The optative mood of the verb, *ψηλαφήσειαν*, in this text indicates that it is God’s desire or wish that some would, as F.F. Bruce puts it, “grope for him in the darkness, when the light of his full revelation is not available.”²⁸⁸ There is nothing in this text that would suggest that some have not done this, and given Don Richardson’s account of an earlier revival in Athens (c.f. p. 39-40),²⁸⁹ there is good reason to believe that an entire generation of Athenians found God him through this very means.

Clark Pinnock has written much that is incompatible with the Traditional Dispensational perspective, but he did make a relevant point in addressing the Particularist’s position on natural revelation:

The odd thing here is that you have general revelation without grace. We are told to believe that special revelation is gracious, but general revelation itself is not. It is as if God reveals himself to all people in such a way that the revelation is incapable of helping them to be saved, even though they lack any other possibility. What a strange circumstance.²⁹⁰

While taking Pinnock’s broader point, it is important to keep in mind that no revelation is salvific in and of itself. Paul makes it clear in the tenth chapter of Romans that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. So the word of Christ is a necessary cause, but not the sufficient or the efficient cause of salvation. Without God’s self-revelation salvation would be impossible, thus it is necessary, but the atoning sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the world is the sufficient cause, and the efficient cause is the Holy Spirit using the necessary means of the word

²⁸⁸ F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 337.

²⁸⁹ Richardson, 9-18.

²⁹⁰ *Four Views*, Location 3662.

of Christ to bring the lost to saving faith. Apart from the agency of the Holy Spirit, then, any sort of divine self-disclosure would ultimately be ineffectual.

Along these lines, it should also be remembered that natural revelation is a revelation. In the first chapter of Romans, Paul makes it clear that human beings are able to infer theological data from natural revelation because “God made it evident to them.” Human beings might look at nature and conclude that there is some sort of supernatural causation through human reason alone. In fact, pagan religiosity had done that very thing, but to draw the correct theological information from the available data is something a human can only do through an act of God whereby he makes it evident to them.

Humankind’s ability to gain the correct information from God’s self-revelation in nature has not generally been viewed as a work of the Holy Spirit. Rather, it has been portrayed as the inevitable conclusion of a logical mind rather than an act of Spiritual illumination, but if it is a logical deduction then it is not a revelation at all. The wide variety of creation stories, including the modern story of scientism, demonstrates that the data of creation is not self-obvious. As with any other sermon, the silent sermon can only be apprehended through the Spirit.

Light in Other Religious Traditions?

The Traditional Dispensational Paradigm has historically agreed with the historic consensus of the church that there is no light in other religious traditions. More than this, turning to any other religious tradition is not responding to the light, it is the deliberate rejection of it (Romans 1:18, 21-23). In a larger sense, man-made religion is more than just the suppression of truth, Paul declared it ultimately demonic: “the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God” (I Corinthians 10:20).

None of this has changed with the passage of time. On the contrary, with the passage of time, the human race has manufactured even more false gods and religious systems, and Satan has more than enough demons at his disposal to empower them all. George Whitefield was correct in declaring that religion is one of those things that must be repented of before a person can speak peace to his or her soul. Pinnock bemoans the fact that “there has been too little openness to the salvific presence in the Spirit in other religions.”²⁹¹ The Traditional Dispensationalists would argue that there is indeed a spiritual presence in non-Christian religion, but it is not the Holy Spirit. There is, then, no salvific light in non-Christian religions. On the contrary, the history of humanity’s religious quest is the story of a sinful race rejecting the Light in favor of the darkness because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). This is certainly how Paul presented the pagan religion of Rome in the first chapter of Romans, and there is no reason to believe it has improved since the end of the Apostolic age.

This being said, there is undeniably truth and wisdom in other religious traditions, beauty as well, and moral codes nearly identical with the standard of righteousness revealed in scripture. If non-Christian religions are devoid of light to the point of being demonic, how can these things be explained? The fine arts offer a model for understanding this paradox. Picasso said, “Painting is just another way of keeping a diary.”²⁹² Another way of saying this is, “All art is self-portrait.” Artist, Leah Piken Kolidas explains: “I feel like any art in which we are expressing a part of ourselves is a kind of self-portrait. It is an expression of our inner life, our inner workings. It is perhaps a truer self-portrait than any traditional self-portrait could be because it

²⁹¹ *Four Views.*, Location 1494.

²⁹² Leah Piken Kolidas, “All Art is a Self-Portrait,” Creative Every Day, <http://creativeeveryday.com/creativeeveryday/2009/07/all-art-is-a-self-portrait.html> (accessed July 13, 2016).

shows what's going on beneath the surface.”²⁹³ Art, then, is a revelation of sorts, not a divine revelation but an anthropomorphic revelation.

In the first chapter of Romans, Paul describes pagan religion as a human invention. In this sense man-made religion is like a painting, a sculpture, a song, or a dance, the product of human imagination and creativity. It is, then, art. As such human religion is a self-portrait, and a remarkably accurate and revealing portrait. Some have argued that the image of God in man was completely lost as a result of the fall. Human creativity should call this argument into question, but it has certainly been marred by the fall and this is also apparent in the product of human creativity. Human art still has the ability to thrill and astound with its beauty. This is true of non-Christian religion too, and given that it was invented by creatures made in the image and likeness of God this should come as no surprise.

Winfried Corduan, citing the work of Andrew Lang and Wilhelm Schmidt, has convincingly argued that “original monotheism” should be factored into the equation too.²⁹⁴ Demarest speaks of original monotheism as “a dim and distorted memory of the progenitors’ Edenic concourse with the creator.”²⁹⁵ While much of this primordial knowledge of God has been forgotten, traces of it can still be found in man-made religions. Original monotheism, then, *should* be considered when discussing the “good” found in other faiths.

Corduan has also pointed out that although “the purpose of religion is not to underpin a moral system . . . most religions do include a moral system and that there are many areas of resemblance” between these moral systems and the moral code found in the word of God. Given this evidence of a shared moral intuition, Corduan suggests that “the analysis of the relationship

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Winfried Corduan, *Tapestry of Faiths: The common Threads between Christian & World Religions* (Eugene, Oregon, USA: Wipf and Stock Publishers: 2002), 36-53.

²⁹⁵ Demarest, 227.

between Christianity and other religions needs to take this dimension into account and to develop a theory that accommodates both similarities and differences.”²⁹⁶ This universal moral instinct, natural law if you will, is another factor that needs to be added to the equation if the presence of “good” in other religions is to be explained.

There is at least one more factor that needs to be taken into account, the human need to worship. Whatever else the human animal is, he is a worshipping animal, and in this respect, he transcends the animal world. Interestingly, one of the basic moral intuitions Jonathan Haidt and his colleagues have identified is the sacred/degradation moral foundation. It seems that a sense of the sacred, what can be called a worship instinct, is a fundamental aspect of human consciousness. This can be verified through observation.

Throughout human history, in every place, and in every culture, human beings have worshiped. If there is a human population anywhere in the world, you will find religion, and generally the culture revolves around it. In fact, recent archeological data is causing many to conclude that religion gave rise to civilization itself. Apparently, early hunter gatherers settled down, developed agriculture, and built the world’s first city as a worship center.²⁹⁷ If this interpretation of the evidence is accurate it would seem that the cult produces the culture. It would not be inaccurate, then, to dub the human species, homo-cultus.

Given the historic importance of the religious quest, it should come as no surprise that humankind has brought its very best into its religious quest. This can be seen in the Biblical record of the first human attempt to secure the blessing of God, the story of Cain and Abel. Fallen though the race is, humanity’s best can be quite impressive to human observers.

²⁹⁶ Corduan, *Tapestry*, 14.

²⁹⁷ “Should We thank God for Civilization?” *New Scientist*, March 24, 2015: <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg22530142.800-should-we-thank-god-for-civilisation/> (accessed July 13, 2016).

However, it should be remembered that what impresses a human observer may be completely repulsive to God. Cain's offering might have been very pleasing to the eye, but it did not impress God, and the good works that impress a John Hick may be nothing but filthy rags in the sight of God (Isaiah 64:6). This needs to be kept in mind when the modern observer assigns "good" to non-Christian religion.

Original monotheism, moral intuition, knowledge gained through natural revelation, the worship instinct, and most importantly the *imago dei*, have all been employed in humankind's religious quest; they are the pigments that have been used to paint a human self-portrait. As one studies the painting, man-made religion often highlights the nobility of its creators, but their wretchedness can be seen in its darker colors. Examined closing, man-made religion is a picture of rebels suppressing the truth in unrighteousness while using their most precious creative gifts in service of their rebellion. As a result, truth and error, good and evil, are often juxtaposed in the same religious tradition. For example, the same religious tradition that inspired wisdom in Gandhi stimulated hatred in the heart of the man who assassinated him.

Flawed though it certainly is, God has used religion to restrain human evil. After producing their monumental, multi-volume, *History of Civilization*, Will and Ariel Durant wrote a shorter book, *The Lessons of History*. Though the Durants were atheists they were disturbed by the Western world's experiments with secularism. Specifically, they were concerned about the moral implications of a world without religion:

That states should attempt to dispense with theological supports is one of the many crucial experiments that bewilder our brains and unsettle our ways today... There is no significant example in history, before our time, of a society successfully maintaining moral life without the aid of religion.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁸ Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History* (New York, NY, USA: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks: 1996), 51.

The Durants made an excellent point. Generally speaking, history has shown that a culture is better off with religion than without it; so it can be argued that religious wisdom and morality are an aspect of God's common grace, but this is not the same thing as saying they contain divine revelation, particularly salvific revelation.

More importantly for Biblical Christians, it is impossible to make a scriptural case for the notion that God's revelation can be found in other religious traditions. From the first commandment to the end of the Bible, the message is the same, there is only one true God who alone is worthy of worship, and it is a sin to have any other gods besides him. It is a sin to make an idol, and those who would be saved must turn from their false religious traditions in order to find true rest in Christ. Writing of non-Christian religious traditions, John Calvin wrote that,

It amounts to this, that God is not properly worshiped but by the certainty of faith, which cannot be produced any other way than by the word of God. Hence it follows that all who forsake the word fall into idolatry; for Christ plainly testifies that an idol, or an imagination of their own brain is substituted for God, when men are ignorant of the true God; and he charges with ignorance all to whom God has not revealed himself, for as soon as we are deprived of the light of his word, darkness and blindness reign.²⁹⁹

Calvin's point is well taken. Any attempt to find meaning or truth in a religious quest unrelated to the word of God is ultimately idolatrous. However, as has been argued above, the divine disclosure in "natural revelation" is the word of God. This being the case it is entirely possible that the Holy Spirit would use the word spoken in nature to lead a person to the worship of the one true God. While those within the Reformed camp would insist that this word from God will not lead to salvation, but invariably end in the worship of the creature rather than the creator.

This understanding of the text is required by the reformed system, but it is being contended here that this interpretation is not required by the text itself. Further, it is inconsistent

²⁹⁹ Commentary on John, Vol.1, 122.

with the observable data of human experience. In other words, it fails the test of the Unity of Truth. Consider, for example, the fact that there were Gentiles who came to faith in Old Testament times, but in every case these Gentiles worshiped the one true God. Contrary to Clark Pinnock's unfounded speculation, the scriptures do not present Melchizedek as a pagan Canaanite priest, but as the priest of the Most High God. Job worshiped the true and living God, maker of heaven and earth. Ruth rejected the God of Moab and found refuge under the wings of the God of Israel (Ruth 2:12). When Naaman the Syrian believed he asked special permission to accompany his master to worship his pagan god, but he made it clear he would no longer be joining him because from that point on he would worship only the Lord (II Kings 5:15-19).

In most of these cases of God used special revelation to bring these individuals to repentance and faith, but in the second chapter of Romans, the reader discovers the presence of righteous Gentiles who responded in obedience to the law written on their hearts. This alone calls the Reformed understanding of the first chapter of Romans into question. As previously explained, Stifler has argued that this obedience presupposes faith, and he identifies these believers as the righteous Gentiles who were saved during Old Testament times. Admittedly, there are other explanations for these righteous Gentiles, but if Stifler is correct, the second chapter of Romans provides us with evidence for the proposition that some of gentiles have been brought to faith through the instrumentality of natural revelation, specifically through the moral will of God written on their hearts (Romans 2:14-16).

Like all other human beings, these righteous gentiles will ultimately stand before the judgment bar of God, but the text seems clear; they will do very well on that day. Paul clearly states that the doers of the law will be justified. These righteous Gentiles are doers of the law, showing a prior work of Grace as a result of the "work of the law written on their hearts

(Romans 2:15b). Those who suggest that they will not be justified on Judgment Day have the burden of demonstrating this from the text since there is no suggestion that these righteous gentiles will fall short. On the contrary, these individuals are clearly among those Paul is referring to in Romans 2:7 who “by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor and immortality,” and who as a result of this quest will receive the gift of eternal life.

The Suppressing of the Truth in Unrighteousness

For many Particularists, the foundation of their Paradigm is the Augustinian/Reformed interpretation of Romans 1:18-32. This interpretation has already been challenged, and not all evangelicals agree with the Reformed interpretation of this text, but there is a sense in which it can be accepted as part of the argument being presented here. The Augustinian/Reformed Paradigm posits the theory that everyone suppresses natural revelation in unrighteousness, but as noted earlier, it is the natural response of the human heart to special revelation too. It would seem that the fallen human race suppresses revelation; period. Some reject it in a self-righteous quest to win their salvation through their religious good works, through philosophy, through philanthropy, or through their self-sacrificial devotion to social justice. Some try to save the world by joining the Peace Corps, by becoming animal rights or environmental activists, or by embracing some other worthy cause. Whatever the path, human beings suppress the truth in unrighteousness. It would seem that no matter the kind or quantity of the Revelation available, the narrow road is seldom taken.

The Necessity of the Holy Spirit

For all of the troubling aspects of Clark Pinnock’s inclusivism, there is one emphasis that is worth retaining, his emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in Salvation:

In the economy of God, the Spirit is under nobody's control but free to grace any person or any sphere, however remote from the church's present boundaries. The Spirit embodies the prevenient grace of God and puts into effect that universal drawing action of Jesus Christ. The world is the arena of God's presence, and the Spirit knocks on every human heart, preparing people for the coming of Christ; the Spirit is ever working to realize the saving thrust of God's promise for the world.³⁰⁰

At this point a distinction needs to be made. The Traditional Dispensational approach being advocated in this paper does not propose that there is salvific revelation in natural revelation, nor is it being argued that there is salvific revelation in special revelation. However, it is being suggested that there is salvific intent in all of God's revelation, because the reason God has revealed himself is that he might be known.

Since the intent of revelation is the salvation of humankind, this inquiry rejects the notion that natural revelation is a different kind of revelation, a revelation that will ultimately do little more than justify the damnation of those who reject it. This is why it has been argued that *all* revelation, no matter how specific, will be rejected by the sinful human heart. Thus natural or special revelation in and of themselves cannot save. Only the Holy Spirit can bring the lost to true faith in Christ. He does this through the word of Christ, and there is no scriptural reason to believe he has not, or that he cannot accomplish this through the word of Christ spoken through natural revelation.

The Traditional Dispensational Alternative

The Advantages of a Dispensational Alternative

As a young man Pinnock observed that Dispensationalism provides a framework for addressing the question the fate of the un-evangelized that other interpretative paradigms do not. The reason the Dispensational framework has not been used to address the question of the un-

³⁰⁰ *Four Views*, Location 1488.

evangelized is that Dispensationalism was born within the Augustinian/Reformed paradigm and there was already an answer to this question within the strictures of that system. For purposes of the current discussion, then, it may be helpful to again cite Douglas Moo's summary of the standard Reformed/Augustinian answer:

The current climate of pluralism and tolerance makes it especially important to listen carefully to Paul here for he makes it clear that natural revelation, by itself, cannot rescue people from their sinful state. People have enough information about God in the world around them to be justly condemned, but not enough to discover the good news that is the only path to salvation.³⁰¹

It is important to stress again at the outset of this portion of the argument being presented, that this inquiry agrees with Moo that natural revelation *by itself* cannot save. However, an attempt has been made to show that word of Christ spoken through natural revelation *can* do more than justify the condemnation of the un-evangelized; in the hands of the Holy Spirit natural revelation *has* brought men and women to salvation in previous dispensations even though all who were brought to saving faith before Christ died without knowing the name of their Savior.

This was true of those justified within Israel too. They had special revelation, but they died without knowing the name of their Savior, and they were obviously saved even though the gospel had not been proclaimed to them. Clearly, then, men and women in past dispensations were justified as they responded in faith to the revelation they had available to them, even though the ultimate object of their faith was not clear.

God's Salvific Activity in the Gentile World in the Dispensations before Christ

Charles Ryrie defines a dispensation as "a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God's purpose."³⁰² Dispensationalists, then, read the Bible and note that God has worked with

³⁰¹ Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans: A Theological Exposition*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, Baker Academic, 2002), 57-58.

³⁰² Ryrie, Location 287.

people in different ways at different times. They note that even though there are similarities in the way in which God has worked, there are “some features [that] are distinctive to each [age],”³⁰³ so much so that these distinctive economies in the outworking of God’s purposes can be seen as distinct dispensations. An obvious example of this is the Dispensation of the Law, or Progressive Dispensationalism’s “Mosaic” Dispensation. This inauguration of the Sinaitic Covenant marks the beginning of a new economy in the outworking of God’s purposes. The Law changed the way in which God would henceforth deal with children of Israel. A new age had clearly begun.

Ryrie notes that each new dispensation corresponds with the reception of additional revelation. The inauguration of the Mosaic Dispensation once again provides a good example. The new economy in the outworking of God’s purposes corresponded with a new revealing of truth. Ryrie also notes that each dispensation is “instituted and brought to [its] purposeful conclusion by God.”³⁰⁴ Traditional Dispensationalists have also observed that each dispensation seems to climax with an act of divine judgment. Ryrie notes that at the conclusion of a dispensation certain “distinguishing features are retained by God.”³⁰⁵ In other words, certain elements of the previous economy are carried forward into the next dispensation.

The publication of the Scofield Reference Bible in 1909,³⁰⁶ more or less standardized the dispensations at seven. Within this framework traditionalists have recognized a dispensation of Human Government which was inaugurated with Noahic Covenant. Departing from the Traditionalist model, Progressive Dispensationalists recognize just four dispensations, absorbing

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., Location 293.

³⁰⁵ Ryrie, Ibid.

³⁰⁶ “The Brethren Writers Hall of Fame: C.I. Scofield:” <http://www.newble.co.uk/writers/Scofield/refbibhist.html> (accessed July 14, 2016).

the Dispensation of Human Government into a broad, Patriarchal Dispensation. The Noahic Covenant, more accurately, the Everlasting Covenant (Genesis 9:16b), is foundational to the argument being made in this inquiry. This Everlasting Covenant was a made by God with Noah, his sons, and all flesh. Specifically, God said it was made with “you (Noah and your sons) and your descendants after you...in their successive generations” (Genesis 9:9, 12). The perpetuity of this covenant is witnessed by the rainbow; as long as there are rainbows the covenant is still in effect.

The Traditional Dispensational model is often ridiculed for its famous (or infamous) “four color wall charts.” They do create a problem in that they picture the dispensation that began with the Noahic Covenant ending abruptly with the Abrahamic Covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant did indeed signal the beginning of a new chapter in the history of redemption, but the Eternal Covenant continued alongside of it, and it continues to be in effect to this very day. After all, there are still rainbows. An overlooked question by Dispensationalism, and practically every other interpretative paradigm, is how did God dealt with the rest of the human race after he began his special dealings with Abraham, then Isaac, Jacob (Israel) and his children? After all, the Abrahamic and Sinaiatic Covenants were made with a very small portion of the human race, but what about the rest of humankind?

The Most High unquestionably continued to be “the ruler of mankind” (Daniel 4:17b), and his hand can be seen working among the nations at the same time he is seen working with Israel, but by what law were the nations judged? What did God hold them accountable for? Without question some were justified by faith, but what was the object of their faith, and what means did God use to bring them to a true knowledge of himself for salvation?

The Jewish answer to these questions is that God continued to deal with the nations the same way he had since the days of Noah, according to the terms of the Eternal Covenant which was codified in the Noahide Law. Importantly, the first commandment of the Noahide Law and the Decalogue are the same. Thus the first responsibility of every man or woman born into this world, Jew or Gentile, is to worship their Creator (the presence of faith is implied by the act of worship). Second, all are then required to submit the authority of their Creator by keeping his commandments. According to the rabbis, the Jews are responsible for the 613 commandments of the Torah. The nations (goyim) have it far easier, they are merely responsible for the seven Noahic Laws.

The Particularist Paradigm recognizes that all human beings possess an intuitive knowledge of God and that they gain additional knowledge about him through natural revelation.³⁰⁷ Particularists also agree with the rabbis that the first duty of every human being is to believe in and worship the Creator (c.f. Ecclesiastes 12:13). However, the rabbis and the Particularists part company when it comes to the efficacy of humankind's intuitive knowledge of God and his revelation in nature. Particularists in the Reformed tradition are in general agreement with Douglas Moo who insists that knowledge gained through the word of Christ in nature is not salvific. However, the idea that there are two kinds of revelation, one given so that men can be justly condemned, and another so that they might be saved, is accepted by all Particularists. In contrast, many sincere Particularists find Reformed interpretation of the various proof texts used to defend the Reformed position questionable. These evangelicals, then, are drawn to other paradigms, but they would agree with their reformed Brethren that without the gospel the un-evangelized are lost.

³⁰⁷ Demarest, 228.

All Particularists would also agree that many Gentiles were saved before the advent of Christ. It can be argued that all of these Gentiles were brought to faith primarily through special revelation since their knowledge of God came through Israel, but it cannot be argued that this was always the case. Unless one subscribes to Pinnock's theory that Melchizedek was a pagan Canaanite priest, it is obvious that his faith predated his meeting with Abraham. More than this, the author of Hebrews makes it clear that Melchizedek had a higher standing before God than Abraham since he received tithe from Abraham and Abraham received a blessing from him (Hebrew 7:4-10). The blessing of Abraham is especially significant because the inspired writer plainly declares that "without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater" (Hebrews 7:7).. The spiritual state of Job and his young friend, Elihu, is another case in point. (The spiritual condition of Job's other friends will be left in the hands of God). It can be supposed that these non-Jews received some special revelation, but that supposition is just that, a supposition, an argument from silence.

Also, what is to be made of those who believed in God in the days before the flood? Demarest speaks of a "reminiscent" knowledge of God.³⁰⁸ It is reasonable to assume that this is part of the answer. The rabbis would agree with this since they believe the terms of Noahide Law began to be revealed to Adam in the Garden of Eden.³⁰⁹ There is a record of at least some direct revelation in the dispensations before the flood. For example, God spoke to Cain (Genesis 4:65, 9-9-15), Enoch (Jude 4), and to Noah on several occasions; but minus the discovery of some prehistoric revelation, it must be assumed that reminiscent knowledge and natural revelation were the primary means the Holy Spirit used to bring antediluvian believers to saving faith.

³⁰⁸ Demarest, 227-228.

³⁰⁹ Langer, 266.

It would seem that these were also the means the Spirit used after the flood, at least until he began to reveal himself in a more specific way to Abraham. God did not cease saving Gentiles after he called Abraham, but how was it done, and what covenant were they party to? Since the Everlasting Covenant was still in effect it is reasonable to assume that Gentiles were saved under the terms and conditions of that covenant. Thus, there were two covenant peoples existing simultaneously. One of the strengths of the Traditional Dispensational paradigm is that it allows for just such an occurrence.

Conversion in the Age of Grace

Whatever may have been the situation in the past, the New Testament makes it clear that a new age was inaugurated with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. In the past, God had “overlooked the times of ignorance,” but he was “now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31).

As it became clear that the vast majority of the Jewish people would not receive Christ, the prophetic words of Paul began to be fulfilled, the “salvation of God [was] sent to the Gentiles; they...also [listened].” The Gentiles listened by the thousands during the Apostolic era, as they did the Kingdom emphasis of the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ gave way to an Apostolic emphasis on the Church.³¹⁰ One of the distinctives of Traditional Dispensational theology is its insistence that there is a distinction between Church and the Kingdom. This flows out of the another dispensational distinctive, the distinction between Israel and the Church. Other theological paradigms do not make these distinctions. They equate the Kingdom with the

³¹⁰ Kostenberger, *Encountering John*, 41.

Church and identify New Testament believers as the New Israel. According to these systems, Israel's blessing have been spiritualized and transferred to the church.

In contrast, Traditional Dispensationalists believe the church was something new in the outworking of God's purpose. Traditionalist Dispensationalists maintain that the church began on the Day of Pentecost. The Church is not then a continuation or a replacement of Israel, nor have her covenants been abrogated or transferred to another people, nor is the Church in any sense the Kingdom. Dispensationalists do agree with the Reformed position that Gentile believers "are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise" (Galatians 3:29), but they note that being a descendent of Abraham does not make one an Israelite. As it turned out, father Abraham had many sons, and most of them became Arabs. It is true that Abraham only had one son of promise, but the son of promise had two sons, and the descendants of one of those sons eventually became part of the Arab nation too.

To be an Israelite, even a spiritual Israelite, one needs to be not merely a son of Abraham, not just a descendent of Isaac, but also a descendent of Jacob (Israel). This distinction is important to Traditional Dispensationalists and it bears on this discussion because it allows Traditional Dispensationalists, like the Orthodox Jews, to posit the simultaneous existence of more than one covenant people. This inquiry is suggesting the existence of a third covenant people, one which has existed since the flood. This third covenant people are comprised of those men and women who are related to God according to the terms of the Everlasting Covenant. A possible Biblical precedent for this third group can found in story of the God-fearing Centurion, Cornelius (Acts 10:34-47, 11:15-17).

In rabbinic thinking Cornelius would have been a righteous Gentile since he was responding appropriately to the light he had, and it would have been assumed that he would have

entered the heavenly kingdom had he died while Peter was in route to Caesarea. If this is correct then Cornelius, being neither a Jew nor a Christian, may represent a third category, a believing Gentile related to God through the terms of the Noahide Law (i.e. the Everlasting Covenant). It can be argued on the basis of Acts 11:14 that Cornelius was not saved before Peter came and presented the gospel to him. After all, an angel specifically told him that when Peter arrived he would “speak words to you by which you will be saved.”

Certainly Cornelius was not “saved” in the New Testament sense of the term before Peter arrived, and whatever his relationship with God may have been in the past, and new day had dawned and he be rightly related to God in this new economy in the outworking of God’s purposes, he needed to be saved. However, it must be remembered that the invitation for men to be “saved” is a New Testament invitation, a call which had not been given before the proclamation of the Christian gospel on the Day of Pentecost. Thus, in the New Testament sense of the term, no one was “saved” before Pentecost. The call for repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21), is a distinctive of the present dispensation. Paul explicitly states this in his message on Mars Hill: “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is *now* declaring to men that *all people* everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:30 emphasis added).

Whatever relationship existed between both Jewish and Gentile believers before the coming of Christ, a new economy in the outworking of God’s purposes, began on the Day of Pentecost, the day of salvation had dawned (II Corinthians 6:2). With the arrival of the gospel, men related to God under other Covenants were now called to repent and place their faith in the Jesus Christ. Upon doing this, the Holy Spirit baptized them into the Body of Christ (another New Testament distinctive), and they became parties to the New Covenant.

Justification by faith is timeless, but the salvific call of the gospel is a unique aspect of the present dispensation. Cornelius had not yet heard that call, so he was not saved; the Holy Spirit had not baptized him into the Body of Christ, so he was not a party to the New Covenant. However, there is no reason to believe that Cornelius was not as rightly related to God as a man could be under the previous economy. Was he saved in the New Testament sense of the word? He was certainly not, but it is not clear that he was lost in the sense we use the term. He seems rather to be a man in transition.

While not being dogmatic on this point, the Tradition Dispensational paradigm, as modified here, is offering Cornelius as a *possible* example of a man who was already rightly related to God under the former economy. When the gospel was proclaimed, (actually before Peter had finished proclaiming it) he enthusiastically received this new revelation, and he was saved in the New Testament sense of the word. He was baptized into the Body of Christ. He became party to the New Covenant. Thus, having believed, he was saved, and he moved dramatically but seamlessly from one covenant relationship into another.

The same thing was more clearly experienced by a group of Jewish believers who had been disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1-7). Like Cornelius, they were believers, having responded in complete obedience to the light they had. Before Paul encountered them in Ephesus, they were stellar Jewish believers living faithfully under the terms of the Old Covenant. Paul made them aware of additional revelation. They gladly received it and were baptized. Then, they were dramatically baptized by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ. Another seamless transfer occurred as they moved from the Old into the New Covenant.

These two incidents are relevant to the present discussion because they touch on the vital question of accountability. At what point did Cornelius become accountable for the gospel?

Note, the question is not, “At what point Cornelius became accountable?” He was accountable for the light he had from the moment he reached the age of moral accountability, and the text makes it clear that he was responding properly to the light he had. The question being asked here is more specific, at what point did Cornelius, and anyone else for that matter, become accountable *for the gospel*? This same question can be asked of the disciples of John the Baptist. From the respective texts, it would seem they became accountable for the gospel on the day it was proclaimed to them. It would be a reach to suggest they were they accountable for it before that time.

A new day certainly arrived on the Day of Pentecost. Even those who do not accept the Traditional Dispensational understanding of that day agree that something new was underway. But this was not the beginning of God’s work of justifying fallen human beings through faith. Men and women had been brought to faith long before the gospel was proclaimed by Peter on the Day of Pentecost. How were men and women justified before the proclamation of the gospel? Christ did not become the way, the truth, and the life after his passion and resurrection; he has always been the way even though those coming to God through him did not know his name. There is a consensus among evangelicals that justification has always been by grace through faith. However, the object of that faith in prior dispensations was not clearly revealed. Paul wrote “now we see in a mirror dimly.” The looking-glass was even dimmer in prior dispensations. Nevertheless Old Testament believers were called to believe in God based on the knowledge of him that they had no matter how dimly they saw him.

The Book of Acts records a time of transition. There were those who were brought to faith before the actual sacrifice of Christ. For example, disciples believed in him before his passion. As additional information became available to them they accepted that too. Then, with

the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, they were baptized into the body of Christ. There was not a moment along the way that they lost the salvation they had before Christ became fully known to them, but they were moved into a greater state of being as the New Dispensation began.

The same can be inferred with respect to Cornelius and the disciples of John the Baptist. Their stories are not as much accounts of conversion as they are stories of transfer, from one state of grace to another. They were justified as Abraham had been, but with the reception of fuller light of the gospels they were saved in the New Testament sense of the word and added seamlessly to the Body of Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They had been, respectively, parties to the Eternal and/or the Sinaiatic Covenants before; through Spirit baptism, through the gospel they became parties to the New Covenant.

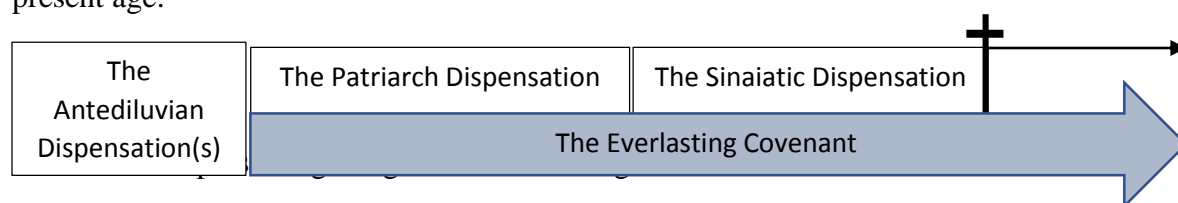
Might there be similar individuals in the world today, justified men and women who are not yet members of the Body of Christ? Might there be some who have heard the word of Christ in nature, repented of their sins, and who are now worshipping their Creator? To accept this possibility is to do nothing more than what is routinely done for small children. It is assumed that God will not hold these innocents accountable for what they do not know. That would be patently unfair. It is only when they reach the age of moral accountability that they become responsible. The hypothesis being set forth here posits the idea of a *day of accountability*. Simply stated, the un-evangelized are not responsible for the gospel until the day the gospel arrives in their village.

Corresponding to this, it is being suggested that the dispensation inaugurated on the Day of Pentecost did not arrive everywhere at the same time, and even today “the day of salvation” has not dawned in every place. In his letter to the church in Colossae, Paul speaks of the gospel

as a dynamic truth “which has come to you [in Colossae], just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, and even as *it has been doing* in you also since the day you heard *of it*” (Colossians 1:5b-6). What about the day before they heard the gospel? Were they responsible for it then, or did the day of salvation dawn on the day the good news was first proclaimed in Colossae? The model being suggested here is that that the people of Colossae were not responsible *for the gospel* before it arrived, and the same thing is true of other un-evangelized peoples. No one will be held accountable for good news they have not heard, so the dispensation which began on the day of Pentecost, has not begun for those who have not heard the gospel, and it will not begin until it is proclaimed to them. In other words, this inquiry is proposing a progressing dispensation.

Obviously, the paradigm adjustment proposed here will require some modification of the existing dispensational wall charts (A fifth color made even need to be added to the original four). First, the new wall chart will need to express some ambiguity concerning the economies of God during the ages before the flood because there is really not adequate information about that mysterious time to be specific as to how God worked during those days. So the first block on the revised wall chart would show an Antediluvian Dispensation (this Dispensation would absorb Traditional Dispensationalism’s dispensations of Innocence and Conscience).

The Everlasting Covenant is represented in the revised wall chart, not as a separate dispensation but a new revelation will underlies all post-flood dispensations until the end of the present age.



The Present age would resemble the char below:



The three colors in this chart represent the three covenant peoples living during the present dispensation, (Perhaps it could be called, the Dispensation of the Gospel, I prefer to call it simply, the Day of Salvation -- II Corinthians 6:2). The red represents the growing Church (i.e. the Body of Christ, Ephesians 1:23) throughout the age. The gray represents those who have responded in faith to the light they have received. This response includes repentance, including turning away from their false religion, and the worship of their Creator. Having done this through the agency of the Holy Spirit, they are party to the Everlasting Covenant. Note that as the gospel spreads the gray line becomes smaller. This is illustration what has happened throughout the age as the gospel spread. The green line represents the third covenant people, Israel. At the end of the age, after the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, then all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:25-29). This is pictured by the way in which the green line tapers into the red after the blue line has ended. Eventually, then, the three covenant peoples become one.

An Eternal Gospel: The danger in any dispensational scheme is that the very structure of the matrix seems to suggest that men and women were saved in different ways at different times.

This has in fact been a charge dispensationalists have had to deal with. Charles Ryrie references John Wick Bowman's criticism:

If any man is saved in any dispensation other those of Promise and Grace, he is saved by works and not by faith! [The dispensationalist] is clearly left with two methods of salvation on this hands – works for the majority of the dispensations, faith for the rest – and we have...to deal with a fickle God who deals with man in various ways at various times."³¹¹

³¹¹ Ryrie, Location 1286, 1289.

Naturally, dispensationalists have rejected this allegation and insisted that salvation is and always has been by grace through faith. Nevertheless, it is easy to understand why this charge has been made.

The model proposed here is that throughout every age there has only been one gospel, the eternal gospel. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the fullest revelation of that gospel. Among other things, it introduces us to the one who has always been the Savior and in him all of the typology represented in all of the sacrifices from Abel onward finds their fulfillment in the Person of the Son of God. It is being argued here that before this full and complete revelation the same gospel was being universally proclaimed through the silent sermon (Psalm 19:4), albeit in and abbreviated form since the full details of the salvific message had not yet been revealed. This message is specifically identified as the eternal gospel in the fourteenth chapter of the Book of Revelation.

The fourteenth chapter of Revelation transports the reader to the closing days of the Great Tribulation. The final judgments are ready to fall on the earth. The destruction of Babylon the Great is about to be announced. But before this, God sends an angel on a salvific mission, to offer “those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people” one final invitation. The message the angel is sent to proclaim is specifically referred to as “an eternal gospel.” This is the message: “Fear God, and give Him glory . . . worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters” (Revelation 14:7).

We are not told whether or not the Spirit will use this final message to bring anyone to saving faith. Presumably, there is sufficient information in this final gracious appeal to accomplish that task if God so chooses, but for the purpose of this argument, this eternal gospel

is vitally important because it is the message of the silent sermon. It is the first responsibility of every person according to the Noahide and Sinaiatic laws.

Notice that the eternal gospel does not mention the name of Jesus. It is not necessary since he is the one through whom “all things came into being...and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3). Those who have believed in and worshiped their creator have always been believing in and worshiping Jesus Christ whether they knew his name or not. This was who Noah and his sons worshiped on the day the Everlasting Covenant was made with the human race. This is what that covenant has always required of humankind. Most importantly, this is the reason the word of Christ in nature has always been a means the Spirit *can* use to secure the salvation of the lost because its message is the exact same as the message proclaimed by the angel in Revelation 14:7. It is the voice of the Savior saying, “I am God! Believe in me! Worship me!” Whether spoken audibly or through a silent sermon, this message has always been the power of God unto salvation. It is the word of Christ. It is the gospel.

The Implications for Apologetics

In every age apologetics has been driven by the questions being asked at the time. As Jonathan Haidt has documented, people in industrialized West have been trained to suppress all but two of their moral intuitions, harm and fairness. Given the cultural reality it is not surprising that questions concerning the fate of the un-evangelized are being raised both within and without the church. Nor is it surprising that many evangelicals, particularly young evangelicals, are finding the traditional exclusivist answers unsatisfying.

The unfairness the culture perceives in the exclusion and eternal damnation of those who have never heard the gospel is causing many to question or reject the exclusivistic claims of

Christianity. In fact, it is easier to make the case that the entire human race will be damned than to convince a modern seeker that the traditional answer is just and fair.³¹² The case for exclusivism is hard to make because it outrages humanity's innate sense of fairness. In order to accept it, a person must embrace a theological system that justifies such a scenario. This is especially difficult in a culture overly sensitive to questions of equity and fairness. More importantly, it raises troubling questions in the minds of many concerning the goodness of God. Unfortunately, these questions are not being adequately addressed by the apologists of our day. Clearly, a better apologetic is needed.

A typical response the fairness objection was discussed earlier in the context of an argument presented by Michael Horton. In that discussion a distinction was drawn between justice and fairness. Justice has to do with giving people what they deserve; fairness has to do with equity. The fairness objection assumes that the equitable treatment of the guilty is an aspect of justice.

Corduan does a better job than Horton in addressing this objection and his approach has merit. He explains that as a professor he has "adopted the strategy in the classroom of never responding to students' questions of what happens to a person who has never heard the gospel of Christ unless they first give...the right answer to the question, 'On what basis can we come up with an acceptable answer to the question?'"³¹³ The right answer, of course, is, "on the basis of what the Bible teaches," but Corduan notes that his students frequently respond with "incoherent ramblings about God's love, justice and fairness":

'Dr. Corduan, don't you think that a good and loving God would never condemn someone to hell who never had a chance to hear the gospel?' The temptation immediately

³¹² In my role as a philosophy instructor I have actually experimented with a secular version of this scenario and discovered that my students are very open to the idea that a galactic federation would be justified in destroying the entire human race before we acquire the means to spread our wretchedness to the rest of the galaxy.

³¹³ Corduan, *Tapestry*, 147.

to respond “yes” or “no” to this question is great, but in doing so, I would be shortchanging the nature of the correct answer as well as harming greatly the theological education of my students. This question ought never to be answered purely on the basis of some theoretical understanding of the divine attributes, not even if we (correctly) throw God’s justice and holiness into the mix along with his love and mercy. The question should only be answered first of all by taking it out of the realm of opinions on how loving we perceive God to be, the only legitimate response is along the line of ‘Well, let’s see what Scripture teaches on this topic.’³¹⁴

Dr. Corduan’s, approach is a good one in that it reminds evangelicals who raise the objection that the scriptures are the sole authority for faith and practice (*Sola Scriptura*), but what if the scriptures do not directly address the question being asked? The scriptures must still be searched to see if scriptures can be found which bear indirectly on the question. If that search fails, the scriptures must still be considered because any proposed answer must not disagree with the clear teaching of the word of God.

However, Corduan’s dismissal of his student’s objections as “incoherent ramblings about God’s love, justice and fairness,” betrays an unfortunate contempt for the question. Also, as has been noted in Section two, from the early days of the church until today many sincere Christians have disagreed on the answer to this question, so perhaps the scriptures are not completely clear on this subject. There are certainly clear answers to the fairness objection within strictures of certain interpretative paradigms, but those who do not accept the assumptions of those systems often leave unsatisfied. Sincere students might even sense that their professor considers their questions nothing more than “incoherent ramblings.” Nevertheless, there is value in Corduan’s approach.

The problem with his approach is that it answers the wrong question first. There is certainly no problem with taking the question out of the realm of opinion concerning the fairness of God, but this should only be done after it has been determined that the inquirer’s “opinion”

³¹⁴ Ibid., 147-148

does not have the added advantage of being correct. After all, not all opinions are equal.

Respectfully, then, Corduan is not answering the question his students are asking him, he is begging it.

It has been demonstrated that human beings have an innate sense of fairness, they know when they are being treated unfairly, and they can recognize when others are being treated unfairly. This is part of humankind's moral intuition, the law of God written on every human heart. It is part of natural revelation. The question Corduan is begging is whether this fairness intuition can be trusted, at least when it comes to a discussion of the justice of God. The question that needs to be addressed, then, is this: "Do the scriptures teach us that God is fair in his administration of justice?"

In considering this question, it is important not to confuse the two aspects of justice. Retributive justice, giving people what they deserve, is but one aspect of justice. Treating those being judged equitably is the other side of the justice coin. It is this latter aspect of divine justice that is begging for an answer when the fairness objection is raised, and this question is addressed in scripture.

This question was much on the mind of Abraham when he learned that God was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah:

Abraham came near and said, "Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep *it* away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are *treated* alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (Genesis 18:23-25)

It is noteworthy that God did not dismiss Abraham's fairness concern, nor did say as some might respond, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2).

Abraham's question sprang from his innate sense of justice. He reasoned that if God was not fair

then he could not be just. The idea that the judge of all the earth might not do right troubled Abraham, as it ought to trouble the moral sensibilities of any person. God patiently affirmed Abraham's intuitive understanding of justice by assuring him that his judgment would be not only a just retribution but also fair retribution.

Peter addressed the fairness question when he entered the home of Cornelius, "I most certainly understand *now* that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him" (Acts 10:34b-35). These words have direct bearing on the subject of this inquiry, but for purposes of the present discussion the focus is merely on Peter's assertion that God is no respecter of persons. It would appear that the judge of all the world is as just and fair in the administration of his mercy and grace as he is in the judgment of the wicked. We should expect, then, that if there is a correct answer to the fairness question it should be consistent with that which the scriptures reveal concerning the fairness of God. Using Adler's principle of the Unity of Truth, we should expect no less because truth is never in conflict with itself. Corduan's attempt to consign revealed truth concerning the nature of God to the realm of opinion is clearly an attempt, not to answer the question his students raise, but to avoid it.

The inability of many Particularists to understand or appreciate the force of the fairness objection is one of the reasons pluralistic and inclusivist paradigms are becoming more and more attractive, and if Particularists do not begin to employ a better apologetic than Pluralism and Inclusivism will continue to draw adherents like moths to a light. This investigation rejects the answers of inclusivists such as Pinnock, but it is hard to argue with his diagnosis of the problem the fairness objection is it is creating for exclusivists:

[Christian] Theology has always claimed that God loves the whole world but has found it difficult to speak coherently about it. Alongside a general hope of the salvation of

humanity, many have beliefs that create doubt about the sincerity of God's love for the world. For example, Western theology has been reluctant to acknowledge that grace operates outside the church, and there is the abhorrent notion of a secret election to salvation for a specific number of sinners, not of people at large. Such beliefs are deep in the Western tradition and place the genuineness of God's universal salvific will in considerable doubt. My sense is that Christians today are less willing than before to accept such a hard and pessimistic theology.³¹⁵

If stream of defections from exclusivism is to be slowed, a better answer to the fairness objection is needed, one that is both theologically orthodox and satisfying to those who are sincerely asking questions. If this is not provided, the exodus away from the historic faith will no doubt continue and increase. The answer proposed in this inquiry offers a better answer in that it allows the maintenance of the exclusivist claims of historic orthodoxy while offering a paradigm in which no one is excluded from the possibility of grace as a result of the fact that they were born at the wrong time or in the wrong place, because through natural revelation the word of Christ is ubiquitous.

The Implications for Theology

It is anticipated that Pluralists and Inclusivists will reject the paradigm being presented here because it does not go far enough. It is after all, an exclusivist answer to the questions they raise. It is also anticipated that the major objections will come from Reformed Particularists because certain aspects of it may be seen as a threat to the Paradigm. It is also hard to see how this proposal would fit with Covenant Theology. Of course, Traditional Dispensationalists would not be disturbed by this concern. On the other hand, it is possible that Arminians and those who take a middle position between Calvinism and Arminianism might find the proposal compatible with their theological paradigm.

³¹⁵ *Four Views*, Location 1368.

The Implications for Reformed Theology

Reformed theologians would be particularly troubled by the interpretation of Romans 1:18-32 being proposed in this thesis because certain key reformed doctrines are linked to the traditional understanding of this text. Specifically, this proposal might be seen as a something that might undermine the doctrine of Irresistible Grace, and possibly the doctrine of Unconditional Election. However, with a few paradigm adjustments this need not be the case.

The most significant Paradigm adjustment would of course be a modification of the traditional Augustinian/Reformed interpretation of the first chapter of Romans. It should be noted that the proposal being offered here is in partial agreement with the Reformed interpretation of Romans 1:18-23. In fact, the adjustment being proposed in this inquiry takes the traditional interpretation one step further by asserting that the fallen human race represses *all* revelation in unrighteousness regardless of whether it is natural or special revelation. The ultimate conclusion, then, is the same: unless enabled by the Holy Spirit all will suppress the truth in unrighteousness and no one will seek God. All, then, have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Accepting a more expansive interpretation of Romans 1:18-23 would require another paradigm adjustment. The pagan idolatry detailed in the first chapter of Romans would need to be seen as just one of the ways the ungodly suppressed the truth in unrighteousness. This paradigm adjustment would be an enormous benefit to Reformed apologetics since the widely accepted interpretation of this passage can be falsified. Broadening the spectrum of unbelief would provide Reformed apologists with an interpretation more consistent with the observable data than the present model. This, in turn, would provide them with far more persuasive argument.

The proposal being offered here might also require an adjustment to the Reformed understanding of election, but it would not necessarily undermine the entire doctrine of election. However, it would require Reformed theologians to consider the possibility that Calvin was wrong and Zwingli right, at least on one point. One will recall that Zwingli believed “a great many un-evangelized will be in heaven,” because, “God may choose among the Heathen those who shall observe His laws and cleave to Him, for election is free.”³¹⁶ As pointed out earlier, some within the Reformed paradigm have already arrived at Zwingli’s conclusion, though they are agnostic as to exactly how such persons can be saved. The paradigm adjustments offered here might provide these individuals with a cogent answer.

There would also need to be a modification of the Reformed paradigm’s understanding of divine revelation. The notion that there are two kinds of revelation, one that serves only to condemn and another that has salvific intent would need to be abandoned. It would also need to be acknowledged that the silent sermon, though less explicit than the full revelation of the New Testament, is still the word of Christ and thereby a means the Sovereign Holy Spirit *could* use to bring a lost person to saving faith. With the modifications proposed here, the traditional Reformed Paradigm would emerge essentially intact, and it would gain much more satisfying apologetic than it currently has in addressing the legitimate questions of a generation overly focused on fairness.

The Implications for Arminian Theology

As with all paradigms, there is a range of beliefs among those who have self-identified as Arminians. C. Gordon Olson lists three main branches of the Arminian tree: 1. Classic Arminianism, which goes back to the “moderate views of Arminius himself, 2. Remonstrant

³¹⁶ Ibid.

Arminianism, which holds the views of the Arminius' more radical successors, who went so far as to deny the penal substitutionary theory of the atonement, and 3. Wesleyan Arminianism, which rejected the more extreme views of the Remonstrants "by holding a strong view of human depravity and God's sovereignty."³¹⁷ The paradigm being presented here would fit well with Wesleyan theology, and it might be well received by Arminians of other stripes as well.

In his article, *Grace and the Un-evangelized*, Wesleyan Blogger, Craig L. Adams, points out that John Wesley and the movement he spawned have always been more open to the possibility, even the likelihood, of a path to salvation for the Un-evangelized. While believing that sinful human beings could only be saved through the Lord Jesus Christ, Adams refers to Wesley as "a hopeful inclusivist." This may be saying too much since Wesley was hardly an inclusivist in the sense of a Clark Pinnock or John Sanders, but in "A Letter to a Person Lately Joined with the People Called Quakers" Wesley does confess his agreement with a statement written by the Scottish Quaker, Robert Barclay:

The benefit of the death of Christ is not only extended to such as have the distinct knowledge of his death and sufferings, but even unto those who are inevitably excluded from this knowledge. Even these may be partakers of the benefit of his death, though ignorant of the history, if they suffer his grace to take place in their hearts, so as of wicked men to become holy.³¹⁸

Adams, opines that Wesley felt that the lack of an opportunity for the un-evangelized "was in conflict with the idea of the universality of the atonement by which some of the benefits of Christ's death were given to all people (prevenient grace)," but he "left the issue of the salvation of the un-evangelized strictly in the hands of God."³¹⁹ In his later years, Wesley

³¹⁷ C. Gordon Olson, *Getting the Gospel Right: A balanced view of Salvation Truth* (Ceder Knolls, New Jersey, USA: Global Gospel Publishers, 2001).

³¹⁸ Craig L. Adams, "Grace and the Unevangelized" Craig L. Adams.com, <http://www.craigladams.com/archive/files/grace-and-the-unevangelized.html> (accessed 8/9/2016).

³¹⁹ Craig Adams, *Ibid.*

became more committed to what might be referred to as the Zwinglian view of the matter.

Wesleyan scholar, Randy Maddox, explains that:

By the 1780s Wesley. . . . now claimed that initial universal revelation enabled people to infer not only that there was a powerful, wise, just, and merciful Creator, but also that there would be a future state of punishment or reward for present actions. More importantly, he suggested that God may have taught some heathens all the essentials of true religion (i.e., holiness) by an 'inward voice.' That is, he raised the possibility that Prevenient Grace might involve more than simply strengthening our human faculties and testifying to us through creation. It might also provide actual overtures to our 'spiritual senses'! With provisions such as this, some people would surely pursue virtuous lives, and the late Wesley appeared willing to acknowledge some attainment. However, he was quick to add that such cases would be less pure and far less common than in the Christian dispensation. Moreover, he was convinced that these persons would not have the assurance that is available to Christians through the Spirit.³²⁰

Adams closes his essay by including numerous references to a long line of Wesleyan scholars who were in general agreement with Wesley. It should be obvious that the later views of Wesley are in most respects compatible with the theory being offered here. Many evangelical Wesleyans are also Traditional Dispensationalists, so the consideration of the approach being advocated in this inquiry would fit well with these Wesleyans' eschatological paradigms.

The implications for those hold to a Mediate Theology

Some have sought a mediate position between Calvinism and Arminianism. Molinism is one such approach. Kenneth Keathley has written that "Molinism is attractive to many leading Christian philosophers of our day, such as Alvin Plantinga, Thomas Flint, and William Lane Craig."³²¹ Craig's advocacy in particular has given Molinism a higher profile within evangelical circles.

Molinism is named for the 16th century Jesuit theologian, Luis de Molina, but as Keathley points out, a similar theology was taught by the Anabaptist theologian and martyr, Balthasar

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, Kindle Location 182.

Hubmaier, and his views were influential in the development of those modern Baptists who have advocated a middle ground between Calvinism and Arminianism.

With respect to the subject of this inquiry, no theologian has come closer to articulating the position being advocated in this thesis than Molina. According to his biographer, Kirk R. MacGregor, Molina agreed with the Reformers that “the work of Christ was necessary for any person to receive salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).”³²² However, he departed from them in his conviction, based on Romans 2:7, that “explicit knowledge of the facts concerning Christ’s life, death, and resurrection was not necessary for a person to obtain salvation.” Macgregor explains:

Molina affirmed that persons with no conscious knowledge of Christ, living at any time and in any culture, would find salvation by placing faith in God and following to the best of their ability the natural law written on their hearts. Concerning those parts of the world unreached by the gospel, Molina wrote, “However, the rest of the world lies still in the former state of the natural law, in which they are able to be saved by fulfilling the precepts of the supernatural. . . . insofar as they are able to understand them.” Thus salvation is universally accessible to all persons at all times.³²³

Molina would also be open to the idea that those who heard the silent sermon were hearing the word of Christ, and if they responded to it they were accepting Christ:

Molina thought that such persons [i.e. those who had responded to natural revelation], had actually received salvation via their proper response to God’s general revelation in nature and conscience. Since the second person of the Godhead to whom such persons had committed themselves was, in fact, Jesus, Molina reasoned that they had placed implicit faith in Jesus and so found salvation in precisely the same manner as did believers in the Old Testament, such as the patriarchs, the prophets, and the righteous gentiles such as Melchizedek and Job.³²⁴

Though some modern Molinists agree with the exclusivist position of their Reformed brethren, the fact that Molina himself was open to an alternative similar to the one being presented here suggests that some Molinists might be open to the approach being advocated here.

³²² Kirk R. MacGregor, *The Life and Theology of Luis de Molina*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan, 2015), 183.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ MacGregor, 183-184.

There are other mediate approaches to the gospel. For example, it has been noticed that many Baptist groups have taken a position somewhere between Calvinism and Arminianism. Fuller treatments of these positions can be found Norman Geisler's, *Chosen but Free*, and C. Gordon Olson's, *Getting the Gospel Right*. These approaches have historically been exclusivistic when it comes the fate of the un-evangelized, yet there is an openness in these systems that might allow for the acceptance of the solution being offered here. For example, in Geisler's brief enumeration of the key points in his "balanced position," he writes that,

Fallen human beings are spiritually dead in that they have no spiritual life. However, God's image is still present in them; hence, they're able to hear His voice and respond to his offer of salvation. They must believe as a condition for being regenerated, and everyone is capable of exercising his belief that brings salvation. But no one ever believes who has not been persuaded by God's grace to do so.³²⁵

The argument being presented in this inquiry could fit well in a middle-way system such as Geisler's. In fact, there are only two paradigm adjustments that would be required to accommodate it. First, those who hold this position would need to recognize that natural revelation is as much the word of Christ as special revelation (Romans 10:16-18). Second, it would need to be recognized that natural revelation was given not to justify the condemnation of those who have never heard the gospel, but so that those who have not heard "might grope after God in the Darkness when the light of his full revelation is not available."³²⁶ (Acts 17:27b). If these two propositions are accepted, then the idea that the Spirit of God could direct a seeker's groping until it accomplished God's desired end – the salvation of his or her soul -- is not an unreasonable conclusion.

The Implication for Missions

³²⁵ Norman Geisler, *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of God's Sovereignty and Free Will*, 3rd Edition (Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA: Bethany House Publishers, 2010), 20.

³²⁶ Bruce, *Acts*, 337.

The Church has been tasked with the mission of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. The church has often been lethargic in carrying out its mission. Often prevailing doctrinal moods have contributed to this spiritual anemia. In light of this sad history, any new proposal concerning the fate of the un-evangelized must be treated with caution lest the Church find itself in the situation it was in on the eve of the modern missionary movement. C. Gordon Olson explains the importance of this cautious approach:

There are three significant tests of any theological system. The historical and philosophical tests are given undue priority in many theological works. However, the test of global evangelism has been ignored. Since evangelism and missions are axiomatic, a theology's harmony with them must be investigated. . . . how strange that most of theology has developed since the Reformation without any reference to God's global missionary program. Indeed, a significant segment of theology has not been conducive to world evangelization, but even hostile to it. In actuality, theology ought to be the handmaiden of missions implementation.³²⁷

Admittedly, the notion that men and women *may* be saved by the Holy Spirit through God's self-revelation in nature runs the risk of causing some to conclude that the proclamation of the gospel is superfluous since the un-evangelized already have the path to salvation available to them. This being the case, the proposal under consideration must be the handmaiden of missions implementation, and it cannot be presented independently of the church's responsibility to take the good news of salvation to the nations.

Motivation for Missions

In his second epistle to the church in Corinth, Paul explained that "we are ambassadors of Christ," and that God is "making an appeal through us" calling a lost, rebellious, and dying race to be reconciled with God (II Corinthians 5:20). To willfully refuse this ambassadorship, is direct disobedience and an insult to the King. The implementation of the Great Commission, then, can

³²⁷ C. Gordon Olson, *Getting the Gospel Right: A Balanced View of Salvation Truth* (Cedar Knolls, New Jersey, USA: Global Gospel Publishers, 2001), 336.

never be seen as optional; it is quite simply a matter of obedience, and the Holy Spirit's prevenient grace among the un-evangelized cannot be used as an excuse for not carrying out the mission Christ has assigned to the church. Those who love him will keep his commandments (John 14:15). This should ultimately and always be the primary missional motivation.

On this point, the experience of Cornelius is worth considering again. God had already clearly determined that Cornelius would be saved, and that Peter's proclamation of the gospel would be the means to that end. However, this did not make Peter's mission superfluous because God's appointed ends include his means to those ends. Peter's mission was not charged with plumbing the mystery of the predetermined will of God (though he did opine on the matter at later time, I Peter 1:1-3). His mission was to respond to God's call to go. His privilege was participation in the salvific mission of God. His joy was in seeing an entire household added to the Body of Christ.

With respect to the Church's assigned mission, it is also good to consider the divine rationale behind the mission. Jesus explained the rationale to his disciples in the tenth chapter of the Gospel of John when he told them that he had "other sheep, which are not of this fold; [and that he] must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd" (John 10:16). In commenting on this text, D.A. Carson explained,

If Jesus has other sheep that are not of this sheep pen, the reference must be to Gentiles. When he calls they, too, will respond to his voice. . . . Jesus' death was not only 'for the Jewish nation' but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one' (11:51-52). This is the fulfilment of messianic prophecy, and the ground of the Gentile mission. Indeed, if it is Jesus himself who must gather these sheep from other pens, it is assumed that it is Jesus himself who is operative in the Gentile mission.³²⁸

Carson's commentary on this passage also sheds light on the ambassadorship Christ has

³²⁸ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 388.

assigned to his servants (II Corinthians 5:20). Paul told the Corinthians that the ambassador's task is to beseech "on behalf of Christ." It is through this proclamation that the voice of Christ is being heard by those sheep in other folds to leave the place they are, come to the shepherd, and follow him into his fold. This is indeed "the ground of the Gentile mission."

This text also provides an answer to those who would argue that there is salvific revelation in other religious traditions. The call of Christ is to come out of those other folds because they cannot come to the shepherd unless they leave those other folds. The model being posited in this inquiry is exclusivist. It has been argued that the shepherd's voice is faintly heard in nature, but when the missionary arrives it is clearly heard, and when Christ's sheep hear his voice, they will immediately and gladly respond to his call. The missionary has the privilege of speaking for God, calling his sheep, and watching with joy as they come to a full knowledge of God.

Don Richardson provides a beautiful example of this very thing in his account of mass conversion of the Karen tribe in Burma.³²⁹ Theirs' is the story of an entire people who, according to the oral tradition of the tribe, faithfully worshiped their Creator while waiting for the day when an ancient prophecy would be fulfilled, and a white man with a book would arrive to bring them back to the God they had been separated from as a result of a great sin of their ancestors. Richardson writes that, "The Karen nation was thus poised like an 800,000 welcoming party, ready for the first unsuspecting missionary who approached them with a Bible and a message of deliverance from God. Whoever he proved to be, he was destined to enjoy one of history's greatest privileges."³³⁰

³²⁹ Richardson, 73-85, 92-97.

³³⁰ Richardson, 84-85.

The story of the Karen nation does not fit into the Particularist paradigm in its present forms. Previous generations were motivated by the idea that the un-evangelized were dying in darkness without hope unless reached by a missionary. God certainly used this understanding of the necessity of the missionary to motivate generations of missionaries to reach the world. And as a general description of the spiritual state of the world, it is not completely inaccurate.

However, the final phrase in the above quotation speaks of another motivation. If the missionary is motivated to obey the Lord he or she loves, then the reward of that obedience will be the great privilege of seeing Christ's sheep respond to the voice of Christ speaking through them as they leave those other folds and come into the fold of the Good Shepherd. This should be a powerful enough motivation for any missionary.

A Mission Apologetic

The philosopher of science, Thomas Kuhn, spoke not only of scientific paradigms, he spoke of them in relation to scientific revolutions. He noted that there comes a time when the old paradigm does not provide satisfactory answers to the questions being asked. At that point there is an openness to a new paradigm. When a new paradigm is proposed which offers viable answers to the questions being asked, a scientific revolution occurs.

Political revolutions are inaugurated by a growing sense, often restricted to a segment of the political community, that existing institutions have ceased adequately to meet the problems posed by an environment that they have in part created. In much the same way, scientific revolutions are inaugurated by a growing sense, again often restricted to a narrow subdivision of the scientific community that an existing paradigm has ceased to function adequately in the exploration of an aspect of nature to which that paradigm itself had previously led the way. In both political and scientific development, the sense of malfunction that can lead to crisis is prerequisite to revolution.³³¹

³³¹ Kuhn, 92-93.

Throughout history, there have been theological revolutions too, and the dynamic is the same. When one peruses the missional literature, when one spends time on a secular college campus, when one listens to the voices of the popular culture, it is increasingly apparent that a crisis moment has arrived. The old apologetics are often designed to answer questions no one is asking, and this is resulting in the trends noticed by Barna and others. The answers being offered by the evangelical church are not even satisfying the minds of their own youth let alone the modern seeker. Their sincerely held questions and therefore the goodness of God are not being answered, at least in a way that commends itself to their innate sense of fairness. Missiologist, Harold Netland, has put his finger on the problem,

There is something different about our current encounter with other religions that gives the term “religious pluralism” its distinctively modern sense. There is something unique about religious diversity, that encourages different ways of thinking about religions, thereby posing significant challenges to traditional orthodoxies.³³²

Netland goes on to note that,

The calmativ influences of the disestablishment of Christianity in Western societies, the increased marginalization of traditional religion in modern life, a deepening skepticism about the claims of orthodox Christianity, and the existential awareness of cultural and religious diversity engendered by globalization work together to erode confidence in the truth of Christian faith in favor of more pluralistic alternatives.³³³

The importance of Netland’s insight into the spirit of the age cannot be overstated, and when the ubiquitous postmodern, multi-cultural ethos is added to the mix, one can understand the challenge faced by the church as it seeks to complete the charge Christ gave to his disciples on the day of his ascension. When viewing the present missiological landscape, one is reminded of the rhetorical question asked in the old hymn, *O Breath of Life*: “Is zeal abating while harvest fields are vast and white?”³³⁴ The answer seems to be, “yes it is.”

³³² Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 11.

³³³ Netland, 15.

³³⁴ *Living Hymns*, 263.

Under Pope Francis, the Vatican is leading the way to a more inclusive view of non-Christian religions, and many in the evangelical church are joining the parade.³³⁵ There is, as John Hick points out, a growing echo of the conclusions first reached by mainstream Protestants when they accepted the spirit and the recommendations of the “rethinking of missions,” presented in the *Layman’s Foreign Missions Inquiry* (1932-1933). At that time it was suggested that,

Christian missions should not focus upon evangelism with the intention that followers of other religions should convert to Christianity; rather ‘ministry to the secular needs of men in the Spirit of Christ is *evangelism*. The purpose of missions is not to conquer or displace other religions. Instead Christianity must “make a positive effort, first of all to know and understand the religions around it, then to recognize and associate itself with whatever kindred element there are in them.’ The new missionary should ‘regard himself as a co-worker with the forces which are making for righteousness within every religious system.’³³⁶

Similar thoughts can indeed be found in contemporary evangelical missiological literature. It seems that many evangelicals are earnestly searching for a new paradigm that will provide a way to get Gandhi to heaven. The paradigm posited in this inquiry does not provide that paradigm. On the contrary, the view of non-Christian faiths presented here is within the historic consensus of the church. It has even been argued that human religion is a way in which humankind suppresses the truth in unrighteous, and that Religious good works are among those things which need to be repented of before a person can speak peace to their souls. As for Gandhi and other non-Christian “saints,” they are not un-evangelized. They were and are men and women who heard the gospel, understood the gospel, and rejected the gospel. Any effort to include those who have specifically rejected Christ is in fact, a denial of the need for Christ. The death of Christ is then made superfluous because salvation is available whether one believes in

³³⁵ Netland, 43-54.

³³⁶ David J. Hasselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Kregel Publications, 2005), 83.

him or not. A Savior is not needed. Fallen man can save himself by following any number of paths. There is no other way to spin it.

If the uniqueness of the Gospel is maintained, if the exclusivist claims of Christ are maintained, and if the validity of the church's mission is maintained, a new apologetic is needed. Historically, apologists have defended the church's beliefs from attacks from without. A new apologetic is needed to defend the church's practice from those who oppose it from without, and from those who are undermining, redefining, and subverting it from within.

David Hesselgrave, in his important book, *Paradigms in Conflict*, has identified and addressed many of the issues that need to be addressed.³³⁷ Similar works, and works of a more polemic nature, may be necessary to defend the gospel and the centrality of the Great Commission from the attacks of an overly inclusive evangelical mission intelligentsia, but it is beyond the scope of this inquiry to provide such an apologetic. However, the proposal being offered here could be a part of such an apologetic because it provides a direct answer to one of the most compelling arguments being made by those who oppose the church's evangelistic and missiological enterprise.

One of the strengths of the approach being offered here is that it makes the unevangelized responsible for their own damnation. The Augustinian/Reformed paradigm does this too, but not in a manner likely to persuade outsiders that God is good. The author takes a middle position between Calvinism and Arminianism, accepting Geisler's assertion that the lost are graciously enabled by the Holy Spirit to hear the voice of God and respond to his offer of salvation. Should they then refuse to be saved they have not one to blame but themselves, "God

³³⁷ David J. Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Kregel Publications, 2005).

did not send his Son into the World to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:17).

Why, then -- if a sacrifice sufficient for the sins of the whole world has been offered -- are all not saved? The Molinist answer to this question is worth considering.³³⁸ Everyone would be saved but for reasons hidden in the mystery of iniquity (as opposed to the sovereignty of God), some will not have it. God then cannot be blamed for their damnation because he sincerely desired their salvation, but they are “condemned already because they would not believe.”

What then of those who have never heard the word of Christ? Romans 10:18- provides an answer to this question: “Indeed they have [heard]; “Their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world” (c.f. Psalm 19:4a). Based on this and other texts, the model being set forth here agrees with Irenaeus’ assertion that there is no such thing as an unevangelized person (c.f. page 24). More than this, the model proposed here recognizes that the orator proclaiming the silent sermon is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, and since natural revelation is the word of Christ, it is sufficient to do more than justify the damnation of those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Its purpose is to provide a way so that men and women might “grope after God in the darkness, when the light of His full revelation is not available,”³³⁹ and in doing so, find him.

Finally, the proposal being offered here would take one of the most persuasive arguments against the mission enterprise off of the table without compromising the central truth that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one can come to the father but through him.

³³⁸ Keathley, Kindle Location 970, 1001, 1022.

³³⁹ Bruce, *Ibid.*, 337.

Conclusion

The argument presented in this proposal addresses the questions which are being asked by many Christians who are struggling to maintain their faith in the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ in an increasingly pluralistic culture. It also provides an apologetic for defending exclusivism by providing reasonable answer to the questions honest seekers are asking, answers which are not being provided by Particularists at the present moment.

Specifically, the argument presented here addresses the question of fairness, a concern that is too lightly brushed off by too many within the Particularist camp. Glib answers which win the applause of those within the paradigm are hurting the cause of Christ. Serious questions deserve serious answers. The question of the fate of the un-evangelized is a serious question. The position posited here places the responsibility for human reprobation where it belongs, on the sinful human heart that suppresses the truth that would save them in unrighteousness rather than God. Keithley has written that when representing Christ, a Christian's concern should be "to portray faithfully God's character. Those condemned by God are justly condemned because receiving Christ is a choice genuinely available. Adhering to genuine human choice is not an end in itself; upholding the integrity of God's character is."³⁴⁰ Those percolated in a post-modern culture will not accept an argument for exclusivity that offers anything less.

It is often argued that God is under no obligation to justify Himself or to comport to some human concept of fairness.³⁴¹ Of course the sovereign God of the Universe is not obligated to justify Himself. However, if it is claimed that the God of the Universe is good then an explanation is in order. The problem is that God Himself commands fairness. For example, judges were commanded to be fair and equitable in the administration of justice: 'You shall do

³⁴⁰ Keathley, Location 1024.

³⁴¹ For a fuller discussion of this objection see chapter 14, p. 138-143.

no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly” (Leviticus 19:15). In this text we see fairness specifically linked to the concept of equity, and God seems to assume that those responsible for the administration of justice have a sense of fairness/equity. Further, it is assumed that this moral intuition is trustworthy. Importantly, God does not place himself above the law He gave to human judges. On the contrary, scripture declares that God will execute judgment “with equity” (Psalm 9:8b). How can passages like these be understood if the basic human understanding of fairness is somehow flawed? If God has a different standard of fairness what is it? Where is this taught in scripture? This seems important since God exhorts humankind to be fair/equitable.

The objection to the fairness question also assumes that it is being raised as an accusation against God. While some might raise the objection in this rebellious spirit, the question itself does not require a judgmental and rebellious spirit. It can be asked in a spirit of humble reverence, such as Abraham displayed when he dared to question God about the impending judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. When asked in this spirit the fairness question can be fair question.

The weakness of Particularism as currently configured is that it discounts the fairness question and it does not provide an answer satisfying to the moral conscience of those who sincerely ask the question. One wonders if the “who are you to judge God,” response is actually an evasion of an uncomfortable conundrum of the system rather than a serious response to a serious question? It is being suggested here that if Particularists do not change their attitude toward the fairness question and if they do not offer a more compelling answer then we should expect that defections to more inclusivistic paradigms will continue and accelerate.

The answer being proposed here provides an answer that will allow evangelicals to defend the uniqueness of Christ in to a pluralistic, post-modern culture. Most importantly it is scriptural, logically defensible, and independently verifiable in a manner consistent with the Unity of Truth.

There is a sense in which this argument is retrospective because the number of truly un-evangelized peoples is shrinking by the day as the church grows ever closer to the completion of the Great Commission. However, this does not diminish its importance as a serious answer to the serious questions concerning the fate of the un-evangelized in the past, and it is hoped that it will provide a new line of defense for the remnant that still point to the narrow road, the *only* path to the place where the lost will find true rest for their souls.

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