

Feb 13, 1976

CHRISTOLOGY

For Hawaiians and cult group

A Christology without Christ: A Critique of Cosmological Christology

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The liberal ecumenist, Troy Organ, argued that there is salvation apart from Jesus Christ (in "A Cosmological Christology," The Christian Century, November 3, 1971). Organ contended that Peter's declaration that there is salvation in no one else except Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12) "falls when it is remembered that this was Peter's opinion at the time when he was attempting to transfer Jewish exclusiveness to the new religion." However, "after his experience with Cornelius, Peter held quite a different view: "I now see how true it is that God has no favorites",..."(Acts 11:34).

Organ offered three arguments for his "Cosmological Christology." First, he claimed a distinction between the Christ office (which other "Christs" than Jesus can fill) and the Christ function, viz., redemption. "We should simply say "Jesus is the Christ" and leave the door open for other Christs whether they are Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu (p. 1294). Secondly, if salvation entered the world only at the time of Christ, then no one was redeemed in the thousands of years before Christ. Thirdly, God is eternal and His love is omnipresent. Grace is found everywhere and not simply in the Cross of Christ.

There are four implications of the Cosmological Christ drawn out by Organ. First, redemption was not introduced at any given point in history; God's love is eternal and universal. Secondly, some modern credal statements (such as the Plan for the Union of the Church of Christ in the United States) reveal that salvation did not originate with Christ but is really only renewed by him. Thirdly, redemption like creation is never finished; it is an ongoing process. Fourthly, Organ concludes that the Cosmological Christ has much to offer the ecumenical movement. In fact, "the movement cannot begin until Christians become more humble in their claims for Christianity and the Christian church."

He adds, "'ecumenical' means the entire inhabited world." Hence, "a Christian church desiring to be ecumenical should begin with three convictions: (1) that God has no favorites; (2) that God is witness in all cultures; (3) that to be acceptable to God does not require one to become a Christian." Organ feels that "Christology needs to be expanded to denote the total redemptive features of the Cosmos. God manifests himself among all peoples. The Eternal is eternally redemptive" (p. 1295). Organ believes that "the place to attack the parochialism of Christian theology is at the very heart and core of Christianity: its doctrine of exclusive redemption." Speaking of this core doctrine, he adds conclusively, "it must be abandoned" (p. 1293).

In response to Organ's universalism we offer the following comments. First, the Bible nowhere indicates we can separate the redemptive function from the redemptive office of Jesus Christ. Old Testament redemption looked forward to Christ and New Testament salvation looks back to him. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin (Hebrews 9:22), and it is only by Christ's blood that one can be redeemed (Hebrews 9:26; 10:11-12). Jesus himself said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). He also claimed "I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved," but "he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber" (John 10:9 and 1). Paul emphasised the same exclusive truth saying, "there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

Secondly, Organ does not distinguish between the actual historical accomplishment of salvation (at a certain moment in time through Christ) and the universal availability of that salvation to all men at all times. Since salvation has been an accomplished fact in the mind of God from all eternity (Eph. 1:4), there is no problem in it being available to all men, even those who lived

before the time of Jesus. God saved Old Testament believers by the same Gospel with which New Testament believers are saved. Paul declared that there is only one Gospel (Gal. 1:8,9) and added that this Gospel was preached to Abraham in the Old Testament (Gal. 3:8).

Thirdly, Organ does not distinguish between the source and channel of grace (which is from God and through Christ) and the universal extent of grace (which is to all men). Paul said, "the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men" (Titus 2:13). The rays of the sun fill the whole world but they all come from one source. Likewise, Christ said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). God's light shines into all the world but it shines only through Jesus Christ (cf. John 1:9).

Fourthly, Organ decidedly errs when he claims Peter changed his view between Acts 4 and 11. Acts 4:12 speaks about the one channel of salvation through Christ, whereas Acts 11:15 indicates that Peter came to understand that this one channel of salvation is inclusive of Gentiles as well as Jews who believe. This truth is nothing new to a devout Jew, since the Old Testament had predicted Gentile salvation hundreds of years before Christ (cf. Isaiah 42:6; 60:3). Furthermore, the proof that Peter never changed his mind about Christ being the only way of salvation is found long after Acts 11 or even Acts 15:7-11 (A.D. 49). In Peter's first epistle (c. A.D. 63) he declared that we are saved by nothing but "the precious blood of Christ," (1:18,19). In the next chapter Peter presents Christ as the stone of salvation by which men are either saved or condemned (2:6-8). Christ is the one who "died for sins once for all" (3:18). This same unique and exclusive salvation through Christ is continued in Second Peter as well (cf. 2:1; 3:2, 9). Neither Peter nor any other apostle or New Testament writer is known to have changed his

mind about Christ ^{being} ~~as~~ the only means of salvation (cf. Hebrews 1:1-2; 2:3; 10:26).

Fifthly, the Bible clearly warns against the belief that there are other "Saviors." There are false "Christs," there is only one true Christ. Jesus said, "many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray" (Matthew 24:4). To claim to be the Christ is one thing but to prove it by fulfilling Old Testament prophecy, being crucified and by rising from the dead is quite another (Matthew 12:39-40). Only Jesus of Nazareth ever claimed and proved to be the Christ (Acts 1:3).

Sixthly, supposed "humility" of claim is not a test for truth. Christ made some pretentious claims; he claimed to be equal with God (John 5:18,23; 8:58). He accepted worship on numerous occasions (cf. John 9:38; Matthew 28:17). These claims are not contrary to true humility; true humility is not to think of ones self more highly than one ought to think (Romans 12:3). But since Christ was God it was not vanity to think of himself as God. Likewise, since Christ is the only way of salvation, as he himself claimed, it is not lacking in humility for the Christian to proclaim this exclusive truth. Two plus two equals four is a very exclusive truth. There simply is no other way to add it. The central question is not whether a claim is "humble" but whether or not it is true.

Seventhly, the offer of redemption is not eternal as Organ suggests. There is a final point beyond which no one can be saved (cf. Revelation 20-22). For "it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). God is eternal and His love is everlasting, but the allotted time for accepting this love is not infinite. For a life-time decision one is given only a life-time to decide. There comes a point when a man has rejected love so long that he is beyond the possibility of accepting love. A soul

shriveled and shrunken by sin can, like a closed cup, be beyond the ability to hold the Water of Life.

Eighth, it is true that God has "no favorites" in the sense that salvation is offered to all. "God so loved the world..." (John 3:16). However, God knows that not everyone will accept His love. God's light shines into all the world but not all men seek it. In fact, men "loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). For those who seek the light they do have through creation (Romans 1:19,20) or through conscience (Romans 2:12-14) God provides enough light to be saved. Sometimes God sends a missionary with the light of the Gospel (Acts 10); sometimes men are saved through reading the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12); other times God sends an angel with the Gospel (Revelation 14:6); and sometimes God provides a dream or a vision through which men are informed of His will. The key is that God gives enough light to those who want it. God "rewards those who seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). But a man who is lost in darkness ~~and~~^{who} turns from the little light he may see on the horizon is responsible for his own condition. When one goes toward the light it gets larger. But if one turns from it and finds himself in utter darkness he has no one to blame but himself. "God is not... willing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (II Peter 3:9).

Ninth, God desires all to be saved. But God is love (I John 4:16) and love never forces anyone against their will. Forced "love" is not love: it is rape, and God is not a divine rapist! Hence, only those will be saved who choose to be saved. God will not force a man against his will. Love is persuasive but never coercive. Love demands a hell, otherwise men could be forced into heaven and coerced into loving God against their wills. Heaven would be worse than hell for someone who was eternally forced into an endlessly undesirable

situation of loving a person they hated.

There is an old Hindu parable that is a favorite among universalists. Six blind men by an elephant each contend it is something different. One blind man holding the tail believes it to be a rope, another embracing a leg contends it is a tree, still another feeling the side claims it is a wall, one enjoying the breeze from the flapping ear argues that it is a fan, the blind man tangling with the trunk exclaims it is a large snake, and the one touching the point of the tusk is sure it is a spear. Each believes that he alone is right, but each is wrong in his exclusivism while right in having one aspect of the total reality. So it is, we are told by the universalists, with religions; Each may claim that they alone are the way to salvation, but in this exclusivism they are wrong. Nonetheless, each is a way of salvation. Now the believer in Christ's unique claims need not be embarrassed by this parable and its apparent plausibility. For as a matter of fact the parable is helpful to the Christian claim. Indeed, one might sing a song in response to to it: "once I was blind but now I can see that the light of the world is Jesus." One is not surprized that six blind men believe six different things about the same reality. But what about six men whose eyes have been opened to the light of the world? Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). In fact Jesus came to open the eyes of the blind (Matthew 11:5). If our blind Hindu friends would open their eyes to the light of the world they would not believe the elephant was six different things. Likewise, if men with opened eyes would examine the claims, character and credentials of Jesus Christ, how could they believe there are other saviors? Who also fulfilled hundreds of prophecies made hundreds of years in advance, lived a sinless and miraculous life, underwent unjustly but calmly a torturous crucifixion and rose from the grave to prove he was the Son of God? Like Peter of old, we must confess: "Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life."