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nized men who people the technological society. "Compared to men who have not been feminized," he says, a feminized man will "place much higher emphasis and attention on how he feels and how other people feel. He will be much more gentle (*sic*) and handle situations in a 'soft' way" (p. 636). One wonders how gentleness can be a fruit of the Spirit and yet not be pre-eminent in manly (as well as womanly) character. If God wanted aggression, he should have asked for it rather than for love, joy, peace, and so on.

Clark is certainly to be praised for emphasizing that there is a basic sociality of the gospel. Interpersonal relationships are constitutive in the life of God's people. But Clark does not stop there; he insists that a highly developed and intricately nuanced sociology of the gospel is also fundamental. Because Clark has confused the importance of Christian sociality with his particular sociology, and because he has elevated this sociology over virtually every aspect of the Christian's existence, even his concern for loving relationships becomes somewhat disfigured.

In his brief "Afterword" (a little more than one page out of this massive tome), Clark admits that "perhaps the pastoral recommendations made in this book do not express the best way" of living out the relationship and distinction between the sexes (p. 668). After hundreds of pages, such a self-critical reflection of his own position is welcome. If only it had come sooner! On occasion, he does admit to problems with his own view (though the reader is left in the dark as to what they might be). He even grants on one occasion that a diversity of opinion might be possible (p. 338). Yet he is easily entrapped by polemics into making some very serious charges against any who might disagree concerning men's and women's roles (e.g., pp. 297, 365). Because Clark so closely identifies God's will with his own social construction, the possibility of obedience to Jesus by someone who takes exception to his program seems remote.

If only the body of *Man and Woman in Christ* had been marked by the intellectual humility and the spiritual solidarity with the rest of the church which becomes visible briefly in this "Afterword," the book might have been a helpful contribution to our attempts to understand the sexes before God. As it is, unfortunately, Clark's work must ultimately take its place among the polemic and divisive literature which has polarized and stymied the discussion up to now. In the end, it is one more book which will briefly cause a stir in the debate and then be forgotten because it confused its own particular way with the ways of God.

URBANA '81

Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship's biennial student missions convention will be held December 27-31 at the University of Illinois—Urbana/Champaign. The 17,000 delegates will hear plenary speakers, attend elective seminars, participate in small group Bible studies, and confer with representatives from hundreds of mission agencies. Plenary speakers this year include, among others, Samuel Escobar, Billy Graham, Isabelo Magalit, George D. McKinney, Rebecca Pippert and Helen Roseveare. To request more information or registration forms, write Urbana '81, 233 Langdon, Madison, WI 53703.

This year Theological Students Fellowship will be sponsoring elective workshops on Theology of Missions each afternoon during the convention at 4:00 PM. These workshops will not be included in the regular Urbana seminar listings. Write TSF for more information on these; or, if you register for Urbana, watch for a notice from us in the mail.

EVANGELICALS AND THE RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD

By Stephen T. Davis, Professor of Philosophy, Claremont Men's College.

Recently I heard an impromptu speech from a seminary president who had just returned from a trip to China. In his opinion, he announced, American seminary students ought to spend a year in the Orient. My initial reaction was: Why just the Orient? Why not a year in Rome or Sao Paulo or Nairobi? Immediately I saw the answer — what the man had in mind, apparently, was the religions of the world. In Rome and Sao Paulo and Nairobi, one encounters, in the main, Christianity; in the Orient one encounters, in the main, religions other than Christianity.

My purpose is not to criticize the man, nor will I argue against his suggestion. But I do suspect that the idea of Christian seminarians being asked to spend a year studying other religions is symbolic of a deeper issue. It points to what I regard as a pandemic and alarming loss of nerve among many Christian theologians and clergy. To put the matter bluntly, it is now widely felt that in the light of our new awareness of a religiously pluralistic world, it is no longer polite or appropriate or warranted for Christians to claim that they are right and followers of other religions wrong.

The study of the religions of the world is not one which evangelical scholars have emphasized or even much participated in. The field has been left largely to religious skeptics or Christians of a theologically liberal persuasion. Now I am an analytic philosopher, not a historian of religion. But living as I do in an academic community with several notable historians of religion and a community which occasionally sponsors academic conferences in the field, I have been forced to think seriously about how evangelicals ought to view the religions of the world.

Exclusivism in Religion

Let us define an exclusivist religion as one whose adherents regard it as the one and only true way. They essentially say, "We believe that we are right and that people of other religions who disagree with us on crucial points are wrong." By this definition, some of the religions of the world are clearly exclusivist. In my opinion, Christianity is one such religion. I will return to that point later.

A rather obvious preliminary point ought to be made here. I mention it only because some scholars apparently believe that the very fact of religious diversity creates logical difficulties for exclusivist claims. The point is this: One cannot refute a person who holds a given view merely by pointing out that some people disagree. Specifically, one cannot refute an exclusivist religion merely by pointing out that other exclusivist religions make equally strong claims. Nor can one refute an exclusivist religion merely by pointing out that there are people — religious scholars, some of them — who in the interest of religious harmony in the world would much prefer that no exclusivist claims be made in religion.

There is a danger, I believe, for students of religion who are ideologically committed to the existence of a cooperative world religious community and who believe that such a community can exist only on the basis of agreement. The danger, naturally, is that such people will misconstrue the data of world religions — that is, distort the exclusivist religions. We see this danger illustrated in two of the seminal figures in the field today, Wilfred Cantwell Smith of Harvard University and John Hick of the University of Birmingham and Claremont Graduate School. These scholars, it seems to me, share the belief and the commitment mentioned above. Smith's strategy to solve the problem of religious diversity is to search for an essence or common factor in all religious experience, something crucial to all the religions of the world. In several of his books he has suggested that such

a factor is the concept of faith. Smith defines faith as "that quality of or available to humankind by which we are characterized as transcending, or are enabled to transcend, the natural order."¹ Faith for Smith is the exercise of our innate religious impulse or sense of the transcendent; it is our relation to the transcendent.

John Hick on the other hand suggests an overarching theory of religion that is meant to account for religious diversity and yet allow all religions to be partial approximations of the truth. Relying on Kant's distinction between *noumena* (things as they are in themselves) and *phenomena* (things as they are experienced by us), Hick suggests that the one divine transcendent reality is an unknown and unknowable *noumenon* and that the various religions of the world are all different ways that people apprehend the *noumenon*, given their historical and cultural settings. Allah, Shiva, Yahweh, etc. are all *phenomena*. All are true or at least approximations of the truth; none is true to the exclusion of the others. Says Hick:

I suggest that this pluralistic situation is rendered intelligible by the hypothesis of one infinite divine noumenon experienced in varying ways within different strands of human history, thereby giving rise to different divine personalities who are each formed in their interactions with a particular community or tradition.²

The first problem with the Smith and Hick approach is the one noted above — the danger of actually misconstruing the religions of the world. Smith, for example, has been criticized by other historians of religion for his claims about the centrality of faith in all the religious traditions. In a number of religious traditions, these critics argue, the concept of faith, defined even in the broad way Smith defines it, plays little or no crucial role.³ As for Hick, we are entitled to wonder whether there is any good reason to believe his bold thesis apart from a strong desire (on his part at least) that it or some other unifying theory of religion be true. One suspects that the primary motivation for Hick's theory is the desire to avoid atheism or exclusivism — the conclusion that no religion is true or that only one is true and all the rest false. But of course the desire is not evidence. Is there any positive reason to believe that the religious traditions are all different apprehensions of the same divine reality? Furthermore, Hick's theory itself can be rejected by exclusivists as not at all capturing what they are trying to say. Evangelical Christians, for example, will want to insist that Hick misinterprets Christianity. They can perhaps accept the notion that the God they know is God as revealed rather than God as he is in himself. But they reject the notion that Christian claims about God exist in a vast ocean of other equally valid and valuable religious claims, all of which are different apprehensions of the one transcendent reality. Evangelicals want to say that Christianity is the only true way.

The second problem is simply this: All people, including evangelicals, wish for a harmonious world religious community; global cooperation, mutual understanding, and trust are indeed badly needed. But why say that such a community can be achieved only on the basis of agreement? One might have thought that something like the reverse is true. The only way in which people of various religions and cultures can come to understand and cooperate with one another is to honestly recognize their differences. Minimizing them or subsuming them under some unifying theory is not the way to proceed.

Truth and Falsity in Religion

Admittedly there is something odd about speaking of religions as true or false. Surely it is *propositions* that are true and false, philosophers might want to say, not *religions*.

Still, all religions make certain claims. Some religious claims are historical, some moral, some metaphysical. When I call a religion true, I am simply saying that its crucial claims — or at

least a high percentage of them — are true. When I call a religion false, I am saying that a significant percentage of its crucial claims are false. I hold Christianity to be true precisely because I believe that its crucial claims — for example, that a personal, all-powerful God created the world, that Jesus rose from the dead after three days — are true claims. The fact that I believe them is much (but not all, of course) of what makes me a Christian. I further take it that the most significant question we can ask about any religion is whether its claims are true.

In several of his books Professor Smith says a great deal that is relevant to this issue of truth and falsity in religion, but some of it is confusing. One wonders, for example, how to construe his claim that religious truths can *become* true:

I have long thought that one should not speak of a religion's being true or false simply, but rather of its becoming true or false as each participant appropriates it to himself and lives it out. It is much too glib to say that Christianity, for instance, is true (or, indeed, is false) without recognizing that my Christianity may be more false than my neighbor's or that so-and-so's Christianity may be truer today than it was last year.⁴

I agree that we may somewhat loosely and without a great deal of confusion speak of a person's Christianity being *truer* than it was or than another's. But surely this means just that such a person is a better Christian than before or than the other. The fact that for some person Christianity has *become true* (in Smith's sense) is quite unrelated to what I am calling the *truth or falsity of Christianity*, that is, the truth or falsity of its crucial claims.⁵

Smith disagrees with the logic which says that if Christianity is true, the other religions are false.⁶ The fallacy here, he says, is that of "confusing faith with theology." What Smith again appears to have in mind is some nonpropositional notion of truth, but it is not clear exactly what. Of course, theological propositions do not exhaustively explain a religion; we must look to what might be called practice as well as theory. Perhaps Smith means that a religion is "true" if, say, its adherents practice it sincerely, or if their lives are morally admirable, or if the religion pragmatically "works" for them. If he does mean something like this, he is right that the truth of Christianity does not entail the falsity of, say, Buddhism or Islam. But this is hardly to refute the notion that there is a broad propositional or theological element in religion.

Christian Exclusivism

Christianity is one of the exclusivist religions of the world, but Christian exclusivism has been expressed in a variety of ways, some of them unacceptable. For example, evangelicals must reject an arrogant Christian triumphalism. This is the theory — still held among some fundamentalists — that Christianity has all the truth worth knowing; that other religions are not worth studying; that God does not work through other religions as well; and that people who die as nonbelievers in Christ have no hope of avoiding eternal damnation. People who hold such views do so, I believe, on the basis of bad theology and are not being genuinely Christian. Other religions must be understood and appreciated rather than rejected out of hand. It is quite clear that in many cases God does indeed encounter non-Christian people where they are, in and through their other religions.

Smith disapproves an interesting statement he says was discussed by the commission on faith of the United Church of Canada. It says: "Without the particular knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, men do not really know God at all."⁷ But consider the familiar distinction between *knowing* and *knowing about*, as in the sentence "I know a great deal about Ronald Reagan but I don't know him." People can know truths *about* God apart from Jesus Christ, I believe, but knowledge *of* God comes only

through Jesus Christ. Smith calls such a position arrogant and notes that it antagonizes and alienates non-Christians. Well, I hope this is not true, but perhaps it is. But it is frankly hard for me to see how a person can be a Christian at all without affirming something like this statement. And non-Christians should not expect Christians in their desire to be tolerant and affable to give up beliefs that are essential to Christianity.

Christians do indeed affirm that God has worked and revealed himself in various ways among the peoples of the world. According to St. Paul (see Rom. 1:18-32, 2:12-16) some truths about God were "written in our hearts" by God. Thus it is not surprising to find impressive wisdom and deep piety in the various religious traditions. Nor is it surprising to find virtual unanimity at many points in ethics. But Christians insist that the supreme revelation of God to us, the fullest possible revelation of God we can comprehend, the one sure path to God, is the person of Jesus Christ.

Does such a position entail that non-Christians are totally wrong, that non-Christian religions are a waste of time, that Christians must hope Hindus and Buddhists and Moslems are eternally damned? Of course not. Non-Christians may know a great deal about God and the moral life. Again, God leaves no one totally ignorant of him. And the Bible makes it clear that it is God's will that all people be saved, not just Christians (1 Tim. 2:4). There is, I believe, a clear criterion evangelicals can use to distinguish between views that are acceptable and those (e.g. "All roads lead to the same mountain top") that are not. It is a practical, not theoretical, criterion — namely, the need for evangelism. Evangelical Christians find unacceptable those views that minimize or belittle or rule out the need for evangelism. They take seriously the command, "Go . . . and make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28:19).

But how could any Christian know, Smith asks, that Christianity is true and other religions false?⁸ Members of many other religions also claim to be the best, or only, way to God, and they seem just as happy and pious as Christians. The answer to this question must be *revelation*: God has revealed to us that people truly know him only through Jesus Christ. But Smith, anticipating this, denies that revelation is propositional. Christian exclusivists like me, he appears to be saying, misinterpret Christian revelation.

No one, of course, is immune to the danger of misinterpreting divine revelation. But it seems to me that the whole (by now venerable) concept of nonpropositional revelation is vastly oversimplified. Certainly God reveals himself in deeds and persons as well as words, but he does reveal himself in words. It is hard to read the Bible without seeing this. God reveals himself through the law Moses brought down from Sinai, through the oracles of the prophets, through the parables of Jesus, through the epistles of Paul — all of which consist of *words*. I should like to suggest that classic Neo-orthodox theologians who typically denied that revelation is propositional believed (in fact, if not officially) in propositional revelation. They simply didn't like the propositions literal interpreters of the Bible claimed to find there, and so (in effect, if not by admission) they looked for and found others.

The biblical *locus classicus* of the Christian exclusivism found in the United Church of Canada statement is undoubtedly John 14:6, where Jesus says: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me." My own position on this issue is as follows: I believe it quite possible that in the mercy of God non-Christians can be saved. But if they are, it is only through Jesus Christ, whom they do not affirm and of whom they may never have heard. I do not know in what numbers they are saved; all I know is that God is merciful. I also believe, however, Christians can be saved far more easily. Christianity is true and the other religions false.

Christian Imperialism

Unquestionably — and evangelicals are prepared to admit it

too — the Christian church has been guilty during much of its history of what we might call imperialism, attempting by coercion or other unethical means to convert people to its viewpoint and persecuting those who refuse to be converted. We need not look to the Orient or to Africa for the worst example. We need only look at the very ambiguous way, at best, in which Christians have treated Jews.

Why have Christians behaved imperialistically? This is a complex question. Doubtless there have been many factors. Two of the most important, it would seem, are a certain accident of history and bad theology. The accident of history is the fact that Christianity has been mainly a Western phenomenon throughout most of its history; and it has largely been the West that has behaved in politically, economically, and socially imperialistic ways toward the East and the South, rather than vice versa. Naturally, many of the Westerners who considered themselves politically, economically, and socially superior to non-Westerners also considered themselves religiously superior, and this influenced their behavior.

The bad theology is the mistaken connection some Christians have drawn between Christian exclusivism and Christian imperialism. My firm conviction is that there is no necessary connection between the two. There is no necessary connection whatsoever between (1) holding that Christianity is true and other religions false, and (2) failing to behave in loving, cooperative ways with non-Christians.

The Impact of the World's Religions on Christian Theology

Here let me return to the seminary president who wants theological students to spend a year in the Orient. I said that this opinion is symbolic of something deeply disquieting to me, namely, the ease with which many of today's Christian theologians look to other religions for answers to theological and spiritual questions. Why are they so quick to do so? Occasionally, vague references are made to "problems" in the Christian view of this or that, the implication being that the problems might be solvable if we used the resources of other traditions. But what exactly are these problems? And why not try to solve them from within the Christian tradition?

Although I will not try to develop the notion here, I take the problem to be an aspect of what might be called the reduction of theology to philosophy. We all know that philosophers and theologians ponder many of the same problems. Classically, the main methodological difference was that theologians did and philosophers did not anchor their thinking in certain assumptions about revelation and authority. Thus the task of discovering the teachings of the Bible was infinitely more important to the theologian than to the philosopher. But now liberal Christian theology is often done quite apart from those assumptions; theologians must do the best they can to answer theological questions according to any light they can find; and the resources of other religious traditions are appealed to.

Both John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith believe that the religious pluralism of our world requires serious changes in Christian theology. I have been arguing that this need not be true. The mere fact of diversity implies nothing by itself about the truth of Christian claims.

One of the things that bothers me about the current state of Christian theology is that it is so faddish. I was amazed when I was in seminary and have been constantly amazed ever since at the breathtaking speed with which theological movements capture the interest of theologians and seminarians, hold their interest for a while, and then fade from view. To the extent that seminary students are interested in theology at all these days (many are not), they are interested only in the latest ideas hot off the press. Aquinas and Calvin and Schleiermacher are not being read much any more. When theological movements fade, they look pretty ridiculous. Consider the Death of God or the Theology of Hope. "How on earth could people have been captivated by such notions?," we now find ourselves asking.

One of the current interests among theologians is global the-

ology. Smith has just completed a work to be entitled *Toward a World Theology*, and Hick is at work on a systematic theology from a global perspective. Now I am no prophet — perhaps a global theology is here to stay. Perhaps Christian theologians for the next hundred years will do their work as much influenced by the *Koran* and *Bhagavad-Gita* as by the Bible. I hope not. I do hope that Christians will read and appreciate these great and important books. But I hope they do their theology largely within the confines of Christian tradition. For one thing, the Christian faith is a theological and moral system, not a set of discrete religious truths from which we can pick and choose. More importantly, I believe the answers to our theological questions are to be found there.

Let me make a radical confession: *I am not existentially interested in the religions of the world.* True, I am academically interested in and intellectually curious about them. But I have no *existential* interest, no interest relative to my own spiritual enlightenment and well-being, because my commitment is to the gospel of Jesus Christ. I do defend the freedom of non-Christians to believe as they want to believe without any sort of coercive interference. And no intelligent person can become aware of the great religious traditions of the world without admiring the depth of wisdom and spiritual insight found there. But I admire and appreciate the religions of the world in much the same sense in which I admire and appreciate, say, the philosophy of Plato. I look neither to it nor to them for the answers to life's deepest questions. Such answers are to be found only in Jesus Christ.

REFERENCES

¹*Faith and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 142. See also *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

²"Toward a Philosophy of Religious Pluralism," p. 12. This is a paper Hick read at a conference entitled "New Directions in the Philosophy of Religion" in Claremont, California, in January, 1980. See also John Hick, *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions*. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), pp. 151-55.

³For example, see several of the papers read at a conference entitled, "Toward a Philosophy of Religious Diversity" held in Claremont, California in January, 1981. These included "Faith and Belief — Some Critical Reflections on the Thought of W. C. Smith" by John A. Hutchinson; "Smith's World Theology: An Appreciative Critique" by John R. Cobb, Jr.; and "Faith and Self Awakening" by Masao Abe.

⁴*The Faith of Other Men* (New York: New American Library, 1963), pp. 46-47; see also p. 88.

⁵This is not to deny that *some* claims can become true, namely, those expressing propositions whose truth values change over time. For example, the claims, "Stephen Davis is fifty years old" and "The Middle East is at peace," will both, I hope, one day *become true*, though neither is true now. But this apparently is not what Smith has in mind when he speaks of religions becoming true.

⁶See *The Faith of Other Men*, pp. 92-131. Of course, this is possible even on my understanding of truth and falsity in religion: conceivably two religions could both be true if their crucial claims were similar enough. But again, this is apparently not what Smith means.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 134-138.

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WHERE ARE THE TSF GROUPS?

Is there a group of students meeting on your campus to discuss Theology? Ethics? Spiritual Formation? Theological Students Fellowship would like to assist in developing a network of such groups in order to help make helpful resources (publications, conferences) conveniently available to seminary and religious studies students. Please write and let us know what is happening on your campus. Theological Students Fellowship, 233 Langdon, Madison, WI 53703.

INTERSECTION

(The integration of theological studies with ethics, academic disciplines, and ecclesiastical institutions)

A BREAK IN THE BATTLE

By Mark Lau Branson, General Secretary, Theological Students Fellowship.

A hopeful step toward reconciliation and respected diversity emerged at a June 1981 conference in Toronto. Billed as "Interpreting an Authoritative Scripture," and co-sponsored by the Institute for Christian Studies and Fuller Theological Seminary, it attracted about 100 professors, pastors, and students. This week-long series of papers, responses, working groups, extensive personal conversations and well-used social gatherings indicated new possibilities for a unified evangelicalism. A unique meeting-of-the-minds established a synergism for the common enterprise of hermeneutics.

Primary in the thinking of seminary students is the work of formulating a theological understanding of scriptural authority and pursuing faithful interpretation. While one receives volumes of information about Scripture and endless theories about how to understand and apply biblical teaching, the process of sorting these ideas is usually thwarted. The polemics of recent books, articles and conferences fail to offer any encouragement. However, this Toronto conference was markedly different. During lectures, participants were in attendance rather than in hallways and lounges. Several commented midway through the week that fatigue was setting in — probably because more effort was expended on listening than is common during such occasions.

Jack Rogers, professor of theology at Fuller, opened with a paper subtitled "A Contemporary Effort to Correct Some Current Misunderstandings Regarding the Authority and Interpretation of the Bible." For a classroom discussion at Fuller, Rogers had invited Professor John Frame of Westminster Seminary (San Diego) to discuss the inerrancy position. "Inerrancy simply means truth," said Frame. According to Rogers, the terminology was a symbol for authority.

It prescribed a reverent attitude toward the Bible which had no place for fault-finding, or picking and choosing, or dictating what God may and may not say. At the same time, inerrancy, for Frame, was compatible with imprecision of language, accommodation to ancient, cultural forms of expression and a variety of literary genre. He admitted that all of the problems hadn't been solved and that some attempts at harmonization were not very helpful. But the important thing which inerrancy symbolized for John Frame was an attitude toward Scripture of obedient listening to the voice of the Lord. By John Frame's definition I certainly want to be an inerrantist.

Rogers has experienced that some inerrantists carry the use of such symbols into destructive battles. The rallying of people to particular "language games" causes misunderstandings and forces battle lines that damage people and institutions. Now he admits, however, that all inerrantists are not so rigid.

On the second day of the Toronto conference, contributors discussed methods of biblical criticism which offer theories and tools for analyzing biblical texts. Many conservatives have avoided and even denounced such work. Few deny that some biblical criticism is employed for a kind of text deconstruction