

VERDICT

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Towards a Transreligious Faith

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Editorial Introduction

In this issue of *Verdict* we wish to press further along the path traversed in recent issues on resurrection, Biblicism, qualified universalism and “The Spirit of Jesus versus Christianity.’ 1 Some of our readers may be apprehensive about where our journey may lead. Sometimes we feel the same way ourselves. If only we could know where this pilgrimage might lead in the next five or ten years! Yet the security and boredom of a defunct Western Christianity cannot be compared with the exhilaration of the harrowing journey along these untraversed paths.

If some of our proposals appear to be startlingly new or contrary to respected Christian tradition, we appeal to our readers not to reject them on that account. The Christian church has often been notoriously slow to confront important issues. Again and again it has required the stark lessons of history and the pressure of crisis to force theologians to revise their theology. For centuries the church thought it could live with the institution of slavery. It took nearly two thousand years to change its mind on that issue. A similar observation could be made about religious toleration, European colonization, and the status of women and the scientific accuracy of the biblical world-view. Again and again the Christian religion has been forced to retract positions that were confidently asserted on the basis that “the Bible says...”

Before proceeding with this issue of *Verdict*, we wish to acknowledge our indebtedness to Roman Catholic scholar Walbert Buhlmann for his outstanding book *God’s Chosen Peoples*. 2 Buhlmann represents a new generation of Catholic thinkers who today are working on the front line of religious research. It is only when we discuss the solution to the problem of religious boundaries that we point in a different direction. For further reading we cannot recommend Buhlmann’s book too highly. *God’s Chosen Peoples*.

Come, let us reason together. R. D. B.

The Cult of the Elect

One of the most prominent features of biblical religion—the Judeo-Christian faith—is that of election. In both Testaments we frequently encounter the words *chosen* and *elect* as well as other expressions which convey the thought that certain people are distinguished from the rest of mankind and sustain a special relationship to God. In the Old Testament the Jews were the “chosen people.” In the New Testament the Christians became the new people of God. In all this we have the biblical principle of particularism.

Of course, other passages in the Bible make it clear that God is not only the God of Jews and Christians; he also loves and cares for non-Jews and non-Christians and somehow wants them to share in his saving acts. In all this we encounter the biblical principle of universalism.

Throughout history both Jews and Christians have experienced great difficulty in holding these two biblical principles in proper tension. We say, “Experienced” to indicate that this is not merely an abstract theological difficulty but a very practical one. To put it bluntly, the fruit of particularism throughout history has been an embarrassing disaster. To begin with, the chosen people of the Old Testament felt that it was not only their right but their sacred duty to expel the non-chosen from their settlements and even to exterminate them without mercy. To justify wholesale genocide, later Old Testament writers did not hesitate to put this mandate of wholesale slaughter in the mouth of Moses 3 or even Yahweh himself.

“When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgasbites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than yourselves, and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them; then you must utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, and show no mercy to them.

“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth.” – Deut. 7:1, 2, 6.

“And you shall destroy all the peoples that the Lord your God will give over to you, your eye shall not pity them.” – Deut. 7:16.

“Moreover the Lord your God will send hornets among them, until those who are left and hide themselves from you are destroyed. You shall not be in dread of them, for the Lord your God is in the midst of you, a great and terrible God. The Lord your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you may not make an end of them at once, lest the wild beasts grow too numerous for you. But the Lord your God will give them over to you, and throw them into great confusion, until they are destroyed. And he will give their kings into your hand and you shall make their name perish from under heaven not a man shall be able to stand against you, until you have destroyed them,” – Deut 7:20-24.

“Hear, O, Israel; you are to pass over the Jordan this day, to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourselves, cities great and fortified up to heaven, a people great and tall, the sons of the Anakim, whom you know, and of whom you have heard it said, ‘Who can stand before the sons of Anak?’ Know therefore this day that he who goes over before you as a devouring fire is the Lord your God; he will destroy them and subdue them before you; so you shall drive them out, and make them perish quickly, as the Lord has promised you.” – Deut. 9:1-3.

Frankly, we cannot see how these acts of Israel toward their neighbors differed in principle from the actions of the Nazis toward the Jews— unless we plead that the first atrocities were committed in a barbarous, pre-Christian age.

There were, of course, other passages in the books of Moses which commanded Israel to be kind to foreigners just as God had been kind to Israel. The book of Jonah reminded Israel that God even took pity on a great city that was Israel’s archenemy. Deutero-Isaiah rose above the narrow provincialism of his contemporaries and exulted in a saving justice which would reach to the ends of the earth and lighten the Gentiles.

But the Jews generally believed that the natural corollary of their being chosen was that others were un-chosen. The Jews were the clean. The rest were the unclean. Particularism meant exclusivism. The laws of Moses were a wall to shut the Jews in and to shut the Gentiles out. Naturally, this caused hostility on both sides (Eph. 2:14). The Jews contemptuously called the Gentiles “goyim”— a pejorative term like the expressions “hun,” “wog,” “gook,” “nigger,” etc. We know that by the time of Jesus the atmosphere of hostility between the chosen and non-chosen had reached an explosive point.

Let us now turn to the history of the Christian people to see whether we have fared any better. In his book, *God’s Chosen Peoples*, Walbert Buhlmann confronts us with the stark facts of Christian history. This history, of course, is openly available from countless sources, but as an honest scholar, Buhlmann brings the facts of Christian triumphalism together in a startling and humiliating way. He pictures the new people of God setting out on their course through history imbued with the idea that they alone were the elect and the rest of mankind were damned— unless they came to acknowledge the truth uniquely possessed by Christians. Beyond the borders of Christendom lay “barbarism and the realm of Satan— hence, no tolerance, no compromise, only conflict.” 4

How did the rest of mankind— the Christian church’s partners in history— fare at the hands of God’s chosen people? Buhlmann recounts the centuries of mistreatment of Jews at the hands of Christians.

“The church in this age killed a good many more martyrs than it produced from its own ranks”. 5

Buhlmann hides nothing. The church even slaughtered her own children in the person of the so-called heretics. Of the dread Inquisition he says:

It is said that the Inquisition sacrificed as many as ten million human beings. This is a gross exaggeration. But there is no exaggerating the cruelty of the institution, nor any justifying it, nor even any glossing over it. The only explanation is the grossly misled spirit of the times. The real heretics, the real traitors to the gospel, were those who conducted the affair! 6

Then Buhlmann traces the bigotry expressed in the church's missionary enterprises, not neglecting the mutual vilification of missionaries practiced by different sections of the church.

It now appears that the traditional missionary was simply exclusivist, intolerant, and aggressive in his or her judgment of "the others". 7

Buhlmann shows how the Christian approach to other religions was altogether too negative. Christian spokesmen generally relegated Muslims to the great mass of the damned.

The true God could not dwell among infidels or hear their prayers. 8

As for the church's missionary efforts for the Aztec, Incan and Mayan cultures in Latin America, Buhlmann says:

Religious zeal and inhuman cruelty went hand in hand.... "It is far and away the cruellest and bloodiest chapter in recorded world history before 1933." 9

The Christians who settled colonial America saw themselves as God's elect who even reenacted the ancient Exodus. They fled the tyranny of the Old World and, like Israel, crossed the sea to settle in the new Promised Land. The indigenous Indians were regarded as Canaanites, to be dispossessed, driven out or slaughtered. Blacks were enslaved because this was judged proper for the descendants of "Ham." In a popular catechism it was argued that slaves were privileged to be plucked out of pagan Africa and, even as slaves, given the opportunity to hear the gospel.

The Christian (Calvinistic) Boers also assumed that they were like the chosen people of the Exodus when they undertook their great trek through the heart of Africa. They saw themselves passing through the desert on their way to the new Promised Land. The black heathen represented the Canaanite enemy, against whom the whites believed they had divine right on their side.

This whole unhealthy situation is once more the fruit of a "chosen people" ideology. 10

Buhlmann concludes his sketch of Christian history:

We have taken six slices of history, lengthwise, and have examined how the church dealt or misdealt with its six groups of associates in history. Now we may feel a certain depression, or a certain humility. We certainly cannot simply draw a glad breath and thank God for this history. No, we go our way pensively, with a feeling of anxiety. Why did things have to be that way? Why did the church so often talk past its partners, talk against them, and condemn them without having heard them? The only thing we both did together was fight. 11

Our survey of this history of unsalvation has been in broad strokes, like the view from an overpassing satellite. Were we to resurrect the details from the archives, the reader would shudder, scarcely able to believe the facts of history. Thus any discomfort our pages may have occasioned here and there in their presentation of these facts is only the faintest echo of the furious indignation of those whom the church has persecuted and humiliated. 12

At the root of the unsalvation history we have just portrayed is not the theology of election, but what became of it: an ideology of election. It was an ideology of election that allied itself with might, generating a mentality of supremacy, exclusivism, and intolerance, with devastating consequences. True, intolerance can seem all too closely bound up with revelation and prophetic speech. The prophet speaks and acts by God's commission. Whoever opposes him or her opposes God. ...

We have to go back and question all the "convictions" that led to such absurdities. We must subject them to a critique based on the biblical grounds they claim, and much will have to be demythologized. ... It will not be out of place to take cognizance of certain voices raised in judgment of this ideology of election; they support the analysis that will come later.

Arnold Toynbee:

"It is a painful irony of human history that the acknowledgment of one sole God and the concept that all human beings are brothers and sisters before God, should at the same time have brought with it intolerance and persecution."...

F. Heer

"There is no world religion, and no human society that has again and again amassed in its bosom the quantity of dynamite that 'Christian society' has... Again and again it has manufactured its 'deadly enemies' and its scapegoats. The church constituted itself the permanent pyre for the burning of 'heretics' of right and left."

Heer goes on to speak of the self-enclosure of the church as a pathological social structure, and concludes: "Christianity is guilty of depriving the world of hope".

Last, let us hear the voice of a New World black, Frantz Fanon:

"This Europe, which has never stopped talking about 'human beings', which has never ceased crying that it cares only for human beings! Today we know the suffering with which humanity has paid for every one of the victories of the European spirit. Up, mates, Europe is played out, and for good! We shall have to find something else."

Yes, the church, by its exclusivism, has made itself into a kind of sect. Instead of proclaiming the oneness of all the men and women of God, and then living by its own model, it has exalted itself and condemned the others. This simply cannot continue. This is the direction in which things have been going, but thank God, they can go no further. 13

It would be different if the history we have briefly cited represented merely a few aberrations of the Christian religion. We could then argue that such aberrations were only barnacles on the good ship and not representative of the fundamental nature of the ship itself. But we are forced to acknowledge that the Christian religion generally seems to be imbued with an inherent spirit of intolerance and arrogance toward others, especially toward other religions. Buhlmann's eye is mainly on what we might call "the great church." But those of us who have our roots in the smaller, sectarian (evangelical?) churches must admit that the same spirit rules there, often in a fiercer degree. Even the pacifist sects who eschew all forms of physical violence can dominate, manipulate and persecute by all kinds of psychological and social pressure. A Christian sect generally regards itself as God's special elect, the little remnant. Other Christians are, at best, second-class citizens of God's kingdom, and those outside Christianity are lost souls unless they can be brought to the Christian religion. Thus, that non-Christians cannot be saved without our works.

For hundreds of years, then, we have constrained God's free and generous promise of salvation. We have institutionalized it, made it dependent upon the human efforts of the baptizing missionaries and of the pagans who had themselves baptized. We have made ourselves more important than God. We have fettered the giving hand of God. 14

Yes, it is difficult to be humble and apparently quite impossible not to be arrogant when our religion is utterly unique and utterly right while all others are foolish, deceived and doomed to perdition.

The Old Testament's Bond with Other Religions

The claim to "special people" status is grounded in the idea of possessing a unique religion. If Israel is a unique people, she must have a unique religion. Many arguments have been advanced to demonstrate the uniqueness of Old Testament religion. However, we will now review evidence that points in another direction: Old Testament religion is not as unique as is commonly supposed.

The Chosen People

The Old Testament religion of the chosen people finds counterparts everywhere.

"The populations of the Congo have a stubborn opinion concerning their origin, which they represent to be the most noble and most eminent of all the world...They imagine their territory to be not merely the broadest, but also the luckiest, richest, and most beautiful part of the world...and it is their constant contention that, when he created the universe, God assigned the constitution of the remainder of the world to his angels and other loyal minions, but reserved unto himself the formation of the Ethiopian lands, and most especially the kingdoms of the Conga, after his sublime conception and taste. Puffed up by the excellence of these supposed principles of theirs, they presume

themselves to be the world's first human beings." 15

In 1910, M. Merker wrote about the Masai shepherds of East Africa:

"The most salient characteristic of the Masai is their national pride, based on their religious notion that they are the chosen people of God. God is supposed to have created the world and all that is in it for them alone. All non-Masai are considered to be inferior to the Masai. This is the explanation for the pride and deep scorn with which they regard the sedentary black peoples— who do not know Ngai, the Masai Supreme Being, and hence have no right to any of the good things created by him. Thus these latter are condemned to wring their daily sustenance from the earth in the sweat of their toil; God cares for the Masai, on the other hand, as for his own children"

Hence, Merker continues, the Masai think they have the right to assault and plunder the other tribes. Not the most attractive picture of a "chosen people"!

Of another shepherd people, the Tutsi of Rwanda and Burundi, J. P. Hallet reported in 1966 their belief that

"their region is not only the greatest and most civilized on earth, but the center of the universe itself. They take their own propaganda very seriously, and consider themselves the "chosen people"— the descendants of the Ybirnanuka, or first human beings, who fell to earth through a hole in the sky and were chosen to rule the world forever and ever." 16

The religions of Ghana are most strikingly like that of the Old Testament. 17

The African tribe called the Galla worship the Supreme Creator they call Waka.

They feel superior to polytheistic peoples, and look down on them as of little worth. They feel themselves called to vanquish them, and either lead them to faith in Waka or exterminate them. 18

The infamous Genghis Khan of the thirteenth century believed in heaven's favor and support, especially toward his own people. He was so sure of his heavenly mission that opposition to his plans was regarded as an outrage against heaven. He is said to have slaughtered some thirty million people in his lifetime.

His second successor, Kuyuk (1246-1258), made answer to the question of papal delegate John of Piano Carpini as to why they had killed so many persons including Christians:

"Genghis Khan and Kagan have only carried out the plan of God. Those peoples had showed themselves arrogant. They put our emissaries to death. It was, then, the eternal God who punished and annihilated those peoples. It is in the power of God that all regions have been delivered unto us, from the rising sun even unto its going down. How, can anyone have accomplished such things but by the command of God?"

One could think one were reading the Old Testament. 19

The entire caste system of India, with the Brahmins as the elite, priestly caste, has its basis in religious particularism. Buhlmann cites a Buddhist sect in Japan who feel that Japan is the holy land and their task is to bring salvation to all their people and to

all humanity. In like manner:

Islam has always understood itself as a very exclusive community, just as Christianity has. Those outside count for nothing. They are only invited to enter the “House of Islam”. But no Muslim dare leave that house. This would be social death. Islam is theocratic, and religion is thereby linked to force. The Koran is civil law, too, just as was the Torah in the Old Testament. 20

The same conviction of being heaven’s chosen was embodied in the nations of the Christian West and here found such expressions as white supremacy, colonialism and fascism. Many books have been written on the “redeemer nation” mentality of America— a mentality which has played no small part in missions and foreign policy.

Most peoples, on all continents, nourish and foster a marked ethnocentrism, generally accentuated and supported by religion. They acknowledge a deity as the ultimate foundation of their identity as a people. Consequently, they live in a kind of covenant with God. They see themselves as an altogether special people— as the people of God, and hence explicitly or implicitly, a chosen people.

It suddenly strikes us that the notion of election by God, or covenant with God, has nothing exclusively, or even originally, to do with Israel. There were older peoples than those nomadic tribes of the Sinai who believed themselves to be especially close to God. Instructed by our insights and conclusions it would behoove us to rethink the theology of covenant. 21

The Creation Stories

The Genesis story of the creation and fall has its counterpart in other religions all over the world. The German Africologist, H. Baumann, collected and analyzed some two thousand creation myths from all over Africa. These creation myths have been the principal source for studies on African notions of God. Such traditions were orally transmitted from generation to generation.

It is recounted in most of the creation myths that God, often through the intermediary of other beings, first created the world, then lowered human beings from heaven by a kind of rope, or called them forth from the water, or formed them from clay. There was, we are told, a very ancient time when God lived with human beings, and in those days human beings lived in luxury, knowing neither sickness nor death. But then they fell. Content with neither sun nor rain nor anything else, not even with a feast given by God himself; they simply murmured at everything. Or else a woman, bidden by God to take a sealed box to a determined place, was overcome by curiosity on the way, opened the box, and out came a serpent and God withdrew. From then on, need, sickness and death held sway. 22

The Altai Tatam of southern Siberia have preserved their ancient belief practically intact, whereas the Turkish peoples have adopted Islam or Orthodox Christianity. The Altai have a complicated cosmology. In the uppermost stratum of the sky dwells the “Gracious Lord Heaven”, Tengere Kaira Karn, and there rules the destiny of the universe. From him, by emanation, other deities came to be. The Altai myths contain the scenario of a temptation and fall, with a forbidden food, a serpent and human beings who grew ashamed and hid themselves behind a tree. There follows the curse of the human beings and of the devil. Then God withdraws. This account, ethnologically very old, is of course strikingly like that of the Book of Genesis. 23

Buhlmann also cites the case of the primitive Toba-Batak people in Sumatra. Indonesia:

They had a great number of creation myths, explains Sinaga, and these testify to “Mulajadi na Bolon” as creator. He never began, and he will never die; “in the beginning” he made the earth and all that exists; there are other deities, but it is Mulajadi who has made them. The first human beings came forth from an egg. Humans lived in a happy land at first, with a River of Life and a Tree of Life, and God was close to them; but then they prayed no longer, showed themselves to be prideful, and God withdrew; still, he watches over their moral conduct just as before. 24

Furthermore, Indian tribes in America and aboriginal tribes in Australia and New Guinea all had their myths of creation and the primordial age.

We now know that the ancient Babylonians, Egyptians and Canaanites also had their creation myths. The Genesis stories are not original with the people of Israel. Literary scholarship has amply demonstrated that the Israelites borrowed myths from their surrounding cultures, including the creation stories they encountered everywhere in the ancient Middle East. These stories were reworked and placed in a setting consistent with Israel’s own revelation of God.

Monotheism

It is well known that the religion of Israel was noted for its consistent and uncompromising monotheism. It could be argued that this was the Old Testament’s special contribution to religious thinking. Yet belief in one Supreme Creator of heaven and earth is not unique to biblical religion. This has also been found in other religions all over the earth.

The fact of faith in God among most of the peoples of Africa can no longer be seriously disputed. True, there are no temples, no statues, and no creeds. But it is enough to observe the daily life of the people, and get acquainted with it from the inside. This is something that white observers were long in no position to do. They saw only “idols”, “witchcraft”, “amusing rituals”, and wrote everything off as “stupid”. For us outsiders, the God of the Africans long remained the Great Unknown.

But missionaries and other researchers have succeeded in discovering more and more of him. His are a hundred names— the Ibo call him Chukwa, the Ashanti, Nyame, the Ila, Leza. The Luo call him Nyasi. The Yoruba name for him is Olodumare. In East Africa the name Mungu, or Mulungu, has great currency. In Zaire it is Nzambi. From Lake Victoria to Rhodesia we find forms such as Olumbe, Lubumba, Kiumbi, Mumb, and so on. 25

It is true that these primitive religions revere a whole hierarchy of spirits or deities, but beyond and above them a Supreme Creator is generally quite clearly acknowledged. This becomes clear not only through the creation myths of primitive religionists but also in their prayers. Many of them are startlingly similar to some of our best-loved Old Testament psalms.

Buhlmann relates this personal story:

In my first year as a missionary in Tanganyika, in 1951, I had a beautiful experience of this total self-surrender to the one God. There were no missionary sisters at Mchombe station in those days, nor any African medical personnel either, and I had to be on call for the sick two days a week. I handled from fifty to eighty patients on those days, doing what I could for their everyday African ailments. One day there stood before me a youth of about twenty, tall and very thin, with a cough and a fever. I asked him what I could do for him. "Can't you see?" he replied. I soon determined that he was in the advanced stages of tuberculosis, and that there was simply nothing I could do for him. He was a "pagan" as they say in the books, and had come to our remote mission station for the first time, lodging with acquaintances in the vicinity. I gave him a tonic and promised to come to see him in a few days at the farmstead.

I did go to see him, and brought him more tonic and a small quantity of snuff. I took the occasion to attempt to prepare him for baptism. But before I began to instruct him I wanted to know what he knew about God. "Risasi ya Ngombe, what do you think— how many gods are there?" He answered unhesitatingly, "There can only be one God. There is only one God." Next I asked, "And what do you think, what does God do?" Risasi ya Ngombe thought a moment, then replied, "*Anatungalia*. He looks at us."

What a beautiful answer. Few Christians could have given such an answer. This "pagan", then, exhausted, fatally ill, and hunched at the door of his hut, lived in the gaze of God, in the presence of God. "Your answer is very beautiful, Risasi ya Ngombe," I said. "This God you know and honor is my God too, the God of the Christians, the God of all men and women. He has done things for human beings that you do not yet know" and I began to tell him about Jesus. He listened to me, was astonished, and believed. 26

So Buhlmann concludes his survey of Africa:

We have considered the religious concepts of three African cultural classes— Pygmies, shepherds, and farmers and hunters. One conclusion is evident: this is authentic religion, profound and spontaneous, permeating the whole life of a human being. To be sure, the variety of its concrete images is very great, but in most cases they constitute a hierarchy, culminating in a pinnacle, which is God— who was before human beings, who created human beings, and who in mysterious ways dwells with his human beings. This picture is clearest in the case of the Pygmies and shepherd peoples, but it is true for the farmers and hunters as well:

"The African is incurably religious. . . His or her view of the world is incomprehensible without the presence of him who stands above and beyond the world, and who nevertheless composes all things in unity.' 27

It is a discovery of considerable weight to be able to assert that the Africans, quite consciously, have stood in the presence of a creating God and have found in him an ultimate meaning for their lives. 28

Next Buhlmann cites the aborigines of Asia and Australia and then the Indians of America. They not only knew and called upon the Supreme Creator, but many of their religions called him "Father" or "Grandfather." For example, here is a prayer from a primitive Indian tribe:

"My father, Man up there, Creator, Food-Giver, hear! Be near us poor beings who have need of

blessings spiritual and bodily. May the people gathered here in this tent be blessed. My Father, have mercy on us. Remember we are your children, from the time when you created sky and earth. My Grandfather, Light of the Earth, please look down here, on your poor, needy people, so that whatever they do for your sake may please you. Our Father, Man up there, here is the pipe you have given us as a sign of your great love. Grant that we may better love one another. Have mercy on us all, and let us rise up now in safety and security. Especially, give the nation increase, that your holy ceremonies can continue. May we fight with evil, and conquer. We ask you to keep us.” 29

But Buhlmann laments:

In all of this abounding religious wealth the Spanish conquerors, as well as the majority of missionaries, saw only superstition, idolatry, and diabolical mimicry. After all, they had come from the land of the Inquisition, and in the time of the Counter-Reformation. They would strike no false compromise. It was believed that one could please God by destroying the idols and building the churches out of the stones of the temples they had destroyed— on the ruins of the Devil’s religion. 30

We do not deny that crudities, stupidities, superstitions and even elements of the demonic exist in these religions. But Christian missionaries were too prone to think that their religion was altogether pure and that other religions possessed no salutary features. They thought it was their task to destroy all vestiges of these evil religions and often the cultures of the people as well.

It is often very difficult for Western Christians to discern anything noble or salutary in the great Eastern religions, especially since the West does not understand Eastern thinking. Yet Buhlmann shows that even in Hinduism there is a belief in the Supreme God above all the deities.

In the Bhagavadgita God’s personal love for human beings is set forth graphically and tangibly. 31

The great Gandhi, a Hindu, had much to teach the Christian West when it came to exhibiting a nonsectarian spirit. Said he, “The one God wills the brotherhood of all.” 32

So Buhlmann concludes:

What we found in...is repeated and confirmed in Asia and America. People after people everywhere, on continent after continent, lift heart and hands to heaven, and see to it that their children do the same. Everywhere, among the most divergent cultural strata, we meet with the consciousness of a primary mystery and ultimate reality, a more or less clearly recognized supreme being, God. This God is far and yet near, mysterious and yet the most self-evident being in the world, cloaked in awe and yet invoked as “Father”. 33

One thing is certain, that as far back into the dark corridors of human existence as history’s light can shine, God was always there, as God of the peoples. There is no people that has not sought him and found him, no people to whom he has not revealed himself. 34

Messianic Hope

One of the most prominent features of Old Testament religion was its Messianic hope. Like the resurrection hope, it did not find full and clear expression at the beginning. At first the hope was implicit; but *like* a seed that grows, it found its full expression in the late Judaism of the inter-testamental period.

Researchers, anthropologists and missionaries have encountered parallel hopes among other races and religions around the world. Buhlmann shows that a Messianic hope was widespread among the African religions. This not only prepared them to embrace Christianity more easily, but it also made them more vulnerable to modern political messiahs who have frequently assumed such titles as Redeemer, Savior, etc. Buhlmann cites examples of Messianic hope among the Indian religions of America and the Hindu religion of Asia. Jaroslav Pelikan states that in the Greco-Roman culture of pre-Christian times there were expectations of the birth of a child who would usher in a golden age. Pelikan makes this remarkable point:

The disciples of Jesus, in their effort to explain the meaning of his message and work to their world during the first three or four centuries, carried out their mission on the growing assumption that there was no culture “where a Christ is not expected” and that therefore, in his person and in his teaching, in his life and in his death, Jesus represented the divine answer to a question that had in fact been asked everywhere, the divine fulfillment of an aspiration that was universal. 35

Old Testament Borrowings from Other Religions

We once thought that Israel lived in a cultural and religious island surrounded by a sea of paganism. Historical criticism has helped us recognize that Israel, too, was part of the ancient Eastern world and naturally lived and thought within the framework of the life and thinking of that era. It shared the prescientific view of the world in which it lived.

We have noted that Israel borrowed myths which existed for thousands of years before Genesis was written. Inspired by God’s Spirit; the Israelites excluded elements that were out of harmony with their revelation of God and placed these myths in a setting peculiar to their own religious traditions.

We find a similar pattern in the laws of Moses or Jewish Torah. Very little of the Torah was original with Israel. Most of the material in the Jewish religion was borrowed from Israel’s neighbors. Circumcision, food taboos, animal sacrifices, laws to govern the disposition of slaves, the idea of a Suzerainty-type treaty with the deity, even the basic prescriptions and proscriptions of daily life— all these things preexisted among the life and religions of other peoples.

The originality and genius of the Old Testament authors consisted in this that; although they took over the civil laws of other peoples, they placed the whole of life under the absolute authority of

We must avoid setting up the Old Testament in opposition to other holy books. Probably the greater part of the Old Testament originated in other sacred writings, or in pre-Judaic and extra-Judaic oral tradition, which are no longer extant. M. Smith caused a sensation thirty years ago when he discovered, in the ancient texts of neighbors of Israel, a single god emerging from the multitude of gods and goddesses and being accorded special reverence; then this god's activity in nature, and the history of his people, receiving prominence; this god being lauded as just and gracious, rewarding good and punishing evil; his relations with human beings resting on some manner of agreement or covenant; and his sending his prophets to announce reward or judgment in his name.

This is not to say that the religion of the Old Testament is nothing more than a footnote to that of the Babylonians. It does mean that the religions of other peoples were incorporated into the Old Testament. 37

The Common Bond of Religion Itself

That which the Old Testament has in common with people of every era all over the world is religion itself. We have already noted that the African is "incurably religious." The same may be said of all people. This is what Israel has in common with the entire human race. In order to grasp the significance of this common bond, we need to ponder the meaning of religion itself.

Religion is born of two inescapable realities which confront the human species. First; human beings are confronted with the reality that God is. There are no people to whom he has not revealed himself. Paul simply says that all sinners know that God is and are therefore without excuse (Rom. 1:20). This knowledge also leaves them no peace. The second reality which confronts man is death. 38 Man lives with the fear of death every moment of his life. This, in fact; permeates everything he does. It may be banished from the conscious mind by various mental mechanisms. Indeed, it must be sublimated from continual open consciousness in order for a person to function as a normal human being. Aside from the knowledge of God, the fear of death is the most determinative factor in human behavior. In his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Denial of Death*, Becker unmasked the shocking truth that much of human activity springs from denying the reality of death. 39 This confirms the biblical statement that it is the fear of death which holds us in bondage (Heb. 2:15) — that is to say, which causes us to sin (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:56).

This also explains why people everywhere are incurably religious. Religion is born of the fear of death. It springs from the human effort to come to terms with or to conquer what the Bible calls "the last enemy" and "the king of terrors" (1 Cor. 15:26; Job 18:14).

For example, the entire ritual system of Old Testament religion was preoccupied with death. There was the continual killing of animals and handling of blood, which revolved around the concept of ritual cleanness and uncleanness. What was the ultimate

uncleanness that this religion was concerned with? Not sin, but death! It is clear from the Levitical laws that every uncleanness only pointed to what the Mishnah Kelim calls “the father of fathers of defilement”— death. 40 Death, of course, is associated with the reality that God is. Man senses that death is the sentence of God and separation from God— from life’s true meaning and ultimate fulfillment.

Since religion is the human effort to establish order in the face of chaos, stability in the face of dissolution, religion is identified with the human effort to arrange order, continuity and stability. Religion expresses itself in a plethora of rites, traditions, monuments, prescriptions and proscriptions, books, priests or tribal elders which designate the way of right beliefs and practices from generation to generation. Religion therefore belongs to what Paul calls letter, elementary principles, handwriting of decrees, Law (*torah* in Hebrew; *nomos* in Greek). “Law” in Paul simply means the Jewish Old Testament religion, 41 and in principle “Law” in Paul means all religion, including the Christian religion. So religion is Law, and Law is religion. By it humanity tries to exorcise the fear of death and overcome its sense of estrangement from God. This is as true of the Christian religion as of any religion.

When we examine religion in this light, we can see what links Old Testament religion to all religion, even so-called pagan religions. (How else could Paul tell the Galatians, that living under the Jewish Torah, would be the same as living under their old pagan religions? See Gal. 4:4-11.)

Through all religion— its rites, laws, institutions, icons— humanity expresses its ultimate dreams, wishes and hopes. Religion may function as a disciplinary agent (Gal. 3:24) to keep alive the awareness of God and to awaken the hope of finding life’s ultimate meaning and fulfillment. But it can never quench the thirst it creates. For that reason religion also frustrates, stimulates sin, imprisons and produces alienation and death (Rom. 7:8; Gal. 3:19-4:5; 2 Cor. 3). This is what Old Testament religion has in common with African, Muslim, and Eastern, in short, with all religions everywhere.

America and the Religious Legitimation of Violence

Religious history is the key to understanding the American character. The Pilgrim Fathers were Christians of sterling piety, morality and sincerity. Their coming to America was religiously motivated. In their religious imagination they saw themselves reenacting the saga of the biblical Exodus. Leaving the Old World with its religious persecution and oppression was a reenactment of Israel’s leaving Egypt. Crossing the Atlantic was a miracle of divine Providence comparable to Israel’s crossing the Red Sea. As the Pilgrims carved out their community in the wilderness of the New World, they were like Israel passing through the wilderness to the Promised Land. This New World was their Promised Land. They proclaimed that this new nation was to be a light

set upon a hill for the entire world.

Just as the Israelites had holy wars of extermination to wage when they settled in Palestine, so these noble Christians had holy wars to wage. There could be no place for heretics, Quakers or Catholics in the new colonies. Those who did not accept the pure state religion were either suppressed or expelled. Quakers, witches and other dissenters were put to death. The native, "heathen" Indians were identified with the indigenous Canaanites whom Israel drove from the land. So the Indians were expelled from their own homelands for religious reasons. Fortunately, the rising religious pluralism of America forced Christians to accommodate reality. Roger Williams, a Baptist, produced powerful arguments for religious tolerance and the separation of church and state. This principle later became enshrined in the Constitution of the United States.

When the founding fathers searched for symbols that would be appropriate for the seal of the new nation, they rejected the image of Moses parting the Red Sea (suggested by Benjamin Franklin) and the image of the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness (suggested by Thomas Jefferson) to formulate a new set of sacred symbols that would signify national identity. The eagle with olive branch and thirteen arrows and the unfinished pyramid topped by the all-seeing eye of God were visual symbols of the new nation. They were supplemented by two mottos: *Annuit Coeptis*, "God has smiled on our beginnings"; and *Novus Ordo Seclorum*, "A New Order of the Ages." These symbols captured the mythic perception of America as a nation formed under divine providence with a sacred cosmic destiny in human history. 42

From its very beginning America has been indelibly stamped by the religious consciousness of being a "redeemer nation." Although modern secularism has greatly altered the face of America, the nation has never relinquished the myth of its cosmic destiny in human history. Its world leadership in the fight against communism must be seen in this context. America becomes the savior of the world from the threat of evil. This sense of destiny is religiously inspired and is a vital aspect of what scholars have called "the civil religion of America."

When the struggle for the preservation or expansion of national self-interest is legitimized by religion, that struggle takes on the connotation of a holy war. Violence is sacralized. As David Chidester says:

Civil religion, in the form of religious nationalism, has always had the religious potential to legitimate political power. This religious nationalism maybe regarded as parochial, exclusive, and self-righteous in its prevalent imagery of American chosenness and sacred destiny. Critics have argued that it has exacerbated conflicts, divisions, and resentments in the larger world. America's sacred mission to regenerate the world, it has been suggested, has been counterproductive as it creates deeply entrenched enemies by violating the principles of equality, liberty, and freedom in its international relations. Religious nationalism has supported the sacrifice of such principles in the interest of doing battle against international communism, the "Great Satan."

The justification of American economic interests in the international arena in terms of the special mission of American religious nationalism has been inevitably linked with American military power.

Military force has reinforced economic, political, and ultimately religious interests in relation to the rest of the world. The exercise of military power has continued to be legitimated within American religious nationalism by commitments to a special mission and destiny regarded as uniquely American. The sociologist Robert Bellah has suggested that “any archaic claims to our own special righteousness or messianic mission, however, can only further the process of global disintegration.” American religious nationalism, particularly as it has become armed with the limitless destructive capabilities of a nuclear arsenal, appears from Bellah’s and other critics’ to have become increasingly problematic in the modern world. 43

Although church and state are separated in America, we must not assume that religion is quarantined from the political sphere. As William R. Jones states:

Matters that appear to be solely political or economic in nature and thereby assumed to deal purely with practical matters are in fact linked to deeper religious, moral and philosophical affirmations of faith that are informed by very specific understandings about the nature and destiny of the human species. It is this unconscious world view, this hidden and usually unconfessed metaphysics that structures our consciousness about life and colors, in turn, our policy values and decisions. 44

To what extent have the popular religious assumptions regarding Israel’s destiny in the Middle East influenced American foreign policy? Many in a position to influence political decisions in the Middle East undoubtedly share the popular evangelical myths about Israel’s place in Bible prophecy.

The same apprehension is raised by the professional journalist, Grace Halsell, in her recent book, *Prophecy and Politics*. 45 Herself a Christian, Halsell marshals the startling evidence that millions of evangelical Christians, led by powerful religious personalities, are pushing the politics of the nation toward more and more nuclear armaments. The Christian right appear to be the most vocal “hawks” in the country. But worse than that, Halsell presents the chilling evidence that in their evangelical fervor they are actually pushing; even lusting for a nuclear confrontation which they confidently believe will eradicate the ungodly Russians and all other enemies of the Christian faith. They believe this conflict will even destroy so many Jews that the remnant will confess that Jesus is the Messiah. Halsell testifies that when some of these popular evangelists preach on the coming nuclear holocaust, their faces “turn radiant at the thought.” 46

They have a battle site in Israel and a line of reasoning for a nuclear war— God wills it. And they preach, promote and actually sell Americans on the idea of building more bombs and then using them. 47

The World and the Legitimation of Violence

When we examine the most violent confrontations in the world today, it soon becomes evident that they are all fueled by the spirit of a religious crusade. Religion legitimizes all forms of violence and turns every conflict into a holy war.

Palestine, Lebanon, Iran, Fiji, Ireland and Afghanistan are reenactments of the one tragic mistake of Jesus' death—a death which is a paradigm of all human history. This happened and continues to happen because religion legitimizes violence by confounding violence with the justice of God. The most dangerous world political leaders are those with the deep religious conviction that God is on their side and that he has given them the mission and mandate to fulfill his will.

This religious issue is so volatile that its resolution may well decide whether the human race continues to inhabit this planet together. Unless the world can resolve the issue of religiously legitimized violence, the outlook is grim—as grim as it was at Calvary.

A Freedom to Play

Traditional Christian piety has had little time for play. Serious Christians have often tended to associate the spirit of play with the spirit of worldliness, which must be banished from the camp of the saints.

In the writings of the early fathers Christianity generally appears not only dour, but even sour. Calvin's Geneva passed a law with a severe penalty for laughing in church. Wesley did not believe that children should be encouraged to play. When he opened a school for little girls, he forbade all play. Instead there were prayers, beginning at four o'clock in the morning. Bunyan's book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, reflects the Puritan piety of his day. Christian's journey could well have been called *Grim Progress*. While there was pious singing on the way to the Celestial City, there was no playing except at Vanity Fair—and this was a snare of the devil!

Max Weber and others have amply demonstrated that Protestantism was known for a vital work ethic. Puritanism valued human activity almost exclusively in terms of productivity and usefulness. There was little room for a festive spirit.

In opposition to much of our Christian tradition, we wish to suggest that we are most truly human when we play. In affirming that the gospel sets us free to be truly human, we are saying that it sets us free to play.

We may contrast work and play by saying that while work is done from necessity and the imposition of external constraint, play is done spontaneously, freely and for sheer pleasure. The presence or absence of the constraint of law is fundamental to any distinction between work and play. This is illustrated in the behavior of children. When they are involved in activity that is done spontaneously and for pleasure, they are at play. We are often amazed at how they can sustain such vigorous activity

without appearing to tire. Yet if children are told to expend a fraction of the same energy at work, they soon complain of exhaustion. The difference is the external element of compulsion or necessity—the law.

Can there be any fun with God? From childhood many have been bound by the notion that worship or churchgoing means setting aside all fun and becoming somber and serious. So we ask another question: Does God play? We answer, Yes.

Creation came into existence by God's play. God was under no external constraint to create. It was not a work of necessity. He did it freely and for his own pleasure. No law made him do it. Creation was therefore a manifestation of God's play. When we look at the vast extravagance of color and splendor in the created order, how can we fail to see that the great Architect was astoundingly playful?

Redemption must also have been a further manifestation of God's play. He did it freely. There was no element of external compulsion, no law of necessity that moved God to redeem his creation. We do not deny the solemn element in redemption; but, to borrow a phrase from C. S. Lewis, may we not call it "solemn fun"?

Adam and Eve, made in God's image, were given the great freedom of playing in God's great garden. As some of the early fathers suggested, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was analogous to the law. If Adam and Eve had shunned the knowledge which brings only external compulsion, they would not have known that labor which came with the Fall.

Although most of man's sinful mortal existence must now be occupied with toil, God would give him a taste of what Eden was like and of what the new creation will be. Even in the Old Testament there is much insistence on festivity— occasions when work would cease so that God's people could celebrate their liberation from Egypt and the greater liberation God had promised at the end of their journey through history. Festivals, celebration, play— all these terms signify the same thing.

Isaiah shows that the resurrection at the end-time would be associated with a great party:

**On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare
a feast of rich food for all peoples,
a banquet of aged wine— the best of meats and the finest of wines.
On this mountain he will destroy
the shroud that enfolds all peoples,
the sheet that covers all nations;
he will swallow up death forever.
The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces;
he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth.
The Lord has spoken. — Isa. 25:6-8.**

No wonder the announcement of Jesus that “the time is fulfilled”— that the Old Testament promises were now to be realized— was associated with both his words and deeds, with much eating and drinking, and with stories about banquets and dancing! Even Jesus’ call to repentance was not inimical to this festive spirit. We tend to associate repentance with crying rather than laughing. Of course, repentance— a change of mind, attitude and ways— may be associated with crying; yet there are numerous examples in Scripture where laughter rather than weeping was the outward expression of repentance. When God’s deed of grace changed Sarah’s mind, she laughed (Gen. 21:6). When the Lord in his grace turned the captivity of his people in Babylon, their mouths were filled with laughter and their tongues with singing (Ps. 126:2). When the Spirit first fell on the Gentiles, the Jewish Christians realized that God had also given the Gentiles “repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). Their signs of repentance were the same as those which appeared at the festival of Pentecost— tongues of praise and joy so boisterous that some suspected them of imbibing too much wine.

The Old Testament festivals were Sabbaths— cessations from work. They were all fulfilled in the resurrection event (Acts 13:32, 33). The gospel proclaims that the great jubilee is inaugurated by the resurrection. The eschatological Sabbath has arrived. All who labor because they are bowed down with the yoke of the law are invited to rest (Matt. 11:28-30; Heb. 4:1-10). This is not a rest which consists in doing nothing. It is an invitation to play, to catch the free, festive jubilee spirit.

Christian ethics— which the New Testament calls good works— is what the gospel causes us to do in a playful, festive spirit. If grace means that the kingdom of salvation is given to us freely and not in any way on the basis of our piety, then good works are done spontaneously, unselfishly, as though playing. If we do them only because we are placed under the law, we become “weary in doing good” (Gal. 6:9)— like children who quickly tire when the activity is perceived as work.

Not only should ethics be a kind of play, but theology should also be

the *free play* of thoughts, words, images and songs with the grace of God.... The freedom to talk with God and of God is being opened by God’s joy. It cannot be forced. For true awareness cannot be coercive; it does not come about by either authoritarian pressure or the force of logic. It presupposes liberty. Being aware of God is an art and— if the term may be permitted— a noble game. 48

In the gospel we are given the liberty to talk for God and about God. Such a theology should be marvelous fun— something it never is when we take our God-talk too seriously. When this happens, we put faith in our theology and our systems of belief rather than in the loving God who raised Jesus from the dead. Theology thereby becomes an idolatrous exercise, for by our God-talk we think we can build a theological tower by which we can ascend to heaven. Then God comes down and con-

fuses the God-talk of the builders so that the proliferating sects cannot even understand each other's theological jargon. Luther quipped that theologians sometimes indulge in such learned talk that God himself is astonished. If we do not laugh when we are tempted to present our theological formulations as the final truth, surely the angels do!

It has.., been observed that dictators and fanatics lack a sense of humor. Dictators and fanatics have classified themselves among the gods and goddesses and therefore cannot tolerate reminders of their humanity in its weakness and stupidity....

If dictators and fanatics have no sense of humor, neither have theologians who unwittingly slip into the role of either dictator or fanatic. Beware of theologians without a sense of humor!...

Only in humor can evangelical theology avoid the humorless theological dictator and theological fanatic. If we have no sense of humor in our theology, we then take ourselves with an inhuman seriousness.

How funny it is to hear some prophetic expert speak of future events as if he himself (or herself) had lived through them and was reporting them as history! How funny to hear a lecture on the inerrancy of Scripture by a lecturer who presumes his or her argument is as inerrant as the thesis! How comical is a sermon in which the preacher attempts to persuade us that God causes all events in the universe! Even this one? 49

The spirit of the gospel is contrary to that ultra-serious arrogance which claims the finality of truth for any of our statements or confessions about the truth. The gospel calls us from this bondage to closed systems of theology into the breathtaking liberty of the children of God.

Yet just as we need to labor to enter this rest (Heb. 4:11), so we need to work to guard this freedom. For, as Moltmann says, "The rule of law spoils everything, even the revolution of freedom." 50

Early church history provides a powerful illustration of how the rule of law spoils the revolution of freedom. Jewish and Gentile believers were eating and drinking together in a great festival of freedom at Antioch. But the party was interrupted when certain ones came from James. The Jerusalem Christians were anxious that Jewish Christians maintain their allegiance to the law. As the emissaries from Jerusalem gazed on the great festival of freedom, they were unhappy. When he saw them, Peter was intimidated. With Barnabas and the other Jewish believers, he withdrew from eating with the Gentiles. The festival of freedom was disrupted. The intrusion of the law spoiled everything. No wonder Paul was angry! (Gal. 2:11-14).

The festival of freedom made possible by the resurrection faith is inimical to bondage to religious institutions, closed systems of theology, clericalism and any carefully defined structure of church life. The gospel gives us no blueprint for tomorrow except to playfully dance our way into the open future in this great festival of freedom.

Christianity— A Communal Faith

The entire stream of Western Christianity has overemphasized the individual man and his deliverance from personal sin. In doing this, Western Christianity has failed to recognize the nature of true man. Just as man is not true man without God, so he cannot be true man apart from community with fellow-men. Some scholars attribute this weakness in Western Christianity to Augustine and to his Grecian view of man.

Unfortunately, Protestantism did not correct this Augustinian problem but fostered an individualism which has diminished the awareness of Christian community. The Reformation so emphasized the individual's relation to God that "faith alone" almost unconsciously became synonymous with "me alone." The dethronement of the pope "without" led to the coronation of the pope "within." The consequence of this totalitarian-self has been a fragmentation of Christian society which continues to this day.

Protestant individualism has also left its mark on biblical interpretation. While the brotherhood of all believers is never formally denied, such expressions as "born again," "new creature," "old man," "new man," "resurrection body" and "temple of God" are given a predominantly individualistic and intensely personal interpretation and thus commonly wrested from their communal meaning in the New Testament.

In the Gospel of John, Nicodemus is introduced as a representative of Israel ("ruler of the Jews," John 3:1, RSV; "Rabbi, we know," John 3:2). In conversing with Nicodemus, Jesus deliberately used the plural when he repeated the command, "You (*humas*) must be born again" (John 3:7). What the Lord meant by "born again" was apparently an Old Testament teaching (John 3:10). As Jesus continued, he addressed the larger Jewish audience (John 3:11f). Thus, C. K. Barrett has declared:

Nicodemus appears before Jesus but never even states the purpose of his coming. As the discourse proceeds he is quickly forgotten, and, further, the conversation speedily moves out of the singular number into the plural; "We speak", "You (pl.) must be born again." We are made to hear not a conversation between two persons but the dialogue of Church and Synagogue, in which (according to the Christian view) the former completes and fulfils the latter, which is in consequence superseded.

When he spoke to Nicodemus, Jesus was primarily addressing the Jewish nation—the old order—and reaffirming the prophetic eschatological hope of Israel. He declared in effect, "You and your nation need to be raised to eternal life, which can only be by the Spirit of the crucified Christ." "Born again" thus becomes a communal event to be equated with the raising of a "new Israel" as from a "valley of dry bones" (Ezek. 37).

"New creation" (*kainos ktisis*) in the Pauline corpus has a virtually synonymous

sense. While “new creation” may be mistakenly viewed primarily as “personal rejuvenation” (2 Cor. 5:17f), it refers to the creative work of the “Spirit who testifies of Christ” and thereby brings forth a new race or new mankind. Jesus’ preeminent act of concern for others has removed all the barriers between cultures, castes and clans to create a new humanity:

For neither circumcision [Jewish religion] counts for anything, nor uncircumcision [Gentile religion], but a *new creation* [counts for everything]. – Gal. 6:15, RSV. For he [Christ Jesus] is us our peace, who has made us both [Jew and Gentile] one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might *create* in himself one *new man* in place of the two, so making peace. – Eph. 2:14, 15, RSV.

“Peace” is the cessation of hostilities and the fruit of reconciliation. And it is quite natural that from the “loins” of the “second Adam” should issue a new and reconciled mankind.

Put off your *old nature* [“old man”] which belongs to your former manner of life . . . and put on the *new nature* [“new man”], created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. – Eph. 4:22-25, RSV.

The “old nature” or attitude is evil because its heightened self-awareness is a barrier to open (“speak the truth”) and fair (“righteousness”) social relationships with the “neighbor” rather than a barrier to personal sanctification. The “new man” is a broad social awareness, “after the likeness of God.”

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the *old nature* with its practices and have put on the *new nature*, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all. – Col. 3:9-11, RSV.

Thus, the “new creation” is a reconciled and reconciling race, and the term is introduced in 2 Corinthians 5 because of its theme on the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). The good news about Jesus is just that and creates just that.

Using another figure, Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again” (John 2:19), and the Gospel then states, “But the temple he had spoken of was his body” (John 2:21). This was a deliberately ambiguous comment, for John knew that the Spirit, who raised the physical body of Jesus the Christ, also, at the same time and by doing so, raised the spiritual body of Christ. John understood that the resurrection of the Christ was accompanied by the creation of a new nation— the vast “body” of the disciples of the risen Lord. Jesus himself predicted the resurrection of such a “body” (cf. John 10:15, 16; 12:32; 17:20-22; 20:19-22).

Alan Richardson has therefore stated:

In his notable book *The Teaching of Jesus*, I. W. Manson suggested that in the mind of our Lord the Son of Man was primarily a corporate personality rather than an individual. Jesus conceived it to be his mission to create the people of the saints of the Most High, to whom the kingdom should be given (cf. Luke 12. 32).

Regarding the phrase “temple of God,” Charles Anderson Scott believes that Paul employed it “to illustrate his conception of the Christian Society,” which was “a Shrine or Temple, it was a Household of God.”

‘Know ye not that ye (corporately) are the temple of God?’ (1 Cor. iii. 16; cp. 2 Cor. vi. 16); ‘Ye are being built up as a dwelling place of God in the Spirit’ (Eph. ii. 22). Elsewhere (1 Cor. vi. 19) the same figure is used of the individual believer; ‘know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you?’ But here, as in 1 Peter ii. 5, it is used of the corporate society to illustrate both the way in which the several members (‘living stones’) are articulated in the whole, and the sacred function of the community to be the dwelling-place of God and the centre of His presence among men.

Of course, Paul’s fullest treatment of the relationship between “many parts” and “one body,” between the particular and whole, is found in 1 Corinthians 12, where it is clear that the particular has no identity or existence apart from the whole.

It is significant that God “in Christ” died for “us” corporately (cf. Rom. 5:8). Indeed, the representative King, on behalf of the entire kingdom, “died for all” (2 Cor. 5:14). Thus, this Christological statement is a sociological statement which turns the cross into a communal reality and Christianity into a communal faith. It is therefore incumbent upon believers in the good news about Christ to think and to act primarily in terms of solidarity rather than solitude. “Justification by faith alone” is of no value to the Christ unless it is understood as a reconciliation which occurs simultaneously both vertically (between man and God) and horizontally (between man and man).

Notes and Reference

Unless otherwise indicated, scriptural quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.

1. See “A Theology of the Resurrection” *The Christian Verdict*, Special Issue 2, 1984; “The Gospel and the Spirit of Biblicism—Part 1, *ibid*” Essay 15, 1984; “The Gospel and the Spirit of Biblicism—Part 2, *Ibid*” Essay 16, 1984; “The Gospel and the World Missionary Enterprise, *ibid*” Essay 20, 1985; “The Spirit of Jesus versus Christianity” *Ibid.*, Special Issue 3, 1986.
2. Walbert Buhlmanr, *God’s Chosen Peoples*, tr. Robert B. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1982). Copyright 1982 by Walbert Buhlmann. All rights reserved. English translation, copyright 1982 by St. Paul Publications and Orbis Books. Excerpts are used by permission from Orbis Books, Maryknoll N.Y. 10545.
3. We now know that Deuteronomy was written centuries after Moses.
4. Buhlmann, *God’s Chosen Peoples*, p. 67.

5. Hans Kung, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 70.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-9.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 109-10.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 124-26.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
15. Antonio Cavazzi di Montecuccolo, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 139.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-40.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
18. *Ibid.*, P. 144.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-48.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 154-55.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-47.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 148-49
27. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 158-59.

32. Mohandas K. Gandhi, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 166.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
35. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 34.
36. Buhmann, *God's Chosen Peoples*, p. 29.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 210-11.
38. We refer the reader to what we said about the fear of death in our issue on resurrection (see "The Liberating Power of the Resurrection," in "A Theology of the Resurrection," *Verdict* Special Issue 2, 1984, pp. 6-8).
39. See Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York Free Press, 1973).
40. Quoted in Emanuel Feldman, *Biblical and Post-Biblical Defilement and Mourning: Law as Theology* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1977), p. 15; see "A Theology of the Resurrection," *Verdict* Special Issue 2, 1984, p. 6.
41. See "Religion and the Gospel" *Verdict* 5, no. 2 (1982): 9, with evidence that the Greek word *nomos* had the meaning of religion.
42. Ruether, "Feminism and Jewish-Christian Dialogue," p. 141.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
44. William R. Jones, "Religion as Legitimator and Liberator: A worm's Eye View of Religion and contemporary Politics," in *Spirit Matters*, p.102.
45. See Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear war* (Westport, Conn.; Lawrence Hill & Co., 1986).
46. *Ibid.*, p. 197
47. *Ibid.*
48. Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology and Joy* (London: SCM Press, 1973), p. 49.
49. Bernard Ramm, *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), pp. 193- 96
50. Moltmann, *Theology and Joy*, p. 64.

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