

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 16

Volume 16 • Number 4 • October 1992

Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews original and selected from
publications worldwide for an international
readership for the purpose of discerning the
obedience of faith*

EDITOR: BRUCE J. NICHOLLS



Published by
PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS

understanding of the malevolent activity of Satan, whereas he is too versatile to be limited to the structural. And this is the great weakness of the new theory with its identification (by some of its advocates) of the principalities with multi-national corporations and the like. Third, we become too negative towards society and its structures. For if we identify the powers of evil with the structures we will seek to dethrone them, or to fight against them. Advocates of the new theory may warn against defying the structures; they have to be warned against demonizing them. Both are extremes to be avoided.

Dr. Peter O'Brien teaches New Testament at Moore Theological College, Sydney, Australia.
p. 385

Conversion: To Cosmic Christ?

Sunand Sumithra

Printed with permission

In this article the author explores some of the theological issues in contemporary cosmic Christologies and their implications for conversion. He suggests some emphases needed in a biblical alternative.

Editor

INTRODUCTION

Pluralism and the shrinking of the globe are two stubborn but important facts of our time. Inevitably they have created dangerous global tensions. Religion, being the most potent cause of strife in human history, is the main culprit directly or indirectly. What is at stake is the peace and harmony of mankind—nay, its very survival. Under such threats, it is imperative that the unity of mankind somehow becomes the goal of all current human enterprises.

In short, the problem is: How should the traditional concept of Christian conversion be reinterpreted in a situation of the world as a neighbourhood where pluralistic claims of salvation are threatening human survival? Since such issues arise not so much in Church worship or renewal meetings as in the confrontation of the gospel with other religious and secular systems, they are decidedly missiological.

I. CONTEMPORARY COSMIC CHRISTOLOGIES

Though it is difficult to locate the birth of twentieth century cosmic christologies, it is easy to see that the background of the 1960s was conducive to such a birth, particularly the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches at New Delhi, 1961, with its theme, 'Jesus Christ—The Light of the World'.¹ Joseph Sittler (then a professor of theology at the

¹ Allan D. Galloway had already used the term for his book *The Cosmic Christ*, New York, 1951.

university of Chicago) had used the phrase 'cosmic Christ' in his address to the assembly, 'called to unity', and so is generally considered the originator of the idea, ever since it has not ceased to be one of the most crucial theological issues to date. P. 386

Taking Col. 1:15-20 as his basis, where the word 'all' is repeated at least six times, Sittler concludes that God's redemption is not smaller than the repeated 'all', it is 'cosmic in scope'. In the same line of thought and in the spirit of the Assembly, Paul David Devanandan affirmed that the purpose of incarnation was that 'the whole creation will be transformed into a totally different realm of being where God's will is done', and in his return Jesus Christ will 'gather the whole world into his kingdom'. Devanandan is quite clear that the 'redemptive purpose in the incarnation is all inclusive', and more, that 'the whole of creation in all its being is already redeemed by the work of Christ', and so the Gospel is only 'calling men to accept what they already are'—namely already redeemed. Summarizing his understanding of Christian renaissance of religions, he concludes:

One cannot resist the impulse of faith that believes in a God who is also the Lord of history, and in a creative Spirit who is ever at work in the world of men, redeeming it even in its present involvements and directing its course to the ultimate fulfilment of his purpose, that in all religious revival God is somehow at work.²

A more precise description of 'resisting the impulse of faith' and the 'somehow' would have led Devanandan to different results.

And so the New Delhi Report affirmed this new approach to religions:

The Church is sent knowing that God has not left himself without witness even among men who do not know Christ and knowing also that the reconciliation wrought through Christ embraces all creation and the whole of mankind.... In the churches we have but little understanding of the wisdom, love and power which God has given to men of other faiths by their long encounter with Christianity. We must take up the conversation about Christ with them, knowing that Christ addresses them through us and us through them.³

It is clear that in this revolutionary approach to other religions where 'Christ addresses ... us through them', cosmic christology has already been approved by the New Delhi Assembly.

Among the Roman Catholics, Vatican II was undoubtedly the watershed in their theology of religions. Basing its findings on God's desire that all men should be saved, Vatican II discerned that such a salvation embraces all humanity and further that God's saving grace is already in operation in them all. Hence, to p. 387

those who through no fault of theirs are still ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and His Church, yet sincerely seek God and with the help of divine grace strive to do His will as known to them through the voice of their conscience, those men can attain the eternal salvation. Nor does divine providence deny the assistance necessary to salvation to those who, without having attained, through no fault of their own, to an explicit knowledge of God, are striving, not without divine grace, to lead a good life.'⁴

Vatican II also further clarified that 'all this holds true not only for Christians but for all men of goodwill in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way ... we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit, in a manner known only to God, offers to every man the possibility of being

² Paul David Devanandan, *Christian Concern in Hinduism*, CISRS Bangalore: 1961, p. 82.

³ *The New Delhi Report*, Associated Press, New York: 1962, pp. 81-82.

⁴ *The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*, 13-17.

associated with this paschal mystery'.⁵ Thus 'whatever good is latent in the religious practices and cultures of diverse peoples' they are redeemed and perfected by Christ. The *Declaration on Non-Christian Religions* stated that whatever is 'true and holy' in the non-Christian religious traditions reflects 'a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men' and is Christ. Thus Vatican II arranged all religions in concentric circles—Catholics, non-Catholic Christians, non-Christians, and finally atheists!

The church recognises that in many ways she is united with those who, being baptised, are honoured with the name of Christian; finally those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God. In the first place there is the people to whom the covenants and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh (cf. [Rom. 9:4–5](#); [11:28–29](#)). But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place among these are Moslems ... Nor is God Himself distant from those in shadows and images seek the unknown God ... Nor does divine providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who ... have not attained at an explicit knowledge of God but who strive to live a good life thanks to His grace.'⁶

It is significant to note that the basis for inclusion in each circle is respectively faith in the Catholic Church, in Jesus Christ, in God and finally in moral values.

During the Vatican sessions, Raymond Panikkar developed and published an even more radical approach in his book, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1964), perhaps the best-known work in this area. Exegeting a well-known text from the Hindu Scriptures (*Janmadi* p. 388 *Yasyatah*), which speaks of the cause of all things as well as their power and goal, but leaves it unspecified, Panikkar affirms that this unknown, unnamed 'that' is Christ. Christ is there already in Hinduism, unknown, waiting to be discovered. He develops his ideas in several steps:

First, Christ is not *only* the historical Jesus, but more than Jesus. Hence Christianity has no monopoly on Christ, since Christ spills over into other religions. Second, since every religion speaks of the necessity of a link between the absolute God and the relative universe, it is valid for Christians to name this link Christ. He agrees that Christ is the 'only Mediator' present and active in all religions, whatever the form or the name—including, of course, Christianity. Third, Panikkar infers that though the faith in Jesus Christ may not be exactly corresponding to the response of men to the corresponding links in other religions, yet there is enough convergence among these various links to identify them under one name—Christ. Finally, for Panikkar Christ is Man, but not a single individual man.

Christ has human nature indeed, he is Man, but he is not a person. He is divine person ... Christ is man, but not *one* man, a single individual; he is a divine person incarnated, a divine person in hypostatic union with human nature.'⁷

Panikkar declares therefore that Hinduism needs to die and be resurrected in Christ; since Christ is in Hinduism, a Hindu is saved by Christ.

Karl Rahner, H. R. Schlette and Hans Küng are other theologians who have systematically developed the theology of the salvific value of non-Christian religions. The notion of 'anonymous Christians' as developed by Rahner is a post-Vatican concept.

⁵ *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 19–22.

⁶ *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions*, 2.

⁷ 'The Meaning of Christ's Name', in *Service and Salvation*, Ed. Joseph Pathrapankal, C. M. I. Bangalore: 1973, pp. 242ff.

Answering the important question of religions, whether they have any salvific value for their adherents *before* they are confronted with the gospel of Christ (i.e., in the 'pre-Christian history' of the religions), Rahner affirms they do, on the following grounds: firstly, God's will ([1 Tim. 2:4](#)) for the salvation of all men means that he must also provide the means for the salvation of all people at all times, and secondly because salvation is not a matter of inner individual spiritual dimension but is necessarily realized through and in concrete historical/social life. The consequence is that the Spirit who provides such universal salvation in every religion becomes the 'spirit of Jesus Christ':

In so far as the universal efficacy of the Spirit is always oriented towards the p. 389 high point of the historical mediation, it can be truly said that this Spirit is everywhere and from the onset the spirit of *Jesus Christ*, the logos of God who became man.⁸

Since men and women, saved in other religions, are saved through Christ, they must be considered, says Rahner, not merely as *non-Christian* but as 'someone who can and must already be regarded in this or that respect as an anonymous Christian'. So every religion becomes 'Christianity of an anonymous kind'.

H. R. Schlette develops his theology of religions in a similar vein. In one world history, according to Schlette, there are two sacred histories—one general sacred history, comprising all the religions and another special sacred history with the religion of Israel and the church at its core. So for him it is valid to speak of 'non-Christian religions as the ordinary and the way of the Church as the extraordinary way of salvation'.⁹ The uniqueness of the Church is that it is a concrete demonstration as well as a representation of universal salvation. The Church must therefore 'enquire into the general sacred history which runs parallel to it' for her own self-understanding.

Following Schlette, Hans Küng also sees the 'vast panorama of history within which the covenant idea is preserved in two concentric circles: the Noahite covenant with the whole of mankind and the covenant with Abraham for Israel alone'.¹⁰ This means, according to Küng, that in God's salvation, 'there is no extra, only an intra; no outside, only an inside'. Hence, the mission of the Church is to be in the 'midst', 'alongside' and 'with' other religions, 'serving' them so that 'from being Christians *de jure*,' their adherents 'may become Christians *de facto*'.

Though many more examples of Cosmic christologies could be given,¹¹ the above will at least indicate the direction of current thinking on religions. At this point a brief word is necessary about ideologies; as noted earlier the cosmic Christ is at work also in ideologies. Religions and ideologies have several things in common. Both give not only a p. 390 comprehensive world-view but also similar truth-claims, eschatological vision and *modus operandi*. But there is one important distinction: while religions define the *destiny* of man and therefrom derive the *meaning* of present human life, the ideologies proceed the other way round: without any anchorage in the eternal realm, they describe primarily the meaning of human existence and from there project a self-styled destiny of mankind. Ideologies are therefore basically this-world oriented. We could also give ideologies an

⁸ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, New York: 1969, p. 321f.

⁹ H. R. Schlette, *Towards a Theology of Religions*, Burns & Oates, London: 1963, pp. 74–75.

¹⁰ In J. Neuner, ed., *Christian Revelation and World Religions*, Burns & Oates, London: 1967, p. 10.

¹¹ There are several versions of cosmic christology, e.g., *Unbound Christ* of Stanley J. Samartha; *Acknowledged Christ* of M. M. Thomas; *Undiscovered Christ* of Braybrooke; John Hick's *Equality of All Religions*; Mercea Eliade's distinction between historical time and mythical time which brings Christianity on the level of the myths of other religions, and so on.

apparently self-contradictory label: secular religions, for the basic core of 'secular' is this-worldly as against the world-to-come, the eternal, as the etymology of the term secular reveals.

In what way is Christ at work in the ideologies of our time? The obvious answer is in the Christian values and principles these ideologies and the revolutions they have caused are saturated with, such as in the classless society of Communism (secularised version of the Kingdom of God), in the ideals of liberty (the Image of God), fraternity (*koinonia*) and equality (justice/righteousness of God), involvement in history (Christian discipleship) and so on. Christ as the Lord of history is active in history through these movements of liberation, by supplying them with values and ideals they can strive after. Without Christ at work in them, they would become dehumanizing, satanic, devouring their own children.

II. SOME MAJOR THEOLOGICAL ISSUES IN COSMIC CHRISTOLOGY

Even a quick analysis of the above shows that several christological and soteriological emphases are at stake here. *Firstly*, a positive approach to all non-Christian religions which is the driving force behind all cosmic christologies is in turn driven by the magnificent obsession with the survival of mankind. In its empirical, existential approach, this obsession with human *survival* so dominates thinking that the unity of mankind becomes the goal of the *progress* of mankind. Such an understanding goes beyond the positive assessment of non-Christian religions as 'hunger' which is satisfied or 'fulfilled' in Christianity—such as is found in the 1928 Jerusalem meeting of the International Missionary Council, where such approval of all religions began. Behind a obsession is the fear of the destruction of mankind such as through nuclear holocaust which appears imminent. Behind all cosmic christologies there is a deistic understanding of God, that he is not really concerned about his world and has left it to make its own destiny. Further, this also means, ultimately, a secular understanding of history—to look at history necessarily without God. Starting with an **P. 391** empirical context, cosmic christology inevitably bypasses truth as a value. It is more concerned with 'facts' or 'context' as seen by man rather than with revelation as given by God, for example, in the Bible. This lack of concern for truth does not, paradoxically enough, discourage conversions but encourages them. Since Christ is in all religions, it does not matter whether one converts from the Hindu faith to a Christian faith or vice versa—the traffic across the border of religions has increased where cosmic christologies are accepted.

Secondly, in spite of taking the biblical support of passages like John, [1:9](#), [Ephesians 1](#), [Colossians 1](#), Acts, [17](#) etc., it is difficult to see how the biblical dualism of God and evil can lead to such an understanding of a cosmic Christ; only an inclusive attitude such as found in Hindu monism could lead to such a goal. Human freedom, personality, history—all belong to the fall, to the transient in Hindu monism, which has the 'absolute goal' of summing up everything in the unknowable Brahman. It seems to me that the cosmic Christ idea is basically another name for this Brahman.

Thirdly, the heart of cosmic christology, the separation of the *person* of Jesus from the principle or idea of Christ, goes against the grain of Chalcedonian christological formula. This rejection of tradition by cosmic christologists is no surprise, since, starting from an existential situation they can hardly give a place of Church history in their thinking. Whatever be the history of the Chalcedonian session, the non-speculative preciseness of its christological definition (two natures in one person, without confusion, without change, without division and without separation) can be attributed only to the providential ruling and wisdom of God who rules and overrules over the affairs of men.

In attempting to define the idea of Christ in total separation from the human nature of Jesus, cosmic christology is a radical christology.

III. IS ONLY JESUS THE CHRIST?

Thus the present debates in cosmic christology ask in a fresh way questions asked earlier in different ways—the questions concerning the relationship between general and special revelation, between God-head and manhood in the person of Jesus Christ, and between the Christ of faith and Jesus of history.¹² They also include the issues in the relationship of Christology to Jesulogy, between Christology from **P. 392** above or below, or *pro nobis* and *extra nos*.¹³ All this means that the theological validity of restricting the revealed Messiah only to the person of Jesus of Nazareth needs a relevant clarification.

Wolfhart Pannenberg put his finger on this sensitive spot in the first of his ten christological theses where he says that the heart of christology is the affirmation that this man Jesus is God. The issue here is to give a reason for our belief that in this man Jesus the fullness of godhead dwells bodily. To what extent did the truth of Christ in the Old Testament become the fact of Jesus in the New, or the promise of the Messiah a fulfilment in the Son of Mary and Joseph?

Already some decades back Edwyn Bevan had written with firm conviction:

The great dividing line is that which marks off all those who hold that the relation of Jesus to God—however they describe or formulate it—is of such a kind that it could not be repeated in any other individual—that to speak, in fact, of its being repeated in one *other* individual is a contradiction in terms, since any individual standing in that relation to God would *be* Jesus, and that Jesus, in virtue of this relation, has the same absolute claim upon all men's worship and loyalty as belongs to God. A persuasion of this sort of uniqueness attaching to Jesus seems to me the essential characteristic of what has actually in the field of human history been Christianity.¹⁴

Similarly E. O. James asserts,

The Godhead attributed to the founder of Christianity, alike in the New Testament and by the Church, renders it unique in the history of religion. Nowhere else had it ever been claimed that a historical founder of any religion was the one and only supreme deity.¹⁵

It is for this reason valid to say that Christianity is founded neither upon the truth of incarnation nor the cross, but upon the fact of resurrection, emphasizing the significance of the claims of Jesus. In several ways the cruciality of Jesus can be substantiated. The apostle Paul, for example, started, right after his Damascus experience, to prove that this Jesus was the Christ. Jesus himself, though he began his ministry with the announcement and the message concerning the coming Kingdom of God, towards the end his ministry specifically drew attention to himself. Both Peter's 'No other name' and Jesus' 'No one comes to the father but by me' speak not so much of Christ, as of the name/ **p. 393** character of the historical person Jesus. The Greeks wanted to see Jesus, not the Jewish

¹² The present heresy of the Jesus Only movement, denying the trinitarian concept, is a reaction to cosmic christology.

¹³ Due to limitation of space in all these debates, only the issue limiting Godhead exclusively to the man Jesus can be considered in the following.

¹⁴ E. R. Bevan *Hellenism and Christianity*, Allen & Unwin: 1921, p. 271.

¹⁵ Quoted in E. O. James *Christianity and Other Religions*, Hodder & Stoughton: 1968, p. 170.

messiah. John repeats the claim of Jesus, 'Believe in me' as the heart of conversion. The unbelieving Thomas accepted Jesus as 'my Lord and my God'. Even in our time, though non-Christians have often been offended by the exclusive claims of Christianity and also by the discovery of Christhood in their religion, without exception they have been attracted by the historical figure of Jesus. His life and character are now universal values. In the light of this, it is most difficult to deny the normativity of Jesus for Christian faith.

This means that evangelism is not merely to 'name the name', nor even merely to introduce Jesus ('Mr. Jones, this is Jesus'), but primarily to confess saving faith in Jesus ('Mr. Jones, this Jesus is Christ').

IV. IMPLICATIONS OF COSMIC CHRISTOLOGY FOR CONVERSION

The Bible portrays conversion as a turning from idols to the living God. Essentially therefore, conversion has two turnings—a turning away from sin (repentance) and a turning towards Jesus Christ (faith). In the English language, the intensive prefix *con-* (instead of *re-*, *ob-*, *in-* or *per-*) rightly reflects the biblical sense that *conversion* is a total personal turning, not merely a person turning partially to Jesus Christ. It is a relationship, the response of one person to 'The Other'. In his 12-volume history of Christianity, Kenneth S. Latourette observes that though in many regions of the world mass movements to embrace Christian faith can be seen, yet in every case prior to such mass movements there have always been a few individuals who have been touched by the gospel and who have been the demonstration of the power of the gospel to these masses. That is to say, in the history of the Church also, conversion has been primarily individual, before any sociological or structural aspects developed. In fact, some have striven to show that the very concept of individual personhood is a Christian contribution to human civilization.

Further, like other personal relationships such as friendship or marriage, conversion is both a decision as well as a process. John Stott observes that though repentance and faith are decisions, conversion is a process whereby a person's relationships with the Church, the society and culture also are transformed. Just as married life is an unfolding of a personal relationship, conversion also is a growing relationship between the saved one and the saviour, moving towards perfection/maturity. And like marriage, conversion is also an unrepeatable decision—no one can be converted more than once! Paul [p. 394](#) Devanandan calls his turning away from Hendrik Kraemer's negative approach to religions a second conversion. This is hardly appropriate. One might call it a shock or rebellion or a discovery etc., but conversion in the biblical sense as sketched above does not suit Devanandan's experience. But this raises two relevant questions.

Is there a decisive element in conversion? The question is relevant because as a process conversion has apparently many levels of response, as many have attempted to show. M. M. Thomas speaks of three levels: the first level where people accept the principle of self-giving love or the Cross as ultimate, the second where the pattern of the suffering servanthood of Jesus is accepted, and the final level where the person of Jesus himself is accepted. One author grades thirteen stages: beginning at the level of persecuting Christians, working slowly upwards to more positive stages, to hostility, rejection, resentment, evasion, aloofness, suspicion, neutrality, interest, sympathy, inquiring, association, acceptance, identification and participation in Christian faith. Whatever the stages of terminology, one's personal trust in Jesus must mark the decisive step in conversion—as Jesus said, this is where a person turns from darkness to light.

The second issue pertaining to the subject of conversion is: who or what is converted? The relevance of this question is clear when we consider that in cosmic christology, since

Christ is found in other religions, the approach was to convert religions themselves. So Panikkar spoke of Hinduism passing through death and resurrection in Christ, coming out as a transformed or Christian Hinduism; M. M. Thomas suggests that since Christ is being in-formed (that is, being formed within) in Hinduism, it is better to speak rather of Hindu Christianity! Balasurya of Sri Lanka writes of conversion not just of persons but also of societal, systemic and cosmic conversions! Hindus allege that Christian conversion is change of one's social or religious allegiances.

We must admit that it is valid to affirm that reformation of religions is caused at least partly by the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is also valid to assert that a person's relationships to social or religious structures must also undergo change in his or her conversion. But it is better to term these changes renascence or reformation or whatever, rather than conversion, since conversion is basically a change in the personal relationship between two persons, man and God. Though the Old Testament speaks of conversion of nations, such as the nation of Nineveh, still it is a personal decision on the part of each of Nineveh's citizens to repent in dust and ashes. *Metanoia* as the renewal of the *mind*, and *pistis* as trust *in a person* are personal elements in the Bible. p. 395

SOME NEEDED EMPHASES

The following initial emphases are necessary in response to the above discussions.

1. If the fact of the world as a neighbourhood brings us the awareness of other religious claims for salvation as serious alternatives to salvation in Jesus Christ, and if cosmic christology approves other religions by discovering Christ's salvation in them, then there is an urgency for Evangelicals to develop a theology of pluralism of religions. The consequence of not clarifying a biblical approach to pluralism would be, sooner or later, a rejection of the Christian Church and her mission as totally irrelevant, as well as a rejection of the Bible and Jesus as God's supreme and final revelation. No doubt 'an ecumenical theology of pluralism' is a contradiction in terms, but do we have an evangelical theology of pluralism? I would like to summarize such a theology as a starter for discussion:

a) If we accept the God of the Bible as all-knowing, all-powerful, holy and gracious and unchanging, then we need also to accept the revelation of the Jewish expectation of the Messiah (Old Testament) fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth (New Testament) as normative for Christian faith, not merely illustrative.

b) Because the truth and goodness in non-Christian religions are in the form of general ideals rather than concrete truths, and also because such truth and goodness are inevitably mixed with falsehood and evil, they are not adequate to lead their adherents to salvation apart from their trust in Jesus Christ.

c) Though the post-Christian history of religions shows a Christian renascence in them thereby bringing them nearer to Christian values and goals, it must be born in mind that in our time there are also counter-developments in religions which cancel any Christianization of religions or its significance. The processes of secularization and religious resurgence are two such counter movements.

2. Christian philanthropic efforts for centuries, no doubt partly motivated by Christian missions, have led to a gross misunderstanding by non-Christians and Christians alike that Christianity is a religion of love, compared to Islam as the religion of freedom (submission to Allah the true freedom) and Hinduism as the religion of truth (of ultimate monism). Such a misconception is also partly responsible for cosmic christologies where the Christ-principle is the self-giving sacrificial love of the cross. In such a situation, I am convinced that an adequate emphasis on the holiness of God is imperative. For the Cross of Jesus is

no example of God's love, but of His *holy* love: the Cross is the p. 396 moment in human history when God's holiness and love meet. Though grace and truth came through Jesus, it must not be forgotten that prior to Jesus the Law had amply revealed God's holiness; thus the Messiah is called the Holy One. Moreover, if the Old Testament concept of holiness is primarily ritual, the New Testament concept is primarily spiritual. So I suggest that not love but holy love be presented as the Christian distinctiveness. As John Taylor demonstrates in his book, *The Go-Between God*, the idea of self-sacrificing love is found not only on the cross but throughout nature and history: the white blood corpuscles dying for the sake of the rest of the body; the mother bird or animal sacrificing herself for the sake of her young ones, and many heroes and heroines throughout the centuries giving their total lives for the sake of other people are some of the obvious examples. But it is hard to find another example of holy love where 'justice kisses mercy'. Jesus is the concrete example of God's whole nature.

Jesus, himself called the holy one, not only addressed God as 'Holy Father' but also taught us to hallow his name. The early apostles called Christians 'saints', the holy ones, not just good or generous or kind people. The Church herself is called 'the holy nation'. The development of monasteries and monastic life in the Church reflects this intense desire for holiness; and it is from these monks and nuns that love was demonstrated! A rejection of emphasis on holiness as is the case in our time, leads to several perversions of the gospel: if God's holiness is under-emphasized then man's sinfulness too is underemphasized. The whole question of God's electing a particular people become a problem and universalism will then be the ultimate goal. But the question of theodicy will be an insurmountable issue. Cosmic christologies, diluting such an understanding of God as the wholly Other and wholly Perfect, make him deistic and result in unnecessary worry about the survival of mankind. We tend to forget that God's mills grind exceedingly slowly, but they grind exceedingly small—as in the case of the Canaanites.

Such an emphasis on God's holiness must show forth also in our life—what the late Francis Schaeffer termed The Great Evangelical Disaster is only too true: the failure to live what we preach. Here we are speaking not just of Otto's idea of the holy as the Majesty, the Numinous, but beyond that, that the experience of the holy in concrete in Jesus. This is a Christian distinctive not found in other religions, or, more precisely, the hunger for it in other religions is satisfied in the example of Jesus.

3. Since an over-emphasis on the Cross of Jesus has led to a truncated understanding of the gospel, I think it is relevant to bring p. 397 back now an emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus. Beyond the popular Evangelical understanding—that if I believe that Jesus died for my sins and accept him as my Saviour I will be saved—the New Testament gives the needed complement: 'If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord", and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved' ([Rom. 10:9](#)). An adequate emphasis on the demonstration of the power of resurrection in our life more than the truth of the cross in our preaching is also the needed antidote to the dangers of cosmic christologies of our time.

Dr Sunand Sumithra is a theologian engaged in missiological research and editing and writing for the Association of Evangelical Theological Educators of India. He lives in Bangalore, South India. p. 398