

Present Truth

A magazine dedicated
to the restoration
of New Testament Christianity
in this generation

Sola Gratia Safety by Grace
Solo Christo Safety by Christ
Sola Fide Safety by Faith

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Present Truth

Present Truth is a magazine dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity and committed to upholding the great Reformation principle of justification by faith.

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Publishers: A group of Christian scholars and businessmen without denominational sponsorship who have united to uphold the objective gospel amid the present deluge of religious subjectivism. Multitudes are being caught up in the popular and frantic effort to find satisfaction in some sort of religious experience. *Present Truth* is a voice in this barren wilderness of groveling internalism, a voice which boldly proclaims those great principles upon which the Reformation was founded—namely:

1. *Sola gratia.* God's saving activity outside of us in the person of Jesus Christ is the sole *ground* of our salvation.
2. *Solo Christo.* Christ's doing and dying on our behalf is the sole *basis* of our acceptance and continued fellowship with God.
3. *Sola fide.* The Holy Spirit's gift of faith through the hearing of this objective, historical gospel is the sole *means* whereby Christ's substitutionary life and death are imputed to us for justification unto life eternal. He who is thus justified by faith and filled with God's Spirit will glory only in Christ's cross and make God's saving work in Christ the central affirmation of his Christian witness. Though he will be careful to obey God and please Him in all things, he will continue to repent rather than glory in the feeble attainments of his own Spirit-filled life.
4. *Sola Scriptura.* The Bible and the Bible only is the Christian's objective and infallible rule of faith and practice, alone sufficient that he may "be established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12). It is the God-ordained account of and witness to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Present Truth is not only committed to the task of upholding these founding principles of the Reformation, but it believes that we today must allow these principles to call all that we do and all that we teach into question. These principles call all traditions into question and all statements about the truth into question—even the ones set forth in this magazine. Our vision is a new Reformation that will recover what the Reformers bequeathed us and complete the restoration they so nobly began.

Present Truth is committed to the time-honored verities of the Christian faith—such as the Trinity, deity of Christ, virgin birth, blood atonement, bodily resurrection and ascension, second coming, final judgment, justification by faith alone, sanctification through the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit, and glorification at Christ's soon return.

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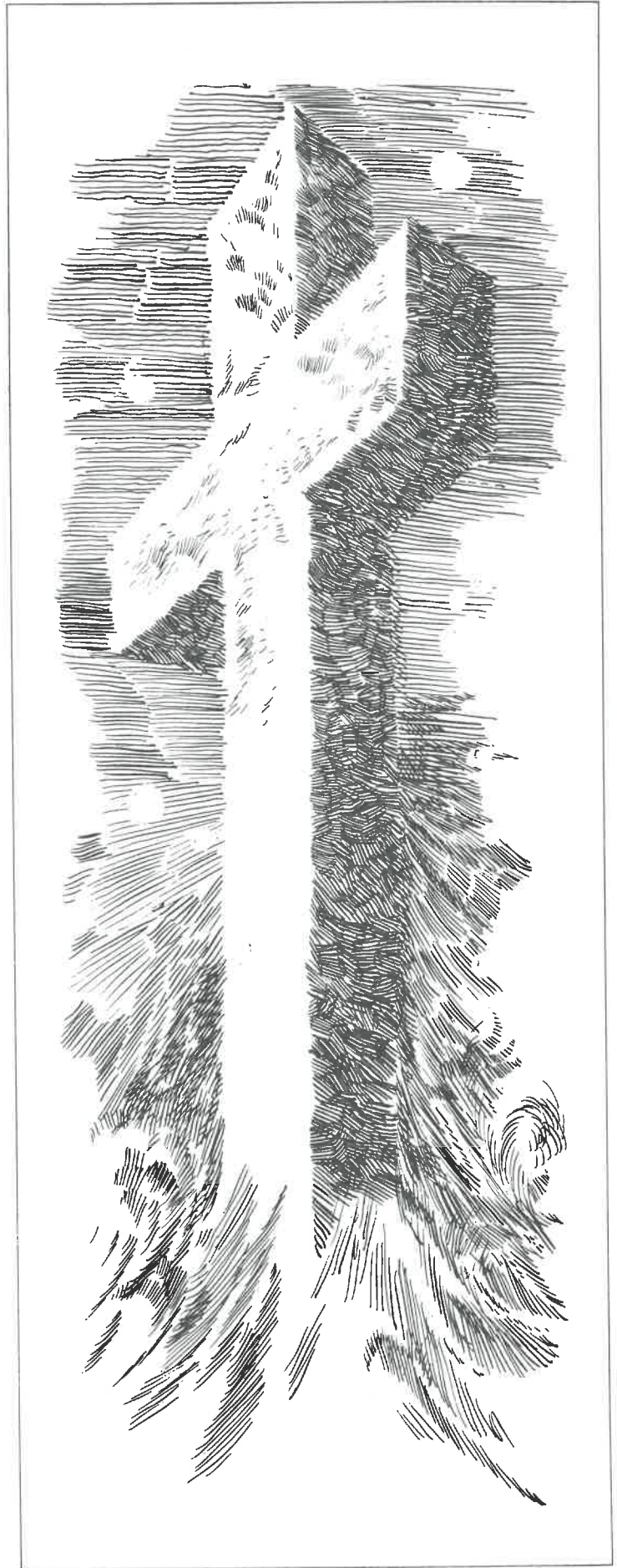
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To Contributors: Since truth is above the preferences and prejudices of any denomination, the editors welcome contributions from anyone and will judge them on their merit alone. If you wish a manuscript returned, please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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Letters

Address Letters to *Present Truth*,
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Stop the Rot

Sir / I am a missionary of the Plymouth Brethren. In England they are known as Christian Brethren. Our leading theologian is F. F. Bruce, of whom you will have heard. And I may add that in England our leading men have discarded the Scofield Bible and dispensationalism generally many years ago. We have, as you point out, given dispensationalism to the evangelical world, and I feel guilty whenever I see a dear Pentecostal brother with his Scofield Bible under his arm. I see that dispensationalism is still very strong in North America, as in Ireland, New Zealand, etc. I do what I can to stop the rot.

J. R. Taylor
Argentina

Repudiation

Sir / Your publication has been a challenge to my theology (being from a strict dispensational background) and my life. Although *Present Truth* hasn't transformed me into a strict Calvinist, it has been a contributing factor in my repudiation of dispensational theology. I find that, in the final analysis, we can gain much from both theologies—not because synthesis is the answer, but because I find the Bible to be much more inclusive than either of these theologies (both having much good to offer; each losing much due to blind dogmatism and rationalism).

I trust that our sovereign Lord will continue to form and reform until that day.

Joseph W. H. Lough
Wisconsin

Better Than College

Sir / You have helped me build up a Christ-centered theology and have taught me more about systematic theology than I ever learned at college.

I have become disturbed about how many Christian theologians are looking with bated breath to Palestine and the blessing they wish to see God give to the Jew.

Brian E. Sterley
South Africa

Cluttered

Sir / While *Present Truth* and some of your readers do not agree with dispensational teaching, I am still grateful for your magazine. My faith in the Lord and in the Word is such that neither *Present*

Truth nor Scofield will hinder my access to heaven. I pray that both will help me understand the Way and continue to help others along the Way, which, I might add, has become greatly cluttered with theology.

A. Frank Gibbs
Arizona

New Perspective

Sir / I would like to express my thanks for the profound influence which *Present Truth* has had on my theology since I first started reading the magazine several months ago. Having become thoroughly disenchanted with my own experience-centered Christianity, I had found myself having difficulty studying the Bible when all I saw was how far short I fell of what God wants me to be. Since reading your magazine, I have begun to look at the Bible from a whole new perspective, attempting to trace God's provision of His own righteousness to believers in both the Old and New Testament. My wife feels much the same way.

Douglas J. Soleida
Germany

Dangerously Shallow

Sir / I always find your magazine interesting, though the approach strikes me as sometimes odd. I pastor a small Baptist church, although I am personally non-denominational in viewpoint. Your eschatology has caused me to examine my premillennialism in light of God's Word and to hold it more intelligently. In short, you help me to see how Christians on the other side of orthodoxy (i.e., non-Fundamentalists) think. You are correct that too many of us preach a gospel that is dangerously shallow.

Marvin P. Reem
Pastor
Illinois

"New Testament Eschatology"

Sir / I have just completed reading the April 1976 issue of *Present Truth* on "New Testament Eschatology." This material is a must for every minister. The Christ event as that which fulfills the Old Testament promises and prophecies was very well presented. But the finest aspect was that the Christ event *unfolds* what is to *unfold* at the eschaton. Christ-centered, Christ-inspiring! To me, that issue

could be summarized as the "schoolmaster" (Gal. 3), driving us to Christ. Please continue to fill that roll.

D. A. Hale
Minister
Australia

The Priesthood of All Believers

Sir / I appreciate your magazine and look forward to each issue. I would certainly be interested in seeing some articles on the doctrine of "the priesthood of all believers."

Wayne McLaughlin
Baptist Pastor
Indiana

Blackmail?

Sir / I will be glad to resume my contributions as soon as you repudiate your September 1976 issue on "Election."

John Robbins
District of Columbia

Aggressive Stand

Sir / It seems that, more often than not, the presentation of your material comes under fire rather than the material itself. As a regular reader of your magazine, I really appreciate your stand, and not only your stand, but the strength of it also. In a day when indecision and lack of commitment seem rampant, your stand is most refreshing.

Although we do not agree on every point, I am in complete accord with you when it comes to justification, sanctification and the neo-Pentecostal movement. I consider your opinions to be of high quality and very trustworthy.

If the truth is worthy of belief, then it is worthy of a strong commitment. Part of the problem that we are now facing in the evangelical camp is the wishy-washy stand of prior generations. I think it is time we took a firm and aggressive stand on the truth of God's Word. As the old adage says, "If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything."

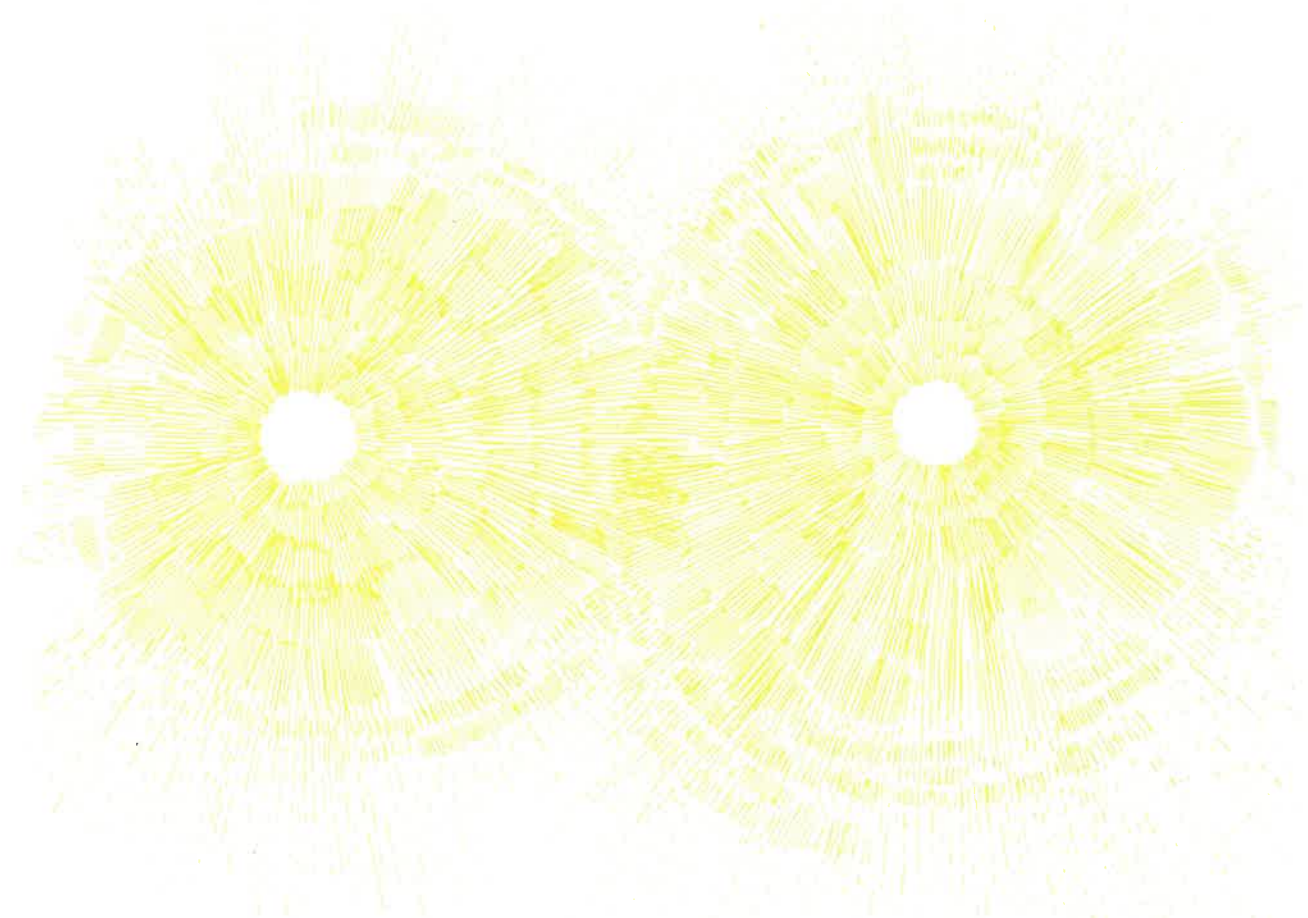
Olen Jones, Jr.
California

Hard Time

Sir / From indications, the true believers in justification by faith and imputed righteousness are in for a hard time.

D. Scott Schnarr
Bible College Student
South Carolina

**For I am not ashamed
of the gospel: it is the
power of God for salvation
to every one who has
faith, to the Jew first and
also to the Greek. For in it
the righteousness of God is
revealed through faith for
faith; as it is written, “He
who through faith is
righteous shall live.”
—Rom. 1:16-17, RSV.**



Editorial Introduction

In this issue of *Present Truth* we continue our series of articles on the subject of righteousness by faith. Our anonymous writer¹ appears again with an excellent essay on "Ecumenical Developments between Roman Catholicism and Non-Christian Religions."

We are encouraged as we see a growing interest in the objective gospel and justification by faith in many sections (and most surprising places) within the Christian church. Religious subjectivism and charismania

are not the only things able to cross all denominational boundary lines. We believe that there will be a great renaissance of the objective gospel in our generation. Many of the old religious boundary lines have already become obsolete. We can therefore expect a regrouping of religious loyalties in the days to come. The two articles in this issue of *Present Truth* could very well indicate the two points of polarization.

Come, let us reason together.

R.D.B.

¹See "Editorial Introduction," *Present Truth*, July 1977, p. 5.

Righteousness by Faith (Part 3)

Robert D. Brinsmead

CHAPTER 5 Righteousness by Faith

For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."—Rom. 1:16-17, RSV.

We have found that righteousness is necessary for salvation, but it is beyond man's power of attainment. Paul introduces his gospel to the Romans by declaring, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."¹

What exactly is this righteousness of faith? How does it become available to sinners? How do they lay hold of it? How does God communicate it to them? What relation does it have to the justification of the believing sinner? These are the questions which we must now endeavor to answer.

¹Verse 17 literally reads, "The righteous by faith shall live." It is grammatically possible to say that "by faith" refers either to "righteous" or to "shall live." If the former, the Revised Standard Version, as quoted above, is correct—and also Luther's translation. If the "by faith" refers to "shall live," the Authorized Version's "the just shall live by faith" is correct. Cranfield (*The International Critical Commentary, Romans* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark]) argues convincingly for the first sense mainly on the ground of context and Paul's argument in Romans.

The Righteousness of God

The first thing we must notice from Romans 1:16-17 is that the righteousness of faith is called "the righteousness of God." In Philippians 3:9 it is called "the righteousness which is of God by faith." It is called the righteousness of God because *God provided it*. The New International Version translates the Pauline expression *dikaiosune Theou* as "a righteousness from God."

When all men stood destitute of righteousness before God's judgment bar—when they stood before the law which demands perfect righteousness, red-faced, silent, guilty, empty-handed and with nothing to pay (Rom. 1:18-3:20)—God intervened. "But *now* [at the point of man's utter destitution] the righteousness of God without the law is manifested . . ." (Rom. 3:21). This means that God fulfills His own demands. He not only gives salvation, but He fulfills the conditions of salvation by providing for man the righteousness which the justice of God's law demands. That is good news indeed!

Recently Kaseman and others have proposed that "the righteousness of God" in Paul means the *activity* of God. This can be supported not only from the grammatical construction of Romans 1:17, but by a lot of Old Testament background, especially in the Psalms and Isaiah 40 to 66. In these Old Testament scriptures the righteousness of God often refers to the saving acts

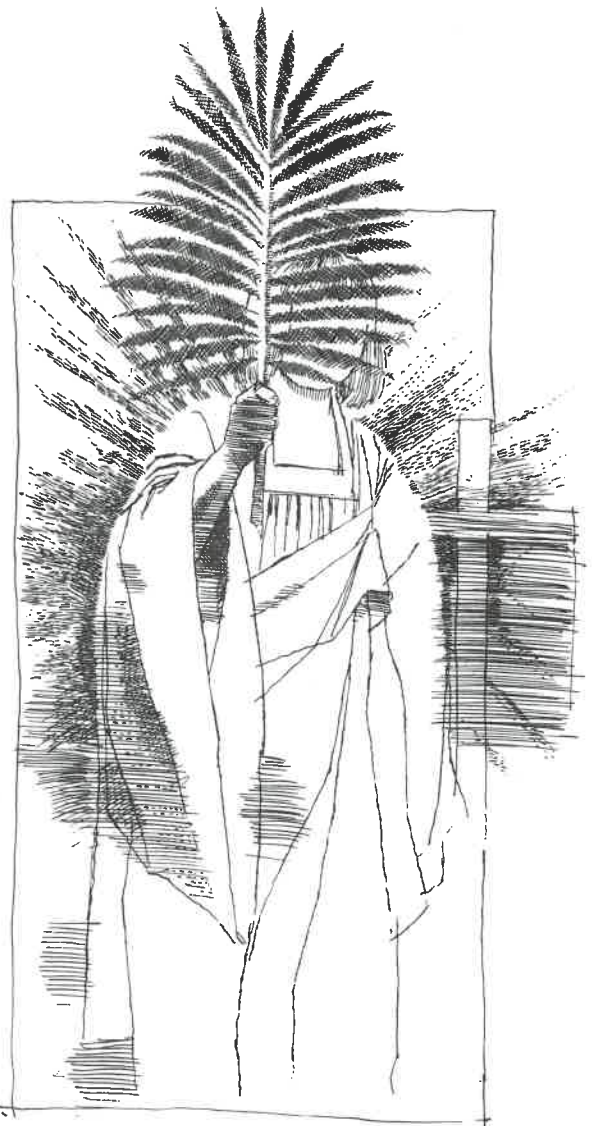
The righteousness which God provided for our salvation is something He did entirely apart from any human help or participation.

of God (see Isa. 51:5). These saving acts were a manifestation of God's covenant loyalty and faithfulness—that is to say, His righteousness. But all these saving acts, like Israel's deliverance from Egypt and her release from Babylonian captivity, have been superseded by God's ultimate act of salvation which took place in the Christ event. It is quite fitting, therefore, to call God's redemptive act in Christ "the righteousness of God."²

We suggest that the interpretation of "the righteousness of God" as "God's saving act" is not inimical to Luther's interpretation which says that the expression means "righteousness which God has provided." God's gracious act in the life, death and resurrection of Christ provided a righteousness with which poor, destitute sinners could answer the claims of divine justice.

Whether we take "the righteousness of God" to mean the act of God or the provision of God, or both, one thing must be clear: Paul is talking about something objective, something entirely outside man's experience. The saving act took place once-and-for-all as a historical event in Palestine 2,000 years ago. The righteousness which God provided for our salvation is something He did entirely apart from any human help or participation. This is why Paul declares that it is "the righteousness of God apart from the law" (Rom. 3:21)—meaning apart from any law-fulfillment on the part of the believer. This makes it clear that the believer's holiness of life (sanctification) is not included in "the righteousness of God." This righteousness is apart from all works, all law-keeping on man's part, whether done before grace or after grace. God alone has the honor of providing this garment of righteousness, quite apart from human devising—even sanctified devising. When God provided the wherewithal of salvation, we had absolutely no hand in it.³ Just like Daniel's description of God's eschatological victory, this took place "without hand" (see Dan. 2:45; 8:25).

We have already seen how righteousness is pri-



The believer's holiness of life (sanctification) is not included in "the righteousness of God."

²See R. D. Brinsmead, "The Righteousness of God," *Present Truth*, April 1976, pp. 19-30, where this meaning is more fully explained.

³This cannot be said about sanctification or the holiness which the Spirit works in the believer. Some think they can smuggle sanctification into "the righteousness of faith" by saying, "It isn't I but God's grace at work in me." Unless we are going to say that grace annihilates human individuality and responsibility, we must acknowledge that sanctification involves the believer's meaningful activity in cooperation with grace.

marily concerned with relationships. Man's activity cannot establish a relationship (covenant) with God. The relationship (covenant) between God and man has to be established by an elective act of God. It has to be a *given*. This was even true in the case of sinless Adam. Establishing the covenant was God's act in which Adam made no contribution. He could only accept the donation or reject it. Much less could sinful Israel do anything to establish a relationship (covenant) with God. It was God's unmerited, electing love which chose Israel and put her in covenantal fellowship with Himself.

The act of God whereby He bridged the gulf between Himself and sinful man and provided the wherewithal of a right relationship with Himself is *sola gratia, soli Deo gloria*—solely by grace and solely to the glory of God. Says Moorehead in his *Commentary on Romans*:

The righteousness of God is never represented in Scripture as something wrought in the sinner by the grace and Spirit of God—the implantation of the principle of grace in the heart nor even the new nature. If the righteousness of God means partly a work of grace by the Spirit in the soul, partly a work of the sinner co-operating with grace, then the Reformation was a mistake and a blunder, and we ought to return to Romanism, for this is the one supreme point of difference touching the ground and nature of justification between Romanism and Protestantism. Rather, the righteousness of God is set forth as something objective to us, reckoned to us, set to our account, therefore not an internal work.—pp. 87-88.

The Righteousness of Christ

The righteousness of faith is also called “the righteousness of One” or “the obedience of One” (Rom. 5: 18-19). This is because it is a righteousness which God has provided for us in Jesus Christ. Peter calls it “the righteousness of . . . Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1).

When Romans explains for us that the righteousness of faith is the righteousness of Christ, this does not mean that it is a righteousness which Christ works in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Paul is talking exclusively about the righteousness of Christ's own Person. Romans 5:12-21 contrasts this righteousness with the disobedience of

When Romans explains for us that the righteousness of faith is the righteousness of Christ, this does not mean that it is a righteousness which Christ works in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

The saving righteousness of Christ was a once-and-for-all, unrepeatable act which took place external to us.

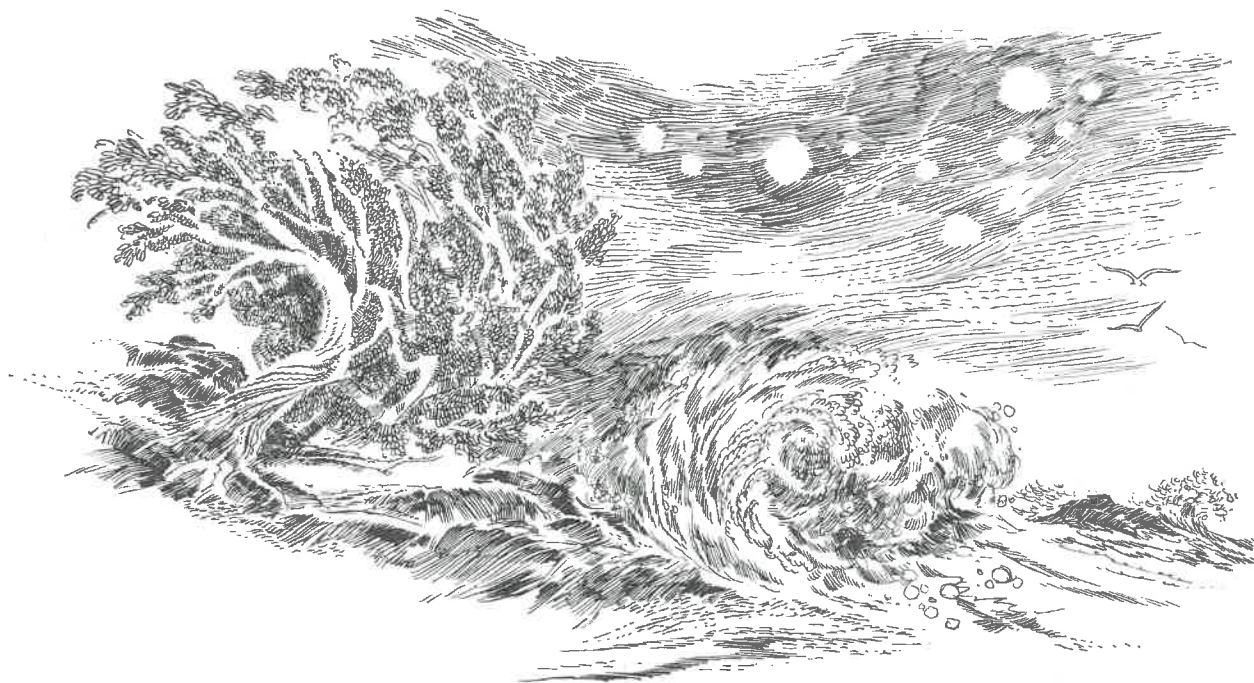
Adam. In this passage Paul is not contrasting the righteousness which Christ works in our hearts with the wickedness which the devil works in our hearts. Rather, he is talking about Adam's personal disobedience and Christ's personal obedience—and both were outside-of-me acts. Just as “one act of sin exposed the whole race of men to God's judgment and condemnation, so one act of perfect righteousness presents all men freely acquitted in the sight of God (Rom. 5:18, Phillips). Cranfield says that *dikaioma* of verse 18 undoubtedly means “one act of righteousness” in contrast to Adam's one act of disobedience. This means that Paul cannot possibly be talking about repeated acts of renewal and sanctification in the hearts of believers. The saving righteousness of Christ was a once-and-for-all, unrepeatable act which took place external to us.

The Old Testament bears explicit testimony to the righteousness of the coming Messiah (see for instance Isa. 53:9, 11; 42:1-4; 50:4-7; 52:13; 11:2-5; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:16). This is fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, the One who fulfills all righteousness (see Matt. 3:15; Luke 23:41, 47; 4:34; 22:42; John 5:30; 17:4; Heb. 1:9; 4:15; 5:7-9; Phil. 2:5-9; Rom. 5:18-19).

We have seen how *righteousness* means (1) a right relationship to God, to man and to the created order—or covenant loyalty and faithfulness; (2) right conduct and behavior, rectitude expressive of right relationships—or obedience to the Ten Commandments; (3) being and doing that which will win God's approval. The righteousness of Christ is all that.

As the true Son of man, Christ was the second and last Adam in right relationship to God, to man and to the created order. God's Edenic ideal was re-enacted in Jesus. Because He was subject to God, the created order was subject to Him. He was the Man in God's image, over the works of God's hands. In Him, the new Adam or Representative of man, God brought man into that ideal relationship to Himself and to all creation. Even in the wilderness the wild beasts were at peace with Him. Even the winds and the waves obeyed Him.

Isaiah 40 to 66 depicts Christ's righteousness in terms of covenant faithfulness. As the “Servant of Yahweh,” He personifies the new Israel who keeps covenant with God. The New Testament uses this Isianic servant motif. As Israel was called out of Egypt and tested in the wilderness, so Christ also is called out of Egypt (Matt. 2:15) and tested in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11). Whereas Israel murmured against God and broke her covenant vow, Christ passes over the same ground as



God's new Israel. He is the righteous Servant who keeps covenant with God.

This righteousness of Christ certainly has ethical content. The conduct and character of Christ express His perfect relationship with God, with man and with the created order. In the aforementioned Old Testament passages is depicted a life without guile, without violence and without rebelliousness. It is a life full of God's Spirit, a life of humility, patient trust in God, zeal for God's glory, perfect submission to God's will and unflinching courage to finish the work which God gave Him to do.

Here is a life which fulfills the covenant stipulations, the Ten Commandments (Ex. 34:27-29; Deut. 4:13). Christ kept God's commandments (John 15:10). He fulfilled the law (Matt. 5:17). He was obedient (Phil. 2:5-9; Heb. 5:7-9). And this obedience of Jesus Christ to the law (will) of God is what constitutes His righteousness (see Rom. 5:18-19, where *obedience* is used as a synonym for *righteousness*). Says Calvin:

For if righteousness consists in the observance of the law, who will deny that Christ merited favor for us when, by taking that burden upon himself, he reconciled us to God as if we had kept the law."—*Institutes*, Bk. 2, chap. 17, sec. 5.

The obedience or righteousness of Christ was consummated in His death of the cross. He "became obedient unto [literally, until] death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8). The Formula of Concord is no doubt

The Formula of Concord is no doubt correct when it defines Christ's righteousness as His entire course of obedience from the manger to the cross.

correct when it defines Christ's righteousness as His entire course of obedience from the manger to the cross. It includes His bitter sufferings and death. If we clearly grasp this point, we will soon see the folly of saying that the Pauline article of righteousness by faith is something wrought out in us. Christ's righteousness is Christ's act of atonement. This righteousness is a once-and-for-all act. It is absolutely unrepeatable and cannot be communicated to us in any way except by imputation.

There is another important aspect of Christ's righteousness that needs our closest attention. After the death of Luther, Osiander contended that Christ's righteousness was the righteousness of His divine nature. Others reacted by saying that it was the righteousness of His human nature. The Formula of Concord settled the issue for the Lutherans by affirming that, being the righteousness of the Person of Christ, it was at once divine and human. The Reformed stream of the Reformation followed this line of thought also. If we are to understand

Christ voluntarily assumed both our nature and our obligation so that in our stead He could do for us that which we could not do for ourselves.

why Paul ascribes saving efficacy to Christ's righteousness, we need to see both aspects:

1. Vicarious Righteousness. Christ's righteousness could not save us unless it was truly vicarious—rendered to God in our place and on our behalf. And it could not be truly vicarious unless it was rendered to God in real human nature. Justice demands righteousness from man; therefore Christ's obedience had to be a genuine human obedience.

On the other hand, if Christ were not more than human, His obedience would not be vicarious, because He would have owed it to the law on His own behalf. As Lawgiver, He owed no obedience to the law. Obedience is the obligation of the creature, not the Creator. But Christ voluntarily assumed both our nature and our obligation so that in our stead He could do for us that which we could not do for ourselves (see Gal. 4:4-5).

2. An Infinite Righteousness. Although this righteousness was lived out in the flesh-and-blood reality of Jesus of Nazareth, we must also consider that it was the obedience of an infinite Person. It is the Person of Christ which gives value to His work. Since His Person was infinite, His work was infinite, and therefore it has infinite value with God. If this were not so, it would be impossible that "the righteousness of One" could suffice to save a whole race of sinners. The character of Christ was infinitely perfect. He was filled with "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). According to the clear testimony of Philippians 2:5-8, His humiliation was infinite. His obedience was so glorious that it merited all honor and eternal blessedness (Phil. 2:9-10; Ps. 24).

Righteousness of life has its necessary place in the experience of the believer. But for salvation, the law of God requires a higher righteousness than any saint will ever live out.

The righteousness which is of faith is both vicarious and infinite. Vicarious means that it was done *for us* and not *in us*. Infinite means that it cannot be reduced to an intra-human experience. It is a righteousness which mounts up to the throne of the Eternal. It is as big as God. It is big enough for all sinners to run under and find shelter, for it is a righteousness which is eternally pleasing in the sight of God, fully satisfactory for all the claims of divine justice.

Righteousness of life has its necessary place in the experience of the believer. But for salvation, the law of God requires a higher righteousness than any saint will ever live out. When Paul presents the saving righteousness of faith, he is talking about this higher righteousness—one that is both infinite and unrepeatable. It stands absolutely alone.

The Righteousness of Faith Alone

When Paul tells us in Romans 1:17 that the righteousness of God is "from faith to faith," he means that it is by faith from start to finish. It is as if he said that it is by faith and nothing but faith—*sola fide*, by faith alone. He backs this up by saying that it is a righteousness "without the law" (Rom. 3:21), "without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28) and "without works" (Rom. 4:6).

It has been argued by all good Romanists and by all poor Protestants (in one way or another) that the renewal and sanctification of the believer must be included in the Pauline article of righteousness by faith.

It has been argued by all good Romanists and by all poor Protestants (in one way or another) that the renewal and sanctification of the believer must be included in this Pauline article of righteousness by faith. We will endeavor to show (1) that this does violence to the structure of the book of Romans and (2) that this is in direct opposition to Paul's line of argument in Romans.

The Structure of Romans

All are agreed that Romans 1:16-17 is Paul's introduction to the theme of his book. That theme is succinctly stated when the apostle says, ". . . as it is written, 'He who by faith is righteous shall live.'" It will be noticed that there are two clauses here:

1. *Ho dikaios ek pisteos* (righteous[ness] by faith)
2. *Zesetai* (shall live, or shall gain salvation)

Here we have (1) condition (righteousness—attained by faith) and (2) result (life).

Says Cranfield in this very fascinating comment on the structure of Romans:

1:18-4:25 expounds the meaning of *ho dikaios ek pisteos* [righteousness by faith], while 5:1-8:39 expounds the meaning of the promise, that the man who is righteous by faith *zesetai* [shall live] (that this interpretation is not forced upon the text, is confirmed, as Nygren has pointed out, by the facts that in Romans 1:18-4:25 *pistis* [faith] occurs twenty-nine times and *pisteuein* [believe] eight times, whereas in chapters 5 to 8 they occur only twice [and both of these occur in Romans 5:1, 2, which is the summary of the foregoing argument and transition into the next section] and once respectively, while in 1:18-4:25 *zoe* is found only once, *zen* not at all, and *zoopoiein* once [the Greek words for life, live, and life-giving], whereas in 5:1-8:39 *zen* occurs twelve times, *zoe* twelve times, and *zoopoiein* once).—*The International Critical Commentary, Romans*, p. 102.

Furthermore, in this first section (Rom. 1:18-4:25), where *faith* and *believe* are used repeatedly, Paul often connects them with the word *righteousness* (see Rom. 3:21-22, 25; 4:3, 5-6, 9-13, 21-24). Throughout Romans 3 and 4 Paul is not talking about the believer's holiness of life but about righteousness being imputed.

In the second section (Rom. 5-8) Paul swings his attention to the life that righteousness by faith brings to us. He talks about the life of the believer both here and in the hereafter. It is described as a new life, a Spirit-filled life, a glorified life and a holy life. Scholars generally acknowledge that Romans 6, 7 and 8 are talking about sanctification. In Romans 6 Paul even uses the word *righteousness* a number of times. Here he is referring to the believer's actual righteousness of life (see vv. 13, 16-20). *But* in this context he never uses the word *faith*. The apostle thereby makes a clear distinction between the righteousness of faith (chaps. 3-4) and the righteousness of life (chaps. 5-8). In Romans 8:4 the righteousness which is wrought in the believer by the Holy Spirit's indwelling is called "the righteousness of the law."

Another remarkable feature about the structure of Romans is that in the section where Paul is explaining the article of righteousness by faith, he makes no mention of the Spirit. But in the section where he deals with the believer's righteousness of life ("righteousness of the law," Rom. 8:4), The Spirit's indwelling is mentioned repeatedly. So the apostle makes a clear distinction between the righteousness of faith (a righteousness which was wrought out in Christ) and the righteousness of life (a righteousness wrought out in the believer by the Holy Spirit).

All this proves that the righteousness which is of faith is what is done *for us*, and righteousness of life is

The righteousness which is of faith is what is done for us, and righteousness of life is what is done in us.

what is done *in us*. Here are root and fruit.

The Line of Argument in Romans

When we follow Paul's line of argument closely, we see that there are several powerful reasons for excluding sanctification from the righteousness which is by faith alone.

1. "Faith alone" is our acknowledgment that the righteousness which God has provided and made known to us in the gospel is all-sufficient. It has been wrought out, presented to God on our behalf, and accepted. Faith does not bring it into existence but confesses its existence. "Faith alone" means that the righteousness of God's provision is everything necessary for our salvation, and nothing remains to be added to that perfect and finished work. But when we come to talk about sanctification, this "faith alone" language would be most inappropriate. The righteousness of life is not yet complete in the best of saints, and much yet remains to be added to our spiritual attainments, as 2 Peter 1:5-8 testifies.

2. "Faith alone" means that the righteousness of God's provision is not seen (see Heb. 11:1). This righteousness is declared to us in the gospel and is only believed on and seen with the eye of faith. When the New Testament talks about sanctification, however, it talks about a righteousness which can be seen in loving deeds (see Matt. 5:16; 1 John 3:7-18; James 2:14-26; Rom. 12; Eph. 4-5; Titus 2:11-12). In this life we are righteous before God only by faith—meaning that we are not righteous before God by love, renewal or our lives of new obedience, for this inward work is only begun in us and will not be complete until glorification.

3. "By faith alone" means that the righteousness which God provided for our salvation is "without the law," "without the deeds of the law" and "without works" (Rom. 3:21, 28; 4:5-6). Here is a righteousness in which all our efforts, works, cooperation, participation and obedience are shut out. This is why Luther called it a passive righteousness.

It would be most inappropriate to talk about sanctification as being by faith alone. To be sure, living a life of holiness depends on faith, but not faith alone. J. M. Cramp, in his *The Council of Trent*, declared, "True Protestants never maintained the absurd position that

“True Protestants never maintained the absurd position that we are sanctified by faith only.” —J. M. Cramp

we are sanctified by faith only.”— (London: Religious Tract Society, 1840).

The business of living a holy life—what Luther called active righteousness—is not without meaningful human activity. The New Testament does not hesitate to speak of the necessity of human effort in cooperation with divine grace. The Christian life is often depicted as a battle, a march, a fight. We are not only told to pursue holiness, but we are warned that it will involve conflict and much tribulation. The Spirit is not given to do everything for us. We must not speak of the work of the Third Person of the Godhead in substitutionary terms. The Holy Spirit does not negate the need for responsible human effort. Rather, He enlists the human faculties in the great work of Christian sanctification.

Once the Pauline article of righteousness by faith alone is allowed to spill over into sanctification, not only is the glorious gospel ruined, but sanctification is ruined too. It becomes poisoned with a sickly, dehumanizing view of sanctification which, if really carried out, would reduce a man to the level of a pious zombie who is just a suit or glove which Jesus wears. The sections of the New Testament Epistles which deal with sanctification do not sound anything like Quietism. The apostles' doctrine has none of this mystical sanctification by faith alone. In his well-known book, *Holiness*, Bishop J. C. Ryle makes a clear distinction between the righteousness which we receive by faith only and sanctification. That justification is by faith alone he affirms; that sanctification is by faith alone he denies. “. . . not once,” he says, “are we told that we are ‘sanctified by faith without the deeds of the law.’”—(Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1956), p. ix; cf. p. viii. Ryle ends his book with an excellent section from the Puritan, Robert Traill, who makes the same clear distinction between the righteousness which is of faith and sanctification. Says Traill:

There is a work required of us—to be perfecting *holiness* in the fear of God (2 Cor. vii. 1). But we are nowhere required to be perfecting *righteousness* in the sight of God; for God hath brought in a perfect righteousness, in which we stand; but we are to take care, and to give diligence to perfect holiness in the fear of God.—*Ibid.*, p. 330.

4. “By faith alone” means that only faith is counted for righteousness.

For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. . . . But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth

the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works. . . . —Rom. 4:3, 5-6; see also vv. 20-24.

Faith alone is counted for righteousness—not love, hope, joy, peace, goodness or anything else. This is not because faith is a virtue that outshines all others. Faith is not our righteousness, nor does it have any special merit in itself. We must be careful at this point that we do not make faith run competition with the Saviour. He alone is our righteousness and salvation. In our place and in our name He lived that life of perfect righteousness necessary for entrance into eternal life. As our Substitute, He died on the cross to make satisfaction to the law for our sins. God was pleased to accept His work on our behalf and to impute it to us on condition⁴ that we believe on Christ. As Shrenk says:

The assertion of faith as a condition is always closely linked with the most objective declarations concerning the *dikaiosune Theou* [righteousness of God]: R. 1:17, 3:22-28; 4; 5:1. The achievement and declaration of salvation are never separated from the appropriation of salvation, because the revealing action in question always stands in the I-Thou relationship. . . . The most objective thing that can be said, namely, *hilasterion* [propitiation], is followed at once by *dia pisteos* [by faith]. . . . —*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), Vol. 2, p. 206.

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The relation between the objective act of redemption and the subjective appropriation of faith may be illustrated by an event in American history. On January 1, 1863, Lincoln declared a general emancipation of American slaves. When the individual slave heard and believed what Lincoln had done, he thereby applied it to himself and became personally free.

There are two sides to the transaction called righteousness by faith. (1) Faith (2) is counted for righteousness. On the human side there is faith; on the divine

⁴We are not unmindful of the difficulties attached to the word *condition*. We do not mean *meritorious* condition. That is perfect righteousness, and this condition of salvation has been met for us by Jesus Christ. We speak of faith merely as an *instrumental* condition.



side there is imputation of righteousness.

Let us look first at the human side of the transaction. The poor, condemned sinner hears that God has already acted in Christ and provided for Him a perfect righteousness whereby he can stand in the judgment of God. He hears that Christ's sinless life, bitter sufferings and death were actually for him. Christ was his legal Substitute and Representative, and God is prepared to reckon Christ's life and death as his if he will only accept them. Now this poor, lost sinner is so helpless that he cannot of himself believe on Christ or come to Him. But God calls him by His Word, enlightens him by the Holy Spirit, and enables him to savingly believe. He cries out (to use Luther's moving words), "Mine are Christ's living, doing, and speaking, His suffering and dying, mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, suffered, and died as He did."

Let us now look at the divine side of the transaction. God "imputes righteousness without works" to this man. The righteousness He imputes is "the righteousness of One" or "the obedience of One" (Rom. 5:18-19). The word *impute* (*logizomai*) means to *reckon* or to *account*. It does not in itself change the object, but it changes the way the object is regarded. In this case it means that the believing sinner is credited with Christ's doing and dying. The believer stands before the bar of

justice as if all those beautiful works and deeds were His own.

A young farmer was called to serve in the American Civil War. Because of hardship, another man volunteered to be his substitute and was accepted as such. The substitute served and lost his life. At a later date the young farmer was called up again. His reply was, "I have already served." However, the army would not accept his plea, so the young man appealed to the highest court in the land. The court ruled that the man was legally free. As far as the law and justice were concerned, he had served.

Is God's court any less just? On the grounds of Christ's imputed righteousness, God can justify the ungodly (Rom. 4:5) who believe on Christ. It is not a question of "how can He do that?" (see Rom. 3:26). In the verdict of the divine court, the believing sinner is *justified* (Rom. 3:24-28). This does not mean that he is *made righteous*, but it means that he is *declared righteous*.

Justification has to do with judicial categories. It is not something done in the sinner by the Holy Spirit, but it is simply a judgment, a decree, or a verdict of the Judge. That is the plain sense of what *justify* means wherever it is used in like contexts throughout the Bible (see Deut. 25:1; Matt. 12:36-37; Rom. 2:13; Prov. 17:15; 2 Chron. 6:23; 1 Kings 8:32; Luke 7:29).

The Relation between Righteousness by Faith and Justification by Faith

We are now prepared to consider the precise relationship between the Pauline righteousness by faith and justification by faith.

In the first place, it would not be wrong to say that these two expressions are more or less synonymous. "Righteousness of [or by] faith" always appears in the context of justification by faith. In the Greek, *righteousness* is *dikaiosune*, and *justification* is *dikaiosune*—exactly the same. It could also be pointed out that whereas Galatians 3:21 has *righteousness* in the Authorized Version, the Revised Standard Version has *justification*. Translators substitute one word for the other in Romans 10:4, 10 and 8:10 (see AV, RSV, NEB, etc.).

Yet it might also not be wrong to argue for a technical difference.⁵ After all, translators agree that *dikaiosune* should be translated as *righteousness* rather than *justification* in a number of passages, even when connected with *faith*. *Righteousness* means a right relationship which finds expression in right behavior. It means obedience to the law of God, a righteousness which is so flawless that it can be considered right in the eyes of God. The word *justification* does not have the same ethical content, because it is purely forensic.

The law demands a righteousness with ethical content, and this the sinner owes to the law, but he is incapable of rendering it. Yet by faith he can bring the righteousness of Christ—all that the law demands of him—and God places the obedience of Christ to the sinner's

account. *Having made him righteous by imputation*, God justifies or declares him righteous.

Just as righteousness is the condition for salvation, so righteousness is the condition of being justified (Rom. 2:13). Justification is the verdict of the Judge that a man is saved and shall surely live (Rom. 5:9, 18; 1:17; 10:10). By faith the believing sinner attains to righteousness and can thereby stand approved in the judgment of God. Strictly speaking, then, being justified is the result of becoming righteous (imputatively) by faith.⁶

Throughout this chapter we have followed a line of thought to show that the righteousness which is of faith does not refer to any subjective quality in us, nor does it refer to the Spirit's work in us, but it is entirely objective to us. It is first the righteousness of God—the righteousness of His provision. It is the righteousness of Christ—the deeds and acts of incarnate Deity. It is apprehended by faith alone—meaning that it is not seen or felt by us. It is a righteousness which comes "without the law," "without the deeds of the law" and "without works"—meaning that it cannot possibly be referring to the inward righteousness of sanctification. It is imputed righteousness—meaning that the righteousness done and found in Another is counted as ours. And finally, it is a righteousness which justifies and saves us to life eternal—meaning that with utmost simplicity we can say that we are saved solely by faith in the objective doing and dying of Jesus Christ.

⁵This point is made by Ziesler (*The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul* [Cambridge University Press]), and we suggest that his argument is valid.

⁶We are hereby deliberately contradicting Ziesler's main thesis wherein he proposes that righteousness by faith is the result of being justified. We maintain that Paul clearly teaches that we attain righteousness by faith and are on this account justified and saved. "He who by faith is righteous shall live" (i.e., gain God's verdict of acquittal).

CHAPTER 6

Imputed Righteousness: The Rock of Offense

But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.—Rom. 4:5.

Christianity is absolutely unique in that it proclaims the gospel of the God who justifies the ungodly. Many from within the church have tried to soften the blow of this scripture and to take away its force.

It was the Reformation which revived the Pauline message of God's grace—a grace which accepts the unacceptable. All Christians believe that Christ died for the ungodly. But many will not accept that God justifies—declares righteous at His tribunal—the man who in himself is not righteous but full of all sin.

Of course, this raises the question of the righteousness of God's verdict. After all, did not God instruct the judges of Israel that they should justify only the righteous and condemn the wicked? (Deut. 25:1). How is it that a Judge who is supremely just can justify the ungodly?

Paul's answer is in the doctrine of imputed righteousness. While it is true that the believer is every whit a sinner in himself—and will in this life continue to fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23)—God imputes to him the righteousness of Jesus. It is on this basis that God can declare him righteous and treat him as if he were actually righteous.

The Reformers did not hesitate to talk about this "as if" element of the divine jurisprudence. The doctrine of Christ's substitutionary work demands it. (He was treated as if He were a sinner.) The doctrine of imputed righteousness demands it. (The sinner is treated as if he were the One who lived that sinless life and died on the cross.) Listen to how boldly Luther and Calvin affirmed this "as if."

Luther:

Therefore a man can with confidence boast in Christ and say: "Mine are Christ's living, doing, and speaking, his suffering and dying, mine as much as *if* I had lived, done, spoken, suffered, and died as he did."—*Luther's Works*, American ed. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-), Vol. 31, p. 297.

This is the inevitable confession of a man who believes in substitution and imputation.

Calvin:

For if righteousness consists in the observance of the law, who will deny that Christ merited favor for us when, by

All Christians believe that Christ died for the ungodly. But many will not accept that God justifies—declares righteous at His tribunal—the man who in himself is not righteous but full of all sin.

taking that burden upon himself, he reconciled us to God as if all had kept the law.—*Institutes*, Bk. 2, chap. 17, sec. 5.

We define justification as follows: the sinner received into communion with Christ, is reconciled to God by his grace. While cleansed by Christ's blood, he obtains forgiveness of sins, and clothed with Christ's righteousness as if it were his own he stands confident before the heavenly judgment seat.—*Ibid.*, Bk. 3, chap. 17, sec. 8.

The "as if" is the inevitable result of believing in the gospel of salvation by substitution and imputation.

Rome fought this concept bitterly. She maintained that God could not declare a man to be righteous unless he was personally righteous; otherwise God would appear to be a liar.⁷ From that day to this, Roman Catholic scholars—whether Bellarmine, Newman or Hans Kung—will not accept what even Kung caricatures as "a pasted on 'as if' righteousness." The Reformation defenders replied that if Rome were correct, no one could be justified in this life, for no one is sinless or can be called righteous if the verdict has to rest on his own experience.

The justification of the ungodly through the imputed righteousness of Christ does not mean that God's verdict is a fiction which is based on no reality. Before God, Christ's atonement is a reality which is all-sufficient. It does not need to be supplemented by any other reality. God's verdict of justification is not grounded on any reality within the believing sinner. This is the rock of offense on which Rome stumbled. But not only Rome. It is a rock of offense within Protestantism too. There is the continual temptation to ground God's verdict of justification on some reality within the believer. This really means injecting something of the subjective element of sanctification into justification, which immediately corrupts the doctrines of both justification and sanctification.

⁷F. Pieper, in his *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951), Volume 2, page 524, says: "It is characteristic of all good papists and poor Protestants to set up the principles that God can declare only such people righteous as are righteous in themselves. . . . It would [they say] be unethical for God to employ any other method of justification." On page 526, Pieper cites Oslander's objection, "God would not commit the injustice of declaring a man to be righteous in whom there is nothing whatever of true righteousness."

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Attempts to Get Rid of the Offensive "As If"

1. The Subordination of Justification to Sanctification. At least earlier in his ministry, John Wesley had some real reservation about the Reformation understanding of imputed righteousness. In his *Letters to Hervey* he denied that Christ's righteousness was imputed, but merely said that faith was imputed for righteousness. Yet there is some evidence that Wesley later became fully reconciled to the Reformed doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness. First, this is indicated in his sermon of 1765 called "The Lord Our Righteousness" (see *Sermons on Several Occasions*, Vol. 1, pp. 169-177). And in the same year, Wesley wrote in a letter to John Newton: "I think on justification just as I have done any time these seven and twenty years, and just as Mr. Calvin does. In this respect I do not differ from him one hair's breadth."—Cited in Albert C. Outer, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 78.

Wesley's sermon on "Justification by Faith," however, does show a shifting away from the Reformation position in one important respect. In this sermon Wesley refutes the Roman Catholic position that *justify* means *to make righteous*. He is clear that justification is what God does "for us." Wesley is not guilty of injecting sanctification into the article of justification. But at the same time, he denies the Reformation position which says that *justify* means *to declare righteous*. God cannot declare a person to be righteous if he is not personally righteous, says Wesley, adding, "Such a notion of justification is neither reconcilable to reason nor to Scripture."—*Sermons*, Vol. 1, p. 47. How does he therefore deal with Paul's statement that God justifies the ungodly? Wesley says that "the plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sin."

To say that Romans 4:5 means that God "forgives the ungodly" avoids the whole problem of imputed righteousness, but it does so at the expense of having a very weak doctrine of justification. Justification only has the negative element of forgiveness left in it and is bereft of the positive element of being declared righteous before the tribunal of God. It becomes a very real temptation to put the sanctified life of the believer in the room

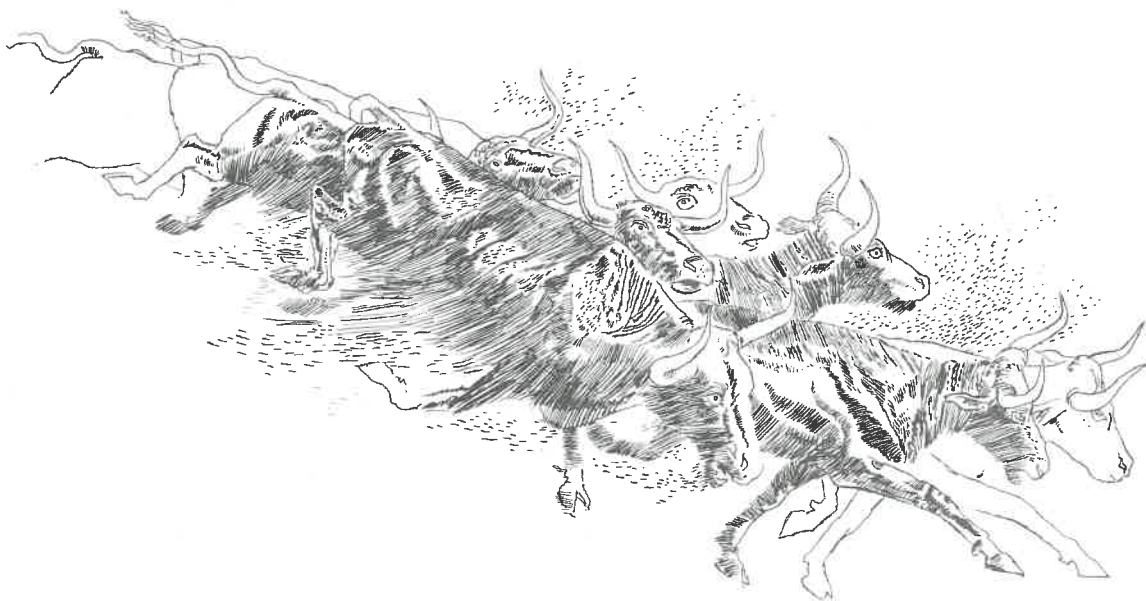
of the imputed righteousness of Christ as that which obtains God's favorable verdict in the final day of judgment.

It does not help matters just to say that this sanctified life is made possible by God's grace. Niebuhr points out that the Wesleyan tendency is to subordinate justification to sanctification in such a way that salvation ultimately comes to rest on sanctification. To do this, says Niebuhr, is to land right back in the camp of Roman Catholic soteriology (see *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. 2). We do not say that Wesley does this. But he certainly opens the door to it, and many of his followers have moved in that direction.

Then there are others who may even admit that *justify* means *to declare righteous*, but *imputed* righteousness does not seem to be as real to them as does *imparted* righteousness. They confess that imputed righteousness is necessary for Christian beginners who have nothing else. But sanctification is seen by them as the higher stage of the soteriological process, and justification is very decidedly subordinated to it. They would not be so irreverent as to say this, but it seems that imputed righteousness is to them a sort of make-believe "abracadabra" righteousness that somehow gets you by until you can acquire the real internal righteousness of sanctification. They seem to say: "It would be a bit too presumptuous or too uncertain to rest on this invisible righteousness alone for salvation. At least the safest thing would be to have some of both—and the more of the second, the safer you would be." Of course, no one would express it as crudely as that, but how can we help suspecting that this is the way they feel when a little justification is swallowed up by an overwhelming preoccupation with inner experience?

One writer who represents this stream of thought is bold enough to say, "With the passage of time, we should require less emphasis on Christ's imputed righteousness and should actually possess more and more of imparted righteousness."—Don Hawley, *Getting It All Together*, p. 35. Not surprisingly, this author's system winds up advocating that, in the final analysis, salvation is by character instead of by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Or to put it another way, the writer really means that justification does not actually put a believer in possession of full salvation, but sanctification does. Here sanctification is not injected into the article of justification by faith, but justification is shorn of real saving efficacy, with the result that sanctification comes along, first to supplement it, and finally to supplant it altogether. All this is a far cry from the mighty Pauline doctrine of justification by faith, and it is a far cry from the Reformation.

2. Justification in Prospect of Future Righteousness. Early in this century, Luther scholar Karl Holl tried to get rid of the offensive "as if" by asserting that God justifies the believer because, being eternal, He sees what the believer will eventually become by Christ's



Today it is hard to find a scholar who stands stiffly for the old doctrine of imputed righteousness.

renewing power. God acts like the sculptor and sees in the raw block of marble what He can make of it. Holl even asserted that this is what Luther actually taught.

More recently, James Stewart declares that God sees the new direction in which the sinner turns:

... his heart [if not his feet] is in the law of promise. . . . That is what God sees; and on the basis of this, God acts. . . . His [the sinner's] position may not have altered much, but his direction has been changed completely, and it is by direction, not position, that God judges. Once the sinner had his back to Christ; now his face is Christward. This is faith, and it holds the potency of a glorious future. This is what God sees; and seeing it, God declares the man righteous. God "justifies" him. Is this a legal "fiction"? The question answers itself. There is nothing fictitious about it whatsoever. It is the deepest and most genuine of realities.—*A Man in Christ* (New York: Harper & Bros.), pp. 256-257.

This is not justification on account of what Jesus Christ has done and on the basis of His finished work alone. It shifts the ground of salvation from the vicarious righteousness of Christ to the personal righteousness which the

believer will possess—one day.

Why is this done? At the end of the last century (1895), Sanday and Headlam, in their great commentary on Romans, proposed that the doctrine of justification by an imputed righteousness looks as if the Christian life had its beginning in a legal fiction. That is what Rome has always said. But it seemed that Sanday and Headlam's comment began a chain reaction to the supposed horror of a legal fiction. Protestant scholars started a stampede to get rid of this offensive "as if." Today it is hard to find a scholar who stands stiffly for the old doctrine of imputed righteousness. But what is done by way of an alternative? Justification ends up being based, in one way or another, on a reality within the believer. Justification is fused with sanctification. In grounding justification on an internal reality, different roads may be taken, but they all lead to Rome.

While Holl and Stewart say that God's verdict of justification is based on a future righteousness within the believer, authors like C. H. Dodd and Vincent Taylor say it is based on what the believer has actually become in principle. Dodd says that the basis is not the believer's

In grounding justification on an internal reality, different roads may be taken, but they all lead to Rome.

quantitative righteousness but his *qualitative* righteousness—his “attitude of mind and will.”—*The Meaning of Paul for Today* (Collins: Fontana Books), p. 121. Taylor says:

He can be accepted by God as righteous, because, to the full extent of his present apprehension of the divine purpose for himself, and the world, an apprehension ever growing from this focal moment in rightness and insight, he has identified himself with that purpose.—*Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (London: MacMillan, 1941), p. 65.

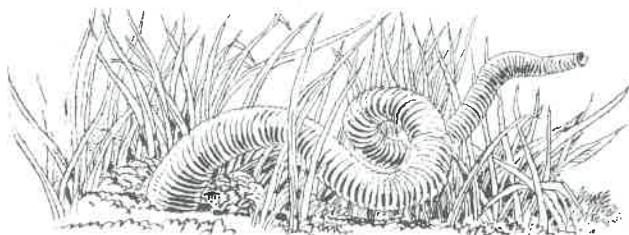
N. H. Snaithe repudiates the whole notion of imputed righteousness and grounds justification on the quality of faith in the believer (see *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* [New York: Schocken Books, 1964], p. 164). And even James Denney suggests that

the distinction of imputed and infused righteousness is unreal. The man who believes in Christ the propitiation, who stakes his whole being on sin bearing love as the last reality in the universe—is not fictitiously regarded as right with God, he actually is right with God, and God treats him as such.—*The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, p. 164.

Again Denney says:

When He pronounces the sinner *dikaïos* [righteous] he is *dikaïos*. . . . Now on virtue of his faith, he is all right with God, and there is henceforth no condemnation for him. Nor in all this is there anything unreal, anything akin to legal fiction.—*Ibid.*, p. 292.

The irony of all these formulations, designed to get rid of legal fiction, is that they end up with a real legal fiction. The fact of the matter is that even the believer is beset by many inner contradictions, as Romans 7:14-25 amply testifies. There is nothing in him—not even his best intentions—which is entirely free from the taint of original sin. His faith is not unmixed with the alloy of unbelief. (“Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.”) If God pronounced him righteous on the basis of any reality in him, this would call the truth of God into serious question. Justification is a declaration that the believer possesses an absolute and perfect righteousness. It ought to be clear that such righteousness is not found in the believer’s good intentions, his attitude, his faith or in anything within such a poor worm of a creature. He



To base justification on any reality within the believer is a horrendous legal fiction.

needs a far better righteousness than anything within him to stand in the tribunal of Almighty God. Such a righteousness is found nowhere else but in Jesus Christ, and therefore to base justification on any reality within the believer is a horrendous legal fiction.

3. Justification on the Basis of the Believer’s Relationship with God. The most plausible way of bypassing the doctrine of justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ is to propose that justification means God’s declaration that the believer is now in a right relationship with Himself. This line of reasoning uses so many right words, and says so many true things, that we need to be wide awake lest we embrace the counterfeit article while all the while thinking it is the genuine Pauline and Reformation article. The argument goes something like this:

Righteousness belongs to the language of relationships. God’s grace brings the believing sinner into a right relationship with Himself. *Justification* is simply God’s declaration that a right relationship exists. This is real righteousness. There is no “as if” about it, for it is purely relational. The problem of talking about imputed (fictional?) righteousness disappears, because if you talk about having a right relationship with God, the distinction between imputed and imparted righteousness is irrelevant.

This is the line taken by Bultmann, Whiteby and many others. Ladd’s otherwise excellent *A New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), falls for this argument too. Says Ladd:

A man’s relationship to God is no fiction. God does not treat a sinner *as though* he were righteous; he is in fact righteous. Through Christ he has entered into a new relationship with God and is in fact righteous in terms of this relationship.—p. 445.

If we here pause to clear the air, we should have no trouble taking off the mask of this theory and showing that hiding beneath its plausible terminology is the principle of Roman Catholic justification. We will make three brief points.

1. Righteousness is certainly a relationship, and as we have already shown, it means having a right relationship with God, with man and with the whole created order.

2. We have also shown that righteousness is not a relationship in the abstract, but it is a living, dynamic thing which is expressed in concrete behavior. It has

The relationship which Christ our Representative has with the Father on our behalf must be distinguished from our own heart-relationship with Christ.

The relationship which Christ our Representative has with the Father on our behalf must be distinguished from our own heart-relationship with Christ, which the Bible calls faith (that is, faith-union with Christ). This is not the efficacious, meritorious union. Faith always points away from itself to rest for salvation on Christ's union with God.

It is often said that the most important thing in the Christian religion is the believer's heart-relationship with the Lord. But as important as that is, it is not the most important thing. The most important thing is Christ's relationship with God. This is the believer's guarantee of acceptance unto eternal life. Justification is based on this reality which is completely outside the believer. It is the righteousness or the relationship of Another. The believer is not accepted *because* of his faith—even though he will not be accepted *without* it. He is accepted because Another is accepted. He is declared righteous because Another is righteous on his behalf.

The objections about legal fiction are really only a "red herring." Neither a good Catholic nor a good Protestant will say that God declares a person righteous without the existence of a real righteousness. As Chemnitz points out in his *Examination of the Council of Trent* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971), the Reformation acknowledges that righteousness is necessary to secure God's verdict of justification. So let us not be diverted by the non-question as to whether a real righteousness must exist. That is not the issue. The issue is, Where does this righteousness reside? As Buchanan in his masterful treatise on *The Doctrine of Justification* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1961) asks again and again, "Is this righteousness vicarious, or is it a personal righteousness in the believer?"

The Issue behind the Issue

What is behind all the efforts to rework the doctrine of justification—efforts which lead in one way or another to grounding God's justifying verdict, at least in part, on some reality within the believer? Back of them all is a dissatisfaction and uneasiness about the plain Pauline and Reformation doctrine of imputed righteousness. It is disappointing that even many good authors, who confess that salvation is based on an objective foundation,



real ethical content. Thus the man who has a right relationship acts right toward God, toward his neighbors and toward the world around him.

3. Since God's justification is not piecemeal but is entire and absolutely perfect, it is a declaration that the believer has a perfect relationship with God, man and the world.

It ought to be clear that no believer has this perfect relationship existentially. If he had, then he would pray perfectly, praise God perfectly, and his heart would never wander in the slightest from loving God with the whole soul, mind and strength. Luther confessed that he never was able to say one Lord's prayer perfectly. He said that we should not doubt that our best and holiest duties are defiled with the secret vice of pride. God's declaration that perfect righteousness exists is not to be identified with our personal relationship to God. Let any man honestly look into his heart, and he will confess that his heart-relationship with God is far from what it should be or could be, and he must needs cry for forgiveness.

But does not the believer have a perfect righteousness? Yes, he has! Does not a perfect righteousness mean a perfect relationship? Yes, it does! How then does the believer have a perfect relationship? He has it by faith and by imputation. On his behalf, Christ has a perfect relationship to God, to man and to the whole created order. All that was lost in Adam is restored in Christ.

Imputation and the substitutionary atonement of Christ stand together. An attack on one is an attack on the other.

seem to be soft on the old doctrine of imputed righteousness.⁸ Commenting on the current scene, Ziesler says:

More commonly today, the language of imputation is avoided, partly because of the difficulties to which it has led [legal fiction] and partly because its use in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 seems very much due to the exigencies of polemic.—*The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul*, p. 8.

As we have pointed out, all this talk about legal fiction is a “red herring.” So is the argument which says that we must make allowances for Paul’s polemic against the Judaizers. The whole concept of *imputation* is tied to the biblical doctrine of a *substitutionary atonement*. These two things—imputation and the substitutionary atonement of Christ—stand together. An attack on one is an attack on the other.

The center of the apostolic message was that Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3), was made a curse for us (Gal. 3:13), suffered for the unjust (1 Peter 3:18) and gave His life “a ransom for [Greek, *anti*, meaning *in the stead of*] many” (Mark 10:45).

. . . God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. . . . For He hath made Him [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.—2 Cor. 5:19, 21.

God laid our sins on Jesus Christ by imputation. “. . . He was numbered with the transgressors . . .” (Isa. 53:12). This is how He was “made . . . to be sin for us.” There was nothing in Him worthy of death. But having been made to be sin by imputation, He was condemned by the righteous judgment of God. In this sense it was right and proper that Christ should suffer the wrath of God. He had to be treated as *if* He were a sinner. It is on this same basis that God deals with the believing sinner. Having made him righteous by the imputed righteousness of Christ, God pronounces him just and treats him as *if* he were righteous. Those who repudiate imputed righteousness are really repudiating the central truth of the cross of Christ—that is, substitution.

But let us press this further in order to get back to the ultimate source of the problem. Why have many

biblical scholars begun to look for the meaning of Christ’s atonement elsewhere than in the concept of substitution. They talk about Christ’s solidarity, identity or oneness with the race. Markus Barth gives an excellent presentation of Christ’s representative role. But Barth cannot bring himself to acknowledge *substitution*. To many, the whole substitution-imputation concept is unreal or unnecessary. They are critical of the typical “Fundamentalist” portrayal of Christ’s substitutionary work—and often for some very good reasons, we must admit. For is it not all too true that some presentations of Christ’s substitutionary atonement appear to be arbitrary, artificial and not wholly unlike a pagan appeasement? Why does not God simply forgive without having to be “bought off” by the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ?

The atonement cannot be explained except by an appreciation of the binding claims of the law of God. The Ten Commandments are the words or the stipulations of the everlasting covenant (Ex. 34:27-29; Deut. 4:13; Rev. 11:19; 15:5). The covenant guarantees the blessing of life to the obedient and invokes the curse of death upon the disobedient. This law is the constitution of the universe. It cannot be changed, modified or relaxed. God must uphold the moral order of the universe. The law’s demands must be honored by perfect fulfillment and by the most complete satisfaction for sin. If this appears rigidly severe, let it be understood that we are dealing with an exact and omnipotent justice which will not abdicate the rule of divine law. Ultimate stability and freedom are not found in weakening, much less abolishing, the law of God.

When we acknowledge that this “law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12), that it requires of us the most perfect and exact obedience, that its penalty for any default must be carried out, and that it would be easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one jot or tittle of this law not to be carried out, then we will bless God that means have been devised that a Substitute stand in our stead. We will bless God for His sinless life which met our obligation. We will thank grace that He was willing to make reparations for the damage done. We will know why God could not spare His own Son if He was to save us from eternal ruin (Rom. 8:32). The sufferings of Christ will impress upon us what a tremendous evil it is to transgress God’s commandments.

We submit that such a view of the atonement shows

The atonement cannot be explained except by an appreciation of the binding claims of the law of God.

⁸Even Leon Morris (*The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, pp. 271-272, 282) is disappointingly weak on imputation.

It is not the Reformation doctrine of justification by Christ's imputed righteousness which is a cul-de-sac with no road from it to ethics.

us that there is no salvation other than by substitution and imputation. More than that, it is a salvation which will lead to a life of penitent, grateful submission to the law of God—apart from which all freedom is an illusion. It is not the Reformation doctrine of justification by Christ's imputed righteousness which is a cul-de-sac with no road from it to ethics. Rather, the blind alley is found in the theories of atonement that are not grounded on the moral necessities of the law of God.

We live in an age which has become notorious for its spirit of lawlessness. That spirit has permeated the church as well as the world. Multitudes of proposed Christians do not want to submit to the outside law of God any more than they want to submit to the outside righteousness of faith (Rom. 10:3). They want to live by some "Spirit-ethic" (the uncertain voices within, "sanctified" human intuition) just as they want to be justified by some "real" righteousness within. But it is "the man of lawlessness" (2 Thess. 2:3-8, RSV) who opposes justification by faith by crying up the need for real inward righteousness while all the while his heart thinks to "change the times and the law" (Dan. 7:25, RSV).

In short, all this opposition to imputed righteousness stems from the spirit of rebellion against the law of God. Let the law of God be upheld and its claims urged home upon the conscience, and then Christ's substitutionary atonement stands, and troubled consciences will be glad to find shelter under His imputed righteousness.

God's verdict of justification, therefore, is grounded on the reality of the law of God and the cross of Christ. Those who want to ground it on their own reality dishonor the law and despise the all-sufficiency of the cross. All this is implicit in Paul's argument in Romans 3:21-31.

Then, in Romans 4, Paul presses his argument further against those who want to base God's justifying verdict on a reality within themselves.⁹ The God who justifies the ungodly (v. 5) is the God who creates out of nothing and who raises the dead. Paul shows that this is the God in whom Abraham believed. When his own body was procreationally dead and Sarah's womb was dead, God pronounced him a father, saying, "I have made thee a father of many nations" (v. 17). This was not said *after* Isaac was born but *before* Isaac was born

(see Gen. 17:5). God's declaration that Abraham was a father was not based on a reality in Abraham. The God who creates out of nothing (Heb. 11:3)—not being dependent on any reality save the reality in His own Word, who is Jesus Christ—is the God "who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17). This assertion of Paul is a thunderbolt against those who say that a man has to be righteous before God can declare him righteous. And when God raises the dead, He is not dependent upon some supposed immortality of the soul.¹⁰ God's word calling the ungodly righteous and the barren woman a mother is, like election itself, not grounded even on the foreseen righteousness or fruitfulness of the human subject, but on the reality of Jesus Christ and His work alone. God finds in Jesus an adequate reason and justification for all His decrees.

To insist that we must be righteous before God by a righteousness within us is as foolish as thinking vain thoughts about surviving the disaster of death by our supposed immortality. Saying that the righteousness which we have within is by the grace of the Holy Spirit does not improve the situation. If anything, it makes our situation worse. It means that we use God's gift to steal His glory.

(To be continued)

¹⁰Thielicke is quite right when he observes that the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification by infused righteousness and the doctrine of the immortality of the soul belong together.

Let the law of God be upheld and its claims urged home upon the conscience, and then Christ's substitutionary atonement stands, and troubled consciences will be glad to find shelter under His imputed righteousness.

⁹*Logizomai* (impute, account, reckon) is used 11 times in Romans 4.



Ecumenical Developments between Roman Catholicism and Non-Christian Religions

Introduction

On December 2, 1964, a strange thing happened in Bombay. Pope Paul VI was given a tumultuous welcome by thousands of people who had traveled from all over India in order to see him. According to one who witnessed it, the reception given to Paul VI by the people of India completely overshadows the reception given to other famous visitors such as Queen Elizabeth, Khrushchev or Eisenhower.¹ Did the pope, as he drove through those dense crowds, stop to think that the vast majority of those cheering him were Hindus, Moslems and Buddhists? Is it possible that the "universal father" saw in what was taking place an omen of the papacy's role in future world events?

Since the historic Second Vatican Council, papal ecumenism has launched an aggressive program

aimed at bringing about a worldwide reconciliation which will include all men. Non-Christian religions are not excluded. Vatican II stressed "the universal design of God for the salvation of the human race."² It called for truly human conversation and patient dialogue with the nations of the earth. The council's "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" explicitly says that the Vatican's present attitude arises from her newly understood task of "fostering unity and love among men."³ The council fathers continue:

In our times, when every day men are being drawn closer together and the ties between various peoples are being multiplied, the Church is giving deeper study to her relationships with non-Christian religions.⁴

¹C. Murray Rogers, "Hindu and Christian—A Moment Breaks," in *Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Herbert Jai Singh (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1967), p. 104.

²Walter M. Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II*, introduction by Lawrence Cardinal Shehan, translations directed by Joseph Gallagher (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966), p. 586.

³*Ibid.*, p. 660.

⁴*Ibid.*

Since Vatican II, a tremendous interest in inter-religious dialogue has been developing among Roman Catholic theologians and missionaries. This interest was given impetus when Paul VI advocated dialogue with world religions in his encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam* (June 6, 1964). And not only has the pope advocated dialogue, but he has even tried to give it institutional permanence by creating a special Secretariat for Non-Christians on Pentecost, 1964. This new Vatican secretariat (cabinet position) is responsible for furthering good relations between the church and other world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.

This is all very interesting when it is remembered that Scripture predicts a special role to be played by Rome in earth's final spiritual apostasy and religious confederation. The views given under inspiration to the apostle John, and recorded in the book of Revelation, strongly suggest that in the future all the people of the earth (except for a small "remnant") will look toward Rome for spiritual and political leadership.

And all who dwell on the earth will worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain. . . . And the whole earth followed the beast with wonder (Rev. 13:3, 8).

Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of her impure passion (Rev. 14:8).

And I saw, issuing from the mouth of the dragon and from the mouth of the beast and from the mouth of the false prophet, three foul spirits like frogs; for they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty (Rev. 16:13-14).

The questions I have attempted to answer in my research are these:

1. What world conditions have been responsible for encouraging inter-religious cooperation and dialogue?
2. What changes have taken place in Rome's attitude toward non-Christian religions, especially since Vatican II?
3. Is there evidence that Catholicism may be willing to assimilate certain elements from other world religions? Is it possible that some kind of synthesis will take place between Roman Christianity and paganism, similar to what occurred in the early church?
4. And finally, what role will "religious experience" and "mysticism" play in Rome's attempt to unite all men with herself? Is this a possible point of contact between world religions?

Catholic theologians sense that they are living in a unique moment in history, just when world conditions seem to be converging which favor dialogue between religions.

In the conclusion, I will summarize my findings and—based on current indications—offer some predictions regarding the future development of Rome's inter-religious ecumenism.

Rome and the World Religions

World Conditions That Encourage Inter-Religious Dialogue

Catholic theologians sense that they are living in a unique moment of history, just when world conditions seem to be converging which favor dialogue between religions. The globe is quickly shrinking, and men of various faiths are beginning to realize that they must work together for the well-being of civilization. Tremendous problems face modern man which, it seems, can best be solved through united effort. Global crises such as ecology, famine, war, racism, human rights and poverty represent a latent incentive for "getting together."

A case in point is the conference which took place in Korea several years ago. Thirty representatives from six major religions (Buddhism, Won-Buddhism, Confucianism, Chondism, Protestantism and Catholicism) came together to see what they could do in common to help solve the pressing problems of their country.⁵ Even more recently, the World Conference on Religion and Peace met in Kyoto, Japan. Two hundred eighty-five persons attended, representing ten major religions and thirty-six countries. Interestingly, a Roman Catholic archbishop was chairman of this conference, which focused its attention on peace, human rights, disarmament and human development. The *Japan Christian News* witnessed the event:⁶

⁵The conference met during October 8-9, 1965. S. J. Samartha, "The Progress and Promise of Inter-Religious Dialogues," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 9 (Summer 1972): 463-76.

⁶October 30, 1970.

Blue turbaned Sikh, Orthodox priest with flowing robe and hood, fez-wearing Muslim, shaven-headed Buddhist monk, business-suited rabbi, clergy-collared Protestant, crucifix-adorned Catholic Archbishop, orange robed Hindu swami—they were all there.

Pope Paul VI, in an address to the Secretariat for Non-Christians, has hinted at the papacy's grand plan for the betterment of the world: "We hope we will soon see the day when all religions will unite their efforts concretely in the service of man, his freedom, and his dignity."⁷ Paul expressed much the same sentiment to a delegation of Buddhist monks who recently visited the Vatican: "We hope that there will be increasingly friendly dialogue and close collaboration between the traditions that you represent and the Catholic Church. Such contacts can . . . assist in advancing the cause of justice and peace in [the] world. . . ."⁸

Another powerful incentive which tends to draw world religions together is that they are all threatened with a common enemy. Organized religion of all kinds is being assaulted by a deadly combination of materialism, religious indifference and atheism. Paul Cardinal Marella, the first to head the Secretariat for Non-Christians, has written that the religions must begin to collaborate in "cherishing the basic religious sentiment existing in every man, which is being attacked today by atheistic materialism."⁹ Henri Le Saux, a Catholic priest who is deeply involved in dialogue with Hinduism, declares that inter-religious cooperation is the way to "stem the tide of materialism which is sweeping over the world."¹⁰ This idea seems to be gaining ground and can be seen more and more in the ecumenical literature.¹¹

Rome's New Attitude toward Non-Christians

There has been a radical shift in Rome's attitude toward non-Christians in the last twenty years and especially since Vatican II. In the past, the church's attitude toward rival religions (including Protestantism) was determined by a very literal interpretation of the formula, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the church there is no salvation). This adage is supposed to have been originated by Cyprian, and for centuries it was used by popes and councils to justify a hard-nosed approach to non-Catholics. For example, the Council of Florence declared:

⁷L' *Osservatore Romano*, October 19, 1972, p. 3.

⁸*Ibid.*, June 15, 1972, p. 5.

⁹Preface to H. Van Straelen, *Our Attitude Toward Other Religions* (Tokyo: Enderle-Herder, 1965), p. 7.

¹⁰Abhishiktananda [Henri Le Saux], *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point: Within the Cave of the Heart*, foreword by Klaus Klostermaier, translated by Sara Grant (Bombay: Institute of Indian Culture, 1969), p. 4.

¹¹See, for example, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 10 (Winter 1973): 24; *L'Osservatore Romano*, April 13, 1972, p. 8.

"We hope we will soon see the day when all religions will unite their efforts concretely in the service of man, his freedom, and his dignity." —Pope Paul VI

Neither pagans nor Jews, heretics and schismatics can obtain eternal life but will be condemned to the everlasting fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels unless, before the end of their lives, they are received into the Catholic Church.¹²

Boniface VIII, in his bull, *Unam Sanctam*, stated the matter in the strongest possible terms:

We are required by faith to believe and hold that there is one holy, catholic and apostolic Church; we firmly believe it and unreservedly profess it; outside it there is neither salvation nor remission of sins. . . . Further, we declare, say, define and proclaim, that to submit to the Roman Pontiff is, for every human creature, an utter necessity of salvation.¹³

In view of these strong medieval pronouncements, the reader may be surprised to discover the new philosophy regarding non-Christians which now prevails in Roman Catholic circles. According to Vatican II's *Constitution on the Church*, "those who have not yet received the gospel are related in various ways to the People of God."¹⁴ The same document continues:

Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God; for the Saviour wants all men to be saved. Those who, through no fault of their own, are still ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of His Church, yet sincerely seek God, and with the help of Divine grace strive to do His will as known to them through the voice of their conscience—those men can attain eternal salvation.¹⁵

In other words, it is no longer considered necessary that one be a member of the visible Catholic Church or render conscious submission to the pope in order to obtain salvation. The idea that even non-Christian religions represent the outworking of the divine plan for the salvation of the world is becoming more and more the accepted Roman Catholic view. The salvific value

¹²D 714.

¹³D 468f. The necessity of being in the church for salvation was also explicitly taught by Innocent III (D 423) and the Fourth Lateran Council (D 430).

¹⁴Abbott, *Vatican II*, p. 34.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 35.

of other religions is recognized. This does not mean, however, that Cyprian's taut formula has been completely discarded. It is still true, in a sense, that salvation can be obtained only in and from the Catholic Church. The non-Christian religions can be salvific only because they are "related in various ways" to the church.

This shift in Catholic philosophy really goes back to the First Vatican Council, where (in the *schema constitutionis dogmaticae de Ecclesia Christi*) a distinction was made between what we might term culpable and nonculpable paganism. According to this document, those who do not belong to the visible church because of "invincible ignorance" actually *may* be members of the church without realizing it! They belong to the church *in voto* (by desire).¹⁶ This distinction was strongly reiterated in 1943 when Pius XII issued the encyclical, *Mystici Corporis Christi*.¹⁷ Here again, while Cyprian's formula is maintained, the possibility of membership "by desire" is allowed for (as opposed to membership in actual fact). The reasoning goes like this: The necessity of actual church membership for salvation is comparable to that of baptism. Just as there is a "baptism of desire" (in which a person wants to be baptized but dies before he can receive the sacrament), so it is not always necessary that a person be actually incorporated into the church as a member, but it is at least required that he belong to it in wish or desire.

The letter from the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston¹⁸ (August 9, 1949) regarding the interpretation of this encyclical further reveals that this "desire" does not necessarily need to be explicit. In the case of those who live in invincible ignorance, God accepts "the implicit wish, so-called because it lies in that right disposition of the soul by which a man wishes his will to conform to that of God."¹⁹ Or, as Boniface Willems explains it:

God's will tends toward the Church. Since the 'pagan' of goodwill wishes to do the will of God, he is also implicitly ordered toward the Church. Salvation is therefore granted these men for the Church's sake.²⁰

This really means that all men—whether Buddhist, Hindu or Presbyterian—who sincerely want to live in accordance with God's will, can be considered as though they were already members of the Roman Catholic Church and therefore partakers in the church's salvation. They do not realize it, of course! Pronouncements such as these have set Catholic theologians in

¹⁶D 1821-40.

¹⁷D 3821.

¹⁸D 3866-73.

¹⁹D 3870.

²⁰"Who Belongs to the Church?" translated by Theodore L. Westow, in *Council: Theology in the Age of Renewal*, Vol. 1: *The Church and Mankind*, p. 144. Boniface Willems, O. P., is professor of dogmatic theology at the Albertinum in Nijmegen.

There has been a radical shift in Rome's attitude toward non-Christians in the last twenty years and especially since Vatican II.

motion to develop a worldwide ecumenical theology. In their initial attempt, a whole spectrum of theories has been spawned, such as Karl Rahner's "anonymous Christianity"²¹ and Teilhard de Chardin's "cosmic Christology."²² One theologian thinks he has found a "hidden Christ" in Hinduism, and others are talking about the existence of some kind of "Church incognito." For example, Bede Griffith, a Catholic priest who is deeply involved in dialogue with the religions of India, asserts that these religions can no longer be considered simply "false" or "anti-Christian." He writes:

We cannot look upon the Hindu, the Buddhist or the Muslim as outside the covenant of grace. Through the elements of truth in their religion . . . by which God makes himself known through nature and conscience, they belong to the economy of grace. There is already a 'presence' of Christ and therefore of the Church in all genuine religion, however hidden it may be.²³

As can be seen, a tremendous attempt is being made to enlarge the theoretical scope of the church's boundaries.

Admiring the "True and Holy" in Other Religions

Not only has salvation now been granted to millions of "anonymous Christians," but it is also acknowledged that there are many elements which are "true and holy" in these religions. According to Vatican II, the rules and teachings of non-Christian religions "often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men."²⁴ Pope Paul VI recently emphasized this idea in an address to a group of Buddhist monks who were visiting the Vatican:

We have a profound regard for the spiritual, moral and socio-cultural treasures that have been bestowed on you through your precious traditions. We recognize the values of which you are custodians, and we share the desire that they should be preserved and fostered.²⁵

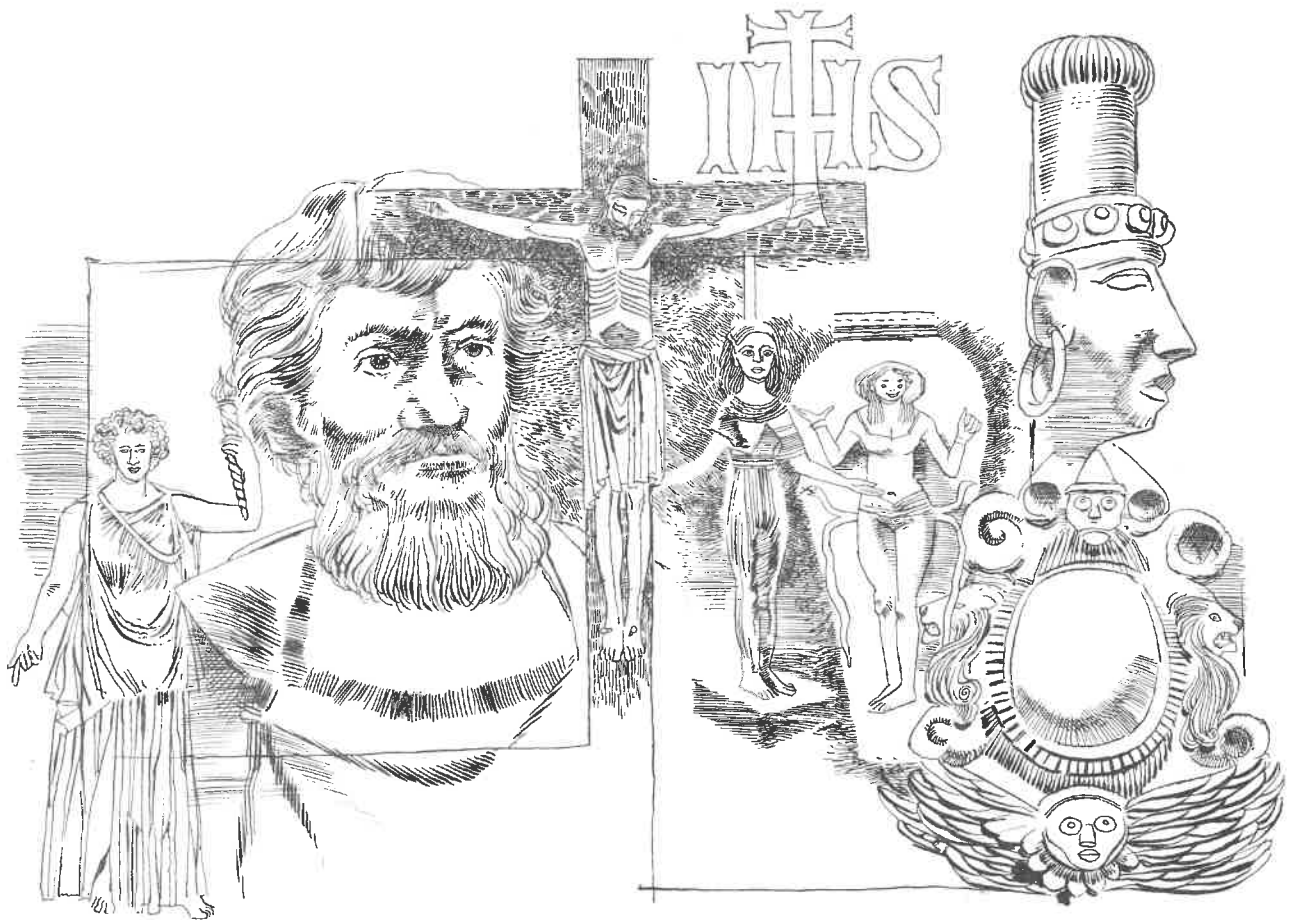
²¹Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 11 vols., Vol. 5: *Later Writings*, translated by Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966).

²²Christopher Mooney, *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

²³*Christ in India: Essays towards a Hindu-Christian Dialogue* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 247.

²⁴Abbott, *Vatican II*, p. 662.

²⁵*L'Osservatore Romano*, June 15, 1972, p. 5.



In his 1964 Easter message, the pope declared:

Every religion is the *daybreak* of faith, and we are waiting for the dawn to become brighter and brighter, until it reaches the brilliant splendour of Christian wisdom.²⁶

This statement, while it clearly points to the superiority of the Christian faith, also reveals the current Roman Catholic attitude regarding the validity of other religions. They are like the "daybreak"—and a daybreak can be a very beautiful thing. The pagans are custodians of many true and holy treasures. The Secretariat for Non-Christians is convinced that the rites of other religions, for example, are "a certain foreshadowing . . . of the paschal mystery" and that even pagan sacrifices are "a prelude and a prefiguring of the saving sacrifice of Christ."²⁷

²⁶*ibid.*, May 15, 1969, p. 9.

²⁷Secretariat for Non-Christians, *Towards the Meeting of Religions; Suggestions for Dialogue; The First Part of a Guide for Dialogue*, September 21, 1967 (Washington, D.C.: Publications Office of the United States Catholic Conference), pp. 19, 22. The attitude taken toward "idol-worship" among non-Christians in this document is also very interesting. The veneration of idols, ancestor worship and the veneration of the dead—says the secretariat—are not in themselves idolatry and should be considered "permissible" since they are really an expression of man's search for the divine. See p. 18.

We are even told that "it may well become plain that a great preponderance of basic Hindu belief is indeed divinely inspired."²⁸ C. Murray Rogers, a Catholic who resides in India, cannot conceive that the spiritual phenomena seen in Hinduism are "apart from Christ."²⁹ Although Christianity claims the "culmination" of all divine revelation, other religions also have "revelation," and therefore their sacred writings should be treated with respect. Because the basis of their writings is a genuine religious experience, it is "impossible" that they are merely the product of man himself.³⁰ Catholic theologian Sabbas Kilian writes:

One can seriously ask the question whether God did not call on men, outside of Israel and Christianity, and inspire them with a mission similar to that of the prophets and the apostles. . . . Islam reveres Mohammed as the Prophet. Buddhism experienced a period of prophetism,

²⁸John Moffitt, "Christianity Confronts Hinduism," *Theological Studies* 30 (June 1969): 222. Moffitt converted to Catholicism after living as a Hindu monk for 25 years.

²⁹"Hindu and Christian," p. 110.

³⁰Sabbas J. Kilian, "The Catholic Theologian and Non-Christian Religions," *Thought* 49 (March 1974): 21-42.

and so on. The existence of prophetism outside the Judeo-Christian world cannot be denied. And if prophetism is taken seriously as meaning speaking in the name of God, one cannot avoid asking the question whether it could not be the vehicle of "positive revelation"³¹

It is true, of course, that while the non-Christian religions possess many "true and holy" things, they do not possess the "fulness" of divine truth. It is at this point that Catholicism offers itself to the pagan world as the grand "fulfillment" of all their spiritual aspirations. This does not mean, however, that inter-religious dialogue need necessarily be a one-way street. Catholicism may regard itself as the "culmination" of spirituality, but that does not keep it from accepting the special insights which other religions have to offer. For example, C. Murray Rogers confesses that he has been personally enriched through his contact with "Hindu spirituality."³² Could it be that in the future, Catholics and non-Christians will be learning from each other in what Peter Schreiner calls a "mutual enrichment?"³³ William Johnston, a Jesuit on the faculty of Sophia University in Tokyo, says:

To us Catholic Christians the Vatican Council brought the refreshing news that we are still seekers, members of a pilgrim church, and so we can join hands with other searchers, whether they be Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim or anything else, in our common quest for truth. Needless to say, we have Christ, who I believe spoke of God as no man ever spoke; but I do not think we can claim to understand the revelation of Christ in all its fulness. . . . Moreover I also believe that in sundry times and diverse ways God spoke to our fathers through the prophets, and these include the prophets whose voices echo beautifully in the *Gita*, the *Lotus Sutra*, and the *Tao Teh Ching*.³⁴

Raymond Panikkar, a Catholic who teaches religion at the University of California (Santa Barbara), writes in a recent ecumenical journal that Christians have "no monopoly of goodness" and "no monopoly of truth."

In her eagerness to draw the whole world under her authority, is it possible that Rome will permit (or even encourage) some kind of synthesis?

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 34.

³²"Hindu and Christian," p. 110.

³³Peter Schreiner, "Roman Catholic Theology and Non-Christian Religions," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 6 (Summer 1969): 394. At the time of publication, Schreiner was a doctoral student at the University of Munster, Germany.

³⁴*Christian Zen* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 10.

He continues:

The Christian Church's claim to be the custodian of divine revelation, even when admitting that the fullness of revelation is to be found in Christianity, does not mean that the Christian has exhausted God's disclosure of himself to mankind. . . . Who are we to limit the works of God . . . ?³⁵

Bede Griffith writes, "We have to acknowledge that the Church has not only to teach but also to learn from other religions."³⁶ And Robley Edward Whitson, in his book, *The Coming Convergence of World Religions*, suggests that the different religions are in some ways complementary and can therefore contribute greatly to one another.³⁷

This raises an interesting question. If it is true that the church has not exhausted God's disclosure of Himself, if it is true that other religions contain many true and holy things and that the church has much to learn—how much of the non-Christian philosophy, doctrine and ritual is Rome willing to incorporate into herself? In her eagerness to draw the whole world under her authority, is it possible that the church will permit (or even encourage) some kind of synthesis?

Rome and the Assimilation of Other Religions

Before trying to answer this question, it would be well to get a historical perspective. Only in this way can we understand the scope of what may take place in the near future. It is a well-known fact that syncretism crept into the early church. Syncretism refers to the combination of different religious systems and a blending of their beliefs and practices. The Roman Church generally denies being guilty of syncretism. However, in view of her past history and the "religious pluralism" concept which is currently being developed by some of her theologians,³⁸ one begins to suspect that Rome does not really know where "enrichment" ends and "syncretism" begins.

It appears that Catholicism inherited a certain tendency toward syncretism from its political predecessor. According to J. N. D. Anderson, syncretism was widespread in the ancient Roman Empire (from which the papacy sprang—Dan. 7:8). He cites the example of Emperor Alexander Severus, who "had in his private chapel not only the statues of the deified emperors, but

³⁵"Christians and So-called 'Non-Christians,'" *Cross Currents* 22 (Summer-Fall 1972): 283.

³⁶*India*, p. 247.

³⁷(New York: Newman Press, 1971), pp. 52-53.

³⁸Raymond Panikkar, "Confrontation Between Hinduism and Christ," *New Blackfriars* 50 (January 1969): 197-204.

In view of her past history and the “religious pluralism” concept which is currently being developed by some of her theologians, one begins to suspect that Rome does not really know where “enrichment” ends and “syncretism” begins.

also those of the miracle worker Appolonius of Tyana, of Christ, of Abraham and of Orpheus.”³⁹ Syncretism under every possible form—ethical, political, social and theological—was a favorite policy of the Roman emperors, who saw in this philosophy a powerful tool for uniting and strengthening the empire. Bert Beach says that it amounted to a “syncretistic tidal wave” which “swept all the way from Persia to Scotland. The emperors collected gods the way wealthy art collectors gather paintings.”⁴⁰

When the Roman bishops began to function in the place of the emperors through the creation of a Holy Roman Empire, they also adopted, to some degree, the syncretistic philosophy of their predecessors. It is a well-known fact, for example, that many Hellenistic concepts were brought into Christianity. The theory of the immortality of the soul was one of those false doctrines that Rome incorporated into the religion of Christendom. Many other pagan ideas and customs were assimilated in order to facilitate the acceptance of Christianity by the heathen. The adoration of images and relics were introduced into Christian worship in order to afford converts from heathenism a substitute for the worship of idols, and thus to promote their nominal acceptance of Christianity.

Arnold J. Toynbee writes:

In winning the competition between the higher religions in the Roman Empire, Christianity did not really eliminate [them]. . . . One of the means by which it won . . . was that it . . . [absorbed] into itself what was valuable [sic] in those rival religions.⁴¹

Protestant theologians have shown rather conclusively that many aspects of ancient paganism con-

tinued to live within the bosom of the Catholic Church.⁴² For example, Karl Heim points out that the “mana” ideas of primitive animism continued in the custom of dissolving holy pictures in water to use as pills. The nature worship of the Mother Goddess (Isis and Astarte) continued in the cult of the Queen of Heaven (Mary) with her wide, blue mantle. The deities of the barbarians were perpetuated in the “saints” of the church (Peter of Milan as the patron of brewers, Barbara as the patron of gunners, St. Anthony of Padua as the patron of those eager to marry). The Hellenistic mystery cults of Attis, Mythras and Serapis continued to exist under new forms in the church’s sacramental rites. These “skeletons in the closet” used to be considered a devastating criticism against the Catholic Church. Today, however, opinion has reversed itself. George Tyrrell, the famous Catholic modernist, wrote:

What is so often used as a reproach against Catholicism—its various affinities with non-Christian religions, with Judaism, and Graeco-Roman, and Egyptian paganism, and all their tributaries—seems to us one of its principal glories and commendations. We like to feel the sap of this great tree of life in our veins welling up from the hidden roots of humanity. To feel so, to possess this sense of solidarity with all the religions of the world . . . this is to be a Catholic.⁴³

Even more recently, Catholic Kaj Baago, who is deeply involved in dialogue with Eastern religions, points to this “mixture” as a sign of the church’s greatness:

Christianity came to be a mixture of elements from Judaism, Greek philosophy, the mystery religions and Roman Law, i.e., a syncretistic religion. Syncretism is a naughty word nowadays, but actually the greatness of the Early Church consisted most of all in its ability to be syncretist without betraying the gospel [sic]. It . . . borrowed from Greek philosophy and from the mystery religions, and its theologians . . . could quote Plato, Socrates, Abraham, Isaiah, and the Sibylline Oracles in one breath. Similarly in its worship it copied the initiation rites of the Isis religion and took over not only the word ‘sacrament’ but also formulated a great deal of its sacramental theology according to the concepts of the Mithras cult. The Early Church also depicted Jesus in the form of pagan gods, as . . . ‘the true Apollon,’ or as the sun-god Mithras . . . , an identification which made it all the more natural for the Christians to take over the great sun festival on December 25th, converting it into Christmas. Above all, it was able to adopt and transform the universal humanism found in various Greek philosophical schools.⁴⁴

³⁹*Christianity and Comparative Religion* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1974), p. 12.

⁴⁰*Ecumenism: Boon or Bane?* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1974), p. 131.

⁴¹*Christianity among the Religions of the World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 111-12.

⁴²Karl Heim, *The Nature of Protestantism*, translated and with a foreword by John Schmidt (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), pp. 12-14. The following examples are taken from his work.

⁴³*Through Scylla and Charybdis* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1907), p. 23; cited in Heim, *Protestantism*, p. 14.

⁴⁴“Dialogue in a Secular Age,” in *Inter-Religious Dialogue*, pp. 127-44, edited by Herbert Jai Singh (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1967), pp. 130-31.

Karl Heim considers it a "profoundly symbolic fact" that in 609, Pope Boniface IV "consecrated the Roman pantheon, into which Agrippa had once received the deities of the ancient world, to the blessed Mary, ever virgin. . . ."45 "Whereas Protestantism denies much in man," says Heim, "Rome assents to all of him."46 Historically, Catholicism has tried to incorporate the spirituality of its opponents within itself, gathering up all man's religious quests, from the most primitive magic of nature religion to the strict legalism of the Jews and the ecstasy of the mystic. Like a universal "mother,"47 the Roman Church gathers the whole world in her arms.

Having made this survey of church history, we must now return to the present ecumenical scene. Is it possible that Rome may try to assimilate her rivals in the modern world just as she did in past centuries? Henri Le Saux, a Benedictine priest who lives in India (and writes under an adopted Indian name, Abhishiktananda), confesses:

In fact what we are looking for now in India is simply a corresponding event to what happened in the first centuries of the Christian era, when the Church developed within the religious and philosophical context of the Hellenistic world. The greatest Doctors and Fathers of the primitive Church first drank deep of Greek language, literature and philosophy. Then under the grace of the Spirit, they achieved almost unconsciously within themselves the synthesis . . . referred to above.⁴⁸

Le Saux hopes that a "living synthesis" can be achieved in our day between Indian and Christian theology and liturgy.⁴⁹ He encourages his colleagues to search the Hindu scriptures for that which can "enrich the diadem of the Church" and says that he wants to see the "riches of Hindu traditions" integrated into the church ("in all possible aspects—liturgical, ascetical, theological, and the like").⁵⁰

Kaj Baajo, who also lives in India, feels that history is about to repeat itself:

If one were to write a history of the relationships between Christianity and other religions through the ages, it would have to be divided into three main periods. The first period would cover the four hundred years after Christ of the Early Church, which was expressive of an open dialogue with other faiths on the part of the Church and a real willingness to receive from them. The second period would comprise the following fifteen hundred years, which was characterized by hostility, crusades, colonialism and missionary imperialism. The third period of that history . . . has just begun, and we can already now see that it will

⁴⁵Heim, *Protestantism*, p. 13.

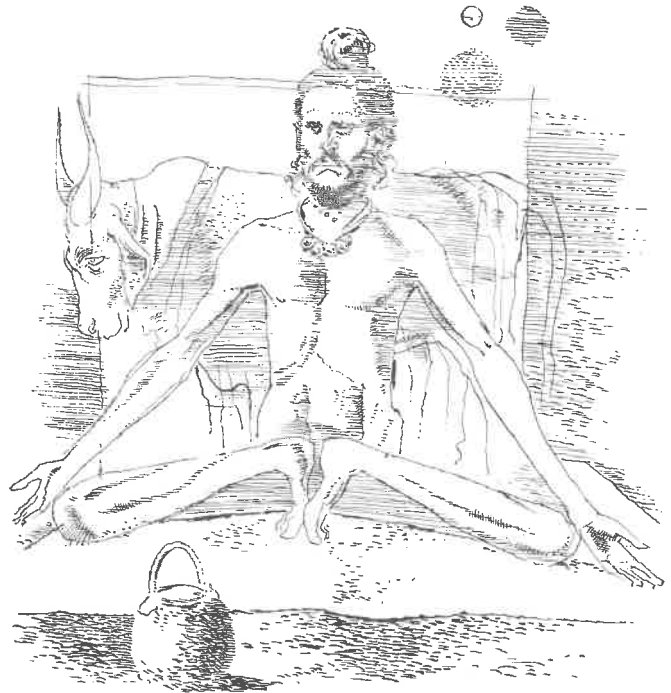
⁴⁶*ibid.*

⁴⁷"Mother of harlots" (Rev. 17:5).

⁴⁸*The Church in India: An Essay [sic] in Christian Self-Criticism* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1969), p. 37.

⁴⁹*ibid.*

⁵⁰*ibid.*, p. 55.



take us into a new inter-religious dialogue . . . similar to that of the Early Church.⁵¹

Bede Griffith, a Catholic priest who has pioneered in developing Christian monasteries (or ashrams) in India, wants the church to undertake a "synthesis" with Hindu and Buddhist philosophy which will approximate what the "Fathers" accomplished in regard to Greek philosophy.⁵² He declares:

The great need is to have a theology constructed on the basis of Indian and Chinese thought, and beyond that a christian spirituality which will draw on all the infinite resources of Indian spirituality, Hindu, Buddhist, Taost and Confucian. . . . In India we need a christian Vedanta and a christian Yoga, that is a system of theology which makes use not only of the terms and concepts but of the whole structure of the Vedanta, as the Greek Fathers used Plato and Aristotle; and a spirituality which will make use not merely of the practices of Hetha Yoga . . . but of the great systems of Karma, Bhakti and Jnana Yoga, the way of works or action of love or devotion, and the knowledge or wisdom, through which the spiritual genius of India has been revealed through the centuries.⁵³

Griffith again and again points to the early church as a precedent and justification for what he expects will soon take place in the Orient—"a real cultural fusion of Chris-

⁵¹"Dialogue," p. 125.

⁵²*India*, p. 249.

⁵³*ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

tianity with the people of the Far East."⁵⁴ He reminds us that the early church "did not hesitate to adapt its ceremonies to local customs and even to take its festival days from the pagan calendars."⁵⁵ He points out how the Greek fathers assimilated the principles of Greek philosophy until they had incorporated it "into the very tissue of christian thought," and how in yet a later age, St. Thomas Aquinas took up the thought of Aristotle and built that also into the structure of Catholic theology.⁵⁶ He concludes:

We have, therefore, in Christian history the evidence of a continuous movement of assimilation, by means of which different forms of culture have been integrated into christian tradition, to guide us in our attitude to the cultures of the East. . . . The same approach is obviously required in our approach to India.⁵⁷

He does not mean to imply that the church can accept everything in the non-Christian religions indiscriminately. He feels that there are no doubt certain elements which will have to be rejected. Nevertheless, the church must aggressively begin to assimilate what she can both in regard to modes of thought and forms of worship.⁵⁸

Another Catholic who is writing prodigiously in this area is William Johnston. Johnston, a Jesuit, is on the faculty of Sophia University, Tokyo. In his book, *Christian Zen*, he states:

Just as a whole new era opened up for Christianity when Thomas introduced Aristotle in the thirteenth century, so a new era, an even bigger one, could be opened up by the assimilation of some Buddhist ideas and attitudes. . . . [The church] will only reach something like completion when it sees truth through the eyes of all cultures. Indeed, it is precisely because of its claim to universality that Christianity needs the insights of other religions.⁵⁹

Indeed, this approach to non-Christian religions may soon be the prevailing fashion in Roman Catholic circles. Already a spate of books has been produced exploring other religions from this perspective. Books such as *Christ in India*, *Zen Catholicism*, *Christian Yoga*, *A Theology of Paganism*, *The Still Point* and *The Encounter of Religions*⁶⁰ all manifest a definite trend among Catholics toward the selective appropriation of certain thoughts and practices from the Eastern religions.

William Johnston says something about Buddhism which could be said of all non-Christian religions:



All forms of Buddhism are going to make an enormous impact on the Christianity of the coming century. If there has been a Hellenized Christianity . . . there is every likelihood that the future will see the rise of an Oriental Christianity in which the role of Buddhism will be incalculably profound. Indeed this process has already begun.⁶¹

Bede Griffith gives an interesting insight into the church's changing attitude toward Hinduism:

Until recently the Church in India has remained sealed against any influence from Hinduism. It was regarded as a mortal sin to read the Bhagavad Gita or any of the sacred books of Hinduism, to enter a Hindu temple, or even to witness a Hindu dance or listen to Hindu music. . . . But since Vatican Council a great change has taken place. Everywhere there is an awakening interest not only in Hindu culture but in Hindu religion and a recognition that the Church has much to learn from Hindu spirituality. . . .⁶²

In the matter of rites and customs, Anthony Fernando has pointed out that "in the spirit of dialogue" every attempt is being made to integrate into Catholicism at the local level the customs and traditions prevailing in that region.⁶³ Some Catholic monasteries in India have adopted the kavi (a saffron-colored habit worn by both Buddhist and Hindu monks) and are trying to follow as far as possible the customs of a Hindu ashram (monastery).⁶⁴ Sabbas Kilian, a Catholic who teaches theology at Fordham University, suggests that some of the "beautiful and meaningful prayers of the non-Christian heritage" should "find their way into the liturgies of the Christian Churches."⁶⁵ Jesuit Christian Troll discusses the possibility of developing forms of common prayer for Moslems and Christians. He says:

Practicing the discernment of spirits we should be constantly on the lookout for the traces of God's word amongst men, to adopt into our own life of faith the religious sentiments of other people.⁶⁶

⁵⁴*ibid.*, p. 70.

⁵⁵*ibid.*

⁵⁶*ibid.*, p. 72.

⁵⁷*ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

⁵⁸*ibid.*

⁵⁹pp. 14-15.

⁶⁰The authors, respectively, are Bede Griffith, Alred Graham, J. M. Dechanet, Henri Maurier, William Johnston and Jacques-Albert Cuttat. See bibliography.

⁶¹*The Still Point: Reflections on Zen and Christian Meditation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1970), p. xii.

⁶²"Salvation in India," *Tablet* 226 (December 23-30, 1972): 1221.

⁶³"Salvation and Liberation in Buddhism and Christianity," *Lumen Vitae* 27 (June 1972): 304. Fernando lectures in Buddhism and in catechetics at the National Seminary, Kandy, Ceylon, and edits the national catechetical magazine in Ceylon.

⁶⁴Griffith, *India*, p. 42.

⁶⁵"Catholic Theologian," p. 38.

⁶⁶"A New Spirit in Muslim-Christian Relations," *Month* 6 (September 1973): 304.

In the matter of religious "holy days," the church may once again try to incorporate the festivals of other religions into her own system. For example, the Secretariat for Non-Christians in Rome has for several years published its own greetings as well as those of Pope Paul to the Moslim community on the occasion of the Id al-saghir (this is the most popular Moslim feast day; it marks the end of a month of fasting). In 1971, Rome sent the following message:

We attach to your fast a great religious value. Your fast is in effect a homage to God and a sign of your desire to be faithful to him. How could we fail to associate ourselves with such a homage and to rejoice with you on the feast-day? . . . During these hours we feel closer to you.

It is good to repeat on this occasion our common faith in God, the very foundation of our mutual relationship. . . .⁶⁷

On another front, Jesuit Carl F. Starkloff writes about the "mutual enrichment" he hopes will take place between Catholicism and the religious traditions of the American Indians. He feels it is important to "explore the possibilities of one's being a christian according to the traditional tribal religious practices."⁶⁸ Regarding the use of peyote by some Indians who use it to induce a mystical experience, Starkloff feels that it would be "most unwise" for ecclesiastical authorities to suppress it.⁶⁹ He writes:

Most Indians, young and old, with whom I have spoken, have told me that they see no necessity of conflict between their religious traditions and Christianity. . . .

Christ is transcendent to all tribes and cultures, but demands of none of them that they relinquish their identities.⁷⁰

What about the various doctrines of non-Christian religions? How will the church deal with them? In the past they were ignored or denounced, but now vigorous efforts are being made to relate them to Catholic doctrine. For example, Griffith speculates regarding how the Indian doctrine of "karma" might be integrated with Christianity.⁷¹ John Moffitt (who converted to Catholicism after twenty-five years as a Hindu monk) points out the many parallels between Hindu and Christian belief in the areas of trinity, incarnation, fate of the soul, heaven, hell, purgatory, sacramental practices and mysticism.

⁶⁷Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 299.

⁶⁸"American Indian Religion and Christianity: Confrontation and Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 9 (Summer 1972): 318. Starkloff has been chaplain at Haskell Indian College, Lawrence, Nebraska.

⁶⁹*ibid.*, p. 319.

⁷⁰*ibid.*, pp. 320-22.

⁷¹Bede Griffith, "Salvation," p. 1221. Briefly, karma is the idea that every deed has its inevitable consequence and that the effects of karma continue from one rebirth to another until the soul is finally purified and attains final release. There is a profound truth in this, says Griffith, when we realize that it is *humanity* as a whole that takes birth continually from age to age and that human history is really the working out of the karma.

Catholic ecumenists seem to realize that the best hope of uniting the world religions lies in the realm of "religious experience" and "mysticism." Here, indeed, there is plenty of common ground.

While noting some differences, he does not feel that the gap is too great for a synthesis to take place.⁷² Still another Catholic priest, Lawrence Sullivan, has written an article to show how the Chinese concept of "tao" (the way) can be related to Christian theology.⁷³

It is generally agreed, however, that in these doctrinal matters a long dialogue will be required before true agreement can be reached. Some of the doctrinal divergencies are serious. Catholic ecumenists seem to realize that the best hope of uniting the world religions lies elsewhere—in the realm of "religious experience" and "mysticism." Here, indeed, there is plenty of common ground.

The Role of Mysticism in Inter-Religious Ecumenism

Obviously, the most important step in developing ecumenical relationships with non-Christians is to find some kind of solid, common ground, some basis for fellowship. Griffith writes:

There is a need of an ecumenical movement in religion, by which we seek to discover what is the common ground in the different religious traditions of mankind and then in the light of this understanding to comprehend all these different religious traditions in their vital relationship to the living Christ. This is the great task of the future.⁷⁴

While admitting that there are problems in relating all the different pagan doctrines to Christianity, Griffith feels that there is at least one area in which we have reason to be very optimistic: "When it comes to the doctrine of salvation and union with God, the agreement is already extraordinary."⁷⁵ He continues:

What is required is a meeting of the different religious traditions at the deepest level of their experience of God. Hinduism is based on a deep mystical experience

⁷²"Christianity Confronts Hinduism," p. 30.

⁷³"Lao Tzu and the Doctrine of the Way," *Spiritual Life* 18 (Fall 1972): 166-73.

⁷⁴*India*, pp. 164-65; cf. p. 30.

⁷⁵"Salvation," p. 1221.

The Catholic Church recognizes that she has “no monopoly of mysticism” and that the mystical experiences of holy men in other religions bear “a remarkable resemblance” to the traditional teaching of Catholicism.



and everywhere seeks not simply to know ‘about’ God, but to ‘know God,’ that is to experience the reality of God in the depths of the soul. It is at this level that Christian and Hindu have to meet, to discover in their experience of God, what is really common. . . .⁷⁶

All through Indian history there has been this yearning to experience God in the depths of the soul. The whole system of Yoga . . . is intended to bring the heart and the mind into . . . the ultimate experience. . . . That is where our . . . final contact finally has to take place.

To meet on the level of liturgy, of language, music and art is not so difficult. To meet on the level of philosophy and theology is a difficult and extended task, though I think we can manage it eventually. But to meet in the interior depths of the soul, in this experience of God, is, I believe, the final task of the Church, not only in India but in all the East. . . .⁷⁷

Griffith believes that any truly successful encounter with non-Christians will have to take place on this level.⁷⁸ He even implies that if dialogue is to be fruitful, both sides must allow their dogmas to be tested and judged by this common “experience.”⁷⁹ It is for this very reason that Griffith went to India to establish a monastic order in Bangalore. He recalls:

My interest in eastern religion had grown steadily over the years. It was not merely an academic interest but rather a sense of need for that which Indian spirituality had to give. I had long been familiar with the mystical tradition of the West, but I felt the need of something more which the East alone could give; above all the sense of the presence of God in nature and the soul, a kind of natural mysticism which is the basis of all Indian spirituality. I felt therefore that if a genuine meeting of East and West was to take place, it must be at this deepest level of their experience and this I thought could best come through the monastic life.⁸⁰

The word *mysticism* has to do with obtaining a knowledge of God by means of subjective experience rather than by objective revelation. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* concedes without hesitation that authentic mystical experiences occur among non-Christians.⁸¹ The church recognizes that she has “no monopoly of mysticism” and that the mystical experiences of holy men in other religions bear “a remarkable resemblance” to the traditional teaching of Catholicism.⁸² Pope Paul himself, when he went to India in 1965, praised the people of India for their “profound meditation” and mystical search for God. In 1972, Pope Paul received a group of Buddhist monks who were visiting the Vatican. In his address to them, he commended them for their “spirituality.”⁸³ The Secretariat for Non-Christians, picking up the cue, has issued a document which mentions man’s “desire for perfection and self-purification” and “search for God” as being the “basis for dialogue.”⁸⁴

Mysticism has always been a powerful force in drawing together men of different faiths because, as J. N. D. Anderson points out, mystics, regardless of religious background, are apt to speak the same sort of language. “Mystics in different religious traditions often recognize in each other a common experience which, they assert, transcends theological differences.”⁸⁵ This helps us understand what Klaus Klostermaier means when he says, “In true dialogue . . . it is not . . . doctrine or theological theory that matters but spirituality.”⁸⁶ Klostermaier is the consultant on Hinduism to Rome’s Secretariat for Non-Christians. Elsewhere he explains that “at the level of formulated theology and fixed doc-

⁷⁶Griffith, *India*, pp. 46-47; cf. pp. 63-65.

⁷⁷*ibid.*, p. 183; cf. p. 24.

⁷⁸*ibid.*, pp. 175-76.

⁷⁹*ibid.*, p. 200.

⁸⁰*ibid.*, p. 17.

⁸¹Vol. 10, S.v. “Mystical Phenomena,” J. Aumann.

⁸²*ibid.*, S.v. “Mysticism,” T. Corbishley.

⁸³*L’Osservatore Romano*, June 15, 1972, p. 5.

⁸⁴*Suggestions for Dialogue*, p. 14.

⁸⁵*Christianity*, pp. 18-19.

⁸⁶“Dialogue—the Work of God,” in *Inter-Religious Dialogue*, edited by Herbert Jai Singh (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1967), p. 123.



The principle that man can save himself by his own works (or experience) lies at the foundation of every heathen religion.

trinal concepts there can be no true spiritual meeting or dialogue” and says that ecumenists must go beyond that “to the level of the spiritual encounters of the self with God in the inner being.”⁸⁷

Abhishiktananda (Indian name assumed by Benedictine Henri Le Saux) feels that the “ultimate depths of the self” is the only adequate level for dialogue.⁸⁸ This common “interiority” will be the cement to bind together the hearts of men. The title of his book speaks for itself—*Hindu-Christian Meeting Point: Within the Cave of the Heart*. The translator of Le Saux’s book writes:

Only in the cave of the heart can true dialogue between Christianity and Hinduism take place: contact at any other level can never be more than superficial and fleeting. . . . The time has come for Christians and Hindus to recognize in each other the gifts of the Spirit, and for that both must go silently down to the depths of their own being, to “the place where the glory dwelleth.”⁸⁹

The potential ability of “religious experience” to transcend theological differences is illustrated in a story told by William Johnston in his book, *The Still Point*:

⁸⁹*ibid.*, note by translator (Sara Grant), p. vii.

Papal ecumenism has launched an aggressive program aimed at bringing about a worldwide reconciliation which will include all men.

⁸⁷Foreward to Abhishiktananda, *Cave of the Heart*, p. 7.

⁸⁸*ibid.*

It can truly be said that, experientially, Catholicism is ready to meet and dialogue with all the nations of the earth.

In the hot summer of 1968 I had the privilege of participating in the Zen-Christian dialogue held in Kyoto [Japan]. This was an unforgettable experience—a week in which Buddhists and Christians met in an atmosphere of great cordiality, forming deep friendships and laying the foundations for further union. Obviously we were not in complete accord on every point. On the contrary, when it came to formulating propositions on which we were agreed, it seemed that there was not a single philosophical or theological tenet that we held in common. . . . Yet that we had much in common was proved by the very atmosphere of delicate charity and understanding that penetrated the week in which we lived together. And soon it became clear that what united us was not philosophy but religious experience. . . . Indeed it was amazing that such diverse philosophies should produce such similar experiences.⁹⁰

Raymond Panikkar, who comes from a mixed Hindu-Catholic home, recognizes that the meeting of religions cannot take place except in the sphere of an "existential" encounter.⁹¹ And here again, there is growing evidence that the dialogue will not be a one-way street. Bede Griffith writes, "We stand in desperate need of . . . interior life such as the East can teach us."⁹² Already, certain elements of Eastern spirituality are finding their way into Catholicism. For example, William Johnston writes:

It seems to me that Christians can profit greatly from Zen methodology to deepen their Christian faith, and here in Japan an increasing number of Christians, both Japanese and Western, are discovering this. A growing number of Catholic Japanese nuns, for example, are quietly practicing Zen, and I believe it has a future in the Church.⁹³

Johnston feels that in its dealings with the East, Western Christianity must humbly admit that it has much to learn. "She will find her encounter with the Orient no less enriching than her meeting with Greco-Roman thought in the early years of her existence."⁹⁴

⁹⁰pp. xi-xii.

⁹¹*The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd [1965]).

⁹²*India*, p. 74.

⁹³*Christian Zen*, p. 19.

⁹⁴*Still Point*, p. 182.

He points out that Zen meditation and the mystical contemplation of St. John of the Cross are "remarkably similar" and that Zen can no doubt add many "precious and valuable teachings" to the Christian experience.⁹⁵ Abhishiktananda also writes (from his hermitage near the Ganges in the Himalayas) that there must be an "integration in Christian spirituality of the Hindu mystical experience, and that this is the most essential duty cast on us, Christians of India, by the Spirit. . . ."⁹⁶

One of the most interesting examples of how Eastern spirituality can be blended with Catholicism is the case of Thomas Merton (d. 1968). Merton was a Trappist monk who became deeply involved in Oriental mysticism and Zen meditation. (Zen is a technique usually associated with Buddhism. One author describes it as "the quest for direct and pure experience on a metaphysical level, liberated from verbal formulas and linguistic preconceptions."⁹⁷ Many Catholics feel it is compatible with their faith.)⁹⁸ Merton himself was a deeply committed ecumenist who seemed to feel that Zen could facilitate the dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity. "It would do so," he wrote, "by elevating contemplation over doctrines and concepts."⁹⁹ Merton contended that Buddhism and Christianity, after all, have the same aim, namely, "ontological transformation through direct experience."¹⁰⁰ Merton recognized the validity of mystical experience found in other religions. He wrote:

Since in practice we must admit that God is in no way limited in His gifts, and since there is no reason to think that He cannot impart His light to other men without first consulting us, there can be no absolutely solid grounds for denying the possibility of supernatural (private) revelation and of supernatural mystical graces to individuals, no matter where they may be or what may be their religious tradition, provided that they sincerely seek God and His truth.¹⁰¹

To illustrate the mutual appreciation of mysticism by both partners in the ecumenical dialogue, Merton tells the story of a Hindu monk named Brahmachari who one day told him (with special emphasis) that he (Merton) ought to read *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas a Kempis, and Augustine's *Confessions*. Merton looks back on this experience with the following observation:

It seems to me very probable that one of the reasons why God had brought him all the way from India, was that

⁹⁵"Zen and Christian Contemplation," *Review for Religious* 29 (Spring 1970): 703.

⁹⁶"Hindu Spirituality," *Clergy Review* 54 (March 1969): p. 174.

⁹⁷Chalmers McCormick, "The Zen Catholicism of Thomas Merton," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 9 (Fall 1972): 803-804. For a good description of Zen, see Johnston, *Still Point*, pp. 1-23.

⁹⁸*ibid.*

⁹⁹Quoted in McCormick, "Merton," p. 813.

¹⁰⁰Donald Swearer, "Three Modes of Zen Buddhism in America," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 10 (Spring 1973): p. 301.

¹⁰¹Quoted in McCormick, "Merton," pp. 809-10.



he might say just that.

After all, it is rather ironical that I had turned, spontaneously to the east, in reading about mysticism, as if there was little or nothing in the Christian tradition. . . .

So now I was told that I ought to turn to the Christian tradition [regarding mysticism] . . . —and told by a Hindu monk!¹⁰²

Another example of how mysticism serves as a common ground for inter-religious dialogue is seen in the conference that took place between Zen Buddhists and Catholics in 1967.¹⁰³ A large portion of the time in this conference was devoted to a discussion of the so-called “interior way” in which the participants shared their personal religious experience in order to discover a deeper connection among themselves.

The Catholic participants in the conference focused on the notion of prayer when they discussed the interior way. They tried to clarify the relationship between specifically

Christian prayer and Zen meditation. The three Catholic reports on this theme agree on one point: there is no unbridgeable gap between the two types of spirituality.¹⁰⁴

At this same conference, a young Japanese Carmelite monk, Ichiro Okumura, told how he had combined the spiritual values of Japanese tradition with those of Carmelite spirituality. Soon after becoming a Christian, he became acquainted with Catholic mysticism through the writings of St. John of the Cross. When he entered the Carmelite order, he brought with him his familiarity with Zen discipline and an intimate knowledge of the great Zen master, Dogen. He told the conference that he feels Christian spirituality can be enriched by Zen meditation.¹⁰⁵

Another Catholic at the conference, Enomiya Lasale, stated that with the help of Zen meditation, he had experienced “a new and undreamed of possibility for spiritual recollection and concentration.”¹⁰⁶ One of the Buddhist participants was Zenkei Shibayama (he is abbot of a cloister of Buddhist monks). He told of how

¹⁰²Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 816.

¹⁰³Heinrich Dumoulin, “A Dialogue with Zen Buddhists,” translated by John Drury, in *Concilium: Theology in the Age of Renewal*, Vol. 29: *Opportunities for Belief and Behavior*, edited by Christian DuQuoc (New York: Paulist Press, 1967).

¹⁰⁴*ibid.*, p. 158.

¹⁰⁵*ibid.*, p. 159.

¹⁰⁶*ibid.*, p. 160.

he "renounced the world after recognizing the fleeting nature of worldly things and the enduring values of the spirit."¹⁰⁷ This is something that every Catholic ascetic can appreciate.

What does all this mean? It means that we live in a time when—surrounded on every side by calamity and uncertainty—the masses of humanity are lusting for a satisfying religious experience. The Roman Catholic Church is well-equipped to satisfy the world's mystical longing for experience, for immediacy. Indeed, some of the world's greatest mystics have drawn their nourishment from her bosom. A chain of mystics stretches through all the centuries of the church—Bernard of Clairvaux, Eckhart, Suso, Tauler, Thomas a Kempis, Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Catherine of Siena, etc. And in Roman mysticism, says Theresa, the soul "drinks deep drafts of the water of grace flowing abundantly from God and sinks into a heavenly intoxication, a holy frenzy."¹⁰⁸ This ecstasy, this *unio mystica*, may turn out to be Rome's greatest attraction in the accelerating quest for inter-religious unity.¹⁰⁹

According to the official Vatican newspaper, Rome wants to establish a "true, mutual existential communication" with world religions.¹¹⁰ It can truly be said that, *experientially*, Catholicism is ready to meet and dialogue with all the nations of the earth. "Here, at the level of mysticism, East meets West. Here is the still point of the turning world."¹¹¹

Conclusion

In summary, I would like to state the following conclusions:

1. World conditions seem to be ripe at the present time for the greatest syncretistic movement since the early church. Common social problems and a menacing common enemy (atheism) are tending to draw the world religions into more intimate cooperation and dialogue.

2. Rome is manifesting a new attitude toward non-Christian religions which could be characterized with the words "dialogue" and "mutual esteem." Sincere pagans are now "anonymous Christians," and it is acknowledged that many true and holy things are contained in their respective religions. The rites and dogmas of rival religions are no longer denounced, but often admired.

3. Rome seems willing to assimilate certain ele-

ments from these religions for the sake of improved ecumenical relationships. Rome may soon permit some kind of synthesis to take place which will include not only rites and customs, but philosophies and dogmas as well. A repetition of the fusion that occurred between Catholicism and the Greco-Roman civilization is being predicted from many quarters. This time, however, it is the Oriental religions which will be engulfed.

4. Subjective "religious experience" or "mysticism" is the most promising meeting point as world religions cast about for some common ground upon which to fellowship. The principle that man can save himself by his own works (or experience) lies at the foundation of every heathen religion. Most Catholics who are actively involved in dialogue feel that man's innermost spiritual life is the only level at which successful ecumenism can take place.

In view of these emerging factors, what predictions can we make regarding the shape of inter-religious ecumenism in the future? It is difficult to say how far Rome is willing to go in the matter of assimilation, but there are plentiful indications that some kind of marriage between Catholicism and Oriental spirituality is imminent. For example, John Moffitt, who converted from Hinduism to Catholicism and is well-acquainted with both Hindu and Buddhist religious thought, writes:

I am a Christian, . . . but I can no longer say I am *not* a Hindu or a Buddhist. . . .

In becoming a Roman Catholic . . . I was not let to forget or deny the profundities of my earlier faith. After the first flush of convert zeal subsided, I realized there was a deeper kinship between Hinduism and the technique of Jesus Christ than most Westerners had up to now perceived.¹¹²

Bede Griffith also gives an interesting insight into how this "marriage" is progressing in India.

I once joined in a Catholic procession at a church in Bangalore, where the statues of the saints were carried in procession, and I could not help seeing that it was almost like a Hindu procession, where the statues of the saints had taken the place of the 'idols' of the gods.¹¹³

But what about the attitude of Hindus and Buddhists toward Christ? Are the barriers insurmountable? Not according to Raymond Panikkar. He points out that Hindus, for example, tend to readily accept the idea of Christ as "the Son of God." They recognize the validity of religious thought beyond their own horizon. Indeed, Panikkar says that Christ is already becoming a popular

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁰⁸Quoted in Heim, *Protestantism*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁹For a thorough survey of classical mysticism in the Catholic Church, see Sidney Spencer, *Mysticism in World Religions* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963).

¹¹⁰Piero Rossano, *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 22, 1970, p. 10.

¹¹¹Johnston, *Still Point*, p. 174.

¹¹²*Journey to Gorakhpur: An Encounter with Christ beyond Christianity* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1972), p. xi.

¹¹³*India*, p. 105; see also p. 109.

figure in the Indian "pantheon."¹¹⁴ Catholic Edward Rice agrees that it is relatively easy for Hindus to "believe" in Christianity—they have the capacity to encompass many beliefs.¹¹⁵ Klaus Klostermaier, a consultant to the Vatican's Secretariat for Non-Christians, writes that "the educated, religiously-interested Hindu respects Christ and often reads the New Testament, and many Swamis quote freely from the Bible when preaching to their followers."¹¹⁶

As much as Catholics loathe to use the word *syncretism*, it seems that no other word so well describes what is beginning to take place. At this time it would be well to ask, What is God's attitude toward syncretism? Several biblical passages speak to this very point. For example, 1 Samuel 5 relates how the victorious Philistines placed the captured ark of the covenant in the temple of Dagon at Ashdod (in order to add Yahweh to their pantheon of deities). During two successive nights, the statue of Dagon fell upon its face before the ark, breaking off its head and hands! It seems that Yahweh does not agree to being synthesized with other religions. In Acts 14:11 we read that when Paul performed a miraculous healing in Lystra, the populace (including the priests of Jupiter) were eager to incorporate the Christian missionaries into their religious system. The apostles, however, could not tolerate such a God-dishonoring fusion.

What about the aspect of interiority and subjectivism in the current inter-religious dialogue? This is often considered the best meeting point, the "cement" which can unite men of different faiths. But is mysticism a valid place for men to gather and worship God? As a Protestant, I must agree with Karl Heim that mysticism and *true* worship are as far apart as the east from the west. Writes Heim:

We cannot find God through a condition of ecstasy. . . . As long as we are intoxicated we are not with God, but only with ourselves. We are concerned with the swelling ocean of our own mental life. . . . We can find God only in a spiritual act that occurs in deep solitude and with full mental clarity. That is why the Word plays the decisive role in the search for God.¹¹⁷

Protestants recognize that true worship can be offered only by one who is in full control of his faculties, and that this worship consists not in subjective experiences, but rather in hearing the objective Word of God. Further, this ecumenical emphasis on interiority is radically opposed to the apostolic preoccupation with the objective mercies of God. True Christianity is unique

among world religions in that it is a historical faith. The Christian's salvation is based on something entirely outside of himself—the doing and dying of Jesus, the Christ of history. While Oriental and Catholic mystics are turning their gaze inward to discover God "in the depths of their being," the true people of God will be looking away from themselves to the alien righteousness of Christ, which alone can make them acceptable to God. They will look upward into the heavenly sanctuary where Christ has entered, cast their anchor within the veil, and enter boldly into God's presence by the blood of Jesus.

Finally, it seems that in the current inter-religious dialogue, the enemy of souls is laying the groundwork for his final deception. The final uniting of the world religions will in all likelihood be accomplished by Satan himself. Bede Griffith, a Catholic who is extremely active in inter-religious ecumenism, predicts:

As the different religions draw nearer to one another in mutual respect, seeking the ultimate truth to which they all alike bear witness, may we not hope that they may eventually arrive at unity? Yet perhaps we have to allow that this ultimate unity will only be reached at the end of time. It is notable that all the different religions look forward to a figure who is to appear at the end of time. The Hindus expect the last *avatara* in the form of Kalki, the Buddhists await the coming of the Buddha Maitreya, the Jews look for the coming of the Messiah, and both Christians and Muslims expect the coming of Jesus. . . .¹¹⁸

When this dazzling religious figure comes, this counterfeit christ, he will offer the world peace, unity and healing. Through the agency of spiritualism, miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and many undeniable wonders will be performed. Christians will unite in the use of this wonderworking power, and they will see in this development a grand opportunity for the conversion of the world and the ushering in of the long-expected millennium.

In the meantime, Rome can be expected to patiently continue working toward her great ambition of worldwide ecumenism and unity. The sweeping analysis offered by Bert Beach is probably not exaggerated. He writes:

Rome has launched out on an ecumenical enterprise of truly impressive proportions. . . . All religions, races, social classes, professions, cultures, governments, are to lay their aspirations and values on the altar of Catholic ecumenism and let Roman integration and unity make up for their division. . . . Nothing is excluded except that which refuses to be integrated into this enlarged framework. Catholicism thus presents itself as the universal religion of mankind, the religion of the United Nations.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴"Confrontation," p. 202.

¹¹⁵Edward Rice, "The Hidden Christ of Hinduism," *Sign* 49 (June 1970): 32.

¹¹⁶"Hindu-Christian Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 5 (Winter 1968): 27.

¹¹⁷*Protestantism*, 79.

¹¹⁸*India*, pp. 36-37.

¹¹⁹Beach, *Ecumenism*, p. 260.

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