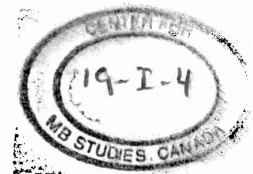


February 1991

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RESPONSE TO THE PAPER WRITTEN BY JAMES PANKRATZ

"NO OTHER NAME": A BIBLICAL VIEW OF ATONEMENT WITHIN NON-CHRISTIAN FAITHS

I agree with James that Christology is important for our denomination. Many questions are being asked. What kind of answers can we provide especially since we go back to claim Menno Simons' lead verse:

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:11 NIV)

Jesus Christ the God/Man who lived among people and claimed to be the Christ, the Messiah, is the foundation of our faith. There is no other. Christology is also being discussed in the larger evangelical world.

Terry Muck, editor of Christianity Today, wrote in the May 14th, 1990 issue of C.T.:

"There are two kinds of Christians - those who believe in the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and those who don't. For the first group, Jesus is the only way to salvation. For the second, he is only one of several ways.

...The uniqueness of Christ has been a cornerstone of orthodoxy for nearly 2,000 years. No major theologian has ever denied it. Most have championed it vigorously. But incredible as it may seem, this choice may well be the key theological issue of this decade.

...The linchpin in this process is holding fast to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

...We are called to recognize this new worldwide challenge. We are called to learn all we can about the historic religions. We are called to love and respect people of all faiths, whether Hindu, Buddhist, or Muslim. But we are also called to be Christian.

At last Fall's meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Bong Ro, one of Asia's foremost theologians, said "we are looking to you, the American church, to make a clear statement on the uniqueness of Christ. Frankly, we are fighting a battle for it in Asia."

James, who has had cross cultural experience, who has encountered the questions raised not through books and discussions only but by meeting and dialoging with people from different cultures, has done us a valuable service with this paper.

It is helpful especially for many who have had little cross-cultural experience. I sense in it a plea to take people of other cultures and religions very seriously. They are made in the image of God and deserve our deepest respect; we should acknowledge their dignity.

Religious pluralism is now a fact of life also for those who live in North America. That in itself should be no threat to Christians but rather an opportunity to learn to understand people and to share interest in their faith.

It was very informative to read that the religions briefly described by James are all very much aware of the "Wrongness of Existence". The solutions offered must be known and recognized by those in dialogue cross-culturally.

James highlighted the Judaistic solution as unique. Judaism sees no other solution outside its own. They show no interest in other nations. That was their mistake! The people of God in the Old Testament were meant to be a blessing to all nations but they misunderstood their role and became ingrown and proud. Jonah is one exception of outreach to other nations. The Psalmist in Psalm 24 and 27 also highlights God's interest in the peoples of the whole world.

Are solutions to the problems of the "Wrongness of Existence" outside of Christ, as offered by other religions, adequate? That is a crucial question. I do not think so. Are there "righteous pagans" outside of Christ? I do not think so. I want to learn, I want to be open to new insights. But I would rather err on the side of a conservative view of Scripture. The first three chapters of Romans indicate the universality of sin. Paul sums it up by saying:

9 What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.

10 As it is written:

"There is no one righteous, not even one;

11 there is no one who understands,
no one who seeks God.

12 All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one."

13 "Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit."

"The poison of vipers is on their lips."

14 "Their mouths are full of cursing and
bitterness."

15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood;
16 ruin and misery mark their ways,
17 and the way of peace they do not know."

18 "There is no fear of God before their
eyes."

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. 21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:9-23 NIV)

On page 7 James refers to the most important question: Who is Lord?. That question is not adequately dealt with in this paper. Others here will address that issue further.

The statement on page 8 in paragraph numbered two is also of crucial

importance. It raises questions in my mind. Is Christ first of all "the way in which God sets things right"? This statement leaves the door open for secondary ways to salvation - an idea that surfaced in Normal, Illinois as well. That thought is also expressed in the second last paragraph of the paper.

Paragraph numbered 3 on the same page states the central belief of all evangelical Christians. Paragraph numbered 6 underlines that basic understanding as well.

I resonate with Chapman who in the previously quoted issue of C.T. notes:
"The challenge of agnostic science will turn out to have been as child's play compared to the challenge to Christian theology of the faith of other men."

Some concluding observation:

1. I do miss in this paper a passionate plea to reach out to people of other religions with the gospel of Jesus Christ. This may be James' underlying assumption. In the context of the issue discussed, it is of too great an importance to be omitted.

2. I think the issue of going to the ends of the world is before us because Jesus has sent the church and because Jesus by His Spirit has poured out His love into our hearts. It is a love that encourages the church to get the message out. We may be ambivalent about those Gentiles who live up to the light they have received within their religious system as to their salvation. But what about those who do not measure up?

Colin Chapman in C.T. (same issue as above) wrote:

"Could we not start with the following affirmations?

-Salvation is only through Christ and it is a gift of God's grace, received through repentance and faith.

-The church as a whole has the responsibility and the privilege of proclaiming the gospel, and like Jonah it is running away from its divine calling.

-While some of us believe (on the basis on certain Scriptures) that those who do not hear the gospel have absolutely no hope of salvation, and others (on the basis of other Scriptures) hold back from such a conclusion, we all agree that salvation comes only through the name of Jesus, and that the only way by which anyone can be sure of salvation is by responding to the preaching of the gospel in repentance and faith.

3. James' paper has helped me to focus the issue. I disagree with some of the ideas expressed there. I am looking forward to a discussion of the two perspectives that James highlights on the last page.

4. I am glad that we do not have to make pronouncements about issues on which the Bible is silent. I find comfort in the fact that God is absolutely just. He will deal rightly with all people.