

# **HOW WIDE IS GOD'S MERCY?**

**By**

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**Confronting The Important Issues  
of 'Predestination' and  
'The Destiny of the Unevangelized'**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION..... 1

## PART ONE

DOES GOD DESIRE THE SALVATION OF ALL OR ONLY SOME PERSONS?..... 3

    Arminianism's Five Points..... 4

    Calvinistic Declarations and Official Statements of Predestination..... 5

    Personalizing The 'Horror' of 'Calvinistic Predestination'..... 6

    Calvinistic Predestination Repudiates Man's Free Will..... 9

    Calvinistic Predestination Violates God's Justice.....13

    Calvinistic Predestination Is A Denial of God's Love and Mercy.....15

## PART TWO

HAVE ALL RECEIVED ENOUGH 'ENLIGHTENMENT' TO BE SAVED?.....23

    Final Judgment – Relative Opportunity, Not Absolute Uniformity.....24

    Truth Was Coming Into The World Gradually and Progressively.....25

    "God Hath Given To Every Man a Certain Day or Time of Visitation".....29

    Different Faiths Can Teach One Another What They Have Learned of the Way..31

    The 'Condition of One's Heart' Determines His Eternal Destiny.....33

    John Wesley – "Do Not Reject Those Persons Whom God Accepts"..... 35

    "All Truth Is One, And All Truth Is God's Truth".....41

    The Phenomenon of the 'Guilty Conscience' Is Universal.....43

    Judgment According To 'Light' Received and 'Deeds' That Are Done.....45

    The 'Finality of Christ' Is Not Contradictory to the 'Wideness of God's Mercy' .....55

    Will The Majority of The Human Race Be Saved?.....63

## HOW WIDE IS GOD'S MERCY?

One of the most important questions which anyone can ask is the question: 'How wide is God's mercy'? The answer to this question will largely determine one's very concept of God! In an attempt to answer this very 'basic question' regarding the nature of God, there are two other questions which must be addressed, if an answer to the 'basic question' is adequately to be answered. Those two other questions are these: (1) Does God love all persons without exception and does He desire (will) the salvation of every person who has ever lived or who will ever live? (2) Has God revealed Himself sufficiently, through the 'spiritual enlightenment' which He has given, through various means, to make it possible for all persons in all ages and in all circumstances to be 'saved' (in order that all persons could spend eternity in heaven, if they so choose)? Logically and obviously, if these two questions are answered in the 'negative', then God's mercy, at best, is very limited.

Again, one's answer to these two above-stated questions will largely influence one's concept of God. If God only loves a limited (small) number of human beings, predetermined by God's sovereign choice, then it is hard to accept the Biblical conviction that God is in any meaningful sense a 'merciful God'. Again, if God will not allow anyone to enter His heavenly home unless they have accepted Christ as personal Savior, then, at best, God's mercy is not very 'wide', but instead very 'exclusive'. It is said that the majority of the world's population has died in infancy, before any opportunity was given for this mass of humanity to personally accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. To allow entrance into heaven to only that limited portion of the world's population which has made a volitional commitment to Jesus Christ, is to limit the privilege of salvation to a very small number of persons. And this is true, even in light of the amazing 'feats' in Christian evangelistic outreach in our world, both past and present.

Although, obviously, it is not known just how many 'Christians' there are in our present-day world who would answer the two above-stated questions in the 'negative', it is not hard to find Christians (especially of the 'evangelical type') who would take great 'offense' if one suggested that 'salvation' is made available to all persons without exception (whether or not persons have ever heard of Jesus Christ or have had opportunity to listen to the presentation of the Biblical 'plan of salvation'). There are many who would react very negatively to the suggestion that many persons (including so-called 'heathen' persons) are presently 'enjoying the glories of heaven', even though these same persons never once heard of Jesus Christ, or, if they did, were never clearly presented the Biblical plan of salvation. To believe that God would 'allow' such persons into heaven - persons who were never 'evangelized' while they lived on earth - would to some Christians constitute 'gross heresy'. After all, does not Acts 4:12 clearly state that there is no other name given among men, other than the name of Jesus Christ, by which persons can get to heaven? And does not the Bible (in

John) make it clear that Jesus alone is 'the way, the truth, and the life'? And did not Jesus Himself declare that no man can come to the Father except through the Son?

The question regarding the destiny of the 'unevangelized' would probably be answered by more Christians in the 'negative', than the question regarding 'predestination' (i.e., that God desires and wills to save only a minority of the human race). There may be fewer 'Christians' today who believe in 'unconditional election' (i.e., that God sovereignly chose, before the foundation of the world, to save a limited number of individuals with the consequence of damning the remainder of the human race to 'hell', independent of any human responsiveness) than there are Christians who believe that a person cannot enter heaven without personal faith in Christ. But in either 'case', whether it is people who believe in 'divine predestination', or whether it is people who believe that no 'unevangelized person' can enter heaven - in either case, these people have a very limited view of God's mercy! In other words, regardless of what these two 'groups of people' say, God's mercy, to them, is definitely 'limited'. And perhaps the saddest thing of all that can be said about the many Christians (who compose both of these 'groups') is that these 'sincere' and 'well-intentioned' believers think that their 'convictions' are strongly supported by the Holy Scriptures!

It is my desire in this writing 'firmly' (yet 'charitably') to confront these two 'doctrines' (i.e., the doctrine of 'divine predestination', and the doctrine which states that the 'unevangelized' are categorically damned to hell). From the outset, in all 'fairness' to my reader, it is important that I acknowledge that I strongly disagree with those who teach and who promote the doctrine of 'divine predestination', and with those who teach that only the 'evangelized' (i.e., 'Christian converts') can enter God's beautiful heaven following their physical death. I believe that both 'logic' and 'Scripture' teach that (1) God loves all persons and desires that all individuals be saved, by means of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ which is sufficient for all, which is offered to all, and which is personally effective in saving those individuals who choose to accept the universally offered gift of salvation, (2) God has no favorites (but God loves all persons of all times and in all cultures and in all conditions), and God 'enlightens' all persons with sufficient, though various degrees, of 'spiritual revelation', making it possible for all persons to 'turn to God' in repentance and faith, thus assuring every person the opportunity to make heaven his/her 'eternal home'.

In this 'paper' I will address (at some length) each of these two questions, and, in my attempt 'objectively' to refute the two doctrines (briefly described above), I will offer the 'brilliant insights' of numerous leading thinkers, both from the past and from the contemporary theological 'scene'. In order that it may not 'appear' that my 'attempted refutation' of these two 'widespread doctrines' is simply the result of my own 'pet peeves', I will liberally share quotations from the 'pens' of astute and articulate and highly respected Christian thinkers - theologians, philosophers, Biblical commentators, and apologists. Obviously, because there are two questions which must be addressed (in an attempt to answer the very 'basic question' - 'How Wide Is God's Mercy?'), this

'paper' is divided into two parts, with considerable commentary and analysis contained in each of the two parts..

## I. DOES GOD DESIRE (WILL) THE SALVATION OF ALL OR ONLY SOME PERSONS?

Those Christians who believe that God wills the salvation of only some persons, rather than all persons, are popularly called 'Calvinist' because this teaching of predestination is believed by many to be the 'basic premise' of the theology of John Calvin (1509-1564), the well-known systematic theologian of the Protestant Reformation. Calvinism is popularly known by its 'Five Points' (which, following, are summarized briefly by Donald Bastian):

Point One: Even before creation God foreordained the fall of the human race. This was in order to show His mercy by saving a select number. These are the elect or those predestined to salvation. Obviously, those not included in this select number are predestined to be lost even before they exist and therefore before they can sin. This is double predestination.

Point Two: The atonement of Christ includes only those whom God has already chosen to save. All others are therefore excluded. This is limited atonement.

Point Three: The corruption of humankind by sin is complete so that no one is able to call upon God for mercy. This is total depravity.

Point Four: Since God has already elected certain ones to salvation they are unable to resist His call. This is irresistible grace or effectual calling.

Point Five: Finally and logically, those who are thus called and saved will be unable ever to fall away and be lost. This is the perseverance of the saints.

In light of these 'Five Points', Donald Bastian notes: "These five points obviously compose a cast-iron system of logic."

If a person accepts the 'basic premise' of Calvinism (i.e., Point One), that God, in His sovereign will chose only to save a limited number of human beings, then, logically, the atoning blood of Jesus Christ (if it is 'necessary' at all as the 'means' of human salvation) would be 'shed' only for those whom God chose to save. Thus, point two in the system, declares that Christ's death provided only for a 'limited atonement', not an all-inclusive or 'unlimited atonement'. Point three (which seeks to preserve or to 'advance' the 'glory of God' and the 'helplessness' of humans) declares that 'man is totally helpless and hopeless', and totally depraved, and totally incapable of making any 'response' to God's initiating grace. Therefore (according to this 'cast-iron logic'), if any human is to be saved, it is God alone who can (and will) save him. Like a 'giant

magnet', divine (all-powerful) grace will draw only those sinners to God whom God (in His sovereign, mysterious will) has chosen to be members of the 'elect' group. And, if God chose to save some persons (and it is only for those persons that Christ died), and if man is incapable (because of possessing no 'true free will') to make any type of human response to the divine initiative (because of mankind's totally depraved sinful state), then, of course, no human being (whom God has sovereignly chosen to be among the 'elect ones') is capable of 'resisting' the grace of God (which, again, acts like a 'giant magnet' that 'irresistibly pulls to itself' all those persons whom God has chosen to compose the 'select' or 'elect' group of God's people). The above-described 'logic' describes the fourth 'point of Calvinism' (which, of course, is another 'corollary point' of the 'cast-iron logic'). It only 'stands to reason' (at this point in the 'system') that those whom God has 'irresistably drawn to Himself' (because they are 'members of the elect group') can never NOT be 'elect ones' (which is the last point of the 'Five Point Calvinist system'). In other words, when you are 'once in' (because of God's sovereign choice), you are 'in forever', and you, as a human, cannot remove yourself from the 'elect group' ('perseverance of the saints', or, more popularly 'once saved, always saved').

After listing the 'Five Points' of Calvinism, Donald Bastian then contrasts these 'points' with the 'Five Points of Arminianism' (after he gives a brief description of the historical background). He writes, "Linked into (the Calvinist cast-iron system of logic) is a conception of God that seems arbitrary and forbidding. One is saved or lost by eternal decree!

"But in spite of its austerity, Calvinism spread. By the end of the 16th century it had spread from Geneva but was strongest in the Netherlands. There, something startling happened. A Hollander named Richard Koornheerts (Dutch Secretary of State) infuriated the Dutch clergy by attacking Calvinism in his writings.

"The attack was challenged. A brilliant, trained young Calvinist, Jacobus Arminius, was asked to answer Koornheerts. He set about the task, but his study convinced him that Calvinism was indefensible. His thorough study of the Scriptures gave rise to an evangelical perspective different from austere Calvinism.

#### ARMINIANISM'S FIVE POINTS

"The five points of Arminianism are based on Arminius' extensive writings.

Point One: God's saving love reaches toward EVERYONE. Those who respond to the call of His Spirit are the elect or the predestinated.

Point Two: Christ died for ALL. The Atonement is adequate for the whole race generally and every person individually. Therefore, the Atonement is UNIVERSAL in its scope.

Point Three: We all are corrupted by sin or totally depraved, but God extends grace to everyone, which enables us to answer God's call and turn to Christ for forgiveness. This is prevenient grace - the grace that goes before.

Point Four: Because God is not arbitrary and does not coerce, we may, if we choose, resist the grace of God. This is resistible grace.

Point Five: We do not surrender our freedom even after we are saved; thus, we are able (though less likely than some imply) to renounce our faith and be lost."

Then Donald Bastian concisely summarizes the 'main spirit' of the Arminian system of theology. He notes: "These five points are more than a mere answer to Calvinism. They strongly affirm that God loves EVERYONE, that Christ died for us ALL, and that NONE of us is excluded from salvation unless we exclude ourselves by WILLFUL unbelief."

('Does Doctrine Matter?' by Donald Bastian; a pamphlet distributed by 'Light and Life Communications' of the Free Methodist Denomination)

It goes beyond the 'scope' of this 'paper' to make any attempts seriously to analyze the entire system of Calvinism as stated in the 'Five Points'. It is the 'basic premise' of Calvinism, namely, Predestination (Point One) that this 'paper' will be most concerned about - since it is this 'premise' which, as I see it, diminishes, if not denies, the 'wideness of God's mercy' (which is the theme of this 'paper').

#### CALVINIST DECLARATIONS AND OFFICIAL STATEMENTS OF PREDESTINATION

What actually is meant by 'Predestination', as taught by John Calvin? It is important to allow Calvin to 'speak for himself'. Wrote Calvin, "By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death. We say, then, that Scripture clearly proves this much, that God by his eternal and immutable counsel determined once for all those whom it was his pleasure one day to admit to salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, it was his pleasure to doom to destruction. We maintain that this counsel, as regards the elect, is founded on his free mercy, without any respect to human worth, while those whom he dooms to destruction are excluded from access to life by a just and blameless, but at the same time incomprehensible judgment." (Quoted in 'Elect In The Son' by Robert Shank; pg. 47)

The document entitled 'The Protestant Confession Faith', drawn up at Paris in 1559,

espouses this Calvinist doctrine of Predestination. Article 12 reads: "We believe, that out of the general corruption and condemnation in which all men are plunged, God draws those whom, in his eternal and unalterable counsel, he has elected by his own goodness and mercy, through our Lord Jesus Christ, without considering their works, leaving the others in the same corruption and condemnation."

The historic assembling of the Dutch Divines in 1618, at Dort, resulted in the following 'affirmation of Calvinistic predestination'. Article 6 declares the following: "Whereas in process of time, God bestowed faith on some, and not on others - this proceeds from his eternal decree; according to which, he softens the hearts of the elect, and leaveth them that are not elect in their wickedness and hardness. And herein is discovered the difference put between men equally lost; that is to say, the decree of election and reprobation. Election is the unchangeable decree of God, by which, before the foundation of the world, he hath chosen in Christ unto salvation a set number of men. This election is one and the same of all which are to be saved. Not all men are elected, but some not elected; whom God, in his unchangeable good pleasure, hath decreed to leave in the common misery, and not to bestow saving faith upon them; but leaving them in their own ways, at last to condemn and punish them everlastingly, for their unbelief, and also for their other sins. And this is the decree of reprobation." (quotations from 'Calvinism Calmly Considered'; John Wesley; pg. 17)

Calvinistic Predestination is not simply an 'historical phenomenon' which gained widespread attention and which engendered strong debates (and even 'religious wars') during the Reformation Period. The influence of Calvinism is still felt very deeply in our modern times, both in the lives of thousands of persons and in the creedal statements of local and denominational church bodies. The 'Westminster Confession' is today a creedal standard for all Presbyterian churches. It is "one of the most influential creeds of Calvinism, drawn up at Westminster (1643-46)." (Dictionary of the Christian Church; General Editor, J. D. Douglas; pg. 1039) The 'Westminster Confession' affirms Calvin's teaching of 'double predestination', i.e., that God passes over some and offers them no mercy. It states: "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death."

A leading evangelical scholar, Clark Pinnock, comments on this creedal statement from the 'Westminster Confession'. He writes: "In this view God is not troubled by the sparse harvest of salvation or the unfairness of salvific arrangements. God approves of things exactly as they are, having decided whom to sovereignly love and whom to sovereignly hate." (Flame of Love; Clark Pinnock; pg. 191)

## PERSONALIZING THE 'HORROR' OF 'CALVINISTIC PREDESTINATION'

There has been a great company of conscientious persons during the last few centuries, since the theological assertions of John Calvin, who have, in the light of his

doctrine of predestination, either despaired totally because they felt they were not selected by God to be a part of the 'elect group', or who have strongly reacted in their valiant fight against such an unbelievably 'horrible doctrine'.

There is a great deal at stake when one seeks to discover what the 'true character' of God is, for the view that one has of the nature of God 'colours' (and even largely determines) one's view of 'all of life'! If one sincerely believes that Calvin's interpretation of the 'nature of God' (as an all-powerful sovereign who arbitrarily chooses His 'elect ones', consigning all the remainder of the human race to 'hell', independent of human responsiveness) - I say that if one sincerely believes that this is the 'true and Biblical revelation of the God of the Universe' - then it is no wonder that some conscientious persons have chosen to believe in 'no God' rather than to believe in the 'Calvinistic God'! Notes Clark Pinnock: "The image of God as severe Judge and absolute Sovereign has driven and can still drive people to unbelief and despair. Modern atheism is often not so much a denial of the existence of God as the denial of a God like that one. What is needed is not arguments for God's existence but clarification of God's gracious character and actual identity." ('Unbounded Love'; Clark H. Pinnock & Robert C. Brow; pg. 10)

In light of the harsh doctrine of Calvinistic Predestination, there will be one of two 'basic reactions' on the part of sincere and conscientious individuals: either (1) succumbing to despair as a result of one's troubling doubts as to whether or not he is a God-chosen member of the 'select and elect group' who will go to heaven as a result of God's sovereign choice; or (2) justifiable ('righteous') anger that such a doctrine could be taught and promoted as a doctrine that 'accurately' and 'Biblically' portrays God - a 'portrait of God' which is contradictory of the 'picture' and 'revelation' of God which Jesus in the Gospels and Paul in the Epistles give us.

How would you personally feel if someone taught you that all persons are NOT created on equal terms, that some are preordained to eternal life, and others are preordained to eternal damnation? That God actually created some to be damned and created others to be saved? That before you came into the world, God had already predetermined whether you were to be saved or to be lost?

Think of it! John Calvin taught that "one is saved or lost by eternal decrees! It is not surprising that when this idea of 'fixed-fate' laid hold of a poet of another century, he was moved to write,

God, ever merciful and just  
With new-born babes did Tophet (Hell) fill;  
Down into endless torments thrust  
Merely to show His sovereign will.  
This is that Horrible Decree!  
This is that wisdom from beneath!

God (O detest the blasphemy!)  
Hath pleasure in the sinner's death."

(Quoted in 'Thumb-nail sketches of Doctrinal Patterns'; a pamphlet written by 'Light and Life Press' of the Free Methodist Denomination)

Only when you 'personalize' this doctrine of Calvinistic Predestination can you begin to 'feel' the 'horror' (injustice) of such a doctrine! There have been many thinkers (theologians and philosophers, Christian ministers, and poets like the one just quoted) - both past and present - who have sought to 'dramatize the horror' of Calvinistic Predestination. John Wesley, in the 18th century, sought firmly, but lovingly, to refute this terrible doctrine of 'Calvinistic Predestination' (election and reprobation) in his many writings, but especially in his treatise entitled 'Calvinism Calmly Considered'. After Wesley quotes the Calvinist 'creeds' from the pens of Calvinist proponents, he then attempts to 'personalize' the 'horrors' of this infamous doctrine.

Writes Wesley: "Now then, without any extenuation on the one hand, or exaggeration on the other, let us look upon this doctrine, call it what you please, naked and in its native colour. Before the foundations of the world were laid, God of his own mere will and pleasure fixed a decree concerning all the children of men who should be born unto the end of the world. This decree was unchangeable with regard to God, and irresistible with regard to man. And herein it was ordained, that one part of mankind should be saved from sin and hell, and all the rest left to perish for ever and ever, without help, without hope; that none of these should have that grace which alone could prevent their dwelling with everlasting burnings, God decreed, for this cause alone, 'because it was his good pleasure'; and for this end, 'to show forth his glorious power, and his sovereignty over all the earth.'.....Make the case your own: Here are you, a sinner, convinced that you deserve the damnation of hell. Sorrow, therefore, and fear have filled your heart. And how shall you be comforted? By the promises of God? But perhaps you have no part therein; for they belong only to the elect. By the consideration of his love and tender mercy? But what are these to you, if you are a reprobate? God does not love you at all; you, like Esau, he hath hated even from eternity. What ground then can you have for the least shadow of hope? Why, it is possible (that is all) that God's sovereign will may be on your side. Possibly God may save you, because he will! O poor encouragement to despairing sinners!" (pgs. 22, 33, 34)

If John Wesley is one of many (but perhaps the most astute) 'thinkers' from past history who have spoken against the 'horror' of 'Calvinistic predestination', then one of a multitude of thinkers, from the 20th century, who has likewise 'raised his voice in protest' against this 'portrait of God' is Frank Schaeffer (the son of Francis Schaeffer, second only to C.S. Lewis as the greatest Christian apologist of the 20th century). Even though Frank Schaeffer holds his 'famous father' in high regard, Frank Schaeffer found it necessary to 'refute' those doctrines of Calvinism in which he was raised. In

his 'earth-shattering book' entitled 'Dancing Alone' (in which he tells of his journey away from 'Calvinistic Protestantism' into the 'ancient Christian Faith of Eastern Orthodoxy'), Frank Schaeffer seeks thoroughly to expose what he believes to be 'serious errors' in Protestantism in general and Calvinism in particular. In his description of the 'Five Points' of Calvinism, it is easy to discern his 'contempt' for this theological system. The following is what he wrote regarding 'Calvinistic Predestination'. "The Calvinist 'God' was a great unfathomable Zeus-like computer in the sky who arbitrarily saved some while damning others - an irrational, perhaps berserk Augustinian phenomenon no more loving or predictable than a forest fire. The 'God' of Calvinism emerged as inexplicably less merciful than most of his human creatures."

Frank Schaeffer then describes the Calvinist doctrine of 'Unconditional Election' as "God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation, before the foundation of the world, (and God's choice) rests solely in His sovereign will. His choice of certain individual sinners to be saved is not based on any criterion that is humanly knowable. Election, therefore, is not determined by or conditioned upon, what a man will do. On the contrary, God gives faith to individuals He selects. God's choice of the sinner, not the sinner's choice to follow Christ, is the only cause of salvation. This must be so since humanity has no capacity to choose since the will and the intellect are utterly depraved." ('Dancing Alone'; Frank Schaeffer; pgs. 87, 88)

Why have so many of the world's greatest thinkers from both the past and the present - notable 'thinkers' like John Wesley from the 18th century and Frank Schaeffer from the 20th century - been so 'strong' in their reactions against 'Calvinistic Predestination'? There are several 'reasons', but there are at least three reasons why these men (and many other writers) have sought to 'refute' the doctrines of John Calvin (and his followers). Among those 'reasons' are these: (1) Calvinistic Predestination repudiates the genuine exercise of human 'free will'; (2) Calvinistic Predestination violates the principle of justice, as it is inherently sensed by humanity in general and as it is communicated in the Scriptures specifically; (3) Calvinistic Predestination denies God's love and mercy, as revealed dramatically in the life and words of Jesus Christ who best reveals the true nature of Almighty God.

Is it any wonder then that we should take the teachings of Calvinism (and especially the 'basic premise' of Predestination) so very seriously, as we attempt to persuade anyone who holds these views to refute them?

## CALVINISTIC PREDESTINATION REPUDIATES MAN'S FREE WILL

If there is anything that the Bible makes very clear it is this: God created man in His own image, and, therefore, one of the 'gifts' which mankind has received from God is the 'gift' of choice.

The fact of Man's freedom is well described by Suzanne de Dietrich: "The thing that makes us uniquely human is that, unlike the other creatures, we are able to say both 'yes' and 'no' to God. Man does not do the will of his Creator by necessity. The stars in the sky follow their prescribed orbits, the animals of the field obey their instincts, but man has this unique and frightening ability -- he can refuse to be obedient to his Creator. For God does not want slaves, but sons." (God's Unfolding Purpose; pg. 36)

The Scriptures teach that every human being is created with the capacity to make 'moral choices', with either positive or negative consequences 'attached' to those choices. God gives to all persons the gift of faith by which each person has the capability to place his trust in God whose desire it is to save every person who has ever lived or who will ever live. But man (who is capable of believing and trusting in God) must choose to activate his ability to trust in the God of salvation. Even though God is sovereign (i.e., all-powerful), God chooses to allow every human being freely to choose either to accept or to reject God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life, either to exercise his God-given capacity to believe in God or to turn away from God in unbelief, either to accept or to reject God's call to repentance.

John Wesley wholeheartedly affirmed the sovereignty of God, but Wesley strongly denied the Calvinist belief that God sovereignty chose to save some and to condemn all other human beings, totally independent of the exercise of human free will. Noted Wesley, "God proceeds according to the known rules of his justice and mercy; but never assigns his sovereignty as the cause why any man is punished with everlasting destruction." ('Calvinism Calmly Considered'; John Wesley; pg. 33)

The Universe that God created is a 'moral universe', with the 'real existence' of 'moral laws' which every human being 'knows innately', and which, when they are disobeyed, brings a sense of 'deep moral guilt and condemnation'. Because of the 'finished work' of Christ on Mount Calvary (providing atonement for the entire 'fallen human race'), and because of the Spirit of God (who is desirous to indwell and to empower all 'believing hearts'), every person potentially has the ability to 'conform to God's moral laws'. Depending upon whether a human being seeks to 'obey' those moral laws, or whether he chooses to ignore or to reject those moral laws, will determine whether he is 'preparing himself' or 'unpreparing himself' to ultimately 'meet' God at the 'Final Judgment'!

Notes C.S. Lewis: "Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself. To be the one kind of creature is heaven: that is, it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness,

horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other.” (‘C.S. Lewis’s Case for the Christian Faith’; Richard L. Purtill; pg. 96)

Because the Bible has a ‘realistic view’ of Man’s unique creation, the Bible offers many ‘promises to be claimed’, many ‘conditions to be met’, and also many ‘warnings to be heeded’. What is the ‘realistic view’ of Man which the Bible teaches? It is that Man is a ‘free moral agent’ - with the ability to choose between ‘moral alternatives’. The ‘promises’ and the ‘conditions’ and the ‘warnings’ which are given in the Bible to mankind would have no meaning at all if the God-created human being had no ‘free will’. With no ‘free will’, man would have no ability to ‘meet the conditions’ whereby God’s promises can be fulfilled in the life of a human being. And why would God give ‘warnings to be heeded’ (i.e. ‘wrong moral choices to be avoided’) if Man has no ‘free will’ by which he can choose?

The concepts of ‘rewards’ and ‘punishments’ mean nothing at all if Man has no ‘free will’, no ability to make moral choices. “All reward, as well as all punishment, presupposes free agency; and whatever creature is incapable of choice is incapable of either one or the other.....Every punishment supposes the offender might have avoided the offence for which he is punished.” (‘Calvinism Calmly Considered’; John Wesley; pg. 13, 14)

There are doubtless many terms and phrases that could be employed in an attempt to describe the ‘essence’ of a human being, but one ‘non-negotiable’ phrase is ‘freedom to choose’. “Lacking freedom, no one could be held morally responsible. Having freedom is what we mean by being a person.” (‘John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity’; Thomas C. Oden; pg. 261)

The Bible clearly teaches that ‘human happiness’ (contentment and joy and general well-being) is the result of ‘making right moral choices’ in life! Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap. If he ‘sows’ the seeds of evil (i.e., making ‘wrong choices’), he will reap ‘death’ and ‘destruction’. If he ‘sows’ the seeds of righteousness (i.e., making ‘right choices’), he will reap ‘life’ and ‘health’. The Bible teaches this ‘spiritual law’ over and over again! Notes Thomas Oden, “Eternal happiness in Scripture is grounded in God’s own choice to love all humanity, addressed freely to all, and awaiting the response of all. Wedding guests who fail to respond lose their invitation (Matt. 22:8). Those inattentive to wisdom find that she will spurn them (Prov. 1:23-29). Israel was instructed that ‘if you forsake him, he will forsake you’ (2 Chron. 15:2). The people were given a choice of a blessing or a curse, depending upon how they keep the command of God (Deut. 11:26-28). God keeps his covenant love with those who love him and keep his commands (Deut. 7:12). Only when we choose to build the house on the gracious rock provided do we find a place that does not fall (Matt. 7:26).” (‘John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity’; Thomas C. Oden; pg. 265)

John Calvin believed in 'unconditional election', i.e, God's choice to save some and to condemn all the rest of humanity, based, not upon man's free will choice, but upon God's sovereign and mysterious (hidden) 'will' and 'desire'. In contrast to Calvin, John Wesley believed in 'conditional election'. He wrote: "I believe election means....a divine appointment of some men to eternal happiness. But I believe this election to be **CONDITIONAL**, as well as the reprobation opposite thereto. I believe the eternal decree concerning both is expressed in those words: 'HE THAT BELIEVETH SHALL BE SAVED; HE THAT BELIEVETH NOT SHALL BE DAMNED.' And this decree, without doubt, God will not change, and men cannot resist." (quoted in 'The Grace of God and the Will of Man'; Clark H. Pinnock, General Editor; pg. 266)

What makes it possible for the 'fallen human race' - the race that is 'totally depraved in a state of sin' - to respond to the 'grace of God' and to receive the God-offered gift of eternal life? It is relevant, at this point, in our brief evaluation of man's nature (and the assertion that man is a 'free moral agent' with the ability to make 'moral choices') to remember what John Calvin taught regarding 'total depravity'. He taught (and Calvinism continues to teach) that "at the fall, man fell **COMPLETELY**, he lost his free will and became totally depraved." (quote from Frank Shaeffer in 'Dancing Alone'; pg.87)

In light of the idea of mankind's 'total depravity', how would John Wesley answer the above-stated question, and how would modern-day Wesleyan scholars answer this question? Even though the exact term does not appear in Scripture, John Wesley believed the Bible taught what he called 'Prevenient Grace' - described as the grace of God that 'goes before', preparing the sinner's heart for God's 'converting grace'. Wesley taught that prevenient grace elicits "the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him." (quoted in 'John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity'; Thomas C. Oden; pg. 246)

Thomas Oden further describes and summarizes Wesley's understanding of "Prevenient Grace". He writes: "Grace works ahead of us to draw us toward faith, to begin its work in us. Even the first fragile intuition of conviction of sin, the first intimation of our need for God, is the work of preparing, prevenient grace, which draws us gradually toward wishing to please God. Grace is working quietly at the point of our desiring, bringing us in time to despair over our own righteousness, challenging our perverse dispositions, so that our distorted wills cease gradually to resist the gifts of God.

"Grace works antecedently to conversion **TO CONVICT FREEDOM** of its fallenness, and its need for a radical reversal, repentance, a reversal that is only possible in view of God's justifying grace, which meets us on the cross, of which we in time may become aware.....Prevenient grace does not justify, but readies for justification, giving us the desire for faith, which is the one condition of justification.

“The chief function of prevenient grace is to bring the person to a state of nonresistance to subsequent forms of grace. Prevenient grace is that grace that goes before us to prepare us for more grace, the grace that makes it possible for persons to take the first steps toward saving grace.” (Ibid; pgs. 146, 147)

God’s Prevenient Grace is that grace of God which ‘goes before’. ‘Goes before’ what? ‘Goes before’ the time any sinner is ‘saved’. The grace of God which makes all persons ‘saveable’. “The God of the Bible is utterly amazing; he includes all in his grace and excludes in judgment only those who spurn that grace. God has already accepted all people prior to any response on our part, but not all accept his acceptance. The saved respond in faith to the manifold graces of God, while the damned reject them. Because of the work of Christ, God accepts all. Only those who decline to accept God’s grace are rejected.” (‘What About Those Who Have Never Heard?’; Edited by John Sanders; pg.33)

God, in his mercy, gave His Son as the atoning sacrifice for mankind’s sin, thus providing the means by which a condemned and guilty human race could be forgiven and reconciled to an all-holy God. The fact that God provided the atoning sacrifice (through Christ’s death), and the fact that God provided the power by which the stranglehold which sin had on mankind could be broken (through Christ’s resurrection), and the fact that every human being is given the gift of saving faith and the call to repentance (through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost) - all of these ‘divine initiatives’ are amazing demonstrations of God’s mercy and grace and love for lost humanity!

But, even though it is true that God is the sole Initiator in the matter of making mankind’s salvation possible, it is also true that no individual can enjoy personal salvation without a personal ‘faith response’ to God’s offer of salvation. Scripture teaches that God alone is the Source and Power of salvation, but Scripture also teaches that God works with and through human beings to make salvation a personal realization and reality in the life of human beings. To those persons (Calvinists) who declared that, if man had a part in making salvation a reality in the life of a human being, this constituted a ‘work’, and therefore a denial of God’s glory, Wesley replied: “Why, the very power to ‘work together with Him’ was from God. Therefore to Him is all the glory”. (‘Calvinism Calmly Considered’; John Wesley; pg. 46) “The right use of freedom, far from detracting from the glory of God, enhances God’s glory.....Human freedom by grace is being enabled to cooperate interactively with God’s saving plan. It is the coworking by grace of human willing with the divine willing.” (‘John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity’; Thomas C. Oden; pg. 26)

## CALVINISTIC PREDESTINATION VIOLATES GOD’S JUSTICE

Earlier in this ‘paper’ it was stated that one reason why ‘Calvinistic Predestination’

must be rejected is the fact that such a doctrine violates the principle of justice, as it is inherently sensed by humanity in general and as it is communicated in the Scriptures specifically.

If God sovereignly predestinates some persons to be lost, and if there is no such thing as 'human free will', then how can the man who is condemned by God (without any ability for him positively to respond to God) be held responsible for any of his actions? This concept (namely, of harsh 'Calvinistic Predestination') is a great offense to man's 'inherent sense of justice', and it is surely a contradiction to the Biblical 'portrait' of an altogether 'just God'!

Notes Thomas Oden: "A false idea of divine justice is on trial amid claims that God could justly condemn a free person to eternal damnation totally apart from any opportunity for that person to cooperate. 'Justice can have no place in rewarding or punishing mere machines' (Wesley). In Scripture, 'God is pleased to appeal to man himself touching the justice of His proceedings.' (Wesley)

"How can God be regarded as a just judge if an eternal decree has been made that does not take into account any capacity to accept or reject grace? Why should the Spirit be active in our hearts to enable this response if it is already predetermined? God's justice does not damn anyone except those who refuse the grace being freely offered to them.

"One who is not given the power to do good cannot justly be condemned for not doing good. One cannot justly be condemned of sin if the means to escape sin are not present. Who could be justly condemned for doing evil if he could do only evil? Unbelief could not be the basis of the condemnation of those who did not have the power to believe." ('John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity'; Thomas C. Oden; pg. 267)

The 'portrait' of God that John Calvin 'painted' is not the God of the Bible who is portrayed as a God of absolute justice and fairness. Notes Wesley, "Our God is just in all his ways; he reapeth not where he hath not sowed. He requireth only according to what he hath given; and where he hath given little, little is required. The glory of his justice is this: to 'reward every man according to his works'. Hereby is that glorious attribute shown, evidently set forth before men and angels, in that it is accepted of every man according to that he hath, and not according to that he hath not. This is that **JUST DECREE WHICH CANNOT PASS, EITHER IN TIME OR IN ETERNITY.**" ('Calvinism Calmly Considered'; John Wesley; pg. 52)

Is man's inherent 'sense of justice' - which 'sense' causes any 'honest man' to be 'repulsed' with the doctrine of 'divine election and reprobation' (i.e., that God arbitrarily chooses to save some and to condemn the remainder of the human race, independent of human responsiveness) - I say, is this inherent 'sense of justice' a true reflection of God's absolute Justice? Both Luther and Calvin insisted that man's moral judgments

are mistaken and are not to be trusted. They believed that, even though it 'seems that God is unjust and unmerciful because of unconditional election and reprobation', God nevertheless is actually 'just and merciful'! In other words, "We are to believe God is loving and just because we have been assured that he is (in Scripture), even though it seems evident to us that he is not." (Quote by Jerry L. Walls in 'The Grace of God and the Will of Man'; Clark H. Pinnock General Editor; pg. 272) Wesley strongly confronted these assertions of Luther and Calvin. "It was axiomatic for Wesley that our clearest moral intuitions are reliable. He forcefully rejected the suggestion that our most deeply rooted moral judgments may be deceptive." (Ibid; pg. 273)

What mankind inherently 'senses' as being unjust is a 'moral sense' that is reliable and trustworthy - indeed an accurate (though imperfect) 'reflection' of the Justice of God! Any sensitive and honest human being would quickly conclude that, for God to predestinate anyone to a 'devil's hell' (independent of that person's 'free will choice') would be an act of 'greatest injustice'! Wesley was very insistent that anyone who believed that God's 'sense of justice' was completely alien to man's 'inherent sense of justice' was actually calling God "the father of lies!" Wrote Wesley: "Such you doubtless represent him, when you say...that the feelings (of justice) which he has interwoven with our inmost nature are.....illusiv." Wrote Jerry Walls, "It is simply unthinkable for Wesley that God has created us in such a way that our strongest moral feelings cannot be trusted." (Ibid; pg. 273)

#### CALVINISTIC PREDESTINATION IS A DENIAL OF GOD'S LOVE AND MERCY

Calvinistic Predestination is both a repudiation of man's free will, and also a violation of God's justice. As tragic as these are, perhaps most tragic of all is the fact that this harsh doctrine of Predestination denies God's love and mercy. Notes John Wesley: "So ill do election and reprobation agree with the truth and sincerity of God! But do they not agree least of all with the scriptural account of his love and goodness? that attribute which God peculiarly claims, wherein he glories above all the rest. It is not written, 'God is justice,' or 'God is truth,' (although he is just and true in all his ways). But it is written 'God is love,' love in the abstract, without bounds; and 'there is no end of his goodness.' His love extends even to those who neither love nor fear him. He is good, even to the evil and the unthankful; yea, without any exception or limitation, to all the children of men. For 'the Lord is loving (or good) to every man, and his mercy is over all his works.'

"But how is God good or loving to a reprobate, or one that is not elected? (You may choose either term, for if none but the unconditionally elect are saved, it comes precisely to the same thing.) You cannot say, he is an object of the love or goodness of God, with regard to his eternal state, whom he created, says Mr. Calvin plainly and fairly 'to live a reproach, and die everlastingly.' Surely, no one can dream, that the goodness of God is at all concerned with this man's eternal state." ('Calvinism Calmly Considered'; John Wesley; pg. 43)

“While Wesley thought the doctrine of unconditional predestination clashed sharply with God’s truth and sincerity, it agreed ‘least of all with the scriptural account of his love and goodness.’ And love is the ‘attribute which God peculiarly claims, wherein he glories above all the rest.’ But the whole notion of love is utterly perverted if it is held that a loving God unconditionally damns some persons. ‘Is not this such love as makes your blood run cold?.....Can you think, that the loving, the merciful God, ever dealt thus with any soul which he hath made?’” (Quote by Jerry L. Walls in ‘The Grace of God and the Will of Man’; Clark H. Pinnock, General Editor; pg. 266)

The ‘God’ of Calvinism is not a ‘loving God’; instead, he is a ‘God’ who arbitrarily condemns the majority of the human race whom he does not ‘will’ or ‘desire’ to save! In contrast to this kind of ‘God’ who obviously ‘hates’ most of the human race, the God of the Bible is the One who loved the whole world so much that He sent His Son to die on a cross! The God of the Bible loves each person ‘as if there is only one person to love’! God loves all, God desires to save all, Christ died for all, the Holy Spirit calls all to repentance, the ‘prevenient grace’ of God is given to all (making all persons ‘saveable’). God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. God is like a ‘Good Shepherd’ in pursuit of His ‘lost sheep’, like a Father who waits patiently for His ‘prodigal son’ to come home to His loving embrace. God is the ‘Hound of Heaven’ who is willing to pursue the ‘sinner’ who is ‘running away from God’.

The Love of God Is Greater Far  
Than Tongue or Pen Can Ever Tell;  
It Goes Beyond the Highest Star  
And Reaches To the Lowest Hell.  
The Guilty Pair Bowed Down With Care  
God Gave His Son To Win;  
His Eering Child He Reconciled  
And Pardoned From His Sin.

Could We With Ink the Ocean Fill,  
And Were the Skies of Parchment Made,  
Were Every Stock on Earth a Quill,  
And Every Man a Scribe by Trade,  
To Write the Love of God Above  
Would Drain the Ocean Dry;  
Nor Could the Scroll Contain the Whole  
Though Stretched From Sky to Sky.

Chorus:

O Love of God, How Rich and Pure,  
How Measureless and Strong;  
It Shall Forevermore Endure,  
The Saints and Angels Song.

God 'forces' Himself on no one, but God uses all the persuasive powers that are at his 'disposal', just 'short of coercion'. Without 'breaking the will' of the sinner, the blessed Holy Spirit brings powerful 'conviction' - what might seem to the deeply convicted sinner as overwhelming influence and 'pressure' ('pressure' that is hard to 'resist'). This 'pressure' of God (i.e., the strong conviction of the Holy Spirit) is God's 'tough love in action'. God loves all persons, and He desires all individuals to repent of their sins, and to turn in faith to Jesus Christ, His dearly beloved Son, whose blood atones for the sins of all people of all times.

God treats every person with the 'dignity' which every person deserves as a 'unique creation' - as a 'free will agent'. God does not 'over-ride' the will of any person, but instead 'draws' each person with the 'magnet of His tender love'. "The Incarnation shows that God comes to us humbly. The wisdom of God adapts itself to our human condition. God works not by duress, but gently in our hearts - reproving, grieving, wooing, like a lover trying to invite and draw and persuade the beloved. It is a wiser God who offers salvation to humanity without forcing salvation upon them, who enables human self-determination, and welcomes the free interactive play of human choice, than one who would simply create a closed world in which freedom is a cruel illusion. God by grace saves humanity first by enlightening everyone who comes into the world with an understanding of good and evil by means of common grace; then by convicting grace reproving when the will falls into evil; then by moving the will gently, not coercively, to respond cooperatively; then by wooing the will, by nurturing good desires into our hearts, by setting life and death before us, by seeking to persuade us to choose life." ('John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity'; Thomas C. Oden; pg. 268)

In observing the attitudes and actions of both John Calvin and John Wesley, one rather 'obvious truth' emerges, namely this truth: A person becomes like the kind of 'God' whom one worships and serves, and upon whom one 'fixes his focus'.

What kind of 'God' did John Calvin 'focus' on? A 'God' whose actions towards the majority of the human race were 'cruel' and 'heartless' and 'arbitrary' and 'unjust' and 'unmerciful' and certainly 'unloving'. A 'God' who denied the exercise of any meaningful (i.e., genuine) 'human freedom'! Is it any wonder then that John Calvin's actions became 'autocratic', 'cruel', 'heartless', 'arbitrary', 'unjust', 'unmerciful', 'unloving', and even 'murderous'? He, like the 'God' he served, denied the exercise of 'freedom' to the 'subjects' whom he 'ruled'!

Writes Frank Schaeffer (son of well-known Francis Schaeffer who considered himself a 'Calvinist'): "Calvin's own life and work was consistent with service to his harsh 'God.' When Calvin's sermons failed to convince, he resorted to force in prohibiting 'unseemly acts' or words. Since, in Calvin's Geneva, virtually all entertainment was proscribed as 'unseemly' and even dozing in church was a punishable offense, a very dreary, self-righteous religion emerged that came to be called 'Puritanism.'

"The slightest criticism enraged Calvin. Those who questioned his theology were dismissed as, 'pigs,' 'asses,' 'riffraff,' 'dogs,' 'idiots,' and 'stinking beasts.' One morning Calvin found a poster on his pulpit accusing him of 'Gross Hypocrisy.' Since Calvin indirectly ruled his city state of Geneva as well as being its chief theologian and grand inquisitor, he did not have to accept this 'scandalous affront' lying down. A suspect was arrested. No evidence was produced, but he was tortured day and night for a month until he confessed. Then his feet were nailed to a stake by which he hung in public for a day. Ultimately he was decapitated.

"Since Calvin's 'God' allowed no free will, Calvin saw no reason to, either. Calvin's justification for the execution of the unfortunate, alleged 'mockery,' who had left the offending message on Calvin's pulpit, reveals the shamelessly self-righteous mindset of all the Reformation's tyrannical inquisitors. 'When the papists are so harsh,' wrote Calvin, '...are not Christ's magistrates shamed to show themselves less ardent in defense of the sure truth?' ("Dancing Alone"; Frank Schaeffer; pgs. 83, 84)

Notes William Manchester: "It was the consummate irony of the Reformation that the movement against Rome, which had begun with an affirmation of individual judgment, now repudiated it entirely. Apostasy was regarded as an offense to God and treason to the state. As such it was punished with swift, agonizing death." (Ibid; pg. 84, 85)

What did John Wesley think of 'absolute, unconditional election and reprobation'? Wesley wrote: "I think it cannot be found in holy writ, and that it is a plant which bears dismal fruit. An instance of which we have in Calvin himself, who confesses that he procured the burning to death of Michael Servetus, purely for differing from him in opinion in matters of religion." ('Calvinism Calmly Considered'; John Wesley; pg. 91)

Who was Michael Servetus? He was a man (1511-1553) who, because he was considered a 'heretic' by Calvin, was burnt at the stake! Servetus was a versatile man, who studied the biblical languages as well as mathematics, philosophy, theology, and law. He also became a physician. In answer to Calvin's 'Institutes of the Christian Religion' (multi-volumes of Calvin's theological writings), Servetus wrote 'Restitutio Christianismi' in 1553, and, as a result of his attacks on Calvin, he was arrested and condemned and eventually burnt (with the 'full consent' of Calvin).

It is important to remember: One becomes like the 'God' whom he serves! Calvin served a 'cruel' and 'unfeeling' and 'unmerciful' 'God', and, therefore, Calvin too

became 'cruel' and 'unmerciful' and 'unloving' in his reactions to his 'theological enemies'! It is said that a 'stream' cannot flow higher than its 'source'. And a 'servant' (Calvin) cannot be expected to be 'better' in his character and behavior than the 'master' whom he served (namely, the 'God' of arbitrary favoritism whom Calvin 'constructed' from his erroneous interpretation of Scripture).

Even though I believe (as stated above) that there is generally-speaking a 'correlation between what one believes theologically and how one lives and reacts to people', it is not 'accurate' or 'fair' (and it is not 'charitable') to suggest that all 'Calvinists' are 'loveless' and 'insensitive'. Indeed, there are many so-called 'Calvinists' whose lives seem to be 'compassionate' and 'loving'. However, the 'loving lives of Calvinists' is 'in spite of their theology', not 'because of their theology'! Such persons (who claim to be 'Calvinists' and who, nevertheless, are loving in their general approach to people) are 'living far above their theology'!

The 'God' whom John Wesley served was the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ - the God who is best revealed by the Incarnate One whose every action was an action of 'holy love'. Jesus never did or said anything that was not loving. And what Jesus was in 'human form', God has always been in His 'eternal essence'. The Bible says that 'God is Love' (I John 4).

John Wesley worshipped the 'God of Love' - the God who is best revealed by the Incarnate Christ. Wesley was 'lost in wonder, love, and praise'. Love was the 'central theme' of Wesley's messages, and it was the 'driving force' of Wesley's amazing 'feats of compassion'. Wesley's life was 'crammed full of love projects'! Everywhere he went, he spread God's love! He loved the 'loveless', the 'oppressed', the 'lost' and the 'wicked'. His tireless efforts, over many decades, were the result of the 'love of God' which had consumed him!

It was the 'love of God', shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5), which was the 'driving force' in Wesley's long life. Wesley was not self-preoccupied, not self-absorbed, not overly-introspective, but Christ-centered, love-saturated, others-oriented! A man who was deeply in love with his God, as evidenced by his tireless efforts in loving the lost and the suffering and the oppressed and the poverty-stricken persons around him. One of Wesley's (non-Methodist) contemporaries, wrote about the 'passionate Wesley': "To one great purpose he dedicated his powers of body and mind; for this he relinquished all honor and preferment. At all times and in all places, in season and out of season, by gentleness, by terror, by argument, by persuasion, by reason, by interest, by every motive and every inducement, he strove, with unwearied assiduity, to turn men from the error of their ways and awaken them to virtue and religion. To the bed of sickness, or the couch of prosperity; to the prison or the hospital; to the house of mourning or the house of feasting, wherever there was a friend to serve or a soul to save, he readily repaired. He thought no office too humiliating, no condescension too low, no undertaking too arduous, to reclaim the meanest of God's

offspring. The souls of all men were of equal value in his sight and the salvation of the immortal creature unutterably precious.” (Quoted in ‘Goodly Heritage’; J. Paul Taylor; pg. 69)

Why was John Wesley so in love with humanity? Why was love the ‘dominant force’ in his ministry for so many decades - the ‘key’ to his unusually fruitful work with the ‘disenfranchised’ and the ‘uncouth’ and the ‘despairing’ and the ‘unlovely’ and the ‘illiterate’ multitudes in the degenerate society in which he lived? Like a ‘magnet’, his love drew the ‘guilt-ridden’ and ‘neglected’ and ‘abused’ and ‘spiritually-desperate’ persons to him. Where did John Wesley get this ‘supernatural’, ‘creative’, ‘winsome’, ‘tender’ love? The simple (and yet very correct) answer is that he got it (i.e., this ‘unusual love’) from the ‘God of Love’ whom he worshipped and adored and served and obeyed. A ‘servant’ who focuses long enough upon his ‘master’, becomes like his ‘master’! The ‘servant’ becomes like his ‘master - in words, in attitudes, in actions, in reactions, in total lifestyle! Jesus is the ‘Sun’, and Wesley was the ‘Moon’, for Wesley only reflected ‘borrowed light’. He had no ‘inherent’ or ‘intrinsic’ or ‘native’ light - only ‘borrowed light’! Jesus alone is the ‘Light of the World’, but Wesley was one of the best ‘reflectors’ of that ‘Divine Light’ that can be found in all of human history!

Remember: Whether one is talking about John Calvin or John Wesley (or any body else), a person finally becomes like the ‘God’ whom he serves. If one serves a ‘God’ who is arbitrary and forbidding and harsh and unjust, then one will eventually ‘reflect’ those same characteristics (attributes and behavior) in his own life! Of course, the opposite is also true: If one serves a ‘God of Love’, then eventually he will become a love-filled person! Wesley, of course, was not the only one in his ‘day’ who was a ‘love-filled’ person. There were countless others who also were in ‘deep love’ with humanity, because they ‘worshipped’ the Biblically-revealed ‘God of Love’. For instance, the Early Methodists were also known as ‘love-driven’ and ‘compassionate-minded’ persons. J. Paul Taylor notes: “The love of Christ was the full head of steam that drove the wheels of spiritual commerce in early Wesleyanism. The word of God was like fire shut up in the bones of the primitive (early) Methodists. It must have vent. They did not go because they were authorized or commanded to go. They marched to the heartbeats of love. They went out into the highways and hedges and compelled the people to come in through the compulsion of love.” (‘Goodly Heritage’; J. Paul Taylor; pg. 70)

The following is one of Wesley’s strongest passages on ‘God’s love’: “It were well you should be thoroughly sensible of this, ‘The heaven of heavens is love.’ There is nothing higher in religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for anything more than love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way, and when you are asking others, ‘Have you received this or that blessing?’ if you mean anything but more love, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way, and putting them upon a false scent. Settle it then in your heart, that from the moment God has saved you from all sin, you are to aim at nothing more, but more of that love

described in the thirteenth of the Corinthians. You can go no higher than this, till you are carried into Abraham's bosom." (quoted in 'A Theology of Love'; Mildred Bangs Wynkoop; pg. 22)

Notes Mildred Wynkoop: "It does not take long, in reading Wesley, to discover that love is the theme of his entire ministry, thinking, interpretation of theology, actions in respect of humanity, and everything he said or did." (Ibid; pg. 26)

What one thinks of 'God' largely determines what one becomes in his own attitudes and actions. If you serve a 'God' who despises most people, then you too will eventually begin to despise people. If, on the other hand, you serve a 'God' who loves everyone, then you too will eventually begin to love all persons (even those who are not very 'lovely'). Love is the test of our right relationship with God. "This is his command: to give our allegiance to his Son Jesus Christ and love one another as he commanded." (I John 3:23 NEB) What God commands - namely, to love all persons - God supplies - that is, the Holy Spirit sheds abroad God's love in the human heart (Romans 5:5). And why is God able to shed abroad love in the human heart? Because God Himself is Love Personified! Love that is 'unconditional', 'uncaused', 'unlimited', 'eternal', 'unselfish'. And, love that is 'communicated' - 'given' - to the person who has a 'broken and contrite heart', and who is willing to receive God's gift of His supernatural love.

God is Love, and all His actions are the actions of Love. Therefore, 'Calvinistic Predestination' which portrays 'God' as the One who 'damns' the majority of the human race, simply because 'God sovereignly chooses to condemn', must be outrightly rejected and repudiated!

How would you answer the question which we have been exploring during the last many pages of this 'paper', namely, "Does God desire (will) the salvation of all or only some persons?" In other words, "Is the doctrine of 'Calvinistic Predestination' a doctrine that can be Biblically 'supported' and 'documented'?"

I have sought to 'refute' this 'harsh doctrine' by showing that 'Calvinistic Predestination' (1) Repudiates the uniqueness of man's special creation as a 'free will agent'; (2) Violates the 'basic God-given instinct' of justice; (3) Denies the 'wideness of God's mercy and love'.

It was stated at the beginning of this 'paper' that the very important question which 'demands' an answer is this: "How Wide Is God's Mercy?" It was noted that no 'accurate' answer to this question regarding God's Nature can be found unless two other questions are answered carefully and Biblically, namely (1) Does God love all persons without exception and does He desire (will) the salvation of every person who has ever lived or who will ever lived? (2) Has God revealed Himself sufficiently, through the 'spiritual enlightenment' which He has given, through various means, to

make it possible for all persons in all ages and in all circumstances to be 'saved' (in order that all persons could spend eternity in heaven, if they so choose)?

How these two questions are answered will greatly determine the answer to the fundamental inquiry regarding the 'wideness of God's mercy'. If a 'negative' answer is given to either of these questions (regarding Predesination and regarding the opportunity and destiny of the Unevangelized), then one must, in all 'honesty', conclude that, at best, God's mercy is not very 'wide'.

I have sought rather carefully to answer the first question regarding Predesination, and I have concluded that, indeed, God does love everyone without exception, and that God does, indeed, desire and will the salvation of all persons! I have concluded that God is not arbitrary, that He has no 'favorites' whom He has (mysteriously) decided to 'choose' for eternal life with the consequence of rejecting all other individuals, independent of any 'human responsiveness' or 'free choice'. I have concluded that God's mercy is as 'wide' as the entire human race, and that God loves all, that Jesus died for all, that the Holy Spirit convicts all of sin and that He draws all persons to God through 'prevenient grace'. I have also concluded that, while the atoning blood of Jesus was shed for all persons (i.e., that it is an unlimited atonement which is fully effective for every individually potentially), all persons must individually accept God's offer of salvation. In other words, even though an 'objective provision' has been made for all, each individual must personally believe in God and must appropriate (by faith) God's wonderful provision of salvation. While it is true that God wants to save all, and while it is true that God's 'saving grace' (i.e., the 'gift of saving faith') has been offered to every person, it is also true that each individual must personally accept the gift of salvation (by activating the God-given ability to repent and to believe). In other words, the universally offered 'gift of God's saving grace' can be resisted (because God sovereignly chose to allow each person to be created with the amazing capacity of 'free will'). Of course (logically and Biblically-taught), when a sinner does activate his ability to believe and, as a result, becomes 'born again', this 'initial saving faith' must continue to be activated in order for the believer to maintain a vital saving relationship with Christ. Although the doctrine of the 'perseverance of the believer' was not discussed and analyzed in the above writing on Predestination, it is important (when thinking about 'Biblical saving faith') to realize that 'believing in the Son' for eternal life is not a 'once and for all experience'. Rather, believing in the Son is a 'continuous attitude of trust and obedience' which must be maintained for one's entire lifetime. God makes it clear in His Word that "he that endures to the end shall be saved". It is he who is faithful and true (maintaining a 'vital attachment' to the Vine, John 15), who remains 'spiritually alive'!

It is now time, in the development of my 'argument' that God's mercy is as 'wide' as all mankind, to confront the often-debated and very important question regarding the 'Opportunity and the Destiny of the Unevangelized People of the World'.

## II. HAVE ALL PERSONS RECEIVED ENOUGH 'ENLIGHTENMENT' TO BE SAVED?

In the thought-provoking book, entitled 'What About Those Who Have Never Heard?', which is edited by John Sanders, the latter opens his chapter on 'Inclusivism' with this 'pungent story': "The philosophy club at the local state university was sponsoring a discussion on the nature of God. My interest was piqued, and I decided to attend. Several of the students present were Christians I knew, and some outspoken self-professed atheists attended as well. I listened attentively, but said nothing, as the conversation flowed back and forth between the Christians and the atheists. Finally Matt, one of the atheists, said, 'I just can't see how anyone could believe in God.'

"Sensing an opportunity, I jumped into the fray, asking, 'Which God don't you believe in, Matt? There are many different understandings of God on the market. Which one is it that you don't believe exists?'

"Matt retorted, 'The God who damns to hell all those who never hear about Jesus.'

"'Who says God does that?' I inquired.

"'Christians do,' he said. 'A Christian on this campus told me that those who die never hearing about Jesus cannot possibly be saved. People claim that God is loving, but I don't see how God is loving when he does not provide the unevangelized with an opportunity to be saved. What kind of a God creates billions of people without any possibility of salvation and then damns them to hell? It is that God I don't believe in.'

"'It's true some Christians believe that,' I replied, 'but certainly not all. Some of the greatest Christians in history, such as Justin Martyr, John Wesley and C.S. Lewis, believed that God makes salvation universally accessible to all people who ever lived. Moreover, it has never been the official teaching of either Roman Catholicism or Protestantism that those dying unevangelized have no hope of eternal life. And to be honest, Matt, I don't believe in that God either.'

"Matt and I had more opportunity to chat later, and he was deeply impressed that thoughtful Christians had a response to what he considered a decisive objection to the Christian faith. In fact, he decided to reopen his interest in Christianity, saying, 'Perhaps I've written God off a bit too soon.'" (pgs. 21, 22)

Just as there may be many persons, during the last few centuries (since the teachings of John Calvin on Predestination), who have rejected 'God', thinking that the 'Calvinistic portrait' of God was the truly Biblical 'portrait', so it is probable (as in the 'case' of Matt) that many persons have also 'rejected' God and have turned to atheism because they thought that the Bible (and Christians) taught that all persons who have not personally (and rationally and volitionally) accepted Jesus as their Savior went to 'hell' when they physically died!

This question regarding the 'opportunity and the destiny of the unevangelized persons of the world' often troubled the many persons with whom I personally had contact, during the several years that I conducted 'Salvation By Appointment Home Bible Studies'. Many times, while I was in the process of presenting the 'Plan of Salvation' to needy persons (unbelievers) around their dining room table, the 'flow' of my presentation would suddenly be interrupted with the honest and perceptive question: 'What about the heathen, who live in non-Christian countries, who have never heard about Jesus Christ? Is God going to damn their souls and send them to 'hell' when they die, even though they never had a chance to hear about Jesus Christ? What about the many people, who are a part of other 'world religions', who have never had any Christian present to them the Biblical 'plan of salvation'? Are these people hopelessly lost, in spite of the fact that they try hard to live 'good lives' and serve God as best as they understand Him?"

These and similar questions were often asked of me, not by cynical or hard-hearted persons, but by persons (both 'sinners' and 'Christian believers') who had a 'keen sense of justice'. Like Matt (in the above story), these 'inquiring and open-minded persons' wondered how God (whom the Bible teaches is all-loving, all-knowing, all-powerful and perfectly 'just') could send anyone to 'hell' simply because of 'ignorance' or because of a 'lack of opportunity'.

One of the greatest philosophers of the 20th century, a Christian man with an unusually astute mind and a sensitivity to the questions of modern-day persons - persons who were honestly questioning the 'justice of God' - shared his strong reactions against those who believed God categorically consigned the unevangelized to 'hell'. He pungently asks: "What kind of God is it who consigns men and women and children to eternal torment, in spite of the fact that they have not had even a remote chance of knowing the saving truth? What sort of God would create men and women in love, only to punish, irrationally, the vast majority of them? A God who would thus play favorites with His children, condemning some to eternal separation from Himself while admitting others, and distinguishing between them wholly or chiefly on a basis of the accidents of history or geography, over which they had no control, would be more devil than God. In any case He would not even remotely resemble Jesus Christ." (Philosophy of Religion; D. Elton Trueblood; pg. 222)

#### FINAL JUDGMENT - RELATIVE OPPORTUNITY, NOT ABSOLUTE UNIFORMITY

When many persons (both during my scores of 'Home Bible Studies', and during my regular teaching and preaching of my 27 year-long pastorate) asked me these 'penetrating and troubling questions', I would usually resort to Biblical verses from the second chapter of the Book of Romans. I would quote Romans 2:12-15 (oftentimes in the 'Living Bible' paraphrase - for the 'sake of clarity'): "God will punish sin wherever it

is found. He will punish the heathen when they sin, even though they never had God's written laws, for down in their hearts they know right from wrong. God's laws are written within them; their own conscience accuses them, or sometimes excuses them. And God will punish the Jews for sinning because they have his written laws but don't obey them. They know what is right but don't do it. After all, salvation is not given to those who know what to do, unless they do it."

What William Barclay has written, in light of these verses from the Holy Bible (Romans 2:12-15) is surely true: "A man will be judged by what he had the opportunity to know. If he did not know the Law, he will be judged as one who did not know the Law. God is fair...A man will be judged by his fidelity to the highest that it was possible for him to know." (Daily Study Bible; Romans; William Barclay; pg. 45)

There are differing degrees of spiritual light of truth given to humanity. There will be different standards for judgment at the end of the world. Some will be judged by the Law, and some will be judged without the Law. There are different standards for judgment, but every person will be judged. As Barclay says: "Paul saw the world divided into two classes of people. He saw the Jews with their Law given to them direct from God and written down so that all could read it. He saw the other nations, without this written law, but nonetheless with a God-implanted knowledge of right and wrong within their hearts. Neither could claim exemption from the judgment of God. The Jew could not claim exemption on the ground that he had never received the written Law. The Jew would be judged as one who had known the Law; the Gentile as one who had a God-given conscience. God will judge a man according to what he knows and has a chance to know." (Ibid; pg. 46)

The Light of Truth comes in different degrees, and each person will be judged according to the degree of response to the light that he has personally received.

## TRUTH WAS COMING INTO THE WORLD GRADUALLY AND PROGRESSIVELY

The knowledge of the Truth of God is communicated through a variety of means - Orderly nature, Individual Conscience, Witness of the Church, Printed Word of the Bible. All men are not fortunate enough to have available to them all of these forms of Revelation.

"The Word of God is so wonderful that we tend to forget that there are other ways that God uses so that He is not left without witness. It is a tragedy never to have heard the gospel message, but it is a worse tragedy to have sinned against the light one has. Since no one is completely without light, no one can sin with innocence. And one who has great light may be less obedient than one with little light. Light is a matter of

degrees in God's world. And He will judge all men according to how they respond to the light that is available to them". (Aldersgate Series; Romans; Wilber Dayton; pg. 37, 38)

The degree to which one obediently responds to the revealed truth that he has received will determine the degree of one's reward or punishment.

These truths help provide the answer to those who wonder what standard of judgment will be applied to those who lived before Jesus entered the world, or to those millions in our present-day world who have never had the opportunity to even hear the name of 'Jesus' - or to the multitudes of folks who have never once heard a clear and simple presentation of the Gospel 'plan of salvation'.

In an attempt to give 'honest' answers to the above-stated concerns regarding the 'opportunities and destiny of the unevangelized' (i.e., an answer that 'satisfies' a person's 'inherent sense of justice', as well as an answer that is Biblically-supportable), I found that a discussion with 'seekers' about the concept of 'progressive revelation' was helpful. The light of God's revelation (regarding His nature and His 'plan of salvation' for mankind) did not come quickly or easily, but rather slowly and gradually. John 1:9 declares: "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world."

Jesus, the Incarnate One, is the true or complete light of God, in contrast to other lesser and incomplete lights previously given to mankind before Jesus' coming. These other lights were imperfect, incomplete, and transitory. Jesus is the true light because He is God's perfect, complete, and eternal light. He is like the noonday sun in contrast to the reflected light of the midnight moon.

Reflected lights from God were shone upon the earth to mankind before the coming of Jesus. These reflected lights revealed the reality of God partially and imperfectly. The reflected lights cast shadows upon the nature and the person of God, even though it is true that they did reflect something of the truth of God's nature.

What were some of these imperfect and partial 'lights'? The light of NATURE was one of those imperfect lights. Psalms 19:1 tells us that "the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." Much can be learned about the character of God through Nature, but God's revelation through Nature is incomplete and imperfect, compared to His revelation of Himself through His Son. We can see the POWER of God in the thunder and lightning and earthquakes and tornadoes. We can see the ORDER of God in the predictable seasons of each year, in the ebb and flow of the tides, in the unfailing courses of the stars. But, seeing God through Nature alone gives one a picture of God as a Being who is orderly and powerful, but one who may not be LOVING or PERSONAL.

The light of God was imperfectly and partially reflected among men in God's providential activities in HISTORICAL EVENTS. Indeed, the God of Israel is seen as the 'God Who Acts'. The greatest event in history, as far as the Israelites were concerned, was God's miraculous deliverance of the enslaved Israelites from Egyptian bondage, climaxed with God's miraculous parting of the Red Sea! But the light of God revealed to mankind through historical events is still partial and incomplete and imperfect - like a reflection of light from the moon rather than the bright shining of the sun. Why? Because historical events can sometimes be misinterpreted and understood differently from what God intended them to be interpreted. The Jews themselves, as a nation, fell into this trap! Seeing God miraculously deliver them from Egyptian bondage with the result of God drowning the pursuing Egyptian soldiers in the Red Sea, the Israelites naturally concluded that God hated the Egyptians (and indeed, hated all other nations apart from the Jewish people). National pride became Jewish exclusivism. The Jews felt that all other races of people were inferior and even despicable! They concluded, from observation of God's miraculous intervention in history, that God loved the Jews and hated everyone else, that God was obligated to protect Israel and to fight Israel's battles, regardless of Israel's 'corrupt' moral condition! The prophets were raised up to remind Israel, that, in spite of God's wonderful promises of deliverance which were given in the Mosaic Law, and in spite of God's wonderful providential guidance of Israel throughout history, God was not UNCONDITIONALLY committed to helping Israel regardless of Israel's disobedience to God's commandments (which were just as much a part of the Law as were the promises).

Thus, the light of God as revealed in Nature, as revealed in the Old Testament Mosaic Law, and as revealed in God's providential guidance through Historical Events, were all incomplete, partial, and imperfect revelations of God's nature.

The light of God, as revealed through the great writings of the HEBREW PROPHETS was also another great revelation of God, but the light of this revelation (as great as it was) was still only a partial, imperfect, and incomplete revelation. The greatest writings of the greatest prophets were only preparatory revelations of the greatest revelation of all - the revelation of God through His Son - Jesus Christ!

If it is true that the writings of the Old Testament prophets were only imperfect reflections of the perfect revelation of Jesus, how much more true is it to say that the writings and teachings of the leaders of other religions, like Buddhism and Hinduism, and even the monotheism of the Islam religion, are very incomplete and imperfect! We are not, by saying these things about other 'world religions', saying that there is no truth found in other religions, either before or after the coming of Jesus - the Incarnate Son of God. We are saying that, at best, the light of truth found in other world religions is very imperfect and incomplete, and often very distorted because of the mixture of some truths with so much falsehood that is found in any religious system apart from Christ and Christianity (as taught in the New Testament)!

Even the light of God, revealed through the life and preaching of John the Baptist, was not the perfect or complete light of God. John was rightly considered a great prophet, apparently the greatest of all the prophets (if we properly understand the significance of Jesus' words regarding John the Baptist). Many followed John the Baptist, and some of his followers even entertained exaggerated ideas about John. As great as this man was - the cousin of the Son of God - the Gospel writer makes it clear that John the Baptist was not 'that Light'. "There was a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light." (John 1:6-8) It is like saying, "John is the moon. The moon wonderfully witnesses to the fact that there is a sun which is reflecting its light upon the darkened earth through the moon. The moon is a witness to the greater light of the sun. Without the sun, there would be no moon. The sun is infinitely bigger and greater than the moon. The moon has no inherent light of its own. It only exists to reflect the light of the sun upon the darkened world. The sun which brightly shines in the noonday sky no longer needs the moon. Jesus (the sun) must increase; I (the moon) must decrease!"

The light - this light of God - "was coming into the world." (John 1:9) Gradually and progressively throughout history, the light of God's self-revelation was coming into the world. This speaks of PROCESS and PROGRESS. "From the beginning the divine light has shone. Always it was coming into the world." (Readings In St. John's Gospel; William Temple; pg. 9)

We have already noted that God revealed Himself gradually and incompletely and imperfectly through the order of nature, through the events of history, through the writings of Moses' Law, through the prophetic words of the great Hebrew prophets, and more brightly through the powerful preaching of John the Baptist, who was sent as a witness to testify concerning the perfect Light - Jesus Christ. "FROM THE FIRST GOD WAS (SO TO SPEAK) ON HIS WAY TO THE WORLD, ADVANCING TOWARDS THE INCARNATION BY PREPARATORY REVELATIONS. He came in type and prophecy and judgment." (Westcott's commentary on the Gospel of John; pg. 7)

The writer of the Hebrews wrote, "Long ago God spoke in many different ways to our fathers through the prophets telling them LITTLE BY LITTLE about his plans. But now in these days he has spoken to us through his Son to whom he has given everything." (Hebrews 1:1-2 Living Bible)

This true light of God which was gradually coming into the world "gives light to every man." (John 1:9) "No man is wholly destitute of the illumination of 'the Light'. In nature, and life, and conscience it makes itself felt in various degrees to all." (Westcott; Ibid; pg. 7)

"Always it was coming into the world; always it enlightened every man alive in his reason and conscience. Every check on animal lust felt by the primitive savage, every

stimulation to a nobler life, is God self-revealed within his soul....SO IT MAY BE TRULY SAID THAT THE CONSCIENCE OF THE HEATHEN MAN IS THE VOICE OF CHRIST WITHIN HIM - though muffled by his ignorance. ALL THAT IS NOBLE IN THE NON-CHRISTIAN SYSTEMS OF THOUGHT, OR CONDUCT, OR WORSHIP IS THE WORK OF CHRIST UPON THEM AND WITHIN THEM. By the Word of God - that is to say, by Jesus Christ - Isaiah, and Plato, and Zoraster, and Buddha, and Confusius conceived and uttered such truths as they declared. THERE IS ONLY ONE DIVINE LIGHT; AND EVERY MAN IN HIS MEASURE IS ENLIGHTENED BY IT." (Readings In St. John's Gospel; by William Temple; pg. 9)

There is only one light - God's light - but God's light was revealed gradually throughout history in various ways and in various degrees. Christ is the eternal Light of God - the Light which was revealed partially in the wonders of nature, in the writings of the prophets, in the aspirations of the heathen, in the great ethical insights of the non-Christian systems of thought, in the enlightened conscience of seeking minds, in the loving responses of misguided heathen.

There have been many heathen people throughout history who served the living God, even though they never heard of the name of Jesus! Christ, the Light of God, has been manifesting Himself in the hearts of all men, in all generations, under all circumstances. Many have been obedient to the Light of God which has come to them, in various manners, and in differing degrees of 'brightness' and 'clarity'. Yes, many in history (even many so-called 'heathen') have been obedient to the Light, even though they had never heard of Jesus' earthly existence and never knew anything about the 'splendor of God's Light as revealed in the Incarnation'. There have been many American Indians or black men in the dark jungles of Africa who have followed the Light of God (inwardly revealed to them), i.e., Jesus Christ, without knowing of the earthly existence of Jesus. In following their 'inner light', they were following Christ without even realizing it! Many have built shrines to the unknown God and have faithfully served that 'unknown God', never realizing that whom they were serving sincerely, though ignorantly, was none other than the Living Christ who manifested the Light of God concretely on earth during his 33 years of earthly existence in Palestine! "The Light which strives to reach every man is not some vague general light, but the present continuation of the Light which shone in Jesus as He called men by the Sea of Galilee." (The People Called Quakers; Elton Trueblood; pg. 70) This Light reaches out toward every man, whether he is under the 'umbrella of Christian teaching', or under the domination of Communism, or entangled in the false teachings of a non-Christian religion.

"GOD HATH GIVEN TO EVERY MAN A CERTAIN DAY OR TIME OF VISITATION"

ALL PERSONS IN HISTORY, whether living before or after the coming of Jesus to earth (Incarnation), or whether or not they have been fortunate enough to know about

the historical existence of Jesus, CAN BE SAVED! Why? Because “the true light gives light to every man.” (John 1:9) THE POSSIBILITY OF SALVATION IS UNIVERSAL! Wrote Robert Barclay (early Quaker writer and theologian): “GOD, who out of his infinite love sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world, who tasted death for every man, HATH GIVEN TO EVERY MAN, whether Jew or Gentile, Turk or Scythian, Indian or Barbarian, or whatsoever nation, country, or place, A CERTAIN DAY OR TIME OF VISITATION; DURING WHICH DAY OR TIME IT IS POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO BE SAVED, AND TO PARTAKE OF THE FRUIT OF CHRIST’S DEATH.” (Quoted by Elton Trueblood in ‘The People Called Quakers’; pg. 77)

One can believe (as a committed follower of Christ) that the Son of God is the ‘Supreme and Unrivaled Light of God’ - the ‘consummation of all previous and scattered and partial lights of divine revelation’ - and at the same time believe that the ‘lesser revelations’ of God, before the coming of Christ, were used by God effectively to bring the ‘lost ones’ to genuine salvation. “There is no contradiction between the idea that God has been revealing Himself, in sundry times and sundry places, and the other idea that God has revealed Himself fully in one time and one place.” (Philosophy of Religion; D. Elton Trueblood; pg. 226)

One can affirm the ‘exclusivity of Christ’ - that Jesus is ‘the way, the truth, and the life’, that He is the ‘only way to the Father’, that He is the ‘one door to heaven’, that He is the ‘only name’ given by the Father by which sinners can be ‘saved’ - and, at the same time, also believe that many persons ‘find heaven as their eternal home’ who never were fortunate enough during their human existence to know about the earthly birth and the sinless life and the atoning death and the glorious resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Notes Elton Trueblood: “It is only by the Light of Christ that men may find the way.....but THIS LIGHT IS NOT LIMITED TO THOSE WHO, BY GOOD FORTUNE, HAVE KNOWN CHRIST IN THE FLESH OR EVEN KNOWN ABOUT HIM IN THE FLESH. Though this Light is seen in Jesus in its full and complete manifestation, IT APPEARS IN A MEASURE IN EVERY SON AND DAUGHTER OF EARTH. It is the Light that lighteth every man who comes into the world. THUS THE CHRIST OF EXPERIENCE IS IDENTICAL WITH THE CHRIST OF HISTORY, though not limited to particular historical events and particular places. IT IS STILL TRUE THAT CHRIST IS THE WAY, BUT GOD, IN HIS MERCY, HAS MADE THE KNOWLEDGE OF THIS WAY OPEN TO MEN IN COUNTLESS FASHIONS. The enormous advantage of this conception is that it keeps the uniqueness of Christ while avoiding the blasphemy of supposing that God condemns men for mere ignorance. This makes it possible to believe that there were many Christians before Christ because they saw something of the very Light which he was.” (Ibid; pg. 226)

Peter Kreeft (a well-known and highly-respected Christian contemporary apologist) wrote a detailed commentary of the Catholic Catechism. This Roman Catholic scholar, whose insights and commentary reflect the ‘official position’ of the world-wide Catholic Church, writes: “The scriptural data tell us that CHRIST IS THE ONLY SAVIOR, BUT

THEY DO NOT TELL US THAT THOSE WHO CALL THEMSELVES CHRISTIANS ARE THE ONLY ONES SAVED.

“If any are saved, they are saved by Christ. But Christ is divine as well as human. MANY OF THE SAVED MAY NOT HAVE KNOWN HIM ON EARTH IN HIS HUMAN INCARNATION, but only as the ‘Logos’, the Truth, ‘the true light that enlightens every man’ (Jn. 1:9). EVERY MAN KNOWS GOD INNATELY, BY REASON AND CONSCIENCE AND NATURE (Romans 1:19-20). And the only way to know God is through the light of truth that he gives us. And that light is the ‘Logos’, the Word or Mind or Revelation of the Father. And that Logos is the Son of God. Therefore, EVERYONE WHO KNOWS GOD DOES SO THROUGH THE SON. JUST AS ALL WHO SEE THE CREATION SEE IT THROUGH THE LIGHT OF THE SUN, ALL WHO KNOW THE CREATOR KNOW HIM THROUGH THE LIGHT OF THE SON.

“Who then are saved? WE DO NOT KNOW WHO OR HOW MANY. When his apostles asked him, ‘Lord, will those who are saved be few?’ (Lk. 13:23), Jesus replied, ‘Strive to enter.’ He did not satisfy our curiosity about comparative population statistics of heaven and hell. WHAT HE DID TELL US IS THAT HE IS THE ONLY SAVIOR.” (Catholic Christianity; Peter J. Kreeft; pg. 76)

“MEN OF DIFFERENT FAITHS CAN TEACH ONE ANOTHER WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNED OF THE WAY”

Notes Elton Trueblood: “The idea of Christ as reaching out, as does Light, to all men, is particularly relevant today when we are highly conscious of the coexistence of many world religions. We are forced to re-examine the relationship of Christianity to Buddhism, to Hinduism, to Islam, etc. Such a re-examination makes us reconsider the whole reason for missionary activity. To claim that all non-Christian religions are intrinsically evil is to deny the obvious truth, for each of the major religions contains elements of undoubted spiritual strength. One cannot observe the discipline of a Buddhist monastery without recognizing this. But does such a recognition undermine missions? Not if the conception of the Eternal Light of Christ is taken seriously. This means that the Eternal Christ has already been reaching into Buddhist hearts, and would do so without any help from us. Nevertheless we can help one another. The flame is there, but it can be made brighter by human instrumentality.

“Christ is, indeed, the Way, but men of different faiths can teach one another what they have learned of the Way, and those who know of the historic Christ have a special responsibility. THE HUMBLE YET TRULY DEDICATED CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY GOES TO OTHERS AS A LEARNER AS WELL AS A TEACHER. We are not so rich in spiritual resources that we can afford to neglect any. It is a striking fact that, when John Woolman, in the eighteenth century, went as a missionary to the American Indians, he told them that he had done so in order to learn something from them.” (The People Called Quakers; Elton Trueblood; pg. 78)

Most Christians today (and probably most Christian 'missionaries' today) do not think, as the 18th century John Woolman thought, that it is 'legitimate' to go to the 'unevangelized' peoples of the world "to learn something from them", but rather to go to 'the mission fields' for only one purpose - 'to save the lost and to disciple them in the Christian Faith'. Why should modern-day missionaries assume that, when they go to areas of the world which have not heard the Gospel, they can "learn something from them"? Because God never leaves Himself without a 'witness' to the truth! The Spirit of God, through what can be called 'General Revelation', gives the 'light of truth' to every person in every tribe and in every region on the 'face of the earth'! At the risk of too much 'repetition', it needs to be emphasized that the Spirit of God 'moves' upon the heart of every person, and, therefore, the possibility of salvation is UNIVERSAL. All persons (without exception) in history can be saved! What Robert Barclay said (many years ago) is true: "God hath given to every man a certain day or time of visitation, during which day or time it is possible for them to be saved, and to partake of the fruit of Christ's death."

When answering the important question "What Is the Attitude of Christianity to Other World Faiths?", the highly-esteemed and scholarly Methodist preacher (and apologist) William Sangster gave this 'careful and balanced answer': "What is the attitude of Christianity to other world faiths? ONE OF HIGH RESPECT, OF GRATITUDE FOR THE SPIRITUAL INSIGHT OF THEIR FOUNDERS, OF HONEST DESIRE TO UNDERSTAND BETTER WHAT THEY TEACH, AND SINCERE RECOGNITION OF THE DEEP REASON WHY THEY HAVE FED THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THEIR FOLLOWERS THROUGH MANY CENTURIES.

"Christians did not always take this attitude to the other world faiths. There was a time when Christians dismissed all non-Christians as 'heathen.'.....But that (attitude) has passed. Informed Christians are grateful to the Buddhists for their teaching on 'reverence for life'; the spiritual penetration of the Mohammedan mystics is being more widely recognized, and, as for the Jewish religion - well, Christianity sprang from it and can't be understood apart from it.

"Nevertheless, CHRISTIANS FIRMLY HOLD THAT CHRIST WAS A VISITATION OF GOD HIMSELF TO THIS WORLD; that although God had spoken by the Eastern sages and Hebrew prophets, HE SPOKE HIS CLEAREST WORD IN HIS SON; that although these other great religious teachers were a light to their areas, CHRIST IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD; AND THAT ALL THAT THESE OTHERS HAD SEEN OF TRUTH IS CONFIRMED AND FULFILLED IN CHRIST AND, WHERE THEY ERRED, CHRIST PUTS THEM RIGHT.

"CHRISTIANS DESIRE MORE FELLOWSHIP WITH THOSE WHO HOLD THESE OTHER FAITHS. They remember with sadness their past contempt. CHRISTIANS WANT TO SHARE WHAT THEY ARE CONVINCED IS THEIR GREATEST TREASURE,

AND THEY ARE SURE THAT, AS CHRIST IS BETTER KNOWN, HE WILL WIN ALL HEARTS.” (Questions People Ask About Religion; W. E. Sangster; pgs. 128, 129)

I believe that William Sangster’s attitude, which reflects both ‘sensitivity’ and ‘balance’, is the same attitude that we should have towards those who are adherents of other World Religions. Without denying the ‘exclusivity of Christ’ as the ‘only way to heaven’, Christians should, nevertheless, be humble and teachable and loving in their attitudes toward those who don’t yet worship the Living Christ. No condemnation of persons who are not yet ‘under the umbrella of Christianity’. Instead, a genuine love and acceptance of all persons, regardless of their religious affiliation. A sincere desire to learn as much as possible from others who, in other religions outside of Christianity, are also earnestly seeking the ‘truth of God’. A fervent desire to share with all persons the wonderful truth that the ‘partial lights of God’s revelations’ have now been ‘fulfilled in Jesus Christ’, the unique Son of God’ and the ‘Undimmed Light from Heaven’.

#### THE ‘CONDITION OF ONE’S HEART’ DETERMINES HIS ETERNAL DESTINY

Even though the ‘point’ will be made later in this ‘paper’ on the “Wideness of God’s Mercy”, it is important now to note that there are doubtless multitudes of persons rejoicing in heaven, simply because, while on earth, they ‘partook of the fruit of Christ’s death’ - but these many persons did not learn about the ‘method’ by which they were saved until they arrived in heaven! By way of ‘analogy’, there are many persons (perhaps most persons) who enjoy the ‘benefits of electricity’ without understanding the ‘dynamics of electricity’. There have been many, down through the ages, who have had little (or no) knowledge of the ‘historic death’ of Jesus Christ (and the atoning benefits of His death), but who, nevertheless, had ‘sought God in faith and repentance’ (resulting in the ‘salvation of their souls’ and resulting in their ‘eternal life in heaven after physical death’). It is the ‘condition of the heart’ of a person that determines one’s eternal destiny, not the accuracy or fullness of one’s intellectual comprehension of the ‘facts of Christian orthodoxy’. No one knows for sure the amount of knowledge one needs in order to ‘be saved’, but God alone can discern the ‘condition of one’s heart’ (i.e., the degree of one’s openness to the truth of God which is revealed through both ‘general revelation’ and ‘special revelation’, and the degree of one’s genuine ‘sorrow’ regarding his ‘moral failures and sins’, as the Spirit reveals these to the seeking person). The Spirit ‘seeks to save all’ - even those who have never received the ‘light of truth as it is revealed in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ’. To whom ‘much is given’ (namely, the ‘light’ of the Incarnate Christ as revealed in the New Testament and through clear Gospel preaching and teaching) ‘much is required’. God will ‘hold’ these ‘highly enlightened’ persons ‘very accountable’ at the ‘Great Judgment’. These ‘specially-privileged’ persons will be judged by a ‘very high standard of judgment’. If one persistently ‘walks away from the bright light and

opportunity of the Gospel message', he will eventually 'reap the severe wrath and judgment of Almighty God'! The book of Hebrews warns: "Anyone who rejected the law of Moses, died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace. For we know him who said, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' and again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.....You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised...'My righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.' But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved." (Hebrews 10:28-31, 36, 38-39 NIV)

Yes, the Bible makes it clear that, to whom much is given, much is required. On the other hand, it is also true that to whom 'little is given' (namely, the 'lesser lights of general revelation' - through Nature and through the Conscience and through very partial truth in non-Christian religions, etc.) 'little is required'. Jesus said: "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." (Luke 12:47-48)

In the book 'What About Those Who Have Never Heard?' John Sanders shares an interesting story from his life which I think effectively illustrates the difference between 'general revelation' and 'special revelation', and the 'saving power' that is found even in 'general revelation'. He writes: "Once some friends and I were fishing on a large lake when a severe storm arose. We headed for shore, where we fortunately found an old cabin. Although it was locked up, we were able to wait out the storm in the shelter of its porch. **THE CABIN'S PORCH SERVED US EVEN THOUGH WE DID NOT KNOW WHO BUILT THE CABIN OR WHO OWNED IT. IF THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDES THE UNEVANGELIZED TO SHELTER, THEY MAY CERTAINLY BENEFIT FROM IT EVEN IF THEY HAVE TO REMAIN ON THE PORCH.**" (Pg. 37)

How wide is God's mercy? Wide enough to include everyone who is suffering in the 'storms of life', the 'storms of sin'! All who are experiencing the 'death-threatening storms of life' (and who in the 'human race' is not?) may find refuge - 'salvation' - from the 'wind and waves of sin's devastation'! And this is true even for the countless persons in the 'human race' who have no personal intellectual knowledge of or acquaintance with the 'owner of the cabin' One who is threatened by the 'storms of sin' need not have knowledge of the 'owner of the cabin' (i.e., doctrinal understanding of 'the triune God of Christianity') before he finds 'safety and refuge' (i.e. salvation) from the 'death-blown storms of sin'! Whether the 'storm-tossed' person (sinner) reaches only the 'porch of the cabin' (i.e. knowledge of God through 'general

revelation') or enters into the cabin (i.e., knowledge of God through 'special revelation') where greater warmth and comfort can be found than what is found only on the 'porch of the cabin' - either way, the 'death-endangered' and 'storm-tossed' person (sinner) is saved from destruction! Of course, it would be 'good' for one who is in the 'storm' to be 'acquainted with the owner of the cabin' (i.e., have some awareness of the traits and characteristics and character of the 'owner of the cabin'), but this is not a 'prerequisite' in order for one to be 'saved from the storm'! ALL THAT IS NECESSARY IS FOR THE 'PERISHING ONE' IN THE 'STORMS OF LIFE' TO 'DISCOVER THE PORCH OF THE CABIN'. If he has no 'key' (i.e., favored knowledge of 'special revelation') to actually enter the 'front door of the cabin itself', he can nevertheless still be 'saved' if he is merely on the 'porch of the cabin' (i.e. if he has minimum knowledge of 'salvation through general revelation')

#### JOHN WESLEY - "DO NOT REJECT THOSE PERSONS WHOM GOD ACCEPTS"

In his sermon entitled 'The General Spread of the Gospel', John Wesley envisioned that the time would come when the message of Christ ('the Christian Religion') would spread widely and quickly over the 'face of the earth'. What Wesley envisioned, more than 200 years ago, is increasingly becoming a reality (during the 20th and 21st centuries)! Millions of persons, from nearly all tribes and ethnic groups throughout the world, are turning to the 'Living Christ'. The 'feats of world evangelization' are most amazing, and the prospects for a 'world-wide revival' are good! Many Denominations and many Christian para-church organizations (like 'Campus Crusade For Christ' which reported 26,000 full-time staff persons, at the beginning of the 21st century, when its founder Bill Bright passed away) and many Christians with no 'formal church membership' are taking Jesus' 'Great Commission' (Matthew 28:19-20) very seriously!

In his above-mentioned sermon, Wesley deplored the fact that (during his 'day') the world remained largely 'unevangelized' - with spiritual ignorance and 'terrible darkness' covering most of the earth. This caused great concern and even 'perplexity' to the sensitive and observing mind of John Wesley! "Such is the present state of mankind in all parts of the world! But how astonishing is this, if there is a God in heaven, and if his eyes are over all the earth! Can he despise the work of his own hand? Surely this is one of the greatest mysteries under heaven! How is it possible to reconcile this with either the wisdom or goodness of God? And what can give ease to a thoughtful mind under so melancholy a prospect? What but the consideration, that things will not always be so; that another scene will soon be opened? God will be jealous of his honour; He will arise and maintain his own cause." (Wesley's Works; vol. 6; pg. 279)

Even though Wesley acknowledged gladly that there were unusual times of 'spiritual ingathering' and rapid kingdom growth as a result of amazing awakenings (like as

sometimes happened during the long preaching ministry of Wesley himself), Wesley believed that, generally throughout the history of the Christian Church, 'Kingdom growth' was 'slow and steady and gradual'. However, Wesley envisioned a future time when there would be unprecedented and widespread and rapid growth of the Christian Movement. He wrote, "And in every nation under heaven, we may reasonably believe, God will observe the same order which he hath done from the beginning of Christianity. 'They shall all know me, saith the Lord;' not from the greatest to the least; (this is that wisdom of the world which is foolishness with God;) but, 'from the least to the greatest;' that the praise may not be of men, but of God. Before the end, even the rich shall enter into the kingdom of God. Together with them will enter in the great, the noble, the honourable; yea, the rulers, the princes, the kings of the earth. Last of all, the wise and learned, the men of genius, the philosophers, will be convinced that they are fools; will be 'converted, and become as little children,' and 'enter into the kingdom of God.'" (Ibid; pg. 283)

But, while waiting and anticipating that future time of widespread 'harvest', Wesley was quite concerned (if not deeply troubled) that so many millions in the world of his time remained in spiritual darkness. He wrote (in the same above-mentioned sermon): "But one considerable difficulty still remains: There are very many heathen nations in the world that have no intercourse (communication), either by trade or any other means, with Christians of any kind.....Now, what shall be done for these poor outcasts of men? 'How shall they believe,' saith the Apostle, 'in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?' You may add, 'And how shall they preach, unless they be sent?' Yea, but is not God able to send them? Cannot he raise them up, as it were, out of the stones? And can he ever want (lack) means of sending them? No; Were there no other means, he can 'take them by his Spirit,' as he did Ezekiel (3:12) or by his angel, as he did Philip, (Acts 8) and set them down wheresoever it pleaseth him. Yea, he can find out a thousand ways to foolish man unknown. And he surely will: For heaven and earth may pass away; but his word shall not pass away: He will give his Son 'the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.'" (Ibid; pg. 286)

Wesley believed that, in one way or another, God would see to it that Christian messengers would be raised up to go into all parts of the world (of paganism and heathenism and 'spiritual darkness') to spread the Good News of Christ and His love!

But what about the 'unevangelized peoples of the world'? Did Wesley believe that these unfortunate ones - "these poor outcasts of men" - were hopelessly 'lost' since Christian missionaries had not yet gotten to them with the 'saving message of Christ'? No, Wesley did not believe this! He believed in a God of goodness and mercy and justice! In the same sermon in which he expresses optimism (that some day the world's masses would be evangelized), and also expresses pessimism (that, in fact, the majority of the world's population still 'lays in spiritual darkness and ignorance'), Wesley also expresses what I think he would consider 'Biblical realism and truth'! Perhaps Wesley's most important sentence in his sermon ('The General Spread of the

Gospel'), is the following: "YEA, I AM PERSUADED EVERY CHILD OF GOD HAS HAD, AT SOME TIME, 'LIFE AND DEATH SET BEFORE HIM,' ETERNAL LIFE AND ETERNAL DEATH; AND HAS IN HIMSELF THE CASTING VOICE." (Ibid; pg. 281) Obviously, in the context of this sentence, when he uses the phrase 'every child of God', Wesley means 'every human being, specially-created with the capacity of moral choice'.

Regarding the important 'subject' as to how the all-knowing and all-just and all-merciful God 'judges' those with the 'light of Christianity', in contrast as to how he 'judges' (i.e., deals with) those without the 'light of Christianity', Wesley makes it clear (in his sermon entitled 'On Living Without God') that the true Christian experience of Christ's saving power results in a life of morality, but that "it is equally certain, that all morality, all the justice, mercy, and truth which can possibly exist without Christianity, profiteth nothing at all; is of no value in the sight of God, to those that are under the Christian dispensation." (Wesley's Works; vol. 7; pg. 353)

But, what about God's 'treatment' of the 'unevangelized' (i.e., those many millions who are not "under the Christian dispensation")? Wesley continues: "Let it be observed, I purposely add, 'to those that are under the Christian dispensation'; because I HAVE NO AUTHORITY FROM THE WORD OF GOD 'TO JUDGE THOSE THAT ARE WITHOUT;' NOR DO I CONCEIVE THAT ANY MAN LIVING HAS A RIGHT TO SENTENCE ALL THE HEATHEN AND MAHOMETAN (Mohammedan) WORLD TO DAMNATION. It is far better to leave them to Him that made them, and who is 'the Father of the spirits of all flesh;' who is the God of the Heathens as well as the Christians, and WHO HATETH NOTING THAT HE HATH MADE." (Ibid; pg. 353)

Wesley believed (in contrast to too many 'evangelical Christians' in our present-day world) that no Christian had any "authority from the word of God" to categorically condemn the 'heathen world' to a 'devil's hell'! There are too many critical, and loveless, and judgmental-type 'Christians' today (not only of the 'Calvinist persuasion') who quickly conclude that the Bible teaches that 'all the heathen' who have not 'personally and intellectually and volitionally accepted Christ as Savior' will automatically and unquestionably 'go to hell' when they die!

There were in Wesley's 'day' those well-meaning Christians, like many 'narrow-minded' and 'dogmatic' (and well-meaning) Christians in our own 'day', who believed that persons (sinners) had to have 'mental comprehension' of the basic doctrines of Christianity before they could possibly become 'saved'. Wrote Wesley: "Perhaps there may be some well-meaning persons who aver, whatever change is wrought in men, whether in their hearts or lives, yet if they have not clear views of those capital (central) doctrines, the fall of man, justification by faith, and of the atonement made by the death of Christ, and of his righteousness transferred to them, they can have no benefit from his death. I DARE IN NOWISE AFFIRM THIS. INDEED I DO NOT BELIEVE IT. I BELIEVE THE MERCIFUL GOD REGARDS THE LIVES AND TEMPERs OF MEN

MORE THAN THEIR IDEAS. I BELIEVE HE RESPECTS THE GOODNESS OF THE HEART, RATHER THAN THE CLEARNESS OF THE HEAD; and that if the heart of a man be filled (by the grace of God, and the power of his Spirit) with the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man, God will not cast him into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels, because his ideas are not clear, or because his conceptions are confused.” (Ibid; pgs. 353, 354)

To some persons (perhaps to ministers as well as to laymen) who would consider themselves ‘Wesleyans’ (i.e., those who accept the ‘Wesleyan theological system’), the above quotations from John Wesley may come as a ‘great surprise’! Wesley strongly believed that “by the grace of God, and the power of his Spirit” some persons were wonderfully converted (as manifested by a ‘holy lifestyle’ of humility and gentleness and ‘patient love of God and man’), and yet these same converted persons (with the ‘fruits of Christlikeness’ very evident in their lives) had no knowledge of even the ‘basic Christian teachings’, namely, ‘the fall of man’, ‘justification by faith’, ‘atonement made by the death of Christ’, and ‘the transfere of Christ’s righteousness to human beings’! Wesley believed that many persons (who had no ‘intellectual knowledge of basic Christian doctrines’) enjoyed the ‘saving benefits of the death of Christ’! Remember our previously-stated analogy? Many people (perhaps most people) enjoy the ‘benefits of electricity’, without any understanding of the ‘dynamics of electricity’. Wesley, like many other ‘great Christian thinkers’ (who are deeply committed to Christ and to the authority of the Holy Bible) believed that it is possible for a person, with very little ‘mental comprehension’ of Christian doctrines, to nevertheless wonderfully enjoy the ‘full benefits of the atoning death of Jesus Christ’. Such persons, Wesley believed, were ‘saved’ and ‘on their way to heaven’!

Wesley strongly believed in the ‘evangelical doctrine’ of ‘justification by faith’. He often wrote about (and preached about) the ‘righteousness of Christ’ which is ‘imputed’ to the person who ‘has faith’ (i.e., believes). He wrote: “But ‘faith is imputed to him for righteousness,’ the very moment that he believeth....’God made Christ to be sin for us,’ that is, treated him as a sinner, punishing him for our sins; so he counteth us righteous, from the time we believe in him: That is, he doth not punish us for our sins; yea, treats us as though we were guiltless and righteous.” (Wesley’s Works; vol. 5; pg. 62)

Anyone (especially ‘evangelical-type’ believers who strongly ‘identify’ with Martin Luther and his Protestant Reformation declaration ‘The just shall live by faith’) would affirm everything John Wesley stated in the above paragraph. However, it is what Wesley said in the following paragraph (in his famous sermon entitled ‘Justification by Faith’) which causes ‘strong reaction’ on the part of some Christians.

Wesley continued his exposition of ‘justification by faith’, with a ‘conclusion’ that demonstrated Wesley’s great appreciation for what he believed was the Biblically-revealed ‘wideness in God’s mercy’. He writes: “Surely the difficulty of assenting to this proposition, that ‘faith is the ONLY CONDITION of justification,’ must arise from not

understanding it. We mean thereby thus much, that IT IS THE ONLY THING WITHOUT WHICH NONE IS JUSTIFIED; THE ONLY THING THAT IS IMMEDIATELY, INDISPENSABLY, ABSOLUTELY REQUISITE IN ORDER TO PARDON. As, on the one hand, though a man should have every thing else without faith, yet he cannot be justified; so, on the other, THOUGH HE BE SUPPOSED TO WANT (lack) EVERYTHING ELSE, YET IF HE HATH FAITH, HE CANNOT BUT BE JUSTIFIED. For suppose a sinner of any kind or degree, in a full sense of his total ungodliness, of his utter inability to think, speak, or do good, and his absolute meetness for hell-fire; suppose, I say, this sinner, helpless and hopeless, CASTS HIMSELF WHOLLY ON THE MERCY OF GOD IN CHRIST, (which indeed he cannot do but by the grace of God,) WHO CAN DOUBT BUT HE IS FORGIVEN IN THAT MOMENT? Who will affirm that any more is INDISPENSABLY REQUIRED before that sinner can be justified? Now, if there ever was one such instance from the beginning of the world, (and have there not been, and are there not, TEN THOUSAND TIMES TEN THOUSAND?) it plainly follows, that FAITH IS, IN THE ABOVE SENSE, THE SOLE CONDITION OF JUSTIFICATION." (Ibid; pg. 62)

Wesley believed that one, without knowledge of the saving work of Jesus Christ, could be 'pardoned of his sins and justified before God' - if such a person placed his 'faith' (trust) in God Almighty (as best as the 'committing one' understood 'God'). John Wesley, who worshipped and served the 'God of all grace', believed that the mercy of God was as 'wide' as all mankind (including the 'heathen' and those who are ignorantly 'trapped' in other 'world religions'). Wesley pitied those of the Mohammedan religion who had not received the 'light of Christianity'. He said of them: "They are rather to be pitied than blamed for the narrowness of their faith. And their not believing the whole truth, is not owing to want (lack) of sincerity, but merely to want (lack) of light." (Wesley's Work; vol. 7, pg. 197)

Wesley's great compassion for those who 'lay in darkness' extended, not only to those who were 'trapped' in other world religions (like the Muslim religion), but to those whom most would consider to be 'outright heathen'. Wrote Wesley (in his sermon which was simply entitled 'On Faith'): "It cannot be doubted, but this plea (i.e. the plea that they are to be pitied, not for a lack of sincerity but for a lack of spiritual 'light) will avail for millions of modern Heathens. Inasmuch as to them little is given, of them little will be required. As to the ancient Heathens, millions of them likewise were savages. NO MORE THEREFORE WILL BE EXPECTED OF THEM, THAN THE LIVING UP TO THE LIGHT THEY HAD. But many of them, especially in the civilized nations, we have great reason to hope, although they lived among Heathens, yet were quite of another spirit; BEING TAUGHT OF GOD, BY HIS INWARD VOICE, ALL THE ESSENTIALS OF TRUE RELIGION."

But what did Wesley 'think' about the 'modern Jews'? Could they be 'saved', even though they did not 'personally accept Jesus Christ as Savior'? Wrote Wesley, "It is not so easy to pass any judgment concerning the faith of our modern Jews. It is plain,

'the veil is still upon their hearts' when Moses and the Prophets are read.....Yet it is not our part to pass sentence upon them, but to leave them to their own Master." (Ibid; pgs. 197, 198)

Wesley, as noted above, believed that a person, ignorant of the teachings of 'basic Christianity' (including ignorance of the historical reality and significance of the atoning death of Christ), could nevertheless, BY HAVING FAITH IN GOD, become 'justified' and 'fully pardoned' (thus, escaping eternal damnation).

But Wesley asked himself the following question: "What is the faith which is properly saving; which brings eternal salvation to all those that keep it to the end? It is such a divine conviction of God, and the things of God, as, EVEN IN ITS INFANT STATE, ENABLES EVERY ONE THAT POSSESSES IT TO 'FEAR GOD AND WORK RIGHTEOUSNESS.' And WHOEVER, IN EVERY NATION, BELIEVES THUS FAR, the Apostle declares, is 'ACCEPTED OF HIM.' HE ACTUALLY IS, AT THAT VERY MOMENT, IN A STATE OF ACCEPTANCE. But he is at present only a SERVANT of God, not properly a SON. Meantime, let it be well observed, that 'THE WRATH OF GOD' NO LONGER 'ABIDETH ON HIM.'" (Ibid; pg. 198, 199)

Wesley believed that persons of the Mohammedan religion and of the Jewish faith (and even outright 'heathens') could be 'justified in the sight of God' and enjoy eternal salvation - IF they INITIALLY put their faith in God, and if they MAINTAINED their 'faith in God' (as Wesley said) "to the end". Saved though they are, all such persons (who 'fear God and work righteousness', as a result of the convicting and converting work of the Spirit) are nevertheless only SERVANTS OF GOD, NOT YET 'PROPERLY SONS'. Wesley's distinction between a 'servant of God' and a 'son of God' was not understood very well by several of Wesley's 'Preachers'. This caused needless troubles. Therefore, Wesley saw the need clearly to instruct his 'Methodist Preachers' of the importance of making this proper distinction, and the need for them compassionately to 'deal' with those 'believers' ('servants of God') who did not yet enjoy the 'assurance of sins forgiven' which only 'sons of God' enjoyed.

"Indeed, nearly fifty years ago, when the Preachers, commonly called Methodists, began to preach that grand scriptural doctrine, salvation by faith, they were not sufficiently apprized of the difference between a SERVANT and a CHILD of God. THEY DID NOT CLEARLY UNDERSTAND, THAT EVEN ONE 'WHO FEARETH GOD, AND WORKETH RIGHTEOUSNESS, IS ACCEPTED OF HIM.' IN CONSEQUENCE OF THIS, THEY WERE APT TO MAKE SAD THE HEARTS OF THOSE WHOM GOD HAD NOT MADE SAD. For they frequently asked those who feared God, 'Do you know that your sins are forgiven?' And upon their answering, 'No,' immediately replied, 'Then you are a child of the devil.' NO, THAT DOES NOT FOLLOW. It might have been said, (and it is all that can be said with propriety,) 'Hitherto you are only a SERVANT, you are not a CHILD of God. YOU HAVE ALREADY GREAT REASON TO PRAISE GOD THAT HE HAS CALLED YOU TO HIS HONOURABLE SERVICE. FEAR NOT. Continue

crying unto him, "and you shall see greater things than these." And, indeed, unless the servants of God halt by the way, they will receive the adoption of sons.....'He that believeth,' as a child of God, 'hath the witness in himself.' This the servant hath not. YET LET NO MAN DISCOURAGE HIM; RATHER, LOVINGLY EXHORT HIM TO EXPECT IT EVERY MOMENT." (Ibid; pgs. 199, 200)

One who believes in, and who has great reverence for, Almighty God (even if he has not yet been properly 'instructed' and 'enlightened' regarding the sinless life and the atoning death and the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ) is a 'SERVANT of God'. He is 'on his way to heaven', even though he has not yet been 'adopted as a SON of God', and he has not yet experienced the joyous 'assurance of his salvation'. Wesley exhorts his Preachers never to condemn such a person, but instead to encourage him to continue to 'walk in the light' of God, and to 'seek the fuller revelation of God' - the result of which will eventually bring him (a SERVANT OF GOD) to full assurance and to 'adoption as a SON OF GOD'.

"ALL TRUTH IS ONE, AND ALL TRUTH IS GOD'S TRUTH"

There have been many 'keen thinkers' who, like Wesley, have strongly believed that God's 'General Revelation' is meant to be 'Saving Revelation'! That is to say, it is the Spirit's intention, when He gives "spiritual enlightenment" to persons who have never been privileged to receive the 'special revelation', to 'lead these persons to the Living and Saving God'. Wesley's conviction that Mohammedans and Jews and 'Heathens' can be 'saved' is based on his conviction that God's light comes to all persons (past and present) in some form or another, and that this 'partial light' is sufficient to provide all persons, even in the 'darkest of conditions', opportunity to repent and to turn to the Living God (however obscure and 'hidden' God may be to these persons). Of course, even in these 'less-than-favorable' (and even 'depressing') circumstances, it is the 'grace of God' and the 'Holy Spirit' which make possible the 'drawing and convicting and converting power' of God in the lives of 'heathen persons'.

Why is it important to believe that 'General Revelation' (i.e., the revelation of God to lost mankind through Nature, through Conscience, through 'partial truth' in World Religions other than Christianity, etc.) has the 'power' to bring persons to Christ, without the addition of 'Special Revelation' (centered in the Incarnation)? Because such a conviction advances the belief that the 'convicting and convincing and converting' Holy Spirit is active at all times and under all circumstances - both before and after the Coming of Jesus Christ to this earth! The Spirit has always been 'drawing persons' to the Christ, long before the appearance of the historical Jesus. Even though the 'coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost' (Acts 2) signaled the 'beginning of the Church Age', the Holy Spirit has been active in seeking lost humanity in all the 'dispensations of human history'! To believe that God gave 'partial light' to all men

(even to men in the 'depths of paganism') with the purpose of 'seeking and saving' these lost persons (long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem), does not in any way diminish the importance and significance of God's 'Special Revelation' (through the Cross and Resurrection). Notes Alan Richardson: "Without in any way weakening the claim that we know the full measure of the saving grace of God by Christ alone, it (i.e. General Revelation) allows us to recognize a GENUINE revelation of God in non-Christian religions.....In a word, it neither reduces the special revelation in Christ.....nor yet underestimates the significance of the general religious consciousness of mankind.....All our knowledge of truth of whatever kind, is the result of the gracious and revealing activity of the God of truth....All human knowledge is to be ascribed to the illumination of God; it is only by the shining of the Sun of Truth that the soul is enlightened to see the light....Such a conception of the relation of our knowledge of truth to God as the Author and Source of truth is inescapably involved in the deep Christian conviction of the sacredness of truth as such.....Since the essence of the Christian understanding of revelation is that ALL REVELATION COMES FROM GOD, if there is such a thing as truth or as the knowledge of God at all, it must come from the gracious and revealing activity of God Himself. ALL TRUTH IS ONE, AND ALL TRUTH IS GOD'S TRUTH, FOR GOD, IF HE EXISTS, MUST BE THE GOD OF TRUTH." (Christian Apologetics; Alan Richardson; pgs. 118-121)

Why is the 'concept' of 'General Revelation' so very 'revolutionary' in our understanding of the 'ways of God'? "General Revelation recognizes that there may be a knowledge of God through general religious experience, far outside the biblical and Christian frontiers. Furthermore - and this A GAIN OF THE GREATEST IMPORTANCE FOR THE CHRISTIAN APOLOGIST - it helps us to see that there may be A GENUINE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD that comes through all forms of art and artistic experience - music, poetry, drama, architecture, sculpture, painting. Indeed, we must claim that the obligation which the artist acknowledges, HIS INNER COMPULSION TO CREATE THAT WHICH IS BEAUTIFUL AND TO DESTROY THAT WHICH IS UGLY, IS NOTHING OTHER THAN THE PRESSURE OF GOD UPON HIS LIFE, though beauty may be the only sacredness that he recognizes and though he may call himself an atheist." (Ibid; pg. 122)

If it is true that 'General Revelation' means that the Holy Spirit 'draws people to the Living Christ' (even though 'people lost in darkness' often do not even realize that it is to 'Christ' that the Spirit is 'drawing' them), what are the 'means' and 'methods' and 'channels' through which the Spirit draws these 'spiritually-darkened and ignorant persons'? The Spirit uses many 'methods' by which He 'softens hardened hearts' and 'enlightens darkened minds' and 'stimulates weakened wills'. As already noted, sometimes the Spirit 'uses' the very limited knowledge of the truth which the 'heathen' have in their 'false religions'. The Spirit has not 'bypassed and will not 'bypass' any persons (or groups of persons, like tribes who are unexposed to the light of Christendom), in His attempts to 'bring lost ones to the saving Christ'. Sometimes, the Spirit uses the 'light of truth' which is revealed in the 'sense of beauty' which the

'heathen' keenly feel, in their desperate 'search for reality'. There is evidence that there is a 'universal appreciation for the Beautiful' among all persons, regardless of their region or culture or circumstance. From which (or from whom) comes this 'sense of appreciation' for the Beautiful in Nature (and appreciation for 'Order' and 'Power' in Nature)? It comes from the Creator God who has placed deep within the 'bosom' of every human being a 'love of beauty'! It is not hard for the Spirit of God to direct the 'sincere pagan', who delights himself in the 'beauty of nature', to the 'Giver and Source of Beauty'. Contrasting his own 'ugliness' with the 'beauty of nature', and contrasting his own 'inner chaos' with the 'neat orderliness of nature', and contrasting his own 'moral and physical impotence' with the 'power of nature', the 'sincere pagan' is 'made ready' (by God's 'prevenient grace') to open his life to the 'convicting work of the Holy Spirit'. Thus, it is very 'conceiveable' that many 'pagans' find themselves 'prostrate' in repentance and faith and trust and soul surrender before the 'God of Nature' (whose Beauty and Order and Power are very manifest to the 'sensitive pagan worshipper').

As Alan Richardson noted (in the above discussion regarding the unique way God works in the lives of musicians and poets and artists of all kinds) - the very compulsion to create that which is beautiful and to destroy that which is ugly, is nothing other than the pressure of God upon their lives! Again, the 'keen sense of the Beautiful' which these sensitive souls have, provides a 'bridgehead' for the Holy Spirit to 'draw' these artists to the 'Creator' and 'Gift-giver' of all Beauty! The Spirit has multiple ways in which He can 'work' to bring 'awareness to the mind' and 'quickening to the spirit' of those artists who are 'hungering and thirsting for the Essence of Beauty'!

## THE PHENOMENON OF THE 'GUILTY CONSCIENCE' IS UNIVERSAL

In our discussion of the 'power of General Revelation', we must also note the 'universal phenomenon of Conscience'. Writes Alan Richardson: "It remains true also that all men - men and not beasts - have a knowledge that there is a distinction between right and wrong and feel an obligation to do the right, even though they may perhaps hardly ever do it.....THE PHENOMENON OF CONSCIENCE IS UNIVERSAL. By conscience here is meant simply the KNOWLEDGE THAT THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG ACTIONS..... THE SENSE OF OBLIGATION TO DO THAT WHICH IS BELIEVED TO BE RIGHT IS IN FACT THE PRESSURE OF GOD UPON EVERY HUMAN LIFE. GOD IS MADE KNOWN TO ALL MEN, even though they may not have learned to call Him God, AS MORAL DEMAND; and obedience to the behests of conscience is the essential condition of growth in the knowledge of God, just as disobedience to the known moral law is the degrading of the knowledge of God.....THUS, THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD WHICH COMES THROUGH MORAL EXPERIENCE IS NOT LIMITED TO CHRISTIANS; IT IS

ACCESSIBLE TO ALL MEN AT ALL TIMES AND IN ALL PLACES, AND IT BELONGS TO THE SPHERE OF GENERAL REVELATION.” (Ibid; pgs. 124-126)

There are those theologians (like the highly-esteemed theologian of the 20th century, Kark Barth) who do not believe in ‘General Revelation’ at all, or, if they do believe in such, they forcefully claim that there is no ‘saving grace apart from Christ’ (i.e., apart from the ‘Special Revelation’ of the Incarnation). But the ‘evidence’ from both ‘general history’ and ‘Biblical narratives’ does not support this ‘extremism’. Writes the Christian apologist, Alan Richardson: “As we have said that all revelation is from God, so we must now add that ALL REVELATION IS SAVING REVELATION. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IS ALWAYS SAVING KNOWLEDGE. We cannot for one moment entertain the view which, in the imagined interests of the Gospel, is ready to argue that only the biblical-Christian knowledge of God, or special revelation, is redemptive, and that general revelation falls outside the sphere of saving grace.” (Ibid; pg. 127)

Apparently, there are those ‘well-meaning Christians’ who, because they don’t want to diminish ‘Special Revelation’ (namely, the atoning death of Jesus, and the ‘exclusivity of Christ’ as the ‘only way to the Father’), dismiss the ‘power of the Spirit’ which often works through the many ‘limited channels’ of General Revelation to bring the ‘heathen’ to ‘true salvation’. It cannot be emphasized enough that ALL REVELATION IS SAVING REVELATION, ALL TRUTH IS GOD’S TRUTH!

The God who ‘enlightens every man who comes into the world’ (John 1:9) is the God of integrity and justice and fairness and compassion and mercy. He is not a God who ‘gives light through General Revelation’ to the heathen, in order to intensify their ‘guilt’ and to deepen their ‘condemnation’. God always gives the ‘light of truth’ - even in the ‘infant stages’ through Nature and through Conscience and through World Religions other than Christianity - for one ‘purpose’, namely, to ‘draw lost persons to the saving Christ’! The Loving Father’s purpose, administered through the precious Holy Spirit, is not to condemn but to save, not to destroy but to heal, not to curse but to bless, not to alienate but to reconcile, not to ‘deepen the guilt’ but to ‘relieve the guilt’ and to give the ‘gift of eternal life’ to all!

There is a ‘universal sense of moral oughtness’ which mankind the ‘world over’ has within, and it is this ‘universal sense of right and wrong’ (the Conscience) which the Spirit ‘appeals to’ in His attempt to bring needed conviction to all persons (even to those who have never had contact with the ‘Christian Message’). “In the enlightened conscience and the high sense of moral responsibility of the humanist or communist, Jew or Mohammedan, even though with his lips he may deny Christ and the God whom He revealed, we must discern at work nothing other than THE SAVING GRACE OF GOD.....It is not only the phenomenon of conscience that is universal, but the phenomenon of the guilty conscience; MAN’S UNIVERSAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF HIS SIN IS GOD’S MEANS OF RECALLING THE SINNERS TO HIMSELF.” (Ibid; pgs. 128, 129)

This 'universal sense of moral oughtness' - this inner sense that 'some things are always right and some things are always wrong in all ages and in all generations and in all cultures' - is one of the 'greatest allies' which the Holy Spirit has, in His strong desire to bring all persons to repentance and to 'true salvation' (thus, preparing them to go 'home' to heaven when they die). Not only is the Conscience of Man a 'chief ally' for the convicting Spirit, but the Conscience (which has the ability greatly to 'disturb' the 'sin-driven' person) is evidence of God's great redemptive love! John Baillie makes this 'point' very well when he writes: "This hidden canker of an uneasy conscience is our most precious blessing, and for that we must thank God as for nothing else that has come to us. For it means that however much we try to keep to ourselves, yet He will not leave us to ourselves....It means that His is a love that has claimed us from the beginning, and that to the end refuses to let us go." (Quoted in 'Christian Apologetics' by Alan Richardson; pg. 129)

The belief that the blessed and 'ever-active' Holy Spirit is able to 'appeal' to the Conscience of a 'total pagan' (who has never once even heard of Christ), and to a 'worshipper in a false religion' (who has never once heard a 'clear presentation' of the 'Biblical plan of salvation') assumes that, in spite of the historic Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden, there remains 'something' in fallen creatures which was not obliterated in that horrible Fall, to which the Holy Spirit is able to make a 'fruitful appeal'. In other words, what we have been affirming regarding the 'effective work of the Holy Spirit' through 'General Revelation', assumes that 'the image of God' in the soul of mankind was not destroyed, though greatly damaged, in the Fall of Man.

It is the 'conviction' of the writer of this 'paper', that what Alan Richardson states in his book on 'Christian Apologetics' is absolutely true: "If our foregoing description of the nature of general revelation be held to be in any way sound, it follows that the image of God in man is NOT TOTALLY DESTROYED BY THE FALL; THERE IS THAT IN MAN TO WHICH GOD CAN APPEAL AND THROUGH WHICH HIS GRACE CAN WORK. Such powers as man retains of recognizing truth, beauty and righteousness, though he always sees them through the distorting medium of his own self-interest, are nevertheless the 'vestiges' of the divine image, which is marred but not lost.....If man comes into the world with a propensity for selfishness, HE POSSESSES ALSO WITHIN HIMSELF THE MEANS OF KNOWING THAT SELFISHNESS IS WRONG. The high achievements of many forms of non-Christian humanism and of non-Christian ethical and religious systems demonstrate the reality of man's original righteousness and THE FACT THAT IT HAS NOT BEEN ALTOGETHER LOST; the divine grace given in general revelation is manifestly at work through them." (Ibid; pgs. 131, 132)

#### JUDGMENT ACCORDING TO 'LIGHT' RECEIVED AND 'DEEDS' THAT ARE DONE

The great 19th century church historian, Philip Schaff, would certainly agree with the above discussion regarding the reality and the significance of 'General Revelation'. In

his first of eight volumes on the 'History of the Christian Church', he writes: "The elements of truth, morality, and piety scattered throughout ancient heathenism, may be ascribed to three sources. In the first place, MAN, EVEN IN HIS FALLEN STATE, RETAINS SOME TRACES OF THE DIVINE IMAGE, A KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, however weak, a moral sense of CONSCIENCE, AND A LONGING FOR UNION WITH THE GODHEAD, for truth and for righteousness. In this view we may, with Tertullian, call the beautiful and true sentences of a Socrates, a Plato, an Aristotle, of Pindar, Sophocles, Cicero, Virgil, Seneca, Plutarch, 'the testimonies of a soul constitutionally Christian,' of a nature predestined to Christianity. Secondly, some account must be made of traditions and recollections, however faint, coming down from the general primal revelations to Adam and Noah. But the third and MOST IMPORTANT SOURCE OF THE HEATHEN ANTICIPATIONS OF TRUTH IS THE ALL-RULING PROVIDENCE OF GOD, WHO HAS NEVER LEFT HIMSELF WITHOUT A WITNESS. Particularly must we consider, with the ancient Greek fathers, the influence of the divine Logos before his incarnation, who was the tutor of mankind, the original light of reason, shining in the darkness and lighting every man, the sower scattering in the soil of heathendom the seeds of truth, beauty, and virtue." (History of the Christian Church; vol. 1; pgs. 75, 76)

There are several concrete examples of persons (in the Old Testament times) who 'responded' to the 'light of God' which was given through 'general revelation'. Notes Philip Schaff: "There was a spiritual Israel scattered throughout the heathen world, that never received the circumcision of the flesh, but the unseen circumcision of the heart by the hand of that Spirit which bloweth where it listeth (desires), and is not bound to any human laws and to ordinary means. The Old Testament furnishes several examples of true piety outside of the visible communion with the Jewish church, in the persons of Melchisedec, the friend of Abraham, the royal priest, the type of Christ; Jethro, the priest of Midian; Rahab, the Canaanite woman and hostess of Joshua and Caleb; Ruth, the Moabitess and ancestress of our Saviour; King Hiram, the friend of David; the queen of Sheba, who came to admire the wisdom of Solomon; Naaman the Syrian; and especially Job, the sublime sufferer, who rejoiced in the hope of his Redeemer." (Ibid; pgs. 74, 75)

In spite of everything, thus far, that has been 'said', in the detailed (logical) discussion in this 'paper', regarding the 'light of God which enlightens every person who comes into the world' (John 1:9), and the powerful ways in which the Holy Spirit 'draws' those outside of 'Christendom' through various 'means' and 'bridgeheads', there are doubtless still many who will claim that "all the heathen will go to hell when they die because they have not personally and intellectually and volitionally accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior". How widespread this 'dismal view' is regarding the 'destiny of the heathen', no one knows for certain, but, in my own personal experience, it has not been difficult to hear well-meaning Christians (and especially 'Christian evangelists') speak disparagingly or slightingly of the 'hell-bound heathen', or of the 'worshippers of the false god of the Muslim religion', or of the 'Christ-hating Jews'.

This 'loveless spirit' of judgmentalism among 'professing Christians' is frankly difficult for me to understand, for it seems to me that this critical (and almost hateful) spirit is totally contradictory to the 'spirit of Christ' and to the 'spirit of love' which are often demonstrated in the New Testament (especially Matthew 5:1-12, I Corinthians 13, Galatians 5:22-24, I John 4). Some 'professing Christians' (including evangelists) seem to speak with some 'delight' that God will not 'allow anyone into His beautiful heaven unless they have personally accepted Christ', and these same 'well-meaning' and 'dogmatic' and 'harsh' Christians quickly quote verses (like Acts 4:12 and several other verses that declare the 'exclusivity of Christ'), feeling strongly that anyone who suggests that God may have provided a 'method' for the 'unevangelized' to get to heaven, is frankly a 'heretic' and a 'false teacher' and a 'compromiser' and a 'liberal' and a 'Christ-denier' and a 'person who does not believe the Bible', etc. etc.! These Christian brethren (many of whom are deeply committed to the person of Christ) seem not to be 'open' to the possibility that the 'mercy and grace of God' are much, much 'wider' than they could possibly imagine! To suggest to them that God may have great power (through the ever-active Spirit) to enlighten all persons with enough 'spiritual light' to enable 'these poor souls' honestly to 'turn to God' in true repentance and faith, seems to these 'inflexible' Christians to be 'impossible' and 'unBiblical'.

In an amazing sermon on God's Mercy, the great preacher John Watson (1850-1907) responds to the 'closed-minded and heartless attitudes' of Christians like I have briefly described in the above paragraph. He writes: "It is exasperating when the problem of punishment is mixed up with the problem of the heathen, and it is assumed that the nations which have lain outside the line of Jewish and Christian revelation will suffer doubly at the hands of God; first, because they knew not Christ, and second, because knowing not Christ they could not believe in Him, and therefore must suffer everlasting death. SURELY THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH WILL DO RIGHT, AND WILL JUDGE EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO THE LIGHT WHICH HE HAS HAD AND THE WORKS WHICH HE HAS DONE." (20 Centuries of Great Preaching; vol. 7; pg. 13)

It is important, to the extent that one is 'able', to 'think right' - especially when it comes to 'ultimate matters of life and death and God and Christ and the hereafter'. However, as Wesley pointed out (in quotations from his pen which I made, earlier in this 'paper'), it is not the 'rightness of the head', but the 'rightness of the heart' which God will 'acknowledge and reward' at the End of Time (at the Final Judgment of Mankind). John Watson (just quoted in the previous paragraph) agrees: "No serious person will allow himself to belittle the value of correct thinking in matters of religion, or will undervalue the connection between thought and action, but IT WERE MONSTROUS TO SUPPOSE THAT AN ERROR IN THE PROCESS OF REASONING ON THE MOST DIFFICULT AND INTRICATE OF SUBJECTS - THE MYSTERIES OF RELIGION - SHOULD BRING SUCH A DOOM (OF HELL) UPON ANY MAN'S HEAD. We have really only one account of the last judgment, but it is sufficient because it came from the lips of Christ, and THE DISTINCTION WHICH JESUS MAKES BETWEEN THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS IS THAT WHICH WE ALL MAKE IN THE JUDGMENT OF

DAILY LIFE - THE DISTINCTION, NOT OF CREED, BUT OF CHARACTER. If any man be sent to hell, he will find himself there, NOT ON ACCOUNT OF WHAT HE BELIEVED OR DID NOT BELIEVE, BUT ON ACCOUNT OF WHAT HE WAS AND WHAT HE DID.” (Ibid; pgs. 12, 13)

Along with John Watson and Philip Schaff, whose convictions we have already shared, there is another great 19th century leader whom, perhaps to some people’s surprise, had definite convictions regarding the ‘destiny of the unevangelized’. His name is William Booth, who (along with his famous wife Catherine) was the ‘founder of the Salvation Army’. If there was ever a man and a woman who were full of compassion for the ‘lost and hurting and disenfranchised people of the world’, it was William and Catherine Booth. They reached out most aggressively to ‘rescue the perishing and to care for the dying’, to tell them of Jesus’ love and His power to save to the ‘uttermost’. Strong ‘holiness advocates’, they preached well, and they also ‘put their preaching on the compassion of holiness into practice’ by organizing many ‘social programs’ to help the ‘poor and neglected people’ in London (and other places). Because they were ‘gifted’ with unusual organizational skills, they started a ‘movement’ which eventually became perhaps the greatest ‘Christian humanitarian’ ministry (denomination) in modern history. William Booth was uncompromising in his preaching that “Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life”, and that “no one can come to the Father except through Jesus Christ”. But, with his strong belief in the deity of Christ and the vital necessity for every person around him to be ‘born again’, William Booth, nevertheless, had a great compassion for the masses of people in the world who had little or no opportunity to hear about the ‘saving death of Jesus Christ’. He wrote (in his sermon entitled ‘The Atonement of Jesus Christ’): “Millions upon millions more will reach the Golden Pavement WHO HAVE NEVER HEARD JESUS’ PRECIOUS NAME BEFORE THEY GAINED THE HEAVENLY SHORES. There can be no question that sincere souls who, by living up to the light they possess, prove that if they had had the opportunity they would have laid themselves at the Saviour’s feet, will not have to suffer banishment on account of their ignorance. You will remember Paul says, ‘In every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him’ (Acts 10: 35). This shows that God is going to deal with people according to their sincerity. If they are obedient to what they hear, there will be salvation for them; and if they have never heard but would have been obedient if they had heard, they will not be rejected.

“We must hold on to the doctrine of the Atonement because it justifies us in believing in the transference to the Heavenly Shores of multitudes of young children who have never heard His name below.

“More than half the human race die in infancy and, in view of the holy examples set before them by the Heavenly host, grow into celestial maturity in the Heavenly Canaan.” (20 Centuries of Great Preaching; vol. 5; pg. 224)

There are many 'evangelical Christians' who find it difficult (and even 'unBiblical') to think that anyone could be 'saved from hell' and 'saved for heaven' by simply placing one's faith in God alone, without placing one's faith in Christ Jesus. But the Scripture teaches that a sinner can be 'saved' if he humbly turns to God, in repentance and faith, even if he (as a sinner) has no knowledge of Jesus Christ. The famed English poet, John Milton (who wrote the famous poem 'Paradise Lost') was not only a poet but a Christian theologian. Many years ago, he wrote: "The ultimate object of faith is NOT Christ, the Mediator, but God the Father....SO IT DOES NOT SEEM SURPRISING THAT THERE ARE A LOT OF JEWS, AND GENTILES TOO, WHO ARE SAVED ALTHOUGH THEY BELIEVED OR BELIEVE IN GOD ALONE, EITHER BECAUSE THEY LIVED BEFORE CHRIST OR BECAUSE, EVEN THOUGH THEY HAVE LIVED AFTER HIM, HE HAS NOT BEEN REVEALED TO THEM. IN SPITE OF THIS THEY ARE SAVED BY MEANS OF CHRIST." (quoted in 'No Other Name'; pg. 227)

Why is it possible for a sinner to be 'saved' without necessarily placing his faith in Christ and His resurrection? John Sanders answers that question very insightfully. He writes: "Our faith is not reckoned as righteousness because it has the same content as Abraham's but because the object of our faith (God) and the action of our faith (trust) are identical. We believe in the same God even though Abraham identified him as the God who kept his word and we identify him as the God who raised Jesus from the dead. Many commentators interpret Romans 4:24 as specifying that we must believe in the resurrection of Jesus in order to be saved, but, as Godet correctly pointed out, Paul did NOT say 'when we believe in the resurrection of Jesus' but 'when we believe in GOD WHO RAISED JESUS.' Paul definitely says we must believe in the same God as Abraham for salvation, but HE DOES NOT SAY WE MUST KNOW ABOUT THE RESURRECTION IN ORDER TO BE SAVED. All those who are saved are saved by believing in the same God even though he may be known to various people through various identifying characteristics - to Abraham as the God who gives a son in old age, to the evangelized as the God who raised Jesus from the dead, to the unevangelized as the God who created and providentially cares for them (Acts 14:17)." (No Other Name; John Sanders; pgs. 227, 228)

A highly-respected 19th century Baptist theologian (who wrote a 13 volume 'Systematic Theology') was A.H. Strong (1836-1921). His words are worth pondering: "The patriarchs, though they had no knowledge of a personal Christ, were saved by believing in God so far as God had revealed himself to them; and whoever among the heathen are saved, must in like manner be saved by casting themselves as helpless sinners upon God's plan of mercy, dimly shadowed forth in nature and providence. But such faith, even among the patriarchs and heathen, is implicitly a faith in Christ, and would become explicit and conscious trust and submission, whenever Christ were made known to them." (quoted in 'A Wideness In God's Mercy'; Clark Pinnock; pg. 158, 159)

One of the most respected 20th century evangelical theologians - a brilliant 'thinker' whose thought-provoking writings have 'drawn fire' from some 'traditionalists' - is Clark Pinnock. In my opinion, several of his books (especially 'A Wideness in God's Mercy') are among the most 'revolutionary' books that have been written in the latter part of the 20th century. His commitment to 'sheer logic', as well as his strong commitment to the 'God-breathed Word of God', should cause any 'reasonable person' to 'stop and listen' to what he has to say about the 'wideness of God's mercy'! He writes, "If God really loves the whole world and desires everyone to be saved, it follows logically that everyone must have access to salvation. There would have to be an opportunity for all people to participate in the salvation of God. If Christ died for all, while yet sinners, the opportunity must be given for all to register a decision about what was done for them (Romans 5:8). They cannot lack the opportunity merely because someone failed to bring the Gospel of Christ to them. GOD'S UNIVERSAL SALVIFIC WILL IMPLIES THE EQUALLY UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY OF SALVATION FOR ALL PEOPLE." (Ibid; pg. 157)

This last 'point' by Pinnock, namely, that if God wishes for all persons to enjoy salvation, then God must provide (or make accessible) salvation for all persons, makes a 'lot of sense'! Evangelical apologist Stuart Hackett comments on this 'logic': "If every human being in all times and ages has been objectively provided for through the unique redemption in Jesus, and if this provision is in fact intended by God for every such human being, THEN IT MUST BE POSSIBLE FOR EVERY HUMAN INDIVIDUAL TO BECOME PERSONALLY ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE THAT PROVISION - regardless of his historical, cultural, or personal circumstances and situation, and quite apart from any particular historical information or even historically formulated theological conceptualisation - since a universally intended redemptive provision is not genuinely universal unless it is also and for that reason universally accessible." (quoted in 'A Wideness In God's Mercy; Clark Pinnock; pg. 159)

"But this raises a difficult question. How is salvation within the reach of the unevangelized? How can anyone be saved without knowing Christ? The idea of universal accessibility, though not a novel theory, needs to be proven. It is far from self-evident, at least biblically speaking. How can it best be defended?

"In my judgment, THE FAITH PRINCIPLE IS THE BASIS OF UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY. ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE, PEOPLE ARE SAVED BY FAITH, NOT BY THE CONTENT OF THEIR THEOLOGY. SINCE GOD HAS NOT LEFT ANYONE WITHOUT WITNESS, PEOPLE ARE JUDGED ON THE BASIS OF THE LIGHT THEY HAVE RECEIVED AND HOW THEY HAVE RESPONDED TO THAT LIGHT. Faith in God is what saves, not possessing certain minimum information. Hebrews is clear: 'And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him' (Hebrews 11:6)

“People cannot respond to light that did not reach them. They can only respond to revelation that did. Scripture and reason both imply that no one can be held responsible for truth of which they were inculpably ignorant; they are judged on the basis of the truth they know. A PERSON IS SAVED BY FAITH, EVEN IF THE CONTENT OF BELIEF IS DEFICIENT (AND WHOSE IS NOT?). THE BIBLE DOES NOT TEACH THAT ONE MUST CONFESS THE NAME OF JESUS TO BE SAVED. Job did not know it. David did not know it. Babies dying in infancy do not know it. It is not so much a question whether the unevangelized know Jesus as whether Jesus knows them (Matthew 7:23). ONE DOES NOT HAVE TO BE CONSCIOUS OF THE WORK OF CHRIST DONE ON ONE’S BEHALF IN ORDER TO BENEFIT FROM THAT WORK. The issue God cares about is the direction of the heart, not the content of theology. Paul says that faith makes the difference. God is the ‘Savior of all men (potentially), and especially of those who believe (actually)’ (I Timothy 4:10).” (A Wideness In God’s Mercy; Clark Pinnock; pgs. 157, 158)

Pinnock continues with the same ‘line of Biblically-based reasoning’: “Let me develop the scriptural basis for such a position. First, there is the principle enshrined in Hebrews 11:6 that ‘without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.’ Referring as the author does to Abel, Enoch, and Noah, Hebrews indicates that PEOPLE ARE SAVED BY FAITH, NOT PRIMARILY BY KNOWLEDGE.....God looks primarily for faith in persons. God is very generous in doing so, and KEEPS THE WINDOW OF ACCESSIBILITY TO SALVATION WIDE OPEN. THE FACT THAT THE INFORMATION POSSESSED BY THE UNEVANGELIZED IS SLIGHT DOES NOT DISQUALIFY THEM FROM ENTERING INTO A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH FAITH.

“By Christian standards, the knowledge Abraham possessed was certainly at a low level. BUT ABRAHAM GAVE AS MUCH OF HIMSELF AS HE COULD TO AS MUCH OF GOD AS HE UNDERSTOOD. How fortunate this is for all of us; for WHO HAS PERFECT KNOWLEDGE? WHOSE KNOWLEDGE OF THE THINGS OF GOD IS NOT SURROUNDED BY OCEANS OF IGNORANCE? Though some have more to learn than others, THE KEY FACTOR IS TO BE MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION IN FAITH AND TO DESIRE TO KNOW MORE OF GOD’S WAYS AND TO FOLLOW THEM” (Ibid; pgs.159, 160)

It is important to remember what was stated in the ‘main title’ of this section of this ‘paper’, namely, JUDGMENT ACCORDING TO ‘LIGHT’ RECEIVED AND ‘DEEDS’ THAT ARE DONE.

Many centuries ago, one of the Early Church Fathers affirmed this ‘principal’ as the ‘standard’ by which all persons would finally be ‘judged’ at the end of life. Wrote Justin: “We have been taught, are convinced and do believe, that God approves of only those

who imitate his inherent virtues, namely, temperance, justice, love of humankind, and any other virtue proper to God who is called by no given name. IF PEOPLE BY THEIR ACTIONS PROVE THEMSELVES WORTHY OF HIS PLAN, THEY SHALL...BE FOUND WORTHY TO MAKE THEIR ABODE WITH HIM.” (quoted in ‘A Wideness in God’s Mercy’; Clark Pinnock; pg. 162)

During the Reformation Age, when ‘the just shall live by faith’ was the ‘key motto’, and when the significance of ‘good works’ seemed to be minimized in favor of ‘faith only’, the following statement by Zwingli (one of the leading figures during the Reformation) will doubtless seem ‘startling’: “There has not lived a single good man, there has not been a single pious heart of believing soul from the beginning of the world to the end, which you will not see in the PRESENCE OF GOD.” (quoted in ‘A Wideness in God’s Mercy’; Clark Pinnock; pg. 198)

Final Judgment will be based on one’s character (behavior), not on one’s creed; on the basis of one’s heart response to God’s ‘grace initiatives’, not on the basis of one’s knowledge of theology. “Jesus spoke about the salvation of the unevangelized in his parable of the last judgment when he says to those on his right hand, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me’ (Mt. 25:40).....Is Jesus not saying that one day all humanity will stand before him and that deeds of love shown to the poor will be accepted as if done to himself? Such a reading (of Matthew 25) coheres well with the principle in Jesus’ teaching that GOOD WORKS MANIFEST ONE’S BASIC ATTITUDE TO GOD AND THAT NONCOGNITIVE RESPONSES TO GOD COUNT AS MUCH AS COGNITIVE RESPONSES DO. Surely the text (Matthew 25:40) picks up on the beatitudes: ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God’ (Lk. 6:20). SERVING THE POOR EMBODIES WHAT THE LOVE OF GOD HIMSELF IS, AND IT IS ACCEPTED AS THE EQUIVALENT OF FAITH.” (A Wideness in God’s Mercy; Clark Pinnock; pg. 163, 164)

In light of the above statements - regarding the ‘smile of God’s approval’ upon ‘works of love and compassion which are done from the heart’ - the question needs to be asked: ‘Are there love-oriented persons whom God approves who are not a part of the ‘visible church of Jesus Christ’? Clark Pinnock (in his indepth investigation of the person and work of the Holy Spirit) states emphatically: “There are BELIEVERS WHO DO NOT BELONG TO ANY CHURCH.” (Flame of Love, A Theology of the Holy Spirit; pg. 195) Another modern-day theologian (whose writings on the ‘wideness of God’s mercy’ are very profound) is John Sanders. He writes: “Just as God’s grace cannot be restricted to ethnic Israel, so it cannot be restricted to those who hear about Christ before they die. Just as salvation extends beyond the boundaries of those with the badges of Jewish identity, so IT EXTENDS BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF THE PUBLIC CHURCH. If people, moved by the Spirit of God, exercise faith in God, no matter what revelation of God they have, they are saved by the merits of Christ.” (What

About Those Who Have Never Heard?; Editor, John Sanders; pg. 48) Sanders further states: "Though the church is the recipient of the Spirit and salvation, it does not and cannot contain the Spirit and salvation. The Spirit blows where it wishes (John 3:8). Belief in God's providence and sovereignty allows for his work of grace OUTSIDE THE CONFINES OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH. There is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ, but THERE IS SALVATION OUTSIDE THE CHURCH.....REFUSAL TO ACCEPT THE CHURCH'S INVITATION SHOULD NOT BE EQUATED WITH REFUSAL TO ACCEPT GOD'S INVITATION.." (No Other Name; John Sanders; pg. 237) One of the greatest preachers of all times, 19th century Biblical expositor Alexander Maclaren, notes: "It does not follow because you have passed through certain forms, and stand in visible connection with any visible community, that you are therefore within the pale and safe. Churches are appointed by Christ. Men who believe and love naturally draw together. The life of Christ is in them. Many spiritual blessings are received through believing association with His people. Illumination and stimulus, succour and sympathy pass from one to another, each in turn experiencing the blessedness of receiving, and the greater blessedness of giving. No wise man who has learned of Christ will undervalue the blessings which come through union with the outward body which is a consequence of union with the unseen Head. BUT MEN MAY BE IN THE CHURCH AND OUT OF CHRIST. NOT CONNECTION WITH IT, BUT CONNECTION WITH HIM, BRINGS US 'WITHIN.' 'THOSE THAT ARE WITHOUT' MAY BE EITHER IN OR OUT OF THE PALE OF ANY CHURCH." (Expositions of Holy Scripture; Alexander Maclaren; vol. 15; pg. 146)

The greatest Christian apologist of the 20th century, C. S. Lewis, strongly affirmed the 'wideness of God's mercy', i.e., God's willingness to 'save' all persons whose 'hearts' were open to God's love, even if persons were very deplete of the doctrinal truths of Christianity! This is how C. S. Lewis 'applied' the great mercy of the Loving God: "I THINK THAT EVERY PRAYER THAT IS MADE EVEN TO A FALSE GOD OR TO THE VERY IMPERFECTLY CONCEIVED TRUE GOD IS ACCEPTED BY THE TRUE GOD, AND THAT CHRIST SAVES MANY WHO DO NOT THINK THEY KNOW HIM. For He is (dimply) present in the GOOD side of the inferior teachers whom they follow. In the parable of the sheep and goats (Matt. 25:3 and following) THOSE WHO ARE SAVED DO NOT SEEM TO KNOW THEY HAVE SERVED CHRIST." (C. S. Lewis's Case for the Christian Faith; Richard L. Purtill; pg. 83)

The 'case of Cornelius' (Acts 10) demonstrates that God's 'judgment' of a person is based, not on the 'accuracy' or 'fullness' of his intellectual comprehension, but on the basis of his 'heart and soul response' to the 'light of truth' as he best understands it.

There are doubtless many 'evangelical preachers' who have declared from their pulpits that, before Peter arrived to 'reveal the Gospel message' to Cornelius, the latter was not 'saved'. However, the evidence from Scripture does not support this 'interpretation'.

There are several highly-respected scholars who have a 'different interpretation' - an interpretation which they believe is supported not only by the immediate 'context of Scripture' but by the 'total thrust of Scripture' regarding God's treatment of the sincere

'God-seeker' who has not yet been introduced to the 'full light' of the Incarnate Christ. Notes Clark Pinnock: "Cornelius is the pagan saint par excellence of the New Testament, A BELIEVER IN GOD BEFORE HE BECAME A CHRISTIAN. He embodied in his very person the truth that Peter needed to learn: 'God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.'" (Acts. 10: 34-35) (A Wideness In God's Mercy; Clark Pinnock; pg. 165)

The Biblical expositor and commentator, Matthew Henry (1662-1714), who was also an ordained Presbyterian minister, makes the following comment about Cornelius: "God never did, nor ever will, reject or refuse an honest gentile, who, though he has not the privileges or advantages that the Jews have, yet, like Cornelius, fears God, and worships him and works righteousness; that is, is just and charitable towards all men, WHO LIVES UP TO THE LIGHT HE HAS, both in a sincere devotion and in regular conversation." (quoted in 'A Wideness in God's Mercy'; Clark Pinnock; pg. 165)

G. Campbell Morgan (known as the 'prince of the expositors') gives this interpretation and application to the 'Cornelius story': "No man is to be saved because he understands the doctrine of the Atonement. He is saved, not by understanding it, but because he fears God, and works righteousness." (quoted in 'What About Those Who Have Never Heard?; Edited by John Sanders; pg. 39)

Adam Clark (1762 - 1832), a contemporary of John Wesley, and doubtless the greatest Methodist commentator and Biblical scholar in the early 19th century, makes several helpful comments on the 'character' of Cornelius. He notes that Cornelius was "a devout man, a person who worships the true God and is no idolater.....His love to God led him to love men, and this love proved its sincerity by acts of beneficence and charity. He was ever in the spirit of prayer and frequently in the act. What an excellent character is this!.....Being all performed in simplicity and godly sincerity, they (his prayers and alms) were acceptable to the Most High." (Adam Clarke's Commentary; One Volume Edition; pg. 983)

John Sanders makes it very clear what he thinks about Cornelius. He writes: "CORNELIUS WAS A SAVED BELIEVER BEFORE PETER ARRIVED, AND HE RECEIVED THE BLESSINGS THAT COME WITH A RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS; some in his household were unbelievers before Peter came but received salvation through hearing the gospel.....CORNELIUS WAS NOT HELL-BOUND BEFORE PETER ARRIVED, AND NEITHER ARE UNEVANGELIZED BELIEVERS. But just as Cornelius and his entire household came to participate in the blessings of Christ after Peter, so we should seek to bring the Christian life to unevangelized believers." (What About Those Who Have Never Heard?; Edited by John Sanders; pg. 4)

## THE 'FINALITY OF CHRIST' IS NOT CONTRADICTORY TO THE 'WIDENESS OF GOD'S MERCY'

There are those Christians - especially 'evangelical' Christians - who believe that, according to Acts 4:12 and other similar-type Scriptures, it is impossible for a sinner to be 'saved' if he does not 'place his personal faith in Jesus Christ'. However, Scripture and reason both reveal that persons (sinners) who have had little or no opportunity to know about the 'historic Jesus' (His life, and death, and resurrection) can 'find God' and 'personal salvation and eternal life' - and all because of the 'wideness of God's mercy'! In other words, it is NOT contradictory for one to believe in the 'finality of Christ' (i.e. the 'finished work of Christ' - accomplished through His death and resurrection - through which alone lost human beings can find 'entrance' into heaven), and, at the same time, for one to believe in the 'wideness of God's mercy' (i.e., that God allows 'repentant and believing sinners' who know little or nothing about the 'saving Christ', to 'enter heaven' after they physically die).

In his massive volume entitled 'The Word of Truth', the highly respected, evangelical theologian, Dale Moody (who taught at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), affirms both the 'finality of Jesus Christ' (as the 'only person by whom God accepts sinners into heaven') and also the 'wideness of God's mercy' (i.e., that God accepts sinners, who are ignorant of the life and 'work' of Jesus, if they 'place their faith alone in God'). He writes: "The apostolic message of the early church proclaimed that 'there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12). In this Name they went forth to make disciples of all nations and to baptize all in that name (Acts 2:38; 19:5) THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT KNOWLEDGE OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS IN WHOM THE NAME WAS FULLY MANIFESTED WAS NECESSARY FOR THIS SALVATION TO BE FOUND. Even though God allowed past generations to walk in their own way, 'he did not leave himself without witness' in nature (Acts 14:17). In all history, God has been present so 'that they should seek God, in hope that they might feel after him and FIND HIM' (Acts 17:27). WHAT IT DOES MEAN IS THAT THE GOD WHO REVEALED HIMSELF SUPREME IN JESUS IS THE ONLY GOD WHO SAVES." (pg. 309)

Earlier in this same volume of 'systematic theology', Dale Moody deals with this same 'issue'. He writes: "The chief objection to the belief that before the covenant with Abraham and OUTSIDE THE SCRIPTURES AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION THERE IS THE POSSIBILITY OF A PERSONAL RELATION WITH GOD is an appeal to certain Scriptures that are thought to rule such encounter out. The first appeal is usually to ACTS 4:12, but that must be harmonized with ACTS 14:17 and ACTS 17:27. IT IS THE NAME, THE PERSONAL REALITY OF GOD KNOWN IN PERSONAL RELATION, THAT SAVES, NOT KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE HISTORICAL JESUS." (pg. 61)

It is important that no one misunderstands certain 'basic truths' which have often been 'assumed' in this second part of the 'paper' regarding God's great mercy towards the 'Unevangelized'. There is no intention whatever to 'compromise' the strong teachings of the Word of God regarding the 'exclusivity of Christ' and the 'marvellous work of the Holy Spirit'. The 'clarifications' which John Sanders gives regarding these 'central teachings of the Word of God' are helpful. He writes: "Let me make some clarifications. First, nobody comes to God without the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is at work in the world convicting people of sin and seeking to turn their sinful hearts toward God. Whether people have creational or biblical revelation, it is the same Spirit who guides them to God, either through knowledge of the historical Jesus or through creation and providence.

"Second, it is not our own righteousness that counts but that of Christ. But the righteousness of Christ is not credited to us because we assent to some piece of knowledge. Rather, it is accounted to us on the basis of faith in God, whether that God be known as Creator or as the Incarnate One. The Holy Spirit seeks to develop faith in us regardless of the sort of revelation we have.

"Third, I am not ignoring the fact that the unevangelized are sinners who have turned away from God. It is sinners that the Holy Spirit desires to turn around - beginning with repentance. IT IS NOT BEYOND THE SPIRIT'S WISDOM OR POWER TO REACH SINNERS." (What About Those Who Have Never Heard?; Edited by John Sanders; pg. 43)

If the Holy Spirit has the power to 'reach sinners', and if it is possible for sinners to be 'saved' without hearing of the 'specific facts' regarding the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then some may ask: 'Why send missionaries to the 'heathen'?' Before giving a 'full' answer to this important question, it is helpful to recall what was mentioned earlier in this 'paper' about John Woolman (early Quaker missionary). He said that he went to the American Indians, not only to evangelize them, but to "learn from these unevangelized ones". Woolman believed that 'the light of God which enlightens every person who comes into the world' (John 1:9) meant that the American Indians possessed truths from God which it was important for him 'to learn', to become aware of. He believed that the Holy Spirit was constantly 'active' in His enlightening and convicting work, even among those who had never heard the Gospel of Christ. In the 'spirit of humility', Woolman believed that the 'truth of God' (which is the only 'truth' there is) could be learned from tribes and 'people groups' whom many Christians would consider to be in 'total spiritual darkness'.

John Woolman's attitudes toward the American Indians (i.e., that he could "learn from them" some of the 'truths of God', which came from 'general revelation') assumes that the Holy Spirit is actively at work, long before the Christian message is proclaimed by missionaries and evangelists. Notes John Sanders: "Peter and Paul came to the

realization that there were GENTILES WHO WORSHIPED THE TRUE GOD despite the fact that some of them had limited knowledge of the Old Testament while others remained completely WITHOUT SPECIAL REVELATION. In his book 'Eternity In Their Hearts', missionary anthropologist Don Richardson has documented numerous cases where God was at work redemptively with people groups prior to Christian missionaries. He calls his basic insight 'the Melchizedek factor'. Melchizedek was a pagan priest-king to whom Abraham paid tithes and who pronounced a blessing on Abraham. It is fascinating that the Genesis narrative describes Melchizedek as a priest of 'God Most High' (14:18) - HE WORSHIPS THE SAME GOD AS ABRAHAM (14:19) - and this evidently without any special revelation from God. The Bible apparently is not as protective of God's worship as some Christians are." (What About Those Who Have Never Heard?; Edited by John Sanders; pg. 43, 44)

If it is true that, before the coming of Christ to earth, it was possible for Melchizedek to worship the 'same God' as Abraham worshiped (even though the former person did not have as much 'spiritual light' as the latter person), is it possible, after the coming of Christ to earth, for Muslims and Jews to worship the 'same God' as Christians worship? There are those 'earnest Christians' today who 'dogmatically declare' that such is impossible, and that to suggest that Muslims and Jews could be worshipping the same God as Christians worship, is nothing less than an 'heretical and unBiblical idea'. Peter Kreeft (writing in defense of the Catholic Faith, and the teaching of the Catholic Catechism) does not agree with this 'narrow' and 'judgmental' dogmatism! He writes: "JEWS, CHRISTIANS, AND MUSLIMS BELIEVE IN THE SAME GOD. God has the same attributes according to all three religions, because Christians and Muslims learned of this God from the same source: his revelation to the Jews, beginning with Abraham. The three theistic religions agree about (a) the oneness of God and about (b) the nature of God, but they disagree about (c) the Persons in God, because they disagree about Christ. Jews and Muslims do not believe in the Trinity because they do not believe in the Incarnation; Christians believe in the Trinity because they believe in the Incarnation." (Catholic Christianity; Peter J. Kreeft; pg. 43)

There is no doubt that Peter Kreeft (and the entire Catholic Faith which he represents, in his writing of a commentary on the Catholic Catechism) believes strongly in the deity of Christ and in the 'finality of Christ' (in terms of the atoning blood of Christ as the only basis for salvation and hope of eternal life). Without in any way compromising his belief in the 'uniqueness of Jesus Christ' and the necessity of the Cross for the salvation of mankind, Kreeft nevertheless believes that God looks in tenderest mercy upon the masses of humanity (including all Muslims and all Jews) who have not yet learned to pray to God "in the name of Jesus Christ" (the second person of the holy trinity). John Wesley (of the 18th century) and Peter Kreeft (of the 21st century) both seem to be in agreement regarding the 'spiritual condition' of the Muslims and Jews.

As mentioned before, Wesley believed that “it is not our part to pass sentence upon them (modern-day Jews), but to leave them to their own Master.” Regarding Muslims, Wesley believed that they were very earnest seekers for God, and that the only reason they did not believe “the whole truth” is because they had not yet received the greater “light” of Christ. (Wesley’s Works; vol.7; pg. 197)

Christians today (and especially Christians of the ‘evangelical type’) are too quick to ‘judge’ the spiritual condition of persons (like Muslims and Jews) who have not yet acknowledged Jesus’ deity and who have not yet personally and intellectually and volitionally accepted Jesus as Savior. Wesley called those persons (like Jews and Muslims and others outside of the ‘pale of Christianity’) who were sincerely seeking the ‘true God’ (based on the ‘degree’ of spiritual revelation they had thus far received), and whose lives demonstrated the presence of the ‘fruits of godliness’ (such as just and compassionate actions) - I say, Wesley called these ‘God-seekers’ SERVANTS, who were awaiting ‘adoption as sons of God’ with the ‘full assurance of sins forgiven’ which comes as the ‘right of SONS’. Wesley insisted, however, that SERVANTS WERE ‘SAVED’, that they were NOT UNDER CONDEMNATION, AND THAT THEY WERE NOT FACING ‘HELL FIRE’!

I personally believe that there will be many Jews and Muslims, rejoicing in heaven around the throne of God, simply because they trusted God (as best they understood ‘God’) for their ‘salvation’. Both Jews and Muslims (who understood little about the ‘grace of God’ and the ‘saving benefits of the Cross of Christ’, while they lived on earth) will learn - perhaps to their ‘great and glad surprise’ - that Jesus of Nazareth was, indeed, God’s ‘agent and instrument of salvation’, and that they ‘made it safely to heaven’s shores’ only because of the ‘finished work of Jesus’! We (evangelical Christians) must (1) never forget that it is God (and God alone) who knows the ‘thoughts and intents and desires and motives’ of every person’s heart, and that (2) God allows persons to enter His heavenly kingdom, not because they were ‘totally correct’ in their ‘intellectual understanding’ and their ‘theological insights’ while living on earth, but because they ‘walked in all the spiritual light’ they were given and because they made a genuine ‘heart response’ of love to ‘God’ as they best understood ‘God’.

Jesus said, “By their fruits you shall know them.” Yes, it is not hard to discern the ‘fruits of godliness’ in the lives of many Christians (and even in the lives of many ‘God-fearing persons’ like Cornelius in Acts 10, who believed in God before he believed in Jesus). But Jesus also said: “Judge not that ye be not judged.” (Matthew 7:1) No one is wise enough or holy enough or powerful enough to judge the ‘spiritual life’ of any other human being. C. S. Lewis believed that, regardless of the outward appearances of people, no one knew for sure just where another person was in his ‘spiritual life’. Lewis believed that all persons, at all times, were either ‘getting closer to God’ or were ‘moving farther away from God’ - and that some of the ‘most religious ones’ might be

the very ones who, in reality, were 'moving away from God' at that time! In his very popular book 'Mere Christianity', this greatest of the Christian apologists of the 20th century, wrote: "The world does not consist of 100 per cent Christians and 100 per cent non-Christians. There are people (a great many of them) who are slowly ceasing to be Christians but who still call themselves by that name; some of them are clergymen. THERE ARE OTHER PEOPLE WHO ARE SLOWLY BECOMING CHRISTIANS THOUGH THEY DO NOT YET CALL THEMSELVES SO. THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO DO NOT ACCEPT THE FULL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE ABOUT CHRIST BUT WHO ARE SO STRONGLY ATTRACTED BY HIM THAT THEY ARE HIS IN A MUCH DEEPER SENSE THAN THEY THEMSELVES UNDERSTAND. THERE ARE PEOPLE IN OTHER RELIGIONS WHO ARE BEING LED BY GOD'S SECRET INFLUENCE TO CONCENTRATE ON THOSE PARTS OF THEIR RELIGION WHICH ARE IN AGREEMENT WITH CHRISTIANITY, AND WHO THUS BELONG TO CHRIST WITHOUT KNOWING IT. For example, a Buddhist of good will may be led to concentrate more and more on the Buddhist teaching about mercy and to leave in the background (though he might still say he believed) the Buddhist teaching on certain other points. Many of the good Pagans long before Christ's birth may have been in this position. And always, of course, there are a great many people who are just confused in mind and have a lot of inconsistent beliefs all jumbled up together. Consequently, it is not much use trying to make judgments about Christians and non-Christians in the mass.....When we are comparing Christians in general with non-Christians in general, we are usually not thinking about real people whom we know at all, but only about two vague ideas." (Mere Christianity; C.S. Lewis; pgs. 163, 164; 1952, By the Macmillan Company)

As we have repeated (for emphasis) several times in this 'paper', God judges all persons on the basis of the light they have received and how they have responded (and are responding) to that light. The great Presbyterian scholar, J. Gresham Machen, said, "No one knows how little a person can believe and still be saved." (Quoted in 'What About Those Who Have Never Heard?' Edited by John Sanders; pg. 37) Let's leave the determination of people's 'eternal destiny' in the hands of the all-wise, all-knowing, all-loving, and all-merciful God!

After we have emphasized strongly that God's mercy is 'very wide', in His dealings with all persons outside of the 'pale of Christianity' (including Muslims and Jews), we must come back to the question that was posed above, namely, "Why send missionaries to the 'heathen'?" 'Evangelizing the lost' should be a 'strong motivation' for missions (and perhaps the 'key' motivation), but there are other 'motivations' also. With 'sensitivity', John Sanders perceptively notes that there are several "very strong legs for supporting missionary motivation. First and foremost, Jesus commands us to go (Mt. 28:18-20). Second, we who have experienced the love of God in the Son through the Spirit should desire to share the blessings of the Christian life with those ignorant of it. Third, there are, of course people who are not believers in God, and they

need to hear of Christ so that they may come to know the love of God. Finally, even though unevangelized believers will be given eternal life on the basis of Christ's work, God wants them to experience the fullness of life that came at Pentecost. A relationship with the risen Lord affords a much richer spiritual life than can be had through only a knowledge of the Creator. Christians possess the messianic blessings of an assurance of salvation as well as the ultimate revelation of who God is and what God desires. Moreover, Christians have the benefit of fellowship in the Christian community. These are more than sufficient reasons for wanting unevangelized believers to become Christians. The salvation Jesus provides is, after all, not simply for eternal bliss but also for the abundant life now." (What About Those Who Have Never Heard?; Edited by John Sanders; pg. 54)

There may be those Christians who might suggest that the very 'thinkers' who make a 'case' that God has provided sufficient 'light' for the 'unevangelized' to be 'saved' without the 'light of special revelation', are the very same 'thinkers' who are 'weak in outreach to the unevangelized'. If anyone (who believes in the 'wideness of God's mercy') is not motivated to 'reach out to the unevangelized', it is because his understanding of God's mercy is 'inaccurate', and his heart has become hardened to God's compassionate purposes!

It is important to realize that many of Christianity's greatest leaders (preachers and teachers and evangelists and 'humanitarians') have believed in the 'wideness of God's mercy', and, at the same time, have been some of the 'most aggressive messengers' of the Good News of Christ to a 'lost and dying world'. John Wesley, whose comments (regarding Calvinistic Predestination and the Opportunity and Destiny of the Unevangelized) we have looked at rather extensively in this 'paper', is one of history's notable examples of a man who was 'deeply in love with God and with all the human race'. Even though (as we have seen) he strongly believed in the 'wideness of God's mercy', he also strongly believed that he was called to 'fulfill the Great Commission' of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19-20). There have been few (if any) in human history (since the time of Christ) who have been more diligent in 'evangelistic outreach' and 'Christian discipleship' than John Wesley! What kept him 'in the saddle' for 53 years, riding his horse thousands of miles each year, in his attempt to 'tell poor sinners that Jesus loves them'? He preached approximately 42,000 sermons during his long lifetime! Thousands responded to his 'call to repentance', and his Methodist Movement grew to tens of thousands, not only in England, but also in America.. He who was a scholar of the 'highest rank' learned to speak simply and clearly and Biblically to anyone who would listen to his Gospel message, but he 'reached out' primarily to the poor and the neglected and the suffering and the criminal populations of humanity. These 'overlooked' and 'dispised' people listened to him gladly. People by the thousands were 'thoroughly converted', and they sought to live 'Spirit-controlled' and 'love-driven' lives! Not only were

countless persons converted to Christ, but many of the evil institutions of England were transformed! So much so that even 'secular historians' acknowledge that, if it were not for the Wesleyan Revival (Spiritual Awakening), England would have suffered a 'bloody revolution', as what happened in France during the 'French Revolution'! Wesley, who had an unusual sense of God's mercy, as it applied to the masses of the unevangelized throughout the entire world, nevertheless, was a man who was aggressive in 'evangelistic efforts' over several decades of his life! The 'Movement' which God raised up through the leadership of John Wesley (and his brother Charles) spread quickly, not only to America in the 19th century, but the 'Wesleyan Movement' has impacted much of our present-day world. There is strong evidence, for instance, that 'Pentecostalism' (which began in the early 1900's) had its 'roots' in the Methodist Movement. 'Pentecostalism' which had 'humble beginnings' (and which, in its early days, was rather ignored and sometimes 'persecuted' and 'ridiculed') spread like a 'forest fire' during the decades of the 20th century. It is my understanding that the 'fastest growing branch of the tree of Christianity' in the 20th century was 'Pentecostalism'. Even though there are probably some 'slight differences' between 'Pentecostals' and 'Charismatics', these two 'branches' are nearly the same in 'theological content'. Though no one probably knows the 'exact number', I read recently that there is an estimated 400 million 'Charismatics' (including 'Pentecostals') in the world today (and this 'type' of Christian can be found in most Protestant Denominations as well as in the Roman Catholic Movement). If it is 'true' that Pentecostalism is 'rooted' in the Methodist Movement, and if it is true that the Charismatic Movement came from (or at least was strongly influenced by) the Pentecostal Movement, this all means that John Wesley (with his passion for Christ and his 'love for the lost') has been used of God in most remarkable and influential ways - to help motivate the Body of Christ in its task to 'fulfill the Great Commission'!

What is the 'point' in reflecting on the 'evangelistic passion' of John Wesley (and his unusual 'influence' in the Christian World during the last two centuries)? In order that we might dramatically demonstrate that THERE IS NO CONTRADICTION BETWEEN BELIEVING IN THE 'FINALITY OF CHRIST' AND BELIEVING AT THE SAME TIME IN THE 'WIDENESS OF GOD'S MERCY' AS IT RELATES TO GOD'S ATTITUDE AND LOVING TREATMENT OF THE WORLD'S UNEVANGELIZED PEOPLE!

It is a fact that many of the greatest Christian leaders (both past and present) who have most believed in the 'wideness of God's mercy' have also believed in (and have also aggressively practiced) outreach to the 'lost ones' of the world. A contemporary Christian leader who has been a very active and verbal spokesman for the 'cause of world missions and evangelism' is John R. W. Stott of England. As a prolific writer and a popular speaker and an effective pastor for several decades, he is highly respected in the evangelical world. After reading his books - books like 'The Cross of Christ' - no one could be in doubt as to Stott's belief in the 'exclusivity of Christ' as the 'only way to the Father'. He strongly believes in the atoning death of Jesus, and the power of the

Resurrection, as the ‘foundation for salvation’. Yet Stott, who (like Wesley) believes strongly in ‘taking the Gospel message’ to the ‘far reaches of the world’, also believes that the Spirit of God is working mightily to bring the masses of the world’s population to the Living Christ! John Stott of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (like as was true of John Wesley of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) cherishes the hope that the world’s masses will respond to the ‘Light of Truth’ and will ultimately be ‘saved’. This great contemporary spokesperson for missions, writes, “I have never been able to conjure up (as some great Evangelical missionaries have) the appalling vision of the millions who are not only perishing but will inevitably perish. On the other hand, I am not and cannot be a Universalist. Between these extremes I CHERISH THE HOPE THAT THE MAJORITY OF THE HUMAN RACE WILL BE SAVED, AND I HAVE A SOLID BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THIS BELIEF.” (Quoted in ‘What About Those Who Have Never Heard?’ editor, John Sanders; pg. 53).

### **WILL THE MAJORITY OF THE HUMAN RACE BE SAVED?**

I personally and strongly believe the following statements, by deeply Christian and brilliant men regarding the “Light” of God’s Revelation:

“I am persuaded every child of God (God-created human being) has had, at some time, ‘life and death set before him’, Eternal Life and Eternal Death; and has in himself the Casting Vote.” (John Wesley)

“God hath given to every man a certain day or time of visitation, during which day or time it is possible for them to be saved, and to partake of the fruit of Christ’s death.” (Robert Barclay)

“No Man is wholly destitute of the illumination of the ‘Light’. In nature and life, and conscience it makes itself felt in various degrees to all.” (Westcott)

“There is only one Divine Light; and every man in his measure is enlightened by it.” (William Temple)

“*The true light that enlightens everyman was coming into the world.*” (John 1:9, Revised Standard Version)

“We cannot for one moment entertain the view which, in the imagined interests of the Gospel, is ready to argue that only the biblical-Christian knowledge of God, or special revelation, is redemptive, and that general revelation falls outside the

sphere of saving grace. All revelation is saving revelation. The knowledge of God is always Saving knowledge.” (Alan Richardson)

These above statements are summary statements (quoted previously within the context of this present book) that briefly describe the “Wideness of God’s Mercy” which extends to every single human being in all of human history.

If these statements accurately reflect the truth about God’s merciful heart and His saving character, then I think it is reasonable to conclude that it is highly (and logically) probable that most (if not the “vast majority”) of human beings will finally experience genuine faith in God, and thus be ultimately saved and enjoy the ‘glories of heaven’.

Of course, only God knows who will be saved in the end, and how many persons – but it is gratifying to know that the God of the universe is a “God of Love”, as demonstrated by the Incarnation (i.e., the compassionate life and sacrificial death and glorious resurrection of God’s Son who best demonstrates that the “wideness of God’s love” is indeed very wide!)

The fact that God’s light (of truth) shines, and with varying degrees of brightness, upon every person, at all times and under all circumstances, and the fact that God works in the conscience of every person (who has an innate sense of ‘right and wrong’), and the fact that God is “not willing that anyone should perish”, and the fact that God’s Spirit (short of coercion) is powerfully influencing everyone to repent of sin and to turn in faith to the Creator God – these are some of the realities about God’s character and merciful actions which cause me to rejoice that I will (by God’s keeping grace) someday enjoy the presence of countless multitudes of persons who were ushered into heaven ‘on the merits of Christ alone’, even though these multitudes of persons were not fortunate enough on earth to hear about Christ and to make a personal and knowledgeable volitional commitment to Him as Savior. They were saved not because they had proper or full knowledge of Christ on earth, but because their hearts responded to the “Light of Truth” (which was “Christ Concealed”) as they received God’s Truth through “General Revelation” (Nature, Conscience, partial truth in various non-Christian Religions, etc.). It is not the accuracy of head knowledge, but the receptivity of the heart to the “light of God” (even if that “Light” is very incomplete), that determines the ultimate destiny

of the human soul – and only God, in the end, will be the Judge of each personal spiritual condition!

But, is there clearer “Biblical Grounds” for believing that, in the End, most (if not the overwhelming majority) of people will be “Saved” – and enjoy the glories of heaven (which was God’s intention at the time He created the human race)?

As mentioned before, a most respected Biblical scholar preacher/writer/evangelist is John Stott, and in his extensive commentary on the Book of Romans, he shares most wonderful insights on the “Wideness of God’s Mercy” (when he expounds the meaning of Romans 5:12-21). He notes (after considerable discussion on these amazing Scriptures): “Romans 5:12-21 gives us solid grounds for confidence that a very large number will be saved and that the scope of Christ’s redeeming work although not universal, will be extremely extensive... Although Adam’s disobedience led to universal sin and death, there has been a lavish extravagance about the grace of Christ, in both quality and quantity, which was entirely absent from Adam and all his works...The work of Christ will in the end be seen to be much more effective than the work of Adam; that Christ will raise to life many more than Adam will drag to death; and that God’s grace will flow in more abundant blessings than the consequences of Adam’s sin...He (Paul) is affirming that Christ’s work is superior to Adam’s not only in the nature of his action and achievement, but in the degree of its success.” (Romans, God’s Good News for the World; pg. 159-161)

One highly respected theologian/writer of a bygone day, but whose writings are still read with great profit (C.H. Hodge), affirms this belief in the “wideness of God’s mercy”. With conviction, he writes, “The number of the saved shall doubtless greatly exceed the number of the lost. We have reason to believe that the lost shall bear to the save no greater proportion than the inmates of a prison do to the mass of the community.” (Ibid; p. 161)

These are certain “foundation stones” upon which the entire superstructure of salvation rests. Namely: (1) God loves every person whom He has created, even though all are creatures of a “fallen race”, (2) God wants to save every human being from the “bondage of sin”, in life and after this earthly life, (3) Jesus alone provides salvation for the human race, through His atoning death and His powerful

resurrection, (4) Every person (sinner) is “savable”, that is, capable of being saved by Christ – all because of God’s gift to every person of “preventive grace” – the grace that “goes before” to prepare every human being for the convicting and the convincing works of the Spirit, which are prerequisites to a person being saved; (5) the Holy Spirit gives the gift of repentance and the gift of faith to every human being, but each human being (a God-created “free moral agent”) is capable of either accepting or of rejecting God’s gift of saving grace.

God has a “perfect will”, namely, the salvation of every human being. God has no “mysterious, divine decree” by which He decided (elected before the “foundation of the world”) to save a select number of humans and consequently to damn the remainder of humans in His creation! Such explanation of “God’s predestination” is both unbiblical and blasphemous and is an outrage against both God’s justice and His love!

The Bible makes it clear that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should be saved! God’s mercy is wider than the widest sea! It is His desire (because of the unlimited atonement of Christ) to “hide our sins in the deepest sea”, to “remove them as far as the East is from the West.” He wants to “hide our sins in the sea of His forgetfulness,” never to remember them again. To give us joy in place of sorrow. Peace in place of turmoil. Healing in place of brokenness. Dignity in place of shame. Fellowship in place of loneliness. Understanding in place of confusion. Wisdom in place of folly. Reconciliation in place of division. Love in place of enmity. Service in place of selfishness. Integration in place of shatteredness. Beauty in place of ugliness. Purity in place of licentiousness. Single-mindedness in place of double-mindedness. Generosity in place of stinginess. God-centered purpose in place of materialistic pursuits. Transformed life in place of spiritual deadness!

If the God of love and compassion and mercy and forgiveness and grace had His way, the creatures made in His “own image” would never have fallen into sin, in the beginning! But, because the representative of the human race (Adam) did fall into sin, the God of love had a “back-up plan” to rescue mankind (in the “event” that the “unthinkable” would happen, namely rebellion and disobedience rather than obedience, as a result of God’s critical test of Adam and Eve in the Garden). God introduced that “plan of salvation” soon as Adam and Eve “fell flat on their

faces” spiritually (Genesis 3:15). It took many generations before that “plan” was “consummated”, but “in the fullness of time” Jesus did come to realize and to fulfill that God-given plan, for the redemption of all humankind!

What more can God do than what He has already done? He has given us the “Finished Work” of His Son (through Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly intercession). He has given us the Holy Spirit, who “enlightens every man” who comes into the world, making it possible for every person (even those who are totally ignorant of the Incarnation) to repent and to believe in God (as each person best understands the person of God and the revelation of light given in various ways and in various degrees). God has, through “prevenient grace”, given to each person, made it possible for every person to call upon God in repentance and faith. God’s “common grace” (sometimes called “General Revelation”), and God’s “prevenient grace” (that is, the grace that “goes before”, preparing sinners for their reception of God’s salvation), and God’s “saving grace” (God’s enabling, power which accomplishes the justification and regeneration of sinners), and God’s “sanctifying grace” (God’s cleansing power which continuously works for the perfecting of Christians’ characters, to produce Christlikeness within them and outwardly in their behaviors) and God’s “dying grace” (God’s empowering presence which assures and comforts and sustains the followers of Christ – and also the ‘would-be’ followers of Christ – at the time of their deaths) - all of these manifestations of God’s grace (at various times and for various purposes), are always based, not on man’s merits or on his accomplishments, but solely on God’s nature of love!

God loves the human race – including the “least”, and the “last”, and the “overlooked”, and the “most unworthy”. The high and the low, the most gifted and the least gifted, the wealthy and the poor, the beautiful and the ugly, the powerful ones and the weak ones, the high profile ones and the most obscure ones, the highly educated ones and the most illiterate ones, the highly positioned ones and the most overlooked ones, the unusually beautiful ones and the outrightly repulsive ones, the young adults and the decrepit aging ones, the up-and-out moralistic sinners and the down-and-out immoral and ‘raw sinners!

If God would have his way, there would not be one person who would die in his (unrepented) sin! If God had His way (that is, if His “perfect will” were carried

out) there would be universal, spiritual health, as the result of the forgiveness of every sin of every person! None would perish, and all would enjoy abundant life on this earth (amidst problems and trials) and enjoy eternal life hereafter! Hell was prepared for the devil and his fallen angels (demons) – NOT for human beings! God is doing everything in His power (short of coercion) to keep every soul out of hell, and to take every human to heaven! But one's eternal destiny depends upon one thing, and one thing only – the kind of “heart response” that a person gives to God's revelation of Light that He gives to a person (even if that “Light” comes in a diminished form of “General Revelation” and not “Special Revelation”). Those only will be in heaven who have honestly and positively responded in their hearts to God's revelation of “Light” (whether it is response to the “Concealed Christ” or response to the “Known Christ”)!

It is encouraging for us members of a “Fallen Race” to know that God did not abandon us when, through our Race's Representative, the entire human race miserably “fell into sin! Through a rather long and complex plan (over a period of many centuries), God finally brought His Son into the world to accomplish His plan for “world redemption”. No human can fully understand the “mystery of iniquity (sin)”, or the “mystery of divinely–accomplished redemption through the cross and resurrection”, or the “mystery of the human free will” – but God nevertheless, mightily “works his miracles” of human transformation! There are millions of persons today, throughout the world in probably every country who are “openly acknowledging and serving Christ”, and doubtless (because of the universal “work of the Holy Spirit”), there are also many more persons whose hearts are turned toward the Living God, seeking Him as best as they know with their very limited knowledge and with their narrow opportunities, spiritually-speaking.

We humans seem to be impressed (even awe-struck) by large crowds –whether they are in an athletic stadium, or at a political convention, or even in a large sanctuary at a “mega-church”! But the “large crowd” surrounding the “Throne of God” in heaven will be “mammoth” (huge) (awe-inspiring) (overwhelming) compared to any human crowd on earth. God of that great gathering of the Saints gave the apostle John a vision for all the ages! He wrote, “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation,

tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: *'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'*" (Revelation 7:9-10)

Based on an understanding of the "wideness of God's mercy" which encompasses every human being on earth, - that mercy being extended to "*every nation, tribe, people and language*" (Revelation 7:9), through the "light that lighteth every person who comes into the world", revealing either the "concealed Christ" or the "known Christ" - it is likely that the vast majority of the entire human race will compose that "vast multitude that no one could count" around the throne of God, all praising the "Lamb of God"!

I believe that when (only by the grace and mercy of God) I become a participant in that vast crowd of "praising saints" in heaven, I shall come to know, throughout the "endless ages of eternity", the millions of God's children – from every century and from every nation and tribe and people group. I believe that many of them will be persons who learned about Jesus for the very first time, when they took their first "celestial breath" from heaven's atmosphere! I believe, as has been repeatedly stated in this book, that there will be many who will make heaven their eternal home, who put their trust in God, as God was revealed to them on earth (unfortunately) "very faintly" (through "General Revelation" instead of through "Special Revelation"). But these persons, whose hearts were most responsive to these "lesser forms of divine Light" (Nature, Truth from non-Christian Religions, untrained Conscience, Ethical Teachings of Philosophers like Aristotle and Plato, the truth of God faintly revealed through all forms of worldly Beauty, etc.) – these persons with "God-honoring and sincere hearts" (but without accurate head knowledge based on "Special Revelation" - will be standing beside the more fortunate Christians who responded on earth rightly with both their heads (knowledge) and their hearts (emotions) to "Special Revelation" of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection! Both will be there – the persons who on earth were deprived of Special Revelation (but who responded sincerely with their little knowledge to a "General Revelation"), and those who were fortunate enough to know God's "Special Revelation" (Incarnation) and to respond with both their head and heart to that greatest revelation! None will be excluded from heaven,

simply because of ignorance. God only expects people on earth to respond to the “degree” of “light” which they have been given – whether it is the much lesser “light” of “General Revelation” (which is “Christ concealed”), or whether it is the greatest degree of “light” which is “Special Revelation” (which is “Christ clearly revealed”)!

All will be in heaven who on earth “walked in the light of truth” as God gave them light. Some will enter heaven, possessing so much more knowledge of Jesus than others who received so much less light on earth and who possessed little or no accurate knowledge of Jesus. What God will judge, in the end of human existence, for every person, is not the accuracy of mental knowledge about God and Man and Sin and Jesus Christ and the intricacies of Salvation (atonement, justification, regeneration, sanctification, etc.), but the condition of the human heart (receptivity to the Holy Spirit’s multiple work of enlightenment, conviction, offer of forgiveness and new life, etc.).

If a person’s heart is right with God (and only God can fully and accurately determine this), then that person will be welcomed into God’s eternal kingdom, to enjoy the glories of heaven, along with the saints who early in their lives responded to the “revealed Christ” of “Special Revelation”! Both the ‘privileged ones’, and the ‘much less privileged ones’ will be together in heaven!

No person, regardless of the amount and the accuracy of knowledge that he possesses of Christ, will find out when he gets to heaven, that he possesses very much knowledge regarding the Holy Trinity (the God of Eternity)! All inhabitants of heaven – regardless of how little or how much knowledge of Christ they possessed on earth – will find themselves thrilled with the amount of knowledge of God (mentally and experientially) that they will progressively receive throughout the “endless ages of eternity”. There will be so much to learn about the infinite love of our eternal God, and God will not only teach us directly, but I believe He will use all His heavenly citizens to “teach each other”! I believe, as citizens of the heavenly kingdom, we will all enjoy sharing and hearing each other’s personal stories of divinely - wrought transformation, which we all experienced on earth, as a result of God’s Light that came to us in unique ways. If you felt ‘frustrated’ because, on earth, you as a believer had little opportunity (because you were a member of a tiny church in an obscure village, or because you were confined in a

prison in Russia for your 'Faith') to share God's mercy in your life and your unique testimony for Christ, well, in heaven you will have countless ages to "tell your story" to countless millions of the saints (who will also share their stories with you). Mutual rejoicing, and mutual praise for Christ the Wonderful and Merciful Savior!

Learning more and more about God, and yet never coming to an end in that learning experience - and all of this learning about God will result in more and greater worship of the "Holy Trinity of Love"!

So, how "wide is God's mercy"? Wider than any human can comprehend or imagine! And God's mercy and grace and love will keep all the children of God on their knees and on their feet, praising the Three-In-One (Our Tri-une God) forever!

There's a wideness in God' mercy  
Like the wideness of the sea;  
There's a kindness in his justice  
Which is more than liberty.  
There is no place where earth's sorrows  
Are more felt than up in heaven;  
There is no place where earth's failings  
Have such kindly judgment given.  
There is grace enough for thousands  
Of new worlds as great as this;  
There is room for fresh creations  
In that upper home of bliss.  
For the love of God is broader  
Than the measure of man's mind;  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.

But we make his love too narrow  
By false limits of our own;  
And we magnify his strictness  
With zeal he will not own.  
If our love were but more simple,  
We should take him at his word;  
And our lives would be all sunshine  
In the sweetness of our Lord.

By Frederick W. Faber (1814-1863)

During one period of my life, I spent several months reading the daily devotional book, entitled "In Christ" by the great missionary-evangelist E. Stanley Jones (one of my very favorite authors who has helped me immensely to grow in my knowledge and spiritual understanding for many years).

I read a passage that fascinated me - a passage that was very thought-provoking. That passage is as follows: "Someone asked 'Why wasn't Gandhi a Christian?' The reply is that he never really saw Jesus through the racialism of South Africa. The fact is that when Gandhi in that next world sees Jesus as He is, he will probably fall at His feet and say, 'My Lord and my God.'" (page 345)

This quotation by this great writer and evangelist (who, I think, it is said preached more sermons than any person in history - perhaps 60,000 sermons!) brings up questions that, of course, cannot be fully answered. Perhaps there will be multitudes of persons who, like Gandhi "never really saw Jesus" here on earth, because of many factors (like racialism, ignorance of the true Gospel, etc, etc). Surely, the God of mercy will not turn His back upon these many unfortunate (ignorant) persons who would immediately repent and follow Christ if they would have "really seen Jesus" here on earth. Like Gandhi, (according to E. Stanley Jones' belief) they will, in the "next world" see Jesus as He is in all His amazing love and mercy and beauty, and they will gladly fall down at His feet and say "My Lord and my God"! In other words, the many on this earth who did not adequately and accurately have a chance to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, will (after they physically die) have opportunity to behold Jesus for who He really is, and they will fall down and wholeheartedly worship Him! He whom they longed for during their earthly pilgrimage (but failed to find because of ignorance or confusion or misguided seeking), will be there in the presence of Christ who will have outstretched arms to give a warm welcome to eternal life! Why? Because the One who truly knows the heart of all persons who have ever lived, will not allow those to perish who truly yearned for truth and love and intimate fellowship with the true God of the Universe (and with His blessed Son and Spirit), but who remained ignorant of His true personhood while on earth. The darkness that surrounded such unfortunate souls on earth (who unsuccessfully groped, like Gandhi, after the true God during their hard pilgrimage on this terrestrial planet), will be gloriously introduced to the Light that shines forever - namely, the kind face of a caring and forgiving and understanding and merciful God! Such torn and battered and ignorant souls will be taken into the warm embrace of the tender arms of the loving Heavenly Father! No more darkness, but eternal light! No more hurts, but eternal healing and health! No more loneliness, but eternal fellowship and friendship! No more sadness and sorrow, but joy and laughter and happiness forevermore! No more confusion and ignorance, but understanding and wisdom and knowledge that shall unfold and increase forever! No more dullness and drabness and monotony, but eternal delights and beauty and creativity and growth in heavenly awareness! Worshiping the triune God forever! Coming gradually to know the heavenly saints, as the ages of eternity unfold. Becoming more like God forever, but never becoming gods. Just heavenly citizens, loving God supremely and loving others joyously and humbly!

Some may criticize this idea because it advances what they think is a concept of a "second chance" after physical death for some people, an idea they think is both unBiblical and heretical. But (along with one of the most evangelical, holiness writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, E. Stanley Jones) we are not advocating a "second chance" for rebellious sinners who die in an unrepentant state.

Rather, we are advocating an “adequate chance” for persons who did not have the mental or spiritual resources on earth to make an understanding (intelligent) commitment to Christ as Savior and Lord. The misconceptions regarding true Christian belief were so great in the life of the godly Gandhi that he was overwhelmingly hindered in making an intelligent decision to accept Christ as his personal Savior - even though he deeply admired Christ and he greatly respected Christ’s “Sermon on the Mount”. Many, like Gandhi, are sincerely “walking the light of the truth” as they best understand it (such as countless numbers of Muslims and Buddhists and Hindus like Gandhi). God, the all-together merciful One, alone can judge the condition of all persons’ hearts. He will not condemn anyone to hell, simply because of ignorance! All persons, whether on earth or in eternity will be given sufficient knowledge regarding the person and redemptive work of Jesus Christ, to allow every person to exercise his/her will positively to surrender to the Lordship of Christ. Like Gandhi, I believe there will be multitudes of persons who, because they were in the darkness of ignorance regarding the saving power of Christ, and thus made no volitional commitment to accept the Savior, will nevertheless in eternity have their spiritual eyes opened to behold the reality of Christ’s personhood and saving power, and these spiritually-hungry persons will fall of their knees and they will say “My Lord and My God!”

If some emphatically and skeptically declare that this idea is unBiblical - the idea of an adequate chance for many to accept Christ in eternity because they did not have that chance while they lived on earth - let such skeptics (including some evangelical Christians) think long and hard about the meaning and the implications of the “Mercy of our God”. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance! And why should it be impossible for some (probably many) persons to experience repentance after their souls have left their bodies? Again, we are not talking about rebellious people - people who have intentionally rejected Christ after adequate opportunities have been given to them - but rather we are talking about the masses of unfortunate (ignorant) people who, on earth, never had unbiased, clear, simple, adequate opportunities to intelligently and honestly accept Christ.

Some may still accuse those (like me) who hold this viewpoint regarding the “wideness of God’s mercy” that they advocate a “second chance” for some people after they die. If critics (including most evangelical Christians) want to accuse me (along with many other such advocates like the highly respected evangelical writer-evangelist E. Stanley Jones) of believing in an unBiblical doctrine, “so be it”! What is so wrong (or unBiblical) in believing that God’s Mercy is so wide that it encompasses all persons on earth, in all different kinds of circumstances - including persons who unfortunately have never read the Bible, persons who have never met even one true Christian, persons who are surrounded from their birth to their death by pagan people who practice heathen rituals, persons who are “brainwashed” from earliest childhood to think certain ways and to do certain things that are totally alien to the teachings and the practices of true Christianity? Only God knows the heart of every person. God, in mercy and in justice has nothing but love in His great heart for these broken and ignorant and spiritually-hungry persons! Adequate chance for acceptance of Christ will be given all persons - either on this earth or in eternity!