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3.1 We urge each national evangelical fellowship to study and address gender issues, in the light of these theological perspectives, in ways appropriate to their context. This should embrace general gender roles and distinctives in marriage and family life, church and society, and may also include issues such as ordination, inclusive language, sexual orientation/homosexuality and lesbianism, representation and voice. In addition, national fellowships should address those issues of abuse specific to their context, for example from among those listed under 1.1 above.

3.2 We recommend further theological and biblical reflection on gender issues by evangelical men and women. The lack of adequate theological resources has limited those working against abuses and exploitation of females. The theological and biblical task should be undertaken jointly by men and women, rather than only by men, or only by women.

3.3 We recommend that WEF facilitate and finance exchange of [p. 384](#) research and publications on gender issues in various countries.

3.4 We recommend that WEF offer scholarships for women to engage in theological study and to participate in conferences so that women's contributions are integrated into the mainstream of theological work.

3.5 We recommend the formation of a task force on women and gender by the WEF Theological Commission to work on issues raised here and other related to them.

The Working Group included the following:

Rev Khaled Boushra (Egypt) (p.t.); Rosemary Dowsett (Scotland); Dr Judith Gundry-Volf (Germany/ USA); Margaret Jacobs (Australia); Rev Joe Kapolyo (Zambia); Leela Manasseh (India); Rev Nikolay Nedelchev (Bulgaria) (p.t.), Beulah Wood (New Zealand/India); Dr Isaac Zokoué (Central African Republic) (p.t.).

The Working Group warmly invites response and contributions from readers of this document. In the first instance, this should be addressed to: Mrs Rosemary Dowsett, OMF International, 4 Borden Road, Glasgow G13 1QX, SCOTLAND, UK (Fax 0141 959 4976). We would gladly receive material pertinent to monographs and study guides addressed to specific issues raised above, or to assist in the preparation of a textbook on gender issues suitable for international use. [p. 385](#)

Proclaiming Jesus Christ as the One Universal Saviour and Lord in a World of Religious and Secular Pluralism

WEF Theological Commission Working Group

PLURALISM: BOTH FRIEND AND FOE

Pluralism is a fact of life at the end of the 20th century which has both positive and negative implications for the proclamation of Jesus Christ as uniquely the Saviour and Lord of all. Evangelicals support and benefit from situations where there is respect for a plurality of perspectives. We are committed to the right of others to believe and worship freely and we ask for that right for ourselves. This sort of tolerance and respect is a healthy form of pluralism. In some situations, however, the tolerance of differences is based on a relativistic approach to truth and knowledge, which either denies the existence of absolute and exclusive truth or insists that knowledge of such truth is impossible.

As we move toward the 21st century, evangelicals increasingly find themselves in one of two situations that have adverse effects for the proclamation of Jesus. There are still many places where religious freedom is granted in principle but not in practice, either because of the dominance of an oppressive religious majority, or because of an anti-religious secular philosophy. On the other hand, in parts of the world which are most tolerant of religious differences, there is a growing resistance to groups which make exclusive claims to truth, as evangelicals do. The proclamation of Jesus as *unique* Saviour and Lord is perceived as an unacceptable intolerance of the convictions of others.

THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOUR AND LORD

Although evangelicals defend the right of others to practise their own religious convictions, we are committed to truths which necessarily exclude the validity of other beliefs and practices. God has made himself known to us through his action in history, the meaning of which he has revealed in the Bible. The Bible is thus our sole authority for faith and practice and is the arbiter of all claims to truth and morality. It is on the basis of this biblical revelation that we assert that there is only one true and living God, who exists eternally as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In his uniqueness, God, who **P. 386** revealed himself supremely in Jesus Christ, is Lord of all other beings, who depend upon him for their very existence.

Humankind was created by God and for fellowship with him, but now lives in fallenness and alienation from God because of sin. To reconcile sinners to himself, the Word of God became a man in Jesus of Nazareth, who lived a perfect human life and died an innocent death. Through his resurrection, he overcame the power of death and sin and opened the way for the reconciliation of sinners to God, so that God might be just and yet justify sinners. All those who truly believe in Jesus as Saviour and who bow to his Lordship are accepted by God as his children. Those who hear and understand the proclamation of Jesus, but who refuse to believe and submit to him, remain under condemnation by their own choice, though God continues to be patient and gracious toward them until the end of their lives when their final response is irrevocable.

There is not a consensus among evangelicals regarding the possibility of salvation by grace, through faith, of those who are incapable of explicit faith in Christ, whether because of a physical incapacity or because of a lack of knowledge. This is an aspect of evangelical theology which is currently receiving intense discussion. From all perspectives in the discussion, however, there is a strong commitment to the importance of the universal proclamation of Jesus Christ as the normal means by which God brings people to salvation. This is one of the essential ministries which God has given to the church.

THE PROCLAMATION OF JESUS CHRIST

The proclamation of Jesus Christ is done both verbally and in deeds which require interpretation for their meaning to be evident. In its verbal proclamation, the church calls

all people to repent of their sin (against God, against other human beings, and against God's creation), to cast themselves upon God's mercy, to trust in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and to submit themselves to him as their Lord. Christians also proclaim Jesus Christ by the symbols of Christian worship, by their lives of Christian faithfulness, and by their deeds of compassion and acts in pursuit of justice for others. As the grace of God is at work in the community of his people, the church becomes a sign of the kingdom and manifests the nature of life in that kingdom, in imperfect but attractive ways.

Having experienced the saving power of God, Christians are called to proclaim his Lordship in private and public worship. Every aspect of their lives, personal and social, must be submitted to Christ. Within the context of the plurality of religions, the identity of Jesus as Lord must be clearly proclaimed. (For example, within Islamic contexts, it must be stressed that Jesus is God and not merely a prophet. Within Hindu contexts, his uniqueness as God is the point needing emphasis.) In every situation, the forms of idolatry, religious and secular must be exposed. In this way, the implications of the Lordship of Jesus will be [p. 387](#) made clear in the face of other entities that compete for the allegiance of human lives.

Given the plurality of religious and cultural contexts in the world, proclaiming Jesus, in a manner that genuinely brings people into a meeting with him, is a complex and difficult task. The situation of hearers of this proclamation must be carefully assessed and those who proclaim Jesus must discover how to communicate effectively the truth of God within the context of the hearers. In this difficult task, we find hope in the promise of Christ to be present with those who carry his name to the ends of the earth, and in the presence of the Holy Spirit who illumines both those who proclaim and those who hear.

In seeking to contextualize the proclamation of Jesus, we must be careful that the Christ we proclaim is the one whom the apostles proclaimed in their preaching and in their writings, as uniquely Saviour and Lord. People must be called to be disciples of Jesus Christ with lives of personal holiness and social righteousness. In every situation, there are risks that the identity of Jesus and the claims of his Lordship will be subtly modified to make the message more acceptable and the life of discipleship more easy. Here evangelicals outside the context may play a role that is helpfully critical, but this requires much sensitivity when their understanding of the context is minimal. The task requires constant attention to both the voice of God in Scripture and the dynamics of the situation in which God is calling people to himself.

EVANGELICAL PROCLAMATION AND RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER DENOMINATIONS AND RELIGIONS

The proclamation of Jesus is a duty accepted by all Christian churches. What this means is not always understood in the same way. Christians should seek to cooperate wherever possible with others who share their commitment to Jesus as uniquely Saviour and Lord of all. In such cooperative mission efforts, evangelicals must ensure that the gospel which is proclaimed is uncompromisingly the biblical good news.

It is essential that we understand the position of those among whom we proclaim Jesus Christ. Dialogue with representatives of other Christian groups or with other religions may be a helpful process to further mutual understanding. Such dialogue is always conducted, however, within the context of the church's evangelistic mission. Listening must precede but may not substitute for proclamation.

Sadly, serious, and often violent, religious conflict is a feature of our times. Evangelicals, while holding fast to the uniqueness of Jesus as Saviour and the universality of his claim as Lord, must do so in evident humility. It is Jesus Christ who is supreme and

we are simply his followers. We, of all people, should be most conscious of God's grace toward us and must shun all expressions of pride or superiority. In relationship to other Christian groups, this should lead to a non-sectarian attitude. When persecuted for their [p. 388](#) faith, Christians should follow their Lord in the way of the cross, in a spirit of forgiveness and love. This too is a way of proclaiming Jesus, the one who suffered and called us to suffer with him in order that we might also share the joy of his final victory.